

CULTIVAR PRESERVATION

Annual Report for 2017

Some years ago HIPS members noted that the number of sellers of historic irises was declining and that the most uncommon irises would disappear from commerce altogether, with the likelihood that most, being no longer available in the marketplace, would go extinct in just a few years after that. That danger persists today. The past year, 2017, was devoted most assiduously to curbing such preventable losses. If the sellers needed to retire, and many have been in this business for decades, the irises could still be saved.

The year started with a bang, in the dead of winter, as the owners of Blue J Iris let us know that the business would be reduced in scale as it passed to a daughter in Texas. An order was placed on behalf of some two-dozen gardeners to acquire the irises that would disappear, the more than two-hundred varieties, in more than one-thousand rhizomes, for which Blue J was in many cases already the only source.

As summer came, two projects of a similar nature, initiated in 2015 and 2016, continued. The holdings of Thelma Boose were again targeted for her extraordinary collection of 1950s-1970s vintage irises on the verge of leaving us. And Wanda Rezac requested that the ongoing acquisitions of her massive inventory be accelerated into a single season.

As those efforts were underway, the National Collections program of the American Iris Society had initiated contact with Don and Ginny Spoon, to request that a comparable acquisition incentive be undertaken for their iris collection, possibly the largest in the world. In this first year the focus was on the dwarf bearded irises and the arilbreds (ex collection Dick Sparling) that they held, giving those classes greater representation in the Guardian Gardens program and HIPS gardens. Particular efforts were made in this instance to place appropriate irises in HIPS display gardens and to cement relationships between HIPS and the Aril Society International.

To these massive “rescues” should be added the many smaller ones that individual HIPS members, reading of these efforts in *ROOTS*, are undertaking in their own neighborhoods across North America and beyond to save treasures that otherwise could be lost.

International acquisitions proceed apace. Richard Cayeux once again made rare irises by his family available to HIPS members, gracing us with some of France’s greatest productions. Additional treasures were brought over from Pruhonice’s extraordinary collection, one of the largest in Europe. Another pipeline of rarities has developed out of HIPS’s restoration of British irises to their country of origin; this year saw reciprocation with a collection of Cedric Morris irises and other goodies from Sissinghurst and other prominent collections in the United Kingdom coming westward across the Pond.

All of these efforts have been made possible because of the dedication of some very avid and conscientious HIPS members, and special note should be made of the energies and acumen of Susan Flow, Shaub Dunkley, Laetitia Munro, Catherine Adam, Charlie Carver, and Cathy Egerer in seeing HIPS’s mission fulfilled in such impressive measure.

The Guardian Gardens program, which initiated several of these exchanges and rescues, received wider attention when its efforts were publicized in Scott Kunst's Old House Gardens newsletter and on the very popular website *Gardenista*, with pleas to bring such efforts to other plant genera as well. The inquiries coming from this exposure have numbered several hundred, bringing more people (and importantly, more *young* people) into the GG program, into HIPS, and into iris gardening as a whole. Guardian Gardens once again has more than doubled its roll of participants, and at year end stood at more than one-hundred and fifty members. It is still growing at this writing.

W. Douglass Paschall
Cultivar Preservation Chair