

## **Cultivar Preservation/Guardian Gardens**

### **Report for the Year 2016**

This year was one of solidifying progress.

The connections that HIPS, and especially its Guardian Gardens program, have been making with botanical institutions overseas led to one of the signal events of the AIS Convention in May: a panel presentation of the Guardian Gardens program, the AIS's National Collections program (presented by Robert Pries), the Presby Memorial Iris Gardens (presented by staff member Suzanne Broullon), the gardens of Průhonice in the Czech Republic (presented by Milan Blažek) and the iris holdings from the Countess von Zeppelin collection at the Meriangärten in Basel, Switzerland (presented by Barbara Wüthrich and Dr. Lisa Eggenschwiler). Seldom in the AIS's history has so much "firepower" shared one stage at one time, probably never has such a gathering been devoted expressly to preservation, and this was only one of the ways that HIPS as a whole turned heads over the course of that convention week in Newark. The repercussions of that convention presence are still bearing fruit for us.

On the rescue front, the Thelma Project – saving hundreds of rare historic irises from the 1950s to the 1980s on a small iris farm in North Carolina – moved into its second successful year under the stewardship of Shaub Dunkley. Simultaneously, as a result of overtures and leadership from Leslie Rule and Susan Flow, respectively, Wanda Rezac welcomed several HIPS members to her Nebraska farm for the first installment of a rescue there of rarities that she has been growing for decades. Both projects will continue into 2017.

Between these rescues (and a third that is taking place as the year ends) and program share-outs, the Guardian Gardens program augmented its inventory of adopted irises to more than two-thousand cultivars. Membership in the program once again more than doubled in 2016, so we have more than fifty participants in this preservation initiative. Phil Edinger and Catherine Adam have been appointed Research Curators of the Guardian Gardens program in North America and France.

With Cathy Egerer at the helm, another preservation effort was initiated between HIPS and the National Collections of Great Britain, with HIPS filling gaps in the Britons' Dykes collections from donated rhizomes from several of our members' gardens. Soon after that overture had been completed the Meriangärten staff apprised us that the Guardian Gardens and HIPS will be a crucial partner in their strategic planning for the future development of one of Continental Europe's most distinguished public collections. Here at home in North America, the Denver Botanic Gardens has asked to partner with HIPS on future Rezac Rescue efforts.

Outreach to other sections of the AIS last winter have led to donations of dwarf and median bearded irises and aril and arilbred irises to the Guardian Gardens program, with much more to come. The Society for Louisiana Irises and the Greater New Orleans Iris Society, as they develop an island sanctuary for native southern U.S. species and hybrids, have indicated that additional increase in that garden in years to come will be steered into HIPS's care. Preservation has become a focus of the Society for Japanese Irises as well, and that class of irises, especially its rarities, will also be making its way much more into HIPS gardens in coming years.

They say that what is past is prologue. 2016 was a year that HIPS raised its head high to extol that past again. Others are listening.

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