

# Saving Cook & Williamson: Thanks & a Hat Tip to Jerry Oswalt & Don Goss By Nancy McDonald

In the Fall 2009 and Spring 2010 issues of *ROOTS*, two articles introduced Jerry Oswalt of Bluffton, Indiana, who was trying to save the irises and daylilies of local breeders Paul Cook, his wife Emma Cook, and E. B. Williamson and his daughter Mary Williamson. Jerry had started the Cook-Williamson Memorial Iris Garden there in Bluffton. Jerry and I began corresponding about these irises, and over the years he sent me quite a few, as well as some of Paul Cook's daylilies. This year Cathy Egerer and I were able to visit Jerry in Bluffton, and he very generously gave us more irises by these prolific breeders.



*'Emma Cook'* (Paul Cook, 1959) TB  
photo from HIPS archives

One iris that has intrigued me for years is Paul Cook's **'Emma Cook'**, named for his wife. This iris appears in the ancestry of more than 60 more recent ones, and it's a beauty.

*From AIS Bulletin #153, April 1959: Introducing EMMA COOK (Sdlg. 11155) B.C. 1958. An iris of new and pleasing color pattern that has attracted everyone. Standards white, without other color; falls white, with half-inch border of dark violet, the color solid at edge, thinning somewhat on inner side. Flowers medium large (4-1/2 x 5), moderately ruffled. 34-36 inches. Midseason.*



*'Opaline'* (E. B. Williamson, 1928) TB NM photo

Because **'Emma Cook'** has so many offspring, the original iris can be elusive. After getting not-quite-right (though beautiful) irises from a couple of sources, I mentioned my frustration to Jerry. He was able to help in a most exciting way. He knows a man in Fort Wayne named Don Goss, who sells irises locally, who had a plant of **'Emma Cook'** that came from Paul Cook's garden. Now, *that's* good provenance! Thanks to the generosity of Jerry and Don, I was able to get starts of this authentic iris. It's now safely tucked into my garden and I'm overjoyed. Don told Jerry he remembers Paul Cook visiting his dad's iris garden. This is the kind of local history that makes collecting irises so fascinating.

Because of Jerry Oswalt and Don Goss, I now have 31 cultivars bred by Paul or Emma Cook and 21 bred by E. B. Williamson or his daughter Mary Williamson. In both cases, that is a fraction of the total registered, but it's a good start.

Thanks and a hat tip, gentlemen! 🎩

