Notable Cultivars in Iris History
A presentation of important milestones in Tall Bearded Iris history.
Iris pallida is one of the species irises that is the foundation of today’s tall bearded irises. It is native to the northern Mediterranean coast. It brought height and new color blends into breeding lines.
“Before 1900 irises and all others arose originally from two species - ‘I. pallida’ and ‘I. variegata’ - the first a tall stemmed plant native of Dalmata.”

N. Leslie Cave, The Iris, 1959
“M. Lémon began breeding irises in 1840 and was the first person to attempt to lift irises to an important garden flower.”

N. Leslie Cave, *The Iris*, 1959
Color effect a bright russet-crimson, velvety bordeaux bicolor.

P. Edinger
A sensation in its day and the standard for plicatas for decades after its introduction.

M. Unser
A very popular variety that was important in the breeding of early orchid pinks.
The date 1900 is important - it was in that year the tall, large-flowered, tetraploid species Mesopotamica, Amas and Trojan were imported to England. Previous varieties available were diploid.
‘Amas’ was one of the first tetraploid irises to reach England; because it was hardy and widely grown, it is behind all our modern TB’s.
The most popular pink of its day and for decades after.
An early tetraploid eagerly seized upon by hybridizers to advance early TBs to greater height and substance.

ORIFLAMME
VILMORIN 1904

P. Edinger
CATERINA
SIR MICHAEL FOSTER
1909

An important ancestor in breeding better blues.

M. Hess
At the time nearly every other garden iris of its day was a diploid. Alcazar was one of the first garden tetraploids; having a chromosome count of $2n=48$. It re-presented a great advance over other garden irises of the time.
The very largest, finest and richest dark purple. Extremely popular for many many years, and heavily used in breeding for dark purples and blacks.
Perhaps the single most important iris in the tetraploid revolution. Behind virtually all of today’s Tall Bearded irises.
Met the Iris Family

An early tetraploid and renowned parent. Possibly the most commonly found old garden iris in the USA.

M. Unser
A pale yellow pallida originated by the American hybridizer Miss Sturtevant.

P. Edinger
A child of ‘Dominion’, it was instrumental in the breeding for later red irises.

CARDINAL
A. J. BLISS 1919

M. Unser
A popular tetraploid used in breeding red varieties and blends.
Considered one of the finest irises on the market in its day. It was very important in breeding towards red irises.

P. Edinger
MEET THE IRIS FAMILY

The best of the violet pinks. It is certain that, in purity of tone and brightness of color, it stands in a class by itself.

APHRODITE
W.R. DYKES 1922

P. Edinger
An early American light blue that brought even more height into breeding lines.
MEET THE IRIS
A celebrated early pink with fabulous height and form. Very popular with growers and breeders alike.

M. Unser
MEET THE IRIS
A foundational variety for the Sass breeding lines. Led to wonderful new blends and color in reds, oranges, and browns. Parent of Dykes Medal Winner ‘Rameses’.

KING TUT
HANS P. SASS 1926

M. Unser
“Second landmark: the arrival of the large-flowered yellow raised by W. R. Dykes (who did not live to see it bloom). His widow named it ‘W. R. Dykes’. It has had more influence on breeding of yellows than any other to date.”

N. Leslie Caves, Irises 1959
An important variety in the evolution of yellows due to its good color and height.
“Events began to move rapidly. In America E. B. Williamson and Miss Grace Sturtevant, in England Amos Perry, and in France M. Cayeux were raising more and better irises ---”

N. Leslie Caves, Irises 1959
A sensation in its day. Tall stems of well formed blooms and clear pastel color tones.
“1920-1926 - in California William Mohr and his friend Professor Sydney Mitchell succeeded in uniting the Oncocyculus iris gatesii with a plicata, ‘Parisiana’ and the child of this union was ‘William Mohr’, which brought new genes into TB breeding.”

N. Leslie Caves, Irises 1959
Sister seedling of the plicata and 1927 Dykes Medal Winner ‘San Francisco’.  

M. Unser
MEET THE IRIS FAMILY

Known for its bloom size, height and purity of color, it is in the background of most white and blue irises around today.

PURISSIMA
WILLIAM MOHR-SYDNEY B. MITCHELL
1927

M. Unser
A famous plicata and winner of the Dykes Medal for 1927. ‘San Francisco’ continues to win awards at iris shows in the 21st century.
A widely celebrated red variety and winner of the Dykes Medal for 1929.

M. Unser
An important ancestor for browns and blends. French Dykes Medal winner for 1933.

M. Unser
MEET THE IRIS

Heavily used in breeding better blends and reds, and an important ancestor to Dave Hall’s flamingo pinks. Winner of the 1932 Dykes Medal.
Another step on the road to good tall yellows. Its large size and depth of color was a huge achievement for its time.

M. Unser
An important step in breeding white varieties. Won the British Dykes Medal in 1931.
Famous brown iris that became an important parent for its color class. Exceptional color and form. Still popular with historic iris lovers.

M. Unser
A very popular variety and an early example of a yellow ground plicata. An ancestor of many of today’s rebloomers. The Sass brothers pioneered yellow ground plicatas as well as reblooming irises.
GLORIOLE
H.R. SASS 1931

Instrumental in breeding better light blues with good form and substance.

P. Edinger
The standard by which neglectas were measured for many years. Short, but with exceptional blooms.
Though no advance in form, it was very, very popular with iris growers and the gardening public for its height and bright, cheerful color.
An early plicata from France that revolutionized the plicata pattern from that time forward. Exceptional in size, form and performance.
The huge flowers, and great pattern and colors, led many breeders to use it in advancing blends.
Early tetraploid amoena that set the standard for all that followed. Arguably one of the most popular irises ever produced and still eagerly sought after by iris lovers. Winner of the Dykes Medal for 1940.
Dr. Kleinsorge considered this his greatest breeding iris, and he used it heavily in many of his lines to produce better browns and blends.
Brought ‘lace’ into the gene pool for Tall Bearded Irises.
An important early color break. It was a forerunner of the Flamingo pinks.
MEET THE IRIS FAMILY

A yellow bitone that was very popular in its time and used widely in breeding by other hybridizers.

FAIR ELAINE
SYDNEY B. MITCHELL
1938

M. Unser
Dykes Medal Winner for 1942. The standard by which other blues of the day were measured and very important in the evolution of today’s varieties.
A giant leap forward in breeding better black irises.

M. Unser
A major advancement in breeding browns and oranges. Very popular and heavily used by other hybridizers. Dykes Medal Winner for 1943.
The first large perfect, white tetraploid to catch the iris community’s imagination. Considered by some the most important iris ever created and behind the parentage of most all modern cultivars.
An early warm pink with tangerine beards. Led to the development of better pink, apricot, and salmon tones.
A popular blue plicata that brought size and height to the class.
A major advance in the brown color class and incredibly popular for many years afterward. It was so widespread it is hard to believe that it is believed extinct today.
MEET THE IRIS

M. Unser

First of the oncobreds to be hardy across a wide range of climates. Brought new genes into TB breeding.
The best neglecta for many years. Though an American creation, its ancestry is almost entirely French.
One of the first luminatas to become popular and an important ancestor to that pattern in today’s varieties.
A quantum leap forward in form for orchid pinks. It advanced this color class tremendously and its notable descendants include ‘Melodrama’ and ‘Amethyst Flame’.

DREAMCASTLE
PAUL COOK 1943

M. Unser
Instrumental in bringing dominant amoena genes into wider circulation while adding hardiness and reliability of blooms in warm climates.
The next step in breeding light blues. Added width and ruffles, and was very popular with hybridizers. Dykes Medal Winner for 1949.

A. Moran
An intense, deep yellow, and winner of the Dykes Medal for 1948.
An early advance in reds, heavily used to advance the color class.

RANGER
KLEINSORGE 1943

Cooley’s Gardens Catalog 1945
MEET THE IRIS FAMILY

Deeper, smoother color and a self-toned beard brought blacks to new heights.

BLACK FOREST
SCHREINER 1944

P. Edinger
MEET THE IRIS FAMILY

A very widely used blend that led the way to many new color combinations.

CASCADE SPLendor
KLEINSORGE 1944

M. Unser
Brought blues closer to ‘true blue’. An advance that was appreciated by many breeders. Dykes Medal Winner for 1947.
Brought lacing into fashion and launched new directions for hybridizing.
A major breakthrough in color in the amoena pattern and a sensational garden flower.

M. Unser
MAYTIME
MRS. C. WHITING
R. 1947

This lovely variety brought the amoena pattern into new color classes.
A pure white with no yellow at the heart. Popular with growers and breeders.
The premier blue of its day and one of the most important blues in iris breeding history. It laid the groundwork for more ruffles and larger size blooms.
Another step in the advancement of reds, which tended to lag behind other color classes.

M. Hess
Added depth to the pink tones and was foundational in advancing this class.
“Honor goes to David Hall for the pale pink irises with tangerine and vermilion beards.”

N. Leslie Cave, Iris 1959
Considered Dave Hall’s finest pink. Not only did it have exceptional form, it grew well everywhere, including warm climates that many pinks did not like, and even re-bloomed there as well.
MEET THE IRIS FAMILY

A large pink that captivated iris lovers. Widely used in breeding for many years. Dykes Medal Winner for 1954.

MARY RANDALL ORVILLE FAY
1951

M. Unser
The first bi-color to bring blue-purple into the falls of variegatas instead of the traditional red or purple.
An IB that was instrumental in bringing genes from *Iris reichenbachii* into reach of hybridizers. It changed everything and led to a new spectrum of possibilities for bicolors.
An intense deep golden brown that heralded a new era in the development of the brown varieties.

INCA CHIEF
GRANT MITSCH
1952

M. Unser
First of the ‘dark tops’ or reverse amoenas. A whole new direction for hybridizers to pursue.

M. Blazek
SUPER-pink color! Probably the apex of Tell’s breeding and widely used by others.
Blue, Blue, BLUE!!!
Also a superb grower and bloomer. The form was on the plain side, but color purity was outstanding.
The first of the Austin ‘space-age’ varieties, it launched horns, spoons and flounces into the eye of iris collectors.
Not the last of the Sass blue/white plicatas, but definitely the best. Lovely flower form, clear colors, and a decent grower. Widely used, therefore, as a parent.
TAHOLAH
JIM GIBSON
1956

A key breeder in adding new colors to plicata lines.

M. Lowe
GLITTERING AMBER
MELBA HAMBLIN
1957

Advanced warm pink, cream and apricot blends, but also has a big effect on whites, browns and red blends too!
A major advance for amoenas, and widely used to add new colors and better form to them. Winner of the Dykes Medal in 1962.

M. Unser
A new type of pattern emerged with this variety, which came to be known as ‘the Emma Cook pattern’ for lack of a better term.
A strong, smooth pink with a self beard. Behind many later award winners such as ‘Vanity’ and ‘Beverly Sills’.

ONE DESIRE
GEORGE SHOOP
1960

M. Unser
**ROCOCO**
**SCHREINER 1960**

Combined great branching, vigor, flower placement, clean colors and loads of ruffles. Behind most blue plicatas that came after.
RIPPLING WATERS
ORVILLE FAY
1961

Winner of the Dykes Medal in 1966.

J. Graham
A masterpiece from Jim Gibson, heavily used in the advancement of new colors in plicatas.
The plicata pattern brought to perfection. Still topping popularity polls in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century. Dykes Medal winner for 1968.

M. Unser
A gorgeous rose bitone that set the standard for its class for many years.

CAMELOT ROSE
CHET TOMPKINS
1965

M. Unser
The first approach to a pink amoena and an important ancestor in amoena breeding, as well as an excellent garden plant.

M. Unser

M. Unser
This is just a brief glimpse of a small handful of the iris varieties that were milestones along the road to our modern varieties.
Iris history is rich with beautiful flowers and their stories, and is well deserving of preservation for future generations to enjoy.
Historic Iris Preservation Society

www.historiciris.org