
In Memoriam

WILLIAM T. BLEDSOE

September 11, 1906—November 21, 1977

*And now that he has journeyed on,
His is a fame that never ends
He leaves behind uncounted friends.—Anon.*



When Bill Bledsoe became a member of the American Iris Society in 1959 that same year he was appointed RVP of the newly formed Region 24, and his meteoric flash in the official Heaven of the society was both brilliant and phenomenal. And like a meteor he was too soon burned out and gone in eighteen years.

Bill was born September 11, 1906 in Arkadelphia, Arkansas. His parents were the Reverend John and Rosa Bledsoe. Theirs was a large and happy family of four daughters and six sons. Bill graduated from Arkansas State College at Conway, Arkansas, majoring in French and Latin. He then attended La Salle's School of Accounting. He married Mary Louise Crawford October 14, 1927 and they had one child, Billie Jean (Mrs. C. W. Matthews of Jackson, Tennessee.) He was the proud grandfather of Bill, Chuck, and Pam Matthews and the especially exuberant great grandfather of Matthew and Molly (MOLLY MATTHEWS made her debut to the iris world in the Winter 1977 AIS BULLETIN). He retired in 1973, and in 1975 he and Mary Lou moved from Fayetteville, Tennessee, to Jackson to be near their beloved daughter and her family. At the AIS Convention in Memphis 1977, Bill and Mary Lou with their very good friends, Mr. and Mrs. J. R. Hamblen and Mr. and Mrs. Larry Gaulter celebrated their Golden Wedding Anniversary. The popularity of the three couples with AIS members was attested by the tremendous number who packed the reception rooms and waited in line in the corridor to congratulate them.

Before becoming a member of the AIS, Bill's earlier interest in the horticultural world was growing and judging roses. He was a

judge in the American Rose Society and conducted schools for judging in Tennessee, Kentucky, and Mississippi. But soon after becoming acquainted with iris they became his first love, which is understandable to all AIS members.

In the April 1960 issue of the AIS BULLETIN, Bill contributed the first of many articles of interest to the readers. His principal interest, and the one which was his greatest contribution to the Society, was the exhibition and judging of irises. In 1963 he was made Chairman of Exhibitions and Chairman of a committee to revise the "Handbook for Judges and Exhibitions." This same handbook with additional revisions is at present the one in use by the AIS. He conducted judges training sessions in almost every region, and was the instructor for the one at the AIS Convention in Memphis 1965 and again, in co-operation with his friend Carol Ramsey, for the tall bearded section at the 1977 Memphis convention.

Bill was elected Second Vice-President of the AIS at the October board meeting in New Orleans in 1965, and at the Chicago board meeting in 1968 he was elected the twelfth President of the AIS. In his first message to the membership in the January 1969 BULLETIN, Bill perhaps describes himself better than anyone else could: a person with pride and humility. Pride in that he had been so honored, and humble with the sense of the responsibilities he was assuming. He was modest yet completely sure of himself. No one who knew him would think of applying the word arrogant to him. He was completely at ease with the entire AIS membership. He was a man anyone could talk to. Bill was truly a beautiful person.

After serving his term as president for three years, his interest and activities in the AIS never abated. He intensified his hybridizing, and the American Iris Society Foundation became his great consuming interest. He was in demand always as an instructor in judges training. On October 7 and 8, 1977, he was moderator for a judges training session at Region 7's fall meeting at Horton State Park, Tennessee, and so spent his last well days with some of the iris people who meant so much in his life. On October 9 at his home in Jackson he had his fatal attack and died November 21, 1977.

QUAY BAUMAN

A Personal Note . . .

Dear Bill,

For the rest of my life, I will cherish the sweet memory of that most pleasant visit you, Mary Lou, and I had at Horton State Park October 7th—just two days before your fatal illness. I'll remember your great delight that Mary Lou had such a good time visiting with her friends in Fayetteville on your way to the Region 7 meeting, and your concern for her rest when you asked me to come to your room for a talk. So Bill, I'll remember always your thoughtfulness, sincerity, honesty, and understanding and above all I'll never forget that with a kiss the three of us pledged our eternal friendship and love.

Quay

The sense of loss we feel with the death of William T. Bledsoe is tempered with appreciation for the years he gave to us. Even before his appointment to the American Iris Society Board of Directors, Mr. Bledsoe was thoroughly involved with irises on a national as well as a local scale. He was a member of the AIS committee for judges' training, and had conducted several judges' training schools in various regions. In 1963 he had accepted the Chairmanship of the AIS Committee for Revision of the Judges' Handbook, published in 1965 and recognized as a monumental achievement. (However, in the very year of its publication, Bill was engaged in directing a team of writers for another revision.)

William T. Bledsoe was born, reared, and educated in Arkansas. In 1927 he and Mary Louise Crawford were married; and from that union came a lovely daughter, Billie Jean, who in due time presented them with two grandsons and a granddaughter. Bill and Mary Lou enjoyed a wonderful marriage, sharing—to a remarkable degree—the same interests and hobbies, which makes it impossible to write about Bill without frequent mention of Mary Lou.

Bill Bledsoe acquired an extraordinary diversity of experience as a teacher, basketball coach, sales supervisor, contract negotiator, accountant and auditor before he finally settled for a position with the U.S. Government. Shortly after Pearl Harbor he enlisted in the service. During his military career he was a member of a six-man unit of auditors who traveled from coast to coast auditing teams that were being processed prior to shipping out. After the Armistice, Bill became the supervisor of the Government Guidance Center in Memphis, Tennessee. Ten years later, when the Center was closed, he was transferred to Nashville.

It was in Nashville that Bill and Mary Lou began their life-long love affair with flowers. Their first love was the rose. They joined the Rose Society and became Accredited Judges. Bill had an inherent gift for expressing his thoughts effectively Mary Lou is also an accomplished speaker and she soon learned the art of creating award winning arrangements. Together they made an impressive team, and before long were spending much of their time giving programs to rose and garden clubs—with Bill conducting judging schools while Mary Lou gave demonstrations in the fine craft of flower arranging.

In Nashville the Bledsoes also became acquainted with irises. Geddes Douglas, as guest speaker at Mary Lou's garden club meeting, talked about irises and explained the mechanics of hybridizing. Mary Lou's imagination was sparked. Her enthusiasm, as she related the experience to Bill, was contagious and in 1956 Bill made his first iris crosses. Still devoted and active rosarians, Bill and Mary Lou found time to become knowledgeable and dedicated irisarians.

When Bob Carney, as RVP of Region 7, convinced the AIS Board of Directors that the territorial limits of the region's four states (Tennessee, Kentucky, Alabama and Mississippi) was too great, in January 1959 Region 24 was activated with Bill Bledsoe as its first RVP. Within two years Region 7 and 24 had doubled their member-

ship. Bob Carney, Bill Bledsoe, and Jake Scharff organized the Huntsville Iris Society as well as the Birmingham Society. Bill and Mary Lou went on to organize societies in Guntersville, Louisburg, Jackson, and North Alabama.

In 1964 the membership of Region 24 was 393, a gain of 207 members in five years (Region 24 Newsletter, March 1964). The region was justifiably proud of its progress and equally proud of its first regional vice-president. A message in the same Newsletter, titled, **SPRING ACTIVITIES OF OUR BILL**: "Bill Bledsoe, our first RVP is gaining fame and fortune (well, fame anyway) and will be teaching judging schools . . . March 21, Centralia, Illinois; April 12, Lexington, Kentucky; April 25, Callaway Gardens, Georgia; May 1, Memphis, Tennessee; June 5, Chicago National Convention. He promises to save a date for Region 24!" (Bill finished the season with a judging school at Dallas, Texas, September 9.)

Meanwhile, Bill had been transferred to the U.S. Missile Command, Redstone Arsenal, Huntsville, Alabama, where he remained, as auditor, until his retirement. He and Mary Lou found a lovely home in nearby Fayetteville, Tennessee, with ample space for their rose-beds, iris garden, and Bill's seedling beds.

Some of Bill's more popular irises were: **ROSA BLEDSOE**, 1963; **SUNBURST**, 1965; **GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY** and **OLIVE LANGDON**, 1966, and the following HM Award winners: **MONTA SANO**, **CORAL ELEGANCE**, **NASHVILLE SOUND**, **BLUE BONANZA**, **BLACKBERRY WINE**, and **STRAWBERRY WINE**.

Bill Bledsoe became a Director of the American Iris Society in January, 1965, and was appointed Chairman of the Exhibition Committee, a position he held until 1968 when he was assigned to the judges' training program. Those of us who had not known him prior to his Board appointment soon learned to love this gentle, quiet spoken man. He was quickly recognized as a person of extraordinary mental capacity, with a treasury of information, and a superb command of the English language. In 1966 he was elected to the office of Second Vice-President of the AIS.

An enduring personal friendship developed between Bill and Mary Lou, and Jim and me when they spent a few days in Utah prior to the 1967 Denver AIS Convention. Bill's acceptance of an invitation to conduct a two-day judging school during Region 12's spring meeting received wide publicity, and many Denver-bound iris fans (from nine states!) detoured through Utah to attend the judging sessions.

Although Bill's expertise as a judges' instructor was common knowledge, we were not prepared for his superlative performance. No quiet spoken man was this informative, authoritative, fun-loving personality, who at any formal affair would be referred to as an orator. With sparkling, expressive eyes, keen wit and timely humor, Mr. Bledsoe enjoyed complete command of an enthusiastic, participating audience. Later, when I complimented him, he laughingly replied, "Well, my daddy was a minister."

During this weekend, Frances and Larry Gaulter, Mary Lou and

Bill, and Jim and I discovered that we all had been married in 1927. It was then that we planned to celebrate our Golden Anniversary together; and thanks to many good friends, it was a celebration to remember.

Four years after William T. Bledsoe's appointment to the Board of Directors, he was elected as the twelfth President of the American Iris Society. Ordinarily, he would have served a three year term as First Vice President, but when our well loved BULLETIN Editor J. Arthur Nelson, who was in line for the presidency, declined the honor, Mr. Bledsoe was, in his own words, "... catapulted from the second vice-presidency all the way to the presidency."

Quoting further from Bill Bledsoe's first Presidential message, "... it is with deep feelings of pride and humility that I compose my first message as President. I take pride in the fact that I have been so signally honored, but I am humble in the realization of the important responsibilities of the office. I assure you that I shall retain this humility and shall keep an open mind as I strive to lead this organization in accordance with the high traditions established by those outstanding presidents who have preceded me. . . . If you have a suggestion for the betterment of AIS, I would like to hear from you. In fact, I would just like to hear from you—you don't need to have a reason for writing!"

This message set the tempo for Bill Bledsoe's term as our President. He was humble and dignified, enthusiastic and practical, imaginative and realistic; and at every opportunity he stressed the importance of communication between the officers and members of the Society. He never failed to praise the efforts of those who made worthy contributions to AIS, but to learn of Bill's endless contributions, it is necessary to read between the lines. His July 1969 presidential message is a prime example of his ability to camouflage, with expressions of gratitude to others, his own accomplishments: "AIS is on the move in 1969! Let no one make you believe that AIS interest is waning. I have this year already attended regional meetings in Region 1, Region 4, and Region 7. The enthusiastic responses in those regions have been heart warming." There is no mention of judging schools, but there is no doubt in my mind that Bill attended these meetings for this purpose. Curiosity prompted a telephone call to Mary Lou. Bill's personal records offered scant information, but apparently he conducted at least forty-four judging schools, and he visited eighteen regions.

Under Bill Bledsoe's dynamic leadership, AIS made significant progress. Stimulated by his enthusiasm, projects already initiated were accelerated or completed. New programs were introduced, and after careful study to determine if AIS would benefit, were put into effect. Regional vice-presidents were singled out for more recognition and responded by taking more active parts in the Society.

Dr. Clarke Cosgrove chaired a committee to up-date the bylaws. Various publications were finalized and published: "What Every Iris Grower Should Know"; the 1969 "Handbook for Judges and

Show Officials," edited by William T. Bledsoe; the revised Color Classification, Irene S. and J. Arthur Nelson, 1971; and the "Handbook for AIS Members and Officers," authored by Ira E. and Elizabeth A. Wood, 1971. President Bledsoe successively promoted and detailed the silver and bronze Commemorative Medals. The Golden Anniversary of AIS was appropriately celebrated in 1970.

At the 1970 fall Board meeting a dream became reality when the Board voted to "... file the Declaration of Trust for the American Iris Society Foundation at the earliest feasible date." Bill's last few years were spent promoting the Foundation as fervently as he had earlier promoted the Judges' Training Program, and it is a fitting memorial to him that one of the last offices he held in AIS was as President of the American Iris Society Foundation Board of Trustees.

MELBA HAMBLÉN

THE AMERICAN IRIS SOCIETY

The American Iris Society was founded in 1900 by a group of iris enthusiasts who met in the home of William T. Bledsoe. The society's purpose was to promote the cultivation and appreciation of iris plants. The society's first meeting was held in the home of William T. Bledsoe, and it was there that the society's first constitution was adopted. The society's first meeting was held in the home of William T. Bledsoe, and it was there that the society's first constitution was adopted.

The American Iris Society has since grown to become one of the largest and most active horticultural societies in the United States. The society's membership has increased steadily over the years, and the society's activities have expanded to include a wide range of programs and services. The society's first meeting was held in the home of William T. Bledsoe, and it was there that the society's first constitution was adopted. The society's first meeting was held in the home of William T. Bledsoe, and it was there that the society's first constitution was adopted.

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