

THE AMERICAN IRIS SOCIETY

SAMUEL W. BURCHFIELD

(1870-1928)

Samuel W. Burchfield died early Wednesday morning, November 14, 1928, at his home in Ann Arbor. He was born November 16, 1870 in the Humboldt Mountains of Nevada. In 1876 his parents moved to Philadelphia, later settling in Youngstown, Ohio, where Mr. Burchfield was educated. Shortly after finishing high school he removed to Ann Arbor, Michigan, where he established a tailoring business, retiring from active interest in the firm of Burchfield & Ryan in 1926 because of failing health. Actively interested in politics he served 28 years as coroner of Washtenaw County.

A lover of the outdoor life he devoted his leisure hours to hobbies of this type. He early became interested in taxidermy, which led to an extensive study of bird life. Fishing and hunting held his interest at various times but all soon gave place to horticulture which became the great interest of his life.

Becoming interested in the subject of mushrooms he soon became known as an authority whose advice was frequently sought by the faculty of the University of Michigan, and for many years he was a lecturer there. His collection of books on mushrooms was one of the most complete in the country.

During the early years of his interest in horticulture he had a general garden but his growing interest in the iris soon caused him to concentrate his attention upon the cultivation of this plant. Experiment followed experiment and he became nationally and internationally known as a raiser of irises. A thousand varieties of irises, one hundred of which are unusually rare, are to be found in his garden, this collection being valued at more than \$25,000. Mr. Burchfield worked for years in his experiments, gaining results in the growing of irises of rare color and beauty which attracted the attention of horticulturists in all parts of the world. Exhibits in local, state and national flower shows gained him addi-

tional honors and awards. During these years he grew many thousands of seedlings, one being an entirely black iris, while another, a pink one, he named Lady Lillian, in honor of his wife. He introduced to commerce only those seedlings he considered distinct from varieties already known. His iris garden attracted visitors from the four corners of the country and many gardens, both public and private, owe many of their rare irises to his interest in the more unusual iris species.

IN APPRECIATION

Burchfield—the Boy

In the male of the species, the boy seems eternally to lurk but just below the surface. Most of us manfully keep the little rascal submerged, weakening only when we are ill and must be mothered, or when we win the club trophy and must be praised.

In Sam Burchfield, the boy—the little boy—seemed to have the upper hand most of the time. Any iris fan who has hurried and hopped and puffed around in Sam's wake in the Huron Valley garden appreciates that.

Burchfield had an apparent good will for the casual visitor who referred to his pets as "flags," the while battling with a rising scorn for any-one so depraved. The ordinary flower lover who didn't specialize in much of anything was made the subject of skillful propaganda, for here might be a convert who in time would worship as faithfully as any at the iris shrine. But let a collector come up that gravel drive that led from the street to a garage full of garden tools and Sam Burchfield, the solid citizen of sober age simply disappeared. The boy appeared.

His garden hospitality was not that of a guide showing the features of his precious acre bed by bed and plant by plant—no orderly tour conducted up this path and down that one. The fine bubbling enthusiasm of the boy swept the visitor this way and that, one variety in the rockery compelling comparison with another just a little better behind the garage and that one immediately calling for a look at a third the other side of a little white church which sat serenely on the next lot. You soon dropped the "Mister"—somehow you couldn't get to know the man very well and use anything but "Sam." Bending over some variety sent

to him by a friend near the equator, Sam would peer through his large glasses, praise the pet extravagantly and then wait with bated breath for your opinion. He'd whip the little black book from the hip pocket of his knickers and while you were still examining the iris in question you'd hear his call from far beyond a shrubbery planting and you'd find him down on his knees at another shrine, his devotion completely transplanted.

Enthusiasm—warm, youthful, bubbling enthusiasm that welled so fast as to make him inarticulate—that's what made a boy of a man of mature years. His iris friends caught it instantly. The garden tour became a marathon. Argument rose to the heavens. You left the place confident—and rightly so—that you had missed many things you should have seen.

And it seemed especially fitting that so large a boy should interest himself particularly with the tiniest of the genus *Iris*. His work with the dwarfs was perhaps more important for the impetus it gave to others than for any definite achievements to its credit, though Burchfield gave us such things as *Endymion*, *Huron Imp* and *Sonny*. Many an iris lover has paid scant attention to the little fellows until he came under Burchfield's spell. Sam did a lot of work on these early ones and made real contributions to the nomenclature of iris. Besides the three already named, consider the poetry of *Judy*, *Lady Bird*, *Harbor Lights*, *Fi Fi*, *Buzzer*, *Danny Boy*, *Silver Elf*, *Quaint*, *Urchin* and *Wendy*!

In his hybridizing, Sam was something of a Bolshevik. A wide reader, he had studied plant breeding and knew so much about it as to know the limitation of the rules. You gained the impression that he kept few records of crosses—he found himself at variance with sober gentlemen who meticulously follow the blood through generation after generation. With what salty comments would he have greeted the announcement that the production of a certain beautiful iris had been confidently and accurately foretold by the hybridizer two years before!

Burchfield worked hard for his results—worked with intelligence—and scoffed at many of the laws laid down. He packed a whole iris kingdom into two city lots. His collection took only that much room, less the space which Sam grudgingly allowed for a comfortable abode. The church he bought and moved out of his way. His surplus stock he grew in other people's back yards, as does many another.

But it wasn't his surplus stock that held his interest. It was the fairy population of innumerable beds, tucked around under bushes—shade didn't seem to bother Sam's iris. Serious in his work of hybridizing, untiring in the gruelling work of taking care of so many valuable plants, Burchfield needed only the companionship of a kindred soul to clip off forty years and be as naïve, as optimistic and as effervescent as the boys who flew their kites on the commons below the churchyard.

Sam Burchfield left the world more beautiful by reason of the prompting he gave to Nature; the sly whispers with which he suggested things for her to do about this delicate matter that goes on between the stem and the fading petals of an iris bloom. More than that—far more—he left a pleasant wholesome memory behind—a memory that quickens the hearts of those who knew him.

—A FRIEND.

Among the tender memories of Sam Burchfield which many of us hold dear there will always be pictures of many hours spent together in gardens where his enthusiasm and genial whimsicality ran like quicksilver. Of all my iris friends he was the most enthusiastic. Varietal names by the hundreds were at his tongue's tip and in the dead of winter in conversation with congenial friends the images these names called forth were as vivid as the irises themselves. "Finest in the world" was a phrase often on his lips. Fungi he loved, and birds, too, and knew them well, but iris stood unrivalled in nature in his affections.

He was an enthusiastic and intelligent collector and his discussions of adventures in this field brought all his vivid personality into voice and face. But I never heard him discuss his hybridizing work or any of its results unless direct questions were put to him. His modesty in this particular set him off rather sharply from the rest of us who find the conversation most interesting when our particular creations, accidental in most cases, are under discussion, preferably favorable. This modesty of Sam Burchfield's was not a cloak to cover any secrecy. Once others brought the conversation definitely to his own work he was as frank as he was modest. But he knew too much science to have any delusions about the status of iris breeding.

He was a frequent and most welcome visitor in my own scattered bits of gardens where I profited by his comments and was

inspired by his enthusiasm. He was a dear and loved friend, whose interest in iris was unselfish and constructive. The results of his enthusiasm will acerue in many gardens long after that day when his own garden knew him no more forever.—E. B. WILLIAMSON.

We first became acquainted with Mr. Burchfield through his iris catalogue, as he listed many species and varieties which were, at that time, difficult to find in this country. There was also a fine list of the dwarf bearded and intermediates, quite a number of them being his own seedlings with names which were quite alluring.

From this source we became possessed of many treasured plants and later on, we twice secured him as judge of our iris shows—held under the direction of the A. I. S.—finding him thorough, capable and willing to impart information. He had a good flower eye and was decided in his opinion as to which were worthy and which were not and why. He was interested in becoming acquainted with members of the Society and in visiting their gardens; seeming to be one of those who found “untellable content” in his garden.—MRS. AZRO FELLOWS.

Mr. Burchfield was a most genial and delightful character, a man who had a great fund of iris knowledge and who loved to talk about the plants in his garden. His was really a “kindred soul,” and in his death I feel the iris fraternity has suffered a great loss and those who knew him a fine friend. I am sure that many of his friends in thinking of him will feel with the poet,

“But oh! for the touch of a vanished hand
And the sound of a voice that is still.”

—R. V. ASHLEY.

Few knew that several years before the Iris Society was organized Mr. Burchfield had considerable correspondence with Mr. Farr regarding the possibility of forming such a society and had also asked the assistance of the editorial staff of *The Garden Magazine*. A charter member of the society he was keenly interested in all its activities. Because of failing health he would not accept the

vice-presidency of his region, though he gave unstintingly of his time in furthering interest in iris growing in the north central states and always responded to a call to act as a judge at the shows, though often it was at a time when he wanted to be in his own garden.

In his northern garden he assembled what was undoubtedly the finest collection of iris species in this country, growing those most difficult with an ease that caused constant amazement to growers in more favored climates, whose efforts often met with failure. He had a most complete collection of apogons, being more interested in this group than in the bearded section. His collection of Japanese hybrids was very large and he deserved much praise for the care shown in compiling his catalog listing of this section at a time when there was so much confusion regarding nomenclature. From 1923 to 1927 he listed a number of seedlings of both dwarf and tall bearded, the result of several years of hybridizing. He felt too little thought had been given the dwarfs and hoped to develop a series of better size and form, feeling that the size of bloom should be more in keeping with the height of the plant. But it was in his work with the other groups he was most interested and was looking forward to the blooming in 1929 of many reglio-cyclus crosses, as well as to first bloom of his seedlings of the beardless groups. Often he would write of the slowness of his work with the apogons because, even with the greatest care, the bees and the self fertilization of some species put his labor to naught. Of the reglio-cyclus he considered Hera the finest and used it in his breeding. Hyacinthiana (Farrer's No. 496) he considered the finest of the ensatas, introducing it to American gardens in 1926. Of his own introductions he considered Quaint the best of the dwarfs and Schiawassee the finest of the tall bearded. Huron Regent, a fulva hybrid, he considered the best of his beardless seedlings. Many gardens have been enriched through his interest in the unusual among irises and hard to obtain species could usually be had by writing him, though his catalog listed only a part of those he grew.

While we had been friends through correspondence for a number of years it was not until 1927 that I had the pleasure of meeting him. I found him to be all his letters had led me to expect, an enthusiastic irisarian whose great pleasure was to exchange views regarding his favorite flower with kindred spirits. The time was all too short and we parted looking forward to another day

at Freeport the following season. But, alas! he was not well enough to make the trip and the notes we had made during the winter months of topics we wished to discuss were left to the pages of the little note books.

In sending Harbor Lights to my garden he told me the name was suggested when, returning from a trip to Montreal, the lights of the harbor shone forth across the water, reminding him of this little seedling bloom on a terrace in his garden. I like to think the lights of the harbor shone as brightly for him on this last crossing.

Springs will come to this northern garden; birds sing gaily in the boughs of the cherry trees; the flowers he loved so dearly will blossom under the care of loving hands, while throughout this broad land of our his memory will endure in the beauty of the irises.—THURA TRUAX HIRES.

The delightful thing about Sam Burchfield was his amazing enthusiasm and his tireless interest. I have never visited with him in his Iris garden that I was not impressed with these characteristics.—HARVEY WHIPPLE.

My acquaintance with Sam Burchfield dates from 1920 when I walked by his house one day in June, admired his irises and was invited into his garden. That same year the American Iris Society published Bulletin No. 1 which contained the list of charter members among whom we were both included. Upon receipt of his copy Mr. Burchfield telephoned me to say that the local members should know each other and do what they could in support of the society. From that year on I visited his very interesting garden frequently during the iris season. He was always cordial to visitors and his place was a great attraction to the flower lovers of Ann Arbor. He grew many unusual plants when such plants were not so easy to get as they are to-day.

His iris collection was remarkably complete and, until new introductions of doubtful merit began to appear in floods, he aimed to have all the varieties in commerce which he could grow and frequently spoke of his importations from European dealers. I have just been looking over his first catalog, issued in 1925, and find a surprising list of species, offered in no other one catalog so far as I know.

He was particularly successful with the regelias and the regeliocyclus hybrids of which he had a good number. He grew them in raised beds on a terrace on the south side of a retaining wall where they flourished without any particular care apparently. I remember especially a fine clump of Hera which made a very gay show every spring. He was also a lover of the peony and one of the features of his garden latterly has been a long, closely planted bed of early single peonies which he raised from seed. These bloomed with the tall bearded irises and made a fine display.

His garden was on the city lot where he lived but it was surprising how many plants he cultivated in the space available. I often wondered at the neatness of the place for he did all the gardening himself in his spare time. His seedlings he grew on plots rented from some of his neighbors. A few years ago, in order to expand his garden, he acquired the lot next to his house and moved off a small chapel which stood there. This extension made his property adjoin a small city park so he arranged with the Superintendent of Parks to plant a part of this park with irises. The whole arrangement was very attractive.

Mr. Burchfield was the most enthusiastic and thorough gardener I ever knew and I greatly miss his cheery greeting and the opportunity I enjoyed of discussing our favorite flower upon visits to his delightful garden.—ALBERT E. GREEN.

BURCHFIELD INTRODUCTIONS

1923

Gray Voile. (T. B.)	Lady Lillian. (T. B.)
Guileless. (T. B.)	Lorna Doone. (T. B.)
Harvestone. (T. B.)	Maid Huron. (T. B.)
Huron Wile. (T. B.)	Meadow Lark. (T. B.)
Joshua. (T. B.)	Zobeida. (T. B.)

1925

Endymion. (D. B.)	Reflection. (D. B.)
Gandhi. (T. B.)	Silver Elf. (D. B.)
Huron Imp. (D. B.)	Weathered Sibirica. (Sib.)
Placid. (D. B.)	Winona. (T. B.)
Quaint. (D. B.)	

1926

Huron Regent. (Hex.)	Sonny. (D. B.)
Milleress. (T. B.)	Wendy. (D. B.)
Obediah. (T. B.)	

A. Muehlig. (T. B.)	Judy. (D. B.)
Buzzer. (D. B.)	Lady Bird. (D. B.)
Danny Boy. (D. B.)	Moqueto. (D. B.)
Fi Fi. (D. B.)	Schiawasee. (T. B.)
Harbor Lights. (D. B.)	Urchin. (D. B.)

There are between fifty and sixty seedlings, both dwarf and tall bearded, still under observation.

SERAPHIN MOTTET

AUGUST, 17, 1861—MARCH 15, 1930

To members of the American Iris Society M. Mottet was known chiefly through the introductions from the famous firm of Vilmorin-Andrieux et Cie and through his contributions; in particular Les Iris Cultives, the report of the International Conference in 1922. Alcazar (1908-1910) was for many years the best known of irises; as a garden clump it is still difficult to surpass and its progeny still ranks among the highest. To early gardeners the first sight of this one variety remains memorable.

The traveled members of our group had the pleasure of meeting M. Mottet the man but he will be remembered by many more for his contributions to the development of finer irises.—*Ed.*

Death continues to take its toll among our contributors. In February we sorrowed over the loss of M. Leon Chenault, and now, it is with keen regret that we announce the death of one of the earliest, the most faithful and and valued of them all, M. Seraphin-Joseph Mottet, who died at Paris on March 15, in his sixty-ninth year.

M. Mottet, like his friend, M. Chenault, was a personality in French horticulture and known by his works. Though born at Paris in 1861, his childhood was spent at Saulee-sur-Rhone (Drome) and he commenced his horticultural career in 1875, working at Lyon with Mme. Ducher, the rosarian in the Parc de la Tete d'Or, and later at Marseilles in the Jardin d'Acclimatation. In 1880 he came to Paris, entering the employment of Vilmorin-Andrieux et Cie and working first in the establishment at de Reully, then in the head office on the Quay de la Megisserie. Except for a brief experience in England in 1885 he has continued in his connection with this famous firm.