

# Robert O. Clinefelter, Hybridizer

by Dorothy Clinefelter Ladman

My grandfather, Robert Owen Clinefelter, was born in Coldwater, Michigan, on November 10, 1895. His mother was concerned that he was not a robust child, and he was persistently underweight. A doctor told her he just needed to get outside and dig in the dirt for awhile. She determined that if he was going to dig in the dirt he might as well make a garden, so that is what she set him to doing. When he enlisted in the Army during WWI, he was still underweight, but they took him anyway. He served in France with his brother, who was killed there. He was captured by the Germans and spent time as a POW. His parents had been informed that he was also killed and they were sent a death certificate. You may imagine their relief when it was discovered he was actually a prisoner of war in Germany. He got to read his own death certificate when he returned home.



*Grandpa hybridizing*

Once back in the United States, Grandpa married Dorothy Ida Cook, my grandmother, in 1920, and they moved to Omaha and raised two children, my dad, Ken Clinefelter, and my aunt, Roberta Clinefelter Cole.

I don't know when Grandpa got into raising irises, but the family story is that he really wanted to raise hybrid tea roses, but that was too expensive for him. So he chose iris. He was in Omaha at the time of the Sass brothers, and my understanding is that he knew them well. I have a picture of Grandpa with some Iris Club or Garden Club members, none of whom I can name except Grandpa.

Grandpa hybridized irises in Omaha, and he had



*'Age of Innocence' (Clinefelter, 1952)*

two registered and introduced irises in 1952, **'Pansy Patch'** and **'Age of Innocence'** (and yes, that name was used again in 1994 by Mr. Kerr). Family legend has it that Grandpa was trying to name his new iris the spring of 1952 and he chose **'Age of Innocence'** while watching my younger cousin and myself, both of us under 2 years old, playing in his yard. I have the original registration certificates for **'Age of Innocence'** and **'Pansy Patch'**, as well as one of his seedling exhibition certificates.

Grandpa died on September 23, 1956, at the age of 60. I believe he would have named and registered more hybrids had he lived longer. My grandmother kept up his backyard iris beds until her death in 1982. When I married and moved to a

house with a yard, Grandma called and said, "You have a yard now. Come get iris!" I did, and I came home with a dozen varieties that Grandma and I chose that day. They thrived on neglect during the years I taught school and raised two daughters. When my daughters moved out and had their own yards, they took Grandpa's iris with them, and have them planted in their own yards in Salt Lake City and Salina, Kansas. My siblings have also at various times planted the family iris in their yards in New York and Lincoln, Nebraska.

In the meantime, I have been more attentive to my irises since joining the Lincoln Iris Society. I have attempted to acquire the varieties I know Grandpa raised, using some of the AIS prize ribbons he received at various shows in the early 1950s to get that information.

I have about 90 varieties now of the irises Grandpa had, including **'Age of Innocence'**, **'Pansy Patch'**, and a purple seedling he kept because Grandma liked it. I recall a yellow seedling, but I believe that one has been lost.

When I was a child, every



*'Pansy Patch' (Clinefelter, 1952)*

# I'm Somebody, Too

## The Linnamaki Noids

by Nancy McDonald



R. Clinefelter, back left. Who are the other iris people?

Memorial Day we used to go to Omaha, pick up Grandma, and take irises to decorate Grandpa's grave. Now I am the oldest living member of the family, and every May and every Memorial Day my memory returns to the iris, Grandma in the garden, and the wonderful blessing my grand-parents left me that is the love of irises. ☞



Grandpa's Purple Seedling



Dottie Ladman has kindly supplied the Guardian Garden program with 'Age of Innocence' and hopes to be able to share 'Pansy Patch' with us soon. You may reach her at <dladman@inebraska.com>.

Grandpa & Dottie, 1952

Remember falling in love with irises? For me it was two noids from the old Linnamaki farm next door. Neither is especially beautiful except to the eye of the besotted, but since when is physical beauty required for true love?



We bought the old Ylimaki place in 1984, and had started a garden before the papers were even signed. By the next June, the garden was well underway. As I worked outside one June evening, the most entrancing scent caught me. I followed my nose across the field to the old farmyard next door. The house was derelict and empty, the grass thigh-high even in June, but a patch of irises five feet in diameter was pumping out the perfume.

The irises were rather drab. I didn't care. To rescue one was the work of a moment, to look around for others the work of the next. I found one, too—another big patch. At that time I didn't know the word *variegata*, but what a cute little iris! No scent from this one, but dear, cheerful flowers with the festive demeanor of little jesters.

I named them Linnamaki Purple and Linnamaki Gold, and to this day I would not be without them. Noid Linnamaki Purple is rather like, but not, 'Sherbert' (Sturtevant, 1918). Noid Linnamaki Gold may be 'Sans Souci' (Van Houtte, 1854).

We'll probably never know for sure. They could be varieties that lost their names, or bees could have bred them. It doesn't matter. When old age forces me to cut back on my irises, these will be the last to go, as they were the first to arrive. ☞

