

An Introduction to Forrest McCord

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In January of 2023, Mike and Rebecca Elton started a search for one of Mike's grandfather's irises. His grandfather was Forrest McCord and the iris, 'Merrilyn Lee' (McCord, 1956), a white self that has the popular 'San Francisco' (Mohr, 1927) and 'Jake' (Sass, 1943) as parents. 'Merrilyn Lee' resembles 'Jake'. A small search party formed and while the team searched for the missing cultivar, we found more information about Mr. McCord's influence on iris breeding.

Mr. McCord started the Iris Growers of Eastern Indiana in 1951. This led the search to the Muncie Evening Press, which featured a 1980 article by Vicki Dean on Mr. McCord and his now famed irises. "Forrest says the first trip he and his wife, Virginia, made in search of new and different irises was to Vincennes, Indiana. 'I discovered there that each variety has a different name,' he recalls...I remember paying \$2.50 for a 'Blue Shimmer' (Sass, 1942) and I thought I was going



Photo from the AIS Bulletin, No. 127, October 1952: Officers of the Iris Growers of Eastern Indiana, at first anniversary meeting March 9, 1952. Left to right, Forrest McCord, president; Mrs. Gladys Ammon, secretary; Mrs. Adda Ayres, treasurer; Joseph Fedor, vice-president; and Walter Welch, guest speaker.

all out.” Mr. McCord’s speciality was Siberian irises; ‘**Grand Junction**’ (1968) and ‘**Halcyon Seas**’ (1972) are two of his Morgan Award winning introductions. He was also National Test Garden Chairman for the Society for Siberian Irises. Mr. McCord influenced one of the most prominent breeders of Siberian irises today, Robert Hollingworth. The AIS Region 6 Newsletter from Winter 2016 tells the story of Mr. Hollingworth and Mr. McCord meeting for the first time: “The Siberians in the garden were impressive, and in one of the AIS Bulletins he [Bob] noticed that Forrest McCord lived within an hour’s drive of West Lafayette and off they went to see his garden. There they saw ‘**Ego**’ (McGarvey, 1966) and ‘**Super Ego**’ (McGarvey, 1965) blooming along with Forrest’s own introductions and it seemed that Siberians were improving rapidly.” Mr. Hollingworth named his first



The 1954 catalog back cover of *Edenwald, Vincennes, Indiana*. Includes image of ‘**Blue Shimmer**’.

Siberian, a diploid, ‘**Forrest McCord**’; it was introduced by Borbeleta Gardens in 1984.

After Mr. McCord’s garden, Mr. Hollingworth visited Currier McEwen’s work with tetraploidy in Siberians. For more information about Mr. McEwen’s work, see Part II of “Currier McEwen & How He Named His Flowers” in this issue of *ROOTS*.

Mr. McCord’s tall bearded creations are beautiful too; the aptly named ‘**Blazing Fire**’ (1961) is one. In 1980 he told the Muncie Evening Press, “I have a white bearded one now that hasn’t been named yet. So far it just has a number: 7612WS.” He registered it as ‘**Virginia Agnes**’ in 1982. It is a striking white iris. In 1985, when rhizomes of ‘**Virginia Agnes**’ were for sale for the first time, his grandson, R. M. McCord, told the AIS Bulletin, “This was the last iris registered (in 1982) by my grandfather and was named for his wife of 55 years.” If you know of anyone who grows Mr. McCord’s irises,

please contact <coeditor@historiris.org>. ☞



Siberian iris ‘**Forrest McCord**’ (Hollingworth, 1984)



From AIS Bulletin #256 January 1985 Introducing ‘**Virginia Agnes**’ (F. V. McCord) TB, 37" M. Ruffled white self; white beards; slight fragrance. Sdlg. 7612Ws: ‘**Ruffled Satin**’ X (‘**Ruffled Satin**’ X ‘**Drifting Cloud**’). \$25.00.