

ALMANAC:

Society for Pacific Coast Native Iris



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PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE FROM THE SPCNI TREASURER

Prices listed are for SPCNI members

Check List of Named PCI Cultivars

Lists and describes Pacific Coast Native Iris and named hybrids through 2005. ~70 pages. Hardcopy or CD: \$9.00 for USA, \$11.00 for Canada, and \$13.00 overseas. For both a CD and a hard copy, the cost would be \$4.50 less for the CD.

SPCNI Photo CD

Compiled by *Ken Walker*. This CD includes 280+ photos \$9.00 US, \$11 CDN, \$13 other

A Guide to the Pacific Coast Irises

Victor A. Cohen: The British Iris Society 1967 Booklet, 5.5x 8.5, 40 pages, 16 line drawings, 8 color and 6 black-and-white photographs. Brief descriptions of species and sub-species including their distribution. \$8.00 postpaid, \$10.00 out of U.S.

A Revision of the Pacific Coast Irises

Lee W. Lenz: Photocopy of *Aliso* original. Booklet 5.5x8.5, 72 pages, 9 line drawings, 14 photographs and 12 maps. Definitive work on the taxonomic status of the *Californicae*, with a key to the species and sub-species. Detailed maps and accounts of distribution. \$8.00 postpaid, \$10.00 out of U.S.

Hybridization and Speciation in the Pacific Coast Irises

Lee W. Lenz: Photocopy of *Aliso* original. Companion booklet to the above, 5.5x8.5, 72 pages, 30 figures, graphs, drawings, and photographs. Definitive work on naturally occurring inter-specific crosses of PCI, including detailed account of distribution. \$8.00 postage paid; \$10.00 out of U.S. If ordered together, both Lenz booklets may be obtained for \$14.00, postpaid, \$16.00 out of US.

Diseases of the Pacific Coast Iris

Lewis & Adele Lawyer: ALMANAC, Fall 1986. 22 pages, 9 b/w photographs. \$4.50 postage paid, \$6.50 out of US.

SPCNI SLIDE SETS

Two slide sets are available through SPCNI. They can be obtained by requesting them from: Terri Hudson, 33450 Little Valley Road, Ft. Bragg, CA 95437 (707) 964-3907. The charge is \$7.50 for either of the two sets. The first set deals with species: the second set is concerned with hybrids. **The combination set is no longer available.** The slides in each set will be contained in a Kodak carousel. The carousel will be convenient to use and less likely to be damaged in shipment. Payment (payable to SPCNI) should be sent to Terri Hudson. The person requesting the slides is financially responsible for return of the slides.

ALMANAC

DEADLINES: March 15 and September 15.

Back issues are available for \$4.00 each, postpaid.

Index by Subject, Species, Hybrids or by Author, \$4.00 each postpaid. (This is also on the web site to download) Contact Terri Hudson at the address above.

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MEMBERSHIP AND SUBSCRIPTIONS

The Society for Pacific Coast Native Irises is a section of the American Iris Society (AIS). Membership in the AIS is **not** a requirement for membership in the SPCNI, but it is suggested and may be of considerable benefit.

| Membership | Individual | Family |
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| Annual | 8.00 | 10.00 |
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Please send membership monies to the SPCNI treasurer. For foreign members, annual or triennial, please add \$4.00 per membership per year; 10/20 year membership, please add \$20/\$40 per membership.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION FROM THE SECRETARY/TREASURER DUES NOTICES

First dues notices will no longer be sent. Please note the expiration date of your membership on the address label. This date indicates the month and year that your SPCNI fees are due. We will continue to send you a final reminder notice if we have not heard from you in 90 days.

AMERICAN IRIS SOCIETY

Membership of the American Iris Society is not required for SPCNI membership. AIS membership is, however, suggested, and may be of considerable benefit.

Send membership renewals or inquiries to the Membership Secretary:
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10606 Timber Ridge St, Dubuque, IA 52001-8268
e-mail: aismemsec@earthlink.net

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SPCNI MEMBERSHIP LIST

SPCNI is offering its membership list of individuals for a slight fee to cover the cost of mailing and printing (approximately \$3.00 for the US, \$4.00 for out of U.S.). This list can be used only for contact purposes and cannot be used or sold as a business mailing list. If anybody wants to be excluded from the list, please contact Terri Hudson.

**Visit the award winning SPCNI Website
For great photos and articles
<http://www.pacificcoastiris.org>**

PLEASE ADVISE SPCNI AND AIS OF ANY CHANGE OF ADDRESS

FROM THE HOT SEAT – The President’s Message

Dear Fellow Members,

I thought my winter might bring me a quiet break before the next bloom season, but it would seem that the coming of the Internet has ended such things. SPCNI continues to grow and change.

Steve Taniguchi, a former Almanac editor, has donated \$1000 to SPCNI to formally start the Adele and Lewis Lawyer Memorial Fund, to be used to further scientific research into Pacific Coast Irises. A second, anonymous donor has matched that amount, and your Executive Board has voted to add all recent uncommitted donations, bringing the total involved to \$2330. I am very excited at the prospect of having sufficient funds to fund significant research, either on our own or perhaps in concert with the American Iris Society or others. If we can amass a base of \$20,000 we could give a \$1000 scholarship annually without diminishing the principal. With half that amount, we could still award the same scholarship every other year. I would like to appoint a committee to propose the terms and conditions of such a scholarship, investigate possible co-sponsors, and suggest research topics and ways of soliciting researchers. I hope many members will join in this venture: contact me if you’d like to be part of the committee, or send donations to our Secretary/Treasurer Terri Hudson. Gifts to the Fund are tax-deductible, as the IRS recognizes us as a 501-C-3 organization. Pursuing the research and the irises that were so much a part of Lewis and Adele’s lives seems like a totally appropriate way to honor the Lawyers.

Unfortunately, we have a new subject for memorial donations. Vernon Wood, Pacific Coast Iris hybridizer *par excellence*, passed away early in 2008 after fully 90 years of life on this earth. He won many AIS awards for both his PC and Tall Bearded Iris hybrids, and was very generous with anyone who was interested in them. Donations to SPCNI in Vern’s memory are welcome (and wholly tax-deductible). They will be recognized in the next Almanac, and applied to the Lawyer Memorial Fund unless otherwise specified. There is an obituary article on another page in this issue.

SPCNI has been without a 2nd Vice President for a while, but I’m very pleased to tell you Bob Sussman has agreed to expand his horizons to include that job as well as the Seed Exchange. Mr. Bob’s a very capable guy with lots of energy and ideas, and I think we’re very fortunate.

We have seen some other changes as well. As you may have noticed, each major area of our membership has a Representative to gather members’ input. Last fall John White of Maine retired after many years as Eastern US Representative, and David Schmieder of Massachusetts agreed to fill his shoes. This year Kenneth Hixson has taken over the post of Oregon Representative from George Gessert, and Oklahoma’s Louise Carson agreed to interface with all the other Central US members. Please, if you have information to share, or wonder if others have experienced something that happened to you, contact your Area Representative, or send an article on your findings to Editor Gareth Winter. The Almanac is so named because it is “a miscellany of useful information, though some of dubious merit, including entertaining remarks, pithy and scientific observations, and remedies for sundry ailments, both grave and trivial,” and its success depends on input from all of us. The Editor is just its facilitator, not its sole author, so send in your input.

Another change is coming in the “public relations” department. The American Iris Society (of which SPCNI is a Section) is actively developing publicity on all types of iris. SPCNI’s Recorder Ken Walker and Secretary Terri Hudson have been instrumental in supplying information and pictures of the Mitchell-Medal-winning PCI to AIS for inclusion on a webpage about the best of all kinds of modern irises. This will soon be up on the AIS website, www.irises.org, and our Webmaster Steve Ayala has been updating the Mitchell Medal section of our website (www.pacificcoastiris.org) as well. Also, as “slide sets” seem to be going digital now, Terri has been developing a CD with a Power Point presentation on PCN species, Medal-winning hybrids and cultural information. This will be available later this year to all interested SPCNI and AIS members at cost through the AIS Storefront, and will publicize PCI much more cheaply and easily than our aging slide set, to anyone with a

CD-reading computer. If you have an idea for another such program on PCI, please contact one of SPCNI's officers, as it would be very good to develop several such CDs. And if your club would be interested in a program on PCI, watch the AIS Bulletin or their website for when this CD becomes available. Estimated price: \$3, including postage?

Our first Online Photo Contest has concluded. Congratulations to winners Liselotte Hirsbrunner and Bob Sussman! You can see their winning photos elsewhere in this issue as well as on the website. Now that we've worked out some of the 'bugs' the second annual contest should be even better, so if you didn't enter this year you have another chance next fall. Take some really excellent digital photos this bloom season---especially of PCI in the landscape, either garden or wild---and submit them next fall to share with the global iris community.

Hope you have (or if you're in the Southern Hemisphere, had) a beautiful iris season,

Debby

NEWS FROM DOWN UNDER – the new editor introduces himself

Kia ora, greetings from New Zealand. I am Gareth Winter, your new editor. I am a 50-something archivist, working in a community archive in Masterton, Wairarapa, New Zealand. I previously worked in the nursery business for approximately 20 years, about half of that time owning a bedding plant nursery. I have a background in journalism, and have written five books on local history, as well as chapters in other books, and numerous articles for newspapers, journals and magazines. I write a syndicated gardening column in New Zealand, and previously hosted a gardening talkback show in Radio New Zealand National.

My grandparents were enthusiastic gardeners, and passionate iris growers who were instrumental in the formation of the New Zealand Iris Society (NZIS) in the late 1940s. My own horticultural education started at my grandparents' garden, as I weeded their extensive iris beds as they aged.

My grandfather loved TBs – the bigger and the brassier, the better he liked them. I have many precious memories of his extensive collection. I also have the notebook and photographs I kept during the 1971 season, recording the irises flowering. My grandmother was a much more naturalistic gardener. Her passion was for smaller bearded varieties, and for species iris. She grew sibericas, spurias, junos, reticulatas – every variety she could lay her hands on. And in one favored spot, along the pathway to the kitchen door, she grew a bed of her special plants – *Velthemias*, *Lachenalias*, *I. unguicularis* (pink and white forms) - and along the edge, a border of a small yellow flowered iris – *Iris innominata*.

I planted Pacific Coast irises in my own first garden. We moved, leaving them behind. My second garden had an area set aside for PCIs, in the light shade of a large *Eucalyptus leucoxylon* 'Rosea'. My grandmother gave me some seed she had obtained from a NZIS member and I started growing PCIs from seed. Now that I think about it, I am sure the seed came from the SPCNI, and was divided among the NZIS members. From that sowing, over 25 years ago, I still have a lovely white form, a reliable late flowering variety. Our years of nursery ownership were not conducive to personal gardening projects, and various favorites fell by the wayside – my black polyanthus breeding programme and my double auriculas were put to one side, and I did not grow any PCIs. When we moved from the nursery and could, once again, take up serious gardening, one of the first things I did was contact the SPCNI, join up, and order some seed. We are away again on these Pacific Coast beauties, with over a thousand seedlings growing.

It is impossible to get named overseas varieties in New Zealand, so we try to get as wide a range of seed as we can, firstly to have as wide a range of plants as possible, and secondly, to allow us to do some breeding. Last year was a very trying one when the local Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries found what they determined to be a spot of fungus on one seed from the society pool, and stopped our order – and all New Zealand orders. This year things were equally difficult, but we did manage to get the seed through the borders!

I am slightly overawed to be dealing with some of the people I will be in doing this job. I feel very humble at being asked to edit our almanac, and can only hope that, with help from members, we will be able to produce something you look forward to receiving as keenly as I always anticipated the arrival of our ALMANAC.

Gareth Winter

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UPDATED INDEX TO ALL PAST ALMANACS

Our hard working Secretary/Treasurer Terri Hudson, assisted by Steve Taniguchi, has compiled a thorough index to the SPCNI Almanac, covering the years 1973-1006. The index is arranged by subject, hybrids, species and author. The file is in pdf format, and is available as a free download from the SPCNI website, www.pacificcoastiris.org This is a marvelous resource. If you use it frequently it will probably pay you to print a copy off and keep it nearby. You will need Adobe Acrobat to open the file – if it is not already installed on your computer, it is available as a free download too.

The Almanac, which first appeared in 1973, is the most extensive, illustrated source available for information on Pacific Coast native iris. Copies of most back issues of the Almanac can be obtained (\$4.00 each) by contacting the secretary. Each year brings contributed practical experience reports on sources of seed, seedlings, plants and distinct horticultural lines, evaluations of introduced varieties, growing iris from seed, planting mixes, fungus and disease control, transplanting, hybridizing methods, PCIs in landscape design, growing tips from eastern states and other countries and climates, field trip reports - with itineraries and the best places and times to see wild iris species, updates and reviews of published reports and current scientific research, an annotated list of new introduced and registered Pacifica hybrids.

VERNON D. WOOD

June 9, 1918 to January 22, 2008

Vernon Wood was born and raised in Berkeley, California. He earned an MS in Chemistry from the University of California at Berkeley and worked his whole professional life as a chemist, creating ink colors for the printing industry. During World War II he was an Ordinance Unit Commander for the US Army's Alaska Defense Command, and one of his earliest memories of irises was the fields of wild iris he could see from the train windows there.

Vern lived for many years in Berkeley and Pinole, California. He began hybridizing tuberous begonias, but they were troubled with diseases and so he shifted his attention to iris. He hybridized bearded and arilbred iris as well as PCIs, finally focusing on the PCI because of the small size of his garden space. If a plant wasn't excellent, he removed it to make space for a new one

He thoroughly enjoyed working quietly and seriously with his iris, willingly sharing his knowledge with others. His introductions began to show up in the 1960s. The PCIs that brought Vern the highest honors were his Mitchell Medal iris: 'Mimsey', 'Pink Cupid', 'Raspberry Dazzler' and 'Sea Admiral'. His AMs were for 'Pinole Princess', 'Smuggler's Cove' and 'Wine and Cheese'. Vern was also given HMs for 'Admiral's Pride', 'Beckoning Beauty', 'Enchanting Lady', 'Distant Nebula', 'Fort Point', 'Rose in Prose', 'Seabright Cove' and 'Violet Vixen'.

Vern's local Society, Mt. Diablo Iris Society honored him with a Life Membership in their Society as well as a new show trophy for PCIs, "The Vernon Wood Perpetual Cup for Best Californicae".

Donations made to SPCNI in memory of Vern will go into a new fund for scholarship and research unless otherwise specified.

VIGOR AND HARDINESS

By Richard C. Richards

One of the joys of growing irises and other plants, even if one never hybridizes, is the joy of sharing the flowers with family, friends, and even total strangers. Plants that lack either vigor or hardiness seriously compromise this joy. Gardeners who want to grow PCIs have every right to expect plants with both qualities, and this behooves hybridizers to pay attention to both. Even if the plant produces an occasional spectacular flower, if it will not grow dependably, it is of dubious value. A spectacular flower as the swan song of a frail plant is simply sad.

Vigor is the ability of a plant to produce an abundance of healthy growth and flowers in a given climate. It includes disease resistance. Hardiness is the ability of a plant to be vigorous over an acceptable range of climatic conditions. These factors are obviously not the same. A plant that is vigorous in one set of climatic conditions may be a total failure in others. It has vigor in some climates, but not hardiness. The ideal combination of these factors is a plant that can thrive in any climate from the equator to the arctic, and I know of no plants that fit this description. Realistically, addressing these factors with regard to PCIs, the best we can do is try to produce plants that are vigorous over a fairly large range of climates, and that is what I call hardiness.

The characteristics of the various species that have gone into the production of PCI garden hybrids have made hardiness a challenge for the hybridizer. Most of the species go dormant in the summer, and water at this time can be detrimental or fatal. On the other hand, at least one species seems to go dormant in the winter, and can therefore take periods of considerable cold. Others cannot. The cultural requirements of the different species present both a challenge to the hybridizer and possible solutions to those challenges.

For a hybridizer, the problems are complex. Vigor is easy to evaluate. You grow a given seedling, and it is soon clear that the seedling is or is not vigorous in your garden and in your climate. But vigor of course is not the be all and end all of the process, since invariably a seedling will show up with vigor but an ordinary flower, or great flowers and not much vigor. It may even die after its maiden bloom, thus eliminating any need for further evaluation.

But vigor in a given garden does have its problems. As advanced generations of hybrids are produced in that garden, and vigor is rightly one of the principles of selection with regard to which seedlings are kept, the hybrids selected in that garden may become increasingly adapted to conditions in that garden or similar conditions in other gardens only, and hardiness is compromised. The advanced seedlings may thrive in gardens with those specific garden conditions only, and die in all other gardens with other climatic conditions where other PCI cultivars succeed.

Thus hardiness becomes important. But it is quite difficult for the hybridizer to judge unless he has gardens in several differing climates. Most of us do not have that luxury. Having friends in other climates who will grow and evaluate those seedlings is the next best, and probably the most practical solution.

PCIs have a reputation for growing only in relatively temperate climates such as occur along the west coast of North America, which is of course their native range. Maybe all we can produce is hybrid PCIs that are hardy only in this relatively narrow range of conditions? I think not. Within the genetic heritage we have acquired from the various species are traits that can considerably increase the range of areas in which PCIs can be grown.

Let me cite a few considerations. Early hybridizers used mostly *I. douglasiana*, *I. innominata*, and *I. tenax*. Later other species were introduced into the DNA brew from which hybridizers are presently drawing some rich floral results. *I. douglasiana* seems to be the hardest in a wide variety of climates, growing as it does along the coast from Oregon into Southern California. Hybrids involving *douglasiana* often do well here in inland Southern California and in other hot interior climates. The species in its native range often gets considerable water in the summer from condensation from fog, and so is much less subject to rot from summer water than other species. Some plants of this species, without any tinkering by a hybridizer, make nice garden subjects because of this hardiness. Another PCI species *I. tenax* goes dormant, often deciduous, in colder climates, and that species, plus hybrids from it, have been established throughout the United States, in such challenging climates as those of Maine and New York, and many midwestern states. My point is that the genetic potential is there for hardiness under a wide range of climatic conditions.

Part of the fun of hybridizing consists in combining the various genetic possibilities into garden hybrids with the hardiness necessary to thrive in a large variety of climates. One challenge is the fact that *I. tenax* does not survive well in more temperate climates than its native habitats, where snow and colder weather are the rule, and where the soil and water are usually acidic. *I. innominata*, chosen for its brilliant yellow color by early hybridizers, usually will not grow for long too far south of its native range in Southern Oregon. Its soil and water preferences seem to mirror those of *I. tenax* in many respects. In Southern California, for example, the soil is often heavy, the summers can be very hot, the soil and water are usually alkaline, and the northern species respond with premature death if attempts are made to grow them. A season or two is usually their limit.

Indeed, Southern California does have a rich variety of climates, though the Chamber of Commerce is hardly ecstatic about this. Along the beach and in areas with a strong coastal influence, growing most PCIs is no challenge. The climate is temperate, even nearly ideal. But inland, where summers are hot, it is a challenge as most species prefer their summer to be dry, and water will cause rot, yet gardeners in hotter climates expect to water plants at least weekly all summer for their survival. These hot interior climates are the ones in which rapid human population growth is occurring. This means many actual and potential gardeners could be enjoying PCIs in their gardens if they weren't so often deterred by the reputation that PCIs have for being difficult if not impossible irises. That reputation needs to be changed, and hybridizers can change it. The genetic potential for thriving with summer water, and in a hot climate, is available thanks to *I. douglasiana* and

its hybrids

So what can a hybridizer do who wants to produce hybrids that are not only vigorous in his climate, but are hardy in a wide number of areas? Let me spell it out. It involves using hybrids in crosses that have a reputation for hardiness. Sometimes these are older irises that have survived the test of thriving in a wide range of gardens and climatic conditions for years. These older irises do not have the latest flower form, but they are survivors. Their genetic heritage is there, waiting to be used.

The production of hardy cultivars involves the use of PCIs from hybridizers from widely differing climates. Ideally it involves the use of hybrids that have a proven success record in difficult climates, such as that of inland Southern California, or areas of the country with much more cold than is normal in the native range of the species. The late Bob Ward of Little Rock, Arkansas, using plants involving *I. tenax* crossed with *douglasiana* hybrid plants bred for summer heat and water tolerance, produced several cultivars that he named and introduced. These grew quite well in Little Rock. Bob's efforts were not fully appreciated at the time, but he certainly showed one way to produce hardy varieties for the Midwest. I am not aware that any of his hybrids are still in existence, which says more about how they were received by gardeners than about how hardy they were. Bob was simply ahead of his time.

Let me pull together the suggestions I have been making. There is sufficient genetic potential in the various Californicae species to produce hybrids that are hardy in many areas of the United States and some foreign countries. Some of the required characteristics are present in advanced garden hybrids available today. If PCIs are to become a viable garden subject in areas colder or hotter than coastal California, or western Oregon and Washington State, careful selection of parents on the part of the hybridizers will have to occur. Care will have to be taken to cross to the varieties that show the desired characteristics, and are not simply vigorous in one nearly ideal climate. That this can be accomplished more quickly with more new hybridizers stepping forward is a given.

The unique beauty of the PCIs can be shared with gardeners in many more States than at present. It is up to hybridizers to make that a reality. To further that goal, I have appended a list of cultivars that I personally know from experience to be good to excellent growers in hot inland regions such as those of Southern California. Most of these cultivars are available in the PCI trade. The use of these cultivars should produce more seedlings with the ability not just to tolerate hot and wet summers, but to thrive in them, and they should pass this hardiness to many of their offspring

Here is a baker's dozen of PCI cultivars that are vigorous and probably hardy in Southern California, in no particular order.

1. Canyon Snow. One hybridizer calls it "bullet-proof." It is excellent in a wide range of conditions. For example, it has been growing for over half a decade in Phoenix, Arizona. That is desert in everyone's book.
2. Orchid Respite. Grows very well in interior climates of Southern California. It may be a bit difficult to divide and transplant, but is vigorous when established. Will take considerable sun.
3. Blue Moment. An Oregon iris with several Southern California parents. Grows vigorously and divides easily in inland Southern California.
4. Clarice Richards. Does very well in hot, wet climates. Clump may have a tendency to die back, looking like it is gone, and then to produce new growth in the fall.
5. Susie Knapp. Excellent all over Southern California. Stems get long and snaky if grown in too much shade. Will take considerable sun.

6. California Mystique. Has been doing well for me in my hot and intentionally wet garden for several years.
7. Blue Sage. A slow grower, but hardy in a wide variety of sub-climates in Southern California. Performs like a weed along the coast.
8. Idylwild. This more recent iris is proving quite adaptable in this region.
9. Gravitas. It has Idylwild in its background, and performs very well. It divides easily here.
10. Munras. An older iris that also performs well here. I have had it quite a few years in a number of locations in my garden.
11. Joey. Bred in interior central California. Very heat tolerant.
12. Native Warrior. Grows well in my garden in interior California.
13. Chimes. This older white iris blooms fairly early, and has been a dependable cultivar in Southern California's hotter climates for years.

There are others, but this list is a good start. Growing these cultivars is most successful in hot climates by giving them medium shade, or at most an hour or two of morning or evening sunshine. A few will tolerate full sun, but they usually will not show full vigor if grown there. Most will not take full sun in my garden.

To sum up, there is a genetic heritage in the PCIs to produce cultivars hardy in a large number of climates in the United States and other countries. Hybridizers need to accept the challenge of producing such cultivars. This can bring the unique beauty of the PCIs into more gardens and be the source of more beauty in the world. In my opinion, the more beauty we have, the better our lives and our world are.

REPORT FROM EASTERN US REPRESENTATIVE DAVID SCHMIEDER

There are eleven members in the Eastern U.S. region. I was surprised to see how spread out we are, although all but one are in the eastern coastal states. Virginia rules, with three members, but conditions in North Carolina seem to be favorable based on the results of Susan Lambiris in Raleigh, NC and the initial results of James Harrison in Asheville as reported in the Spring 2005 issue. Susan plans to report on her PCI experiences in the fall issue, as does Dorothy Willott in Ohio. John White has been keeping us posted, and I am so glad he hasn't let past losses keep him from continuing his quest for a hybrid PCI hardy in his difficult conditions. We cannot help bragging on his winning the 2007 Payne Medal, the top JI award given by the AIS, for his 'Pink Milestone'. Because I thought Ken Walkup had been a member recently, I asked him to report on his experience with the PCI, and I hope that he does get the garden space to try them again soon.

I am sure the kind of hardiness some of us in the Eastern U.S. are hoping for is a long shot, requiring many seeds to be planted and selected from. Although maybe none of us can carry out such a program by ourselves, perhaps collectively we can, so I plan to continue the activity as long as I am physically able. Such gardening can be a pleasure at any economic level.

From James Harrison, in Asheville, NC

I have had some success with PCIs but my failure is that I have never discovered an indelible marker which could reliably mark my successes. The problem is that I am not entirely sure what I have, and depend on those more knowledgeable to tell me. I have had some beauties that I have subsequently lost after one or two seasons, but seasonal variation is such that I do not know the reason for the loss: temperature, rain, cold or whatever. Our climate in this temperate rain forest is not unlike coastal Oregon, but we are having a dry spell, and who

know what that means.

From Ken Walkup, in Ithaca, NY

I was a member of the SPCNI for a year or maybe two, mostly to get access to their seed exchange. I had pretty poor results with the seeds; by the time I figured out how to germinate them with any degree of success, I had pretty much given up on them due to lack of garden space, the fungus problems I have had, and the general difficulty of keeping them going in a place so far from their home. For the record, my best results with germination came from using the toilet tank method for about a month, followed by sowing the seed in pots kept in an east facing window in an unused bedroom that I can keep at about 50F; germination would take four or five weeks after that. That seemed to be the charm; they must be used to a long cool spring as opposed to the few days we get in between ice and sweltering. I think I only ever got *I. tenax* to bloom. I know I tried *douglasiana*, *innominata*, and a bunch of hybrid seed. I would do it again, given enough time and space. I have pretty much stopped working with sino-siberians, too, for some of the same reasons but mostly fungal rots. After reading about how much trouble Lorena Reid has had with these, too, I really have to wonder if I got the problem along with some of the plants. I ordered a lot in the late 90s.

From John White, in Minot, ME

I had only four plants last fall, all 'Ocean Blue' x *I. tenax*.

I got more seed from the exchange which arrived in early February and have been given 30 days cold treatment in the refrigerator. They are now planted in two flats in a warm room. None have come up yet but it has only been three or four days as of this date. They are as follows:

I. douglasiana x *I. innominata*, *I. tenax* x 'Canyon Snow', 'Night Editor' x *I. tenax*, and 'Dracularity'.

I will see if I have any better luck crossing these back and forth with each other. I would like to try crossing them with some siberians.

From David Schmieder, in Concord, MA

I find that my when my struggles to get fall garden maintenance completed last fall turned to struggling with heavy snow and ice storms from early December on, not only did I fail to put in an intended order from the seed exchange, I didn't even get my own iris seeds planted in pots until March 7. I find amongst those, there is only one seed involving a PCI coming from my attempt to get an interspecies cross with the LAs. Of course it takes only one seed if the right things happen, but with likelihood approaching zero. A lot of PCIs were lost the previous winter, and seed pods from those that survived, whether made by me or the insects, all turned up empty or with weak seeds that disintegrated as I cleaned them. Nevertheless, since I save pots of seeds over for several years (thankfully, since I found that my *I. cristata* seeds almost never germinate until the second year), I usually end up with some more PCI seedlings to set out every year. Some of those are now in a protected bed by our kitchen window, with oak leaves that fell after our early winter began (before our late fall was done) plastered like a sheet of plastic over them. When it's not raining cats and dogs, it's going down to 20 deg F. at night and not getting out of the 30s during the day, but as soon as possible I will lift off the Xmas tree branches, remove the leaves and replace them with nice fluffy salt marsh hay to protect from the freeze-thaw cycles of spring. On the other side of our parking area is a bed that has been mostly relegated to species iris, and that is where I have moved some of our more resilient clumps of PCIs. Unfortunately, it is one of the few areas where I can throw snow from the snowblower, so it is still covered with about four feet of snow and ice. I am looking forward to seeing how all the seedlings do in these two rather different beds as well as the more woody area where some others reside. I plan also to prepare some other areas that may be more naturally kind microclimates, to receive whatever seedlings I may have to set out this year. Many areas on our property have been clear of snow for quite a while, while others, far away from the parking area, are still covered with several inches of snow and ice. And I will also look forward to reading about the results of others in the *Almanac*, as well as the wealth of horticultural information there and on the web site.

TREASURER'S REPORT

BALANCE SHEET as of 12/31/07

| | |
|---------------------------------------|------------------|
| Assets | |
| Cash and Bank Accounts | |
| CD Account | 4,725.96 |
| Checking | 5,366.48 |
| Total Cash and Bank Accounts | 10,092.44 |
| Total Assets | 10,092.44 |
| | |
| Liabilities & Equity | |
| Liabilities | 0.00 |
| Equity | 10,092.44 |
| Total Liabilities & Equity | 10,092.44 |

INCOME STATEMENT 1/1/07 - 12/31/07

| | | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Income | | Expenses | |
| Back Almanacs | 31.50 | Almanac | 1,403.10 |
| Book sales: | | Office | 134.15 |
| Checklist | 9.00 | | |
| Book sales - other | 60.00 | Sec-treasurer | |
| | | Postage | 42.18 |
| Total book sales | 69.00 | Total Sec-treasurer | 42.18 |
| Donations | 87.50 | web page | 165.00 |
| | | | |
| Dues | 1,270.00 | | |
| Interest earned | 29.42 | | |
| Memorial funds | 100.00 | | |
| Photo CD | 114.50 | | |
| Seed exchange | 408.00 | | |
| Slide rentals | 16.00 | | |
| Total Income | 2,125.92 | Total Expenses | 1,744.43 |
| Total Income/Expenses | 381.49 | | |

PACIFIC COAST IRIS ONLINE PHOTO CONTEST

As you read this ALMANAC, Northern Hemisphere gardens will be at the peak of the Pacific Coast Iris season. There will be many opportunities for you to get your camera into action and take plenty of photographs for next year's online contest. This year brought forward some beautiful photographs in both sections, so this season, be on the lookout for the chance to take even better pictures. Remember there are two judged categories – Landscape and Individual Flower, as well as the People's Choice award given from votes cast by visitors to the SPCNI website.

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Updated 3-08

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PACIFIC COAST IRIS BREEDERS' GROUP NOTES

Among the members of the SPCNI is a group of hybridizers who have formed a small informal discussion list on the Internet. Late last year some of the members responded to coordinator Diane Whitehead's request to provide some information on how their hybridizing was progressing, and what goals they have set for the upcoming season. Editor Gareth Winter reports, and asks your forbearance for his New Zealand spelling!

Diane started discussion off with a report on some of her lines. She reported that she is making some progress with introducing better branching into her hybrids, but reported that her multi-flowered stems were mainly plain coloured flowers, so she has been crossing to flowers showing more interesting patterns. New Zealand grower Gareth Winter commented that he found branched seedlings were often very unattractive, as the branches tended to become entangled and the dead flowers did not drop cleanly from the plant, leaving an untidy appearance.

Garry Knipe had this to say about branching:

Some of the late varieties have lots of branching and 2-4 flowers per spathe. This helps extend the bloom period of the plant. Unfortunately, almost all branching PCI that I have seen have the branches intertwined amongst the other branches with all the flowers clumped together. This can get ugly when lots of old flowers crowd the newly opening ones. It will be a long time before we have PCI with nice symmetric straight branching. I am keeping my eyes open for better branching forms.

Diane Whitehead has been also working on red-edged spathes, but reports that she has only achieved this among her white-flowered varieties. Garry Knipe has also been working in this area. He has been playing with red on the stems, spathes, and perianth tubes, and dark purple on the seedpods and perianth tubes. Last year he saw about 150 plants bloom from three crosses for these and selected eight to ten plants for further evaluation and breeding.

On two other fronts Diane reports no progress. She has been attempting to breed for scent but has had no discernible increase in fragrance. Similarly, she reports no progress in achieving re-blooming. One plant she had held hopes for has not bloomed at all for the past two years since she moved it, nor have any of her seeds from this variety germinated.

Garry Knipe reported on his experiences with fragrant plants.

I collected pollen from some fragrant I. macrosiphon and crossed it to some Ghio and Belardi varieties. I have a bunch of selected seedlings that at one time or another had a mild fragrance. Unfortunately, the fragrance is variable. I think it is very temperature sensitive, with very mild fragrance detectable on recently opened flowers (with) temperatures exceeding 70 degrees. The weirdest thing with these is that after sticking my nose into tons of flowers, the fragrance hits me most strongly after I get into my sun-warmed car and start driving. I suspect the fragrant oils need to warm up before they really become noticeable. A real pain for evaluation in the garden.

Kenneth Hixson had similar findings. He says he does not breed irises (meaning he does not undertake planned crosses) but does raise a lot of plants from seed. He says that for him, a flower is incomplete without fragrance – even though it may be beautiful.

I got some of the seed Garry contributed to the seed exchange, and some of the resulting seedlings were scented, rather than fragrant. Before I could do anything meaningful, such as select seedlings

that were worth saving for scent, I had to move my garden. Some of the seedlings were moved, but so far haven't been scented in this garden. The scent of the original seedlings was noticeable in the vicinity of the plants, but sniffing flowers was less successful, and I was not sure which plants were fragrant and which were not. I noticed that I could detect scent at nine a.m., but when I came back to the same plant an hour later, I could not detect anything. I had not made any correlation with temperature, though I did notice that scent was noticeable in the morning and in the late afternoon, and I found little scent during the hotter, middle of the day. Newly opened flowers being scented was also something I had not considered, but certainly may be one of the factors. I only have a couple seedlings planted out this fall, but hope to continue raising seedlings, if anything worthwhile shows up.

No one seemed to have a reliable strain of rebloomers. Gareth Winter commented that he has plants regularly bloom out of season, but (has) no single variety that does it regularly. In his North Island, New Zealand garden seedlings sometimes flower in their first year from planting, sometimes in season but often through the summer. He suspects that this may be an environmental effect, as he grows in pure bark chips and waters regularly. Sometimes mature plants have a rebloom, but no single variety has rebloomed through two or more seasons.

Garry Knipe's primary goal in his breeding is to get true blue and turquoise flowers with good form and substance on robust plants. He started with seed from the SPCNI Exchange donated by Lewis & Adele Lawyer. A few of the seedlings were either light blue or had some turquoise down the center of the falls or turquoise veins. Most had very narrow petals and some were severely affected by rust while others had poor increase. These were crossed with assorted Ghio and Belardi cultivars and he has been playing with these for a few generations now. Although he can see improvements, he feels he still has a long way to get what he is aiming for. He reported:

The light blue and turquoise colors as a group are a bit fickle and tend to vary. Sometimes the colors are beautiful and other times they are washed out or open as a light violet-lavender. I do not know much about pigment organic chemistry, but I suspect some pigments do better with cool damp cloudy weather and a few others do better with warmer weather.

Over the past few years, I have noticed many flowers having problems opening properly and getting hung up in the spathe valves. I. munzii has long open spathe valves. Ghio/Belardi hybrids (from I. innominata, I. douglasiana, etc.) have shorter closed spathe valves. Crossing these yields a mixture of flower part sizes. Many have closed spathe valves and those with shorter pedicels, seedpods, and perianth tubes have a hard time getting out to open properly. This year I spent more time thinking about these parameters before making my crosses, in an attempt to increase the odds of open spathes and flowers held further out of the spathes. Petal width has been slowly increasing and substance is improving, but not as quickly as I'd like.

Garry is also interested in extending the flowering season for PCIs. He reports that the best of his early flowering forms came from crosses with Joe Ghio's 'San Andreas,' and the best of the later flowering forms came from Lawyer branched varieties, especially XP326. He has crossed these seedlings with Ghio's 'Ocean Blue.' The resultant seedlings peak about a month after the main season, but he is dissatisfied with the flowers, which are whitish, and will wait until he has some better blues from his own lines to work with. Garry's seedling ABSA_3 has been circulated among some breeders. This is a very early flowering clone – or a very late flowering one! Some report being able to pick flowers from this selection for their Christmas table

Ryan Grisso reported that he had used 'San Andreas' in the past, and its seedlings were always the first to flower. Unfortunately, he reported that they were usually badly damaged by the rainy weather, and there were no other PCIs to cross them with. He thought it would be useful for promotional purposes if there were more PCIs in flower at the same time as Tall Bearded Irises, as this coincided with the main Iris show season. Gareth Winter stated that early blooming varieties were prone to frost damage in his area, and he was more interested in extending the flowering season later.

Richard Richards, writing from inland Southern California, had some interesting views on this matter. He said that those from milder climates probably were more interested in early flowering varieties as their gardens tended to heat up very quickly in spring. As he said, a "fried PCI is not an attractive sight." Those from colder climates were interested in extending the season later in order to avoid the worst of the late winter weather.

He pointed out that *I. douglasiana* can flower late in some parts of its range, and that 'Orchid Resprite' and 'Blue Sage' have both flowered in July for him. It was June flowers on 'Orchid Resprite' that enabled him to cross with *I. hartwegii* var. *australis* pollen, giving late flowering varieties with increased cold hardiness. He believes that within PCI there is enough genetic material to produce PCIs that bloom for up to six months in some areas.

We have the genetic material to produce PCI that will take considerable cold in the winter, and considerable heat in the summer. What might happen if we put all these lines together? Is there a climate anywhere where the hybrids of such efforts could grow successfully? Might the hybrids adjust to the demands of the climate they find themselves in and bloom relatively early for that climate and relatively late for another type of climate?

Richard believes that Tall Bearded Iris breeders have concentrated too much on having varieties that flower for the shows, and have thus restricted the flowering season for their varieties. He hopes that PCI breeders will continue to work with early and late varieties in order to extend the flowering season. His work in adding the genetic heritage of *I. hartwegii* var. *australis* is meeting with some success. He is evaluating some crosses with 'Orchid Resprite' for vigour, variation from the *I. hartwegii* var. *australis* form and colour, and increased "growability." The species is very difficult to grow outside its native range, and Richard has divided his seedlings this year, planting some back into the ground while potting others. He has also produced some seedlings from *I. hartwegii* var. *australis* crossed with 'Gravitas.' He reported that the cross produced a few vigorous seedlings – and "quite a few dead ones."

Richard is also trying to extend the geographic range that PCIs can be grown in. He has been concentrating on trying to introduce more attractive flowers onto the forms that cope well with his Southern Californian climate. He has crossed his own 'Clarice Richards' with 'Oxymoron,' hoping to add some of 'Oxymoron's' colour combination and flower width to the hardiness of 'Clarice Richards.' He has 100 seedlings from this cross growing, but reported that 'Oxymoron' had become "permanently deciduous."

He says his long-term goal is to produce vigorous and hardy clones that will survive in most parts of the country. Those that have done best so far seem to be of *I. tenax* derivation, but he feels that *I. hartwegii* var. *australis*, which grows in the local mountains at 5,000 to 7,000 feet might pass on to its offspring the ability to survive in really cold weather.

Garry Knipe has also been making crosses intended to extend the growing range of PCIs. He has sent some seed to John White in Maine, and a few packets to the seed pool. John sent some open pollinated seed back to Garry, and he has selected one of those seedlings for future seed production. Debby Cole collected some *I. tenax* seed from 4,000 feet, and Garry has selected the best seedling from a batch raised from the seed, and will send seed to the Exchange.

Steve Taniguchi in Santa Clara, California has two areas of main interest in breeding, but admits that he gets easily distracted by other crosses he makes out of curiosity. His first goal is a real orange coloured flower – not yellow-orange, not pumpkin orange, but real orange. Vern Wood suggested that crossing with pink flowered forms might bring out the orange gene, and he reported that he crossed his orange-ish seedlings with a pink, and has a nice pink with a dark perianth tube. His second area of interest is the ‘Valley Banner’ pattern. He has seen some interesting work with the pattern from Joe Ghio, Ryan Grisso and the late Lois Belardi, and has been making some crosses. Most interestingly, he has crossed the ‘Valley Banner’ type of seedlings with a ‘Wine and Cheese’ type.

Ryan Grisso is also working with ‘Valley Banner’ and ‘Wine and Cheese’ lines, although he has different goals in mind. He reported that one of his goals is to get different bicolours, where the style arms are completely different from the rest of the plant. Last season (2007 bloom) was the first time he was able to make crosses among his own seedlings. He prefers shorter plants that hold the flowers well above the foliage, and selects for a more rounded, modern flower.

His work on the ‘Valley Banner’ line started with Vernon Wood and Joe Ghio seedlings as a foundation, concentrating on the yellow ground forms. Photographs of some of the interesting forms have been previously featured in the Almanac. He has also been crossing with blue flowered forms to try for ‘Valley Banner’ patterned blues. He reported that this line throws strange and unique looking plicata seedlings.

His work on red has been based on a ‘Wine and Cheese’ sibling seedling that has proven to be a good grower with reliable increase. He reports that outcrossing has produced some very interesting seedlings. He has also been “playing around” with grassy-foliaged lines, based on ‘Carrot Top’ and ‘Fairy Chimes,’ looking to add a more modern looking flower to the finer foliage. He reported that the resultant seedlings had very native looking flowers, and wonders whether a grassy foliaged flower would have the stamina to support a modern flower.

He has also been working on what he calls a “Commercial Nursery” line. He reported that one of his first crosses was ‘Canyon Snow’ and ‘Idylwild,’ which gave one seedling with very strong growth and increase. It is a light blue, and seems to have the vigour of ‘Canyon Snow’ in a commercial nursery setting – summer irrigation with overhead sprinklers. He has made a number of crosses with this seedling that should flower this spring. His hope is to breed some hardy varieties with modern flowers that will survive commercial nursery production methods.

Kenneth Hixson has been thinking about commercial nursery lines as well. He lives in Oregon and reports that PCIs in containers are chancy - *our winters are cold enough that in some years the plants (presumably the roots) are killed. Not every year, but for commercial purposes often enough that to have a dependable supply, plants in containers should have winter protection--which raises the cost. Shipping them in from warmer areas is unlikely and expensive.*

Another problem in commercial production is that some plants grow outward rapidly, over the rim of the container. The roots growing downward do not find soil, and die, and that rhizome soon dies. Within three years the Iris tenax I was trying to grow in containers were dead. A nursery would prefer to sell plants in the same year they were potted, and two year growing cycles would probably be the maximum they could afford. "Clumping" plants are more likely to be acceptable than rhizomatous spreaders. One possible solution would be to have a few large clumps in large containers and label them "stock plants, not for sale", or better, price them high, with a more reasonable price for one year plants of the same variety in pots around the large plants. Not an ideal solution, just a possibility.

He reported that some seedlings derived from pool seed seem to satisfy these criteria. *I. purdyi x macrosiphon* seed gave some very interesting plants.

Some of the plants were kept in containers for ten years, and although not happy, survived winter freezes and summer water, and did not overgrow the rims of the containers--or rather, the center of the clump survived. The flowers were small, species size, but still acceptable, though some people certainly would prefer modern hybrids. I've raised a couple of generations of OP seedlings from the "yellow" selections, and got a range of color and height. I have some OP seed of the "lavender-maroon" seedlings planted, but will not see flowers this year, so don't know what will come from them. The few I did raise gave a couple of flowers with flat or "cartwheel" flower form, in dull lavender. Something that survives is better than something showy that dies and disappoints.

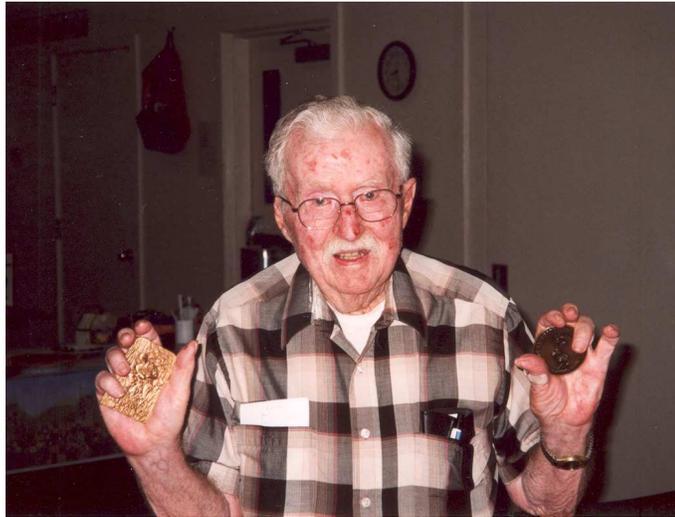
In summary, it seems that many of our PCI breeders are working toward extending the geographic range that our favorite irises can be grown in. They are also very interested in extending the flowering season, by breeding for both early and late flowering, although different climates mean breeders have varying goals. The quest for new colors, and combinations of colors, continues, and most seem to be aiming for low growing plants with rounded, modern flowers. The goal of varieties that are more easily grown in commercial nurseries will help to ensure that PCIs can become known to a wider gardening public. And all of you in the society – if you have a breakthrough in any of your seedlings – a plant with wonderful branching or overpowering scent - make sure to let one of the breeders know.

PACIFIC COAST IRIS - 2008 INTRODUCTIONS

The Monterey Bay Iris Society's website includes photographs of PCI breeder Joe Ghio's introductions for 2008, as well as photographs of earlier varieties. The web address is <http://montereybayiris.org/gallery/ghiopci08.shtml>

All Things Iris have a couple of new introductions from George Gessert in their 2008 catalogue, viewable at <http://www.allthingsiris.com/20in.html>

VERNON WOOD'S AWARD WINNING PCIs



The late Vernon Wood introduced many varieties from his breeding program, and was rewarded with the Mitchell Medal four times, as well as winning other honors.

MITCHELL MEDAL WINNERS



Mimsey



Pink Cupid



Raspberry Dazzler



Sea Admiral

AWARDS OF MERIT



Pinole Princess



Smugglers Cove



Wine and Cheese

HONORABLE MENTIONS



Admiral's Pride



Beckoning Beauty



Enchanting Lady



Distant Nebula



Rose in Prose



Seabright Cove



Violet Vixen

PACIFICA IRIS ONLINE PHOTO CONTEST

The winning photos have been announced in the SPCNI 2008 Online Photo Contest.

In the Landscape Photograph category, judges gave second and third place awards. Second place went to Liselotte Hirsbrunner, for her photo (#1, below) of a Pacifica iris hybrid grown from seed obtained in the annual SPCNI seed exchange. The iris blooms form part of her colorful home garden in Switzerland. A third place award was given to Bob Sussman for a photo (#2) of a clump of *Iris tenax*, taken during the Society's 2006 Spring Trek to Hagg Lake in Oregon.

Judges gave First, Second and Third place awards in the Individual Flower category photographs. Liselotte Hirsbrunner took all three for her photos (#3, 4 and 5 below) of Pacifica iris hybrids growing in her garden in Switzerland, started from seed she obtained through the Society's seed exchange project.

Visitors selected some of the same photographs for their "People's Choice" awards. In the Landscape photograph category, Bob Sussman's photo (#2) of an *Iris tenax* clump at Hagg Lake, Oregon, and Liselotte Hirsbrunner's photo (#1) of Pacifica hybrids in her Swiss garden tied for first place. Liselotte's Pacifica hybrid photos earned First (#5) and Second Place (#3) awards in the Individual Flower category.



Liselotte Hirsbrunner's #1



Bob Sussman's photo #2



Liselotte Hirsbrunner's #3



Liselotte Hirsbrunner's #4



Liselotte Hirsbrunner's #5

SEEDLINGS FROM DOWN UNDER

In the next issue we hope to carry details of PCI culture in Australasia – Australia and New Zealand. Until then, here are a few seedlings to whet your appetite.

From the editor's garden in New Zealand



(Pacific Miss x Eyes Have it)
x (*I. munzii* hybrid x garden hybrid)



Sojourner seedling



Wishing seedling

From Jan Sparks' garden in Australia

