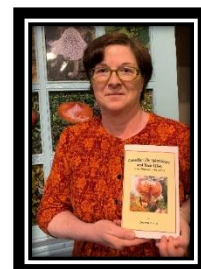


Canadian Lily Hybridizers

Leanne Dowd

It's good to be able to connect with everybody today. Who could have guessed that something as disruptive as a pandemic would have the silver lining of allowing people from different provinces to gather for a meeting without leaving their houses? A person can always find reason for optimism, can't they? Especially gardeners. I was contacted by Lorne and asked to talk about THE BOOK which I am happy to do.



The story begins really, all the way back to 1992 when my parents purchased a large property in Wawanesa, Manitoba to build their retirement home on. Not to get too detailed, this property backed on to what was, in the not-too-distant past, Ed Robinson's Gaybird Nursery and home. Ed had moved into a care home in 1990 and passed away in



Ed Robinson

1992, the same year my parents bought their property. His home and property had been left abandoned during those 2 years. The house was left open and was badly deteriorated and what was at one time the life's work of a devoted gardener, apiarist, nursery owner and hybridizer became overgrown and the countless perennials on the acreage stolen. When my parents bought the adjacent property it had a decaying orchard in the back. In under the old fruit trees they began to find lily stems, some of them with metal markers that were illegible by this time but gave a hint of their importance. Thankfully, and fortunately, they began lifting the bulbs out of the overgrowth and transplanted them to a newly created garden plot. As time went on, they found more and more in different places. How these ones managed to elude theft was

nothing short of a miracle. Once moved, they flourished and I loved to see them when I went for visits. Mom knew of my love of gardening and my fondness for the lilies. The collection had a type of lily I wasn't aware existed until then. They were tall with whorls of leaves on the stems and curious down-facing, small, recurved flowers with a distinctive

scent. They piqued my curiosity and I was immediately hooked because of their unusual look.

In 2006 my Mom phoned me to see if I wanted to take the lilies in her yard as she felt she could no longer manage them and in her words “You want to come get these lilies? If you don’t want them I’m going to till them under.” And believe me when I say she would have without hesitation. She is a woman of her word. I grabbed every plastic grocery bag I had in the house and jumped into my ancient, rusted, land yacht of a Buick and headed south out of Brandon which is where we lived at the time. Once at her house in Wawanesa, I dug and



she bagged every bulb I could find because I knew whatever was left was going under the tines of the tiller and being replaced with grass seed. If I had won the lottery I could not have been more excited. The significance of that day is burned into my memory although I couldn’t have dreamed then where it would lead. Several hours later, I had filled every one of my grocery bags and every one of hers to boot. There may have been some boxes in there too. The car trunk, and this was a big car, was filled to capacity. The trunk lid had to be closed

gingerly to avoid crushing bulbs. The back seat area floor to roof and the front seat including the dashboard were also plugged full with only enough room for me to squeeze in and turn the wheel. It’s a good thing I had gone alone because a passenger would have been strapped to the hood for the drive home. The bulbs were important after all. Visibility was not a priority during the drive back. If I had been stopped by the police they wouldn’t have been too impressed. I had to drive super slow back to Brandon because the back wheel wells were rubbing on the tires there was so much weight in the car and the headlights were pointed skyward like I was about to lift off. The next 3 weeks solid were spent digging out every spare corner of our huge city yard that I could and planting bulbs in the freezing rain until every bag was empty; and there they sat for 4 years.

In 2010 we moved to our current location in the country and the dig, transport and replant scenario replayed itself. Just another belonging to be dragged along whenever we moved. Let it be said that lily bulbs possess incredible fortitude, at least these ones do. Some of them spent weeks in those bags outside waiting for their turn to be unceremoniously thrown into the the icy, half-frozen clay. They were a ways down the priority list at the time. There was no garden on the new property. My son-in-law generously offered to till a spot for the lilies. He pretty quickly regretted that offer as he discovered our soil was actually rock hard clay. He wasn’t so much tilling as he was jack hammering the turf with the tiller. What a nightmare. One of many actually, but that is another story in and of itself. The lilies sat in despair exactly where they were planted for another 6 years. I’m fairly certain they had lost their sense of humor by that time.



Now to 2016. I jumped into the deep end of the Manitoba Regional Lily Society in 2016. I could say I was thrown in but that would be fibbing. I dove ignorantly but willingly. The collection of lilies I had owned for many years came to the attention of one of the board members through a chance meeting at a spring craft sale in Neepawa where she was selling potted lilies along with many other varieties of perennials. As I checked over what she was selling I happened to mention that I had lilies and a brief conversation ensued about what I had and where they came from. If I hadn't happened to meet that particular person on that particular day it is highly likely my lilies would have remained privately confined to my yard and none of what has unfolded since 2016 would have happened. And so very much has happened. At that point she was very casual about what she was hearing and I would only find out later that her stomach was doing flips as she listened. She could have carried on with her day and forgotten we ever spoke but she didn't and I am forever grateful for that. Following that serendipitous

introduction, she and I stayed in touch. After several messages back and forth she asked if she could bring some of the board members up to see the lilies.



Board members in the garden 2016

I reluctantly hosted a tour of my thistle infested lily patch by a few of the board members that spring. Thistles like clay. The lilies had been basically left to their own existence for 6 years. It was very embarrassing. I will never forget that day. These

people drove all the way from

Winnipeg and Brandon to look at my sorry patch of lilies. The looks on their faces puzzled my husband and I for whom the lilies were always just there. One kept shaking his head as he puffed on his pipe, another pointed here and there. Knowing glances were passed back and forth. At one point I said to one of the ladies that I guessed I had about 500 lilies there. Her response was "Oh, my dear, you have many more than that". I was nervous because I didn't want their visit to be a waste of their time. As it turned out they didn't perceive it that way. They said they felt the collection was of great historical significance. After they left I decided the time was overdue to give the lilies better living accommodations. I started the process of identification by



Numbering lily varieties

numbering each different variety that summer, some which have since been named or identified and many still numbered. In the fall each one had to be literally chiselled out of its clay prison to be replanted in generously amended beds and my husband had to come to terms with the fact that the ground where he had been planting his potatoes had gone to better use. I roughly estimated I moved 2000 bulbs that fall.



New garden rows spring 2017

Following the date of the lily tour by the board, my new friend started taking me to garden related events with her. She opened a door for me. I wasn't a joiner prior to meeting her. We went to gardening seminars, lily and iris shows and she started to introduce me to people. She was very resourceful and I learned a lot from her. I was having so much fun. I became an MRLS board member very quickly and felt massively out of place among my learned colleagues around the table at meetings. At that point I didn't know my petals from my

sepals, bulbils from bulblets or stigmas from stamens. I operated according to the saying that I should remain silent and look stupid rather than open my mouth and remove all doubt. At least for the first few meetings. I got the feeling they were looking at me like vultures over a fresh carcass.

Oooooo, a new sucker, I mean, member, on the Board!!!!

The learning curve was the Mount Everest of inclines. Once it was suggested there may be some value to what I had in my garden, I launched into finding out more about them. I always had a feeling in the back of my mind that there was more of a back story to the collection than I was aware of.

The lilies were just too unusual for there not to be. I

recalled my Mom saying when she still had the lilies in her yard that members of a local horticultural society had come to visit and take some of the lilies and were very eager to find a

spotless white one that might be a lost treasure. As it turns out there was no spotless white and I believe what they were referring to is Asiatic 'Snow Bunting' which is a true white with some lilac spotting. At this point it was clear that the lilies had belonged to Ed Robinson. How they ended up in his neighbors yard is a matter of speculation.



Snow Bunting



Nigel visits the garden 2018

I have always been someone who lives by the motto that anything worth doing is worth flogging to death. In that same summer of 2016, after the board members viewed the garden, I drove to the Lily Nook and presented myself to Nigel Strohman to find out if he knew anything about what I had and of course he did. His father had harvested and moved hundreds of Ed Robinson's lilies to his gardens in 1990 with Ed's blessing. Nigel has since been up to see my lilies and identified some that were long since thought lost to time. Things have snowballed from 2016. Once I had a handle on what I owned I delved into learning about everything liliium and began acquiring as many as I could.

My unquenchable thirst for knowledge that can get me into trouble and led to what I am talking of today, THE BOOK. Working on the premise that: 1. I know nothing and 2. I can't

remember anything, writing things down and keeping mountains of printouts of information from the internet as well as buying liliium related books was a must. My uncle Bob passed away last year. He was an author and my aunt asked my sister and I if we would like some of the books in his library. I had to smile when I got into his office. Virtually every book had little papers in them marking pages with information that was important to him and piles of precious papers were everywhere. I recognized that system of filing.

I became the MRLS librarian which, of course, gave me access to volumes more information. I volunteered to maintain the MRLS heritage garden from 2017-2019 just in an attempt to immerse myself and learn more. I think that volunteer stint was the catalyst that turned my primary interest from generalized lily collecting to focusing on Canadian heritage lilies.

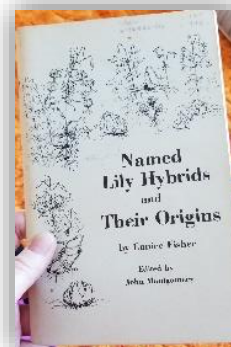
Weeding those beds allowed me to learn some of the names of the more prominent hybridizers and a few of their lilies and instilled in me a sense of urgency regarding how fragile their existence could be. Having researched and written an article about Ed Robinson in 2017, I was now curious about the stories of other lily breeders. Heritage lilies aren't the sole attention grabber for me, I adore all martagons and am building up a collection of them. I also love species lilies and have been growing them from seed and getting the odd bulb where I can find them and have 23 species and species variants so far with another 2 growing as seedlings under lights that I hope will survive to get to the garden.



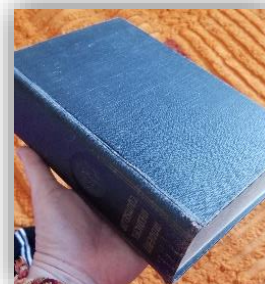
Me at the MRLS Heritage Garden 2018

From 2016 until now, I have joined the board of the MRLS, become its librarian and, as of this spring, vice-president. I have also become a member of several other garden societies, given talks at horticultural and lily society events, written articles, entered stems in society shows, attended the NALS annual convention in Boston in 2018, taken judges training, written a book and met and corresponded with many, many wonderful people around the world that all share a passion for lilies. It's all a bit surreal to be honest.

One of my MRLS board colleagues commented that if I was writing a book on lilies I must know everything. In fact it is exactly the opposite. I don't know anything and can't remember anything. I knew I had to have a file about Canadian lilies and those who hybridize them, that I could use as a reference. I was SO naive. What I initially thought was going to be a pamphlet sized reference like this.....



after one year of full-time work became this.....



and ultimately at the end of year 2 was more like this.....



At the outset I thought there were perhaps 10 hybridizers to learn about. That ridiculous notion was rapidly dispelled as I found more and more, and more information. At some point the idea of writing a book materialized, largely because it occurred to me that there wasn't a comprehensive reference on the topic of Canadian lily hybridizers and the adage came to mind, if it isn't written down, it didn't happen. I began gathering information from innumerable newsletters, books, newspapers, yearbooks, personal conversations, etc, etc. No source was off the table. Also, without the generosity of numerous people in sharing information and photos, the book would be sorely lacking. The information was there in quantity but scattered among hundreds of reference points and the big picture was getting

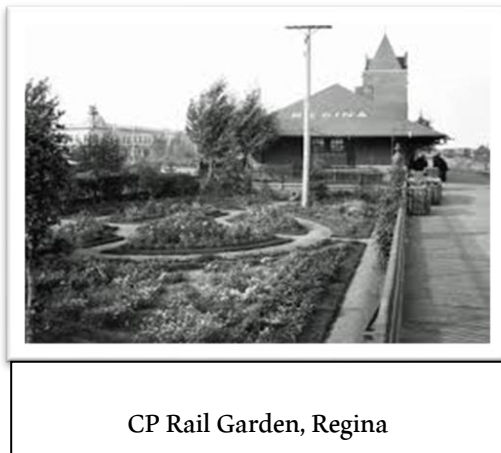
lost in the process. Some super sleuthing would be required. A few words or a name and patchy description here, a paragraph there. A picture once in a while. And cross-referencing when at all possible to ensure accuracy. A small group of veteran lily growers agreed to proof-read the book for content and accuracy as well. They were invaluable. I didn't want to sit judge and jury over whether a single lily hybridized by someone in relative obscurity was less important than those created by a well-known personality in the field so everyone was included. At some point, and I can't recall just when, I took the idea to the Board to see if they thought that it was an endeavour of merit and they were very supportive.

I doggedly followed every thread of significance. It was like putting together a patchwork quilt with half the pieces missing. One discovery would lead to another until linear threads of research began to look more like a giant spider web. One of these webs centred around the influence of experimental farms. I knew of Wilbert Ronald and Lynn Collicutts work at the Morden Experimental Station. I found out about Isabella Prestons plant breeding activities at the Central Experimental Farm in Ottawa where she managed the ornamental plant breeding division. Her interest in lilies began when she attended and then worked at the Ontario Agricultural College with Professor John Crow who also bred lilies and he also taught Frank Palmer the principals of lily breeding. Palmer acted as the Director Horticulture at Vineland Station in Ontario from 1916-1956 and went on to mentor J. C. Taylor who created the "Ontario Bird Series" of Asiatic lilies. In finding information on other experimental farms, sure enough, there were ornamental horticulture breeding programs at these facilities as well, sometimes a funded part of the program of research and other times as a supported private endeavour. This research divulged the name of W.A. Wallace who worked at the Central Experimental Farm in Ottawa and Morden Research Station before going to the Beaverlodge Station in Alberta in 1943. There was another Palmer, Richard, who began the apple breeding program at Summerland Station in B.C. after graduating with a Bachelor of Agriculture from the University of British Columbia in 1921. In the yearbook he was described as a good worker with a weakness for apples. Incidentally, the Spartan apple is one of his developments. Frank and Richard were brothers. These are some of the many people included in the book. I became more intrigued and more determined as I went on

but the search was enormously convoluted and links between individuals were apparent frequently, as just this one scenario centred on experimental farms shows.



The development of Canadian agricultural research stations began in 1886 with the Central Experimental Farm in Ottawa. They arose as part of a world-wide growing interest in the advancement of natural sciences in the 1800s, and more specifically, to educate newly arrived immigrants on how to farm in Canada's challenging and highly variable climate. Each



CP Rail Garden, Regina

station focused on programs specific to the livestock, growing conditions and crops of the surrounding area. Ornamental horticulture was an important course of study at these institutions at the time and manicured grounds served as demonstration plots for plants created there. Trees, shrubs, perennials and annuals were used to as a way to convey affluence and pride of ownership around people's homes. CP Rail created gardens along their routes to beautify the vast expanse of prairie landscape in an attempt to attract new settlers. The Crop Diversification Centre

outside of Brooks began in the early 1900s as a demonstration farm for CP Rail. It was CPR's plan to bring water to the prairies and demonstration farms were part of their irrigation scheme, built along the railways to reveal the power of irrigation for diversifying agriculture. In 1935, the station at Brooks was taken over by the Department of Agriculture.

Practical agriculture was a matter of survival but ornamental horticulture helped tame a wild landscape and gave settlers something to enjoy. As Canadian settlers established themselves, subsistence was no longer top of mind. Gardens expanded. In addition to the development of experimental farms and CP Railway gardens, schools offered

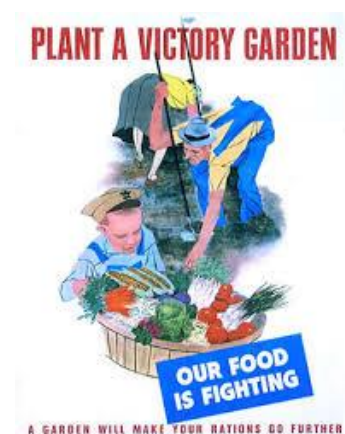


Komarno School
north of Winnipeg
Teacher and
students in school
garden 1917

horticulture as part of the curriculum beginning in the early 1900s. Botanical gardens and parks were established from the 1830s forward and were yet another reflection of ideas deemed to be of horticultural significance of the time which were: 1. scientific advancement of prairie hardy plants and 2. environmental enrichment. Horticultural societies also came to be in most major cities during these early years.

Over the years, restricted finances and changing priorities dictated that some research stations close and that others redirect their focus to developing new plants of more practical purpose, ie. those that feed the population. An example of this trend is the Morden Research Station in Manitoba, established in 1915, which was where many new and exciting lilies, roses, and other perennials were developed and where Wilbert Ronald and Lynn Collicutt began their ground-breaking work on complex interdivisionals. That mandate ceased in the early 1990s and the station is now devoted to cereal crop research. Agricultural experimental farms formalized the research of prairie hardy plants and provided a platform for several Canadian hybridizers. At their peak in the 1970s there were over 50 stations. That number had shrunk to 19 by 1995 and as of 2019 there were 20, now called “research centres or centres of excellence.

The impact of war was profound. Attention during WW I and WW II shifted back to self-sufficiency, thrift, and joining in the effort to contribute to the war. Private and school gardens during WW II became known as ‘Victory Gardens’ with some of the produce being shipped overseas. This was an organized campaign by government with numerous advertising posters and manuals issued to garner cooperation of citizens and maximize their ability, young and old, to grow their own garden produce. Several of Canada’s hybridizers were members of the Armed Forces during these times: Alwyn Buckley, John Bond, Alex Burnett, Percy Byam, Stuart Criddle, Stan Dunville, Robert Erskine, William Evans, Hans Jacobi, Charles Robinson, Herbert Sunley and Fred Tarlton. Gardening passions frequently had to be put on hold until life’s commitments were put to bed and many haven’t seriously taken up the hobby until after retirement. Alex Burnett would go on to name a series of lilies after air force fighter jets called ‘The Fighter Series’.



The longer I worked at it, the more I realized I was in for the long haul and the more I learned, the more unanswered questions surfaced. Never would I have dreamed that there were so many individuals in Canada to document, let alone the massive numbers of lilies. The list of individual names and institutions eventually ballooned up to 104. Now, to find some interesting information about each one, and then for good measure, every lily they ever



named and descriptions for them. Really?? I eventually needed a bigger, better laptop to hold that glut of information and pictures. Oh, and here's the kicker. I'm virtually computer illiterate. I learned enough about Microsoft Publisher and Word that I could limp along from day to day but was miles out of my comfort zone. It was important to me that I be as detailed as possible for those lilies that were named but not registered as the book might very well be the only reference for some of

these lilies and pictures for these ones was literary gold as descriptions were often patchy or virtually nonexistent. For registered ones, I abbreviated the listing details from the RHS Register to those that I felt were most important to identification in the field and added some more colloquial content for interest. I didn't want to regurgitate information that was already in the Register. It was meant to be something novel. Wherever possible, I wanted to include a picture of each lily. Let me tell you, when you have a 400+ page document which includes literally 100s of colored pictures, the cost of publishing skyrockets. After I felt I had done the best I could at putting down the facts, I sought quotes on publishing. It was a staggering blow when the most affordable quote came in at \$11,000. I thought the project was dead in the water at that point and was extremely disappointed to say the least until my husband suggested we buy our own publishing equipment, commercial printer, binding machine and an industrial guillotine cutter large enough to lop off heads. He used his overtime pay to purchase these machines and we were in the publishing business. This was an incredible gesture of support on his part.

As I wrote in the forward of the book, heritage plants, and in this case lilies, are difficult to perpetuate. Some of them in this country go back to the early 1900s. Societies have good intentions and create dedicated beds. Universities and colleges have spots for heritage lilies and individuals do their own collecting. But what inevitably happens is these collections disappear over time. Society members come and go and the priorities of past members fail to be carried forward. Hybridizers pass away and their lilies may be plowed under or be spread out among many keen individuals. Their gardening journals seem to go missing too. Universities and colleges change priorities and groundskeepers. Individuals fail to pass their collections and records along when they can no longer manage them. Good intentions fade and so do the lilies. Disease, weather, lack of vigor, markers gone missing and mother

natures bulb munchers all take their toll as well. Trying to keep a personal collection intact is no easy feat. My own lilies are a good example. Between 2006 and 2016, they received no special care and had to endure harsh treatment at times. It wasn't until 2016 that I began to pay more attention to them. It is not just possible, but likely that some of what I started with didn't make it to 2016. Such was the case of Bert Porter's lilies. When he passed away, a farmer purchased his land and was going to turn it into a field. A group of concerned citizens banded together to stage a herculean effort to purchase Porter's nursery grounds and buildings back and formulated a plan to create a heritage site. Honeywood Heritage Nursery is now a designated Municipal Heritage Property. The people who managed to pull that off are to be applauded.



Honeywood Heritage Nursery

Joseph Tiffen, who bred and registered Asiatic 'Josiveve' in the 1960s, wrote an article for the NALS Yearbook in 1967. In it he tells of how, following Percy Byam's death, his wife told him to take Byam's seedlings or they were going to be destroyed. Tiffen subsequently had to move to Nova Scotia so donated the collection to the Royal Botanical Gardens in Hamilton, Ontario. That was in 1964. After reading that article in preparation for this presentation I contacted the Curator and Manager of Plant Records at the Botanical Gardens. He sent me a long list of lilies in the gardens there. He wrote "I am certain this list is out of date as there hasn't been a recent inventory and we have had struggles with the lily beetles. Also, deer have been an issue in the past for inventorying what's still there since they eat all the flowers before we can confirm identifications". Lilies aren't listed on their website as being one of the collections there. Under the heading of "Collections" it states "The department currently maintains over 50 collections featuring plants of wild origin or ornamental plants and plants of scientific and conservation importance. Each collection is curated like a museum collection or exhibit and supports the scientific, horticultural, educational and conservation work undertaken at RBG. The gardens keep detailed plant records, and plants are labelled.....". "This kind of work is one of the reasons that we are a botanical garden and not simply a city or municipal park, private garden, community

landscape or general greenspace”. People such as Joseph Tiffen donate to this type of organization to see collections preserved but this is the reality of what actually happens. According to the list there are supposed to be lilies hybridized by William Evans, Isabella Preston, Frank Palmer, Percy Byam, James Taylor, Cecil Patterson, Hans Jacobi, Frank Howarth and George Brown among others. But who knows? The Curator of Records has since passed my inquiries on to the Curator of the Lily Collection. On a positive note, as the following example shows, miracles can happen. In 2007, upon discovering that ‘G.C. Creelman’, one of Isabella Prestons lilies, was no longer in the lily collection at the Royal Botanical Gardens, the Curator began a search for another. Finally, in 2017 a woman stepped forward and said she had it. She had inherited it from her grandmother who had obtained it from a neighbor who had purchased it from the Ontario Agricultural College in 1950.



In another reference on the Summerland Ornamental Gardens website, the plight of the rose gardens there echo the plight of many publicly organized preservation gardens. It states “Due to the volunteer nature of the Friends of the Summerland Ornamental Gardens, and lack of experience on the part of the volunteer gardeners....the rose collections had fallen into a state of benign neglect over a period of many years.” Also, at the experimental farm in Ottawa, many of the rose fields were ploughed under in the 1980s and in some cases exterminated the last of some of Canada’s hybridized rose varieties. These parallels to other genera hybridized by some of the same Canadian hybridizers that produced lilies are case in point. The Grounds Chair at Summerland has confirmed with me that none of Richard Palmers lilies exist there.

The Central Experimental Farm in Ottawa has confirmed via email that none of Isabella Prestons introductions remain there despite her 20 year career as an experienced breeder and Dominion Horticulturalist. She created 200 hybrids including roses, crab apples, columbines, Siberian irises and lilies which included the Stenographer Group, the Fighter Group, the Preston Group and the Tigrimax Group.

In the past, lilies were poorly marketed. With them being present in only a few gardens, many fizzled out. Frank Skinner supported the idea of plant patents and labelling nursery stock from its place of origin. This was met with push-back from large-scale nurseries and he was ultimately unsuccessful in his attempt. The practice of acquiring hybridizers promising stock, renaming them and underselling the originator served to undermine hybridization efforts. Growers in some cases cloaked their creations in secrecy to prevent this deception. The above narrative demonstrates the many ways in which it is possible to lose valuable historical lilies.

I have been enthusiastically collecting Canadian heritage lilies for the past 5 years, building on my original collection and have already made provisions that when I can no longer manage the lilies they will be passed on to a family member who has agreed to take them on which is many years away hopefully. It is my best effort to see them perpetuated. Not dropping the ball could prove to be the single most important way of keeping these lilies in circulation. In the meantime, I have committed myself to saving what I can and sharing where I am able in information, seeds, pollen and bulbs. As I meet more lily lovers in Canada, it becomes clear that there are many others like me who have heritage lilies in their private collections. Some have an online presence which makes sharing of information effortless but others don't and that leads to an isolation of those pockets of lilies and word of mouth is a scatter-shot method of communication.

Snippets of information and the odd picture are still surfacing which doesn't surprise me given the obscure sources of much of the information included in the book. One of the advantages of self-publishing is it will be relatively easy to update and add content once enough has been saved to make a new edition worthwhile. I would like to add that if anybody has any information and/or photos of new or old named Canadian cultivars or strains that aren't already in the book please pass them along to me. Now that the book is done and published it is time to devote my attention to other goals. One of them that is high on my wish list is to take a trip west and visit hotspots of lily activity across the prairie provinces with stops at as many locations as possible. I have the route mapped out and it would be an epic journey to manage to get to all the places and visit all the people I would like to include. I think it's an important part of this commitment to the history of Canadian lily hybridization and the Book that I make this trip a reality. A pilgrimage of discovery like the foundation hybridizers in this country might have undertaken. At this point it is more of a dream than a plan. Doing some pollen dabbing of my own is on the agenda too.

There seems to be little to no lily activity east of Ontario. The following may give a hint as to the reason. To again reference Tiffin's article, following his move to Nova Scotia from Ontario in 1964, he writes of his experience of growing lilies there. He refers to the variable climate, depending on location, having an impact on seed maturation and also that the weather could often be very wet. He lamented of how he tried in vain to stir up interest in growing lilies among others who lived there. Look west and the history of lily hybridization is rich. In particular, Canadian hybridizers are renown for creating new martagon varieties. It began with a core group of enthusiasts many years ago, Preston, Skinner, Wright, Bazett, Erskine, Porter, Robinson, Patterson, all familiar names among them. They were known not only for lilies but for creating new offerings across many genera of the plant world, ornamental and agricultural. They laid the groundwork for future hybridization successes in this country. The work was carried out with a pioneer spirit of necessity and tenacity, of creating new, hardier varieties than those in Europe for both food and beauty. They would travel abroad to gain knowledge and collect specimens of promise and ask that others be sent through the mail. Some of their stories are quite remarkable such as that of *Isabella*

Preston who persevered and overcame discriminating hiring practices and prejudice against women in the workforce due to gender expectations of the time.



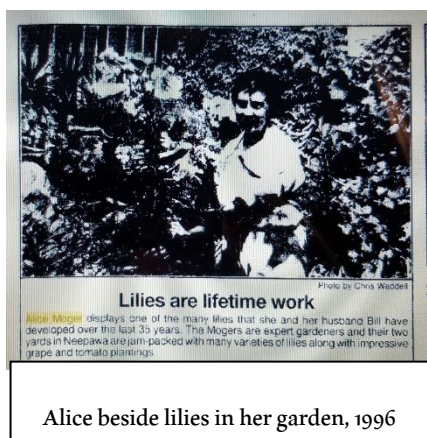
Criddle/Vane Clan, year unknown. Stuart upper right

Stuart Criddle immigrated to Manitoba from England with his family in 1882 when he was 5 years old. They scabbled out a desperate existence to begin with, almost starving to death in their first winter here. He had no formal education but his accomplishments in the areas of mammology and botany earned him an honorary Doctorate of Science from Brandon University as well as a number of other accolades. *Percy Wright* didn't attend school until he was 14 but went on to graduate from the University of Saskatchewan with 'great distinction'. *Frank Skinner's* passion for creating prairie hardy plants resulted in a self taught career in horticulture and plant breeding. He leaves behind a legacy of roughly 300 trees, bushes, clematis, roses, honeysuckles and lilies. He researched and collected plants from around the world and established contact with professional and private growers in many countries. He earned some of the most prestigious awards available to those who further the interests of horticulture including an Honorary Doctorate of Law Degree from the University of Manitoba. Remarkable.

These private and professional pioneering hybridizers held what is referred to as round robin discussions where they shared ideas. Countless letters would have been sent across the country. Quarterlies and annuals of the time carried all important articles where each shared their latest installments of what crosses they had made which were updated in future issues. Those articles immortalized their achievements and provide a foundation for future lily growers in their own gardens.

The canvas for hybridizers includes private gardens but there are others who have worked more collaboratively in universities and agricultural colleges as a formal framework for their work in addition to those on government run experimental farms as already mentioned.

Current lily breeders get to benefit from the experiments of the past and have a vastly more generous palette to work with. The first of the Canadian hybridizers worked primarily with species crosses. The interconnectedness and support from like-minded individuals has played a pivotal role in the development of lilies in Canada. For example, *Alex Burnett* began with bulbs from *Fred Fellner*. *Fred Fellner* first received bulbs from *Robert Simonet*. *Simonet* was given bulbs from *Fred Tarlton* and seeds from *Percy Wright* to ignite his passion for lilies. Upon selling his rural property, *Fred Tarlton's* collection went primarily to *Marvin Joslin* who worked with *Dan Dale*. *Percy Wright* focused on working with material from *Isabella Preston* in his breeding program. *Preston* worked with species 'sargentiae' and 'regale' and was credited with being the first person to bring 'davidii var. willmottiae' into the field of lily breeding. And, so, each hybridizer is interconnected with others in this manner. Proximity certainly played a part in sparking an interest as well. *R.S. Barber* was *Isabella Preston's* neighbor. *Madeline Holloway* was *Robert Erskine's* neighbor. *Barrie Strohman* lived in the same town as unknown hybridizer *Alice Moger*.



Alice beside lilies in her garden, 1996

Her story is yet another example of how the life's work of a dedicated gardener can be lost so easily. She and her husband Bill were regarded as expert gardeners. They had extensive garden beds behind their house in town, another small acreage on the edge of Neepawa and, at one time, another 2-3 acres of lilies on a family member's farm out of town. Both the town yard and acreage were concealed behind formidable fences. After they passed away, extended family sold the house in town and those plants were dug up and distributed among the new owner and her family members. The acres of lilies in the country had

long since been plowed under. Only because I relentlessly hounded the family, were my husband and I lucky enough to be able to buy the acreage on the edge of town last spring. By that time, it had sat with the relatives for 2 years. Countless perennials and thousands of lilies had been taken out. Nevertheless, there is still a wealth of horticultural value. Although a prolific hybridizer of peonies, irises and martagon lilies, none of Alice's creations was ever named or shared. Someone said to me not long ago: "That fence was always that barrier to the secret garden we found out about but never got to see". I have enquired after her

garden records and my contact within the family can't remember where they ended up. Alice's initial breeding stock came from Skinner, Porter and Preston. An extensive clean up



Corner of yard, spring 2020

has begun. It's exciting to imagine what treasures remain there to be discovered! We were able to clear a small corner inside the gate where you had to fight your way in through an impenetrable matt of vegetation. The area was an impossible tangle of grapes, raspberry canes, 3' high weeds, and numerous rotted trellises and cages.



Same area, fall 2020

This picture is what that same area looked like after a summer of clean up. It was surprising how many desirable plants and martagon lilies had survived under all that overburden. Notice you can now see the 6' fence in the background that was completely obliterated in the first pictures.



To date, Canadian Lily Hybridizers and Their Lilies has been sold to individuals in Canada, the United States, Ireland, Scotland and New Zealand. That, to me, is astounding considering I never go anywhere but the garden for the most part and consider myself largely a recluse. I have spoken to some who feel that researching and recording the profiles and lilies of past hybridizers is perhaps not the best use of my time. But, I felt honoring the devotion, identities, peculiarities and ambitions of the kaleidoscope of characters in the past and present of Canadian lily hybridization was something I felt personally close to and was important to me. And they are a colourful lot aren't they Dr. Evans? If you can take my book to the garden, flip through it with your dirty fingers and use it to identify even one old lily or find it useful to discover

that a particular cross produced a more desirable lily and would be useful in charting your own course of breeding, that's all I hope for. Even if it makes a useful coaster for your coffee cup I will be pleased. I like to keep my expectations low.

As final food for thought, there are many small islands of preservation across Canada; the Royal Botanical Gardens in Burlington, the University of Guelph perhaps? Dr. Patterson's lilies at the University of Saskatchewan, Bert Porter's lilies at Honeywood, Hugh Skinner still has some of his Dad's, Olds College; The University of Alberta? Home gardens, society plots, community gardens. As many as I have listed here, I have missed that many more. Therein lies an important issue. What is lacking to my mind is centralization with a sole purpose of preserving what is remaining of Canadian hybridizers' works. Is it too grandiose a scheme to suggest a national repository with a curated collection? It would require a joining of forces and cooperation of lily societies, institutions and individuals as well as determined attempts to locate material; plenty of networking. It would exist as a focused effort to preserve the heritage of Canadian lily hybridizers, provide education to those who want to know more about lilies and Canadian lilies in particular. The cost of managing the garden could be offset by annual sales of bulbs, scales, pollen and seeds. This would simplify access for all and the more sharing of lilies, the greater the marketing of these historical gems, the greater the likelihood of their survival. It would be imperative to maintain a long term vision. Perhaps the book could be thought of as the beginnings of this centralization? A jumping off point?

Thank you everyone for being here today and joining me in sharing a love for lilies and a celebration of all the talented Canadian lily hybridizers, past and present. Their invaluable contributions lay the groundwork of future hybridization and, as such, are worthy of record.

