



A 2015 open-pollinated seedling out of 'Oso Easy Cherry Pie'  
Photo by Stephen Hoy

# Singularly Beautiful Roses

A Publication Dedicated to Single,  
Nearly Single, and Semi-Double Flowered Roses  
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Summer

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## 'Mrs. Oakley Fisher' – A Color Fashioned by the Sun

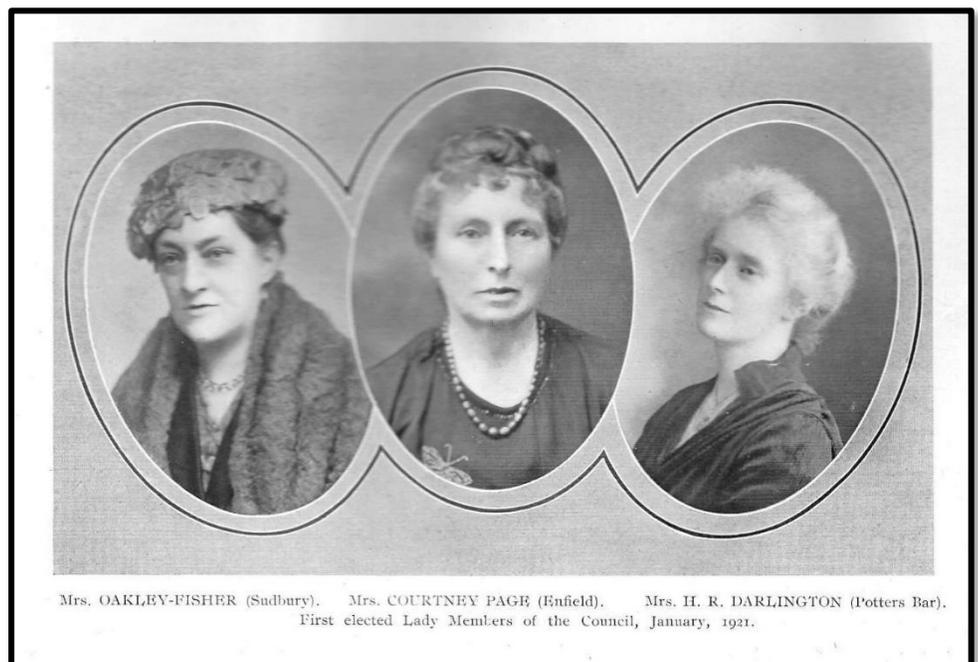
Our tale begins in two historic market towns in the southeast of England. Sudbury, first incorporated in 1554, is situated on the River Stour which delineates Suffolk and Essex counties. The community's weaving and silk industries have been an important part of its heritage for hundreds of years. In fact, the silk in Princess Diana's wedding gown was woven there.

During the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Sudbury was the home of Mr. and Mrs. George Oakley Fisher, Esq. As early as 1891 George's occupation is described as auctioneer, land, estate and house agent, and surveyor and valuer. He maintained offices in London and Oxford according to a commercial and professional London directory (*Kelly's London Post Office Directory*, p. 964). A variety of sources indicate his business opportunities allowed him to become an avid collector of fine china, porcelain and jade, historic European and English paintings, vintage furniture, and antique books. Mrs. Oakley Fisher gained a reputation as a successful amateur exhibitor of cut flowers and roses at her local Harrow Flower Show as early as 1904. The record of her success in classes designated Table Arrangements can be found in period horticulture publications, *The Garden*, *The Gardener's Chronicle*, and *The Gardener's Magazine*. Among the documented roses she grew were the popular exhibition cultivars 'Madame Abel Chatenay,' 'Charles E. Shea,' and 'Ophelia' as well as the single-flowered varieties 'Irish Elegance' and 'Irish Fireflame,' both used extensively by many rose enthusiasts in the Table Arrangement classes. In 1921 she was given the distinct honor of being named one of the first female members of the National Rose Society's Council along with Mrs. H. R. Darlington and Mrs. Courtney Page.

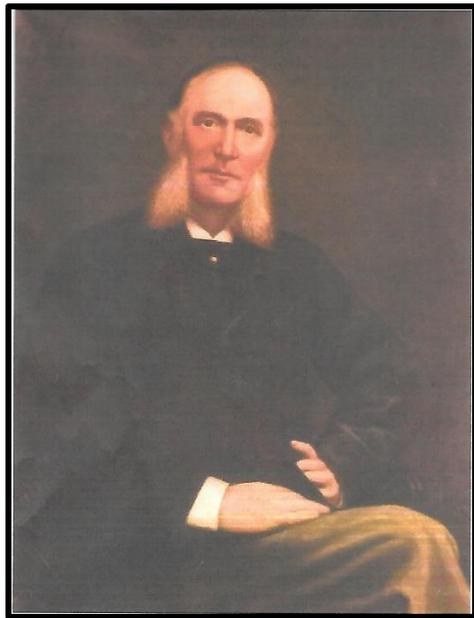


The story continues in the nearby market town of Colchester, a mere fifteen miles away. Much like Sudbury, the town is also located on a waterway, the River Colne. Although its history dates back to pre-Roman times, it is well known as one of the oldest and chief towns of Roman Britain. Colchester was also the family of the family home of Benjamin R. Cant & Sons, the oldest continually operating rose nursery in England. Their current website states that records indicate that Ben's grandfather, William Cant (1742-1805), established the nursery in 1765, although the Cant connection to horticulture may go back as early as 1728.

Photo courtesy of *The Rose Annual*, 1921



Mrs. OAKLEY-FISHER (Sudbury). Mrs. COURTNEY PAGE (Enfield). Mrs. H. R. DARLINGTON (Potters Bar).  
First elected Lady Members of the Council, January, 1921.



**Benjamin R. Cant**  
 portrait by Charles Head

Ben (1827-1900) and his wife Elizabeth were running the nursery when an acquaintance, having just returned from a trip to France in the summer of 1853, convinced Ben to consider purchasing three roses just released to commerce – ‘Gloire de Dijon,’ ‘General Jacqueminot,’ and ‘Jules Margottin.’ He soon had a ready supply of these roses to sell; ultimately that acquisition radically changed his life. After winning four silver cups at the first National Rose Show in 1858, held at the newly opened St. James Hall in London, he went on to become an amazingly successful exhibitor. In 1879 the firm of Benjamin R. Cant & Sons relocated to Mile End just outside the city limits of Colchester to dedicate themselves exclusively to the breeding and selling of roses. Upon his death in 1900 his sons Cecil Edward Cant (1860-1925) and Benjamin Edmund Cant (1871-1933) assumed the reigns of the family business. Cecil is credited with hybridizing/introducing the varieties that appeared in their catalogs after 1900, including the well-known pink Tea named for his mother, ‘Mrs. B. R. Cant.’

Based on a mutual interest in exhibiting roses and the close proximity of their residences it can be inferred that Mrs. Oakley Fisher knew the Cant family and was certainly a customer. Familiar with her skilled use of ‘Irish Elegance’ and ‘Irish Fireflame,’ the Cant family introduced a new single Hybrid Tea in their 1921 catalog named for their acquaintance. They described the new rose, ‘Mrs. Oakley Fisher,’ as a “true single variety . . . [having] the characteristics of the “Irish Singles,” good branching habit of growth with clusters of flowers, and good bronzy foliage. The flowers are . . . a rich orange-yellow throughout, of similar coloring to ‘Lady Hillingdon,’ and sweetly scented (*The Rose Annual, 1921*, p. 206).” The rose was awarded a Certificate of Merit that same year at the National Rose Society’s summer show held at the Botanic Garden in London’s Regent’s Park.

Mr. Courtney Page, Secretary of the National Rose Society, sent a report of Great Britain’s new Gold Medal and Certificate of Merit winners to Horace McFarland to be included in the 1922 *American Rose Annual*. It included a description of ‘Mrs. Oakley Fisher’ describing it as “pale golden buff, with deeper-colored stamens . . . an attractive variety (p. 145).” With this introduction to the American market it was soon added to the catalog of New Jersey rose growers Bobbink & Atkins. Already promoters of the “Irish Singles,” they were quick to mention its similarity, excepting color, to “all the Irish varieties (*Bobbink & Atkins Roses, 1924*, p. 35).”

‘Mrs. Oakley Fisher’ made her appearance in Australia in 1922 by way of Hazelwood Bros. Nursery located in Sydney. Founded in 1908 by Harry and Walter Hazelwood, the brothers were fellow pioneers along with American rose enthusiast Capt. George C. Thomas, Jr. in

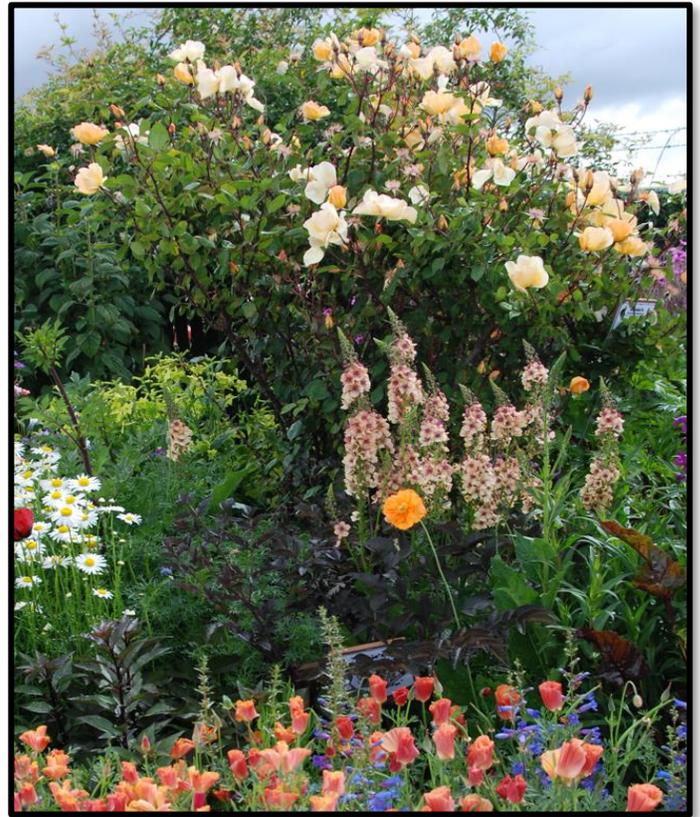


‘Mrs. Oakley Fisher’ - Photo by Bobbie Reed

advocating selecting roses based on local climate conditions. Listed under Novelty Roses, their 1922 description of 'Mrs. Oakley Fisher' was excerpted from the B. R. Cant & Sons catalog entry (p. 12)."

Its value as a uniquely colored decorative rose was most likely enhanced by its inclusion in the luxurious gardens of Vita Sackville-West at Sissinghurst Castle. After she and husband Harold Nicholson purchased the crumbling castle in 1930, they began a decades long rejuvenation of the grounds. The result was a romantic profusion of herbaceous treasures, among which roses, especially the "old" roses, were prominently featured. We know that 'Mrs. Oakley Fisher' was among the two hundred or so roses in her garden by way of comments made by British gardener Christopher Lloyd who indicated he had a roughly fifty-year-old specimen in his garden at Great Dixter given to him by Sackville-West as a cutting (*Roses, A Celebration*, p. 87.).

Although most single-flowered Hybrid Teas have universally faded from commerce this rose ironically is still available from a variety of sources in North America, numerous European countries, Australia, and New Zealand. I have been growing Mrs. Oakley Fisher' for over thirty years and love it for several reasons. First it is a survivor. It was included in the early catalogs of the Antique Rose Emporium when their pages were populated primarily by rustled roses known to survive under less than favorable growing conditions. I typically see minor problems with black spot in early spring under no-spray conditions, but with the onset of warmer weather the bush re-clothes itself with a rich canopy of foliage that persists for the rest of the season. Next, 'Mrs. Oakley Fisher' blooms prolifically from April through November here in Georgia – hundreds of flowers. In full bloom, 'Mrs. Oakley Fisher' gives the impression that a migrating cloud of Sulphur butterflies has landed on a rose bush. The color is one I'm particularly fond of; in different seasons it might be described as yellow-orange, buff, apricot, amber, honey, almond, or peach. And the stamens! Yellow anthers sit atop golden filaments that rise from a glowing halo of red-orange. These colors contrast nicely with the plum-colored tint of new foliage. One last characteristic requires a story. Years ago, I contemplated opening a mail-order rose business catering exclusively to lovers of single-flowered roses. I propagated hundreds of roses and was able to grow them in an unused greenhouse where I worked. . .



Above; 'Mrs. Oakley Fisher' in the mixed border  
Photo courtesy Annie's Annuals & Perennials

Below; 'Mrs. Oakley Fisher' w/ 'Anna Olivier'  
Photo by Billy West



One day while weeding and deadheading the delicious scent of cloves captured my attention. The source – ‘Mrs. Oakley Fisher!’ Bring a bloom inside and it will surprise you. Why add this *femme classique* to your garden? The answer might best be summed up in the words of the family that introduced it, “[‘Mrs. Oakley Fisher] . . . will hold its own with any variety of its class and is distinct from all (*The Rose Annual*, 1923, p. 248).”

## New Rose Hybrids and the Hybridizers

This list is not intended to be comprehensive. It directs attention to a small group of hybridizers with whom I’ve personally corresponded. Each has recognized the beauty of the single and/or lightly petalled roses for which I presume to be an advocate.

**Joe Bergeson** is a third-generation nurseryman and rose hybridizer who resides in Fertile, Minnesota, just miles from both the Canadian and North Dakota borders. His biggest challenge is producing roses that will survive in his zone 3b climate. Additional goals include a rounded shrubby habit of growth and healthy foliage.



Named “Foliocom,” this seedling is a result of a cross of the ferny-leaved species *R. foliolosa* and Dr. Robert Basye’s relatively thornless ‘Commander Gillette.’ It is repeat flowering, has few if any thorns, and is generally healthy. Joe hopes to use it to add “vigor, health, shrubbiness, and hardiness to modern roses.” Photo by Joe Bergeson.

Another candidate that meets his goals of hardiness and shrubbiness is a cross of the old Hybrid Rugosa ‘Belle Poitevine’ and ‘Commander Gillette’ (in search of a thornless Rugosa). Codenamed “Poitecom,” it blooms all summer and has the added bonus of a nice fragrance. Photo by Joe Bergeson.



**Rob Byrnes** is a rose hybridizer who lives in Roebling, New Jersey. His posts caught my attention due to a common interest in many of the same roses. Rob's main goals include disease resistance and winter hardiness. He gardens in a smaller space and grows many of his roses in containers much like myself.



This unregistered seedling is a cross of the Rugosa/Nitida hybrid 'Nyveldt's White' and the copper-orange Harm Saville Miniature 'Denver's Dream.' Although still a relatively young seedling, with the genes of 'Nyveldt's White' one would expect great winter hardiness and wonderful resistance to black spot. Photo by Rob Byrnes.

Also suggesting good winter hardiness is a cross of the yellow, highly fragrant Hybrid Rubiginosa 'Cläre Grammerstorf' and a remontant Hybrid Spinosissima just getting established in my garden, 'Prairie Peace.' It is still a juvenile plant and thus hasn't demonstrated reblooming capability just yet. The foliage is reported to be black spot free and the bloom possesses some fragrance. Photo by Rob Byrnes.



Our third featured hybridizer is **Andre Carl** from Des Moines, Iowa. His three stated goals include breeding for cold hardiness and disease resistance in large-flowered roses that are characterized by a rounded plant architecture. Looking at his “plants bred” tab on HMF it is clear that utilizing some of the “Sub-Zero” hybrids created by the Brownell family is part of his vision. Andre and I also share an interest in purple roses!

‘Far Out’ is a seedling Andre bred by crossing the fully petalled Brownell Hybrid Tea ‘Country Doctor’ with ‘Knock Out.’ The petal count has increased as the plant has matured, but still has the feel of a lightly petalled Shrub. He notes the color is a clear pink with scalloped edges, the bloom can reach five inches in diameter, and the plant is extremely black spot resistant. Further it repeats quite quickly. Photo by Andre Carl.



Named ‘Light My Night,’ this maroon/purple seedling is a cross of the zone 3a hardy member of the Parkland Series ‘Adelaide Hoodless’ and the highly fragrant Tom Carruth LCl, ‘Night Owl.’ The flowers are large and usually appear one-per-stem or in small clusters and the plant is virtually thornless. Photo by Andre Carl.

**Joseph Marek** is a licensed landscape architect living in Santa Monica, California. He specializes in residential projects on a variety of scales in the southern California area. One pursuit in his rose breeding is the creation of seedlings with dark, richly hued filaments and anthers, a characteristic that he believes adds character and depth to the bloom. YES! He also continues to work with *Hulthemia* genes in search of more subtle expressions of the blotch. Photos by Joseph Marek.



**Linda Schuppener** lives in the metro Atlanta, GA area. We had been friends for some time before I discovered she hybridized roses. After some encouragement from our small group of GA/FL rose breeders Linda has finally registered several of her seedlings.

Bred in 2015, 'Sharon's Jewel' is a cross of Dr. Keith Zary's yellow Floribunda 'Walking on Sunshine' and one of my favorite roses, 'Paul Ecke, Jr.' It has glossy green foliage and is compact growing. It won a blue ribbon at this past spring's Greater Atlanta Rose Show – a show that typically has a very diverse and quite competitive display of Modern Shrub roses. Linda reports a mild fragrance. Photo by Linda Schuppener.



**Tom Silvers** is an experienced hybridizer who lives in Maryland. His stated rose breeding goals revolve around working with Species roses and making Species crosses. He also works with a broad spectrum of ornamentals, vegetables, and fruits.



The first featured seedling is a cross of *R. rugosa* x *R. xanthina* done in 1994. It is a vigorous spreading rose in my garden with pale yellow single flowers that are lightly fragrant. It is a totally carefree once-flowering rose that Tom says may be somewhat pollen fertile. Don't expect any hips though. Photo by Tom Silvers.

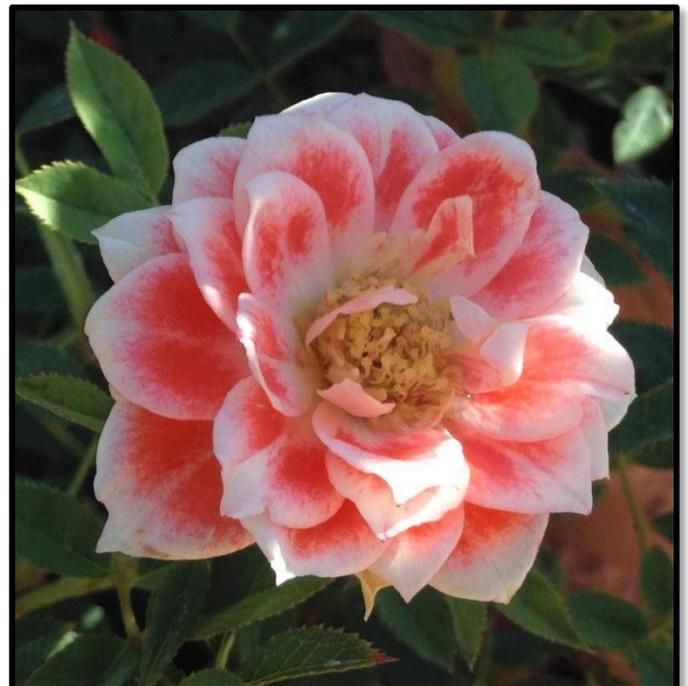


Another unique seedling Tom has raised is a cross of *R. bracteata* and (*R. rugosa* x *R. palustris*). It has inherited the prickles and rugose foliage of its paternal grandmother along with great disease resistance and the gorgeous stamens of its seed parent. He indicated that it is quite vigorous! Photo by Tom Silvers.

**Judith Belsham Singer** faces quite contrasting climate conditions in regard to her rose-breeding efforts. She lives in Tucson, AZ (zone 9b) and her roses must endure extremes of desert heat and powdery mildew pressure. She recently registered three gorgeous hand-painted Miniature seedlings with names reminiscent of soda fountain treats. Photos by Judith Singer.



‘Cherry Spritzzz!’



‘Tangerine Spritzzz!’



‘Orange Cranberry Spritzzz!’

I have featured some of the roses bred by my friend **Allen Whitcomb** in previous editions. Al lives on the Gulf Coast side of Florida near Tampa. Several of his registered seedlings are starting to make their mark in our Florida, Alabama, and Georgia rose shows by winning ribbons and classes!

One of his early efforts, ‘Miss Grace’ is an open-pollinated seedling out of Griffith Buck’s ‘Summer Wind.’ It is one of the most uniquely colored roses I’ve ever seen – perhaps fuchsia-rose. The stamens are eye-popping. It produces long cutting stems and lasts several days in the house. I’ve been growing an own-root ‘Miss Grace’ since 2015 without the use of any fungicides. Photos by Al Whitcomb.



A second seedling is my favorite. Named 'Rhapsody in Red,' this crimson-red rose has ruffled petal edges and is fairly compact growing. It is a self-pollinated seedling out of a ten-petaled Hybrid Tea named 'Excite.' Everybody notices the dazzling color of this rose. It also grows well without spraying in my garden. Photo by Stephen Hoy.



Last but not least is another self-pollinated seedling out of 'Summer Wind,' named 'Debbie's Delight.' I chose the name to honor Debbie Coolidge, a co-owner along with husband Geoff, of Cool Roses in West Palm Beach, FL. Along with impressive vigor and great black spot resistance, this variety has a delightful and very noticeable fragrance. Photo by Stephen Hoy.

*Flowers seem intended for the solace of humanity. Children love them. Quiet, contented, ordinary people love them and rejoice in them gathered. They are the cottager's treasure, and in the crowded towns flowers mark, as with a little fragment of broken rainbow, the windows of people in whose hearts rest the covenant of peace.*

## From the Editor

It has been a HOT summer here in Georgia. Rose blooms not cut early in the day look broiled by afternoon. I've been deadheading by simply removing the spent flower, leaving as much foliage on the plant as possible. This, in theory, gives the plant a greater chance of surviving the extreme heat and the shortfall of rain we've experienced. Maybe if I had fewer roses . . .

In the context of researching the elusive Mrs. Oakley Fisher, the person and the rose, I purchased a book entitled, *Roses: A Celebration*. Edited by Wayne Winterrowd, the book is a collection of thirty-three essays written by a who's who of contemporary garden writers about their favorite rose. None of the contributors selected the same rose, which demonstrates the breadth of diversity that characterizes the object of our love, the unique attributes which we individually value, and in some instances the power of wonderful memories. The value of this "rose book" lies in its well-written prose, it is a great read. The essays, already a pleasure, are beautifully accompanied by the superb watercolors of award-winning Canadian botanical artist Pamela Stagg.

I recently received an email from a French rose enthusiast. By virtue of my invitation to share the newsletter with friends he read my article from in an earlier issue about the Lawrenceanas/miniature Chinas. Our conversations have resulted in his sharing his efforts to collect and identify roses growing in nearby cemeteries – Chinas, Centifolias, Bourbons, Hybrid Perpetuals, etc. – with photos and documentation. What a thrill! I've also enjoyed new email/Facebook connections with rose growers in Belgium, Poland, New Zealand, and Australia. In the midst of a season in which so much toxic energy is focused on our differences it is remarkably rewarding to find common ground. Please feel free to communicate.

## Sources & Contact Information

'Mrs. Oakley Fisher' – too many sources to list. Go to [www.HelpMeFind.com/rozes](http://www.HelpMeFind.com/rozes) and click on "Buy From" tab.

'Miss Grace' – A Reverence for Roses – [www.areverenceforroses.com](http://www.areverenceforroses.com).

'Rhapsody in Red' – contact me or breeder Al Whitcomb.

'Debbie's Delight' – Cool Roses – [www.coolroses.com](http://www.coolroses.com).

## Singularly Beautiful Roses

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Please feel free to share this newsletter with friends and fellow enthusiasts!