



Isobel

Singularly Beautiful Roses

A Publication Dedicated to Single,
Nearly Single, and Semi-Double Flowered Roses.
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A Man and His Women: Affairs of the Heart

It has been labeled *La Belle Epoque*, The Beautiful Era. During the reign of Britain's King Edward VII (1901-1910), the upper class enjoyed long, leisurely afternoons and summer garden parties. England's population had doubled in the previous fifty years, and the British Empire was hale and hearty. English authors H. G. Wells, Joseph Conrad, Vita Sackville-West, and George Bernard Shaw published famous literary works. Composers Edward Elgar, Ralph Vaughn-Williams, and Gustav Holst birthed a renaissance of English musical composition. Jazz had crossed the Atlantic and was making its presence known all over Europe. The image of the Gibson Girl, beautiful, yet emancipated, became an international influence in the world of beauty and fashion.

The English landscape garden, characterized by the philosophy that "all nature is a garden," had dramatically altered the countryside. The extensive plant-collecting expeditions of previous centuries had broadened the English gardener's palette of plants. Gertrude Jekyll (1843-1932) was at the height of her fame as a garden designer. Extensive private and public gardens were created, many of which survive to this day.

Among the lavish catalog listings available to plant lovers was a new class of roses known as the *hybrid teas*. Still in their infancy as a class, a number of cultivars were uniquely possessed of only one or two rows of petals. Called single hybrid teas, many were included on "most popular" rose lists. Among them was a group labeled the "Irish" singles, including *Irish Beauty*, *Irish Glory*, *Irish Modesty*, *Irish Star*, *Irish Engineer*, *Irish Pride*, *Irish Brightness*, *Irish Harmony*, *Irish Elegance*, *Irish Fireflame*, and *Irish Afterglow*, all hybridized by Alexander Dickson before 1914 (of the group only *Irish Elegance* and *Irish Fireflame* remain available today). Over a hundred single or nearly single (by the ARS's current definition) bush and climbing forms of hybrid teas were introduced through 1937.

The hybridizer responsible for the most popular and commercially successful single hybrid tea ever created was a gentleman by the name of **William Edward Basil Archer**. A furniture designer originally, he began breeding roses as a hobby. He, his wife, two sisters, and his daughter moved to Monk's Horton in Sellindge, Kent, in the south-east corner of England in the early 20's. There he and his daughter Muriel partnered in introducing a number of roses from the 20's

through the 40's following several unusual breeding lines. Sometime in the early 20's a cross was made by Archer between the exquisitely fragrant *Ophelia* and a rich red semi-double hybrid tea, *Kitchener of Khartoum*, more widely known as *K. of K.* The result, *Dainty Bess*, was a stunning rose that would immortalize Archer's wife. Introduced in 1925, it was originally described in the 1926 ARS Annual in the following terms: "Type, distinct. Flower 3 ½ to 4 inches across, single, broad-petalled, fimbriated edges, rose color; borne several together. The large, flat cluster of stamens is held above red filaments, reminding one of *R. moyessi*" (1926 ARS Annual, p. 181). Missing from the narrative



Dainty Bess: photo by Al Whitcomb

is the rose's intoxicating fragrance. "Rose" is at best a wishful description of its color. The light pastel pink on the inner side of the petals is contrasted by a somewhat darker "rose" reverse. During the growing season the fimbriated edging is as often not seen as it is seen. The flowers come on long stems, the growth is upright, and the foliage is matt green, and it is susceptible to black spot. What makes this rose so widely grown? It's those stamens!!! The striking splash of garnet red filaments gaudily contrast with the bloom's subtle shade of pink, giving this rose an appeal that transcends the objections that some have regarding the "lack of petals." Its popularity shot up dramatically in 1931 when it was awarded "Best Rose in Show" at a rose show in Toronto, Canada among an exhibition of thousands of roses. A brief conversation (now more than a decade ago???) with Tom Carruth of Weeks Roses revealed that roughly 44,000 plants of *Dainty Bess* were sold between 1990 and 1995.

The second single hybrid tea introduced by Archer and daughter was only recently rediscovered and imported from Germany by Gregg Lowery of Vintage Gardens. *Bonnie Jean's* name-sake is unknown, but she must have been a bright and cheerful young lady. Introduced in 1933, the rose *Bonnie Jean* is cerise pink with a prominent white eye and rich yellow stamens, and 3 ½ " in diameter. Several of Archer's roses, including this one, grow more like another rising class rose from that era, the hybrid polyanthas. The rooted cutting I received from Vintage quickly grew to about two and a half feet in height and diameter. Although compact, it frequently bears its flowers one per stem. I have found it to be much more black spot resistant than *Dainty Bess*.



Bonnie Jean

It's not surprising that Archer named a rose after one of the most distinguished gardeners of that era, Ellen Willmott. This contemporary of Gertrude Jekyll sponsored numerous plant-finding forays and was active in breeding new cultivars of perennials. Amazingly, over sixty plant species and cultivars were named after her, including four roses. Ms. Willmott loved old-garden roses and the simple species roses and was responsible for publishing one of the definitive works on roses, *The Genus Rosa*, beautifully illustrated by Alfred Parsons. Three of the four roses named after Ms. Willmott include: *Ellen Willmott*, HT (A. Bernaix, 1898) mp, Dbl; *R. willmottiae*, Sp (Hemsley, Int. 1904) m, 5 petals; and *Miss Willmott*, HT (McGredy, 1917) wb, Dbl.

The rose hybridized by Mr. Archer was introduced in 1936 two years after Ms. Willmott's death. A cross between *Dainty Bess* and *Lady Hillingdon* (an unusually hardy apricot yellow tea rose) the Archer version of *Ellen Willmott* is creamy white touched by a hint of lemon yellow with a pale frosting of pink around the edges of the petals, especially in cooler weather. Its stamens consist of red filaments topped with gold anthers, and are a prominent and attractive feature as evidenced by a



Ellen Willmott

comment recorded by Daphne Filiberti, “If roses had eyelashes this one could certainly bat her eyes.” The foliage is an eye-catching dark green and above average in health. The bush produces long stems in true hybrid tea fashion.

S. Reynolds Hole, one of the founders of Britain’s Royal National Rose Society, wrote that “He who would have beautiful Roses in his garden, must have beautiful Roses in his heart” (*A Book of Roses*, p.1). Most of us would agree that growing roses is an affair of the heart. Anyone familiar with *Dainty Bess*, *Bonnie Jean*, and *Ellen Willmott* would probably agree that William Archer had beautiful roses in his heart. In twenty years when 90% of the hybrid teas in our gardens will have disappeared from commerce, these long cherished single hybrid teas will still be found here and there occupying a place of love, not only in this garden and that, but in the hearts of those for whom it can be said, “As with the smitten bachelor or the steadfast mate the lady of his love is lovely-ever, so to the true Rose-grower . . . the Rose [will] always be a thing of beauty” (*A Book of Roses*, p. 1).

A Tale of Two Roosters

“To praise, justify, and thank the **Meilland** family, only four words are needed: ‘They gave us *Peace*.’” So wrote Jack Harkness in his wonderful book *The Makers of Heavenly Roses* (p. 121). It and many, many other roses appear in the bloodlines of a significant number of the modern roses we love and grow today. Antoine Meilland’s journey into rose prominence is wonderfully chronicled in one of my favorite rose books, *For Love of a Rose*, by Antonia Ridge. At sixteen he went to work for the well-known rose grower and hybridizer Francis Dubreuil. Nine years later he married Dubreuil’s daughter Claudia, and shortly thereafter a son, Francis, was born. After fighting in the French army during WWI, ‘Papa Meilland’ took over his father-in-law’s business. After a visit to Charles Mallerin’s garden in 1929, Antoine was inspired to begin hybridizing his own roses. Young Francis, under the tutelage of Mallerin, also began to experiment with creating his own hybrids. In 1932 Mallerin introduced Robert Pyle to the father and son business partners. Impressed with the young man’s enthusiasm, Pyle offered Francis a contract to market his roses in America. Shortly thereafter another famous American rosarian J. H. Nicholas offered a similar contract. Nicholas would write several years later, “We will hear from Francis, and I predict for him a great future.” (*A Rose Odyssey*, p. 18) In a bold stroke of independent thinking Francis announced his plans to travel to America in 1935. After arriving in New York he purchased a used Studebaker and proceeded to drive across the country visiting rose grower after rose grower. After 15,000 miles Francis returned to France with rose catalogs, and notebooks full of ideas. The subsequent story of how *Peace* was introduced to the world just a few years later is one for another article.

Cock-a-doodle-doo! Qui-qui-ri-qui! Ũŭ-ŭrŭ-ŭŭŭ! Co-co-ri-co! What does the sound of a rooster crowing (in English, Spanish, Turkish, and French) have to do with roses? In 1951 Francis Meilland was intrigued by a brilliant orange red seedling whose color was so eye-catching that he entered it in several rose trials in Europe. The instant appeal of the color resulted in two Gold Medals, one from Geneva and one from the National Rose Society in England. What to name a rose that so loudly proclaims its presence, why *Cocorico* of course!



Cocorico

It was introduced in America in 1954 by Conard-Pyle (Robert Pyle's contract still in force) and its parentage was listed as *Alain x Orange Triumph*. In the 1955 American Rose Society Annual numerous evaluations of the rose appeared in "Proof of the Pudding," a section dedicated to written comments by rose growers across America. Words like "dazzling," "startling," "arresting," and "fiery" give some sense of the effect conveyed by this novel floribunda. The '55 Annual records its national rating (NR) as 8.0. Despite the appeal of its color American rose growers expected a little more profusion of bloom from their floribundas (and a few more petals), and its popularity has gradually declined.

In the garden my own-root *Cocorico* has grown to three feet in height after several years. It grows in a border and always stands out by virtue of its densely hued orange red color. The three to four inch blooms have above average substance making the nice sprays that arrive on this rose a little longer lasting in my Georgia heat. Its petal count can sometimes go over the eight petals the ARS defines as the maximum a single flowered rose may have, but in general I would classify it as a single. Although some detect a fragrance, to my sense of smell the fragrance is very slight. The foliage is olive green with a waxy texture possessing medium resistance to black spot (I generally have very few mildew problems).

As many of us know the House of Meilland occasionally uses rose names a second time. So it is with this rose. I first saw it at an open house held by Heirloom Roses in St. Paul, Oregon. I purchased the rose as *Birthday Girl*, but when I searched for it in Modern Roses I discovered that its correct exhibition name is *Cocorico '89*. In an old Heirloom Gardens catalog John Clements claimed that it has perhaps won more awards in international trials than any other rose. *Cocorico '89* won Gold Medals at Bagatelle, Saverne, Monza, and Rome in 1989, at Baden-Baden in 1990, and at Belfast in 1991. After falling in love with the bloom, creamy white with a hint of yellow blending to coral red on its wavy petal edges, I discovered that this floribunda is extremely disease resistant. I confess to being a hit and miss user of fungicides, but to my delight this rose just doesn't succumb to black spot. The foliage is a healthy, glossy green and the plant is vigorous. In



my garden it has grown about four feet tall and perhaps just a little wider. It produces semi-double blooms in sprays of three to five on medium length stems. Again fragrance is only slight, but the health of the plant and the pleasant blend of colors make this variety quite an attractive addition to the garden.

Cocorico '89
(*Birthday Girl*)

What Do Poinsettias and Roses Have in Common?

Not much! Except for a rose introduced in 2004. For eleven years I worked for my in-laws in a nursery and greenhouse business whose origins were based on the sales of tomato and other vegetable transplants. By the time I entered the picture (as an employee) the greenhouse side of the business was selling approximately 3000 pots of various sizes of poinsettias during the Christmas season. I always enjoyed the process of growing this crop especially when the greenhouses transformed into a sea of red. As I played more of a role, I tried to educate myself about this unique holiday plant.

Poinsettias are native to Central America and in particular to southern Mexico. An Ambassador to Mexico, Joel Roberts Poinsett, sent plants back to his Greenville, SC hothouses in 1828. The next year the plant was introduced to American growers as “a new euphorbia with bright scarlet bracts or floral leaves.” It wasn’t until 1836 that the plant was renamed “poinsettia.” Albert Ecke, a European health spa owner and lover of flowers, moved his family to a small town in California (by the name of Hollywood) in 1906 and opened a nursery. His son Paul took a special interest in poinsettias in particular noticing that the bract transformation from green to red occurred close to the winter solstice. Thus the idea to market the plant as a Christmas floriculture crop was born. In the 1960’s his son Paul Ecke, Jr. assumed leadership of the ever-growing business, and was responsible for the introduction of a variety of new cultivars showing improved growth and color.

What’s this got to do with roses? In 2004 **Tom Carruth** of Weeks Roses fame decided to buck the commercial taboo regarding introducing single flowered roses and he named a very unusually colored rose in honor of Paul Ecke, Jr. A seedling resulting from a cross between (*Playboy* x *Altissimo*) x *Santa Claus* x (*International Herald Tribune* x *R. soulieana* derivative)), the bloom is a smoky orange surrounded by an outer halo of purplish black. In no way does the description convey the unique beauty of this rose! Not only does the bloom possess a novel appeal, but the bush is healthy and nicely upright growing. In Georgia and Florida it gets fairly large – up to six feet by four feet. Armstrong Nurseries who originally purchased the rights to the plant dropped it from their catalog several years ago, but it is available now from several sources, none of whom can propagate it fast enough.



Paul Ecke, Jr.

From the Editor

As times evolve and the information age progresses our ability to communicate has been augmented beyond the current generation's ability to comprehend. As a grower of roses for the last thirty years, I recall sending several dollars or a postage paid envelope to rose businesses for a copy of their catalog or rose list, and waiting to receive it (of all things) through the mail! As an incurable collector of "stuff" I still have file cabinets full of those catalogs/lists. Now that same information is available to us on-line, our orders can be called in or sent via email, and most businesses confirm those orders through the internet.

For years I have been a hunter and collector of single-flowered roses. Fortunately, I had a friend and mentor in the Middle Georgia Rose society, Coleman Ray, who pointed me in the sometimes rather obscure directions necessary to find one more of these rare treasures. Do you remember Roses of Yesterday and Today and the rich prose of Will Tillotson and Dorothy Stemler's rose descriptions? Or the simple hand-typed and mimeographed list sent out by Muriel Humenick of Rose Acres in El Dorado, California? Both were invaluable sources for a wonderful variety of single-flowered roses, particularly the hybrid teas.

It remains to this day a rarity to encounter a fellow enthusiast of single roses, but I know you are out there. When I attend a district or national convention I usually make it a point to chat with folks I've never met, and I always find at least one person who shares my passion to some extent. If there is a common interest group for exhibitors, miniatures, OGR's, and arrangers, why not for lovers of single roses? Our gardens can potentially span the whole spectrum of rose families, including hybrid teas, floribundas, shrubs both modern and classic, miniatures and mini-floras, ground cover types, climbers, OGR's, and species.

It is my intent to create a means of communication for the network of folks who have cultivated a taste for single, nearly single, and semi-double flowered roses. Hybridizers and wholesale/retail rose growers know that we are out there, but are often reluctant to add or keep single flowered roses in their catalogs. These roses will remain in commerce if we bring their unique beauty to the attention of those folks that are buying and planting roses.

If you would like to share photographs or have a cherished or rare single, if you would like to offer insights into a rose that has been passed along to you, if you have hybridized a single and would like a little PR, please feel free to communicate with me. Please feel free to pass this e-newsletter along to someone you know who might enjoy it!

-Stephen

"When sorrow like a deluge sweeps over the soul of a friend, the first impulse is to give a bunch of roses. Why? Is it because their comforting music has a consoling effect that nothing else can? They soothe grief and drive away sorrow as plainly as did, of old, David's song and harp."

Charles G. Adams

1925 ARS Annual

Singularly Beautiful Roses

Stephen Hoy, Editor
223 Sentry Oaks Drive
Warner Robins, GA 31093
hoy127@cox.net

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Sources:

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Vintage Gardens – www.vintagegardens.com



Mutabilis
Rose Art by Ron Gladin