

Abstract Photo Entry in Deep South District Photo Contest  
by Elaine Pawlikowski

# Singularly Beautiful Roses

A Publication Dedicated to Single,  
Nearly Single, and Semi-Double Flowered Roses  
Volume 8, Issue 1  
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## Contents

Wanted – Irish Singles!.....	2
From the Editor .....	9
Sources & Contact Information .....	9, 10

## Wanted - Irish Singles!

Our story begins in the land of Ulster, known since 1921 as Northern Ireland. Alexander Dickson (1801-1880) had emigrated from Scotland to the village of Newtownards, just east of Belfast. There he began a nursery business in 1836. His sons Hugh (c. 1831-1904) and George (1832-1914) joined him as partners in 1853; Hugh would later start his own nursery business. George's oldest son Alexander II (1857-1949) became a partner in Alexander Dickson and Sons in 1872; shortly thereafter the family began breeding roses.

Alexander II became the hybridizer of many successful roses. In 1895 he introduced the single-flowered Hybrid Tea, 'Kathleen,' a rose that has long been extinct. The earliest reference I've discovered can be found in the July 12, 1902 edition of *The Garden*. A list of "British Raised Roses" includes the cultivar describing it simply as coral.<sup>i</sup> It was more thoroughly portrayed in the 1903 Andorra Nurseries catalog, "Coral-pink suffused with rose, base of petal shaded yellow, perfect form and outline, medium size; very floriferous and highly perfumed."<sup>iii</sup> 'Kathleen' was apparently not a commercial success, but it assuredly planted an idea in the mind of the hybridizer.

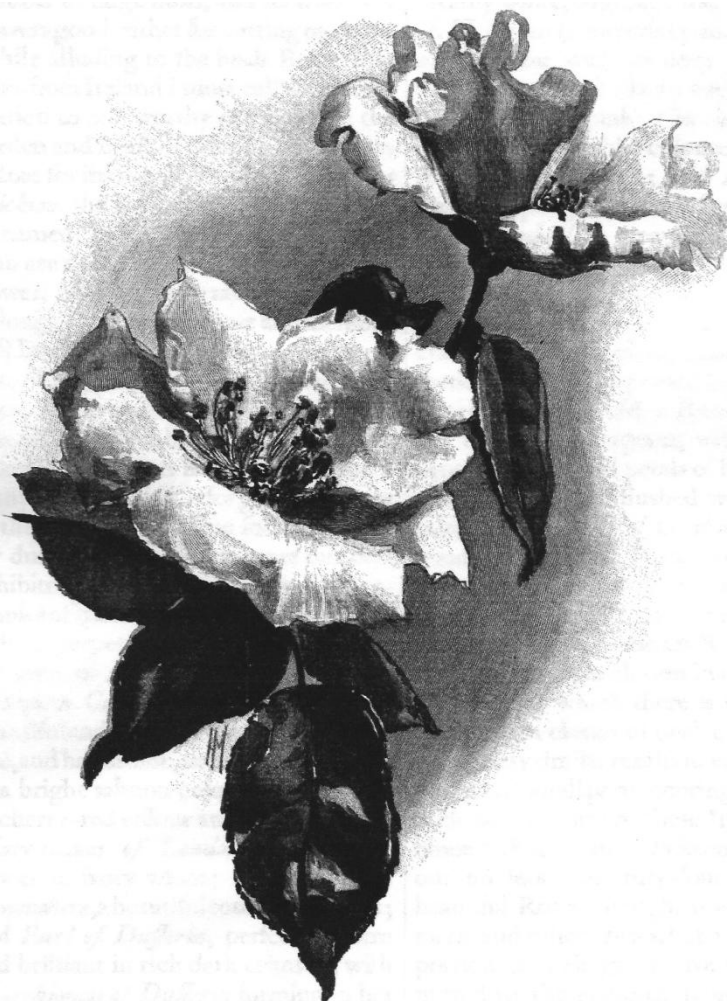


Five years after 'Kathleen's' introduction, Alexander Dickson evidently believed that single Hybrid Teas were still a potentially viable commercial commodity. In 1900 he introduced the first of a series of roses eventually dubbed the Irish Singles - 'Irish Beauty,' 'Irish Modesty,' and 'Irish Glory.' A rose-grower from surrounding County Down commented on them in an article that eventually appeared in a bi-lingual Irish-American publication named *The Gaol*, "These three roses are thoroughly well-worth a place in all rose collections. They may be depended on for cut flowers and general beauty of bloom."<sup>iii</sup> Of particular interest was their fairly perpetual habit of flowering, a relatively novel characteristic at that time, "Until the Hybrid Tea and Tea scented [roses] arrived, the season in which single Roses were most beautiful was a short-lived one. But now we may have them until frost comes."<sup>iv</sup>

Every description of 'Irish Beauty' draws attention to its pure white color and fragrance. "Taking them in the sequence in which they were introduced, we have Irish Beauty with large stout petals of purest white, exhaling an exquisite odour; the centers filled with a wealth of clear golden anthers in beautiful contrast to the dense white of the petals."<sup>v</sup> One catalog boasted of flowers "often measuring five inches across" and that it was the "finest single rose yet raised."<sup>vi</sup> One enthusiast wrote, "So beautiful is this Rose that it well deserves to be planted in a group of five or six at least, although one plant will develop extraordinary dimensions if allowed to do so."<sup>vii</sup> 'Irish Beauty' received a Card of Commendation from the National Rose Society.

The comment about its vigor elicits questions of origin that is further made intriguing by the fact that all three 1900 Irish Singles are categorized as "Dickson Hybrid Wichuraianas" in the 1903 Andorra Nurseries catalog. Due to a fire that occurred at the nursery in 1921 no record of the genetic background of any of the Irish Singles exists. Perhaps the owners of Andorra Nurseries merely invented a category due to the habit of growth of these three – perhaps they had been given some information from the Dickson family. We are left to speculate.

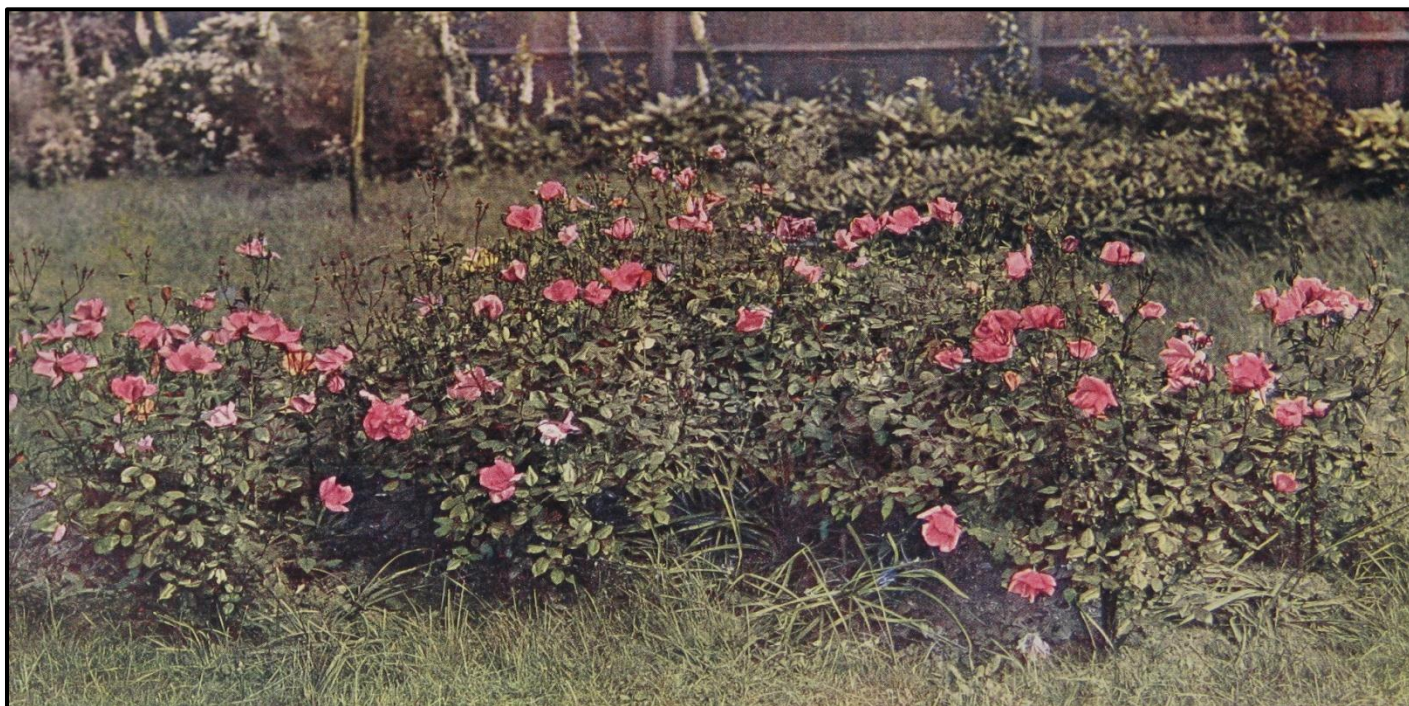




'Irish Glory' was also noted for its vigor – "so vigorous that one could make a very nice moderate hedge with this variety."<sup>viii</sup> The Andorra Nursery catalog described it as "A most striking flower of immense size, produced in large clusters."<sup>ix</sup> In glowing fashion one author wrote, "The flower is a masterpiece of beauty, a rich deep pink, marbled with silver and flamed on the back of the petals with a rich tone of crimson. It is very sweetly perfumed, and the buds are of great length . . . the flowers at full expansion disclose a heart of golden anthers which complete the exquisite combination."<sup>x</sup> It was the first of the Irish Singles to be used in rose shows for a class featuring cut roses in a dinner-setting arrangement.

Top - 'Irish Beauty'

Bottom - 'Irish Glory'



The third of the initial trio of Irish Singles, 'Irish Modesty,' seems to have garnered less attention. Arthur Goodwin's article, "Some Single Roses," paints the most vivid word portrait and distinguishes its habit of growth from the two previous cultivars. "'Irish Modesty,' also introduced in 1900, is of short, rather sturdy growth, and a remarkably abundant bloomer. The buds are long and pointed, and open into large flowers of a delightful tint of coral-pink, with anthers of a delicate straw color."<sup>xi</sup> The color *ecru* (an earthy shade of ivory leaning toward tan/yellow) was used by several authors to describe the blush of color at the base of the petals.

Several years would pass before the next Irish Singles appeared on the market, however, an appetite for more had definitely been created. The October 3, 1903 edition of *Country Life* (a British periodical) highlighted several new rose introductions including 'Irish Brightness,' 'Irish Pride,' and 'Irish Star.'<sup>xii</sup> In the mind of several rosarians these three were regarded as Tea roses.

"Irish Brightness is considered a pure tea and is a fine grower. The flowers do not belie their name, for they are a most attractive shade of bright crimson in the bud, and on opening display a zone of silvery pink around the anthers. The flowers are produced in trusses of five to ten, and the wealth of richly tinted foliage and glaucous growth serve to further emphasize their comeliness."<sup>xiii</sup>

The second of the group thought to show distinct Tea influence seems to have played second fiddle to its Ulster cohorts. 'Irish Pride' "has finely formed flowers of an enchanting combination of blush rose, bright pink, and gold that is rather hard to describe."<sup>xiv</sup> Its other chief attribute was its everblooming habit. Among articles featuring the Irish Singles this variety rarely receives more than a casual mention if any at all.

'Irish Star' was thought to be the most unique of the set. Its flowers were cup-shaped and described as a *Rose du Barri* shade with a star-like pale lemon center surrounding golden stamens.<sup>xv</sup> 'Irish Star' was also considered a profuse bloomer. Like the previous rose it never gained "star-like" fame. It and many of the early Irish Singles would be eclipsed by later varieties.

Two more Irish Singles followed in 1904. 'Irish Engineer's' color was described as "dazzling scarlet" by more than one commentator. Rosarian H. E. Molyneux wrote, "I think the most vivid scarlet flower I have yet seen . . . a flower that once seen will be wanted."<sup>xvi</sup> One grower likened it in color to 'Gloire de Margottin.' Another noted, "This variety is a hybrid tea of a quite a distinctive type, and is just the sort to use as an edging to beds of taller growing roses. The flowers are of large size with bold, massive, circular petals, and every shoot is crowned with flowers."<sup>xvii</sup>

The second, 'Irish Harmony,' was also a rose of unique coloration. Of it Mr. Molyneux waxed eloquent and deserves to be quoted in full. "For freedom of growth and profusion of flower it, I think, one of the best of the whole series; color in the bud saffron yellow, with a tinge of carmine on the outside of the petal, opening into a large single flower often five inches in diameter, of a pale yellowish white, quite distinct, and likely to prove a good bedding Rose. A mass of bloom when I saw it in mid-July . . . The scent is delicious; there is undoubtedly a good deal of Tea blood in it. This Rose when exhibited by the firm at the autumn show of the National Rose Society on September 24 last [1904] in great sheaves was awarded a gold medal. And if the gold medal of the National Rose Society is to be awarded to single Roses, none have so far deserved it better than Irish Harmony."<sup>xviii</sup>

## Rose du Barri

a delicate shade of opaque rose-pink used as a ceramic overglaze. It was developed in 18th century France and named for the Comtesse du Barri, a mistress of King Louis XV.

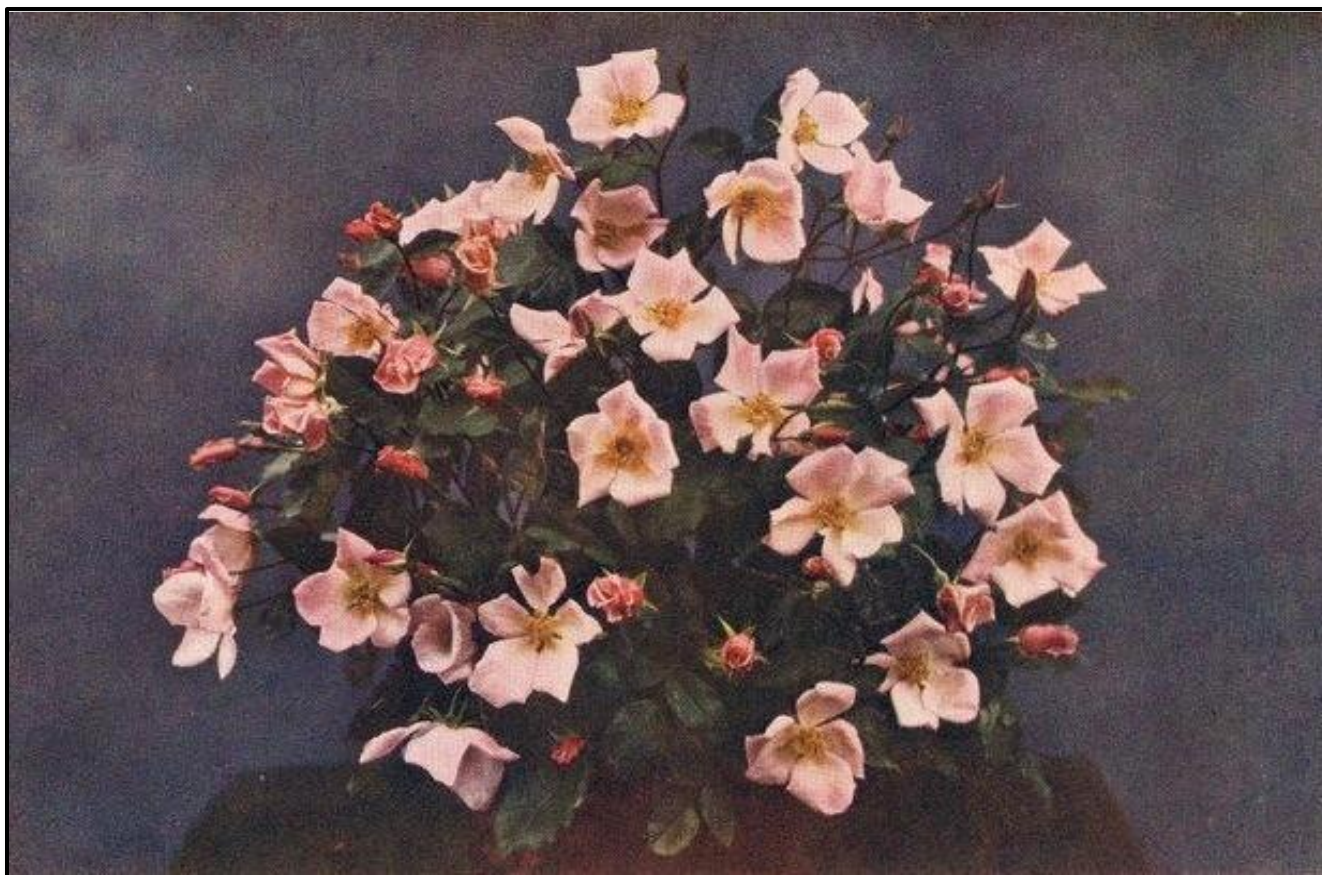




*'Irish Elegance' – Photo by Stephen Hoy*

*A basket of 'Irish Elegance' from 1912 RNS show.  
1913 NRS Annual*

As wonderful an endorsement as a gold medal from the National Rose Society was the qualities of 'Irish Harmony' were soon overlooked in favor of Dickson's next introduction, 'Irish Elegance.' It won a gold medal at the autumn show of 1905. Its color in that era was a novelty of the first order. Bronzy orange-scarlet in bud stage, the bloom opened to what one author opined as "all shades of apricot."<sup>xix</sup> Like some of the early Irish Singles the growth habit of this variety was quite upright. Its ability to bloom in wet climates without balling and in the extremes of hot weather was well documented. Many found the cultivar worthy of growing for its buds alone, for which it gained a following for use in rose shows calling for table arrangements. Australian rosarian Olive Hardinge wrote, "'Irish Elegance' is more successfully used in competitive decorative work than any other rose in New South Wales. [It] is so robust and unusually productive that one bush will provide ample material for a table scheme."<sup>xx</sup>





The amazing commercial success of 'Irish Elegance' must have so occupied production space that it would be nine years before Alexander Dickson II would officially introduce another Irish Single. However, ALL rose enthusiasts are on the lookout for the next great thing, and it WAS on the way. I discovered the following story several weeks ago when burrowing down another rabbit hole.

"A few years ago it was noticed in London that *people of taste* (editor's italics!) showed a marked preference for single roses. Whenever obtainable, they were used in their table decorations, in their house decorations, and as gifts. To meet this demand, the leading hybridizers abroad [Europe] devoted thought and skill to the production of a class of single roses that combine grace, color, and durability in their blooms.

Irish Fire Flame is the most striking of this class. It won the gold medal at the national rose show in London, but its introduction into this county [U.S.A.] is due to the visit of Alexander B. Scott to the rose growing establishment of Alexander Dickson & Sons at Newtownards, near Belfast, in Ireland in the summer of 1910. In their trial grounds Mr. Scott first saw Irish Fire Flame. The rose charmed him. It had growing qualities and its color was unique. The long pointed buds were bright scarlet. The open flower was a coppery salmon. The keeping qualities of Irish Fire Flame are remarkable for a single rose with only five petals, due partly to the great substance of those petals. Possessed with the idea that such a rose would appeal to those of his friends who had *true artistic discernment*, Mr. Scott imported fifty plants of Irish Fire Flame. Today he has three thousand plants. The house in which they are growing on his place at Sharon Hill, Pa., is a beautiful sight. The plants are a picture of health, producing their attractive buds in profusion. The buds are in demand among the leading florists. Mr. Scott's representative, the S. S. Pennock-Mehan Co., is said to obtain \$10 a hundred for this novelty in a market that is much lower on almost all other varieties. It is said Irish Fire Flame will be disseminated next spring [1913]."<sup>xxi</sup> (Ed. note; a climbing sport of 'Irish Fireflame' was discovered by A. Dickson in 1916)

**'Irish Fireflame'**

In Georgia – Stephen Hoy

In West Virginia – Peter Harris

In California – Kim Rupert



In 1918 A. Dickson II discovered another sport of 'Irish Fireflame' and named it 'Irish Afterglow.' It would be the last of the Irish Singles. One grower wrote, "How shall I describe 'Irish Afterglow,' a single? Well, the raiser says of it that it is "a deep tangerine, passing to crushed strawberry." But there language fails. The rare hues of the different stages, of bud, of fully developed and fading bloom, must be seen to be believed. After all, the name is the best description; *the western sky, when a day has died gloriously has all these blends.*"<sup>xxii</sup>

While the Dickson firm would continue to introduce several more Hybrid Teas that were almost single-flowering, the series of roses that came to be known as the Irish Singles came to a magnificent conclusion with the introduction of 'Irish Fireflame.' The Hybrid Teas as a class were undergoing a redefining evolution headed toward the high-centered double flower that became the preferred form of choice among all modern classes of roses . . . *until recently.* Wanted – Irish Singles!



Illustration from  
Roses of the World in Color  
by Horace McFarland

- 'Cecil'
- 'Dainty Bess'
- 'Irish Fireflame'
- 'Isobel'
- 'Vesuvius'

Illustration from  
American Rose Annual 1936  
Edited by Horace McFarland

- 'Cecil'
- 'K. of K.'
- 'Innocence'
- 'Irish Fireflame'
- 'Dainty Bess'



## Post Script

I first purchased what was labeled 'Irish Fireflame' in the late 80's. In 1998 I was thrilled to find 'Irish Elegance' listed for sale in Sequoia Nursery's *Supplemental List* and quickly purchased it. Imagine my disappointment when its first bloom turned out to be identical to that of my established 'Irish Fireflame.' A cross-country visit to a rose conference at Heirloom Roses gave me the opportunity to talk with guest speaker Clair Martin, then of Huntington Gardens. He provided some useful clues as to the correct identities of each rose and also suggested I contact Kim Rupert. I dashed off an actual letter to Kim who kindly sent me several articles he had written which provided even more insight (see "Eureka! An Update on the Real Irish Fireflame" written by Kim in 1997<sup>xxiii</sup>). Finally enough information was at hand to determine that the rose in my garden was 'Irish Elegance.' Soon thereafter I was able to purchase the correct 'Irish Fireflame.' Once the small plant began to grow distinguishing characteristics became recognizable. In contrast to the more reflexed petals, matt green foliage, and the muted apricot-pink coloration of 'Irish Elegance,' 'Irish Fireflame' is more intensely hued, its petals often overlap, and the foliage is semi-glossy. Eureka!



'Duchess of Wellington'  
Photo by Eric Timewell

1905, pink/yellow/copper; 'Duchess of Wellington,' 1909, buff-yellow; 'Lady Greenall' -1911, salmon/pink/yellow; 'Carine,' - 1911, salmon/pink/copper/red; . . . numerous roses in vaguely similar color schemes.

Australian rose enthusiasts are the beneficiaries of extensive imports from Alexander Dickson and Sons as well as many other European nursery firms. Several found roses exist that bear resemblance to early 20<sup>th</sup> century single-flowered Hybrid Teas. One of those is "Bishop's Lodge Precious Porcelain," a pale lemon-yellow five petalled rose thought to be a Hybrid Tea. There is some speculation that it MAY be 'Irish Harmony,' which is enough to engage my interest! I am reminded of my own conjectures about a rose I purchased years ago from Vintage Gardens labeled 'Beryl.' It was generally acknowledged to NOT be 'Beryl' due to its lack of petals. In my garden it tended to be more or less single-flowered. I began a conversation about it possibly being 'Irish Harmony' but did not have the research skills to follow up.

As already mentioned Dickson's breeding records were destroyed in a 1921 fire, so there is only speculation regarding the parentage of any of the Irish Singles. At some point *Rosa hibernica* was considered a possible parent for 'Irish Elegance' and 'Irish Fireflame,' as well as two other single/nearly single Hybrid Teas formerly available from Sequoia and Vintage Gardens – 'Innocence' and 'Isobel (The former can still be purchased, the latter appears to be extinct or virtually so).' It would seem that examinations of ploidy make that possibility fairly remote or at least several generations removed. Based on cursory examination of identified roses used by the Dickson's in their breeding and by looking at the other cultivars they were introducing during that time frame it may be more plausible that Teas and/or Pernet-Ducher hybrids were involved in the creation of 'Irish Pride,' 'Irish Star,' 'Irish Harmony,' 'Irish Elegance' and 'Irish Fireflame.' Using HMF it appears Alexander Dickson II clearly used Teas and Pernet-Ducher-bred cultivars to produce 'Duchess of Portland,' – 1900, pale yellow; 'Betty,' –





*'Bishop's Lodge Precious Porcelain'  
? Possibly 'Irish Harmony'*

*Photo by Margaret Furness*



*'Bishop's Lodge Precious Porcelain'  
? Possibly 'Irish Harmony'*

*Photo by Eric Timewell*

## *From the Editor*

Heaven help any of you who desire to have a book published by an academic publisher! My history of Camp Oglethorpe is still in editing Purgatory and we haven't even gotten to editing text yet. Format, format, format. Meanwhile, I have uncovered more information than I imagined on the life of Dr. Robert Huey, Civil war soldier, prisoner-of-war and survivor of Macon, GA's Camp Oglethorpe, dentist, professor, inventor, English Setter enthusiast, and rose expert/avid customer of Alexander Dickson and Sons. That article will be completed soon and submitted for publication.

Another project underway is creating a library of eleven years' worth of photo submissions to the Deep South District's photo contests. Some absolutely stunning photos like the one featured on the front cover should be shared with the rose loving public. At some point they will be available on our Deep South District website.

## *Sources & Contact Information*

Here in the U.S. the only two Irish Singles known to be in commerce are 'Irish Elegance' and 'Irish Fireflake.' Both are available from the following sources – Greenmantle Nursery, [www.greenmantlenursery.com](http://www.greenmantlenursery.com), Rogue Valley Roses, [www.roguevalleyroses.com](http://www.roguevalleyroses.com), and Roses Unlimited, [www.rosesunlimitedsc.com](http://www.rosesunlimitedsc.com).

# Singularly Beautiful Roses

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Please feel free to share this newsletter!  
Grateful thanks to those who generously allowed me to use their photos!  
Please support [HelpMeFindRoses.com](http://HelpMeFindRoses.com) – an invaluable resource!

## Footnotes

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<sup>i</sup> "British Raised Roses," *The Garden: An Illustrated Weekly Journal of Horticulture in All Its Branches*, No. 1599, Vol. LXII, London, July 12, 1902, 23.

<sup>ii</sup> *Andorra Nurseries Catalog*, 1903, 128.

<sup>iii</sup> Walter Smyth, "Irish Roses," *The Gaol*, (A Monthly Bi-Lingual Magazine Devoted to the Promotion of the Language, Literature, Music and Art of Ireland), No. 1, Vol. XX, New York, January, 1901.

<sup>iv</sup> "Single and Semi-Double Roses," *Gardening Illustrated*, No. 1480, Vol. XXIX, July 20, 1907, 267.

<sup>v</sup> Arthur R. Goodwin, "Some Single Roses," *The Gardeners' Magazine*, Vol. 49, London, November 10, 1906, 740.

<sup>vi</sup> *Andorra Nurseries Catalog*, 1903, 134.

<sup>vii</sup> "Single and Semi-Double Roses," 267.

<sup>viii</sup> "Single Hybrid Tea Roses," *Gardening Illustrated*, No. 1543, Vol. XXVIII, January 12, 1907, 633.

<sup>ix</sup> *Andorra Nurseries Catalog*, 1903, 134.

<sup>x</sup> Goodwin, "Some Single Roses," 740.

<sup>xi</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xii</sup> "Some New Roses for the Planting Season," *Country Life*, Vol. XIV, No. 352, October 3, 1903, 469.

<sup>xiii</sup> Goodwin, "Some Single Roses," 740.

<sup>xiv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xv</sup> W. J. Grant, "Beautiful Irish Roses," *Flora and Sylva*, Vol. 1, No. 8, London, November 1903, 266.

<sup>xvi</sup> H. E. Molyneux, "Mssr. Alex. Dickson and Sons' Roses," *The Garden: An Illustrated Weekly Journal of Horticultural in All Its Branches*, February 4, 1905, 79.

<sup>xvii</sup> Goodwin, "Some Single Roses," 740.

<sup>xviii</sup> Molyneux, "Mssr. Alex. Dickson and Sons' Roses," *The Garden: An Illustrated Weekly Journal of Horticultural in All Its Branches*, January 28, 1905, 60.

<sup>xix</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xx</sup> *American Rose Annual*, 1926, 21.

<sup>xxi</sup> "Rose Irish Fire Flame," *The Florist's Review*, Vol. XXXI, Issue 782, November 21, 1912, 14.

<sup>xxii</sup> Mary Hampton, *Rose Gardening: How to Manage Roses and Enjoy Them*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1922, 116.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Article can be found on [HelpMeFindRoses.com](http://HelpMeFindRoses.com) under Comments for 'Irish Elegance.'