

Blue Grass Hemerocallis Society

First and Oldest Club in Region 10

Kentucky, the Bluegrass State, was alive with the newest of hemerocallis hybrids well before there was a hemerocallis society in Kentucky or Region 10. Mrs. H. H. (Adele) Pitzer, Mrs. J. C. (Frances) Lamb, Mrs. Goebel (Martha) Porter, and Mr. Carl Carpenter were just a few of the early gardeners that were growing and/or hybridizing hemerocallis. But their interest in hemerocallis didn't end at their gardens' gates. They were involved in promoting hemerocallis, learning more about hemerocallis, attending national conventions and serving the national organization as judges. In addition to those activities, they were also participating in the Round Robins and serving as Regional Supervisors. Mrs. H. H. (Adele) Pitzer of Lexington, KY grew hemerocallis in the late 1930s collecting early and late varieties to stretch out the flowering season. She was also a charter member of the Midwest Hemerocallis Society according to The Hemerocallis Journal in 1960 and a reference can be found in 1951 where she spoke on hemerocallis to the Garden Department of the University of Kentucky Woman's Club. Another early daylily enthusiast, D.R. McKethan, was quoted in 1952 in the Hemerocallis Society Newsletter as saying "On the evening of April 10th, I appeared before a group of approximately fifty "hem bugs" at Lexington, KY....From talking to the folks in attendance at this meeting, I am sure that there is a great deal of interest in hemerocallis at Lexington and it surely will be one of the points where many new lovers of daylilies will join the present ones". In 1954, the time for a hemerocallis society had arrived. On June 7, 1954 at the Kentucky Utilities building in Lexington, Mrs. J. C. (Frances) Lamb held a meeting to organize a central Kentucky hemerocallis society and plan for a hemerocallis show in late June. This meeting was the origination of the Blue Grass Hemerocallis Society. The first officers of the society were Mrs. S. P. Mahney, President; Mrs. H. H. (Adele) Pitzer, Vice President; Miss Sallie Johnston, Secretary; and Miss. Roberta Barkley, Treasurer.

The Blue Grass Hemerocallis Society was the **FIRST** daylily society in Region 10. This includes the times up to 1951 when West Virginia was removed from Region 10 and Mississippi and Alabama were added and then to 1957 when Mississippi and Alabama were removed from Region 10 leaving only Kentucky and Tennessee to comprise the region. In addition to being the first hemerocallis society in Region 10, the Blue Grass Hemerocallis Society is one of the few societies with documentation to make it one of the oldest societies in the American Hemerocallis Society. It also boasts being one of the longest (if not the longest) continuous running hemerocallis society in the American Hemerocallis Society.

Now that the Blue Grass Hemerocallis Society was up and running it was plowing away at planning its first show; a show that would be only 24 days after the society was formed. This would be no problem for the group as many members were involved in putting on a show the previous year patterned after the hemerocallis show held in New Orleans, LA in 1953. Many were also involved with a hemerocallis show/exhibit put on by the Lexington Garden Club in 1952. This first show was held July 1, 1954 at Calvery Baptist Church, and included 12 horticultural classes and 7 arrangement classes. This show started the Blue Grass Hemerocallis Society's tradition of an annual daylily show. This year the Blue Grass Hemerocallis Society celebrated its 65th year. In that time, the society has held 62 daylily shows. For various reasons shows were not held in 1991, 1998, 2014, and 2016. Planning for the 63rd daylily show in 2020 has already started.

Best-In-Show in the horticulture classes was always a goal at the shows. Hybridizers were interested in awards for their work in unregistered cultivars and registered but not introduced cultivars. In 1981, Joe Freeman won the Achievement Medal with Hemerocallis 'Maywick Lad'. While the hybridizers had their areas of interest in the show, those entering arrangements didn't hold back to win the Mabel Yaste Tri-Color Trophy. Mrs. Wm. H. Frost in 1962 was the first Blue Grass Hemerocallis Society show exhibitor to win the Mabel Yaste Tri-Color Trophy. Several had won the Tri-Color Award but not the Mabel Yaste Tri-Color Trophy. The class called for an arrangement for a tea table and the arrangement included H. 'Sweet Refrain,' H. 'Tootie,' and H. 'Pink Orchid.' Competition for the Achievement Medal has declined over the years and the arrangement classes have disappeared due to lack of interest. However to generate new interest in daylilies from a different perspective the club added a daylily photography section to the shows. This section was well received with many entries. Unfortunately this section too has faded from the shows but BGHS hopes to bring back the arrangement classes in the 2020 show. Over the years, the daylily shows have been held in churches, garden centers, the University of Kentucky campus, and malls. The most unique show was in 1967 when the show was held at Hillenmeyer's Nursery in a lath house. The containers were buried in the soil allowing the daylilies to be viewed as if they were growing in a perennial border. The annual daylily show is the highlight of the year for the Blue Grass Hemerocallis Society. The members come together to set up, work the various positions, and engage in a friendly competition showing the best of their daylilies to public. While

members of the BGHS enjoy showing off the results of hard work in their gardens to the public at daylily shows, they also enjoy showing off their gardens and the work of local hybridizers to fellow daylily enthusiasts at regional meetings and garden tours. The club hosted its first (the region's second) regional meeting in 1965. Guests to this regional meeting were treated to meal in a member's home and tours of several members' gardens. Following regionals included meals, garden tours, speakers, and judges' clinics. BGHS has hosted 9 Regional Meetings and Garden Tours (1965, 1967, 1971, 1979, 1982, 1990, 1996, 2005, and 2014) and they are looking forward to hosting again 2021.

Regularly hosting regional meetings and putting on an annual daylily show take quite the toll on the club's finances and more and more money is needed to have these events run smoothly. To raise those funds the club holds an annual public sale of daylilies. In the beginning the daylily sales were advertised and held in members' gardens. Daylilies were given as door prizes and a drawing was held for a choice daylily. In 1964, the choice daylily was H. 'Multnomah.' which was the Stout Medal winner in 1963. From the members' gardens, the sales moved to sidewalk sales at a shopping center, Gardenside Plaza on Alexandria Drive and then to garden centers. It was at this time that daylilies had a very strong following in the Lexington area. Cars would be lined up out the gate blocking traffic to get to the daylily sale and police would be required to manage the traffic. The last several years the sale has moved from a standalone sale in August to a sale in conjunction with the daylily show. And most recently there was a sale with the daylily show in addition to a sale held in August at the Twilight Festival in neighboring Versailles, KY. The daylilies for sale are donations from the club members' gardens and the club's goal is to provide daylilies to the public that have grown well in members' gardens.

Members of the BGHS are both talented, having won several awards, and hardworking, having served both at the local and national level. Members winning awards include Debbie Monbeck for her photograph along with numerous hybridizers for their introductions. Mrs. J. C. (Frances) Lamb won the highest honor of the Helen Field Fischer Award. In 1962 for her work. She served as Region 10 Supervisor from 1954-1956 and Region 10 Director from 1957-1962. During her time as director, she was also the Exhibition Judges Chairman. While in that position she was instrumental in having the exhibition judges' handbook printed as a book and saw the inauguration of the Mable Yaste Tri-Color Award. Many members have given their service to the AHS by taking on roles in the national or regional level. MaryAnn Duncan, Rich Rosen, James W. Alexander, Albin Kinkead, and Frances Lamb have served as Region 10 Directors. Mrs. Goebel (Martha) Porter, Mrs. Stella M. Young, and Thomas C. Bar have served at Regional Supervisor, Regional Vice President, or Regional President depending on what the position was titled when they served. Mrs. Thomas C. Bar, Mrs. R. F. Griffith, Mrs. Cecil C. Carpenter, Albin B Kinkead, and Gary Bunch have served as Regional Publicity Directors. Still others have served on AHS committees: Jim Lurton, Technology Committee; David Kirchhoff, Assistant Editor-At-Large; and Debbie Monbeck, Historic Daylilies Sub Committee and Registration Image Sub Committee.

The Blue Grass Hemerocallis Society in its effort learn about and to expose others to daylilies has taken on different projects outside normal meeting times. A hemerocallis test garden was organized at the University of Kentucky in 1963. Mr. and Mrs. James Alexander were the first to have their garden awarded AHS Display garden in Region 10 in 1977. Since then several members have received the AHS Display Garden status. In 1961 and 1972 members opened their gardens to those traveling to the National Conventions in Chicago and Indianapolis respectively. Members have opened their gardens to groups that have requested to come visit gardens through the years. In addition to these special garden visits the BGHS has held open garden tours during daylily bloom season for the public at no cost. The BGHS has also installed two daylily display gardens, one at The Arboretum, State Botanical Garden of KY and the other at the Kentucky Horse Park. The Blue Grass Hemerocallis Society tries to have activities and programs to meet the needs of all daylily enthusiast whether they enjoy growing daylilies in their garden or have advanced to the level of hybridizing and introducing new cultivars. In the beginning meetings were quarterly and programs consisted of slide presentations and panel discussions about different daylily topics. The club gradually moved to where it now meets monthly and continues to strive to have meetings to meet everyone's needs at their current level of interest with daylilies. Activities at meetings include presentations from hybridizers, auctions of plants from hybridizers or members, private sales for members only, presentations about topics such as weed control, fertilizing, daylily culture, specific daylily forms, photography, etc., daylily bingo, an annual picnic, a fall bulb swap, and a winter socializing meeting. The Blue Grass Hemerocallis Society is always looking for ways to better serve its membership and provide education about and promote interest in the growing of daylilies. The meetings are always open to the public and information can be found on the Blue Grass Hemerocallis Society Facebook page.

(Information in this article was collected from the Midwest Hemerocallis Society, The Hemerocallis Society, and American Hemerocallis Society newsletters, yearbooks, and journals, the Region 10 newsletter The Daylily Appeal, the Lexington Herald/Lexington Herald Leader, and the Courier Journal.)



Mrs. Frances Lamb - Early BGHS Flower Show

Containers in Soil



Early BGHS Flower Show - Tricolor Trophy Winner



Gary Bunch & Linda Donald at the Garden Club Fair



Ron Dotson & Linda Layne Clerking at BGHS Flower Show