

American Iris Society: Williamson-White Medal-MTB

History: History written by Clarence Mahan

This medal is restricted to miniature tall bearded (MTB) irises. It is named in honor of E. B. Williamson (1877-1933), his daughter Mary Williamson (1909-1987) and Alice White (1886-1969).

Edward Bruce Williamson was born in Marion, Indiana in 1877, and grew up in Bluffton, Indiana, where his father was a bank president. His friends called him Bruce, but he is known to the iris and zoological worlds as "E. B. Williamson." After graduating from Ohio State University, Williamson worked as Assistant Curator of Insects in the Carnegie Museum in Pittsburgh. Succeeding his father as bank president in 1928, he continued to study and conduct research on insects, particularly dragonflies. He was later appointed Research Associate in the Museum of Zoology at the University of Michigan. He wrote many monographs and articles, and was recognized as a world-class authority on dragonflies.

Williamson began growing irises in the early 1900s, and collected many different species, which he then grew from seed. He grew thousands of seedlings, frequently used mixed pollen, and kept few records. He established Longfield Iris Farm in Bluffton, and it became a mecca for iris lovers. His 'Lent A. Williamson' (1918, TB) and 'Dolly Madison' (1927, TB) were considered masterpieces, and are to be found in the pedigrees of nearly all modern tall bearded irises. He introduced many outstanding cultivars including 'Cinnabar' (1928, TB), 'Dorothy Dietz' (1929, TB), and 'Amigo' (1934, TB). The TB 'Wabash,' which won the Dykes Medal in 1940, was hybridized and introduced by his daughter Mary in 1936 after his death. His beautiful Louisiana iris hybrid 'Dorothea K. Williamson,' introduced in 1918, tends to breed true to form, and it has the distinction of now being naturalized in some areas of the eastern U.S. where Hexagonae species are not indigenous.

Although others had introduced irises that fit into the miniature tall bearded iris class before Williamson, he and his daughter were the first to breed them as cultivars in a distinctive class of irises. They were apparently byproducts of breeding for tall bearded irises. Thura Hires and Ethel Peckham were the first to sort them out of the Williamson's seedling beds. They recognized that these smaller irises had great potential as garden plants and for use in floral designs. Mrs. Peckham gave them the name "table irises." The first of these table irises to be introduced (Ed.: before the MTB classification was established in 1958 so they were registered as intermediate irises) were 'Siskin' (1934, IB), and 'Pewee' (1934, IB) which later became the "type" when the MTB classification was formalized. 'Chewink' (1937, IB) and 'Daystar' (selected clone) followed. Mary Williamson produced 'Widget' (1943) and 'Nambe' (1946).

Although table irises had a number of proponents such as Mrs. Hires, Mrs. Peckham, and Charles Gersdorff, they languished in the shadow of tall bearded irises for many years. In the early 1950's, Alice White of Hemet, California began a crusade to gain recognition of the assets of these wonderful smaller irises. She organized table iris rosters and wrote many articles for the AIS Bulletin and gardening magazines promoting their virtues. She encouraged iris hybridizers to breed these irises to obtain new and finer cultivars. She led the campaign to have a separate class established for table irises. When the class was finally approved, Alice White graciously accepted the name "miniature tall bearded" irises, although she always preferred to call them table irises.

(Much of the iris literature extant only associates E. B. Williamson's name and not his daughter's with the MTB Williamson-White Medal. However, extensive research by Jim Morris for this 50th Anniversary issue has uncovered proof positive that the medal was for both

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Williamsons. In the AIS Bulletin No. 190, July 1968, pp.68-69 are the words prepared by the Editorial Staff of the Median Iris Society, which included Donald Tufts, Bee Warburton and Jean Witt: "It is a great pleasure to all interested in the smaller bearded irises that the newly named award [Williamson-White Award], which is the equivalent of the Award of Merit for tall bearded irises, should commemorate E.B. Williamson and his daughter, Mary, who carried on his work for many years; and also our friend Mrs. David K. (Alice) White, who so ably started the work of rescuing them from oblivion."

In the subsequent July 1968 issue of The Medianite, p.40, Bee Warburton writes, "Members will be delighted to know that the Williamson-White Award for the miniature tall bearded irises has been activated by the American Iris Society this year. Your editorial staff prepared a notice and citation for the AIS Bulletin so we won't go into detail here. Suffice it to say that the original 'type' of table iris was selected from the garden of E. B. Williamson, a man whose services to the iris world were considerable in all respects and included starting Paul Cook off on his lifetime interest in irises, and that Alice White almost single-handedly rescued this type from oblivion in the early 50s. This is not yet a medal award, and that must wait for awarding of more preliminary awards. For now, the award will be the equivalent of the Award of Merit. Our congratulations to Mary Williamson, long her father's assistant and his successor in the gardens he established; and to our valued member and friend Alice (Mrs. David K.) White." (See separate article on Mary Williamson)

Winners: WILLIAMSON-WHITE MEDAL Miniature Tall Bearded (MTB)

2012	PLUM QUIRKY (Riley Probst)		
2011	DIVIDING LINE (Charles Bunnell)		
2010	SAILOR'S DREAM (Kenneth Fisher)		
2009	SOMEWHAT QUIRKY (Riley Probst)		
2008	MASLON (Donald Spoon)		
2007	Madam President	Hugh Thurman	
2006	Baubles and Beads	Lynda Miller	Noblesville, IN
2005	Ace	Lynda Miller	Noblesville, IN
2004	Merit	Kenneth Fisher	Bella Vista, AR
2003	Apricot Drops	Terry Aitken	Vancouver, WA
2002	Reminiscence	Clarence Mahan	McLean, VA
2001	Bangles	Lynda Miller	Noblesville, IN
2000	Pardner	Kenneth Fisher	Bella Vista, AR
1999-T	Billie the Brownie	John Burton	South Hamilton , MA
1999-T	Pretty Quirky	Ann Probst	Kirkwood, MO
1998	Striped Pants	Kenneth Fisher	Bella Vista, AR
1997	Zula	Kenneth Fisher	Bella Vista, AR
1996	Petite Monet	Katharine Steele	Charlotte, NC
1995	Frosted Velvet	Kenneth Fisher	Bella Vista, AR
1994-M	Rosemary's Dream	Mary Louise Dunderman	Akron, OH
1993-M	Bumblebee Deelite	Jack and Glenda Norrick	Muncie, IN

Winners: WILLIAMSON-WHITE AWARD Miniature Tall Bearded (MTB)

1992	Welch's Reward	Walter Welch by Earl Hall	Middlebury, IN West Alexandria, OH
1991	Crystal Ruffles	Mary Louise Dunderman	Akron, OH
1990-A	Bumblebee Deelite	Jack and Glenda Norrick	Muncie, IN

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1989	Little Paul	Kenneth Fisher	Bella Vista, AR
1988	Aachen Elf	Lois Kennedy	Huntsville, AL
1987	Abridged Version	Ben Hager	Stockton, CA
1986-A	Rosemary's Dream	Mary Louise Dunderman	Akron, OH
1985	Consummation	Walter Welch	Middlebury, IN
1984	Chickee	Mary Louise Dunderman	Akron, OH
1983	Disco Jewel	Dorothy Guild	Spokane, WA
1982	Doll Ribbons	Mary Louise Dunderman	Akron, OH
1981	Spanish Coins	Jean Witt	Seattle, WA
1980	Panda	Mary Louise Dunderman	Akron, OH
1979	White Canary	Earl Roberts	Indianapolis, IN
1978	Quirk	Alta Brown	Kirkland, WA
1977	Cedar Waxwing	Earl Roberts	Indianapolis, IN
1976	New Idea	Ben Hager	Stockton, CA
1975	Bit o' Afton	Dorothy Guild	Spokane, WA
1974	Carolyn Rose	Mary Louise Dunderman	Akron, OH
1973	Ice Fairy	Jean Witt	Seattle, WA
1972	Dainty Dove	Alta Brown	Kirkland, WA
1971	Dainty Damsel	Alta Brown	Kirkland, WA
1970	Mockingbird	Earl Roberts	Indianapolis, IN
1969	Dainty Dancer	Alta Brown	Kirkland, WA
1968	Pewee	Bruce Williamson	Bluffton, IN

The Median Iris Society sponsors the annual awarding of four medals by AIS to medians in each of the recognized classifications: SDB, IB, MTB, and BB. Note that most classifications within the AIS Awards System began with Award of Merit (AM) equivalent Awards, later elevated to Medal status. At this transition, previous Award winners from a specified period of time re-competed for the higher Medal honors. Thus there are some duplicate entries. They are designated with an "A" beside the date on which they won the AM-equivalent, and an "M" on Medal status. "T" designates a tie. Any year omitted is a year in which no award was made.