

American Iris Society: Sydney B. Mitchell Medal-PCN

History written by Clarence Mahan

This medal is restricted to Pacific Coast Native (PCN) irises. It is named in honor of Sydney B. Mitchell (1878-1951).

Sydney Mitchell loved plants and gardening even as a small child. When he attended McGill University, he made friends with the university gardener who gave him irises. Mitchell's brother allowed him to grow the irises in his backyard and he soon had a very large collection. His wife shared his interest in plants, and when he moved to California, where he worked at the Stanford University Library, they began their lifelong collaboration in the garden. In 1911, Mitchell moved to Berkeley to head the purchasing department of the University of California library, and the Mitchell's took their iris collection with them.

Prof. Sydney Mitchell was an educator. He became Acting Librarian at the University of California during WW I, and later founded and became first director of the Graduate School of Librarianship at that university. He was also one of the organizers of the American Iris Society, president and editor of the California Horticultural Society, a founding member of the American Fuchsia Society, and a prodigious author on gardening subjects for gardening and horticultural magazines and journals. He wrote four books: *Gardening in California*, *From a Sunset Garden*, *Your California Garden and Mine*, and *Iris for Every Garden*.

Tom Craig wrote this of him: "Sydney looked upon plant breeding as a long term international effort in which individuals from all over the world should co-operate and add generation after generation to a real human achievement. He made me feel a real part of this and more particularly a part of a special work started by William Mohr and carried on by himself. Sydney generously gave flowers and plants of seedling for further encouragement with this work."

Sydney Mitchell's collaboration with William Mohr, - and his continuation of Mohr's breeding lines is now one of the legends of the AIS. Mitchell also bred outstanding irises of his own, and was especially interested in obtaining large flowered yellow tall bearded irises. Some of his finest cultivars are 'Alta California,' 'Happy Days,' 'Naranja,' 'Natividad,' and 'Fair Elaine.'

Mitchell was also interested in the native irises of the West Coast and promoted them at every opportunity. He took great pride in the plantings of PCNs in his own garden. He had a large collection of various forms of *I. innominata* and *I. douglasiana*.

Winners: SYDNEY B. MITCHELL MEDAL Pacific Coast Native (PCN)

2019 DA VINCI CODE (Joseph Ghio)
2018 PACIFIC TAPESTRY (J. T. Aitken)
2017 FOGGY DAYS (Joseph Ghio)
2016 PERIWINKLE PERSIAN (Deborah Cole)
2015 BAY STREET (Joseph Ghio)
2014 RODEO GULCH (Joseph Ghio)
2013 HIDDEN ASSET (Duane Meek) and LINES THAT RHYME (Joseph Ghio) tie
2012 BLUE PLATE SPECIAL (Joseph Ghio) and OCEAN BLUE (Joseph Ghio) tie
2011 BAR CODE (Joseph Ghio) and STAR OF WONDER (Joseph Ghio) tie
2010 WILD SURVIVOR (William Plotner)
2009 MENDOCINO BLUE (Robert and Janet Canning)
2008 WINE AND CHEESE (Vernon Wood)
2007 PACIFIC MISS (Lois Belardi)
2006 COZUMEL (Joseph Ghio)
2005 SIERRA AZUL (Joseph Ghio)
2004 RASPBERRY DAZZLER (Vern Wood)
2003 SEA ADMIRAL (Vern Wood)
2002 SEA GAL (Lois Belardi)
2001 JEAN ERICKSON (Colin Rigby)
2000 PINK CUPID (Vern Wood)
1999 CHIEF SEQUOIA (John Weiler)
1998 PACIFIC RIM (Bennet Jones)
1997 NIGHT EDITOR (Joseph Ghio)
1996 IDYLWILD (Joseph Ghio)
1995 SIERRA DELL (Lewis Lawyer)
1994 SIMPLY WILD (Joseph Ghio)
1993 MIMSEY (Vern Wood)

Winners: SYDNEY B. MITCHELL AWARD Pacific Coast Native (PCN)

1992 MIMSEY (Vern Wood)
1991 DRIVE YOU WILD (Joseph Ghio)
1990 BIG MONEY (Joseph Ghio)
1989 CALIFORNIA MYSTIQUE (Joseph Ghio)

1988 No Award (Tie vote)
1987 SIMPLY WILD (Joseph Ghio)
1986 BIG WHEEL (Joseph Ghio)
1985 No Award
1984 CITY HALL (Joseph Ghio)
1983 SANTA RITA (Joseph Ghio)
1982 COUNCILMAN (Joseph Ghio)
1981 RESTLESS NATIVE (Joseph Ghio)
1980 SOQUEL COVE (Joseph Ghio)
1979 LOS GATOS (Joseph Ghio)
1978 SNOW CANYON (Dara Emery)
1977 SIERRA SAPPHIRE (Lee Lenz)
1976 WESTERN QUEEN (George Stambach)
1975 NATIVE WARRIOR (S. August Phillips)
1974 AMIQUITA (Eric Nies)
1973 OJAI (Marion Walker)