

American Iris Society: W.R. Dykes Memorial Medal

History: A collected, condensed and edited version of the history by Christopher Hollinshead (November 2012). Includes information from: The Biography of W.R. Dykes from the British Iris Society Annual, June 1926

The Dykes Medal is the overall top award of the American Iris Society (AIS), given to a single iris each year. Irises are eligible as a Dykes Medal candidate for three years following the winning of a classification medal and all the classifications are eligible. Only AIS accredited/registered judges may vote for this award.

William Rickatson Dykes, M.A; L.-es L., V.M.H. the second son of Alfred Dykes was born November 4, 1877. He was a botanist, horticulturist, schoolmaster, plant breeder, author, and the foremost authority on irises. He first went to City of London School, and then to Wadham College, Oxford. There he took honors in classical schools. Later at the University of Paris he was L-esL.

While studying at Cambridge he met Sir Michael Foster, and through him became interested in the study of the iris family. He was an apt pupil and Sir Michael was a qualified teacher. He visited Sir Michael at Shelford, and carried on his work with increasing impetus and interest. It has been generally written that Sir Michael left Mr. Dykes his material on iris. But in the introduction to "The Genus Iris", Mr. Dykes says "My greatest debt of all is due to the late Sir Michael Foster, who encouraged me to undertake the investigation into the whole genus. My acquaintance with him was all too short, but it was long enough to make me appreciate that generosity with which he placed his knowledge and his plants at the disposal of those who followed in his footsteps.

As valuable as the Foster notebooks were in part, it was comparatively small in amount to the material which Mr. Dykes himself collected. He became the world's leading authority on iris, and was a worthy successor to Sir Michael. His insatiable curiosity led him to obtain a wide knowledge of many other plants, but his chief interest was in the lily, iris, and amaryllis natural orders. He also did much work with tulips, and his knowledge of them was comparable to his knowledge of iris.

In A.I.S. Bulletin 19 an article is reprinted from "The Book of Arrangements" published by the Royal Horticultural Society in 1926. Concerning Mr. Dykes, it says, "First and foremost, William Dykes was his own gardener. To collect the seed himself and to bring the plant safely through the cycle of its life to seed-time again was his great joy. To his first love, the genus iris he was always true, but he loved all plants and could appreciate the florists' flower just as well as some rare or new species."

In the same Bulletin in an article, "The Late W.R. Dykes" R.W, Wallace wrote, "His ambition was to collect seeds, either when on a journey or by correspondence wherever irises grow, raise the plants, and study them closely from the seedling stage until they grew, flowered, and seeded again. He could tell off -hand minor differences between species as to shape of seed or seed pods, and whether the foliage was round, ribbed, or flat. He could discourse at length on the history of every species, and the habitat of all known irises."

W.R. Dykes was also a prolific author. In 1909 he began to plan and work on his monograph, "The Genus Iris". He worked on this project for 5 years. In a long drawer he kept hundreds of cards arranged in alphabetical order. On each of these was detailed history of an iris which he had collected and grown, and from these cards he wrote his book. Of this monograph has been written, "This great monograph is a fitting tribute to our common Master's (Foster's) memory. As

Mr. Dykes himself would be the first to allow, such a book could not have been attempted without the labour's of the leader to whose memory it is dedicated."

In A.I.S. Bulletin 19, Mr. A.J. Bliss wrote of him, "He was insatiable for information of every sort about iris, and his correspondence must have been enormous. His energy was amazing, no less than his patience in working out a classification tangle, but I was most of all impressed by his thoroughness. He was never satisfied with hearsay or second-hand information. His aim was to see every species in its living state, and if possible to grow it from seed, not only to see what range of variation it might display, but also to experiment in cross -fertilization with other species for indications of affinity, and so far as it was possible, he carried out this ideal for "The Genus Iris."

On December 1, 1925, W.R. Dykes died as a result of a motor accident. His work had only begun, for he was on the threshold of greater achievements as demonstrated by his glorious yellow seedling which was named for him. His death was a shock and a loss to the entire world of gardeners. At a meeting of the British Iris Society held on June 16, 1926 it was resolved to award a medal to the hybridizer of the outstanding iris variety of each year in memory of Mr. Dykes and thus the Dykes Medal was created. It has become the most highly coveted, highly prized iris award dreamed of by all iris hybridizers. This is the highest iris award available and its name, the Dykes Medal, keeps his name alive and warm in all our hearts.

Winners: DYKES MEDAL from inception in 1927 to date (hybridizer name and the year of introduction are also shown)

2019 Bottle Rocket (Michael Sutton 2010)
 2018 Haunted Heart (Keith Keppel 2010)
 2017 Mountmartre (Keith Keppel 2008)
 2016 Swans In Flight (Robert Hollingworth 2006)
 2015 Gypsy Lord (Keith Keppel 2005)
 2014 Dividing Line (Charles Bunnell 2004)
 2003 That's All Folks (William Maryott 2005)
 2012 Florentine Silk (Keith Keppel 2005)
 2011 Drama Queen (Keppel 2003)
 2010 Paul Black (Thomas Johnson 2003)
 2009 Golden Panther (Tasco 2000)
 2008 Starwoman (Marky Smith 1998)
 2007 Queen's Circle (Kerr 2000)
 2006 Sea Power (Keppel 1999)
 2005 Splashacata (Tasco 1998)
 2004 Crowned Heads (Keppel 1997)
 2003 Celebration Song (Schreiner 1993)
 2002 Mesmerizer (Byers 1991)
 2001 Yaquina Blue (Schreiner 1992)
 2000 Stairway to Heaven (Lauer 1993)
 1999 Hello Darkness (Schreiner 1992)
 1998 Conjunction (Byers 1989)
 1997 Thornbird (Byers 1989)
 1996 Before the Storm (Innerst 1989)
 1995 Honky Tonk Blues (Schreiner 1988)
 1994 Silverado (Schreiner 1987)
 1993 Edith Wolford (Hager 1986)
 1992 Dusky Challenger (Schreiner 1986)
 1991 Everything Plus (Niswonger 1984)

1990 Jesse's Song (Williamson 1983)
1989 Not Awarded
1988 Titan's Glory (Schreiner 1981)
1987 Not Awarded
1986 Song of Norway (Luihn 1979)
1985 Beverly Sills (Hager 1979)
1984 Victoria Falls (Schreiner 1977)
1983 Ruffled Ballet (Roderick 1975)
1982 Vanity (Hager 1975)
1981 Brown Lasso (Buckles-Niswonger 1975)
1980 Mystique (Ghio 1975)
1979 Mary Frances (Gaulter 1973)
1978 Bride's Halo (Mohr 1974)
1977 Dream Lover (Tams 1971)
1976 Kilt Lilt (Gibson 1970)
1975 Pink Taffeta (Rudolph 1968)
1974 Shipshape (Babson 1969)
1973 New Moon (Sexton 1968)
1972 Babbling Brook (Keppel 1966)
1971 Debby Rairdon (Kuntz 1965)
1970 Skywatch (Benson 1964)
1969 Not Awarded
1968 Stepping Out (Schreiner 1964)
1967 Winter Olympics (O.Brown 1963)
1966 Rippling Waters (Fay 1961)
1965 Pacific Panorama (Sexton 1960)
1964 Allegiance (Cook 1958)
1963 Amethyst Flame (Schreiner 1956)
1962 Whole Cloth (Cook 1956)
1961 Eleanor's Pride (Watkins 1952)
1960 Not Awarded
1959 Swan Ballet (Muhlestein 1955)
1958 Blue Sapphire (Schreiner 1953)
1957 Violet Harmony (Lowry 1948)
1956 First Violet (Deforest 1951)
1955 Sable Night (Cook 1952)
1954 Mary Randall (Fay 1950)
1953 Truly Yours (Fay 1949)
1952 Argus Pheasant (Deforest 1948)
1951 Cherie (Hall 1947)
1950 Blue Rhythm (Whiting 1945)
1949 Helen McGregor (Graves 1946)
1948 Ola Kala (Sass 1943)
1947 Chivalry (Wills 1944)
1946 Not Awarded
1945 Elmohr (Loomis 1942)
1944 Spun Gold (Gultzbeck 1940)
1943 Prairie Sunset (H.P.Sass 1939)
1942 Great Lakes (Cousins 1938)
1941 The Red Douglas (J.Sass 1937)
1940 Wabash (Williamson 1936)
1939 Rosy Wings (Gage 1935)
1938 Copper Lustre (Kirkland 1934)
1937 Missouri (Grinter 1933)
1936 Mary Geddes (Stahl-Washington 1931)

1935 Sierra Blue (Essig 1932)
1934 Not Awarded
1933 Coralie (Ayres 1932)
1932 Rameses (H.P.Sass 1929)
1931 Not Awarded
1930 Not Awarded
1929 Dauntless (Connell 1927)
1928 Not Awarded
1927 San Francisco (Mohr 1927)

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