The Business Down Under
by Bill Powell

For water gardeners winter is usually a dead time unless you’re lucky enough to have a heated greenhouse. Even then, chores are minimal leaving lots of time for celebrating the holidays unless your water garden is in the southern hemisphere where the growing season falls inconveniently simultaneous with Christmas!

Imagine too, if your water garden were, a commercial business and its sales weren’t limited to plants, but also included clouds of cut water lily blossoms that had to be harvested and shipped to market throughout the Christmas holidays.

Norma and Laurence Gedye grew accustomed to long hours and short holiday celebrations. Their large commercial operation outside Melbourne was the largest commercial water lily business in Australia during the middle decades of the twentieth century.

From October until April, the Gedyes often worked without sleep for up to thirty hours at a stint harvesting blooms from the 20,000-plus water lily plants they grew in several lakes scattered over more than 30 miles and encompassing acres of water.

Sale of cut blossoms was the backbone of the business. Laurence Gedye’s technique for keeping the flowers fresh during shipment was the family’s trade secret. In addition, the blossoms really traveled – sometimes “as far afield as Darwin, Sydney, and Perth” where they were used for “weddings, wreaths, and for ordinary household bowls.”

(continued on page 4)
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Annual Holiday Banquet and White Elephant Gift Exchange
by Dorothy Martinez

Please join us for our annual Holiday Banquet and White Elephant Gift Exchange to be held on Thursday, December 18th starting at 6:00 pm.

It’s that time of year again and our thoughts are turning to winter and the holidays. The Colorado Water Garden Society will be hosting its annual Holiday Banquet and White Elephant Gift Exchange. The club will provide the main dish, dessert, and drinks. Please bring your favorite appetizer, side dish, or salad to share. We anticipate about 40 people to attend.

The festivities will start at 6:00 pm with time to socialize and visit with your fellow water gardeners. This is the perfect time to catch up with one another and share stories of various successes or failures in your 2014 water gardening exploits. We will start dinner at 6:30 pm and the White Elephant Gift Exchange will begin at 7:30 pm.

Just a few ground rules for the White Elephant Gift Exchange. Gifts to be exchanged should be valued at $10 or under and if possible have a water garden theme, but they don’t have to be. Numbers corresponding to the number of guests who brought gifts will be put into a hat and each participant will draw a number. Gifts will be selected and opened in their numeric order. The person who draws #1 will select and open first, the person who draws #2 can either opt to select a gift or “steal” #1’s gift, this process continues until the guest with the final number has opened their gift. Any one gift can only be “stolen” three times; if the person “stealing” the same gift is the third person to do so, that gift is theirs and it is “off the table”.

Everyone has a great time and the White Elephant Gift Exchange is always popular as well. Please bring a guest and kick off the holiday season in style and plan on attending the Holiday Banquet.

If you haven’t already, meet…
Brenda Parsons-Hier
by Bill Powell

September’s election brought new leadership to the CWGS Board. Brenda Parsons-Hier, a member who has served as a Board Member-at-Large for a number of years, was elected President. Brenda brings enthusiasm and a passion for nature to her position. She also brings considerable experience digging in the mud.

Brenda was born and raised in Coldwater, Michigan. She was drawn to plants and animals early. Brenda particularly loved her summer visits to the Michigan lakes. “What animals…?” lay beneath, Brenda wondered, picturing the lake drained for her exploration.

Brenda’s curiosity served her well during her thirty years teaching 8th graders in the JeffCo schools. Her interest in aquatic landscapes never left her. She took up scuba diving and was fascinated by sea life…as well as wildlife. Brenda has been an active volunteer at the Denver Zoo for 25 years where she especially enjoys taking “small education animals (no lions, tigers or bears, please!) for public programs, especially to senior facilities.” Every Friday Brenda chops up food and feeds fish in the tropical building. “Ask me sometime about my favorite fish” - it’s a “porcupine puffer that is target-trained and spits when it is upset.”

When she met her husband Peter Hier, Brenda and Peter found they shared an interest in gardening and in ponds. Their home, nestled into the steep slope of a plateau in Golden, presented a problem and an opportunity – how to introduce ponds and water to the hillside. Brenda remembers:

“We wanted our first pond (now we have five others) to look like it was coming out of the hill in our steeply inclined backyard… like a spring. We used rocks from the hill for that effect.”

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The Business Down Under

The Gedyes estimated they grew several million water lily plants of 20 different varieties in their ponds, the first of which was started by Laurence’s grandfather 100 years earlier in the mid-nineteenth century. Some of their nymphaea species were native to Australia. Some were collected by the Gedyes. Other plants were happy circumstance, the result of natural hybridization.

Although they also sold water lily plants, cut flowers were the focus of the Gedye’s operation. Laurence often delivered the shipments personally to florists in Melbourne, packing both open blossoms and buds into plastic bags and boxes. Interstate deliveries traveled by airfreight across the continent until tastes changed in the florist trade and the business in cut water lily blooms declined.

Elizabeth Auld, who visited the Gedye’s farm at the height of its production in the mid-twentieth century, remembered her first visit:

“There lay an enormous lake of water lilies, the pink, yellow and white blossoms floating on its surface like stars in the milky way.”

Auld also took note of the “nymphs” who were “picking the water lilies, swimming to the most abundant patches, detaching the lovely star-like head and throwing its long stem back into the water.” The nymphs were summer employees, mostly teenage girls and often the Gedye’s own children, who “earned money for school holidays by picking peaches from the orchard and water lily flowers from the lake for market.”

Norma Gedye, who still lives in Australia and is a friend of CWGS member Doris Freestone, may seem a familiar name, particularly if you’ve volunteered during the summer at Denver Botanic Gardens. That’s because you may have helped plant her namesake lily Nymphaea ‘Norma Gedye’, a medium-sized hardy pink bloomer that’s still available in the trade. Doris wrote to Norma recently, asking her how she happened to receive the plant named in her honor. Norma replied:

“Regarding my namesake lily, I don’t know the origin of it as we happened to have it in our small collection at that time, maybe someone gave it to us, I am not sure. At that early stage we didn’t know much about different varieties and their names and tried to find a name of this certain lily from a book (only in black and white).”

Unable to identify the plant from available references, Norma and Laurence began to call it ‘James Brydon’, which was the nearest fit they could find. When the eminent water gardener and hybridizer Perry Slocum visited the Gedye’s farm in the early 1970’s he asked about the plant and corrected their identification. “That’s not ‘James Brydon’! We’ll call it ‘Norma Gedye!’” Slocum suggested. “...and so the name stuck”. Norma writes, “I am sure that Laurence would have given Perry a plant to take home at the time as Perry was always collecting plants from everywhere.”

Joe Tomocik, the first curator of the water gardens at DBG, doesn’t recall how N. ‘Norma Gedye’ came into the Garden’s collection. Norma thinks Laurence might have presented the plant to Joe before they visited the IWGS Symposium that was held in Denver in 1987.
Meet Brenda Parsons-Hier

(continued from page 3)

Remembering her childhood interest in what lay beneath the surface of those Michigan lakes, Brenda knew they “had to have fish” in their new pond. They settled on goldfish they felt would be easy to keep and well scaled to their thousand-gallon pond.

Brenda had always admired the unusual adaptations of aquatic plants and their beauty. “Realizing the need for plants to make the pond more natural got me going. Through the Club I found out about volunteering in aquatics at DBG. Peter and I got involved” working seasonally at the Botanic Gardens, with DBG’s May Plant Sale and with the Club’s June Plant Sale.

Brenda and Peter enjoy their stepped oasis with its falls, cascades, and its changing, watery habitat. Each day some new creature is attracted. The visitor may not always be welcome. Brenda “thought the garter snake swimming across was cool” until she saw it pull one of her fish from the ponds. “Raccoons are not so welcome either...they knock over plants, try to catch fish, and chew on plants, including the water lilies.”

Brenda loves watching the small birds that visit her pond, but not the Great Blue Heron with its great appetite. A smaller visitor, a leopard frog, is treasured. It has overwintered now for two years. Invisible by winter, sometimes the frog goes unseen for several weeks even during the summer active season. Then, suddenly, it jumps up again in a new location - just like algae...and creaks.

Like most of us, Brenda may find pond keeping frustrating as well as rewarding. She hopes her experiences and the shared experience of Club members will help everyone “feel comfortable and excited about our water features no matter the size or design” of our gardens.

The Business Down Under

(continued from page 4)

Norma recalls:

“I am quite certain that we saw Norma Gedye growing there [in DBG] then [1987]. We did sell plants to Perry [Slocum] at a later stage, also Paul Stetson and some other nurseries including some in England, Stapeley Water Gardens and [to] Norman Bennett. I think we may have given Norman his first plant and he was very fond of it.

I know it is growing at the R.H.S. [Royal Horticultural Society] gardens at Wisley as we have seen it there and only recently, a distant Gedye relative sent me a photo of it in bloom there still. At least I know that when I am no longer around my name will be, as a lot of countries have it now.”

The Colorado Water Garden Society would like to give a special thank you to Norma Gedye for her memories and recollections that helped make this article possible.

Notes and references:

1. From “Lakes of Water Lilies” published in Woman’s Day with Woman, April 1, 1957
2. Quote from “Water Lilies Make Summer Idyll,” Elizabeth Auld, March 1950
3. From recent e-mail communications between Doris Freestone and Norma Gedye, 2014.
Volunteer brought own color to world of plants
Gardener remembered with naming of beautiful place at Hudson Gardens

By Sonya Ellingboe
Littleton Independent 8/13/14 (Reprinted with permission from Colorado Community Media)

Bob Hoffman delighted in showing off the spiny undersides of exotic Victoria lilies, as well as in growing, planting and nurturing an impressive collection of lilies, lotuses, cannas, papyruses and many other plant varieties that thrive with wet feet.

His family and fellow gardeners feel an acute sense of loss since he passed away, but are consoled by remembering his really substantial contributions to his community. He was active with, and recently president of, the Colorado Water Garden Society. Volunteers support gardens at Denver Botanic Gardens and Hudson Gardens, planting, dividing, coaxing and caring for a colorful variety of plants.

Often attired in waders, he and other volunteers give these special spots the ongoing attention they require to thrive, which includes specific shelter and care through the winter.

Fran Hoffman said her husband, who spent 15 years in the Air Force before coming to work at Lockheed Martin in Colorado, started talking about his long-awaited pond as soon as they moved into their home on the west side of Littleton — but they had little kids and it had to wait until their son, Mike, could swim at age 8. "Then I said, 'Go for it'. We all dug that first pond and learned a lot. At first, it wasn't big enough," she remembered.

Bob Hoffman was born in 1943 in Illinois, attended Coe College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, as a physical education major and spent 15 years in the Air Force. He and Fran were married in 1968 and had two children: Mike, who lives in Colorado, and Jennifer, who predeceased Bob. Grandson Austin lives with Fran and attends elementary school nearby.

While he had no formal education in horticulture, Hoffman quietly and steadily pursued a love of plants, developing true expertise in his chosen specialty. "He read a lot, volunteered at Chatfield and we all volunteered at Denver Botanic Gardens", Fran said. There he worked with aquatic plant expert Joe Tomocik and his successor Tamara Kilbane.

Hoffman was active with the Rocky Mountain Koi Club and the Mile High Garden Railroad Club — which means he helped with the model train that delights visitors at Hudson Gardens, according to friend and fellow club member Jim Arneill.

Hudson Gardens has renamed the pond near Monet’s Place, the Robert B. (Bob) Hoffman Memorial Pond. This pond was designed and its construction was overseen by Bob until its completion in May of 2014.

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New & Returning Members for August through December 2014

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<td>Rebecca Nash</td>
<td>Pat Weis-Taylor &amp; Rick Hinrichs</td>
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<td>Werner &amp; Nancy Neupert</td>
<td>Gabriella Bertelmann</td>
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<td>Lorna Moore</td>
<td>Michael &amp; Bonnie Collins</td>
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<td>Dorothy Martinez &amp; John Funk</td>
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<td>Don Remaly</td>
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<td>Broomfield, CO</td>
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CWGS Plant Sale (June) ___
Pond Tour (July) ___
Water Blossom Festival (August) ___

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THIS YEAR
A calendar of CWGS Activities and Events:

Thursday, December 18: Holiday Banquet
Holiday Banquet, Volunteer Recognition, & White Elephant Gift Exchange
Plant Society Building, DBG
6:00 PM – 9:30 PM

Board Meeting
Tentative date: Either Jan. 17th at 1:00 pm or Jan. 25th at 1:00 pm
Location to be determined
More details on website in early 2015

Board Meeting
Tentative date: Feb. 15th at 1:00 pm
Location to be determined
More details on website in early 2015

From…

TheWaterGarden
c/o Dorothy Martinez,
Journal Editor
14837 W. 57th Drive
Golden, CO 80403-3001

The Colorado Water Garden Society (CWGS) is a non-profit 501 (c) (3) organization founded in 1983 to encourage appreciation and interest in the use of water in the landscape.

To learn more, visit us at www.colowatergardensociety.org