

Fred B Davis Remembered
By Mark MacDougall

The American Fuchsia Society, throughout its history, has had many dedicated members. Unselfish, caring people who have given themselves toward the promotion of fuchsias and to the growth of the organization. Numbered high in these select ranks is found the name of Dr. Fred B. Davis.

Fred Davis first became interested in growing fuchsias as a hobby in 1927. He became a member of the newly formed American Fuchsia Society and was elected a Director in 1931 at the first annual meeting of the Society. One of his first jobs was serving as Chairman of the AFS Booth at the California Flower Festival held in San Leandro. September 11-13, 1931, during which at least 3,000 persons viewed the exhibit of the Society. The booth display was greatly enhanced by the carload of fuchsia blooms brought from Pacific Grove by Dr. Davis' friends, Hugh and Bessie Hazard.

Fred Davis became President of the AFS in 1942. He was also a founding member of the Peralta Branch of Oakland, of which he was elected President in 1944 and 1949. He was recognized for his merits in 1950 when the society awarded him its highest honor—the Medal of Achievement.

The first medal was appropriately awarded to the incomparable Miss Alice Eastwood at the annual administrative meeting in January 1948. The twenty-ninth, and most recent recipient of this highest award of appreciation from the Society is Mr. Chuck Hassett, current Editor of the AFS Bulletin, honored in 1982.

The inscription on Fred Davis' medal read: "To Dr. Fred B. Davis, staunch pioneer builder of the American Fuchsia society, ambassador of good will, authority on the expert culture of the fuchsia and Past-President of the Society."

Worthy praise indeed. However, it does not mention his artwork, and it is for his accomplishments in this field that Fred Davis is best remembered. It was he who designed the drawing for the AFS medal with the classic fuchsia bloom, complete with foliage and stamens, encircled with the words "American Fuchsia Society—Founded 1929". This familiar emblem, the trademark of the Society, has no equal. It remains a living memorial to Fred Davis, seen on all official AFS papers and stationery. During his life Dr. Davis created many watercolors and other types of fuchsia drawing. His design of "Commander-in-Chief" was used on the cover of *The Second Fuchsia Book* (1950). Other examples of his work are found in illustrations in *The Fuchsia Book* (1950). Other examples of his work are found in illustrations in *The Fuchsia Book* (1945) and in the five *Supplements of Fuchsia Introductions* published by the AFS. A number of AFS Branches have reproduced Davis drawings for their individual letterheads and Branch logo.

The AFS Bulletin of June 1952 was the first to feature the Davis emblem on its cover. This Bulletin was a new format, printed under the direction of AFS President Mel Newfield, consisting of an 8 1/2 x 11, 4-page folder in magenta color. The familiar emblem or symbol of the Society was used on all Bulletin covers until 1981 when the style change to colored drawings and photographs. The AFS emblem is now seen inside the Bulletin to emphasize articles of special importance.

During the height of his painting days Dr. Davis was very generous with his work. Many of his paintings were given to fuchsia friends or donated as Branch door prizes. Today Davis originals are highly treasured "collector's items" among fuchsia lore enthusiasts.

Fred Davis was an advocate of natural gardening. In his Berkeley, California home he had a unique yen for growing tall fuchsias. These were set on a latticed wall on which the plants grew to twelve or fifteen feet in height. Some, he once said, grew over the top of his second story windows, where the plants had to stop for lack of more wall space.

In his writings, Fred Davis mentions the names of many of his favorite fuchsias. These were mostly the older, hardy types, which unfortunately are no longer commonly found if at all. Thus, his gardening habits may seem dated by today's standards. Nevertheless, his early methods are worth recording.

For a 1947 Bulletin article he wrote: "Invariably, plants in the open garden are the most floriferous. Most of the fuchsia plants, in the Bay Region at least, are in sunny open beds and nowhere have I seen a more colorful effect. If I were to plan a new fuchsia garden for myself I would provide no overhead shade, but a series of latticed walls extending north and south, with all of the cool colored blossoming plants, such as the blue, purple, mauve, lavender and lilac on the east side of the lattices, where they would be free from the hot afternoon sun while on the west side would be planted the warm colored ones, such as the orange, apricot, salmon and terracottas. The many red varieties are most accommodating and are not choosy as to what exposure they are given."

The following paragraph, taken from "Why Grow Tall Fuchsias?" by Fred B. Davis, printed in *The fuchsia Book* (1945), is also worth repeating. He writes: "One of the most attractive features of such a treatment (growing tall fuchsias) is the very pleasing effect of the branches and blossoms as seen from inside the house, and often there is the added attraction of having the hummingbirds darting around not more than two or three feet away, just beyond the windowpane. The metallic brilliance of their head and neck feathers gives a most arresting accent in any combination of fuchsia blossoms, metallic sheened, imbued with sudden life, hovering but a moment in a newfound liberty, then daring away in an ecstasy of flight."

The September 1950 Bulletin contained the following *in Memoriam* notice written by Arthur Boissier, Bulletin Editor:

"Dr. Fred Bradford Davis (1879-1950). In the death of Dr. Fred Davis, we of the fuchsia world have lost one of our dearest friends and most valued workers. No member has ever devoted more of his time and energy so generously to the welfare of our Society. He loved all nature, the mountains, the sea, the forest, the birds, the flowers, particularly the fuchsia. He was a quiet, modest man, companionable, with a kindly sense of humor and good fellowship. He was a born artist with a keen feeling for color and decoration. His paramount interest in life, particularly in his later years, was gardening. His favorite flower was always the fuchsia. He grew it well and gave the greater part of his time and thought to this plant of his devotion. We will miss the gentle friend of ours and the fuchsia."

Today, thirty-five years after his death, we know Fred Davis is still with us. We have only to look at our AfS membership card to see the fuchsia emblem of the Society, the legacy he gave us.