

Society for Siberian Irises Board Meeting, May 23, 2025

Meeting Location: Ames, Iowa (hosted by Lois Gorton), and via Zoom

Attendees in person: Gary White (President), Adam Cordes (1st Vice President), Jan Sacks (2nd Vice President), Margaret Spence (Secretary), Jean Kaufmann (Treasurer), Carol Warner (Immediate Past President, Nominating Committee), Lois Gorton (Director, 2025 Convention), Marty Schafer.

Attendees via Zoom: Kate Brewitt (Director), Rebecca Ary (Director), Bob Hollingworth (TSI Editor), Judy Hollingworth (Membership).

Not attending: Chad Harris (Director), Barbara Aitken (Director), Jim Wilson (Website),

The meeting was called to order at 3:26 pm Central. Gary confirmed we have a quorum.

Gary emailed information prior to the meeting:

- Agenda
- Minutes of the last board meeting

Secretary's Report for October 16, 2024 – Margaret Spence

Carol moved to accept the minutes and Jan seconded the motion. Bob identified one correction on the second page for the Nominating Committee ("no nominations for directions" should be corrected to "no nominations for directors"). There were no other additions or corrections. The board approved the minutes as corrected.

Treasurer's Report – Jean Kaufmann

Jean noted that, when she took over from Jim Copeland in January, the checking account balance was \$13,123.44. Since then, she has received \$815 from memberships and ads and a \$500 donation from an East Coast iris society and paid out \$1,830 for the TSI. She took \$10,000 out and put it into a CD. Currently, the checking account balance is \$2,108.06.

Jan asked about income sources, which the group listed as membership, ads, donations, and convention auctions. For the 2025 convention, silent auction proceeds will go to AIS Region 21 and live auction proceeds will go to SSI, except for sales from any SIGNA contribution that will go to that organization. Lois noted that they're using AUCTRIA for the convention auction (free version).

Jan noted that her local iris group makes money from sales that the group doesn't use. They donate to societies (such as SSI) based on member proposals. She made the point that those donations really help the national societies. She asked if there was some way to publicize to other organizations that may also want to donate.

Lois described her use of AUCTRIA (free version) for some other plant organizations. The American Peony Society does an online auction every year. They switched to AUCTRIA a few years ago and have made a lot of money. People can buy from the auction even if they can't attend meetings. People are needed to organize the auction and donate plants. A shipping fee is charged to each bidder (\$15-\$30). Donors do all the shipping and pay for it but can get reimbursed for the shipping. This has been a revenue generator and membership generator; APS has gone from about 800 members to about 1,400 in the last few years.

Gary stated that this is worth exploring. He also noted that HIPS has also been doing this. Jan said she would be willing to contribute plants. Jean noted that this might be an opportunity to get older varieties back into circulation.

Membership – Judy Hollingworth

Judy noted that most plant societies have decreased in numbers recently. SSI has been fairly stable over the last few years. As of October 2024, SSI had 172 U.S. memberships and 31 Canada/Overseas memberships. Currently, there are 174 U.S. memberships and 32 Canada/Overseas memberships for a total of 206 members. Six new members were added since October 2024. Of the total, 51 are life members (about a quarter). Judy said that one life member sent a check for \$30 (she said she didn't expect to live this long).

Judy noted that a couple joined for the seed exchange (membership required to participate).

Carol brought membership brochures to the convention and noted that many of the attendees are not SSI members. She also mentioned that the brochures need to be updated for the current membership chair. Jean asked that her contact information be included for membership payments; she'll notify Judy of new members.

Gary mentioned that the American Horticultural Society has a reciprocal ad deal, and AIS has agreed to participate. The free ad will be published in the magazine for two issues. AHS has about 32,000 members. The SSI will also put an ad in the AHS (Bob will pull it together). The free ad is worth about \$650 (1/9th page).

Committees and Business Items:

Display Gardens – Kate Brewitt

Kate said that there are 11 display gardens, and the number is pretty well static. In 2024, a new garden was added from Ontario Canada (Val is at the convention). She thanked Jim Wilson for keeping this part of the SSI website up to date.

Carol and Jan both mentioned that they have never had anybody come to the garden and say they came to see the display garden, Jan wondered if there was any way to publicize the display gardens. Gary noted that for SJI, Jody Nolin focused on display gardens for the SJI Section Happenings in the latest AIS bulletin. There was a suggestion to also do this for the SSI, as well as for the seed distribution.

It was noted that display gardens requirements are: be an SSI member, grow a minimum number of cultivars, and be willing to open your garden.

Website – Jim Wilson

There was no report received, and Jim did not attend the meeting.

There was some discussion about the current status and utility of the SSI website. Jan said she goes there for convention information, to look up old TSI issues, and look up who won Mogan-Wood medals. This information is useful to her, but there's nothing to attract newcomers or members. There are no moving parts (static); the website needs to change pictures, show new stuff, show what's happening (to attract younger people that expect/look for that).

Adam asked if SSI has a Facebook group. Gary said yes, but it's an international group and that SSI should probably have one specific to the U.S. He noted that if we want more interaction for the website, it will need to have links for viewers to go to for more interaction. But one (or more)

people are needed to set it up and maintain it. The website was good for convention information (it was updated regularly).

Jan suggested that the website be spruced up a bit and made fresher. Adam suggested adding new introductions to the web page (and be refreshed every year). Carol noted that Jim puts whatever information is sent to him up on the website. Gary said he would reach out to Jim to discuss putting in more time to update the website. He'll also form a small group to talk about what information to feed Jim. Gary asked Jan and Adam to discuss possibilities/recommendations.

TSI – Bob Hollingworth

Bob said that, in published form, the TSI costs more than it brings in (ads and memberships). Each issue costs about \$2,000 including mailing. As long as auctions, donations, etc. can cover costs, we're OK, but it's a legitimate question whether to publish electronically. Bob also asked for thoughts on ideas for content.

Jean asked if there's a way to send out a digital copy and not a printed copy? Bob said he would need everybody to select an option, but it wouldn't reduce printing costs that much. We get a bulk mailing reduction (minimum 200 copies); if there are fewer than 200 mailings, then first class postage is used.

The board members expressed preference for keeping printed issues.

Adam asked if there was an option to use another printer. Bob said he looked into it a while ago and didn't find much difference in prices. The printer he's using is quick and responsive.

Carol asked if garden write-ups for this convention were identified. Gary said Linda Wilkie will write up the overall convention, and Bob has people lined up for the SSI garden writeups. Adam suggested publishing convention writeups in the AIS bulletin.

Gary noted that, for the AIS bulletin, the Editorial Board does all the editing now. They're going to increase the pages to 100 for each issue. There will be room to publish more stuff, like an article on this convention.

Bylaw updates – Bob Hollingworth, Kate Brewitt, Gary White

Bob and Kate are working on changes, but they're not finished yet. Kate previously sent out a draft of areas needing changes (email in November and again recently). Her problem is procedures have changed since bylaws were drafted and she doesn't know what current reality is and how to change the bylaws accordingly. Bob noted that 2001 is the latest version of the bylaws.

Margaret noted that SJI recently updated its bylaws, including many changes to update procedures. She offered to send Kate a copy of those changes, but Kate said she has been updating bylaws for some other organizations and is using those for examples.

Siberian Irises at 2026 AIS Convention

Gary provided a summary of the Siberian irises planted for the 2026 AIS Convention. He was there in the past week and saw all four gardens. One garden has no Siberians (Presby); three gardens have beardless iris. The Brooklyn Botanical Garden looks great; they have a staff person worked into the plantings. At Rutgers, the Siberians look OK. Gary Slagle's garden is the master planting, and the bearded and beardless iris look magnificent with few losses. His season is a bit earlier, so the Siberians were done blooming, but the plants looked good.

Active Source Sites for Siberian Sales – Discussion, Possibilities

Bob expressed concern that important sources for Siberians are being lost. He noted that, in addition to Jan and Marty's site, there were five sources on the website this time last year, and this year there are only two. Aitkens and Ensata are no longer selling Siberians, and Cascadia Iris Gardens has closed sales for the year due to health issues.

There was discussion about the need to find and add other sources, encourage others to start growing/selling Siberians. A couple of names were identified as potential new sources. Jan suggested figuring out a way to reach out to students coming out of agricultural/horticultural schools looking for a way to make a living. Adam mentioned some agricultural industries use internships.

Judy noted that, like in England, it would be nice to have a national collection of Siberians somewhere. Adam said he had asked the HIPS president about historic Siberians for their plantings. Apparently, they won't add Siberians to their historic collections because the Siberians readily re-seed and require too much effort to deadhead.

Seed Exchange for 2025 - Bob Hollingworth

Bob said he would like to hold another seed exchange this year. He needs contributions from about six people. He said a little over 20 people asked for seeds, including New Zealand, but he ran out of seeds and couldn't fill all requests. He thought it's worth doing again this year. He has four or five people lined up to contribute, would welcome other contributions. He was reimbursed for all shipping costs (about \$200) last year, even though the By-Laws only allow \$25 for unapproved expenses. For this year, he asked the board to pre-approve funding of all shipping costs for the seed exchange. Jan made the motion to provide funding, Carol seconded the motion. The motion passed.

Next Possible SSI Convention

Carol noted that she worked hard to get the 2025 convention host/location, but she had no other ideas for the next one. A notice needs to go out for guest plants 3 years before a convention. Gary noted that the SJI is having a similar problem and hasn't identified its next location, so it'll be more than 3 years until next convention. Jan said they're not an option due to the iris bud fly in New England. A couple of possible people/locations were identified, and Gary will follow up with them.

Nominating Committee for fall 2025 – Carol and Adam

Gary included this in the agenda as a reminder to the committee. Directors expiring in 2025 will need to be replaced (Kate and Chad). Jan suggested Marty Schafer as a Director, and he agreed to be nominated. Other names were discussed.

Adjournment

Jan moved to adjourn the meeting and Carol seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 4:48 pm Central.

Submitted by Margaret Spence, Secretary