

A Short History of American Orchid Society Judging

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The American Orchid Society has granted awards to plants and exhibits almost from the time of its founding in 1921. The early awards were trophies to plants and exhibits at the meeting, where there were exhibit tables.

In the first of the quarterly issues of the American Orchid Society Bulletin, the plants that received a "vote of thanks" at the quarterly meeting on February 24, 1932, were: *Sophrolaeliocattleya Anzac* 'Orchidhurst' and *Cattleya trianae* 'Mrs. Warren Hook' shown by F. E. Dixon, and a group of 14 hybrid cymbidiums shown by Joseph Manda. Dixon also received the first Award of Merit (AM) to *Cattleya schroederiae* 'Hercules' in April and the first First Class Certificate (FCC) to *Cattleya Moira* 'The Bride' in October. In addition to the FCC, AM, and "vote of thanks," there was also a Certificate of Cultural Commendation award (CCC), the first going to *Oncidium varicosum* var. *rogersii* exhibited by Lager & Hurrell of Summit, New Jersey. (Note that in that period, clone names were listed as varieties, e.g. *Cattleya trianae* var. *Mrs. Warren Hook*, and proper names were capitalized even in botanical usages, e.g. *Oncidium varicosum* var. *Rogersii*.)

These early awards were made by teams of judges appointed by the AOS President at each quarterly meeting. There were no formal rules or regulations. Instead, the awards were made on the basis of a consensus of the judging team in a system reminiscent of the "appreciation method" employed by the Royal Horticultural Society Orchid Committee in England.

After World War II, AOS judging became more systematized. This began with the appointment of the Gore Committee in 1945 and the appointment in 1947 of a committee to draw up standard rules for judging. The Gore Committee, named after Chairman Robert H. Gore, was assigned to devise a method of scoring plants so that anyone would know the range in which a plant scored to receive an Award of Merit or a First Class Certificate. The results of the work of these two committees was the publication in July 1949 of the Handbook on Judging and Exhibition. The major contributors to the handbook were Helen Adams, Robert H. Gore, Sr., Frank J. Lind, Norman and Jean Merkel, and Gordon W. Dillon as Executive Director of the AOS. Also in 1949, monthly judging was established at the Essex House in New York City in cooperation with the Horticultural Society of New York. The Committee on Awards was established in 1949 by renaming the Committee on Arrangements which had instituted this monthly judging.

This work to establish monthly judging and distribute a handbook that included point scales was a major development for the American Orchid Society. The new rules included requirements for flower measurements suggested by Helen Adams. Many of the rules were based in part on the judging systems from other regions of the country, particularly Florida and California.

As early as 1938, a point-scoring system was created by Walter Diggelman and Thomas Kirkwood for the Orchid Society of California, which evolved into the Orchid Digest judging system. The Orchid Society of Southern California created its own point-scoring system in 1949. The Cymbidium Society of America, also in southern California, was started by John Hudlow, Dr. David McLean, and Robert Casamajor in 1946. They began issuing awards in 1948 based on perfection, with a very detailed breakdown of points. The Cymbidium Society awards are only for cymbidiums and paphiopedilums.

Orchid growers from Florida also influenced the preparation of the first Handbook on Judging and Exhibition. In 1945, the South Florida Orchid Society established and judged the first Miami International Orchid Show. In anticipation that AOS judging might grow to include Florida rather than be limited to the Northeastern states, the South Florida Orchid Society established a 16-member panel of judges. Robert M. Scully, Sr., Roy Fields, and Norman Merkel led in the development of an SFOS judging program and training program for judges.

After the distribution of the AOS Handbook on Judging and Exhibition and the establishment of monthly judging in New York City, the AOS Committee on Awards (COA) became very active in expanding the scope of AOS judging. In 1953, judging was expanded to include quarterly sessions in California headed by Morris Holmquist, Jay Muller, Robert Casamajor, Howard Anderson, and Etta Gray as a subcommittee of the COA.

The year 1954 proved to be a second milestone in judging. This was the year of the First World Orchid Conference, which was held in St. Louis, Missouri. This conference, the dream of Gordon Dillon, represented the first truly international orchid conference. All judges throughout the United States were asked to participate in a meeting in St. Louis to precede the World Orchid Conference to discuss the Handbook on Judging and Exhibition. The work accomplished during this meeting was the preparation of a revised handbook which included more input from judges from the various regions in the United States. This second edition, issued in September 1955, provided more definitions for the various point scores given in the first edition and broke down judging into separate classifications for scoring the different genera and into a much more detailed point scoring based on the Cymbidium Society of America awards system. Development of this revised system of point scales enabled most of the major orchid societies to adopt a unified American standard judging system and permitted the AOS in 1955 to expand monthly judging to new areas by

establishing regional judging centers in New York City (with Merritt W. Huntington as regional chairman), Miami (with Robert M. Scully, Sr. as chairman), Oakland, California (with Walter R. Diggelman as chairman), and Los Angeles (with John W. Chadwick as chairman). The creation of these additional centers was largely due to the lobbying efforts of Bob Scully, Sr.

In the early 1950s, Hawaii also had established its own judging system and an Award Committee headed by Seiji Obata. The purpose of this move was to provide judging in the then-remote islands and to establish point scales for their dendrobiums and vandas. These point scales later were adapted into the AOS system. Two years after the 1957 Second World Orchid Conference, held in Honolulu, a regional AOS judging center was established in Hawaii with the Rev. Masao Yamada as chairman.

The third edition of the AOS Handbook on Judging and Exhibition was issued in 1960, with revision in the point scales back to a less complicated breakdown. This revision was the work of the Committee on Awards, which had been chaired by Helen Adams and included Dr. W. W. Wilson, Robert M. Scully, Sr., Frank Lind, John Taber, and Herb Hager. This revision also included definitions of the duties and responsibilities of the Committee on Awards as approved by the Trustees in November 1959. The organization of the COA was changed to include a chairman and working committee from a specific area of the country. John Hanes from California became the first chairman from the West Coast in 1962. In 1966, the chairmanship moved to Florida under Thomas A. Fennell, Jr. In 1972, Dr. David H. Brown became chairman representing Mid-America in St. Louis, followed by Raymond McCullough from Ann Arbor, Michigan. In 1977, the chairmanship moved to the Northeast, with Merritt W. Huntington as chairman, followed by Dr. J. Woodson Phillips. The chair then moved to the Northwest under Maurice E. Powers in 1982, followed by James H. Riopelle. Following the October 1986 Trustees' meeting in Atlanta, AnnaLee Boyett from the Southern Region became chairwoman.

Regional judging centers continued to be added after the addition of Honolulu in 1957. In 1961, St. Louis, Missouri, became a center, with Robert J. Gillespie as the first chairman. Austin, Texas, and Seattle, Washington, were established as centers in 1962 under the chairmanships of Alfred J. Proebstle and Al L. Smith, respectively. In January 1968, the Orchid Digest judging system merged with the American Orchid Society, resulting in the creation of supplemental centers in San Francisco and Long Beach in California and Hilo and Lahaina in Hawaii. The main center in Texas also was moved to San Antonio from Austin. The Regional Chairmen in 1968 were Milton Warne (Hawaii), Mrs. Ruth Peacock (Seattle), Mrs. Shirley Holloway (Oakland), Lloyd DeGarmo (Los Angeles), Leo Riley (San Antonio), Robert Nagel (St. Louis), Wilbur Zimmerman (Philadelphia), W. H. Sparks (Miami), and Jack Sweet (Tampa Supplemental). From the St. Louis Mid-America Region, two additional centers were created. In 1972, Ann Arbor, Michigan, became a supplemental

center, with Raymond McCullough as chairman, followed by Atlanta, Georgia, in 1973, with F L Stevenson as chairman. In 1979, both Ann Arbor and Atlanta became separate, autonomous regions known, respectively, as the Great Lakes Region and the Southern Region. In 1976, Washington, D.C., was granted supplemental status, with Dr. J. Woodson Phillips as chairman. In 1980, a new Great Plains Region was established in Oklahoma City, with Fred H. Strothmann as the first chairman. In March of 1987, a supplemental judging center opened in the Southwest Region in Dallas, Texas.

Reading through back issues of the AOS Bulletin reveals the many changes in the names of the awards granted by the American Orchid Society. As discussed, the early awards were trophies given at the major flower shows in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., Miami, and Oakland and Pasadena in California. The AOS show trophy started as the President's Trophy for most meritorious exhibit. There also were a Vice-President's Trophy for the best American-raised seedling and even an Affiliated Society's Trophy for the best American-raised seedling blooming for the first time. To encourage orchid show judging in other cities, the AOS offered a 2-inch Silver Medal in 1952 for the most meritorious exhibit when not superceded by the larger silver trophy voted by the Trustees. Certainly in those days, they really meant silver awards! In 1954, the silver trophy was deleted. In 1958, the Bronze Show Trophy was made available for most meritorious exhibits of at least 50 square feet. The space requirement for the show trophy was reduced to 25 square feet in 1959.

The Highly Commended Certificate for species or hybrids scoring 75 to 79.4 points was originally a High Class Certificate but was changed to the current name at the AOS Trustees' meeting in the fall of 1958. This award was created at the spring 1957 Trustees' meeting and was first awarded to Vanda Nellie Morley 'No. 2', exhibited by Takumi Kono in Hollywood, California.

The Certificate of Preliminary Commendation was awarded in the early 1950s to unregistered hybrids. It carried with it the score of the plant equal to an AM or FCC according to the number of points. The current practice is to notify the exhibitor of a provisional award, which requires naming and registration of the hybrid within a year, at which time the proper award is issued.

In summary, there is a very rich and varied history to American Orchid Society judging. During the formative years of the society, judging was informal and only done at the quarterly Trustees' meetings. In the late 1940s, thanks to the efforts of Bob Gore, Helen Adams, Frank Lind, the Merckels, Bob Scully, Sr., Gordon Dillon, and others, the AOS system of judging as we know it today was born. The system of point scoring, detailed descriptions and measurements, photography, and monthly regional judging serves the AOS well and is the finest, most highly regarded judging system in the world.