

WORLD ORCHID CONFERENCE MEDALS by Peter R. Furniss

For many years I entertained the idea of collecting medals from all of the World Orchid Conferences (WOC) and giving them to the American Orchid Society (AOS) for permanent display. Since the AOS was responsible for the inception of the WOCs, it seemed that having them on display there would offer both an educational trip down “memory lane” as well as being of historical value. Makoto Hanajima, from Mishama, Japan, is responsible for planting the seed. I served with him on the World Orchid Conference Committee during the 1980s when it was one of the standing committees of the AOS. After the 12th WOC in Tokyo, Japan, in 1987, Mak gave everyone on the committee a gold medal from that event.

Originally, I wanted to have a gold medal from each of the WOCs that I had attended. The idea to get them all and have them housed at the AOS came later. This meant that I would have to get one from the Miami Conference of 1984. Robert Fuchs gave me a bronze medal on behalf of the South Florida Orchid Society and I had it gold plated.

Things started to get easier because all I would have to do would be to get one at each succeeding WOC. Accordingly, I asked Dennis Bonham, the head of the Organizing Committee for the 13th WOC in Auckland in 1990, to help. He graciously consented and I was “on my way”.

The Honorable Alasdair Morrison and Joyce Stewart, instrumental members of the Organizing Committee, donated the medal from the 14th WOC in Glasgow, Scotland, in 1993. The 15th WOC medal, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1996, was given on behalf of the Organizing Committee while the one from Vancouver, Canada, host of the 16th WOC in 1999 was donated by Dr. Wally Thomas, the head of the Organizing Committee.

Somewhere between 1999 and 2002 I decided I wanted to get one from all of the preceding WOCs. It never occurred to me that it would be much trouble.

First I had to determine if specially struck medals had actually been awarded at all of the WOCs. According to the late Mary McQuerry, the 1st WOC in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1954 was, “non-competitive” so there were no medals. The 2nd WOC in Honolulu, Hawaii, in 1957 gave trophies but no medals while the 3rd in London, England, in 1960, gave Royal Horticultural Society medals but nothing that was designed for the WOC.

The first specialized WOC medals were awarded at the 4th WOC in Singapore in 1963. They are inscribed on the front with The Malayan Orchid Society. Dr. Kiat Tan found out that Mr. Yee Peng How from Singapore had a silver as well as a bronze medal and was able to get him to donate them to the growing collection.

“Fifth World Orchid Conference 1966” is on the face of the medals given in Long Beach, California. The gold medal in our collection was presented to Ernest Hetherington for his outstanding service to the 5th WOC, and Ernest was happy to donate it to the AOS.

According to Ernest, “The World Orchid Conferences were conceived in Houston, Texas just about 50 years ago (Ernest wrote this to me in 2002 so the idea was put forward in 1952.) during an AOS Trustees meeting.” He went on to add, “In the Bulletin after St. Louis, 1954, Gordon Dillon wrote: ‘After one sleepless night – while on an excursion down the Houston ship channel – I told of my idea – the Trustees said great – do it. George Pring on Missouri Botanical said. ‘Have it in St. Louis.’ Gordon practically put it together all by himself. Six hundred people came”.

Gerald McCraith sent me the medal from the 6th WOC which occurred in Sydney, Australia, in 1969. Gerald was President of the Australian Orchid Council and had the “job of designing a plaque or medal or whatever, and I chose to do a plaque. It depicts the Southern Cross, a *cymbidium* orchid, and the round Australia House which was the tallest building at the time in Australia, where the conference was to be held.” After the conference all unused plaques were destroyed and we are fortunate to have the one Gerald gave.

Genuine emeralds grace the center of the medals from the 7th WOC held in Medellin, Colombia, in

1972. Through the generosity of Juan Felipe Posada from Medellin, the AOS has a gold and a bronze medal. The back of the gold is inscribed “gracias Juan Felipe and the bronze has “gracias Maria Victoria” (Juan Felipe’s wife). They were given to the Posadas in appreciation for their work in organizing the 7th WOC.

Bob Scully, on behalf of Jones and Scully, gave the collection’s gold medal from the 8th WOC which was held in Frankfurt, Germany, in 1975.

The medals given at the 9th WOC in Bangkok, Thailand, in 1978, were all the same. What differentiated them were the blue, red, or green ribbons to denote 1st, 2nd, or commendation. The ones in the collection were given by Professor Rapee Sagarik on behalf of the Orchid Society of Thailand.

The gold medal from the 1981 10th WOC in Durban, South Africa, proved to be the hardest to obtain. One story I’ve heard is that only 2 gold medals were given and nobody has any idea what happened to any surplus ones, if there were any. Carmen Coll, internationally known orchid hobbyist and goodwill ambassador, had one. When I explained (more than once) to her how important I thought it was to have one for the AOS she sent hers to Cape Town and had new one struck in Cape Town just for our collection – a truly magnificent gesture.

In Shah Alam, Malaysia, site of the 17th WOC in 2002, Tahir gave me a gold medal on behalf of their Organizing Committee. The chair of the 18th WOC in Dijon, France, in 2005, Vinciane Dumont donated the gold medal.

This brings us to the 19th WOC held in Miami. Robert Fuchs, the Co-chairman of the WOC graciously provided the medal for it.

Singapore, home of the fourth WOC and the first to have medals cast for a WOC, hosted the 20th WOC in 2011. Dr. Khoo Chong Yee, chairman of judging for the event, agreed to donate a gold, silver, and bronze medal for the AOS collection.

There is no way I would have been able to garner all the medals without the help of so many friends from around the world. I offer my personal thanks as well as those of the AOS for enabling it to have what is most likely the only complete collection anywhere.