



## Peony Cultivar Registration, a Background

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Nomenclature, as used by the American Peony Society, refers to the naming of peony cultivars and to the overseeing and recording of those names through the application of guidelines and standards developed by the International Society of Horticultural Science's (ISHS) Commission of Nomenclature and Cultivar Registration. Nomenclature has been an activity in which the APS has been engaged since its inception, well before the ISHS formalized procedures in the late 1950s. The APS' founding fathers held their first meeting in response to a letter dated June 26, 1902, the first sentence of which is reproduced below.

*My Dear Sir:*

*Referring to the unsatisfactory condition in which the nomenclature of the peony now is, I write to ask you if you would cooperate in the formation of an association for advancing the public interest in the peony and especially straightening out peony nomenclature ...*

*Sincerely yours,*

*Charles Willis Ward*

In 1915, Arthur Fewkes proposed that names of new varieties be submitted to the Secretary of the Society for registration, but it wasn't until 1922, following the annual general meeting that year, that a regular feature, "Department of Registration," began to appear in The APS Bulletin. The registrations accepted in those days are just as valid as those processed under today's rules, since most of today's basic "rules" were already being applied in those early days. This brief journey into history demonstrates the importance of peony nomenclature to the very existence of the APS and shows that our Society has been involved in it since 1904 when John Coit planted peony roots at Cornell.

The next 100 years presented different challenges than those which confronted the APS in those early days. Peonies being what they are, the old ones never disappear very quickly (if at all) and so the list of them gets longer every year. According to the rules of nomenclature, even if the old peonies are no longer grown, their names must still exist in the nomenclature literature to avoid two peonies being given the same name. Moreover, hybridizers have added to the genetic combinations in the parentage of peonies available to today's gardener. This presents challenges in horticultural classification in that we need to find suitable cultivar group names which convey useful information to the purchasers of these peonies.

In the face of these new challenges, a Nomenclature Review Committee was formed. The committee's mandate was to evaluate, improve and set the course for the Society's function as International Cultivar Registration Authority (ICRA) for cultivated peonies.

The functions of an ICRA, at the most basic level, include registration of cultivars and cultivar group names. The ICRA establishes these names by publishing both the name and a description, publishing comprehensive lists of all peony names including those that may now be obsolete yet continue to exist in horticultural history and to maintain records of the origin, characteristics and history of each cultivar and cultivar group listed. This is all done within procedures and guidelines outlined in the International Code of Nomenclature for Cultivated Plants (ICNCP). The ICRA does not conduct trials, nor does it judge the merit or distinctiveness of cultivars submitted for registration, much as we feel we would sometimes like to.

Registration of peonies is an entirely voluntary activity. The ISHS has designated the APS as ICRA for peonies, but neither organization has any legislated powers to enforce compliance. This presents us with the challenge of balancing registration requirements with ICRA obligations and the needs of the end user, keeping in mind that the process should not become so onerous that the effort of registration exceeds the perceived benefits. The APS Nomenclature Review Committee identifies five primary areas of concern: Registrar, Peony Names Database, Registration Form, Cultivar Group Names and Publications.

Proposed new peony names are checked against existing and historic names to avoid duplication. Indications are that in the recent past, names have been checked against the following published sources:

- History of the Peonies and Their Originations, 1976, which contains:
  - Part I - The Gist List (1956)
  - Part II - Registered Peonies (1956-1976)
  - Part III - Introducers of Peonies and their Introductions (in part)  
Peonies, J 976-1986
- Peonies, 1986-1996
- The American Peony Society Bulletin, 1996-present
- Peonies: The Manual of the American Peony Society (ed. James Boyd), 1928
- The Peonies (ed. John C. Wister), 1962

Work has been done and continues to be prepared to digitize and correct existing names, sources, as well as, to research less available lists so that these can be included.