

Thornden Park: A Historical Review – 2016 Update
(Update on All-American Rose Selections (AARS) and Mills Public Display Garden)
(E. M. Mills Memorial Rose Garden – Recognitions Including 2nd Place in a National Rose Garden Competition)
By Jim Wagner

Prior to 2004 when the “Thornden Park: A Historical Review” article was written and up through 2012 when the All-American Rose Selections (AARS) was dissolved, the E.M. Mills Memorial Rose Garden was one of ten AARS accredited “public display” rose gardens in New York State in which each of these gardens received and displayed the finest rose varieties that would be introduced to the public the following year by All-American Rose Selections (AARS).

The All-American Rose Selections was a non-profit association of rose growers and introducers dedicated to the introduction and promotion of exceptional roses. Every AARS winning rose sent to the Mills Garden had already completed an extensive resistance two-year trial program where it was judged on everything from disease resistance to flower production to color to fragrance. During this evaluation period, each specimen was assigned just an official AARS number, not a name. AARS had been testing roses since 1938 and in 2004 had about 25 Official AARS Test Gardens throughout the United States – one in Buffalo and one in Old Westbury, Long Island within NYS. The Mills Rose Garden was not a test site but one for display of the successfully tested varieties. But with the dissolution of AARS in 2012, the Mills Garden was no longer a public display garden.

During the spring of 2004, SRS members planted 75 AARS roses (four new AARS varieties that were then available to the public in 2005). From what I have heard, these additional AARS roses each year resulted in the addition of a number of new or expanded rose beds. The Society also planted 113 other roses that year including 10 each of Moonstone, Elizabeth Taylor, Rio Samba, and Crowd Pleaser that we never had before. As near as could be determined in 2004, there were about 4,025 rose bushes in these gardens. These included about 29 classes of roses from species and old garden roses to modern types including hybrid teas, shrubs, floribundas, miniatures, and climbing roses that comprised about 385 different varieties. These numbers are similarly close to the present.

I do not know how many, if any, of the special AARS rectangular signs that are still be in place in the Mills Garden but if you find one, it will indicate the name of the rose and the year it was introduced into commerce and available to the public.

For many years the All-American Rose Selection (AARS) held a national competition for the best rose garden in America. In 2010, the Dr. E. M. Mills Memorial Rose Garden in Syracuse was awarded second place in the All-American Rose Selections (AARS) competition. First place was won by the San Jose Municipal Rose Garden in CA. and the third place award was won by another New York State rose garden, the Central Park Rose Garden of Schenectady. For more details of this competition and the winners, go to the Syracuse Rose Society website and click on “ARS Activities” and then “SRS Archives” for a news release from San Francisco, Aug 12, 2010.

In addition to the national award, the Mills Rose Garden has been recognized on the local level twice, once on September 22, 2010 with a ceremony in the Gazebo when Mayor Stephanie Miner presented a proclamation, now posted near the west side of the Gazebo. This proclamation recognizes the dedication of the E. M. Mills Rose Garden on July 2, 1924, that this garden received the above second place national award in 2010, and appreciation of the efforts of volunteers and SRS in the success of this garden.

Also a plaque, located near the water fountain in this garden when then Mayor Matthew Driscoll and Patrick Driscoll, Parks Commissioner presented this in recognition on the 90th anniversary of the Parks Department in 2007 for your service and contributions to the history of Syracuse Park System.

This article updates the All-American Rose Selections (AARS) and Mills Rose Garden information that is in the original 2004 edition of “Thornden Park: A Historical Review” and also includes awards and other recognitions of the Mills Rose Garden. For the complete five page original 2004 history article, go to the SRS website, Syracuse Rose Society. Click on “Mills Rose Garden”, and page down to “History of the E. M. Mills Rose Garden and Thornden Park”.