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## THE ROSES OF GEORGES BUGNET

by Paul G. Olsen

"It is, of course, with the help of this native rose of practically unknown possibilities that we northern amateurs hope to achieve something worthwhile." Georges Bugnet, 1941

The year 2000 is the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the introduction of 'Thérèse Bugnet', an outstanding shrub rose developed on the prairies. It is grown in many northern climates. The rose is popular because it is very cold hardy (zone 2) and floriferous with large, double, pink, fragrant, repeat-blooming flowers. It is the best known Canadian rose. Although commonly stated as a rugosa, it is a *Rosa blanda* hybrid with *Rosa rugosa* in the parentage. The breeder was Georges Bugnet (pronounced Boo - nyea) of Legal, Alberta.

Georges-Charles-Jules Bugnet was born February 23, 1879, at Chalon-sur-Saône, France, 110 km due north of Lyon. He was educated at the University of Lyon and the Sorbonne. Quitting newspaper work, in 1904 he came to Canada at the age of 25 with his wife, Julia, and small daughter. In 1905 the family homesteaded about 80 km north of Edmonton, Alberta, on a quarter-section of land 3 km NW of what later became the village of Rich Valley. At the time of taking a homestead, Mr Bugnet said that no white people lived further north than his family in that region.

Mr Bugnet applied to the Canada Department of Agriculture Experimental Farms at Brandon and Indian Head for trees and shrubs recommended as hardy for the prairies. Some survived and as a result, "I decided to enter into the game." About 1912 Mr Bugnet studied books on plant propagating and wrote to botanical gardens around the world for seeds of plants that would grow in his region. He began working with fruits, since he was unhappy about the quality of plums that he could grow. In 1925 he began hybridizing and developed the 'Claude Bugnet' plum by crossing the cherry plum 'Sioux' with a Manitoba plum selection. He also had a keen interest in apples and hoped to develop a high quality apple that would grow on the northern prairies.

Plants that Mr Bugnet developed and considered useful, he sent for testing to the Morden and Beaverlodge Canada Department of Agriculture Experimental Farms and the Alberta Horticulture Research Centre at Brooks. Selections of caragana and hawthorn were introduced and also the cultivars 'Georges Bugnet' and 'Julia Bugnet' of the edible honeysuckle (*Lonicera caerulea edulis*).

In 1919 Mr Bugnet obtained seed of Scotch Pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) from the Lake Ladoga region north of St. Petersburg, Russia, and grew trees to maturity. The Ladoga pine grown at the Provincial Tree Nursery at Oliver, Alberta, was the fastest growing pine in its collection, and seed was used for reforestation and farm shelterbelt trees on the prairies. The plantation of Ladoga pine on the original homestead has been designated the Bugnet Plantation Historical Site. He also successfully grew mature trees of *Pinus ponderosa* (Ponderosa Pine) that was regarded as not cold hardy enough to grow in northern Alberta.

Georges Bugnet began hybridizing roses using the prairie native species *Rosa woodsii* and *Rosa acicularis*. In the 1941 *American Rose Annual* he wrote of his experience hybridizing roses:

"It is, of course, with the help of this native race of practically unknown possibilities that we northern amateurs hope to achieve something worthwhile. Many years ago I began by using the pollen of a local native rose, then called *Rosa blanda* (sic) now known as *R. macounii*, upon *R. rugosa kamchatica*. The seedlings showed the dominance of the Rugosa in the foliage, in the stronger growth, in the larger single blooms with quite a variety of deeper and velvety hues. To follow this first trail, one of the seedlings later on was married to *R. amblyotis*, a red Siberian wild rose. The result was a very strong growing shrub, 7 to 8 feet tall, with vivid red, single blooms from the end of June until the end of July; canes very hairy, thorns being pliant, somewhat like hard rubber.

"Later on the pollen of this new shrub was used on *R. rugosa flore-plena*. Part of the seedlings have flowers with 18 to 20 petals, glowing pink or light red, while one has a large single bloom of a beautiful

deep velvety crimson. Others have not yet come into bloom. During the past summer the pollen of 'Golden Dream' and 'Conrad F. Meyer' was successfully applied on a plant of these latest hybrids. (Each advance takes five years.)"

About 1925 Mr Bugnet apparently began using the native *Rosa acicularis* in a breeding program. Again in the 1941 *American Rose Annual* he wrote:

"Exploring another trail, some fifteen years ago the pollen of another native was placed on *R. rugosa flore-plena*. Part of the offspring, 5 to 6 feet tall, gave single, and part semi-double flowers. These last have 12 to 17 petals, are 2x2 to 3x2 inches across, deep vivid pink, fragrant of course, and with very abundant bloom from the middle of June into August. One has been named 'Nipsya'. Two years ago a friend living in the Peace River country wrote me that 'Nipsya' was the only rose which passed through the winter unscathed, the only one which bloomed the following summer. It is not unlike the 'Tetonhaka' of Dr. Hansen, but is apparently much hardier and does not seem to sucker so badly. On this last point I am in doubt; a different soil might tell the other way."

'Nipsya' and another *Rosa rugosa* x *R. acicularis* selection, 'Julia', were named in 1930, and the former cultivar was used in a breeding program with 'Conrad F. Meyer', 'Mrs. John Laing' and other cultivars.

'Lac la Nonne' (*Rosa rugosa rubra plena* x *Rosa acicularis*) was also named in 1930 but not registered and introduced by Percy Wright until 1950. The vigorous shrub is very hardy (zone 1), tall (2.2 m) and produces semi-double, deep pink, medium (5 - 7.5 cm diameter), fragrant, non-recurrent flowers. This cultivar disappeared from Canada for many years, but it continued to be grown in Alaska and has now returned to the country of its origin.

'Thérèse Bugnet' was acquired by Mr Wright in 1947 and, recognizing it as a superior shrub rose for the prairie climate, he asked Mr Bugnet permission to register and introduce it. Mr Bugnet replied that he did not wish to make any money on the sales of 'Thérèse Bugnet', and as a result Mr Wright registered it in 1950. 'Thérèse Bugnet' is named for a favourite sister of Mr Bugnet, Sister Marie Thérèse de Gorzaque-Couvent du Carmel, Seine, a nun living in France. The flowers are double, medium pink, large (10 cm diameter), fragrant and repeat their bloom. The hardy (zone 2) shrub is tall (2 m), with glossy red thornless upper canes that are attractive in late fall and winter. Although the shrub is susceptible to mildew and rust, it generally is disease resistant. It quickly became a popular rose grown on the prairies, comparable to 'Hansa' and replaced the similar but only once blooming 'Betty Bland'. Although slow to sucker, it propagates easily from softwood cuttings.

Georges Bugnet spent 25 years developing 'Thérèse Bugnet' and regarded it as his greatest horticultural achievement. In a conversation with David Carpenter (a Saskatchewan writer who translated Mr Bugnet's *The Forest* to English) he said with a smile, "Now I give pleasure to thousands of women." The parentage is given as ((*Rosa acicularis* x *Rosa rugosa kamchatica*) x (*Rosa amblyotis* x *Rosa rugosa plena*)) x 'Betty Bland' but this is debatable. There is evidence that *Rosa rugosa kamchatica* was used as the female parent when crossed with *Rosa acicularis*.

Several *Rosa rugosa* hybrids were developed and named after Mr Bugnet's daughters. They include:

'Martha Bugnet' ((*Rosa rugosa kamchatica* x (*Rosa rugosa amblyotis* x *Rosa rugosa plena*)) x 'F.J.

Grootendorst' had semi-double, purple red, fragrant repeat blooming flowers. The shrub was 2 m tall. Registered in 1959, it has disappeared. Mr Bugnet used it extensively in his breeding programs.

'Marie Bugnet' ('Thérèse Bugnet' x seedling) x 'F.J. Grootendorst' is named for Mr Bugnet's mother Joséphine-Marie-Anne-Elizabeth Sibert Plourde. It was registered and introduced by Dr Frank Skinner in 1963. The white buds with a pink blush open to double, white, medium (7.5 cm diameter), fragrant, repeat blooming flowers. The thorny shrub has modified rugose foliage and usually grows about 1 m tall. It is a popular white *rugosa*.

'Louise Bugnet' – Red buds opening to semi-double, white, medium (7.5 cm diameter), fragrant, repeat blooming flowers. The shrub is 1.2 m tall and nearly thornless.

'Madelaine Bugnet' – Double, pink, medium (7.5 cm), fragrant, repeat blooming flowers. The thorny shrub is 1 m tall.

'Rita Bugnet' – Red edge on petals in the bud open to double, white, medium (7.5 cm diameter), fragrant, repeat blooming flowers. The shrub is 2 m tall and upper canes are thornless.

'Lac Majeau' – Semi-double, white, medium (7.5 cm diameter), repeat blooming flowers. The thornless shrub is 2 m tall.

'Betty Bugnet', an earlier hybrid of possibly 'Thérèse Bugnet' origin, is a shrub 2 m tall producing medium pink, small (5 cm diameter) non-recurrent flowers.

Georges Bugnet was recognized for his horticultural achievements by being made an honorary member of the Western Canadian Society of Horticulture in 1957. He was also an accomplished writer of novels and poetry. His first novel *Nipissa* about the Metis people on the prairies was published in 1924. His best known novel *La Forêt* (1935) is a tragic story of French immigrants to the Canadian West whose failure to live in harmony with nature dooms their homestead. (It was translated as *The Forest* in 1976.) His literary achievements earned him France's Chevalier de l'ordre des palmes académiques in 1970.

Mr and Mrs Bugnet farmed for fifty years and retired to Legal in 1955. He continued working with roses, hoping to develop a hardy, good quality Climber. On his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday Mr Bugnet received an Honorary Doctorate of Laws for his literary and horticultural accomplishments from the University of Alberta at the Saint Emil church, Legal. It was the first time a University of Alberta honorary degree had been granted on a non-campus location. At the presentation, he said, "God has been good to me and I have enjoyed life to the full."

He died in St. Albert on January 11, 1981 when he was almost 102 years old.

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Mr Olsen hybridizes roses in Sidney, BC. We appreciate his investigative skills. It is no small job tracing a person's life and sorting the often conflicting data into a historical presentation. He is the person that found 'Lac la Nonne' outside Canada and brought it back where it belonged.