

Frieda's Red to 'Benjamin' to 'Freida's Benjamin'— An Evergreen Azalea Story

By William C. Miller III—Bethesda, Maryland

Part of the fun of azaleas is pursuing the “little mysteries” that present themselves from time to time. The small plant (often little more than a rooted cutting) that you acquired at some point in the past is blooming for the first time and it is beautiful, but it isn't the flower that you were expecting. Of course, there are a number of possibilities. There could be more than one azalea with the same cultivar name (there are five 'Akebono' listed in the *International Rhododendron Register and Checklist*, hereafter IRRC¹). It could reflect an error in propagation (a mix-up in taking cuttings). It could be an error in tagging (many hundreds of little green plants, not in bloom, tend to look alike). Or, it could simply be a sport of the correct plant (a different error in propagation).

I acquired a number of “new-to-me” plants at the 2016 joint ASA/ARS national meeting in Williamsburg, Virginia. One was tagged Frieda's Red (not a cultivar name²). It was in a quart pot, and it looked like it might be a three-year-old plant. Kind of scraggly, it nevertheless bloomed for me in 2017. It is a very attractive flower, but my first impression was that it was rather poorly named [See Fig. 1]. The flower did not resemble anything that I would name anybody's red, but it did look kind of familiar. I was sure that I had seen the flower somewhere before.

The professional-looking green tag [See Fig. 2] that was attached to the plant was my starting point. It identified the plant as an evergreen azalea. It gave the presumed cultivar

name as Frieda's Red, and it identified the hybrid group as Unknown. After seeing the first flower, I thought the description on the tag was pretty good. It read “Flowers white w bright, salmon-red broad stripe down the center of each lobe. Single with 5 rounded, overlapping lobes, medium size. Blooms midseason. Leaves glossy.” If you examine the white border more closely you will see that the flower is actually another irregular-white-margin-type like 'Ben Morrison'. With Frieda's Red, the white margin is enlarged and has extended significantly inboard toward the axis of the petal. In other words, the white margin is significantly broader than 'Ben Morrison'.

Fortunately, there are a number of approaches that can help address these types of mysteries. I began with the IRRC and its twelve supplements. The IRRC records all registered cultivar names and epithets that have come to their attention as a result of ongoing research. The most recent supplement, the 12th, is current through 2016. Doing the math, a three-year-old plant that I acquired in 2016 obviously existed prior to 2016. Frieda's Red, however, did not appear in the IRRC, so that was a dead end.

ASA Image Library and the First Big Revelation

My next stop was the image library on the ASA website.³ A search on Frieda's Red resulted in two hits for Frieda's Red & White Stripe (not a cultivar name²), with accompanying images that looked like my Frieda's Red. The text in both records was identical and here was the first big revelation. “The name is unofficial as its true one is unknown. It is just too beautiful not to share. May be a sport of 'Dogwood'...” In my experience, the irregular white margin flower is often a sport of something else, so this was not unexpected. This also suggests that the cultivar name on the green tag was truncated and equally unofficial. The descriptive text goes on to state that “...the original plant was purchased from Azalea Trace Nursery in Maryland; they obtained it from Frieda Hill of Pavo, Georgia.”

For the record, the correct spelling of Mrs. Hill's first name is Freida. I corresponded with her for a number of years, and we occasionally chatted on the phone. She was an azalea collector, and one could sense her enthusiasm even over the phone. I had an opportunity to visit Hill's Nursery & Greenhouses in Pavo, Georgia, in 1993, and I found her to be even more delightful in person. Her nursery grew other things, but she especially liked azaleas and camellias. She passed away in 2002.

The ASA Maillist

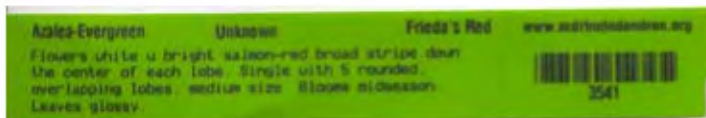
The ASA Maillist⁴ is also a valuable resource. Occasionally, someone will ask a question or post an image and ask if anyone knows what it is. Utilizing this



Photo William C. Miller III

▲ Figure 1— Frieda's Red, photo taken on April 23, 2017.

▼ Figure 2— Green professional-looking tag attached to Frieda's Red.



mechanism, an inquirer has an opportunity to bring to bear the considerable expertise from across the entire azalea community. Here is just such an example:

On March 23, 2012, Jim Thornton (Conyers, Georgia) posted two images of an unknown with the question “Any idea of the name of this Az?”

Fourteen minutes later, Dr. Joe Coleman (Lithonia, Georgia) posted “It is ‘Ben’ or ‘Benjamin’, a sport off of ‘Ben Morrison’. A small plant that doesn’t out grow its place and very neat!”

On April 18, 2012, Maarten van der Giessen (Mobile, Alabama) posted “Got in on this one late. I agree with Joe that it’s ‘Benjamin’, but not a sport of ‘Ben Morrison’. If Joe searches, I’ll bet he’ll remember getting this from the late Freida Hill of Pavo, GA. She named it after her grandson. It’s a sport of ‘Dogwood’.”

It is my considered opinion that Maarten is correct. I see no indication that ‘Ben’ or ‘Benjamin’ is related to ‘Ben Morrison’ based on a morphological comparison.⁵

‘Dogwood’ and its Derivatives

Given that ‘Benjamin’ is a sport of ‘Dogwood’, it occurred to me that a review of ‘Dogwood’ was probably in order. In

Galle⁶, I found ‘Dogwood’ listed under “Miscellaneous Inter-Group Evergreen Hybrids and Miscellaneous Evergreen Azaleas.” In the process, I discovered the existence of ‘Coral Dogwood’ and confirmed the status of ‘Variegated Dogwood’, which I was aware of and had seen before. Galle indicated that all three were patented, so I pulled copies of the patent documents utilizing the US Patent and Trademark Office website’s search engine.⁷ As a cross check, I conducted a second search on the inventor name field to see if additional cultivars would surface, and a fourth azalea, ‘Nancy Marie’, was identified. See Table 1 for a comparison of ‘Dogwood’, its west coast derivatives, and ‘Benjamin’ (actually shown as ‘Freida’s Benjamin in Table 1 for reasons that will become clear later). All four of the patented plants are listed in the IRRC. The only noted discrepancy is that the IRRC contradicts the patent information and cites ‘Dogwood’, instead of ‘Variegated Dogwood’, as the origin for ‘Nancy Marie’.

The patent document is a trove of information which provides multiple avenues to pursue. I contacted Geo. J. Ball, Inc. of West Chicago, IL the assignee of record for ‘Dogwood’, ‘Coral Dogwood’, ‘Variegated Dogwood’, and ‘Nancy Marie’ to see what they could tell me. Since it seems none of the four azaleas is common on the east coast, I hoped Ball had images. Vickie Beutler, an Image Archive Specialist for the Ball Horticultural Company, replied “Unfortunately,

▼ Table 1— The Patented Evergreen Azalea ‘Dogwood’, its Patented Sports, and ‘Freida’s Benjamin’

Cultivar	‘Dogwood’	‘Coral Dogwood’	‘Variegated Dogwood’	‘Nancy Marie’	‘Freida’s Benjamin’
Origin	seedling of unknown parentage	sport of ‘Dogwood’	sport of ‘Dogwood’	sport of ‘Variegated Dogwood’	sport of ‘Dogwood’
Patent No.	PP3,093	PP3,752	PP4,455	PP5,389	N/A
Inventor	Alfred N. Roberts Corvallis, OR	Kenneth F. Fessler Woodburn, OR	Richard A. Arnesen Northridge, CA	Richard A. Arnesen Northridge, CA	Freida Hill Pavo, GA
Assignee	Geo. J. Ball, Inc. West Chicago, IL	Geo. J. Ball, Inc. West Chicago, IL	Geo. J. Ball, Inc. West Chicago, IL	Geo. J. Ball, Inc. West Chicago, IL	N/A
Patent Date	April 4, 1972	July 29, 1975	August 28, 1979	January 15, 1985	N/A
Description (The descriptions for the patented plants were extracted from the patent documents. The description for ‘Benjamin’ is from the green tag affixed to my specimen. See Fig. 2.)	2 ¼- to 2 ½- inch white single flower, often stippled with Delft Rose 020/2; blooms early spring to midseason.	2 ¼- to 2 ½- inch single flower, Delft Rose 020/1 shading to 020 at edges; blotched with China Rose 024/1 and freckled with 024 at base of standard and upper wings; blooms early to midseason of spring.	2- to 2 ¼-inch single flower, variegated white and Camellia Rose 622 at tip with 622/1 to 622/2 in the petal body, the upper three petals having a blotch of Tyrian Purple 727 extending outwardly from near the base, and each of the petals being irregularly bordered with white; blooms early to midseason spring.	2- to 2 ½- inch flower, white with middle stripe of Camellia Rose 622 to 622/1; upper three petals are speckled with Tyrian Purple 727; star-like with each petal being consistently 1/3 coral surrounded by white on each side; blooms at any time during spring.	“Flowers white w bright, salmon-red broad stripe down the center of each lobe. Single with 5 rounded, overlapping lobes, medium size. Blooms midseason. Leaves glossy.”

we do not have images for any of the azalea varieties you specified. I was unable to determine if we are even selling these varieties any longer.”

The inventor (the patent term for the person who invented or discovered and asexually reproduced the distinct and new variety) submits images as part of the plant patent application process. However, the images available to the public online are black and white, grainy, and quite useless. Color images are available from the Patent Office by special order, but the cost is prohibitive. Good images are useful because the plant patent descriptions are often difficult to comprehend. Then there is the question of one’s comfort with, in this case, Wilson’s Horticultural Colour Chart. For example: Camellia Rose, Claret Rose, China Rose, Delft Rose, and Tyrian Purple hold no special meaning for me, and I value a good picture for details that might not convey in a written description (e.g., the distribution of dots in the blotch).

Second Big Revelation-Color Images

Noting that these patented azaleas originated on the West Coast, I reasoned that they might have had difficulty working their way east in the absence of major marketing efforts and promotion of the sort practiced by organizations like Plant Development Services, Inc. (PDSI). It seemed reasonable to me that I stood a greater chance of locating information and images from sources on the West Coast and that suspicion proved to be true. My email to Milfeld’s Nursery, Inc (Peggy and Nick Milfeld) in Riverside, CA, resulted in a response from Anthony Carrillo, the nursery’s general manager.⁸ Here was the second big revelation. Mr. Carrillo’s email contained embedded, thumbnail images of ‘Dogwood’, ‘Variegated Dogwood’, and ‘Nancy Marie’, which demonstrated, conclusively, that ‘Nancy Marie’ is a dead ringer for ‘Benjamin’ [Fig. 3].

Now with the focus on ‘Nancy Marie’, I sought the Internet’s assistance in finding a current physical address for Mr. Richard A. Arnesen who was the inventor of ‘Variegated Dogwood’ and ‘Nancy Marie’. In a letter to Mr. Arnesen, I indicated that I was an azalea hobbyist, that I was working on an article for *The Azalean*, and that I was interested in learning more about and obtaining images of ‘Dogwood’, ‘Coral Dogwood’, ‘Variegated Dogwood’, and ‘Nancy Marie’.

While my letter was not “returned” (a returned letter

would suggest a bad address), it did not result in a response. Even if one identifies a promising address, there is no way to determine how “old” the information is. Further, it is not possible to determine if the individual is still alive since there is no guarantee that a death notice or an obituary was generated. Essentially, there is an information lag, a variable and immeasurable gap, between reality and the Internet’s understanding of reality. Input from Mr. Arnesen would have been useful. Unfortunately, not everyone reacts favorably to contacts from strangers.

Conclusion

Faced with an occasional misidentification, there are steps that one can take that improve the odds of successfully finding out the correct name of your mystery plant. Between the Internet and various online systems, an investigation that would have taken months in the past can now be accomplished in a matter of days. Experts like Buddy Lee, Maarten van der Giessen, Ronnie Palmer, Earl Sommerville, Harold Greer, and Dr. Joe Coleman, with hundreds of years of collective experience, are just an email click away.

Given that the several names previous attached to this azalea all had problems, it remains to be seen how the late Mrs. Hill’s azalea should be named. In a personal communication to the author, Maarten van der Giessen expressed a preference for ‘Benjamin’.⁹ While ‘Ben’ has the advantage of brevity, I agreed with Maarten. I favored ‘Benjamin’ for the practical reason that the longer name has greater survivability on tags ... especially on the typical soft metal (pen impression) tag used by so many azalea growers.¹⁰ Unfortunately, I recently discovered that the cultivar name ‘Benjamin’ already appears in the IRRC on an evergreen azalea introduced by A. Haerens in Belgium in 1935. Presented with this new complication, I dashed a quick email off to Maarten in which I suggested several names any of which could replace ‘Benjamin’. Maarten responded, “‘Freida’s Benjamin’ has a ring to it. I never heard her call her grandson Ben, only Benjamin.”⁹ Therefore, I propose that we name Mrs. Hill’s azalea ‘Freida’s Benjamin’. The name is unique, it isn’t already in the IRRC, and it honors Freida (note the spelling of Freida... e before i) in the process.

All the plant patents mentioned in this article have expired so there is no sensitivity there. The nature of “sporting” is such that it does not matter which of the five

▼ Figure 3— (L to R) Images of ‘Dogwood’, ‘Variegated Dogwood’, and ‘Nancy Marie’ from Milfeld’s Nursery in Riverside, CA.



Photo Nick Milfeld

cultivars (shown in Table 1) one starts with. Eventually, you will see the other three flowers at some time in the future.¹¹ It is hoped that reversions and sports of the ‘Dogwood’- related azaleas will not continue to be repeatedly viewed as “new and different,” and given new names. References like the IRRC and organizations like the Azalea Society of America can play a role in preventing the continued proliferation of new names for existing cultivars. If you do not have access to the IRRC and you are planning to introduce an azalea, you can always ask Michael Martin Mills, the North American Rhododendron Registrar, whether the cultivar name you have selected meets the cultivar name guidelines. His email is arsregisterar@gmail.com, and it is worth the effort to avoid the confusion and embarrassment of establishing an invalid cultivar name that you later have to walk away from. In addition, by notifying him of your plans early on, it documents your intended use of the proposed cultivar name and establishes your priority.

‘Linda’s Star’ Registered

The Newly Registered Cultivar Names section of JARS, Vol. 71, No. 3, Summer 2017 reports that ‘Linda’s Star’ has been registered by Kenneth Menke of Tallahassee, FL. Reported to be a sport of ‘Dogwood’, the description and accompanying image suggest that it is the same flower as ‘Freida’s Benjamin’ and ‘Nancy Marie’.

Nancy Marie’ and Freida’s Benjamin’ (the proposed new name for the plant heretofore known in the azalea community as: 1. Frieda’s Red, 2. Frieda’s Red & White Stripe, 3. ‘Ben’, and 4. ‘Benjamin’) are the same flower, independently derived from different cultivars, by individuals on opposite coasts... and as Paul Harvey would say... “Now you know the rest of the story.”¹²

Notes and References

1. Leslie, A. C. (comp). 2004. *International Rhododendron Register and Checklist* (2nd ed.). London: Royal Horticultural Society. The twelve IRRC Supplements to the 2nd edition are available on the Internet in pdf format and can be searched using Adobe Acrobat Reader.
2. The epithets Frieda’s Red and Frieda’s Red & White Stripe are not suitable cultivar names. The former appears to be a truncated form of the latter; the flower is not red; Freida, a reference to Mrs. Freida Hill of Pavo, GA, is misspelled in both; and the ampersand symbol (&) is not permitted by the *International Code of Nomenclature for Cultivated Plants*. Finally, Art 21H.1 states that “A cultivar name should not be published if it may give the impression that the cultivar has one or more characters that it does not possess.” Specifically, Frieda’s Red is not a red flower, as the truncated name would mislead you to believe.
- Brickell, C. D., et al, (2009) *International Code of Nomenclature for Cultivated Plants*, Proceedings of the meeting of the I.U.B.S. Commission for the Nomenclature of Cultivated Plants, Eighth Edition. Acta Horticulturae.
3. The Web link for ASA image library is: www.azaleas.org/azaleas/
4. The Web link for the ASA Maillist is: groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/azaleas/info. The reader is reminded that one must join the Azalea section of the Yahoo! Groups system in order to access the legacy postings referenced here.
5. Ordinarily, I would have questioned the cultivar status of the epithets ‘Ben’ or ‘Benjamin’ for want of a published description. However, the Northern Virginia Chapter of the ASA produced and made available a list of plants that were going to be at the 2016 ARS/ASA national meeting. Under the name Frieda’s Red appears the synonym ‘Ben’ (single quotes added) and a description. ‘Ben’ does not already appear in the IRRC.
6. Galle, Fred C. 1987. *Azaleas*. Revised and Enlarged Edition. Timber Press, p. 290.



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7. The link for the Patent Office Web page to search for and obtain copies of patents is: www.uspto.gov/patents-application-process/search-patents
8. I had the pleasure of meeting Peggy and Nick Milfeld in 1989 when we accompanied Dr. John Creech on a trip to Japan to attend the 1st International Azalea Festival and Symposium in Kurume. Dr. Creech published an account of the trip in *The Azalean*, September 1989. 11(3): 46-49.
9. Maarten van der Giessen, e-mail messages to author, May 15, 2017 and September 24, 2018.
10. In only a few years, the original pen impressions on the “permanent” soft metal tags eventually become obscured and indecipherable from the effects of environmental forces unknown (inevitable wear). Similarly, and consistent with my experience with “permanent” ink, the longer name would be advantageous as ink on labels “ages” at a variable rate and a partial name is often enough to allow identification
11. This is not a case of “new math.” There are five cultivars in Table 1, but ‘Freida’s Benjamin’ and ‘Nancy Marie’ are the same flower, so three is the correct number here.
12. Paul Harvey Aurandt (1918-2009) was an ABC Radio Networks news and commentary broadcaster who was known for his very entertaining “The Rest of the Story” segments which concluded appropriately with... “and now you know the rest of the story.”

The author expresses appreciation to Dr. Judy Karpen of Silver Spring, MD, to Peggy and Nick Milfeld and Anthony Carrillo of Milfeld’s Nursery in Riverside CA, and to Maarten van der Giessen of Van Der Giessen Nursery, Inc. in Mobile, AL for their assistance in the discovery phase of this article.

William C. Miller III is a recipient of the Brookside Gardens Chapter’s Frederic P. Lee Commendation (1988) and is twice the recipient of the ASA’s Distinguished Service Award (1995 and 2002). He was chairman of the ASA’s Glenn Dale Preservation Project, and a co-chairman of Dick West’s Ten Oaks Glenn Dale Project. He is past president of the Brookside Gardens Chapter, a former vice president of the ASA, a past member of the ASA board of directors, past co-chairman of the ASA’s membership committee, past chairman of the ASA’s public information committee, the longest serving member of the ASA’s Editorial Advisory Board, and a frequent contributor to *The Azalean*.

Navigating *The Azalean* Online

By Paul Beck—Treasurer and Assistant Webmaster

This is the third in a series of articles describing the interactive features of the new ASA website. This article focuses on the online edition of *The Azalean*. The search page can be found by clicking on the menu **The Azalean->Azalean Online**. This article is a brief tutorial on how to use the various capabilities related to searching, reading, and ordering *The Azalean*.

Searching

There are two methods to use to search for articles in *The Azalean*. At the top of the **Azalean Online** page is a Google® Custom Search bar. This works like every Google search, restricting the search area to be *The Azalean*. Enter one or more search terms, and press Enter or click the blue search button. The search results will appear in a “lightbox” on top of *The Azalean* page.

Below the Google search bar, the first time you load the page, are a set of detailed search instructions. These explain how to perform the next type of search, which limits the displayed search results to a range of **publication years**, words in the **title** or **author names**. You can read the instructions displayed on the page, so they will not be repeated here. After the first search is performed, the instructions will disappear to provide more information on the page. The **Clear Search** button will restore those instructions.

The screenshot shows a search form with the following elements:

- From year:
- Title:
- To year:
- Author:
- Show TOC: Click to show the table of contents and article titles simultaneously
- Submit
- Clear Search

Note the comment under the search dialog which reminds you that you need to login in order to view the contents of the 12 most recent issues. This is done to restrict this benefit

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