

# THE HISTORY OF G. ZANDBERGEN- TERWEGEN, SASSENHEIM, HOLLAND

By MATTHEW ZANDBERGEN

It is with pleasure that I respond to an invitation to write the history of our firm for THE JOURNAL of the American Daffodil Society.

My grandfather was more interested in agriculture than horticulture, and when my father, Gerrit Zandbergen, as a boy of school-leaving age, expressed the wish to become a daffodil grower, his father was by no means favorably impressed. He tried to persuade Gerrit to change his mind and said that he would never be able to earn a living growing "these things," and maintained that he would much sooner see a nice calf than a daffodil. He predicted that "bread would always be needed," concluded that it would be much more sensible for Gerrit to become a baker, and arranged with the local baker that Gerrit should become apprenticed.

Gerrit did not like the idea very much but obeyed orders and set out for work regularly at 4 a.m., as the baker was of the opinion that "the early bird catches the worm." At crack of dawn the bread would be ready and Gerrit could start his delivery round on shank's mare. His customers were scattered over a large area. One of them happened to be a daffodil grower, and at daffodil time Gerrit could not resist the temptation to pop through the gate for a peep at the daffodils. Once he was amongst them, he forgot all about the bread—and the appetite of his customers. No wonder that time and time again complaints were lodged with the baker about Gerrit's delivery system.

One bright morning when one of the customers again complained the boss lost his temper, and when Gerrit returned he was fired on the spot. Rather confused and afraid to go home, he decided to go and see his old friend Mr. van Varik, the daffodil grower. After hearing Gerrit's story, Mr. van Varik consoled him and sympathetically offered him a job and even a little more money than he earned with the baker, which was not very much. Greatly relieved, Gerrit made for home. When his father learned the news, he gave him a reprimand, but at the same time agreed that the boy should become apprenticed to the daffodil grower and gave his blessing to the new occupation. Gerrit was now as happy as the day was long.

Daffodil growing was not only Mr. van Varik's bread and butter, it was also his hobby, and in addition to a number of trade varieties, he cultivated various species, wild forms, and natural hybrids. Amongst his favorites were *N. minimus*, *N. bulbocodium*, Queen of Spain, Angel's Tears, Obvallaris, Lent Lily, *N. gracilis*, etc. These fascinating gems took Gerrit's fancy, and it was then that he decided to start collecting



*Matthew Zandbergen of Sassenheim, Holland, and two of his originations: White Marvel, top, introduced in 1950, and Eastertide, 1959. Mr. Zandbergen will be the banquet speaker at the 1966 ADS Convention in Memphis.*

these charming little pets. He had a weak spot for them all the rest of his life.

After spending a very enjoyable and educational time at this nursery, where he learned a great deal, an opportunity arose to join the Leiden daffodil specialists, Messrs. de Graaff brothers. Their nurseries were a real mecca for daffodil enthusiasts, and Gerrit felt on top of the world and happy in his job, hybridizing and selecting daffodils.

When he left the Leiden daffodil farm where he had worked with William de Graaff, Gerrit accepted a position at the Sassenheim daffodil nursery "Terwegen" (wayside). This nursery was once part of an extensive historic estate, of which the mansion had recently been razed, the surrounding dunes reclaimed, and the woodland and marshes turned into bulb land. It had a sandy type of soil, and to get the large particles of sand to the surface, it was trenched 21 feet deep in places.

About the turn of the century my father became manager at yet another of de Graaff's daffodil farms at Oegstgeest near Leiden, where a great variety of daffodils, including many polyanthus or nosegay varieties, were in cultivation. Amongst the white trumpets Madame de Graaff was the highlight, and I remember my father telling me that in a certain year rats did considerable damage to this most valuable stock during the winter by eating the rootplates out of the bulbs, although, curiously enough, they did not touch the surrounding varieties. This behavior was considered most unusual as daffodil bulbs are poisonous and are usually left alone by rodents.

At the beginning of World War I my father returned to the "Terwegen" nurseries at Sassenheim to take over the management and about 1918 commenced business under the name G. Zandbergen-Terwegen.

Mr. de Graaff arranged for my brother and myself to become apprenticed at their Spalding nursery in England (The Spalding Bulb Co.), and after spending an educational time there, we went to gain experience in other countries, to learn our trade and also the languages.

Returning home after a number of years my brother William (sad to say he died at an early age) and I joined my father in the business. Father had extended his daffodil collection considerably by collecting and exchanging bulbs from all possible sources. Curiously, he still used Haworth's classification for his collection, which included species, natural hybrids, wild forms, and also the latest hybrids and novelties. He brought together about 1500 varieties.

P. D. Williams of Lanarth, St. Keverne, Cornwall, England, the world's most successful daffodil breeder of his time, on one of his visits to our country, asked Mr. Ernst H. Krelage, then president of the Bulb Growers Association at Haarlem, if he could arrange for him to meet my father, and to see his daffodil collection. Mr. Krelage obliged, a

meeting was arranged, and we very much enjoyed Mr. Williams' two-day visit.

My father was more interested in daffodils than in languages, and Mr. Williams did not speak Dutch, so I had to be the interpreter. When Mr. Williams, during the course of the conversation, happened to mention that he had raised and was still growing some 2,000 varieties of daffodils, my father was all ears.

It was arranged that we should visit Mr. Williams every week during flowering time to see his flowers and that we should introduce his new varieties to the growers in Holland. We showed his flowers regularly and forced some 200 new varieties every year so that we could send him records of the forcing qualities of his seedlings. Many of his varieties were bought by Dutch growers at fabulous prices. A number of these varieties are still in cultivation, covering a considerable area.

Our regular visits to "Lanarth" were both interesting and educational, as the famous breeders such as the Rev. G. H. Engleheart, Alec Wilson, W. B. Cranfield, Dr. Favell, Guy Wilson, Lionel Richardson, and many others used to meet there to discuss various aspects and problems connected with their favorite flower.

We always welcomed an opportunity to visit Alec Gray en route to see his charming miniatures, as they were still my father's first love. We became close friends, and I still grow a fair number of his varieties, such as April Tears, Mary Plumstead, Tête-à-Tête, Jumblic, and others. I still enjoy my frequent visits to his hospitable home when I am in the vicinity.

During World War II it became more and more difficult to maintain my father's collection of daffodils, and, very much against our will, we were forced to reduce the number of varieties considerably. Later, owing to the shortage of skilled labor, we had to turn to mechanization and to plant and lift mechanically. Here again it proved impractical to grow too many varieties, so we further reduced the number gradually. However, to keep our collection up to date, we have added from time to time many of the latest novelties, and we still grow about 350 varieties.

During the last years of his life my father was seriously handicapped and confined to his chair. He bore his disabilities bravely, at times jokingly, and never lost interest in the work to which he had set his hand. He passed away peacefully in 1956. His perseverance, inspiration, and enthusiasm still stimulate us to carry on his work. Grandfather was right when he predicted that "bread would always be needed", but I would call this world a dull place without a daffodil.