



## ZIONSVILLE The Dahlia City

Nearly a century ago, the then small town of Zionsville gained a nickname of “Dahlia City”. This was due to the success of two neighboring nurseries located in the village. Both produced not only dahlia tubers, but other showy flowers as well. They sold them not only locally, but also across the country through their mail-order catalogs. Zionsville became known as one of the places to consider purchasing tubers to produce colorful and spectacular blooms for embellishing one’s garden or arranging in bouquets.

One of the nurseries was Tudor Gardens, operated by sisters Jennie and Adah Tudor. Their place of business was the corner of Third Street and W. Lebanon Street. That site is now the corner of Fifth and Ash Streets. Copies of their catalogs from the 1920’s are on file at the National Archives. Featured plants included tulips, German iris, peonies, and gladioli.

A doctor’s advice for Jennie to ‘dig in the dirt’ (and to drink goat’s milk) to make herself stronger, led her to growing dahlias as she had seen on nearby farmsteads. She and her sister did well, with folks coming from long distances to see their lovely gardens and buy tubers. Jennie also learned how to exhibit dahlias, winning top prizes not only locally at the Indiana State Fair, but also at the Chicago World’s Fair where she won six first prizes in 1933. She subsequently became the first president of the Indiana Dahlia Association.

Almost next door, Fred Gresh established another nursery, Parkway Gardens. His home is currently the site of Zionsville’s Nature Center, but the dahlias he produced in abundance were grown in fields where Eagle Elementary School now stands. Mr. Gresh and the Tudor sisters no doubt competed to produce the finest flowers in the decades of the 1920’s, 1930’s, and early 1940’s. Accounts from the Garden Flower Society of Indianapolis in 1925 touts Mr. Gresh winning a silver medal for fine blooms of several varieties. But his prime achievement was earning the coveted Gold Medal Award at the 1933 Chicago World’s Fair from the American Dahlia Society for his own new hybrid dahlia called “Zion’s Pride”. We have only recently learned that this variety was a large, lemon-yellow informal decorative type.

Promoters of the growing community, such as the newly formed Lions Club, touted the town’s attractiveness to potential new homeowners and businesses. We believe it is they who coined the name of “Dahlia City”. However, this craze for dahlias eventually waned, and by the 1940’s both nurseries had stopped doing business. And after extensive searching through current dahlia growers and fanciers around the world, it appears the dahlia variety, “Zion’s Pride”, is no longer available in the trade. However, town officials recently named a new road on the south side of town as “Dahlia Way”, to recognize this wonderful part of the village’s history.

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