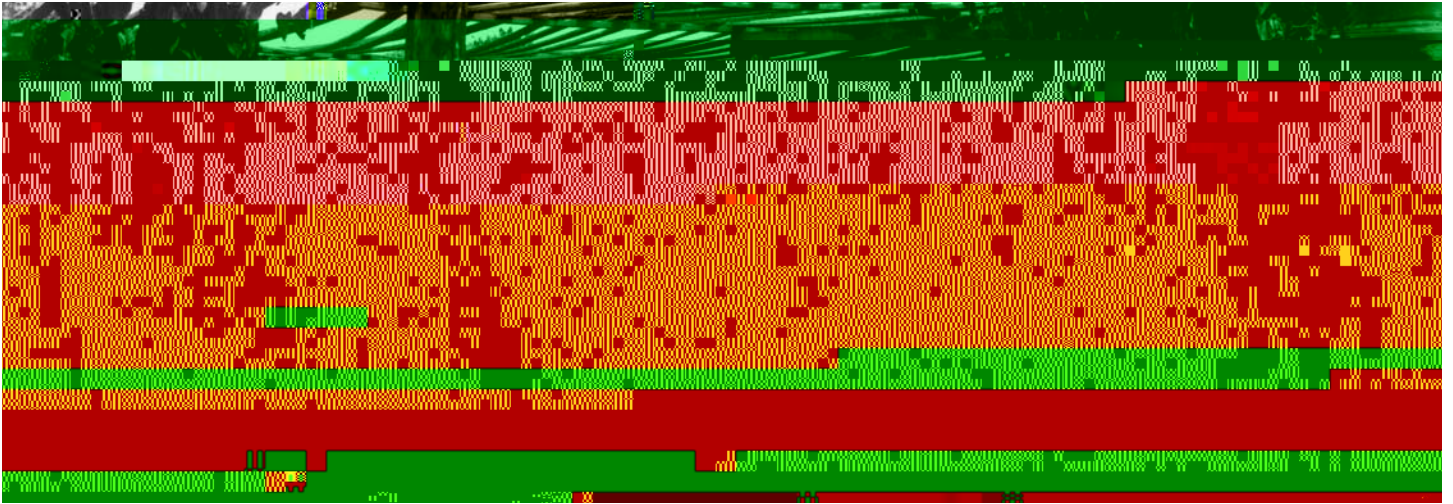




GOTHA, FLORIDA

Nehrling's Palm Cottage Gardens

At the Roots of Florida Horticulture



Nehrling's Palm Cottage Gardens contains the home and remaining gardens of Dr. Henry Nehrling, nationally known horticulturist and ornithologist, and the "patron saint of Florida Gardens." Nehrling achieved his dream of having a garden where he could grow tropical and sub-tropical plants year round. In fact, this property became Florida's first experimental botanical garden, the site where Dr. Nehrling tested over 3000 new and rare plants for the United States Department of Agriculture. Today, the carefully preserved remaining core of this historic property is on the market. The Henry Nehrling Society is working diligently to find a way to purchase it and operate it as the Nehrling Gardens History and Horticulture Education Center.

HISTORY

In 1884, Henry Nehrling, a 31-year-old Wisconsin schoolteacher and naturalist, purchased 40 acres of land in the newly founded German-American community of Gotha in southwestern Orange County, Florida. He began his garden there in 1886, and in 1902 he moved there with his family, overlooking Lake Olivia. Thus the gardens pre-date the building.

Nehrling's dream was of a garden where he could grow tropical and sub-tropical plants year round. As a designer, he developed a landscape that was natural-looking rather than formal. As a scientist, he also experimented extensively with exotic and native plants, ultimately developing many of the varieties of subtropical ornamentals found today in individual



gardens and throughout the Florida landscape industry.

Over time, Nehrling built extensive wood lathe shade houses for his caladiums and bromeliads and also experimented with many varieties of cycads and tropical trees. Eventually, his property became Florida 's first experimental botanical garden, the site where Dr. Nehrling tested over 3000 new and rare plants for the United States Department of Agriculture. Of these, over 300 new and beneficial plants were introduced into Florida and U.S. landscapes including many varieties of caladiums, bromeliads, hybrid amaryllis, gloriosa lilies, palms and bamboos. These plants formed the foundation for Florida 's thriving nursery industry, now the third largest industry in the state. Today, the caladium industry alone is worth more than 13 million dollars to the state's economy, and the amaryllis now grown by the millions have direct ties to Dr. Nehrling's work over a century ago in this garden.

In addition to his research in botany and horticulture, he also developed a specialty in ornithology and the ecology of North American birds. In an extraordinary lifetime of study and cultivation of natural beauty, Dr. Nehrling gave to Florida and America a legacy of exotic and native plants that enhance our homes and public spaces today. His seminal works included *Our Native Birds of Song and Beauty* (1893) and *The Amaryllis* (1908). He wrote eloquently of Florida 's natural beauty and the need to protect it. Two of his books have recently been abridged and edited by Robert W. Read of the Smithsonian Institute and published by the University Press of Florida under the titles *Nehrling's Early Florida Gardens* and *Nehrling's Plants, People, and Places in Early Florida*, in tribute to his outstanding legacy.

Dr. Nehrling's Palm Cottage Gardens soon became a popular destination for thousands of tourists, nature lovers, and new Florida settlers. Many prominent people of the era such as Theodore Roosevelt, John Burroughs and Dr. David Fairchild, the famous botanical explorer, visited these early gardens. Fairchild described Palm Cottage Gardens as the most beautiful place in Florida.

Dr. Nehrling was not motivated by money, but by his love of plants and his dedication to the advancement of ornamental horticulture. He only wanted a garden to grow the plants that he loved and to introduce them to everyone who stopped to visit. His plant collections were sought out by some of America 's greatest botanists and leading authorities in horticulture. Little did he realize the far-reaching impact of his work.

By 1917 a series of severe winters drove Dr. Nehrling to purchase another property further south near Naples (not far from his friend Thomas Edison's estate) for his more cold sensitive plants, but Palm Cottage Gardens remained his first love. After Dr. Nehrling's death in 1929, the Palm Cottage and its gardens were neglected for five years until Julian Nally purchased them in 1934. Nally, a pioneer in bromeliad propagation, added several greenhouses to the property and continued Dr. Nehrling's legacy until his death in 1977. At that time, the property again lay idle until it was purchased by a group of developers and subdivided into the Lake Nally Woods residential development. Of the original 40-acre garden, only 6 acres were retained with the Palm Cottage home site; approximately 3.25 acres are upland while the eastern portion extends into Lake Nally.

Barbara Bochiardy (the current owner) and her late husband, architect Howard Bochiardy, rescued Palm Cottage House and its gardens in 1981. Together, they restored the house and added several architecturally compatible structures. Since her



HOW TO HELP

There are three things people can do to help secure the future of Palm Cottage Gardens:

one | Provide funding: Approximately \$975,000 is needed to purchase the property immediately and begin the first phase of restoration to rescue it from encroaching development. A couple who are supporters of the Nehrling Gardens are willing to purchase Palm Cottage Gardens and provide the Nehrling Society with a 5-year lease/option to purchase agreement, with no financial benefit to them other than reimbursement of expenses. The Society would cover the mortgage payments while conducting a capital campaign, and would have the option to pay off the outstanding balance of the mortgage at any time. The property would be operated as a private home and garden with tours by appointment until such time as an agreement could be worked out with the Lake Nally Woods Homeowners Association to allow greater public access. Unfortunately, the owner's asking price is in excess of the appraisal done by the mortgage company willing to finance this agreement, so the property remains on the market. Financial contributions are urgently needed to bridge the remaining gap so that the property can be purchased and preserved.

two | Urge Orange County's leaders to take action to protect one of its important historic resources.

three | Urge the Lake Nally Woods Homeowners Association to permit a change in the deed restrictions and to actively support interim maintenance of the Palm Cottage Gardens property.

To help, please contact

The Henry Nehrling Society
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Tel. 407-876-1894

www.nehrlinggardens.org

Research

Extensive history and photos submitted with National Register Documentation have been placed on the Florida Master Site File 8OR08111 maintained by the Division of Historical Resources (FTP site).

Site Address

Nehrling's Palm Cottage Gardens
2267 Hempel Avenue
Gotha, FL 34734