

Legacy Of Patron Saint of Florida Gardens

FULFILLING A DREAM

In 1884, Dr. Henry Nehrling, a native of Sheboygan County, Wisconsin, purchased a 40 acre tract of land in Gotha, He had never been in Florida before, but, while living in Houston, Texas, he had become fascinated with - and quite knowledgeable about - tropical and subtropical plants. On this property in Central Florida, Dr. Nehrling would have a place to grow these plants outdoors, year-around.

It wasn't until 1886 that Dr. Nehrling first laid eyes on his property in "the rolling pine region of Orange County", and he was delighted with what he found.

"It was the fulfillment of a long cherished dream." He wrote, "Imagine my happiness at the thought of a home where I could grow my new plant friends.

Upon reaching Gotha, he immediately set to work, clearing some of the land for an orange grove and a house on the east side of the property's small lake. For the first few years, Dr. Nehrling could only spend a few months a year in Gotha, as he held the position of Custodian of the Public Museum of Milwaukee. Consequently, it was 1890 before he could fulfill his dream of creating a tropical garden.

He had set aside ten acres for this purpose, which he cleared, leaving the few pines and small live oak which were already there.

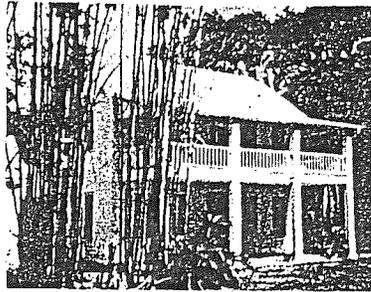
In one of his books, *My Florida Garden*, Dr. Nehrling wrote, in a style reminiscent of Thoreau, of those days:

"As soon as the land was cleared, I searched the hammock woods five miles away for plant material. My kind neighbor and I repeatedly walked ten miles shouldering the heavy plants on the return journey. We collected small specimens of Magnolia, American Olive, Loblolly Bay, Wax Myrtle, American Laurel, Sweet Bay and many other treasures."

Thus was the beginning of Palm Cottage Gardens, which Dr. Nehrling fondly christened his estate; a tropical garden which would become well known and respected by nature lovers all over the state.

PALM COTTAGE GARDENS

In the following years, Dr. Nehrling became one of Florida's most renowned botanists, and over the years, Palm Cottage Gardens became a showplace of Central Florida and an accredited experimental station for the U.S. Department of Horticulture and Agriculture. Around 1909, while serving as a lecturer at Rollins College, Dr. Nehrling would conduct field trips to his home.



THE NEHRLING-NALLY-BOCHIARDY house was moved to the property from Lake Olivia about the turn of the century, and was recently remodeled by the Bochiardys.

HARD TIMES

The next decade would bring some misfortune to Dr. Nehrling and Palm Cottage Gardens. He lost two of his daughters and, in 1911, his wife Sophie died, after forty years of marriage.

In 1917 a heartbreaking freeze killed many of his most valuable plants and, rather than risk another such catastrophe, he moved many of his most tender specimens to Naples, in Southern Florida, where he had purchased another tract of land.

With his new bride, the former Betty Mitchell, maintaining Palm Cottage Gardens, Dr. Nehrling set out to establish his new tropical garden.

"In the new land there were many days of such disappointment and discouragement," he wrote, "that I longed for Gotha again, freezes and all!"

On November 21, 1929 Henry Nehrling died of a heart attack in his Gotha home, but he had left his thumb-print on West Orange County and the State of Florida.

JULIAN NALLY: "A SPIRITUAL HEIR"

In 1933, E.J. Nally, president of the Radio Corporation of America, his wife and their son, Julian, a 33 year old aspiring poet, were traveling through Florida, when a want ad in the Orlando Sentinel caught the senior Nally's eye.

"Whispering pines on a luxuriant estate, hidden by oak forests and colorful with tropical bloom," the ad read.

By the time the Nally's happened upon Palm Cottage Gardens it had changed hands several times and the house and property were in sad shape. Many of the shrubs and plants had been stolen or sold.

Still, Henry Nehrling's garden was a majestic sight which the Nallys immediately fell in love with and bought. It is

said that the senior Nally bought the estate as a place of seclusion where his son could pursue his poetry, but if anything, it was a distraction to Julian's writing - he became totally involved in a love affair with the garden, a love which equalled that of his predecessor.

When Julian Nally moved to Gotha in 1935, he spent most of his time refurbishing the old house, studying the estate's history and recording everything in his delightfully written diary.

Soon Julian was making history of his own. He began his horticultural career raising *Gloriosa Lilies*, a rare orchid-like flower native of Uganda.

At some point Julian became interested in bromeliads, exotic air plants related to the pineapple which he once described as "equally happy growing on the branch of a forest tree or in a clay pot in a sunny window."

He began collecting as many different varieties of these plants as he could get his hands on, buying many from the well known local nurseryman Harry Smith (who Julian later entered business with), and having them sent from South America. He received many of his most valuable specimens from his friend, Mulford Foster, of Clarcona, known as the "Father of Bromeliads".

Eventually Julian had a large nursery on the property, growing his bromeliads in the shade of oak and pine trees as well as in greenhouses.

A member of the Bromeliad Society, Julian became recognized, along with Mulford Foster, as one of the world's foremost experts on the plants. And, like Dr. Nehrling, Nally was a widely read scholar who was occasionally asked to lecture at Rollins. He collaborated with Alfred Jackson Hanna of Rollins on several books. Julian also served on the board of trustees of the West Orange Memorial Hospital from 1963 to 1976.

In the summer of 1977, Julian and Margaret Nally died within a month of each other.

Most of the acreage has since been divided, and developed with large homes and lots maintaining the woody atmosphere.

The house, along with 6 acres of the original property, was purchased in 1981 by Howard and Barbara Bochiardy, and was extensively remodeled without losing the charm of an old Florida home. They are now living there amongst much of the planting cultivated by Henry Nehrling -- including magnolias and cedars which he carried on his shoulders from the woods 5 miles away, nearly a century ago. Additionally, Julian Nally's bromeliads still carpet much of the ground.