

# FACT SHEET FOR BELLINGRATH GARDENS AND HOME

- Bellingrath Gardens and Home is open 362 days a year, closing only on Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Days, and is open from 8 AM – 5 PM, except during Magic Christmas in Lights (Day after Thanksgiving through New Year's Eve) when the Gardens remain open until 9 PM.
- Bellingrath Gardens and Home encompasses approximately 900 acres along the Fowl River. Sixty-five acres are cultivated with annual blooms and continuous color.
- Guests may enjoy a tour of the Bellingrath Home, the Rose Garden, Asian-American Garden, formal garden terraces and The Dwight Harrigan/ExxonMobil Ecological Bayou Boardwalk .
- Special events and weddings are held throughout the year on the property.
- Walter D. Bellingrath was Mobile's first Coca-Cola bottler.
- Bellingrath Gardens was originally known as Belle Camp and intended to be a fishing camp for Walter D. Bellingrath.
- Walter D. Bellingrath and Bessie Morse Bellingrath opened their Gardens to the public for the first time on April 7, 1932. A major traffic jam ensued and admission was charged thereafter for maintenance of the Gardens.
- The 10,500-square-foot Bellingrath Home was completed in July 1936. It features all of its original furnishings from Mrs. Bellingrath and was designed by architect George B. Rogers.
- Bessie Morse Bellingrath died in 1943 at the age of 64. Walter D. Bellingrath died in 1955 at the age of 86.
- Walter D. Bellingrath founded the Bellingrath-Morse Foundation at the age of 80. The foundation benefits Rhodes College in Memphis, TN, Stillman College in Tuscaloosa, AL and Huntingdon College in Montgomery, AL.
- The Bellingrath Gardens and Home Foundation was created in 2004 to further support the Bellingrath-Morse Foundation with the maintenance and operations of Bellingrath Gardens and Home. All donations received are used for operations, capital projects and to establish an endowment fund.

# THE STORY OF BELLINGRATH GARDENS AND HOME

In 1903, Walter Duncan Bellingrath began Mobile's first Coca-Cola bottling operation. His franchise spanned a 100-mile radius, which he covered single-handedly at first. It was not uncommon to see Mr. Bellingrath walking the train tracks between small towns because he lacked the train fare. His perseverance and warm personality won him many customers and his hard work made him a tremendous success.

By the time the United States became initiated in World War I, Mr. Bellingrath's Coca-Cola Bottling Company was a major business operation in Mobile. This success, compounded by sugar shortages during the war, took its toll on Mr. Bellingrath's health. In 1917, he was advised by his physician to buy the Fowl River property he had been admiring, to balance his hectic work schedule with needed rest and relaxation.

By this time, the Bellingraths' home in Mobile on Ann Street was known for its beautiful garden, which the couple graciously allowed drivers to enjoy during the spring. The collection of azaleas was the city's largest and Mrs. Bellingrath began bringing cuttings down to her husband's fishing camp, which had been named Belle Camp. The conditions were ideal and each spring the collection became more spectacular.

After an extensive European tour of gardens, the couple decided to get professional assistance in the design of their property in 1927. They hired George B. Rogers, Mobile's most prominent architect. Rogers worked continuously on developing the property, as well as the couple's home, until his death in 1945. His plan for the Gardens is still being enjoyed today.

In the spring of 1932, the Bellingraths opened their property along the Fowl River up to a Depression-weary public for a day of azalea gazing. The response was phenomenal, as the roads between Mobile and the Gardens became one long traffic jam. The astounded couple decided to open the Gardens permanently, while charging a fee to assist in their care and upkeep.

The Gardens began to expand as azaleas and camellias were shipped in from across the South. In Mobile, Mrs. Bellingrath was known for her generosity in paying tremendous sums for plants from individuals' gardens. The higher demand for the plant normally meant a higher price Mrs. Bellingrath was willing to pay.

The Bellingraths had no children, but they enjoyed the company of their young nieces and nephews. As both were from large families, the need for extra guest rooms moved the couple to have George B. Rogers design a guest house in 1939. The building also contained a large garage, an intimate Chapel and a laundry. Since 1967, the garage space has served visitors as the Delchamps Gallery of Edward Marshall Boehm Porcelain. The collection is the largest of its type open to the public and contains a wide variety of wildlife art created by the veterinarian turned sculptor.

After Mrs. Bellingrath died in 1943, Mr. Bellingrath continued the couple's plans for their beloved Gardens until his own death in 1955. Mr. Bellingrath had not only created a tribute to the region's natural beauty, but had also contributed much to his community.

Mr. Bellingrath's obituary listed numerous accomplishments, in addition to creating Bellingrath Gardens. He had been a staunch member of the Mobile Chamber of Commerce, even writing at least two checks to cover annual deficits. He served as the director of the Mobile Community Chest, as well as its President. A Deacon and benefactor at his church, Central Presbyterian, Mr. Bellingrath was also an ardent supporter of Mobile's Rotary Club and the Mobile Infirmary.

**Bellingrath**  
Gardens and Home

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Operated by The Bellingrath Gardens and Home Foundation,  
a charitable, not-for-profit organization.

In the business community, he was well respected as the president of the Lerio Corporation, Mobile Warehousing, Inc. and was one of the four founders of the Waterman Steamship Corporation. He served as an officer for several Coca-Cola bottling companies in Mobile, in addition to other cities. He was a director of the First National Bank of Mobile and the Mobile Press Register, Inc.

### **The Bellingrath-Morse Foundation**

At the age of 80, Mr. Bellingrath created the Bellingrath-Morse Foundation to perpetuate the existence of his beloved Home and Gardens for future generations to enjoy. The Foundation is also set up to further the efforts of three church-related colleges: Rhodes College in Memphis, TN; Stillman College in Tuscaloosa, AL; and Huntingdon College in Montgomery, AL. Mr. Bellingrath's church, Central Presbyterian, as well as that of his wife's family, St. Francis Street Methodist, are also beneficiaries of the Foundation. These institutions receive approximately 85% of the Foundation's earnings. There is no doubt of Mr. Bellingrath's sincere interest in education. Having a limited formal education himself, Mr. Bellingrath made certain that many others could further themselves through a college education.