

BELLINGRATH GARDENS AND HOME TIMELINE

- 1869:** • Walter Bellingrath born in Atlanta, Ga., on August 6.
- 1878:** • Bessie Mae Morse born in Mobile, Ala., on May 20.
- 1903:** • Mr. Walter Duncan Bellingrath arrives in Mobile to take over ownership of Coca-Cola Bottling Company at the age of 34.
- 1906:** • Mr. Bellingrath marries his former stenographer, Bessie Mae Morse.
- 1918:** • The Bellingraths purchase the former Lisloy Club overlooking Fowl River, a 25-acre property. It was a former men's fishing club, and occupied a pair of rough cabins that had housed sawmill workers in the early 1890s. The property becomes known as "Belle Camp."
- 1922** • The Lodge, a structure to the south of the dining cabin, is rebuilt and enlarged with the help of architect George B. Rogers. It contains a living room with a beamed ceiling and brick fireplace, and three bedrooms. After the completion of the Bellingrath Home, the Lodge was used as a guest house by the Bellingraths' nephews and nieces when they visited.
- 1926** • Electricity comes to Belle Camp with the addition of a generator.
- 1927** • Mr. and Mrs. Bellingrath tour Europe for several months. They are inspired by the beautiful estate gardens throughout Europe. Upon their return to Mobile, they hire architect George B. Rogers to create an estate garden.
• Mr. Rogers and Mrs. Bellingrath search for large established azaleas and camellias for the new gardens from individuals and nurseries throughout the Gulf Coast.
- 1931** • Grotto is completed, along with series of runnels and fountains. Flagstones are obtained from downtown Mobile sidewalks. Mrs. Bellingrath paid for their removal and replacement with concrete, to the delight of City of Mobile officials.
- 1932** • Belle Camp is essentially complete. The Rockery, Mirror Lake and bridge, Summer House, Fountain Plaza and waterfront are in place.
• The Bellingraths invite visiting delegates to a garden club convention to tour their garden. They invite Mobilians to see their gardens the following afternoon. More than 4,700 people arrive at Belle Camp, creating one of the county's worst traffic jams, on April 7, 1932.
• The Bellingraths decide to open their Gardens each Spring from January through April. A 50-cent admission is charged to assist with crowd control.
- 1933** • Visitors flock to Belle Camp's Gardens throughout the entire year. Mr. and Mrs. Bellingrath announce that the property will be open year-round beginning in 1934, with a \$1 admission.
• Walter Bellingrath attends the Chicago World's Fair, where he views colorful bathroom tiles and fixtures produced by Standard Plumbing Company; this inspires him to request similar décor when the Bellingraths begin building the Home.
- 1934** • The Bellingraths ask George B. Rogers to design a permanent home for them at Belle Camp.

- 1935**
 - The Bellingraths and Rogers sign a contract on June 18.
 - Ground is broken for the 10,500-square-foot Bellingrath Home on the site of the north cabin. Rogers describes its exterior as “a mingling of French, English and Mediterranean influences.”
 - Contract signed with Lord and Burnham Co of Illinois for Conservatory to be constructed. Materials would be shipped November 5th.

- 1936**
 - The Bellingraths create the largest Rose Garden in the South.
 - The Bellingraths have their first meal in their new home on July 4, 1936.

- 1938**
 - The Bellingraths return from a visit to New Orleans on July 18 to find a crowd of more than 200 friends and well-wishers in their driveway. A bronze plaque and stone bench had been installed in their absence. It thanks them for opening their estate to the public and “their untiring effort for the up-building of the City of Mobile and this ‘Charm Spot of the Deep South.’”

- 1939**
 - A Guest House replaces the old garage. A wing of the new building contains a small Chapel.

- 1941**
 - Electric lines are installed.

- 1943**
 - Mrs. Bessie Morse Bellingrath dies at the age of 64 on February 15 in Hot Springs, Ark.
 - Mr. Bellingrath hires Mr. M. Thomas Brooks from Birmingham to design the Holly Garden as well as a Bird Sanctuary.

- 1950**
 - Mr. Bellingrath announces the formation of the Bellingrath-Morse Foundation. The Foundation is to maintain the Gardens and Home as a “fitting memorial to my wife.” The Bellingrath Home is to be opened to the public after his death.

- 1955**
 - Mr. Walter Duncan Bellingrath dies on August 8, two days after his 86th birthday.
 - Mr. George Downing becomes Chairman of the Board of the Bellingrath-Morse Foundation.
 - Mr. Frederick W. Holder is named General Manager. He is an early organizer of the Junior Miss Program (now Distinguished Young Women), which always includes visits to Bellingrath Gardens and Home.
 - Part of the Lodge is converted into a gift shop.

- 1956**
 - Property is officially named “Bellingrath Gardens and Home”; Home opens to public for tours.

- 1958**
 - America’s Junior Miss is established, with Fred Holder, manager of Bellingrath Gardens and Home, as its first president, and George Downing, President of Coca-Cola of Mobile and Executive Director of the Bellingrath-Morse Foundation, as its treasurer.

- 1963**
 - Construction begins on the new Entrance Building/Cafeteria.
 - The Lodge is demolished to make way for a new South Terrace Garden.
 - The first Fall Outdoor Cascading Chrysanthemums display is held. Stock plants for the cascade mums were obtained from Longwood Gardens in Kennet Square, Penn.

- 1964**
 - The South Terrace is completed.
 - The Entrance Building/Cafeteria and Pet Motel are completed.
 - The completion of the South Terrace, Rose Bridge, Pet Motel, and Entrance Building, now home to the Cafe and Gift Shop, is celebrated with an open house, attended by approximately 12,115 visitors.

- 1965**
 - Pat Ryan is hired as Assistant Landscape Engineer.
 - Work begins to turn the Bird Sanctuary into the Asian American Garden.

- 1967**
 - The garage is enclosed to become the Delchamps Gallery of Boehm Porcelain, displaying a collection donated by the Delchamps Family. The facility is dedicated on March 9, 1967. It would later be renamed after the Delchamps.

- 1977**
 - The Bellingrath Home is added to the Alabama Register of Landmarks and Heritage.

- 1978**
 - The Bellingrath Home is redecorated and featured on the cover of Southern Accents.

- 1979**
 - Hurricane Frederic strikes Mobile on September 12th. Bellingrath Gardens and Home is severely damaged. The damage is estimated to be over \$6 million. More than 1,000 pine trees, 150 Live Oaks and 330 Water Oaks are destroyed by the storm. The Gardens would remain closed until March 1, 1980, when Bellingrath re-opened with a bulb show.

- 1980**
 - The public is invited to see the Fall Outdoor Cascading Chrysanthemum Show on November 23rd, free of charge.

- 1981**
 - Construction begins on the “Education and Information Center.” The project includes a picnic area and additional parking.

- 1982**
 - The Bellingrath Home is added to the National Register of Historic Places.

- 1992**
 - A ceremony is held in the spring to dedicate new, paved walkways and wheelchair ramps to provide access to both sides of Mirror Lake and the riverfront. The new surfacing was made possible by a grant from ExxonMobil Corp.

- 1993**
 - First Camellia Classic Open Car Show held in partnership with the Mobile Bay Mustang Club.

- 1995**
 - First Magic Christmas in Lights is held.

- 1996**
 - A&E program “America’s Castles” films a segment at Bellingrath Gardens and Home for its “Garden Estates” episode. Bellingrath is the only Alabama property to be featured.
 - The new Dwight Harrigan / ExxonMobil Ecological Boardwalk is dedicated.

- 1999**
 - “Good Morning America” show is filmed at Bellingrath Gardens with Charles Gibson and Diane Sawyer, a former America’s Junior Miss, and Faith Hill, who performs on the Great Lawn.
 - Dr. William E. Barrick is named Executive Director of Bellingrath Gardens and Home.

- 2000**
 - America’s Junior Miss Program returns to Bellingrath.
 - Magic Christmas in Lights show redesigned.

- 2003**
 - Advisory Board established.
 - The “Friends of Bellingrath” membership program is established.

- 2004**
 - Bellingrath Gardens and Home Foundation is established. Although the Gardens receive income from the Bellingrath-Morse Foundation, two-thirds of current operations are financed entirely by admissions, gift shop and restaurant sales, membership and donations.
 - Mobile Rose Society’s Show moves to Bellingrath Gardens and Home.

- 2004**
 - Mobile Youth Symphony performs for first annual Mother’s Day Concert.
 - Azalea Trail Maid Reunion attended by more than 750 former Trail Maids.
 - First Wonderful Wednesday programs held during the summer, including the Kids Kruiise.
 - The American Horticultural Society’s book by Dr. William E. Barrick, “Southeast Smart Garden Regional Guide,” is published.
 - Hurricane Ivan destroys Riverfront Pavilion, damages greenhouses and downs many trees.

- 2005**
 - First Balloon Glow in the Gardens held in the Fall.
 - Hurricane Katrina strikes the Gulf Coast; damage in Gardens is minimal.
 - Entry Building renovation completed.
 - The Mermaid Fountain is restored.
 - 10th Anniversary of Magic Christmas in Lights opened by Alabama’s First Lady, Mrs. Patsy Riley.
 - A reunion of Bellingrath family members is held during Magic Christmas in Lights.

- 2006**
 - New Riverfront Pavilion completed.
 - Winter Wednesday programs began.
 - First Easter Egg Hunt held.
 - First America’s Junior Miss “Breakfast at Bellingrath.”
 - Gift Shop renovation completed.

- 2007**
 - 75th Anniversary Celebration held on April 7.
 - First Easter Sunrise Service.
 - The Dwight Harrigan / ExxonMobil Ecological Bayou Boardwalk reopens with 15 new educational interpretive panels.

- 2008**
 - The restored Rockery reopens.
 - Self-guided educational programs established.
 - Rose Garden Restoration plans completed.

- 2009**
 - New cell phone audio tour introduced.

- 2010**
 - Bellingrath Rosarian Linda Guy awarded American Rose Society Bronze Honor Medal.
 - Rose Garden Fountain installed as part of a restoration project, thanks to generous donors.
 - First Kids Gulf Discovery Day held on July 7.

- 2011**
 - Bellingrath portraits arrive, a gift from Central Presbyterian Church. The portraits are hung in the Bellingrath Home.

- 2012**
 - Dr. William E. Barrick receives Governor’s Tourism Award from the Alabama Tourism Department.
 - Alabama Magazine’s “Best of Bama Awards 2012” honors Bellingrath with “Best Gardens in ‘Bama.”

- 2013**
 - 50th anniversary celebration of Fall Outdoor Cascading Chrysanthemums display.
 - Better Homes and Gardens’ special interest publication, Country Gardens, features Bellingrath Gardens’ Fall Outdoor Cascading Chrysanthemums display.

- 2014**
 - USA Today includes Bellingrath Gardens and Home’s Magic Christmas in Lights on its list of the “10 Best Public Light Displays in America”; votes from online readers put Bellingrath in sixth place.
- 2015**
 - ConventionSouth magazine, a national multimedia resource for planning events held within the South and Caribbean Seas regions, includes Bellingrath Gardens and Home in its “2015 List of South’s Sizzling Attractions for Social Events,” a listing of 22 picture-perfect attractions located across 16 states. Bellingrath Gardens is the only representative for the state of Alabama.
 - Dr. William E. Barrick receives the American Horticultural Society’s 2015 Liberty Hyde Bailey Award and Auburn University’s College of Agriculture Outstanding Alumni Award for the Horticulture Program.
 - 20th anniversary of Magic Christmas in Lights. Opening Night is celebrated with fireworks.
 - Bellingrath Gardens and Home receives the Certificate of Excellence from TripAdvisor.com, the world’s largest travel website.
- 2016**
 - Executive Director Dr. William E. Barrick is named Honorary Chairman of the 2016 Festival of Flowers.
 - Bellingrath holds Greenhouse Tours on May 6 to celebrate National Public Gardens Day, an event to promote public gardens’ important role in leading environmental stewardship and awareness.
 - Bellingrath Gardens and Home is inducted into the Alabama Tourism Hall of Fame at the 2016 Alabama Governor’s Conference on Tourism.
 - First Boo at Bellingrath event held in October in the Gardens, replacing the evening Balloon Glow in the Gardens.
 - The American Bus Association selects Magic Christmas in Lights at Bellingrath Gardens and Home as a Top 100 Event for 2016.
- 2017**
 - March 6: 50th Anniversary of the Delchamps Gallery of Boehm Porcelain. A new film about sculptor Edward Marshall Boehm is created to commemorate the anniversary.
 - April 7: 85th Anniversary of the date that Walter and Bessie Bellingrath opened the Gardens to the public.
- 2018**
 - The Southeast Tourism Society selects Magic Christmas in Lights as a Top Twenty Festival Event Winner for the month of December.
 - USA Today readers select Magic Christmas in Lights to the publication’s list of “Top 10 Best Botanical Garden Holiday Light Displays.”
- 2019**
 - Alabama Magazine’s “Best of Bama Awards 2019” honors Bellingrath with “Best Gardens in ‘Bama.”
 - Magic Christmas in Lights is again included in USA Today’s nominations of “Top 10 Best Botanical Garden Holiday Light Displays.”
 - In July, Dr. William E. Barrick retires and is named Executive Director Emeritus.