

The

Palmetto

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HENRY NEHRLING, Pioneer Florida Horticulturist

"The flatwoods, as the name implies, have a flat, level surface. Usually they are low, — so low in many instances that during the rainy season the surface is moist, or even covered with water. The soil although sandy, is black and rich in humus, while at a depth of a few feet, a thick layer of hard-pan or marl is found. The flatwoods are also the natural flower gardens of the state. Here we find the Pitcher-plants (*Sarracenia flava*) in big patches. And in September they are ablaze with hundreds of thousands of Catesby's Lilies (*Lilium Catesbaei*)."

• Dr. Henry Nehrling

by Peggy S. Lantz

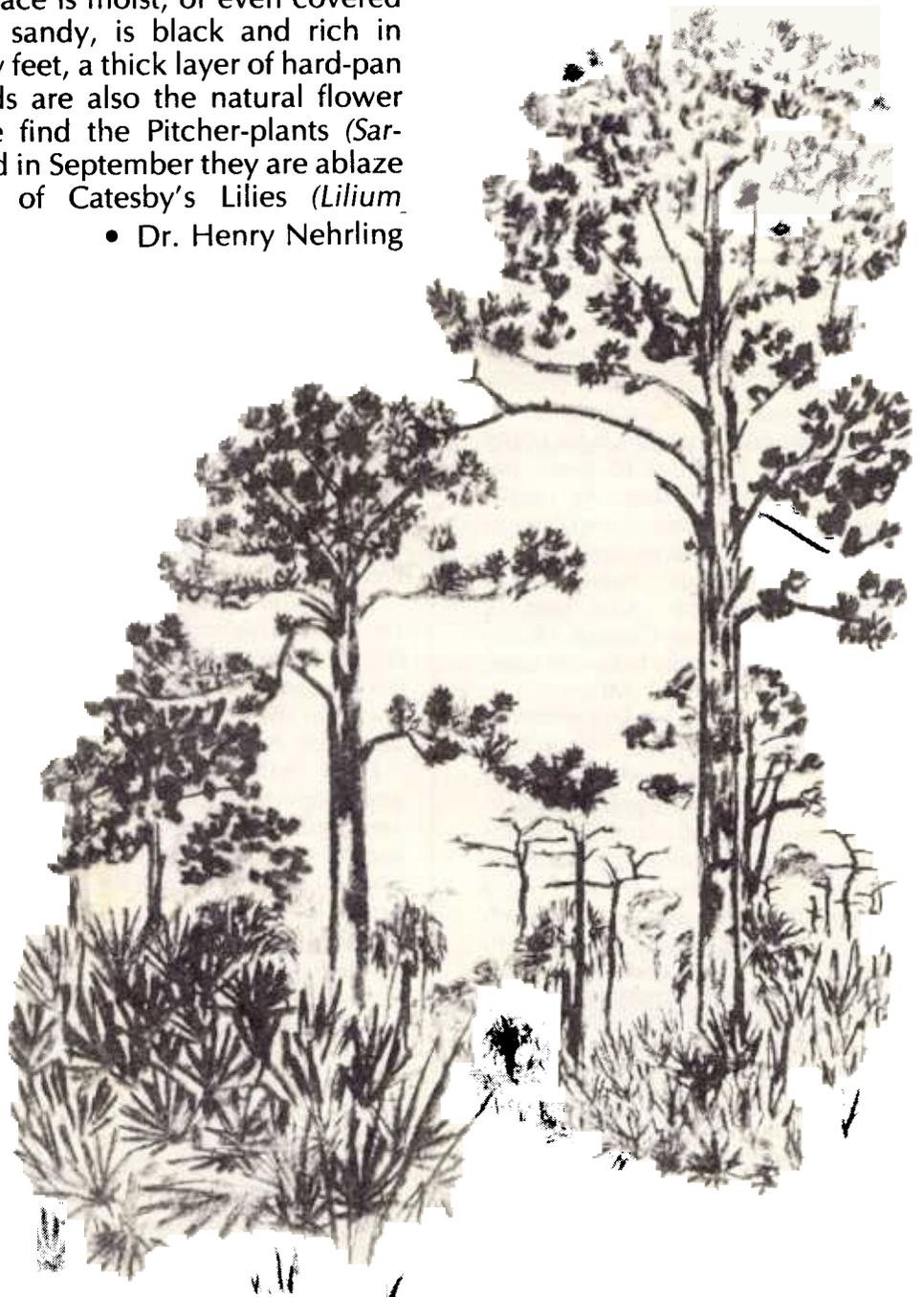
The current interest in Florida native plants has varied and colorful origins. Among these is an important turn-of-the-century horticulturist who tended his tropical gardens in both Central and Southwest Florida — Henry Nehrling.

Dr. Nehrling began as an ornithologist, studied Florida native plants and other tropical and subtropical varieties for more than thirty years, and wrote extensively on the subject, though none of his writings were published until after his death. His home with some of the original plantings still stands in west Orange County.

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This Pine Flatwoods, dominated by Slash Pine (*Pinus elliottii*) and Saw Palmetto (*Serenoa repens*), with patches and strands of Cypress Swamp dominated by Bald Cypress (*Taxodium distichum*) and Cabbage Palm (*Sabal palmetto*) is at the southern border of Palm Beach County. Historically, this was part of the Hillsborough River, one of a few channels in southeastern Florida where water from the Everglades flowed across the coastal Ridge to the Atlantic Ocean. During the rainy seasons of spring and fall, the river became a broad shallow waterway several miles wide. As part of areawide drainage, the river has been converted into a major canal. Though flooded during heavy rains, the land has become dryer, allowing Pine Flatwoods to expand, with Cypress Swamp still occupying wet spots.

Charcoal sketch by Grace Blanchard Iverson



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Articles on any aspect of Florida native plants are invited. Include drawings or photos, if possible. They will be handled with care, and will be returned if you include a self-addressed stamped envelope. Send to Peggy S. Lantz, Editor., *The Palmetto*, Rt. 3, Box 437, Orlando, FL 32811, 305/299-1472.

NEHRLING ————— from page 1

He was born in Wisconsin on May 9, 1853, and became a teacher. Professor E.L. Lord said in an article published in 1925, that teaching "was only an instrument by means of which he could study nature. In order to study the birds of the United States he taught school in several states, particularly in Illinois, Missouri, and Texas."

Then he became interested in Florida, and bought some land in Gotha in west Orange County. He left teaching and eventually became custodian of the Public Museum in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Dr. Nehrling wrote articles on ornithological subjects, did some experimenting with tropical and subtropical plants while in Texas, and collected plants and seeds from many correspondents from the tropics. He grew these in a greenhouse in Milwaukee until such time as he was ready to move to Gotha. continued next page

"Near the flatwoods we often have the poor scrublands, of white sand, running in long strips through high pine-land as well as the lowlands. They are usually only a half mile or so wide, but persist over a vast territory. The predominating tree is the Scrub or Christmas tree Pine (*Pinus clausa*). Wild flowers abound."

• Dr. Henry Nehrling

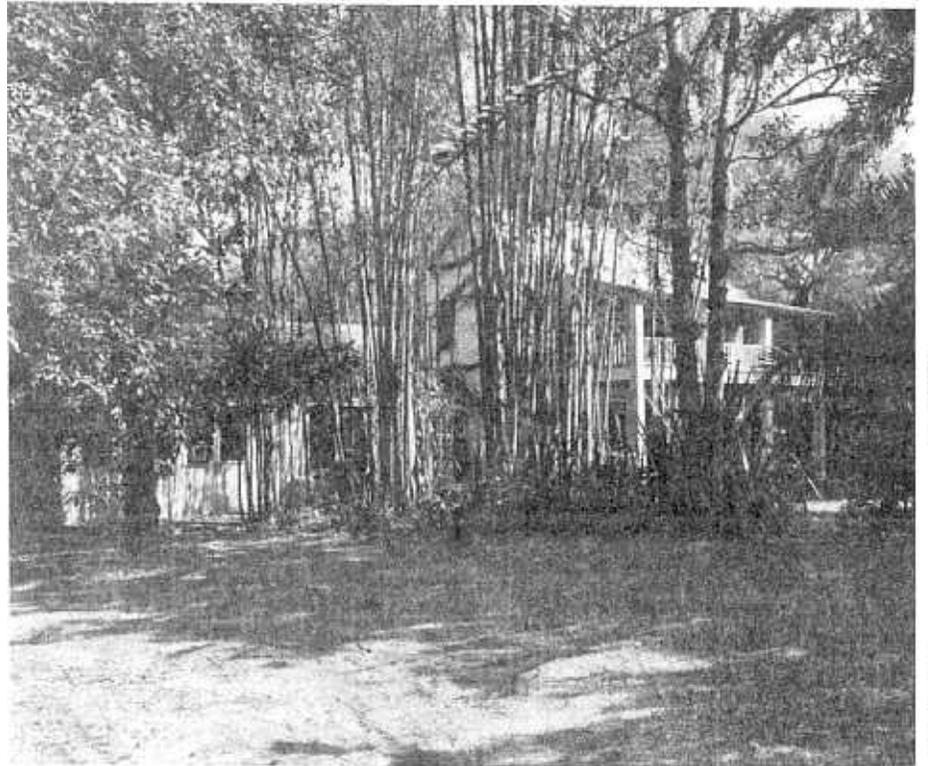


Photo courtesy of Howard Bochiardy

PRESERVING THE PAST

by Peggy Lantz

The remnant of an important turn-of-the-century Florida horticultural activity is prized and preserved in the Central Florida area. The location continues to hold interest for both botanical and architectural reasons.

This is the home and gardens of Dr. Henry Nehrling — a pioneer Florida horticulturist. The origins of the house and gardens are described in the accompanying article about Dr. Nehrling.

From 1933 until 1977, the house and property in Gotha was owned and lived on by Julian E. Nally. During this time Lake Audubon's name was changed to Lake Nally.

The house is still there, though much of the acreage has been divided up and sold off. It is now owned by Howard and Barbara Bochiardy, along with six acres of the original 40-some acres.

Howard Bochiardy is an Orlando architect, and is remodeling and living in the house. Barbara Bochiardy graciously showed me the beautiful home. The drive as I entered is shrouded with bamboo — Nehrling cultivated 150 varieties of palms and bamboo. The original pine floors and cypress walls of the

house have been refinished, and the kitchen has been remodeled and the wiring brought up-to-date. But the old tin shingles are still on the roof, and the back porch and upstairs sleeping porch have the charm of lovely old Florida houses.

We walked through a tangle of bamboo and palm to the lake edge, which has been nearly dried up by the drought. Bromeliads covered the ground under the cedar, red bay, and live oaks. Barbara pointed out and named the many native plants growing there, as well as many of the imported tropical plants still surviving.

But the caladiums and amaryllis for which Nehrling is famous are gone — sold off or stolen by vandals. Barbara can find not a single specimen. She has bought copies of Nehrling's books (*My Garden in Florida*, Vol. I and II, by Dr. Henry Nehrling. Edit. by A.H. Andrews. Publ. in Estero, Florida, 1944 and 1946.) and is trying to locate the native trees and plants Nehrling describes. The magnolias and cedars that he carried on his shoulders from the woods five miles away nearly 100 years ago appear to be the ones we see there now.

She says, "My husband loves the house, and I love the grounds."

“Hammock land is all good land as the hammocks were originally covered and enriched by a dense growth of hardwood trees and gigantic lianas. *Magnolia grandiflora*, Holly, enormous Live Oaks, Maple, Hickories, Sweet Gum and many other forest trees live here in company with tall Cabbage Palmettos. Smilax, Virginia Creeper, Trumpet Vine, and huge Grape Vines reach immense growth.

“Florida is thought of as a land of swamps, but real swamps, consisting of bottomless morasses, are rare. The common type is the Cypress swamp, covered with the Bald Cypress (*Taxodium distichum*) and the Pond Cypress (*T. distichum* var. *imbricarium*). Here we find many plants from the low hammocks. Ferns are abundant, as are Swamp Honeysuckles (Azaleas), Smilax and other moisture loving plants. The old Cypress trees harbor exquisite Air Plants (*Tillandsia*), and the ground is frequently covered with Sphagnum moss, the Partridge Berry (*Mitchella repens*), and a small interesting Fern (*Lorinseria areolata*).”

• Dr. Henry Nehrling



A glimpse of Nehrling's woods and bromeliads

“In both the cultivation, and enjoyment of gardens, is peace, rest, and contentment. Pleasure is not a luxury of life, but one of its necessities, and ornamental Horticulture is one of the truest and most stimulating pleasures in life.”

• Dr. Henry Nehrling



The year was 1886 when he finally came to inspect his new property near Windermere.

Florida was still a wilderness.

“Florida is a great poem of color, light, bird song, and plant life. Tourists and winter residents do not know the real Florida for they never see our summer, which is often the most delightful season of the year in our gardens.

“We have a climate that is conducive to long life and happiness.”

• Dr. Henry Nehrling

He cleared some land and built a small house during the short visits he was able to make, but it was not until 1894 that he actually moved to his new home in Florida, which he called “Palm Cottage Gardens.” It is on the shores of what was then called Lake Audubon. He planted a citrus grove and began collecting his beloved tropical specimens.

In the early 1900s, he replaced the first home he built with a house that he moved over from Lake Olivia. He lived there until the devastating freeze of 1917, which caused him to move to Naples in southwest Florida. He found the soil different there, and more difficult to cultivate. It took a new understanding of the plants to find what would grow in Naples. Sometimes he “longed for Gotha, freezes and all!”

Henry Nehrling died in 1929, leaving a wealth of records and notes and details about his plant treasures.

Dr. Henry Nehrling's writings and notes were edited and compiled by Alfred and Elizabeth Kay, and published by Macmillan Company in 1933, with a preface by Dr. David Fairchild.

Some excerpts from Nehrling's writings, as they appeared in the book by the Kays, are included in this **Palmetto**.

MANATEE SANCTUARY

Remember to send in your contribution in whatever amount to help the Nature Conservancy purchase the islands in Kings Bay in the Crystal River for the manatees. They have until Oct. 15th to raise the money in order to prevent single family house development on the islands. Address: The Nature Conservancy, Crystal River Manatee Sanctuary, P.O. Box 365, Winter Park 32790.