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## Southwestern News, Volume 12 Number 6, October 1950

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# Southwestern News

Number 6

OCTOBER, 1950

Volume XII

## W. D. Bellingrath Honors Southwestern

Selects College For Major Share of Income From Gardens as Means of Fostering Christian Ideals

The magnificent Bellingrath Gardens, outstanding beauty spot of the South, located near Mobile, Alabama, are now blooming for Southwestern. On last February 25, Mr. Walter D. Bellingrath, widely known businessman, churchman, and distinguished philanthropist, of Mobile, recorded the establishment of a foundation, to be known as the Bellingrath-Morse Foundation, which will give to Southwestern forty per cent of any net income to be derived from the Gardens. The other beneficiaries of the Foundation are: Huntington College of Montgomery, Alabama; Stillman College (for Negroes) of Tuscaloosa, Alabama; the Central Presbyterian Church of Mobile; and the St. Francis Street Methodist Church of Mobile. The income designated for the two churches is to be in honor of the parents of Mr. and Mrs. Bellingrath, respectively.

Mr. Bellingrath indicated that he had selected these three colleges as beneficiaries of the Foundation because he wished the youth of the South to be inspired to preserve our American heritage and to be given a "firm and unwavering faith in our almighty and most merciful God." The fact that Southwestern was chosen as a means of fostering American traditions and of strengthening the religious faith of our youth is considered a superlative tribute.

President Rhodes, President-Emeritus Diehl (who has known Mr. Bellingrath for many years), Mr. Sidney W. Farnsworth, and other members of the administration and Board of Directors are much gratified at this high compliment and benefaction. Said President Rhodes, "Southwestern is indeed happy that its ideals of Christian higher education in the best American tradition have received in the provisions of the Bellingrath-Morse Foundation the approval and generous recognition of Mr. Bellingrath. Over the years Mr. Bellingrath, a warm personal friend of Dr. Charles E. Diehl, has encouraged and supported Southwestern in many ways, and it is his hope and expectation that the famous Gardens which bear his name may be put on a basis which will yield in later years a substantial income to the College. 'Mr. Bell,' as he is affectionately known to his close friends, is a leader among those farsighted businessmen who have realized the necessity of adequate support for privately controlled Christian liberal arts education."

The precise terms of the Deed of Trust setting up the Foundation were not disclosed until late summer, and for that reason it has not been possible to give appropriate publicity to this outstanding benefaction. A booklet has now been issued giving details of the Foundation, its powers and responsibilities.

It is not known at present how much annual income may be expected from the Foundation or whether such income will be available in the years just ahead.

### One of the South's Leading Businessmen

Mr. Walter Duncan Bellingrath rose to outstanding success through his own industry and native ability, a type of man in which America has always taken pride. He was born in Atlanta, Georgia, on August 6, 1869, the son of Leonard and Catherine McMillan Bellingrath. During his sixteenth year, he was taught how to telegraph by an agent of the L & N Railroad, and in the following year he was appointed agent and operator for the railroad in Castleberry, Alabama.

After serving as agent for the railroad in Jasper, Florida, he located in Montgomery, Alabama, where he successfully conducted a wholesale merchandise brokerage business until 1903.

During that year he and his brother,

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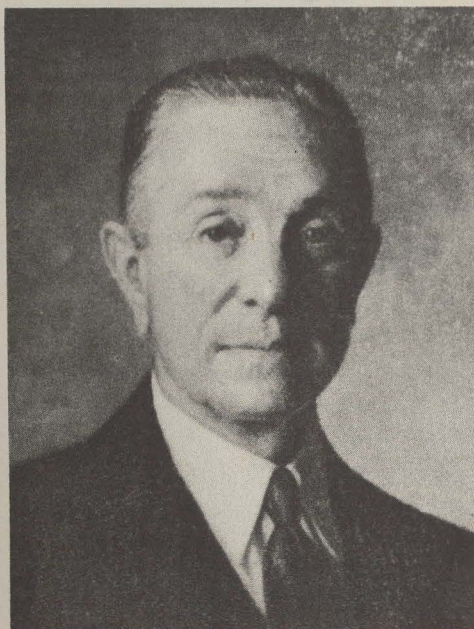
## Bellingrath Gardens Rank With Nation's Finest

No description can convey a just impression of the beauty of the Bellingrath Gardens. Located on the Isle-Aux-Oies River, twenty miles south of Mobile and one mile from Mobile Bay, they comprise six hundred acres of woodland, lawn, and blossom. Thousands of visitors come from far and near to view their splendor every year. For year-round charm they are not surpassed in the country, yet their uniqueness forbids comparison with other famous gardens, such as the DuPont Gardens near Wilmington, Delaware, and the Charleston (South Carolina) Gardens.

As a site for their Gardens, Mr. Bellingrath and the late Mrs. Bellingrath selected a semi-tropical jungle, dominated by aged oaks, bays, pines and magnolias, where flowers, shrubs, and vines grew luxuriantly. It was used as a fishing camp when Mr. Bellingrath acquired it in 1917. But Mrs. Bellingrath, whose love for flowers was surpassingly great, saw in the camp an opportunity to realize a cherished dream. With the aid of the late George B. Rogers, a highly skilled landscape architect, the Bellingraths together planned its details.

The glory of old gardens lies in their mellow charm, as well as in the great size of many flowering plants, which attain their fullest beauty only with great age. For example, azaleas two hundred years old reach great size—a circumference of a hundred feet and a height of twelve to eighteen feet. In full maturity

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Walter D. Bellingrath



Bessie Morse Bellingrath

*Flagstone walks lead through  
ever-changing patterns of bloom -*

*Mr. Bellingrath stands in the court-yard  
of his home in the Gardens.*



*Mirror Lake reflects  
the many colors of  
hundreds of azaleas.*



*The court-yard skillfully blends  
the architecture of home and garden.*

*An archway makes a handsome frame for  
this characteristic picture of "Mr. Bell."*



*Southwestern Singers  
serenade Mr. Bellingrath  
at the fountain during  
their tour in 1949.*

## SOUTHWESTERN RECEIVES HONOR

(Continued from page 1)

the late William A. Bellingrath, acquired the franchise rights for bottling Coca-Cola in Montgomery and Mobile and a considerable surrounding territory. In 1904 Mr. Walter D. Bellingrath moved to Mobile and assumed the management of the Coca-Cola bottling plant there, while his brother took over the Montgomery plant. The business in Mobile has been continued until the present time without a change in management. Many years ago he introduced improved mechanical methods of bottling, which are now in use everywhere, and for which he is given full credit by the industry.

On November 14, 1906, Mr. Bellingrath married Bessie May Morse, daughter of Alice Morrow and Sewell W. Morse of Mobile. This young woman had given distinct evidence of native artistic ability during her early years, ability which her friends and teachers had recognized. Fortunately, these abilities were turned, after her marriage, to the flower gardens at her home in Mobile, which she planned and made beautiful. The present gardens on the Isle-Aux-Oies (Fowl) River, are an extension and consummation of her interest in gardening and are a magnificent monument to her memory.

Mrs. Bellingrath was brought up in the St. Francis Street Methodist Church, but soon after her marriage joined the Central Presbyterian Church, Mobile, of which her husband was a member.

Through the years Mr. Bellingrath has taken an active part in the services of the church, in which he has for many years been an officer.

He has also been active in civic affairs in Mobile, having served as President of the Mobile Chamber of Commerce and the Mobile Community Chest. He has also served with many other civic and charitable organizations of the city and state. At present, he is President of the Mobile Coca-Cola Bottling Company; President of the Lerio Corporation and the Naval Stores Suppliers, Inc.; Presi-

dent of the Mobile Warehousing Company; Vice-President of the Coca-Cola Bottling Company of Frisco City, Alabama; Director of the First National Bank of Mobile; Director of the YMCA; and a member of the Omicron Delta Kappa leadership fraternity of Southwestern at Memphis.

Though now past eighty, Mr. Bellingrath is stronger than most men younger than he by many years. Those who know him best admire his cordial and unassuming manner, his independence, and his sound judgment. He is sympathetic and generous, and above all is a Christian gentleman of unassailable integrity.

## ONE OF NATION'S FINEST GARDENS

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they attain an impressive beauty that younger plants can never equal.

With these facts in mind, the Bellingraths instituted a search of old Southern gardens, and through the years discovered thousands of plants of rare age which they moved to the new home. Every year saw additional plants of extreme age added and the gradual fulfillment of a splendid dream.

In the height of their beauty today, the Bellingrath Gardens offer a magnificent display of a kind not to be found elsewhere because of the presence of so many plants whose age exceeds a hundred years as well as for other reasons. They exhibit a full maturity and a luxuriant beauty which are representative of the Old South.

Every season brings forth new pageants of bloom to the Gardens. The camellias open in October and continue through March, reaching their prime in January and February. Hundreds of varieties of this lovely plant, ranging from the purest white to a deep red, offer a magnificent display perhaps unmatched in any other garden. Some of the plants are eighteen feet in height and well into their second century.

While the camellias are in full flower, the azaleas, for which the Bellingrath

Gardens are most famous, unfold an array of color which *Better Homes and Gardens* has called the "Flaming Drama of the South." From February to April the gorgeous show continues.

In mid-spring the sweet olive (which begins with the azaleas), the dogwood, the double-flowered white spirea, the wisteria, and later the mountain laurel join the parade. In more formal plats, roses add their charm to the show. During May, hydrangea and gardenia come into flower, and in summer the crepe myrtle, oleander, magnolia, hibiscus, and allamanda round out the year of lovely color.

There is infinite variety in the Gardens during every season. With each dozen steps a new vista of beauty opens before the visitor. Here is a formal avenue of hedge and border; there a flagstone walk edged with bloom, leading underneath great oaks draped in gray Spanish moss; there again a rose corner, or a fountain surrounded with blossoming plants and canopied with a luxuriant growth of tree and vine, or a line of blooming shrubs and trees against the blue waters of the Isle-Aux-Oies.

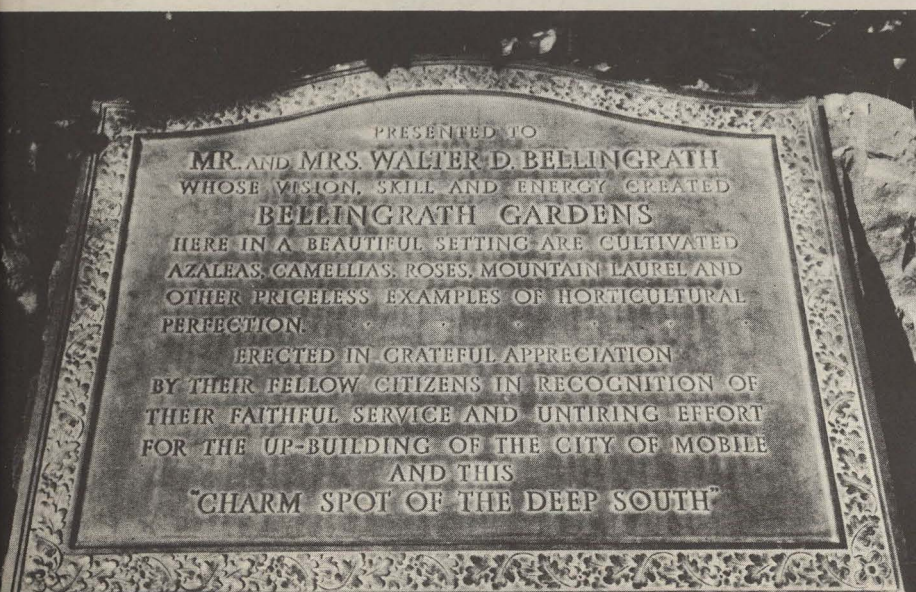
From the time of his entrance into the Gardens the visitor is struck with an almost religious awe at seeing such overwhelming beauty on so vast a scale.

Set in the Gardens and forming a part of them is the spacious Bellingrath home, built of old hand-pressed, slave-made brick and adorned with Southern grillwork from a once-famous Mobile inn. This iron lace is reminiscent of the golden days of Spanish and French settlers along the Gulf Coast. The home is tastefully furnished in rich and rare antiques gathered from many lands. Portraits of Mr. and Mrs. Bellingrath are hung in the spacious living room. The numerous guest rooms give evidence of a hospitality which has delighted many guests of the Bellingraths.

Elmer T. Peterson wrote in *Better Homes and Gardens*: "Bellingrath Gardens are authoritatively listed near the top among the most beautiful gardens in the United States, and when you have seen them you will not doubt."

## SOUTHWESTERN NEWS • MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE

Entered as second-class matter Oct. 28, 1938, at the post office at Memphis, Tenn. under the act of Aug. 24, 1912. Published bi-monthly by the College. Return Postage Guaranteed.



Walter Duncan Bellingrath  
Doctor of Humanities