

EDISON  
and  
FORD  
winter  
ESTATES

HOMES · GARDENS · MUSEUM  
LABORATORY



CELEBRATE MOTHER'S DAY WITH FLOWERS ON MAY 8

MEMBER MAGAZINE  
MAY 2022



EDISON  
and  
FORD  
winter  
ESTATES

2350 McGregor Boulevard  
Fort Myers, FL 33901  
239.334.7419  
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### CONNECT WITH US



## Celebrate Mother's Day

**As spring turns into summer, we celebrate the important women in our lives, especially our mothers. In honor of all mothers, we'll have a pop-up flower shop on site on Mother's Day, May 8, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.**

Floral Designer and winner of Art in Bloom 2022, Anita Singh in collaboration with Floral Artistry of Sanibel and Edison and Ford Winter Estates will have flowers available for sale. Visitors can select fresh-cut flowers and make their own bouquets on site or choose from our designer's choice of floral arrangements. An admission ticket is not required to visit the flower shop. Anyone wanting to pre-order flowers can contact Anita at [asingh@edisonford.org](mailto:asingh@edisonford.org).



# MAY

## EVENTS AND PROGRAMS AT A GLANCE:

*More details on each event and program are included in the following pages and on the website*

[EdisonFord.org](http://EdisonFord.org)

**May 4, 11, 18, 25**

Yoga by the River

**May 8**

Mother's Day Pop-up Flower Shop

**May 10**

Digital Discussion (Civil War Era Baseball)

**May 14**

Garden Talk

**Through May 29**

Sustainable Conceptions Art Exhibit

**Through May 29**

Art in the Gardens Exhibit

### GENERAL HOURS

Open Daily  
9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

...

### ADMISSION

#### Guided Tour:

Edison Ford Members: \$5

Adults: \$30

Teens: (ages 13-19) \$25

Children: (ages 6-12) \$18

Children: (ages 5 and under) FREE

#### Self-Guided Tour:

Edison Ford Members: FREE

Adults: \$25

Teens: (ages 13-19) \$20

Children: (ages 6-12) \$15

Children: (ages 5 and under) FREE

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#### ON THE COVER:

In celebration of Mother's Day, the cover this month is devoted to Mina Edison who was a mother of six, seen here standing on the little bridge that led to the dock along the Caloosahatchee (circa 1930).



## ART IN THE GARDENS EXHIBIT

NOW THROUGH  
MAY 29

Students from local schools will participate in this 14th annual art exhibit. Educators from participating schools will receive a 30" X 30" five-pointed star that students can paint or decorate with recyclable materials. Each school's star will be on display in the gardens outside the museum.



## Edison Ford Robotics Team "ASSEMBLY REQUIRED" Competes at World Festival

The Edison and Ford Winter Estates FIRST LEGO league division robotics team, "Assembly Required," competed in the State Championship on April 2 in Niceville, Florida and won the Innovative Project Award. The team advanced to the world festival in Houston, Texas. Watch the Edison Ford Facebook page to see how they did!

**THANK YOU** to our major sponsors for making the trip to Texas possible: Entech, Graveyard Shift Screen Printing, Ronin Riding Club of Southwest Florida, the Scientists' Society of Southwest Florida and TLC Engineering Solutions. Also, thank you to all the private donors!



# INVENTOR'S SUMMER CAMP

**JOIN US** as science and history come alive in our living laboratory! For students in grades K-2 and 3-5. No experience is needed. Visit the website for health, safety and scholarship information. Registration is required; sign up on the website at [EdisonFord.org](http://EdisonFord.org).

## ROBOT ROUND UP • June 6-10 **WAITING LIST**

Students will learn the principles of robotics in this high-tech camp. They will design, build, and code robots as they tackle daily challenges. No experience is required in this crash course to robotic engineering.

## ELECTRIC EXPLORERS (grades 3-5) • JUNE 13-17

Campers will walk in the footsteps of Edison and Ford as they take a deep-dive into the world of electricity. They will learn the history of electricity, how to make circuits, and how to harness the power of the electron.

## JUNIOR DESIGNERS (grades K-2) • JUNE 13-17 **WAITING LIST**

In Junior Designers, art meets design for a creative week of camp. Campers will explore the basics of 3D printing and the fundamentals of art as their designs take shape.

## EAGER ENGINEERS • JUNE 20-24

Daily engineering challenges are presented in this fast-paced camp. Campers will learn and use the engineering design process to work through problems.

## RENEWABLE ENERGY (grades K-2) • JUNE 27-JULY 1 **WAITING LIST**

This camp is brand new and will explore the renewable power sources behind balloon cars, wind-powered vehicles, circuits powered by solar panels, and paddle boats powered by rubber bands. Hands-on activities related to hydropower and other forms of renewable energy will also be included.

## CODE CAMP (grades 3-5) • JUNE 27-JULY 1 **WAITING LIST**

Campers will learn the fundamentals of computer science with a focus on the logical concepts that are found in all coding environments. They will design a game or craft an animation in this week of code camp.

## ART SMARTS • JULY 5-8 **WAITING LIST (K-2)**

Students will fuse imagination with science and design to create masterpieces in this four-day camp. They will learn about the fundamentals of art along with the science that makes it work.

## LIVING LABORATORY • JULY 11-15

Campers will explore biology, ecology, and the great outdoors of our 21-acre site, as they uncover the scientific investigations of Thomas Edison and Henry Ford here in Southwest Florida.

## SPACE & ROCKETS • JULY 18-22 **WAITING LIST**

This camp teaches students how to survey the solar system and launch a rocket. Campers will explore space science and its history, as well as the four-forces of flight as they launch a water-powered rocket hundreds of feet into the sky.

## LEGO CREATORS • JULY 25-29 **WAITING LIST**

Students will use their imagination and skill to conquer daily building challenges. They will apply knowledge and use LEGOs to tackle engineering challenges, such as bridge building and creating balloon-powered LEGO cars.

## CURIOUS CHEMISTRY • AUGUST 1-5 **WAITING LIST (K-2)**

Campers will learn about the hidden world of chemistry as they discover the building blocks of all things. Chemical reactions, measurements, and hands-on fun are the focus of this camp! Each camper will take part in experiments that fizz, bang, pop, and inspire curiosity.

**COST (5-day camp): members: \$200, non-members: \$230. (4-day camp): members \$160, non-members: \$185.**

## INVENTOR'S SUMMER CAMP SPONSORED BY:





# MADELEINE EDISON SLOANE

By Alexandria Edwards

Affectionately nicknamed “Toots” by her relatives, Madeleine Edison Sloane was born on May 31, 1888, and was the only daughter of Thomas and Mina Edison. She attended Miss Henning’s Kindergarten school in Glenmont, New Jersey, and completed her early education at the Oak Place School. Oak Place was a small girls’ preparatory school run by two of Madeleine’s aunts. To aid the children’s success in school, Thomas and Mina Edison administered pop-quizzes during breakfast based on the children’s homework.

Besides attending school, the Edison’s valued research and diligent reading as a solid form of education. The world-famous inventor encouraged his children to help him go through volumes of science reference books in the upstairs living room at Glenmont and make notations to aid his laboratory work. There were also five newspapers in the house that the family could read, or anything written by Shakespeare, Charles Lamb, or Tennyson was recommended by Thomas Edison, which Mina often read to the children before dinner. During her free time, Madeleine studied French and read “Little Women.”

Starting in 1885, the Edison family wintered at their Fort Myers estate, Seminole Lodge, from January to March through 1931, the year Edison passed away. When the Edison’s were away from their Glenmont estate in New Jersey, Mina often worried about her children missing several weeks of school. Mina spoke to her sister, Grace (the school administrator) and she approved a class trip to

Florida for Madeleine and four other girls in 1906. Since the Edison’s Fort Myers home, was too small to house everyone, the teacher and the girls stayed at the Fort Myers hotel; the remainder of the Edison family stayed at Seminole Lodge. Madeleine’s guests wrote glowing letters about their experiences in Southwest Florida and sent them to Mina’s house in Ohio. Classroom sessions were held in a variety of locations, including the Fort Myers Hotel, the end of the Edison pier, and on the Menge brothers’ ships.



*Madeleine, Charles and Theodore Edison  
July 4th parade circa 1902*

During their time at the Edison’s estate, Mr. Edison thought it would be fun to host a five-day steamship trip up the Caloosahatchee River. Mrs. Edison gave the girls a birding lesson while pointing out a Curlew, an Everglades Kite, and a Turkey Vulture that they saw along the way. After crossing Lake Flint and Lake Hicpochee, they reached

Okeechobee. According to the Fort Myers Press, the girls “seemed subdued by the indescribable feeling that comes over one, unlike that felt at sea, to find yourself out of sight of land on the Okeechobee.” When the group returned to Seminole Lodge, they sang a song to honor Captain Menge, who reportedly blushed profusely.

In the fall of that year, Madeleine began her studies at Bryn Mawr, a liberal arts college in Pennsylvania. She found success in her English and drama classes that she shared with two freshmen, Mary Worthington and Peggy James. Peggy’s father, William James, wrote the text, “Principles of Psychology,” an integral part of



circa 1893



circa 1908



circa 1925

*Madeleine Edison at different ages*

the undergraduate syllabus. When Madeleine was not attending class, she enjoyed her time as a member of the Glee Club. After her sophomore year, Madeline decided to conclude her college career and return to Glenmont. When she returned home from school, Madeleine spent time socializing with individuals at galas and attended football games in Hoboken with her boyfriend, John Eyre Sloane.

She continued to keep in contact with her college acquaintance, Peggy James and invited her to Seminole Lodge after her father passed away. Peggy's spirits lifted when she saw the white walls, red roof, wide porches and French windows of Seminole Lodge. The group took a fishing cruise up the Caloosahatchee on the steamer, "Suwanee," and toured Lake Okeechobee and the Everglades. Peggy was amazed by the large alligators that came up to the side of the boat and the spectacular orchids that were close enough to touch. At night, through her cabin, she heard the "Whippoorwills and Herons and Bitterns and owls calling." Madeline and her friends stayed at the Gilliland House, which Edison purchased in 1906 and turned into his guest house. According to Mina, they remained independent of everyone else except during mealtime.

At the time, Madeleine was 23, but still exhibited a fun sense of humor when she was with her friends. That humor can be seen in an unsigned, undated document that lists her rules for guests at Seminole Lodge. These rules included:

- Don't cabbage unto yourself all the fish poles.
- Don't ask Madeleine what she is writing – if its letters, she won't want you to know – if its literary plights you won't want to know.
- Don't ask her why she writes so many letters. She does it out of spite.
- Whatever happens don't ask why, ten to one none of the family could tell you.
- If you perceive that we need someone with a sane understanding to manage us, look the other way. On our account try to act as the balance wheel. The family all think it's great to be crazy.
- Don't kill the black snakes under the pool. They are there for a purpose.
- Don't make the mistake of thinking you'd like to catch a tarpon. You wouldn't. Mother and Father are both after one with blood in their eye, and there are just four tarpon poles.





*Madeleine Edison (seated far left) and group sitting by the Seminole Lodge fountain circa 1907*

- If you don't think Seminole Lodge is the loveliest spot you've ever wore your rubbers in, don't let that on to Father.
- Don't pick the flowers off the century plants. We might not be there to see them bloom again.
- Don't fail to retire to your room during each part of the day, so that the family may squabble without embarrassment.
- When going on a three-day cruise, don't discover when you are at the far end of the dock that you left your toothbrush in the house. In a case like this, the best thing to do is leave your toothbrush behind but if you are obstinate, get Father to take a nap in the boat and then run for the shore.
- Don't take any conveyance to the village without making the rounds of the entire family to see if you can't do some errand for them.
- Don't stop Madeleine if you see her start anywhere violently alone, she's only trying to work out her disposition.
- Don't capsize in the sailboat if you can help it. Remember there isn't any man to rescue you in 750 miles – and besides there are sharks.
- Don't tell us the perfume of the river hyacinths reminds you of the Jersey meadows by moonlight.
- Don't hesitate to say you are bored.
- Don't hesitate to say you are enjoying yourself.
- Don't ask us anything about palm beach. We don't want to know.

Madeleine and John Erye Sloane were married in the drawing room at the Edison's Glenmont estate on June 17, 1914. Henry A. Brann, director of the St. Agnes' Catholic Church in New York performed the ceremony, which was only attended by relatives and a few friends. They lived for a year in a fourth-floor apartment on 8th street in New York City, across from the Brevoort Hotel, a famed Bohemian gathering place. They later moved to Plainfield, New Jersey, where John's family had a thriving biplane factory. John and Madeleine had four sons, who were Thomas Edison's only grandchildren. Today, there are no direct descendants of Thomas Edison carrying his family name.

During World War II, Madeleine donated much of her time to the New Jersey Red Cross blood drives, serving as the wartime chapter chairmen. She managed more than 1,000



volunteers and a motor pool of 28 vehicles that served her unit. During the four years Madeline ran the operations at the Red Cross, members of the organization packaged 3.5 million sterile surgical dressings and collected 8,146 pints of blood for soldiers who were wounded during the war. When the government committees and board stalled on making decisions to guide the Red Cross, Madeleine stepped in and provided direction for all tasks. As a result of her dedication, perseverance and hard work, Mrs. Sloane was referred to as the Edison version of “Rosie the Riveter.”

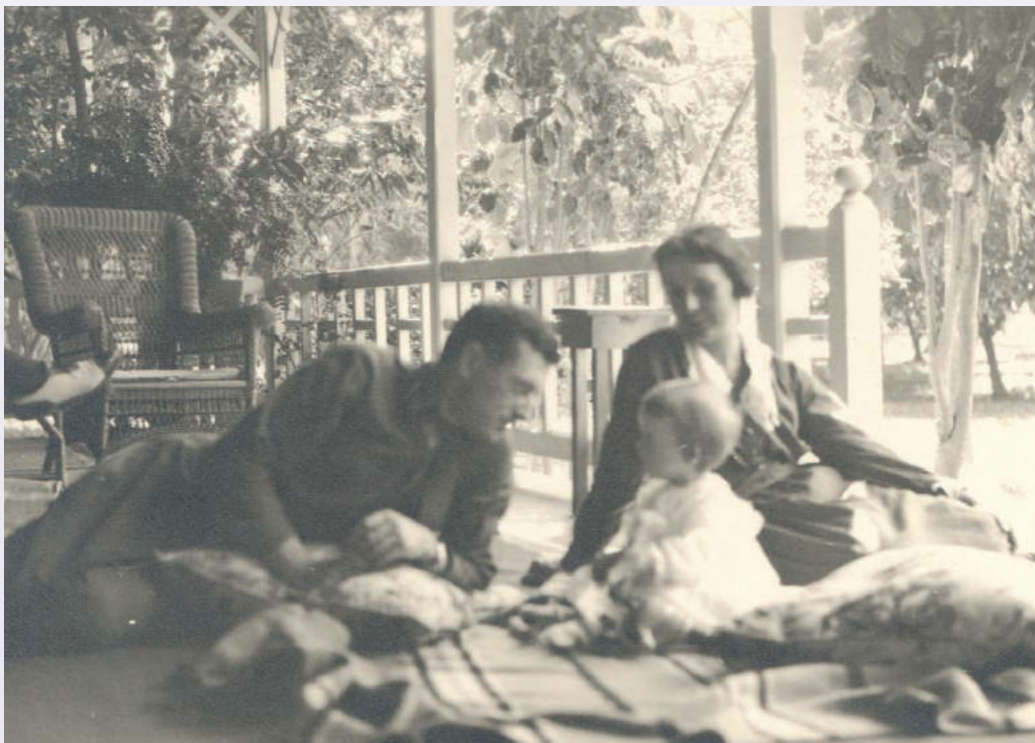
Shortly after the war ended, Madeline and her mother, Mina, focused on preserving Edison’s legacy and bringing his story to life. Both of them decided to open the house he was born in, located in Milan, Ohio, to the public as a memorial and museum. Mrs. Sloane served as the museum’s first director and focused on restoring the home to its 19th century appearance, the time period Edison grew up there. The museum opened on the centennial of Edison’s birth in 1947. The Museum was designated as a National Historic Landmark on September 16, 1965. At the dedication ceremony, Madeleine stated,

“this museum should be more than just a memorial ... we especially want children to get the inspiration that a true picture of him should provide – a better sense of values and to assure them that such qualities as fortitude, industry and independence of thought are still worthwhile and should not vanish from the earth.”

In 1950, Madeleine Edison Sloane was the first woman elected to the Board of Directors for the Western Union Telegraph Company. President, Walter P. Marshall’s hope was that her contribution would help recognize woman’s viewpoints and broaden interests. As a young man, Mrs. Sloane’s father, Thomas Edison, worked for Western Union as a telegrapher. He developed an improved stock and commodity ticket with telegraph equipment, which enabled him to fund his first laboratory. Mrs. Sloane was also a trustee of the Newark Museum and a member of the board for the Salvation Army in West Orange, New Jersey.

**Today, visitors can learn more about Madeleine and Edison’s other children during tours of the site and in special presentations held in the 15,000-square-foot museum on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 11 a.m.**

*Sloanes on porch*





**Holly Shaffer, Program Manager, giving a presentation in the Edison Ford Museum.**

## Tours and Programs

Historian-led guided tours and self-guided tours of the site are offered daily. Through the app, narration is available in English, French, German, and Spanish. A web-based version is also available, which does not require downloading the app. Site maps are available in English, French, German, Spanish and Chinese.

On Tuesdays and Thursdays at 11 a.m., special presentations are offered in the museum.

Guided tours in German are available on Wednesdays at 11 a.m.  
**Cost:** \$30 per person



**James Moss, Automotive Curator giving a tour in garage at Ford Home.**

## Automotive Tour

**MONDAYS • 10:30 A.M.**

Join Automotive Curator James Moss, for a new perspective on the evolution of the automobile. Learn about production and how to operate a vehicle. From the Model T to the Model A, gasoline to electric, the Ford Motor Company and beyond, the Automotive Tour promises to offer a new way to connect with one of our most popular collections. Reservations are not required for this tour.

**Cost:** Edison Ford Members: \$15; non-members: Adults \$40, Teens (13-19) \$30, Children (6-12) \$16.



**Matt Andres, Registrar giving a tour inside Edison's Guest House.**

## Inside-the-Homes Tours

**TUESDAYS • 11:00 A.M.** (first come, first served)

**THURSDAYS • 11:00 A.M.** (pre-registration required)

This tour is a unique opportunity to take a sneak peek inside normally-closed areas of Thomas Edison's "Seminole Lodge" and Henry Ford's "The Mangoes." Approximate tour time is 90 minutes to two hours. (Allow additional time to view the museum, laboratory, and gardens.)

Limited reservations available for this tour, pre-registration required by calling **239-335-3674**. Tours on Tuesdays offered on a first-come, first served basis.

**Cost:** Edison Ford members: free (one time); non-members: Adults \$50, Teens (13-19) \$35, Children (6-12) \$20.





Karen Maxwell, Horticultural Specialist giving a garden tour.

## Guided Garden Tour

**Available by appointment for groups of 5 or more.**

The Edison and Ford Winter Estates botanical gardens contain more than 1,700 plants from six continents including flowering plants and trees, fruit trees, palms, bamboo, cycads, vines, roses, orchids, and Florida natives. On this tour, an experienced horticulturist leads visitors through the 20-acre site and highlights the different types of plants and their importance to the Edison and Ford families. Visitors will see the Moonlight Garden, many rare plants and get to go behind-the-scenes in the propagating nursery. Some of the plants in the gardens are available for sale in the on-site Garden Shoppe. Call today to book your tour 239-334-7419.

**Cost:** \$40 per person.

## Private Guided Tour

**Available By Appointment for groups with a maximum of 15 people.**

To accommodate families or small business groups, private guided tours are now available. These tours are for small groups and ensure that families will not be on a tour with other tourists. Masks are recommended on guided tours. Private tours should be reserved at least 48 hours in advance. During a private tour, visitors will see the historic winter homes of Thomas Edison and Henry Ford, the caretaker's houses, swimming pool complex, Edison's study, the Moonlight Garden, and more than 20 acres of botanical gardens. After the tour, visitors may take extra time to stroll the gardens, museum and botanic research laboratory at their own pace.

**Cost:** \$375 per group.



## DIGITAL DISCUSSION: BASEBALL DURING THE CIVIL WAR

MAY 10 • 10:30 a.m.

According to Thomas Edison, "baseball is the greatest of American games." Edison was a teen during the Civil War. Learn about his favorite game, how it was played during the time of the Civil War, and how it affected the soldiers. Join Program Manager, Holly Shaffer for this Free Digital Discussion. **Registration is required at [EdisonFord.org](https://EdisonFord.org)**



## YOGA BY THE RIVER

EVERY WEDNESDAY • 10-11 A.M.



Yoga offers us a deeper connection to our inner self, nature and to the community. This one-hour yoga class allows you to step away from all the 21st century gadgets and focus on the moment. Yoga helps to recharge the body, mind, and spirit. Class will be held in the River Pavilion during the summer months. All skill levels welcome. The class is taught by Bonnie D'Angelo, a certified yoga instructor. Bonnie started her journey as a yoga teacher to further support her own spiritual growth. She is RYT200 certified with Yoga Alliance and working toward RYT300. She is certified in Reiki 1 and Reiki 2 and will continue the path toward Reiki Master & Energy Worker.

**Cost:** Edison Ford members: \$15; non-members: \$20 per class (Tickets may be purchased online or at the ticket counter). **Bring a yoga mat, water and towel.** Admission to the site is not included.

## SUSTAINABLE CONCEPTIONS ART EXHIBIT NOW THROUGH MAY 29

While the Green Movement was not popular during their lifetimes, Edison and Ford both recognized the importance of recycling and reusing materials. This exhibit showcases art inspired by Edison and Ford's efforts to reuse products and their abilities to work toward a sustainable future. Artwork will be on display in the Edison Caretaker's House through May 29. **Included with general admission.**





## May Book of the Month:

# America 1908

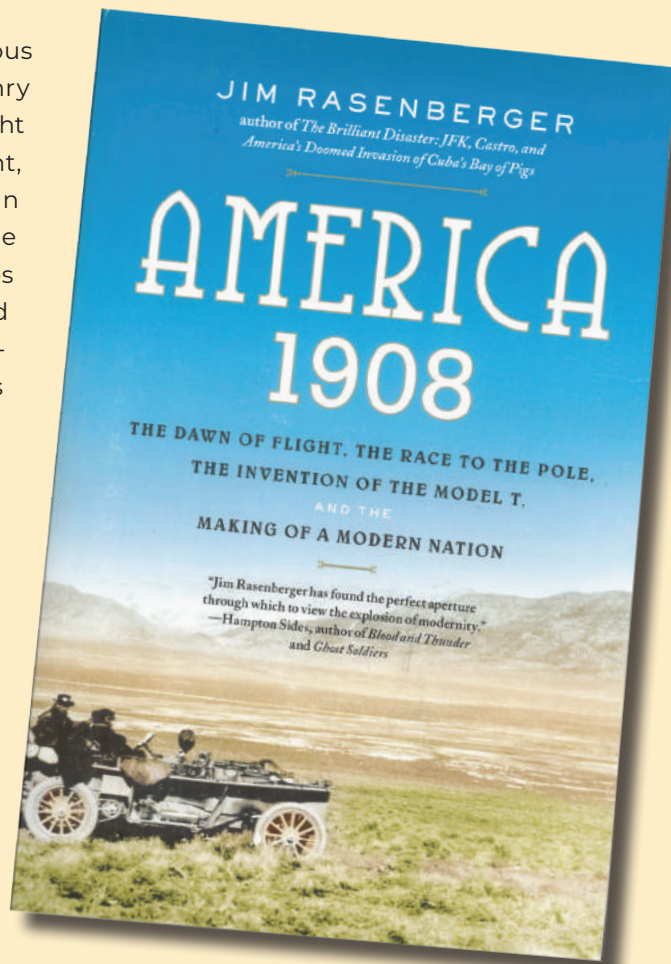
## The Dawn of Flight. The Race to the Pole. The Invention of the Model T and the Making of a Modern Nation

By Jim Rasenberger

A fascinating look at the momentous year of 1908. It was the year Henry Ford released the Model T, the Wright Brothers mastered the art of flight, Teddy Roosevelt sent American naval warships around the globe, the Chicago Cubs won the World Series (the next one would be in 2016), and six automobiles set out on a 20,000-mile race from New York City to Paris via the Bering Strait.

This book will engross and entertain readers as they discover a time when the country was full of hope and optimism and believed that the future would be better than the past.

**Buy a copy in the museum store or have one shipped by calling 239-335-3661. Members receive 10% off the purchase price.**



# THE CALADIUM JOURNEY

By Karen Maxwell, Horticultural Specialist

The month of May heralds the approach of summer gardens in Southwest Florida, with unrelenting heat and humidity that can tucker the most zealous of our lot; however, there is just one more thing to plant! Caladiums!



*Dr. Henry Nehrling*

Whether you are a new or salty and seasoned Florida gardener, these beautiful foliage plants belong in your garden, in a pot, on your balcony, or even on your kitchen table. Before expounding on the virtues of caladiums, the story of their introduction to the gardens of Thomas and Mina Edison is, in and of itself, an interesting tale of adventure, perseverance, triumph and failure.

The Edisons employed a host of gardeners, some simple caretakers, others renowned horticulturists, and one in particular, Dr. Henry Nehrling, a highly educated Wisconsin native of German descent was blessed with an uncanny knack for tropical plants. He was known as the Audubon of Wisconsin for writing three encyclopedias of birds, all in German. The most famous encyclopedia being "Our Native Birds of Song," was two volumes and was published in 1893. Always advocating for the value of birds in the garden as natural pest control, surely, Mina Edison who also loved birds, found this man most intriguing.

Dr. Nehrling purchased 40 acres in Gotha, Florida, deep within the so-called Orange Belt in 1886. He established a Palm Cottage Garden and proceeded to collect and

## GARDEN TALK: BULBARAMA

**SATURDAY, MAY 14 • 10 A.M.**

Learn about the different bulbs that can be grown here in Southwest Florida and how to add them to your garden.

**Cost:** \$10 for Edison Ford members; \$15 for non-members  
Purchase tickets at the door.







raise tropical plants, many samples of which were sent to him by the greatest plant hunter of them all – Dr. David Fairchild. After seven years of living a quiet, probably lonely botanist existence, where shade houses were the most significant buildings to be found in this newly settled area, Dr. Nehrling must have been most anxious to make a trip to Chicago in 1893 to attend the Chicago Columbia Exposition (Chicago World's Fair). Here he would mingle with the intelligentsia of his time: Edison, Tesla, Mark Twain, Scott Joplin; and be introduced to that great ball-game staple, the hot dog which also made its debut at the most famous event in the White City while the world was seeing Thomas Edison's first movie!

In the International Building, the Brazil Exhibit included a fine collection of exotic foliage plants being shown by a transplanted German, Adolph Lietze, now living deep in the Amazon. Nehrling purchased the entire exhibit and returned to Gotha with all eight varieties of the exhibited caladiums. These colorful tropical plants, native to the rainforest floor of the Amazon, in the state of Pará, became an important economic product when Nehrling opened the doors of his Palm Cottage Gardens, to the public. He wrote how visitors overlooked all of his other plants when his 2,000 varieties of caladiums were in full leaf, some with "leaves a full two feet in diameter and big enough to serve as an umbrella!"

Sadly, the freeze of 1917 would just about ruin Nehrling, killing much of his tropical plant collection. He abandoned the property and set out to find a property with more hospitable weather for growing tropical plants. Today, the recently formed Nehrling Foundation is well underway in its restoration efforts of Florida's first botanical garden in Gotha.

Broke and faced with starting over at the age of 64, Nehrling decided Miami was too built up and negotiated with R. Halderman, a real estate developer who offered 13 acres of property and the financial assistance. With that, Nehrling was back in business and wrote that "once again I'm a pioneer in the wilderness." In a short time, Nehrling amassed a vast collection of tropical plant species without care or knowledge as to their invasive characteristics upon the virgin Florida landscape of Southwest Florida. Dubbed his "Garden of Solitude," Nehrling's trials and efforts at his new Naples outpost become the basis for his detailed gardening articles published from 1922-1929 in the American Eagle, the widely read publication of the Koreshan Unity, in Estero.

Nehrling visited Estero frequently and marketed his beautiful caladiums at the Koreshan and Fort Myers flower shows. Books dedicated to South Florida

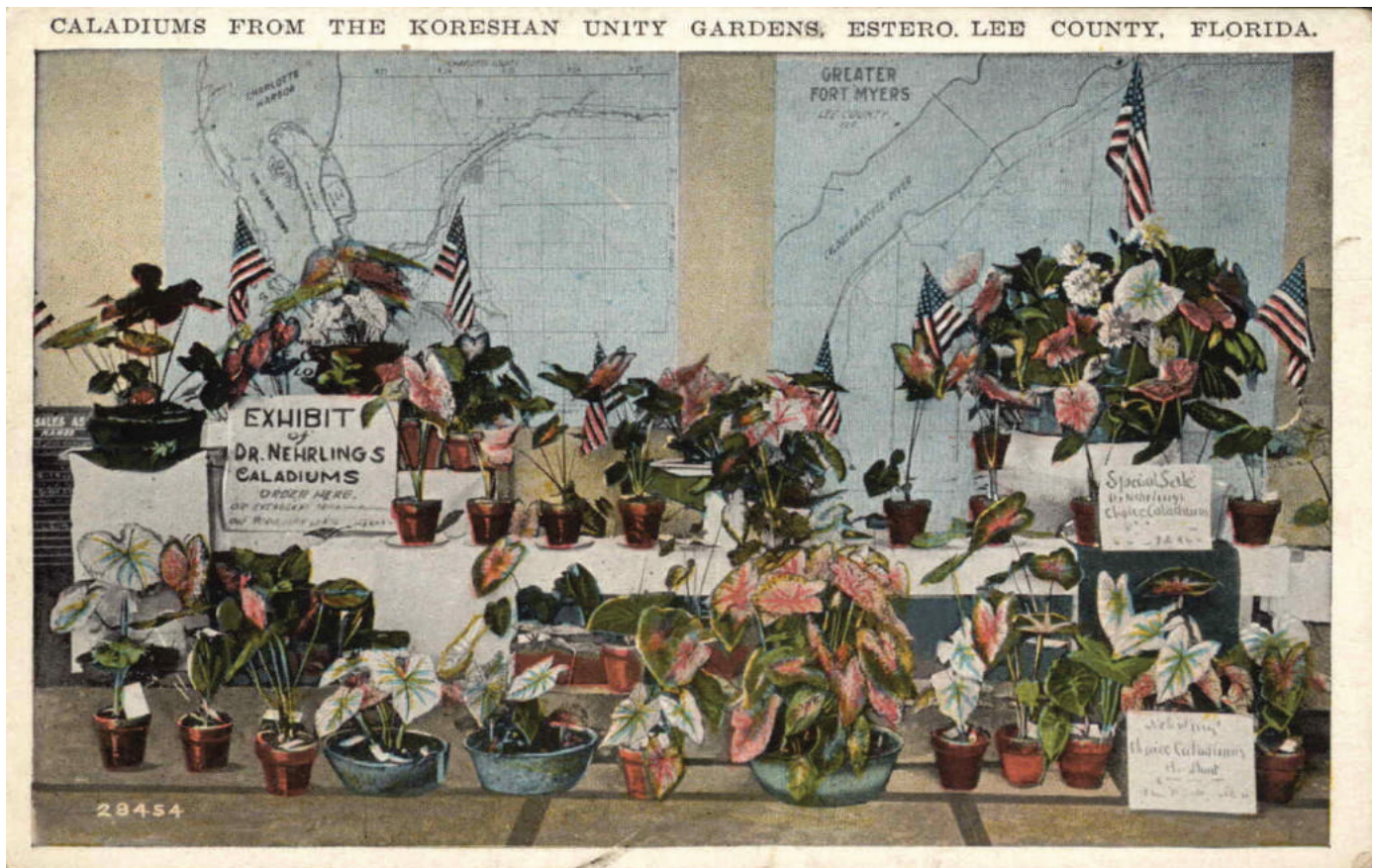
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gardening did not become available until the mid-1930s, and this would have been after the gardens of Thomas and Mina Edison would have been fairly mature. As a result, the Edisons often traveled from Fort Myers to visit gardens and nurseries, in search of great plant material and they most certainly would have been familiar with Nehrling's botanical writings in the *American Eagle*. As the Edisons developed their Fort Myers gardens during the 1920s, we know that Mina adopted many of the Arts & Crafts garden hallmarks (the Moonlight Garden) which included bringing color to the garden with foliage plants and not relying solely on flowering plants and became enamored with the extensive use of crotons and caladiums at the Koreshan compound in Estero.

An earlier gardener at the Edison estate was Ewald Stulpner, also a German educated horticulturist, from whom we inherited excellent notes and details about plantings and purchases for the property (he also assisted the Koreshans in Estero). By the mid-1920s Dr. Nehrling's caladium business was a thriving enterprise

once again only to be pummeled by a hurricane in 1926. To this day, it is unclear how some people who supposedly came to help Dr. Nehrling clean up after the hurricane, made off with truckloads of plants, including most of his remaining caladiums which re-surfaced in Highland County, Florida. Today, Highland County is the center of Florida's \$20 million caladium agri-conomy and 95% of the world's caladiums are grown in Florida to be shipped around the world.

In 1928, Thomas Edison hired Dr. Nehrling to consult and advise on gardening matters and he introduced a number of fruit trees to the Fort Myers property, as well as created Orchid Lane by mounting a collection of orchids and bromeliads to trees to the delight of Mina Edison. Though Edison and Nehrling were 81 and 74 respectively, a visitor to the Estate in March of 1928 commented that the two "bounded out of the laboratory and raced across the grass to look at a plant, moving as rapidly as boys of 20." Nehrling was very helpful to the Edisons and spoke highly of Mina's gardens, though he







didn't mince criticism of plants that he believed would fail in the Florida humidity, such as her Madonna Lilies. In addressing the State Federation of Garden Clubs in Miami in March of 1929, he proudly stated that "Mrs. Edison has extended ornamental plantings along the banks of the Caloosahatchee."

In 1929, Thomas and Mina visited Nehrling at his Naples Gardens and Edison marveled at Nehrling's collection of 100+ species of Ficus – no doubt the source of many of the original Ficus plantings here at Edison Ford. Shortly thereafter, Nehrling passed away, in debt once more and his property was foreclosed only to become the site of "Jungle Larry's Caribbean Gardens." Some of our readers may be familiar with the location today – there are two small brass plaques commemorating the work of Dr. Nehrling, deep inside the Naples Zoo.

Thomas Edison passed away in 1931, shortly after Dr. Nehrling passed. Mina Edison spent some time in deep mourning, not returning to her Fort Myers home until 1933. At this time, she began in earnest to plant the



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*Mural in Lake Placid, Florida*

Moonlight Garden, though there is no evidence she ever used the plant list put forward by Ellen Biddle Shipman because they were predominantly temperate plants. Mina consulted with two nurserymen, a Mr. Helms who owned Royal Palm Nursery in Oneco (outside of Bradenton) and she received a planting list for the Moonlight Garden that included podocarpus, ixora and azaleas. Somewhat unsure of these plants, she ran his list by nurseryman Albert Herman, manager of the Ornamental Nursery in Fort Myers who approved Mr. Helm's suggestions and also added "he left you some fancy leaf caladium bulbs to try."

Today, Edison and Ford Winter Estates plants dozens and dozens of caladium tubers each season. As a tropical tuber, caladiums can be planted in our Zone 10 all year, but they will sit quietly until both the air temperature and soil temperature are a minimum temperature of 65 degrees. Below that, they will remain dormant and if planted too early, in a garden with frequent watering, one runs the risk of rotting these tubers.

Without a doubt, caladiums are one of the easiest plants to include in your summer garden. They come in a wide assortment of colors: white, greens, pinks, reds and countless combinations thereof. Most spectacular when planted en-masse, just lay your tubers out where you want a color riot in a shady part of the garden. Cover with 4" of good compost, water and voila! If you plant now, as described, your caladium palette will fill your garden within five weeks! Keep good compost in your soil, keep the soil moist and caladiums will last through December. Do not let them dry out, as that will kill the foliage.

Most fancy leaf caladiums (the tall, heart shaped leaves) prefer 60% shade or more and all of the white varieties require 100% shade – a great way to liven up a dark corner! Lance leaf, also called dwarf species can often take some morning sun. Because they are shallow growers, feel free to plant caladiums under or around any trees in your gardens – they will not compete. The caladium growers of Highlands County are more than happy to match the correct variety to any garden.

Caladiums are just about pest free and when planted en-mass, they do a great job of crowding out the weeds! Plant enough to enjoy cutting and including them in floral arrangements. After cutting your stems in the morning, allow caladiums to rest and recover for 24 hours before using them in floral design. Just be sure never to put them in the refrigerator – nothing below 65 degrees. Can't get enough? Continue your Caladium journey with a trip to Lake Placid, the Town of Murals, in the center of the caladium industry, or visit during their annual Caladium Festival where one can tour the fields – this year marks their 31st annual festival (July 29-31, 2022).



# Rare Orchids Donated

At the “**Grow Fort Myers**” event, Robert Riefer with the University of Florida, IFAS presented several rare Florida native orchids to Mike Flanders, the Edison and Ford Winter Estates CEO. The orchids donated include the *Trichocentrum undulatum* (Spotted Mule Ear), *Vanilla dilloniana* (Leafless Orchid), and *Oncidium ensatum* (Dancing Lady). These orchids are now part of the estates collection in conjunction with the Million Orchid Project to propagate and conserve these endangered species.



*Robert Riefer of UF IFAS (on right) presents *Oncidium ensatum* and *Trichocentrum undulatum* orchids to Mike Flanders, EFWE CEO.*



*Robert Riefer with UF IFAS holding a cutting of rare *Vanilla dilloniana* orchid.*



*UF IFAS team: Shawn Cannon, USAF; Assistant Professor Dr. Ramadas Kanissery; Lucas Costa, Precision Agriculture Department (IFAS); Robert Riefer, Biological Scientist I, Weed Science; Vitor Gontijo, Precision Agriculture Department (IFAS); Mike Flanders (EFWE CEO), and Karen Maxwell (EFWE Horticultural Specialist).*





Butterfly Garden

If you haven't been to the **GARDEN SHOPPE** in a while, stop by to see what's new! The area has been expanded to offer even more plants and a new butterfly garden has been installed on the side of the museum along Larchmont.

**The Garden Shoppe is open every day  
from 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.**

The Edison and Ford Winter Estates is a National Register Historic Site and a Save America's Treasures site of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The Edison laboratory is a National Historic Chemical Landmark. It is governed by a private, non-profit organization with a Board of Trustees.

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