

United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

# National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

## 1. Name

historic Bellingrath Gardens and Home

and/or common

## 2. Location

S of Theodore MO AL 59

2 mi. South of the village of Fowl River on Alabama 59;  
street & number then 1 mi. East on a paved Road N/A not for publication

city, town Theodore *vic* N/A vicinity of congressional district 01

state Alabama code 01 county Mobile code <sup>097</sup> 078

## 3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: Garden

## 4. Owner of Property

name Bellingrath Morse Foundation

street & number c/o Coca-Cola Bottling Co., P. O. Box 1427

city, town Mobile N/A vicinity of state Alabama

## 5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Probate Division, Mobile County Courthouse

street & number 101 Government Street

city, town Mobile state Alabama

## 6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Alabama Inventory has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1970-present  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Alabama Historical Commission

city, town Montgomery state Alabama

# 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		date _____

## Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Bellingrath estate comprises over 1,000 acres of land of which sixty-five are cultivated and landscaped. It is located on the west bank of Fowl River in southeast Mobile County near the small town of Theodore, Alabama. The garden was planned by its creators, Mr. and Mrs. Walter Bellingrath, as a showplace for an extensive variety of plants, shrubs, trees and flowers native to Mobile and similar climates. Found in the garden are over 250,000 azalea bushes, representing every specie known, live oaks, Southern pines, and a wide variety of roses, magnolias, jasmine, wisteria, camellia, mountain laurel, oleander, crepe myrtle, gardenia and dogwood. Flowers vary according to the season.

The focal points of Bellingrath Gardens are: the rose garden (see diagram map, photo #A), planted in a formal circular pattern based on the symbol of the Rotary Club; the tropical greenhouse (photo #A); the grotto and spillway near the house planted with flowers and shrubs (photo # D, E, F); the rustic bridge (photo #M); the terraces which lead to the house (photo # C, G); and Mirror Lake (phot # L, M).

The approach to the house is via long meandering walks bordered with shoulder high shrubbery hedges. Toward the end of the main walk from the entrance gate, the visitor breaks free of the surrounding hedge to a stunning vista of the great lawn with the house dramatically posed at the opposite end. The approach from the opposite direction (on the north) leads through meandering walks to an impressive view of the house across Mirror Lake. These sections of Bellingrath Gardens were inspired by the English country park which seeks a naturalistic feeling by contrasts of thick growth with open vistas and seemingly random plantings. Most of the plants along the walk are seasonal sun flowers; bulbs in the Spring, chrysanthemums in Fall, poinsetta in Winter and salvia in the Summer.

Closer to the house the garden begins to take on a more formal appearance with terraces, water play areas and symmetrically arranged plantings. Here are found circular, rectangular and square brick beds of lily plants, caladiums and the ubiquitous azalea. The inspiration of the Italian formal garden is particularly evident in the fountain spillway and grotto with the constant splash and movement of water as it makes its way to the river. The area between the house and river descends in a series of formal terraces with brick beds and classical urns planted with seasonal flowers.

Although Bellingrath Gardens suffered great losses during Hurricane Frederick in September 1979, a great recovery effort over the past year has returned the garden to its former splendor. The greatest change has been the transistion from a shade to sun garden due to the loss of most of the great old oaks. Extensive replanting has covered most of the scars and shade is expected to be re-established in about five years.

Despite the damage done by Frederick, the integrity of the gardens has not been impaired; George Rogers' design, which combined English country park with the formal Italian garden, remains the same. The walks, brick beds, great lawn, grotto, and spillway are exactly as they were. Also the original camellia arboretum, gazebo, guest house, chapel, greenhouse, rose garden, Mirror Lake and Rustic Bridge remain. The hurricane did not alter the organization on arrangement of the Gardens or cause more than minor structural damage to the buildings. The only loss was in plant materials, and a large number of trees.

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Continuation sheet

Item number 7

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The only major change to the garden since the early 1930's has been the creation of the Oriental Garden, which enhances the overall concept of the garden. The area was originally a bird sanctuary and was expanded to its present form in 1966-67. It features tropical plants set around and in a small lake. The lake serves as the home for various species of birds, mainly swans, ducks and flamingos. The Oriental Garden was designed by John Brown, landscape Engineer at the time.

The Bellingrath home is a two-story with basement brick structure. According to George Rogers, the architect of the house, the design is based on a combination of Renaissance motifs and the popular brick townhouse of the mid-nineteenth century. The frequent use of the round arch and arcade on the exterior reveals the Renaissance influence, while the cast iron balconies, brick dentils and many gables reflect the local style. The buff colored brick and cast iron were taken from an old hotel in Mobile which had been built in 1850's.

The massing is asymmetrical with a major wing on the east side and a smaller wing on the west. The house is arranged around an interior courtyard which separates the two wings. The wings are connected on the second floor level by a balcony which overlooks the courtyard. The exterior of the Bellingrath house is basically restrained with the main emphasis on the use of the round arch on all four sides of the building, the cast iron and the brick quoining on the corners.

The lavish interior of the house is characterized by careful attention to detail and fine craftsmanship. Rogers patterned the crown mouldings found in the main drawing room and dining room after those he saw in ante-bellum homes in Mobile. They are comprised of the Greek meander, bead and reel, egg and dart and acanthus leaf motifs. In contrast, the ceiling medallions are moderistic sunbursts created by Rogers. Each room which contains a fireplace has a different mantel, with those in the major rooms being more elaborate. Again, these mantels were patterned after those found in the older homes in Mobile. Each riser in the impressive stairway located to the left of the entrance door features a feathery scroll design. Of particular note are the light colored hardwood floors which are pegged together with darker contrasting pegs.

The Bellingrath home is now used as a house museum which features Mrs. Bellingrath's vast collections of plates, porcelain, silver and antique furniture. In addition, the guest house, which sits to the west of the house, is used as a museum to house a collection of porcelain of Edward Boehm.

# 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

**Specific dates** 1927-1939 **Builder/Architect** George B. Rogers

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

Bellingrath Gardens is an excellent example of a large estate garden planned in the late 1920's and is one of the finest of the Southern estate gardens of any period. It is widely accepted as having the most spectacular spring display of any garden in the southeast and is noted for the wide variety of azalias. Planned as the private country garden of Walter D. Bellingrath, who made a fortune in bottling Coca-cola during the first decades of the 20th century, it reflects the ideas of the "Gardenesque Movement" of the late 19th century with the characteristic vignettes of Italian and French formal gardens within an overall romantic English garden. The Gardens are the major landscape work of George B. Rogers, a prominent Mobile architect.

\* \* \* \* \*

After a trip to Europe in 1927 to view the gardens of Italy, France and England, the Bellingraths determined to convert their fishing camp on the Fowl River into a magnificent landscaped garden similar to those they had seen. They engaged George B. Rogers who drew heavily from turn of the century works on Italian and English gardens such as those published by the Country Life Library of London, Elgood and Jekyll's English Gardens (1905) and Latham's The Gardens of Italy (1905).

The Gardens were opened to the public on one occasion in 1932 and shortly thereafter were permanently opened for a small fee. In 1934 A. A. Hunt, an English landscaper with an impressive background, was hired as the landscape engineer. Hunts' training was extensive, having worked in the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew, London and the Marquis of Lansdown's estate, Bowood Castle, and other estates in England before emigrating to the United States in 1906. Once in America he worked at a variety of country estates and professional organizations in New England and California before moving to Louisiana in 1924. There he directed Jungle Gardens on Avery Island and drew plans for planting at Louisiana State University and the State Capitol in Baton Rouge. Bellingrath retained Hunt in 1934 to be General Manager and Landscape Engineer, a position he kept until his retirement in 1954. In 1935, the Bellingraths determined to move to the gardens, and had Rogers design the house which was completed in 1936. The house is considered to be a contributing element of the gardens. After Mr. Bellingrath died in 1955, it was opened as a museum.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

- Barney, Howard. "Bellingrath Home Reflects Two Southerners' Love of Beauty." Southern Accents, Spring, 1980.
- Barney, Howard. Mr. Bell, A Life Story of Walter D. Bellingrath. Mobile, Alabama, 1979.

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 6.5

Quadrangle name Coden

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

**UMT References**

A 

1	6	3	9	0	7	1	0	3	3	6	7	2	6	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B 

1	6	3	9	0	8	7	0	3	3	6	6	6	6	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

C 

1	6	3	9	0	4	2	0	3	3	6	6	6	6	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

D 

1	6	3	9	0	3	2	0	3	3	6	6	9	2	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

E 

1	6	3	9	0	4	3	0	3	3	6	7	3	4	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

F 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

G 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

H 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

**Verbal boundary description and justification** The boundary is described by the red line on the attached plat map. It includes the cultivated portions of the estate, but excludes the recently erected entrance gate and pet motel.

**List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries**

state	N/A	code	N/A	county	N/A	code	N/A
state	N/A	code	N/A	county	N/A	code	N/A

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jan Connelly, (Mobile Historic Development Foundation) & Ellen Mertins

organization Alabama Historical Commission date September 8, 1982

street & number 725 Monroe Street telephone 832-6621

city or town Montgomery state Alabama

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature [Signature]

title State Historic Preservation Officer date 9-9-82

For HCRS use only	
I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register	
<u>[Signature]</u> Keeper of the National Register	Entered in the National Register date <u>10/19/82</u>
Attest:	date
Chief of Registration	

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

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RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

- | CONTINUATION SHEET | ITEM NUMBER | PAGE   |
|--------------------|-------------|--|
|                    | 1.          | River Pavillion - c. 1976: 1 story wooden frame with cedar shake roof; 35' x 55'; replaced boathouse built in 1922 of approximately the same size. NONE-CONTRIBUTING   |
|                    | 2.          | Bellingraph Home - 1935-36: see section 7 for description. CONTRIBUTING  |
|                    | 3.          | Guest House and Garage, now Boehm Porcelain Gallery - 1939; 2 story brick with tile roof, Renaissance motifs; designed by Rogers. CONTRIBUTING   |
|                    | 4.          | Chapel - c. 1939; one story, brick, designed by Rogers. CONTRIBUTING   |
|                    | 5.          | Employee's Garage - c. 1946; one story wood and metal frame; 50' x 25'. NONE-CONTRIBUTING  |
|                    | 6.          | Greenhouse - c. 1951; metal framed with glass glazing and corrugated transite base. NONE-CONTRIBUTING  |
|                    | 7.          | Boilder House - c. 1976; wooden frame construction with board and batten; 30' x 30'. NONE-CONTRIBUTING   |
|                    | 8.          | Rose Garden Storage Building - c. 1934; original boiler house and workshop for conservatory; 40' x 15'. CONTRIBUTING   |
|                    | 9.          | Exotica Conservatory - c. 1934; brick, steel frame, wood and glass. CONTRIBUTING (see photo A)   |
|                    | 13.         | Oriental Garden Pavillion - c. 1967; small frame pavillion painted red and yellow. NONE-CONTRIBUTING   |
|                    | 14.         | Oriental Garden Storage Building - c. 1934, modified 1967; 1-story brick; slate roof, 30' x 18'. NONE-CONTRIBUTING (see photo T)   |
|                    | 15.         | Oriental Garden Tea House - c. 1967 - small structure with cedar shake roof. NONE-CONTRIBUTING (see photo T)   |
|                    | 16.         | A. & B. Water Towers - early 1930s; steel construction with 55,000 and 12,000 gallow capacity; the larger is 100' tall, the smaller 75' tall; prior to hurricane, both were obscured by tree foliage. CONTRIBUTING |
|                    | 24.         | Summer House - c. 1930; 1 story, wrought iron frame with tile roof. Contributing (see photo K)   |