

Warren and Aileen Maytrott, Dahliadel

(through the Eyes of a Daughter)

by Elsie M. Greenhalgh

Dahlias! Dahlias! Dahlias! This is the story of Warren W. Maytrott's life and his wife, Aileen, after they married in 1917. Year by year he replaced his father's rows of grapes from which they had bottled grape juice and planted rows of dahlias. By 1917, he was issuing a small catalog, which continued to grow, as did the business. During the 1940's and 1950's, he had a mailing list of over 25,000, was raising over 50 acres of dahlias, and shipping roots, plants and rooted cuttings to all over the United States, Canada, and even some foreign countries in the early spring. In the fall, the cut flowers were sold locally, were delivered to a wholesale market in Philadelphia, and for several years were sent to Pittsburgh on the overnight train.

He always had seedlings and contacted some famous people for permission to use their names--Arthur Godfrey, Polly Bergen, John Daly, Jacqueline Kennedy, Baby Kennedy, and Thomas Edison (whose letter with signature I, his daughter, Elsie, still have), etc. He also set up elaborate shows at many places, sometimes with a Spanish theme (see pictures below!). I remember walking into Convention Hall in Atlantic City in 1932 to hear over the loud speaker that Dahliadel owned by Warren W. Maytrott had won their highest award! What a thrill for a five year old to hear about her Dad and his business.



Dad had an inventive mind and a great ability to create things. He invented a boiler grate that could use coal screenings (at \$1.00 a ton) and Burnham Boiler made his three boilers for the rights to the patent. Those boilers heated the greenhouses, our offices, our home, shop, and greenhouse man's home. He welded his own plowshares, sawed lumber for dahlia root storage crates, made a machine to wrap cuttings for shipping, invented a corrugated box to hold plants safe when shipping, rigged tractors for opening and closing planted rows, and then could change to equipment for spraying rows. He also worked out a metal box with

heat bulbs to cover and "cook" the sand in the cutting benches between uses to kill the "damping off." Dad built a large bin with steam pipes inside to "cook" his own potting soil. He had created his own mixture of potash, etc that was mixed with soil and state inspectors would come the day of "cooking" and carefully check all areas for temperature. This was the only soil we used for bedding roots/pot roots to propagate our cuttings and then to pot the rooted cuttings. This could go on and on, as he did originate so much.

But with all the inventing work, etc., he also did much to advance dahlias. He exhibited as much as he could. He judged shows every year, served as American Dahlia Society (ADS) President, worked on score cards, helped with classification, etc. He even wrote cultural instructions (8 pages), which were free for anyone, printed in our catalog for many years, and loaned the set type for them to the ADS at no charge. He also had time for anyone to talk about dahlias, and I don't believe my parents met any "dahlia people" they didn't like. Dr. Connors from Rutgers would bring students to see any virus, insects, root gall, etc. and advise what to do. Of course, Mom always fed them a good lunch. She'd entertain others, some overnight, such as Derrill Hart, Stanley Johnson, Masons, Ailstocks, Yanos, Olsons, Aigers, etc.

A big event at Dahliadel each fall was Field Days! This was held two weekends at the end of September, or first of October. Everyone who had ordered over a certain amount of roots/plants in the spring and lived within a reasonable mileage was sent an invitation. This included two free lunches (home made) and drew hundreds of visitors to Dahliadel. My mother worked long and hard to supervise the kitchen and see that all the food was ready. She was in charge of the whole family and lots of friends and neighbors who came together to make the Field Days a success. We were even assigned a police officer to help handle the traffic.

Probably one of Dad's best-known and worthwhile projects was the Dahliadel Color Chart. He saw a real need for a field usable chart and went to work on one. The basis was the Royal Horticultural Chart from England. But this was two volumes--too bulky, big, and not workable for use at the shows or in the field. So, he put that inventive mind back to work. Make a punch for the size color chip needed, arrange the pages by colors on pocket size loose leaf sheets (autumn sheets were added), print sheets with color chip name, and paste color chips (one-by-one) above their name. Of course you want to be able to use those where the chip might get damp, so cover the pages with cellophane. Thus, the Pocket Color Chart was born. It listed in the 1949 catalog for \$15.00. This Dahliadel Pocket Color Chart was the official ADS Color Chart for many years.

My mother was as much a part of the business as my Dad--it took both of them. She even took care of the business while he was away at flower shows, ADS meetings, judging dahlia shows, etc. Sometimes she got a chance to go also, and assist with judging, greet people at shows--loving it all. Both were great promoters of the dahlia, and dahlias were their lives.