

Dahliadel in New Jersey



In memory of our grandparents Warren and Aileen Maytrott, who brought so much color to the world, who treated people with such kindness and respect, who gave so much of themselves and left us with so many memories. I'm also grateful to Elsie (Maytrott) Greenhalgh, my Aunt Elsie, for taking these pictures of the Dahliadel buildings and equipment from the 1960s and before!



It's hard to believe it was over 50 years ago! It was 1963, the day after I graduated from high school, and my sister Janet and I were on the train headed for Dahliadel in Vineland, New Jersey! I am the first grandchild of Warren and Aileen Maytrott, founders and owners of the then famous Dahliadel. In about 1917, our grandfather converted his father's grape vineyard into the dahlia business originally called Dahliadel Nurseries, later shortened to Dahliadel (of New Jersey!).

Our parents, John and Bunny Rapalje, had moved away from New Jersey when I was only one year old. So our contact with our grandparents was limited to a couple of weeks when we visited them in the summer, and a week or two when they came to visit us in Florida at Christmas. This particular

summer, Grandma and Grandpa needed some help working in the fields of Dahliadel, so instead of two weeks, we were scheduled to stay in New Jersey for the entire summer. In fact, for this summer and the next three or four summers while I was in college, I would return to work at Dahliadel with the “men” of the field: Clarence Parsons, Charlie Starzer, Bill Labriola, my younger brother Jim, and of course our own Aunt Elsie (Greenhalgh).

When I arrived in early June, the men of the field would already be working in the cellar trimming roots that had been stored in root bins from the previous fall and preparing them for planting in the fields. After we divided and trimmed the roots, Clarence would open the furrows for planting with the tractor. We would then drop the roots in the furrow from baskets, and the furrow would then be covered, also by tractor. In the picture above, that's ME under the straw hat putting out dahlia plants. That would be Charlie covering for me, and Clarence is on the tractor opening up the furrows on the other side of the irrigation line!

We also planted potted plants and pot-roots (i.e., roots that had been grown in pots the year before) in furrows, which were then covered by hand. The late season plants were re-potted into larger pots, which remained in the coal-frame until later. These became the pot-roots for the next year! (Special thanks to Aunt Elsie for helping me with these memories and for taking these pictures!)

As the dahlias and chrysanthemums grew in the fields, we had to top all of these plants so they could grow into bushes, and constantly hoe the weeds that seemed to grow even faster. In my first year, I remember that the weeds in the chrysanthemum patch got away from us, and Grandpa almost had it plowed under. We could hardly see the plants for the weeds. Fortunately, after long hours of hand weeding, we were able to save the mums! For the rest of the summer, we quoted Santa Claus, “Hoe, hoe, hoe!”

While summers in New Jersey were a lot cooler than in Florida, I remember that it did get hot in those fields! It was here that I became seriously motivated to succeed in my education and follow my calling to become a teacher.

Then, just about the time that the bushes began to look nice and begin flowering, it was time for me to go home and back to school in the middle of August. I always heard about these dahlia fields in September and October, ablaze with color, but I NEVER got to see them! It seems that in every fall

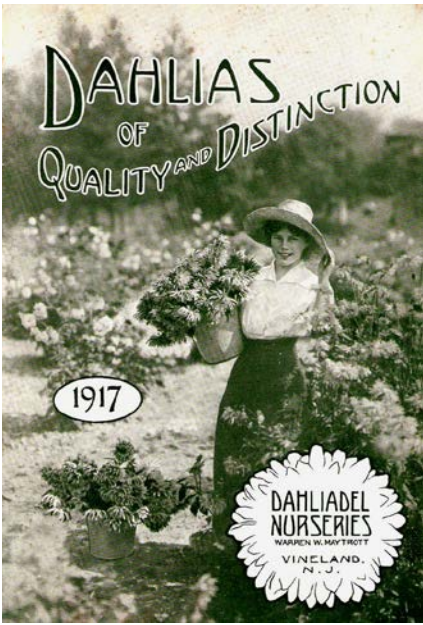
from 1950 until my retirement in 2007, I was either a student or a teacher in a Florida school! Take another look at the pictures above!

It's sad to say that dahlias just don't grow very well in the Florida climate, and as a result, we just don't have very many dahlias there. In fact, if I were to ask my Floridian friends if they know how large a dahlia grows, their response is, "a WHAT?? What's a dahlia?" Then I would say, "You know, a dahlia, like the flower! A dinner-plate sized dahlia!" The friends almost always would reply in extreme doubt, "Yeah, sure they do! NO flowers grow that big!" Well, according to Virginia Medford, our friend and an avid dahlia enthusiast from the Lake Junaluska area, she and her late-husband Billy B. certainly knew how large a dahlia can grow! Back in 1978 at the dahlia convention in Atlanta, Billy B. won the prize for the biggest dahlia in the show. It measured 14 inches across and 9 inches deep. Dahlias don't grow like that in Florida, that's for sure!

Of course dahlias grow very well in New Jersey. In addition to dahlias, New Jersey was filled with special memories from these days at Dahliadel when, as a very young man, I had these opportunities to live with Grandma and Grandpa, getting to know them and to be influenced by them on a day-to-day basis. There were the wonderful odors of roots in the cellars and farm equipment in the barns, freshly mowed grass, fireflies, Tastycakes, Breyers ice cream, cantaloupe (Grandpa could really tell when they were ripe and ready to cut!), and so many other things about the character and the values of our grandparents.

DAHLIADEL in the MOUNTAINS

In 1968, with our grandfather's health failing, the business was sold to A.L. (Abraham Lincoln) Freedlander, in Waynesville, North Carolina. Mr. Freedlander had been a regular customer of our grandparents for many years, and I understand that he already had quite a collection of dahlias at his estate somewhere in North Carolina. During this critical summer, I was not able to help out at Dahliadel, since I was in graduate school for the entire summer to complete my degree so I could begin teaching that fall. I remember hearing that they loaded everything on tractor-trailer trucks and moved Dahliadel to its new home in North Carolina, now to be called "Dahliadel in the Mountains." It was so sad to see the end of Dahliadel as we knew it. Even sadder, it never occurred to me, until it was about 40 years TOO LATE, to go visit the new home of Dahliadel in the mountains of North Carolina.



First Dahliadel Catalog, 1917



Early Dahliadel Advertisement in Living Color



Dahliadel Truck (still in use in 1968)



Dahliadel's "New" Truck (circa 1940s or 50s)



Dahliadel Office, Home of Warren & Aileen Maytrott



ME under the straw hat at Dahliadel in 1860



Dahliadel Award Winning Display at Atlantic City in 1930s



