

Adolph C. Jordahn — Pioneer Plantsman



Adolph C. Jordahn was born in Kolding, Denmark, on Christmas Day, 1882.

When he was fourteen years old he began learning the nursery trade, and he has been in plant work ever since.

At eighteen he came to the United States, going first to Minnesota, then to St. Louis, Missouri, where he had charge of the grounds of the Annheuser-Busch estate, remaining there until 1918. In St. Louis he met and married Mary Nahmensen, a Missourian of Danish descent.

Mr. Jordahn often visited the Missouri Botanical Garden. There he met Mr. George H. Pring, who recently celebrated his fiftieth anniversary as a member of the staff of that institution. Mr. Pring is an internationally known orchid and water-lily expert, having created some of the finest present-day hybrid tropical water-lilies. Influenced by his friend, Adolph Jordahn began growing orchids as a hobby, continuing with it to this day.

After leaving the Annheuser-Busch estate, Mr. Jordahn came to Florida, taking charge of the C. W. Bingham (later Blossom) estate in Palm Beach, which is noted for its beautiful specimen trees and large collection of rare plants. To the already gorgeous coconuts and royal palms on the grounds, Mr. Jordahn added as many rare palms as were to be found at that time.

In 1933 he was chosen by the late Col. Robert H. Montgomery to help him in the development of his new home, the Coconut Grove Palmetum, now famous for its superb collection of palms. Together, Col. Montgomery and Mr. Jordahn combed the tropical areas of the world for seeds and plants of palms, many of which had never before been grown in the United States. This collection now is over twenty years old; many of the palms have reached maturity, under Mr. Jordahn's and Mr. Ray Vernon's care, and offer the lover of palms an opportunity to see full-grown specimens which one might have to travel thousands of miles to see in their native habitats.

When Col. Montgomery had the inspiration of establishing the Fairchild Tropical Garden — a tropical botanical garden open to the public without charge — he donated many fine palm specimens which were transplanted and cared for under Mr. Jordahn's supervision; most of these have thrived and are now subjects of study by botanist, taxonomist and amateur alike. Besides these, many new introductions were made from sources around the world, most of which were acquired through the efforts of Col. Montgomery and Dr. David Fairchild, in whose honor the Garden was named, and successfully grown through the combined efforts of the staffs of the Palmetum and the Fairchild Tropical Garden.

Now retired, Mr. Jordahn looks back with pleasure on years of varied experiences with his two favorite plants: orchids and palms.

— Lucita H. Wait