

MEET MR. GATES



March 30, 1930

La Paz, Baja, California Mexico

I have seen the creeping devil cactus creep on the shores of Magdalena Bay, gathered the casa de rata, (rat's house) been struck by the jumping cholla of Comondu and rode by towering cardons until I see spines in my sleep. I have been down to the axel a dozen times in mud, stuck in sand, had to carry my load up grades, bumped over rocks, broke a universal joint in El Arenoso (The Sandy Place) and again on a hill, been through El Purgatorio and down the grade into El Inferno, turned the truck flat on its side, been in perils on the seashore and mountain tops, under overhanging rocks and leaning cardons, between the living rock and deep pits. I have cut off tree limbs and filled up chuck holes and drank water out of ruts in the road, forgotten what a bridge looks like and been sick in the Mulege but near the end of the road is Le Paz (The Peace) and the trip has been wonderful.

I truly appreciated your courtesy in sending the magazine to La Paz. So far I have been too busy to write stories, but they will come.

EDWARD E. GATES

HAVE YOU HEARD ABOUT HOWARD

By: Patricia Moorten

It is quite fitting and worthy to have this organization established to perpetuate the memory of Howard Elliott Gates in acknowledgement of his dedication and contributions to the horticultural world.

A strange turn of events led Howard into this profession and eventually he became a renowned plantsman – having devoted more than 40 years of his life until he passed away on October 5, 1957.

A native Californian, his parents of modest means raised him near Garden Grove. Upon completing high school Howard joined the National Guard and was sent to Nogales, Arizona to help fight Pancho Villa at the Mexican border. After which he continued his studies at the Bible Institute where he met and married Mabel, his wife. They had one son, Morgan. During the First World War Howard served in the Medical Corps and was stationed near San Diego at Camp Kearney. Upon returning home he took over his mother's nursery and flower business, which she had started in 1904 at Anaheim.

His first action of new management was to dump out some seemingly worthless cactus plants, only to learn soon afterwards that they were choice specimens of rare species. This significant event stimulated his interest in these curious plants. Therefore, as his business grew and expanded to include the hauling of plants and flowers to the Los Angeles market from all over Southern California for other nurseries, he met many noted horticulturalists and started accompanying plant explorers into Baja, California, Mexico. He soon became greatly interested and was grasping every opportunity to study in this special field.

Always a great reader, Howard would go to any necessary extreme to locate factual botanical data. It was well known that he worked at his desk until late hours every night. He carried on quite an amount of correspondence with botanists all over the world.

In 1939, Howard chose 18 acres in the rolling granite hills of the Norco district near Corona for the ideal location for his cactus-growing farm and shipping business. Then with careful designing and shrewd financing, he created a gigantic commercial enterprise – commanding worldwide fame by producing great quantities of quality cactus and other succulent plants.

Mr. Gates continued his trips of plant explorations spending a total of several years time in Mexico and especially in Baja, California. He wrote extensively for many publications. He discovered several new species and described them technically in scientific journals.

Many of these are named in his honor - or he had them named for his colleagues. He received honors or recognition from many botanical societies.

As a dedicated member of the commercial cactus growers associations he heartily supported every worthy project that was of benefit to the profession. He was president of the Cactus and Succulent Society of America and also chairman of that society's conventions.

His nursery, Gates Cactus, Inc., is still in operation under the capable management of Harold Tapia and continues to supply the cactus world market.

Howard Gates was a large man with a humble appearance. He had a twinkle in his eyes and was unusually soft-spoken but could address an auditorium full of people as he conducted meetings or gave programs. He had boundless energy and perpetual enthusiasm and subsequently gained recognized success as a monarch of the cactus empire. He was affectionately called "El Rey de los Chollas" by the people of Baja, California. And for those of us who knew him best, we called him "MR. CACTUS".

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