

## HISTORIC HOMES

Country farmhouse  
a garden centerpiece

*This is the first in a series of weekly features that will appear in the Homes section on Florida's historic houses.*

When the first section of the Harry P. Leu house was built, sometime between 1870 and 1901, the four-room farmhouse stood in the country. The house consisted of a living room downstairs and three bedrooms above it. It was built for John Mizell, son of one of Orange County's founders, and his bride. Over the years, various owners added and subtracted rooms from the once-simple farmhouse, leaving it finally with 10 graciously furnished rooms.

The trim house, now not far from booming downtown Orlando, stands in a 56-acre garden with charming wooden gazebos and thousands of exotic flowers and plants, among them forests of camellias and avenues of giant camphors. This land is what remains of the 103 acres claimed on the shores of Lake Rowena by Angeline May Mizell while her husband was fighting for the Confederacy during the Civil War.

The first structure on the site was the family's log cabin, which stood near the present house. The nearby Mizell family graveyard may still be visited.

In the early years of the century, while the Leu farmhouse was owned by a wealthy New Yorker who came to Florida to plant citrus and play polo, it gained a kitchen, dining room, more upstairs bedrooms and wraparound porches. Between 1906 and 1928, it was the home of a wealthy Birmingham, Ala., industrialist who wintered there with his large family

and staff. In 1936, it became the property of Leu, a prosperous businessman and Orlando native who loved trees and flowers. He and his wife transformed the estate into a tropical paradise, and in 1961 donated the greatly expanded farmhouse to the city of Orlando.

The restored interior of the house features the sort of period furnishings and decor a successful citrus grower might have had between the 1870s and the early 1900s. Pieces on display include an ornate, carved bed; Gov. Napoleon Bonaparte Broward's mahogany library table; and a round oak table and server from the Joseph A. Bumby home in Orlando.

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