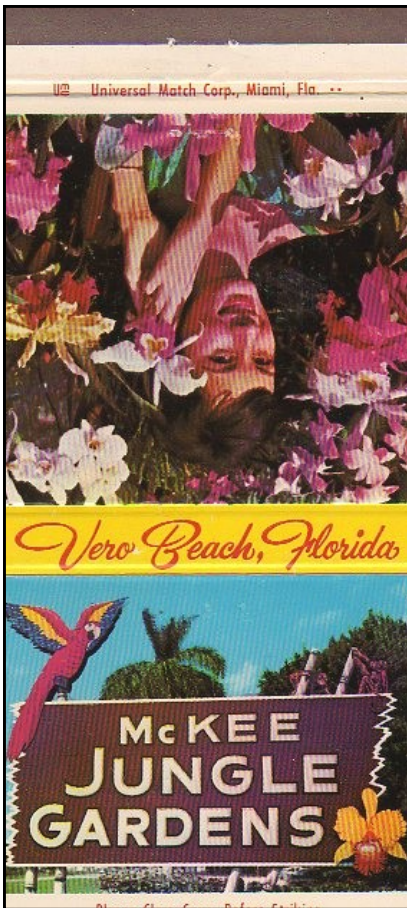# Vero Beach's *McKee Jungle Gardens*

I've never been to Florida, but this is always how I picture it...lush, verdant plants...tropical, exotic animal life. It's nice to see that McKee's is still going....

In 1922, the McKee-Sexton Land Company was established in Vero Beach, Florida. This partnership purchased an 80-acre tropical hammock along the Indian River in 1929 and McKee Jungle Gardens was born.

With the help of landscape architect William Lyman Phillips, now known as the pioneer of tropical landscape architecture, the basic infrastructure of streams, ponds and trails was designed. Native vegetation was augmented with ornamental plants and seeds from around the world as Arthur G. McKee and Waldo E. Sexton set about assembling one of the most outstanding collections of water lilies and orchids.

By the 1940's, more than 100,000 tourists were visiting McKee Jungle Gardens each year, making it one of Florida's most popular attractions. In the early 1970's, attendance dwindled due to competition from new large-scale attractions and the garden was forced to close its doors in 1976. The land was sold and all but 18 acres were developed. The remaining acreage, zoned for additional development, sat vacant for twenty years. In 1994, the Indian River Land Trust launched a fund-raising campaign and successfully purchased the property on December 1, 1995 for $1.7 million.

Close to $9.1 million was raised to purchase, stabilize and restore the Garden. Today, McKee Botanical Garden, Inc. is a private, not-for-profit cultural organization located at the southern gateway to Vero Beach, Florida, with the mission of "nurturing and enhancing a historic garden in a unique tropical setting for the education, enjoyment and enrichment of all." The garden is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is a historic Florida landmark. It received the Florida Trust's "Outstanding Achievement in Landscape Architecture" in 2002.

[http://www.mckeegarden.org/history.php]