

Charge dismissed against 'Cat Lady'

By **ROBERT SIMS**

Daily News Staff Writer

The cat fight is over. At least for now.

A county prosecutor dismissed a charge Friday that Catherine Bradley, Palm Beach's so-called "Cat Lady," failed to take care of a feral feline with mange.

A Palm Beach County Animal Care and Control officer had cited Bradley and impounded the black cat without first giving her 30 days' notice to provide it with medical treatment, the prosecutor acknowledged.

The dismissal came after Assistant County Attorney Leon St. John took a gamble, "for tactical reasons and to simplify the issue," by dropping two animal-nuisance charges against Bradley. Those charges alleged that Bradley let the feral cats she cares for run at large on the property of the Henry M. Flagler Museum.

With all charges dismissed, prosecutors agreed to release to Bradley the black cat and four others captured in August by a county Animal Control officer. Bradley planned to pick up the cats Friday afternoon.

She must first pay the county's impound fees of \$75 per cat and a \$50 medical fee for treating the black cat. Animal Control agreed not to charge Bradley the \$10 daily boarding fine for each cat.

Bradley also faced a fine of \$500 per violation had she been found guilty.

"I guess I'm happy with the victory," Bradley's attorney, animal-rights activist Mindy Felinton, said after the hearing. "But I feel this will be a situation that will continue to arise relative to the cats."

St. John warned Bradley in court that she will be cited and the cats captured if problems persist in the next 30 days.

County Court Judge Nancy Perez also had some stern words for Bradley, an animal lover who feeds and cares for 300 to 400 feral cats on the island.

"You are on notice that you have certain obligations," Perez told Bradley. "You have taken on these obligations. These are serious obligations. You may not have other cats to care for if they get mange from another cat."

Felinton said after the hearing that Animal Control "handled the case negligently" by not giving Bradley the 30-day notice she was entitled to under a county animal-nuisance law passed in October 1998.

"If a cat needs medical treatment, Catherine must be given a sufficient amount of time to capture this wild animal," said Felinton, who co-defended Bradley with Gil Panzer of the California-based Animal Legal Defense Fund.

Rebecca H. Rhoades, the county's Animal Control director, said she thinks that Animal Control "can handle it better next time."