

# General Roy Stone: Portrait of a Gentleman

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Almost two years ago, while trying to improve my scant knowledge of that great family of plants, the palms, I came across the interesting fact that the very beautiful royal palm was named *Roystonea*, and that "the generic name honors General Roy Stone (1836-1905), United States Army Engineer, who rendered outstanding service to Puerto Rico at the time of the Spanish-American War." Later, I found that the name *Roystonea* was given the royal palm in 1900 by O. F. Cook. This led to speculation: was there no generic name for the royal palm before 1900? What sort of a man was General Roy Stone who deserved to have this beautiful palm named in his honor?

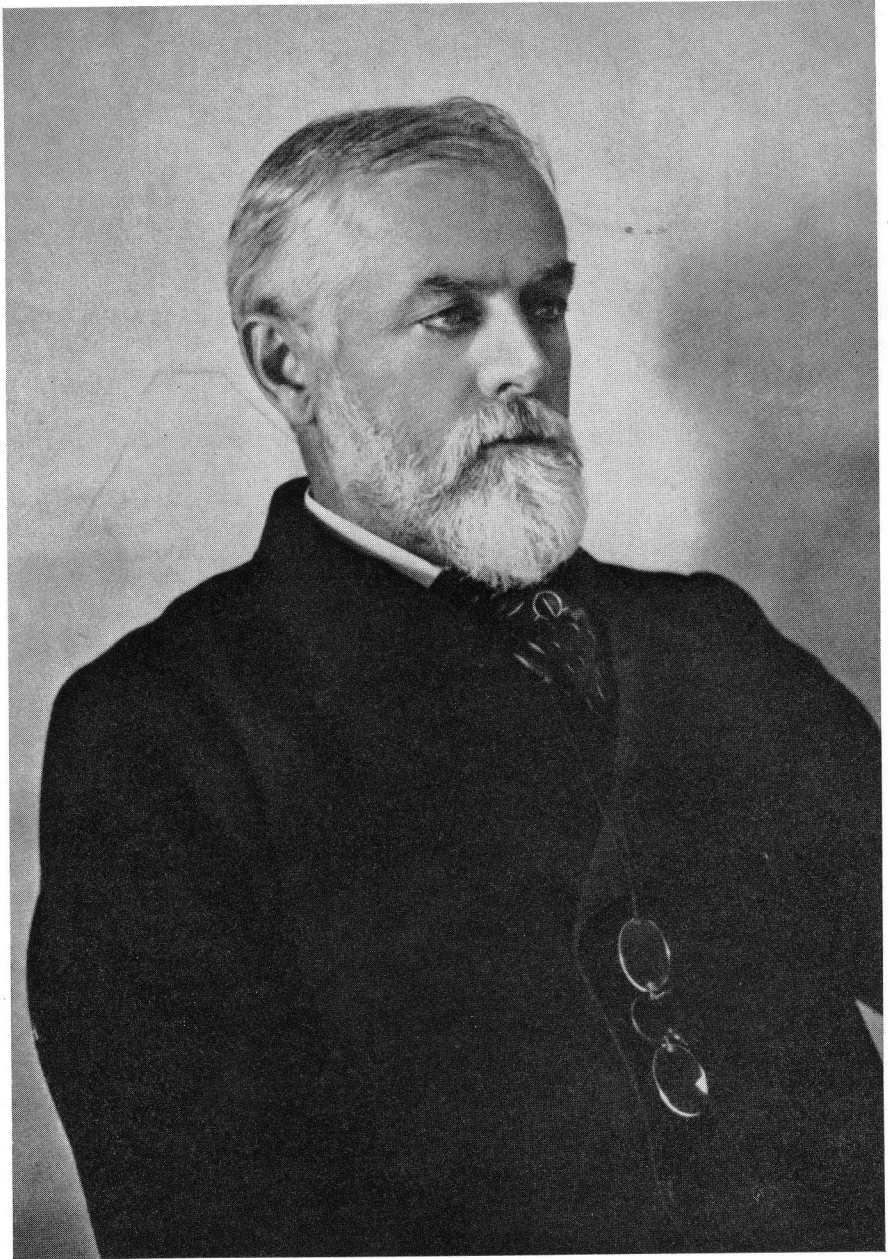
In order to find out more about these questions, I wrote to Mr. Stanley Kiem, Superintendent of the Fairchild Tropical Garden asking for his help. He replied promptly, quoting from various authorities to the effect that the generic name *Oreodoxa* had been mistakenly used for royal palms in the nineteenth century and that it was not until 1900 that O. F. Cook rectified the error by proposing the generic name *Roystonea* for the royal palms "as a respectful compliment to General Roy Stone, the American engineer officer who secured the admiration of the people of Puerto Rico by his fearlessness and conspicuous energy in the Adjuntas road-building campaign which flanked the line of Spanish defenses, and whose subsequent interest in the improvement of the Island will undoubtedly af-

fect its future history." (*Bulletin of the Torrey Botanical Club* 28:552, 1901).

My question about General Stone, however, remained unanswered. I therefore started a quest that took me most of a year and revealed some very interesting facets in the life of that gentleman.

Not knowing exactly where to begin, I wrote to Senator Lawton Chiles, asking his help in obtaining the army records of General Stone. In about a month a large envelope was received containing the entire record of his army life and also some records of his service in the Department of Agriculture, where he served in later years. From these records I was able to contact his granddaughter in Surrey, England, who furnished me with many pertinent facts as well as a photo of the General when he was in his sixties (Fig. 1). Correspondence with historians in Cuba, N. Y., and a three-part article that ran in the *Journal of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania* brought out more interesting facts. Information that follows was drawn from these sources.

Roy Stone was born October 17, 1836, in Prattsburg, New York, a small village of about 50 houses. His father was Ithiel V. Stone, a wealthy land owner, who kept moving west and finally became mayor of Cuba, New York, where he had large lumbering interests. His mother was a Gurnee, whose brother had made a fortune in railroading and was later mayor of Chicago (1851-53). Roy had three sisters, Ella, Cornelia



1. General Roy Stone, about 1900. Photo courtesy of Mrs. T. R. Bevan.

and Ida. The 1855 census in Cuba lists Ithiel as being 52, his wife Sarah as 52, Ella 22, Cornelia 21, Roy 18 and Ida 14. The house in Cuba was listed as valued at \$2,000.00, *pretty high for those days*. (The house is still standing in Cuba, minus the hitching post.) Roy's sister Cornelia later married Albert Gallitin Porter, Governor of Indiana.

After high school, Roy was sent to Union College in Schenectady, New York, which had been chartered in 1795 and was noted for its pioneer work in the teaching of engineering. He graduated at the age of 22 and worked for his father from 1858 to 1861 in the sawmill, and then the War Between the States began. And so, we find that on April 28, 1861, he enrolled in the army at Warren, Pa. as a volunteer and was made a Captain at the age of 25. In June, 1861, he was promoted to Major. His army records show him wounded slightly in the "7 days battle" on June 30, 1862, and while recuperating from this wound he was sent to Pittsburgh to recruit men for the Bucktail Brigade. August 15, 1862, he married Mary Elizabeth Marker, and upon his return to duty was made a Colonel, 149th Penn. Infantry (volunteers). Early in 1863 his father died and he obtained a 7-day leave to go home to Cuba for the funeral.

His army records show him to have been near Belle Plain, Va. early in 1863; also near Pollock's Mills, Va. On July 1st, 1863, his brigade had retreated to Gettysburg, and about noon on that fateful day at the Battle of Gettysburg, he was seriously wounded. When in later years he applied for a pension, his sworn statement reads as follows: "Colonel Roy Stone of the 149th Penn. Vol. while in command of the Bucktail Brigade, Third Division, First Corps, at Gettysburg, on July 1st, was severely wounded, while in the line of duty, prob-

ably about 1 p.m. and was carried into the McPherson barn, where he lay, totally disabled, from which injury we believe he has never fully recovered, although, some months later on, he resumed the command of his Brigade.—we believe a minnie ball went through his pelvis bone, dangerously causing trouble with his hip, and a general disorder of his system."

In September of 1863, he was sufficiently recovered from the Gettysburg wound to serve as President, Court Martial Board in Washington, D.C. and he served in this capacity until March 1864, when he resumed command of his beloved Bucktail Brigade, and was on active duty with the Army of the Potomac, under Grant, in the sweep through Virginia. Many of the 149th Pennsylvania Volunteers were counting the days until their enlistment period was at an end, and they could return home, little knowing that they would be involved in one of the most crucial and bloody battles of the war—the Battle of the Wilderness. For a powerful and moving account of this battle, read *A Stillness at Appomattox* by Bruce Catton. During all the confusion and killing of this battle, with the forest on fire and many wounded men being roasted alive, General Stone was thrown from his horse, aggravating the hip wound received at Gettysburg less than a year before.

So his army records show his absent, wounded, for May, June, July and August, 1864. From September, 1864 until January 1865, he was at Camp Curtin, and in January, 1865, he was at Alton, Illinois, where on the 27th of that month he tendered his resignation. This was accepted and he was given an honorable discharge. After the battle of Gettysburg he was made a Brevet General.

After receiving his discharge from the army, Stone returned to Cattaraugus

County, New York, to begin his civilian life with his wife, "Dearest Mary." Since his father's death he was the owner of extensive holdings along the Allegany River near Vandalia, and operated the sawmill that furnished a living for several families. In later years, when he applied for a pension, he lists his occupation as a "manufacturer" in Vandalia and Cuba, New York, so it may have been that he turned out in his sawmill wooden articles such as barrels, wooden buckets, clothespins and many more.

The house that the General built reflected the woodland that they were part of. The siding and roof were wooden slabs with the bark left on. The large veranda had a railing of roots and tree limbs. The woodland theme was carried into the interior of the house; the walnut dining table top being supported by a tree trunk with the limbs extended; the furniture was made from various woods that grew in the forest. In every respect, General and Mrs. Stone were affluent people in their county.

Now begins one of the most interesting episodes in the life of Roy Stone: he was, for all practical purposes, *the inventor and first builder of the monorail*. Of course, the name *monorail* had not yet been coined at that time. He called his invention "General Stone's Elevated Railroad." When he first conceived the idea is unknown; in fact, very little in the way of diaries or letters or other written records is available to the seeker of details of the life of Roy Stone; it is necessary to assume many facets of his life. The idea may have been triggered by the fact that New York City was in the process of determining the best possible rapid-transit system for its growing population and a Commission was examining every possible elevated system; the financial re-

wards to the successful designer would be liberal. At any rate his patent application read as follows: "To whom it may concern, be it known that I, Roy Stone, of Vandalia, Cattaraugus County, New York, have invented an improvement in locomotives for one-rail railroads"—his patent numbers are 162,323 and 162,501.

Sometime in 1875 Stone had contacted the management of the Phoenix Iron Works of Phoenixville, Pennsylvania, to get help in the construction of a working model of his Elevated Railroad, including his patented "A"-shaped truss. The management must have seen some possibilities in his idea and helped him make up his working model because in early October, 1875, a group of prominent New Yorkers made the trip to Phoenixville to witness a demonstration of the new system. Here is what they saw: "A single-rail track, raised on columns an average of twenty feet off the ground, with steep inclines and a sharp curve, rambling across the deserted factory ground for a fifth of a mile. Properly speaking, it was not a single rail at all. It was three rails mounted on an "A" shaped truss. At the apex was the heavy, bearing rail on which the equipment rolls; at the crossbar of the "A," spaced about 3½ feet apart, were two parallel guide rails. Jauntily perched on center bearing wheels a weird little locomotive and coach straddled the top rail—horizontal guard wheels with rubber rims were pressed against the guide rails."

The engine had been manufactured by the La France Co. of Elmira, New York, and was really two engines, one to propel the coach in one direction and the other to reverse. The single coach was two-tiered, about twenty feet long. In the upper tier, the riders faced each other while in the lower tier the passen-

gers faced outward with their backs to the bearing wheels. The demonstration given by Stone seems to have been a success.

However, the Commission from New York failed to recommend any particular type of elevated system and when construction was begun the standard rail system with two tracks was used, much to the consternation of Stone and the Phoenix Iron Co.

Undaunted, however, by this setback, Roy Stone was determined to sell his "Elevated Railroad" to the nation. A World's Fair was to be opened in Philadelphia in May of 1876; the theme would be "Progress in the Arts and Sciences." Stone was successful in selling his railroad system to the Fair management to operate across a ravine called Belmont Dell. The line extended in a straight line for about 500 feet, with an elevated passenger platform at each end. The engineer was Adelbert Underwood, of Cuba, N.Y. The fare was three cents each way.

For six months the Roy Stone Elevated Railroad operated at the fair without any accidents but failed to meet expenses and, what was even worse, no other city or company had shown any interest in this transportation system. Now, in late 1876, Roy Stone was forced to acknowledge the fact that he was practically bankrupt. He was heavily in debt, and in addition, was having a health problem, due to the serious wounds received in the War Between the States. So, in March, 1877, he applied for an army pension, since he was almost penniless. He was awarded the princely sum of \$22.50 monthly.

Later in 1877, a company was formed to make use of the General's patent in building an elevated railroad between some of the oil towns then being opened by the oil boom in Pennsylvania. Roy

Stone was voted some stock for the use of his patent but he had no part in its operation; it soon went broke after an engine blew up killing several passengers; the details of this operation has no part in our narrative.

The next place we find Roy Stone is in New York City where he had taken a job with the Army Engineers under General John Newton, who had charge of clearing navigational hazards from New York Harbor. This work had been going on for twelve years. In a short time Roy Stone had patented a hydraulic excavator (patent # 224,309), which was used extensively in the clearing work. We must assume that he worked for the Army Engineers for many years; there is a space that is blank in his life.

1898 he again volunteered for service in the Spanish-American War—June 7, 1898. At that time he had served for at least five years in the Department of Agriculture, connected with the Good Roads Board and on February 1, 1899 was made Director of the Roads Inquiry Board. So we may say quite truthfully that General Roy Stone is also the "Father" of the good roads movement in the United States. Sometime in 1900 he again retired with a pension, amount unknown.

The final record reads as follows: Telegram sent to the Secretary of War reading: "General Roy Stone died here last night, burial at Arlington Wednesday or Thursday"—signed John Gilmer Speed, dated August 6, 1905.

His widow, Mary Elizabeth Stone, then applied for a pension, amount unknown, which she received until her death on October 5, 1925. She died while visiting her daughter and son-in-law, Lady and Lord Monson, Burton Hall, Lincoln, England. The body was

transported home on the S. S. "Majestic," and she was buried beside her husband in Arlington Cemetery.

The elevated railroad episode in General Stone's life is written about in much detail by Mark Reinsberg in a series of three articles which appeared in the *Journal of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania* (January 1967, July 1966 and October 1966) under the heading "General Stone's Elevated Railroad. Portrait of an Inventor." I have borrowed from these articles quite heav-

ily and wish to thank Mr. Reinsberg for all the information he uncovered that I had been unable to find. I owe a great debt to Mrs. T. R. Bevan, Barmoor Cottage, Bletchingley, Surrey, England, who is the granddaughter of General Stone; also the historians in Cattaraugus and Allegany Counties, who were of great help. It is unfortunate that more information concerning General Stone's activities in Puerto Rico which led Cook to honor him has not turned up.

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### Palm Popularity Wavers in City

Builders and landscapers have raised their growth hemlines, and the tropical palm tree is passing out of fashion.

The swaying symbol of a balmy city for six decades is an oddity in the fast-growing suburbs and the distinctive trees hugging the coast may be dinosaurs of fading tastes.

The trend away from the southern California favorite is happening so fast, according to city planners and landscape experts, that San Diegans themselves may have to become "tree tourists" to regularly see palm trees.

"The parks, the coast and around the historic sections of town; that's where suburbanites will have to go to find palm

trees," said Karl Schnizler, assistant parks superintendent.

The official of the city once called "a paradise of palm trees" says the plant that gave a distinctive touch has been abandoned for olives, pines and full-leaved trees that grow fast.

Richard Nadeau, immediate past president of the local California Landscape Contractor's Association agrees. "If you are talking in terms of symbols, the olive is replacing the palm in new developments—both commercial and residential," Nadeau said. "Developers and homeowners are planting 100 olive trees to one palm," Nadeau estimates.

When it comes to the complete tree-planting picture, architects and city planters estimate there may be less than two palms in every 500 trees sunk into local soil.

What's causing this sad ending for the tree that Spanish cargo ships brought by the hundreds from the Canary Islands? The experts say there are two basic reasons:

—The palm tree has gotten a bad press because of disease that has raged through trees at Mission Bay, on Shelter Island and in beach areas.

—"Both landscape architects and thousands of new residents come from northern California, the Midwest or the East