

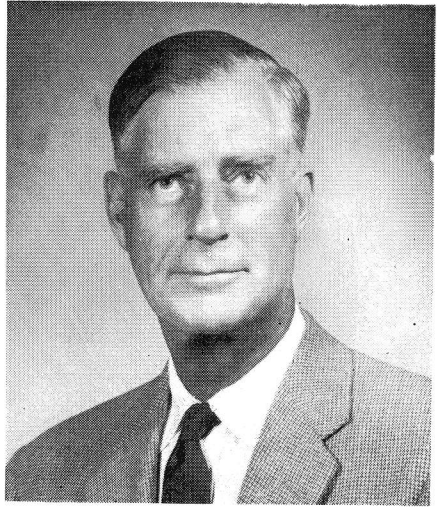
Dent Smith, "Palmateer"

In the short 18 month period that The Palm Society has been in existence this voluntary organization has blossomed from a seedling nourished by only a score or more members to a robust plant still growing on the enthusiasm of almost 300 palm lovers. Starting in January, 1956, with informal processed bulletins it now finds itself, a year and a half later, completing the first letter-press volume of its new quarterly journal, *Principes*.

It is doubtful if all the members of our thriving young Society know how much its very existence and sustenance until now have been due to the devotion, enthusiasm, and "drive" of one man, Dent Smith, palmateer (as he would call himself) extraordinary, who until April of this year not only founded the Society but also served as its first president and able editor of its infant publications. If it were not for his generosity *Principes* would not exist or be continuing today.

Probably only Dent Smith can tell us when that sudden "love-at-first-sight" for palms came upon him. It certainly was not in his early youth for palms do not constitute a part of the temperate flora of Virginia, West Virginia, and New York, states which served mainly as schooling grounds during his early youth. In 1920, while scouting for oil in Mexico, he must have seen palms. Likewise a few years later when, at the age of 26, he went to Palm Springs "for nine months to explore the desert, but for groceries had to hire out as a taxi cab driver when not exploring"!

Of importance to the Society is the fact that Dent Smith found himself about 1930 when he set up his own investment house in New York City. This permitted early retirement in 1939 which in turn made it possible for him to devote much of his time to his new hobby of growing trees. During those early years of his investment business



an innate love of arborescent plants first showed itself. He began personal arboretums of sorts both in New Jersey and Vermont collecting broad-leaved and coniferous trees as his specialties. Note that he prefers the grandeur of trees; plants outstanding for flowers do not give him the same appeal. Indeed Dent has often affirmed his preference for "noble" plants.

I am sure our first president feels that palms are the noblest of all trees. He found them all right in Florida where, in 1949, he went to live permanently. Soon afterwards Dent Smith must have caught palm fever for in 1950 he had already planted palms on his own new place at Daytona Beach. He began scouring the immediate area for these noble plants; extended his search to Orlando and farther south, where in Coconut Grove he found those "gold mines" of palms, the Fairchild Tropical Garden and the U.S.D.A. Plant Introduction Garden (Chapman Field). That his interest in palms was more than casual is shown in a 1953 letter to Mr.

H. F. Loomis of Chapman Field, who had encouraged him in his palm collecting efforts.

"I am experimenting now with palms in order to learn what species can be grown successfully here [Daytona Beach]. Such palms as *Chrysalidocarpus lutescens* and even *Scheelea*, planted in the open here, have withstood the winter without any damage, but we have not had a frost to test them. Anyhow, in my small way, I hope to add to the existing knowledge about the hardness of certain palms and their adaptability to soil conditions here, if I can obtain enough different species to work with. I now have 32 species but to add to this number through the nurseries hereabouts seems impossible."

Where all this has brought Dent Smith today in his own garden is summarized in his article in the last issue of this journal (Palms at a High Latitude in Florida, *Principes* 1: 104-114, April, 1957).

To most men it would have been sufficient to plant and enjoy their own garden. But in 1955 Dent Smith was

wondering out loud to palm-growing friends why, in a world of plant societies, "the palms, one of the world's most important plant families, have been neglected." Since there was no good reason why not, an informal society was proposed. We all know the rest. But what we do not all perhaps know is that for the first six months Dent Smith literally bore all responsibilities of the new Society's operations. His enthusiasm for palms is contagious and it is seen bubbling over in the issues of the Society's first publications, both bulletins and *Principes*. Combined with his love for this group of plants goes outstanding editorial ability. The combination of these two qualifications helped make the new journal an immediate success as is being reflected in burgeoning Society membership.

New officers are now charged with seeing that The Palm Society continues advancing. Only by growing can the fledgling reach that point where it can demonstrate in self-sufficiency the great debt that it owes this one man.—W.H.H.

Dent Smith

Director and Past President

Born 1897, Staunton, Virginia. Attended public schools in Charleston, W. Va., and Chicago; Grace Church School, New York; Charlotte Hall, Md., Augusta Military Academy, Va., Army and Navy Preparatory School, Washington, D. C., and finally at 16 entered junior year of college (Auburn, Alabama). Left this last at end of first semester, while still 16, which ended his formal schooling. As a boy he worked during vacations from his 9th year onward at numerous tasks, the first of which was as a soloist in a nickelodeon. Next was the Kelly Axe Factory, stamping the name and

weight on axe heads, followed by office boy Armour & Co., Union Stockyards, Chicago; cub reporter Charleston (W. Va.) Gazette; clerk in bookshop; newspaper subscription solicitor; cook's helper in dogwagon; armature winding at Cabin Creek coal mine. After leaving college, he worked for a few months as a staff reporter on Charleston Gazette, then as backrodman on surveying gang, Virginian Power Co.

At 18 he enlisted for 7 years in Regular Army, March, 1916, when Villa raided Columbus, New Mexico. Stationed first at Douglas, Arizona, he served his

enlistment in Arizona, New Mexico and Texas mostly on the Mexican border, and in May, 1919 was furloughed to the Regular Army Reserve as a First Sergeant, at San Antonio. He then returned to Arizona where he mucked high-grade copper ore in the Old Dominion mine, Globe; later worked as electrician's helper on crane in converter pit, International Smelter, Miami, Ariz., and later as switchman on slag train at same smelter. The following year (Nov. 1920) he went to Tampico, Mexico, where he was hired as an oilfield scout and was stationed at Pánuco, Veracruz and later at Agua Nacida. Ill with malaria, he went to Mexico City to recover his health, working there as a flunky in the Hospital General for 50c gold per diem.

In September, 1921, he married Guadalupe Hopper y Martínez at San Luis Potosí. Worked for a time as a reporter for *La Prensa* (till the paper went bankrupt), Tampico, and then for 8 months manufactured Smith's Genuine Greenleaf Maple Syrup from sugar, water and mapeline—a business carried on by others ever since with some success. Scouted the Pánuco fields once more for a year, and in June, 1923 left Mexico for southern California, where he worked as a house-to-house canvasser selling building lots, pianos, sandwich-vending machines, vacuum cleaners, model T Ford cars, oil leases, etc. Went to Palm

Springs for 9 months to explore the desert, but for groceries had to hire out as taxicab driver when not "exploring." Omitting a few California episodes too painful for print, he migrated cross-country to New York in 1925 and worked for the next five years as a bond salesman for an investment banking house in Wall Street.

Early in 1930 he founded Dent Smith and Company, over-the-counter dealers in investment securities, and in this endeavor found himself in the kind of work for which, temperamentally and otherwise, he was perfectly fitted. In 1939 he decided to retire so as to give more time to his collections, begun in 1935, of broadleaf trees and conifers, and to do some writing. The change was abrupt; he dissolved all his corporate ties, resigning his posts as President of Dent Smith and Company, President of Transportation & General Securities Co., Chairman of the Board of Duluth-Superior Transit Co., and as a Director of Erie Coach Company, Fort Worth Transit Co. and several others. Growing restless in retirement, he founded the magazine *Encore*, a monthly with nationwide distribution, publishing and editing it from 1942 to 1945. Thereafter he confined his attention to his tree collections in New Jersey and Vermont until 1949, in which year he came to live permanently in Florida.

THE SOCIETY'S FIRST SECRETARY AND TREASURER

The Society is greatly indebted, also, to its first Secretary, Mrs. W. W. Hargett of Ormond Beach, who was present at the organization meeting on April 17th, 1956, and ably carried out the duties of recording and corresponding secretary during the Society's first year of official existence. She and the late Mr. Hargett were among the Society's first and most enthusiastic members.

Miss Margueriete Martin accepted the

responsibility of the office of Treasurer for the first year. She also assisted the President in the arduous tasks of preparing and mailing out the Bulletins, sending information to prospective members and other tedious but necessary tasks.

To both of these ladies goes a tremendous vote of thanks and appreciation from the Society as a whole.

L.H.W.