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The Survivors Observed

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No one who met Mrs. A. Wentworth Erickson, O.B.E., on her 1950's and 1960's visits to Miami ever forgot the occasion. The honorary title fitted her perfectly. She was a tall, handsome woman, a commanding figure in any group. She wore long dresses, flowers at her waist, chokers, and often large flowered hats. And she brought with her, we believed, the aura and elegance of her Colonial Nassau.

During the period when my wife and I knew Dame Cecile, her great energies and attentions were focused upon palms. She talked with charm on many other matters, but the subjects of palms and her Nassau palm garden were persistent.

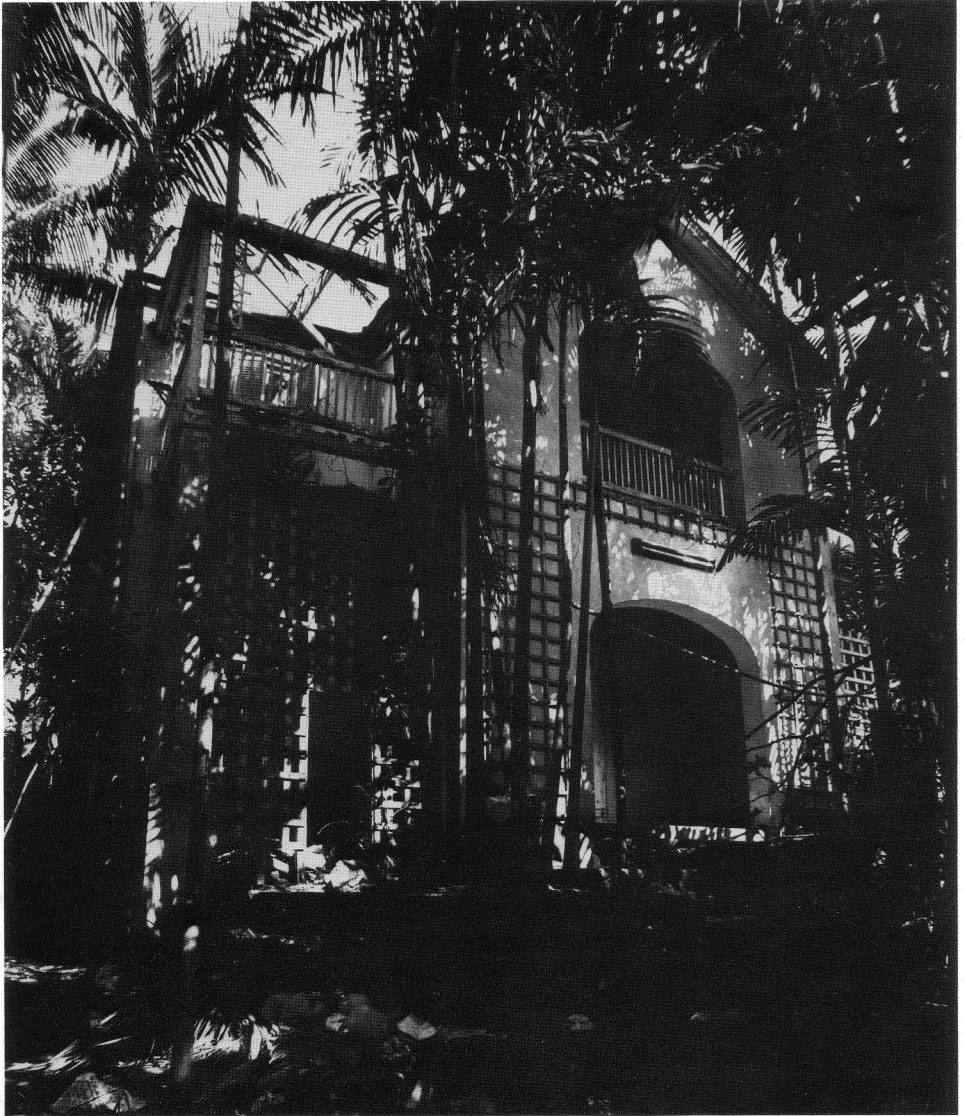
Mr. and Mrs. Erickson moved from Massachusetts to Nassau in 1935, purchasing a handsome house (Fig. 1) on East Hill Street above the town and overlooking the harbor. In 1939 Mr. Erickson died, but Dame Cecile continued to live there. Her New England work ethic and gardening tradition, the terraced hillside of land sloping down from the house and the flat stretches below, as well as new friendships with generous palm lovers, Arthur and Margaret Langlois and David and Marian Fairchild, all conspired to produce her fascination with palms and an ambitious garden.

In Nassau there could hardly have been more different garden sites than those of the Langlois' Retreat with the flat 'cop-pice' and numerous solution holes for planting palms, and that of the Erickson's windy, bare rock hillside. Mrs. Erickson caused great amounts of planting soil to be placed on the hillside, behind concrete

curbs. Elegant steps (see cover and Fig. 2) connected terraces from which to view the ranks of palms. Later there came rock-lined pools which lacked the self-consciousness of so many such works. This was clearly Dame Cecile's garden, but her son Douglas Erickson told me that there was a gathering of the clan in Nassau in 1959 to help with "digging the pools." As Dame Cecile became less easily able to visit the terraces to inspect her palms, an electric track and traveling platform with seats was erected alongside the house. Doug Erickson believes the house, from its appearance on early navigation charts, dates from the 1700's.

When I married Dr. David Fairchild's granddaughter, Helene, in 1958, our honeymoon to Nassau and the Exuma Islands included a visit to Mrs. Erickson's home and her garden. We remember walking easily from terrace to terrace, gazing at the palms, feeling the sun on our heads, and being met below by Dame Cecile on her electric platform, with whom we ascended again to the house for tea.

Twenty-six years later, fifteen years since Dame Cecile's death, we learned from Doug Erickson that the property was still owned by the family, and without hesitation asked permission to revisit the garden. He said that no care of any kind had been available for the palms for those fifteen years, that the pools had long been dry, and that he didn't know if anything of interest would be left. Several weeks later he found what was for us to be an invaluable, undated list of species and sources of palms compiled by his mother, probably in the late 1950's. He clarified



1. The east face of the Erickson house from the second terrace.

locations on a survey of the property with us. We asked our friend Don Evans, Superintendent of Fairchild Tropical Garden, to research early *Principes* for mention of the Erickson garden and to help us with palm identification on the trip. Helene agreed to be the photographer. In Volume 10: 40, 1966, Don found the following paragraph:

After a most pleasant visit at Mr. and Mrs. Russell's delightful home and lunch at Montague Beach Hotel, they drove to "Glenwood", the home of Mrs. A. Wentworth Ericson (*sic*), O.B.E. The garden is on a slope, and a number of terraces lead to level ground. Although we were impressed with the lush look of the growth, with palms of many sizes



2. Palms tower above the central steps between the second and third terraces as D. Evans and L. Pancoast approach them.

featured on each terrace, Mrs. Erickson, who graciously came out to greet us, grieves for the plants that were destroyed by the severe hurricane of

September, 1965. One of the most interesting palms to be seen there is *Arenga undulatifolia*, with wide, wavy-edged leaflets, of an almost steel-blue

color, and long strands of immature fruit.

Don, Helene, and I imagined that we would find few of the drier-growing palms intact, growing here and there among the scuffy Bahamian weeds and bushes. The dry pools would be cracked, the site deserted. We hedged these grim expectations with a visit to the Retreat, and a long, enthralling walk from sink hole to sink hole with Mrs. Langlois' loving monologue about her many "children." Mrs. Langlois had admired Dame Cecile, whom she warmly characterized as "The General." Although she had not visited the hillside garden since shortly after Dame Cecile's death, she astonished us by reciting from memory her own list of the garden's more unusual palms.

The very old house on East Hill Street was still looking out over Nassau Harbor. A friendly caretaker lounged on its veranda. He would have shown us more of the empty interiors, but we were already astounded at what we beheld through the windows: a rich, lush, dense, high, vertical jungle of what were obviously the survivors of all the palms Dame Cecile had planted in her garden: triumphant *Ptychosperma elegans* and *Heterospatha elata*.

Ptychosperma elegans has gone wild where we live in Coconut Grove; at the Retreat we had talked with Mrs. Langlois about her many volunteer "hetties," as she called her *Heterospathe*. But this was a forest of both palms, evenly mixed (Fig. 3). Although a landscape architect might not choose to relate them visually, the birds of Nassau did not hesitate, dropping their small seeds everywhere. Even the unbroken stone walks and terraces had sprouted tall, slender trunks, confusing architectural intentions and greatly filling in the open lawns on each terrace. The pools were half full of water. There were men burning refuse and hacking crudely

at the smaller plants of *Heterospathe* so that people might pass. And there was a surprising sign: "Glenwood Garden Tours. Adult \$1.00. Children \$.50. Open 9:00 to 4:00."

We moved through the smoky air to search out the palms which had withstood the dry Nassau winters and competition from *Ptycho* and *Hetero*. The smaller palms, the shade and water lovers, were gone. Many of the taller kinds had reached the upper canopy to thrive there, but were difficult to see from below. One can strain one's eyes looking for a missing *Howea* in a forest of *Heterospathe*. We could not help indulging in wondering how Dame Cecile would have felt about her beloved garden today. Would the sadness of the palms lost overcome the thrill of seeing the startling growth of the survivors? I think that if she had been there, she soon would have had all of us working to bring Glenwood back into balance, rather than counting species or writing sentimental articles about the past. And, of course, we also began to wonder which palms of our own gardens would ultimately turn survival into triumph.

An unterraced, sloped area of rock eastward of the terraces was called "The Rockery." It appears to have been the place where shade-loving palms were grown, but they do not now remain. If the hillside terraces and rockery were intensely supplied with palms, either by Dame Cecile, or, later, by the birds, there were also palms in the level land below. Sabals, Royals, and the magnificent coconuts, which we Floridians must now envy, were mixed with good specimens of breadfruit, spice trees, avocados, mangos, citrus, Spanish limes and guava.

A trellis and concrete walkways continue to give parts of the level portions of the land some feeling of organization, in spite of the ubiquitous volunteer *Ptychosperma* and *Heterospathe*. As Doug Erickson had told us we would, we found



3. L. Pancoast (left) and D. Evans at the east end of the third terrace.

the flat gravestone of an early Englishman "who fought pirates" dated 1722 to 1764, which prodded our sense of history. We also found a stone lined rectangular pit, which the survey showed as "bamboo," but which was full of smoldering garbage.

Don surmised that the bamboo which had grown there had blossomed, died and spread its seed to start the smaller bamboo which now surrounded the pit. Helene stalked photographs.

We shook hands with *Elaeis oleifera*



4. L. Pancoast beside the silk cotton tree in the lower garden.

and two *Arenga undulatifolia* mentioned in *Principes*. We had agreed to mark with an "X" those palms which were in place but dead; we never used that symbol once.

Finally, we sat under a shockingly massive 80-foot, elephantine *Ceiba pentandra* (Fig. 4), beside beautifully conceived and constructed pools filled with intensely yel-

low-green duckweed and white water lilies, surrounded by superb palms. At mid-afternoon in the wet heat of July, we were truly reluctant to leave.

Below is Dame Cecile's list, with symbols supplied on our visit. "+" indicates

healthy survival; "±" less healthy. "?" indicates that we found no trace of that palm. Also provided is a short list of palms encountered by us in the garden, but not included by Dame Cecile.

Table 1. Palms growing in Glenwood Gardens Nassau-Bahamas.

| Name [Listed Name] | Origin of Plant | Location in Garden |
|--|--|---------------------------------|
| + <i>Aiphanes caryotifolia</i> | Langlois—grown from seed from Rio B.G. | Lawn—Third Terrace |
| ± <i>Arecastrum romanzoffianum</i> | | Third Terrace |
| ? <i>Arenga undulatifolia</i> | Langlois—grown from seed from St. Clair, Trinidad | Second Terrace |
| + <i>A. engleri</i> | Langlois—grown from seed from Trinidad B.G. | Third Terrace |
| + <i>A. wightii</i> | Langlois—grown from seed from Castleton Gardens, Jamaica | Slat House |
| ± <i>A. undulatifolia</i> [species F.T.G. 244] | Langlois—grown from seed from Archibald Expedition to Moluccas (vicinity Gorontalo, East Coast of Celebes) | Lower Gardens |
| + <i>A. pinnata</i> | Florida | Lower Garden |
| ? <i>Butia capitata</i> | Florida | Third Terrace |
| + <i>Caryota mitis?</i> | Locally | Third Terrace and Lower Garden |
| ? <i>Chamaedorea stolonifera</i> | Langlois—offshoot from plant received from Barry, Cal. | Rockery |
| ? <i>C. tepejilote</i> | Langlois—grown from seed from tree growing in Retreat Garden | Rockery |
| ? <i>Chamaedorea ernesti-augusti</i> | Langlois—grown from seed obtained from Br. Honduras by P.W.D. | Vicinity Pool |
| ? <i>Chambeyronia macrocarpa</i> | Langlois—grown from seed from Rio B.G. | Lower Garden |
| + <i>Chrysalidocarpus lutescens</i> | | Rockery by Pool |
| + <i>C. madagascarensis</i> ssp. <i>lucubensis</i> species | Langlois—grown from seed from Trinidad B.G. | Slat House |
| | Langlois—grown from seed from plant found in a park in Bahia, Brazil | Lower Garden |
| + <i>Coccothrinax argentea?</i> | Florida | Lower Garden |
| + <i>Cocos nucifera</i> | Local | Many |
| <i>Cocos nucifera</i> Golden Coconut | | Third Terrace |
| + <i>Cryosophila argentea</i> | Langlois—grown from seed collected from forests Belize Dis., British Honduras | Vicinity Rockery—Second Terrace |
| + <i>C. nana</i> | Langlois—grown from seed from St. Clair, Trinidad | Lower Garden |
| ? <i>Desmoncus</i> species | Florida | Rockery by Pool |
| ? <i>D. quasillarius</i> | Langlois—grown from seed collected from forests at Maskal's, British Honduras | Rockery—Second Terrace |
| + <i>Dictyosperma album</i> | Miss Matthews | Third Terrace and Lower Garden |
| + <i>Elaeis guineensis</i> | Florida | Lower Garden |

Table 1. (Continued).

| Name [Listed Name] | Origin of Plant | Location in Garden |
|--|---|--|
| + <i>E. oleifera</i> | Langlois—grown from seed from Summit Experimental Station, Canal Zone | Lower Garden |
| + <i>Goussia attenuata</i> | Langlois—grown from seed from tree growing in Lotmore Garden, Nassau | Second Terrace |
| + <i>Heterospatha elata</i> [species (green heart) ?] | | Third Terrace Third Terrace |
| ? <i>Howea belmoreana</i> | Government Nursery, Nassau | Slat House |
| + <i>Hyophorbe lagenicaulis</i> | Govt. Nursery | Second Terrace |
| ? <i>H. verschaffeltii</i> | Govt. Nursery | Second Terrace |
| + <i>Latania</i> sp. | Langlois—grown from seed from Trinidad B.G. (Plants of <i>L. loddigeesii</i> and <i>L. commersoni</i> got scrambled (it is one or the other)) | Lawn and Third Terrace |
| + <i>Licuala</i> sp. | Langlois—grown from seed collected from a plant under name of <i>L. spinosa</i> in Trinidad B.G.—not that palm | Vicinity Rockery— Second Terrace |
| + <i>Licuala grandis</i> | | Lower Garden |
| + <i>Livistona chinensis</i> | | Lower Garden |
| ? <i>Opsiandra maya</i> <i>O.</i> species | Dr. Fairchild Langlois—grown from seed collected in forests at Jones' Landing, Sabun River, British Honduras | Lower Garden Lower Garden |
| ? <i>Orbignya cohune</i> | Govt. Nursery, Nassau | Flower Garden |
| + <i>Phoenix canariensis</i> <i>P. roebelinii</i> | Florida | Lower Garden—Third Terrace |
| ? <i>Pinanga kuhlii</i> | Langlois—grown from seed collected Rio B.G. | Slat House |
| ? <i>P.</i> sp. F.T.G. 207 | Langlois—grown from seed from Archibald Exp. to Moluccas (from Minabasa, Celebes) | Slat House |
| ? <i>Pritchardia pacifica</i> ? | Govt. Nursery, Nassau | Lower Garden |
| ? <i>Pseudophoenix sargentii</i> | Local | Lower Garden |
| + <i>Ptychosperma elegans</i> [possibly <i>P. kersteriana</i>] <i>P.</i> sp. | Local Langlois—grown from seed collected from Dade Gar., Trinidad | Second and Third Terrace Slat House |
| + <i>Ptychosperma macarthurii</i> | Florida | Third Terrace by Coach House |
| + <i>P.</i> variety | Langlois—grown from seed from Rio B.G. from three named <i>Balaka see-manii</i> | Rockery—Second Terrace |
| + <i>P.</i> sp. | Langlois—grown from seed from Trinidad B.G. from tree by name of <i>Coleospadix oninensis</i> | |
| + <i>Rhapis excelsa</i> | | Rockery by Pool—also on 2nd level |
| ? <i>Rhopaloblaste augusta</i> | Langlois—grown from seed collected from Dade Gar., Trinidad | Lower Garden (Pit) |
| + <i>Roystonea elata</i> | Local | Many |
| + <i>Sabal palmetto</i> <i>S.</i> sp. | Local Found on property | First Terrace—Lower Garden |
| ? <i>Synechanthus fibrosus</i> | Langlois—grown from seed collected forests Stann Creek, Br. Hon. | Rockery, Second Terrace |

Table 1. (Continued).

| | Name [Listed Name] | Origin of Plant | Location in Garden |
|---|---|--|--------------------------------------|
| ? | <i>Thrinax radiata</i> <i>T. morrissii</i> | Langlois—grown from seed from Barry, Cal. | Lower Garden Rockery, Second Terrace |
| + | <i>Veitchia merrillii</i> | Langlois—small plant from Gardens, Jamaica | Lawn—Third Terrace |

There were a number of additional palms which we found that were not included on Dame Cecile's list above:

| | | | |
|---|-------------------------------|--|--------------|
| + | <i>Livistona woodfordiana</i> | | Second Level |
| + | <i>Bactris major</i> | | Slat House |
| + | <i>Veitchia winin</i> | | Lower Garden |

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