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Dent Smith's Favorite Palm

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In the beginning, Dent conceived of and created the *Journal of The Palm Society*, which over the years has been accepted, generally, all over the world as the foremost authority (the Bible) of current information about palms. Few other publications can boast of comparable editorship and growth in excellence since Dent founded it; in early years he paid to publish it out of his own pocket and continued to contribute to it with down-to-earth words of wisdom.

He groped around a great deal before he selected a title for the *Journal*. But he came up with a good one—all in true Dent Smith vernacular. And Dent could handle “the vernacular” as well as any one ever could. In fact, he was a master of it. So he said, in the beginning of the very first issue of the *Journal*. “*Principes*, plural of the Latin noun, *princeps*, is an alternative name of venerable age for the palms—the Princes of the vegetable kingdom.”

Somehow I always thought that Dent had a certain palm in mind when he delved into the “Princes of the vegetable kingdom.” He must have had some palm-image conceptions; certainly he wasn't considering spinach, or carrots! I'm disposed to think, to this day, that somehow he had in mind a royal palm (*Roystonea*) which indeed is princely and always will be a palm trade-mark, although too many people perceive palms as nothing but coconuts.

No, Dent had a deeper perception of palms. He knew there were some 3,000 species of them. And he traveled to see them and, perhaps, even purchase a seedling at the annual Palm Society sale in Fairchild Garden, Miami, which he is attending in the accompanying picture with his wife, Doris. And note in the picture

that Dent is well equipped with his camera paraphernalia, as photography was another way he enjoyed capturing specimens.

So, did Dent have a favorite palm? He struggled for years with cold weather at Daytona Beach and came up with some preferred species that might be “cold-hardy.” He wrote about that in early issues of *Principes*.

But, personally, I never did get a definitive statement out of him as to his preference for a palm. The last time we talked about it I wheedled him; “Come on, Dent, which is your FAVORITE palm?” He turned his head around a time or two as he thought about this, and replied, “Mel, I won't pick out a favorite palm; I like ALL of them!”



1. Dent and Doris at a palm sale at Fairchild Tropical Garden, October 1980. Photo by Melvin W. Sneed.