

Dent Smith and The Palm Society

LUCITA HARDIE WAIT

621 NE 55th Street, Miami, FL 33174

One day when I was working as Curator of the Library and Museum at Fairchild Tropical Garden, Coral Gables, Florida, the door opened and a tall handsome man about fifty years old came in.

"Mrs. Wait, I am Dent Smith. I live in Daytona Beach. I have come to look at palms."

Thus began a friendship that lasted for over thirty years. We went out and "looked at palms" then and about every six months thereafter for many years. Dent was an ardent collector and student of palms. He would come to southern Florida and take back to Daytona Beach a U-haul truck loaded with small palms of many kinds. He collected an excellent group of them, both cold-hardy and tender, over about ten years of good weather, before a freeze decimated them. He repeated this act many times, until he finally said, "I'm tired of murdering palms."

One day he was in my office and said, "Lucita, there is every kind of plant society—why don't we have a Palm Society? Would you join if we started one?"

"Of course I would," I replied.

"Well, you are the fourth member. I have found two others who would join. Do you think we could find seventy-five peo-

ple over the whole world who would join?" (We now have 2,084 members!)

Dent undertook the entire work of the Society for the first year. He was President, Treasurer, Secretary, everything. He published several Bulletins before we felt we could afford *Principes*, and wrote quantities of letters. He told me once that he had spent over \$3,000 on the Society during that year.

I was taking a sabbatical from my job at Fairchild Tropical Garden, so he asked me if I would become the executive secretary of The Palm Society. I agreed, and we had about twenty years of good times, he telling me what to do and I doing it.

Dent was a firm supporter of The Palm Society during all these years, contributing generously of money and interest even after his health began to fail.

He contributed a great deal to the growing of palms when he started The Palm Society. For many years he had an outstanding collection, and was generous in letting people come to see it. He encouraged the Society both monetarily and with his interest, and helped many beginning collectors get started. He was the heart and soul of the Society and we will all miss him very much.

CLASSIFIED

FOR SALE. Palm garden overlooking Hilo Bay in Hilo, Hawaii. House with 4 bedrooms, 2 baths, and view included. \$160,000, fee simple. JANE ROBINSON (808) 935-3159.

DWARF RHAPIS EXCELSA, Seven green and variegated varieties available. NEW BOOK, "Secret of the Orient," a comprehensive guide to **Rhapis** palms—52 pages fully illustrated. Catalogue 41. Book and catalogue \$5 ppd. ("Secret of the Orient" is also available for The Palm Society Bookstore). RHAPIS GARDENS—PS, P.O.D. 287, GREGORY, TX 78349.