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An Oklahoma Cottage Industry Utilizing the Dwarf Palm *Sabal minor*

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The dwarf palm or palmetto (*Sabal minor*) occurs in wet alluvial ground in southeastern U.S.A., and extends northward into the states of Oklahoma, Arkansas, and North Carolina (Vines 1960). Vines indicated that this trunkless palmetto, which grows to 2.5 m tall, is occasionally used as fodder for cattle. I wish to report another use by Christians during the Easter season of this sole member of the palm family in Oklahoma.

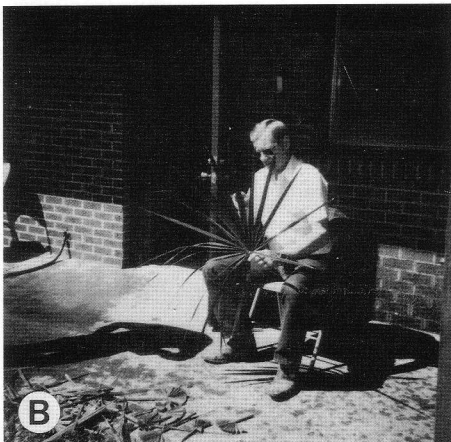
Beginning some ten years after the founding of St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Broken Bow, Oklahoma, a cottage industry, utilizing the local palmetto population and run by the church community, has been in continuous existence for approximately 25 years. The nature of the cottage industry is apparent in its organization. The leader, Susan Harper, begins the process in January. At this time the men of St. Luke's make the first of



A



C

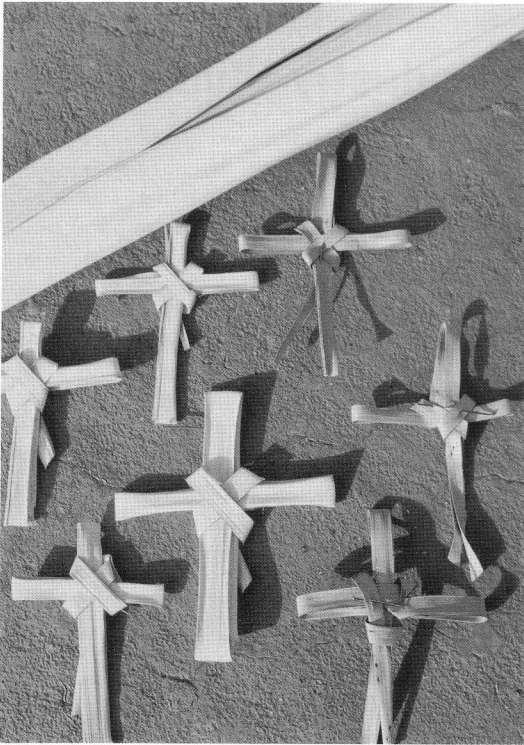


B



D

1. Processing steps of Dwarf Palms (*Sabal minor*). A. Leaves are washed. B. Washed leaves are trimmed. C. Trimmed leaves are separated into segments ("fronds"). D. Fronds are separated into best quality for frond products and good quality to be made into crosses.



2. Each of the 10,000 crosses shipped in 1991 for Easter season observances by St. Luke's Episcopal Church was woven from a dwarf palm segment.



3. *Sabal minor* growing on the mowed highway shoulder in extreme southeast Oklahoma.

approximately five trips to harvest the palmetto leaves. Three products are fashioned and sold from the leaves: crosses, fronds, and fans. The crosses are segments formed into crosses which are worn on Palm Sunday, the fronds are segments that are carried in the Palm Sunday procession, and the fans are the entire leaf which may be used for decoration on Palm Sunday. From each palmetto, 2-3 fans approximately 1 m in height, are selected, and from each fan, 10-12 segments are obtained. The leaves are washed, trimmed, and most separated into segments (Fig. 1). These strips are evaluated by appearance (Fig. 1) and the good become "fronds" and the not-so-good are made into crosses (Fig. 2) in six to seven homes. The congregation is employed on a volunteer basis and involves 15 people, virtually the entire congregation. The youth were employed on a salary basis last year because of the large demand. The palm products are mailed, refrigerated, two weeks prior

to Palm Sunday. A wine and cheese party starts the season and a dinner, called "the last roundup" (attended by the bishop), ends the effort. This is the sole money maker for the church. In 1991 \$2,500 was the income from customers, primarily in the southwestern region, but also as far away as Michigan, Wisconsin, and Tennessee. Of the total, \$2,000 was from the sale of crosses, sold at \$10/50 crosses. Fans are sold at \$8.50/10, and fronds at \$7.50/100. No advertising is used at present; expansion is being considered. The major problem is an allergy to the mold on the leaves.

The "palm patch" is now in Arkansas, approximately 50 miles from Broken Bow. The palmettos are purposely not killed during harvesting of the 400-500 leaves. The patch is leased to a hunting group that considers the palmettos a nuisance. Dwarf palms in Oklahoma are restricted to the extreme southeast corner of the state, adjacent to the Red River. Apparently, the population has been decreasing because of clearing and development. On a recent field trip led by Jim Norman of Muskogee, Oklahoma, sponsored by the Oklahoma Native Plant Society, only one palmetto was found where a patch had existed. The plant was found growing adjacent to the highway, tolerating the frequent mowing (Fig. 3).

It is appropriate that one of the few indigenous craft industries to use native palms in this country should have developed in Oklahoma. The resourcefulness and strength of this state is well known from the Dust Bowl era. Indeed, this cot-

tage industry developed out of the economic necessity to exploit a local source of palm products. It is perhaps also appropriate that a rather maligned species of palms is being used to glorify arguably the most important figure in human history.

LITERATURE CITED

- VINES R. A. 1960. Trees, shrubs and woody vines of the Southwest. University of Texas Press, Austin, Texas, 1104 pp.

SURVEY OF ALL IPS MEMBERS SOON

In October, 1993, the IPS Board of Directors commissioned that a survey of all active members be conducted by the IPS Membership Promotion Committee Chairman, Phil Bergman. The board wishes to determine what services IPS members want and what they do not want. Also, how do members think the services already offered by the organization can be improved.

Look for this survey in your mail and please take just a moment to complete and return it to the IPS. After all, the IPS board cannot act on your wishes if they remain unknown.

MAKE YOUR PLANS TO ATTEND THE INTERNATIONAL PALM SOCIETY BIENNIAL MEETING IN CARACAS, VENEZUELA IN JUNE, 1994

Hopefully many of you are making plans to attend the 1994 International Palm Society Biennial Meeting in and around Caracas, Venezuela, during the week of June 12-16, 1994. The Biennial meeting is being co-hosted by the Venezuelan Botanical Foundation (Botanic Gardens) and AVEPALMAS, the Venezuelan Palm Society. There will be garden tours and special events during the weekend that the meeting opens as well as during the meeting week. Relatively inexpensive airfares have been negotiated from most departure cities and attractive hotel rates are available. Food is very inexpensive in Venezuela and the IPS Registration Fee includes many meals and all required in-country transportation.

Also plan to attend the special pre-Biennial 4-wheel driving tour of Avila National Park palm habitats on Sunday, June 12, and Post-Biennial palm expeditions within Venezuela beginning on June 17th (for from 3 to 10 days each, depending upon your selection of itinerary modules). Post-Biennial excursion modules include expeditions to the palms of high-altitude cloud forests, lowland river delta jungle habitats, upper llanos and others.

You should have already received full schedule and registration information on the 1994 Biennial by mail. If you have not received your copy or if you want additional information on the city, its palms, or any other aspects of the Biennial, please contact Jim Cain, 12418 Stafford Springs Drive, Houston, Texas, telephone (713)558-6153 or fax (713)964-6555.