

Pioneering in Suburbia

PART I

By Nixon Smiley

Nixon Smiley, a well known newspaper reporter for the *Miami Herald*, local historian, and environmentalist, died July 29, 1990. Except for a hitch in the Marines during World War II, Smiley worked for the Herald from 1940 until he retired in 1973. His *Knights of the Fourth Estate*, one of nine books that he wrote, is the definitive history of the *Miami Herald* and an excellent history of Miami as well.

Long the *Herald's* horticultural expert, Smiley was also acting director at Fairchild Tropical Garden from 1956 - 63. His interest in tropical plants was a particularly rewarding part of his life.

Reared by his paternal grandparents, Smiley's early childhood was filled with fear and self doubts. He quickly learned to read faces and anticipate actions of adults to avoid severe punishment. Thus, he developed a keen sense of observation which was to help make him a respected newspaper reporter and author. His writings are characterized by this ability to observe and record in a clear, precise manner those events and details other people often failed to perceive.

Before his death, Smiley recorded the memories of his experiences shared with his family and friends while living on Montgomery Drive in southwest Dade County on property the family bought when the area was still mostly undeveloped. The following observations cover the period between 1951 -1976 when he developed and landscaped the property at Southwest 120th Street and 60th Avenue. His love of the land, his interest and knowledge of tropical planting, and his friendships with a variety of interesting people make the memoir meaningful to all South Floridians.

Today, thousands of people live in the area Smiley describes. How fortunate for Miami that a person as sensitive as Nixon Smiley was there to record the transition from back country to suburban neighborhood. We are grateful to his widow, Evelyn, and his son, Dr. Karl Smiley, for allowing *Tequesta* to publish this special manuscript.

OUR INNOCENT YEARS

From our house, in a setting of native Florida pines, a green vista bordered by rounded clumps of saw palmettos sloped gently through brown tree trunks to a shallow pond at the bottom of a swale. As twilight approached — at martini time — my wife and I liked to sit on our breezeway and watch for the wood ducks that came every evening to spend the night. Appearing suddenly, usually in pairs, sometimes in fours or sixes — silhouettes in the rose-pearl sky — they would bank and dive at exciting speed, tossing silvery spray from the placid surface as they splashed in. We often counted thirty or more on the pond at one time, swimming playfully and uttering their calls, a cross between a squeal and a whistle. As darkness descended, the ducks went to roost in willows whose toppled trunks extended over the pond.

The twilight watch for the wood ducks' splash-in was one of the many delights of living on five acres of woodland, that while only ten miles southwest of downtown Miami, remained a unique wildlife haven although surrounded by suburban development. We (my wife Evelyn, son Karl, and myself) built here in 1951 and on Bastille Day moved into a raw ranch-style house that was only a shell of bare, unpainted concrete walls and cypress cathedral ceiling. It was one of the best moves we ever made. During the quarter century we lived here we celebrated Bastille Day — July 14 — not only because it symbolized mankind's continuous battle for personal freedom but reminded us of our good fortune and our rich experiences. For a major part of my career as a newspaperman, this place was a constant source of inspiring material for columns in *The Miami Herald* about the wildlife, the plants, the subtle changes in ecology, the geology of the land which was created under the sea, as well as the colorful personalities who over the years visited us and shared our delight in the kind of place that has virtually disappeared under the pressure of multiplying population, non-stop housing expansion and the destruction of the wilderness.

But in 1951 Miami was still in her innocent years. In many ways it was still a small town with small-town ways. The great building boom of the 1950's — the prosperous Eisenhower years — was not yet underway. Most of Dade County's half-million residents lived north of Flagler Street. Much of South Dade was rural — pine woods, groves, vegetable farms. Except for the small communities that had grown up along U. S. Highway 1 and the Florida East Coast Railway, you drove through pine woods much of the way between South Miami and

Homestead. Then, taking a zigzagging road from Florida City to the newly dedicated Everglades National Park, you drove through a solid forest of pines, palmettos and slender silver palms. The air was abuzz with the rasping of cicadas, and in the spring thousands of zebra butterflies drifted above the frequently burned-over forest understory. So large was this unique forest you discounted any possibility that one day it would be gone. Perhaps in 100 or 200 years, you might have said. Yet, within 20 years it was to disappear before the bulldozers of land developers, and even where the pines were left on the lots of green belt subdivision, the understory palmettos and other native plants were cleared for replacement with grass and exotic ornamentals.



Creating the pond, 1951.

When we moved to Montgomery Drive it was a narrow, roughly paved street on which you seldom saw a vehicle. Our friends had trouble finding our house, partly concealed among the pines and palmettos a hundred yards north of the street. A bulldozed road, little wider than an automobile, wound through the woods from Montgomery Drive to our house. Although a new development, Town and Ranch Estates was going up on the south side of Montgomery Drive from us, fewer than a dozen houses had been built. Many of the owners

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wondered if they had made a bad decision in buying so far out in the country, three miles from the nearest grocery, drugstore or gasoline station. On weekends people drove out from the city to look at Town and Ranch's newest houses on display — houses designed by a coming architect, Alfred Browning Parker. Despite the attractiveness of the houses there was a reluctance to buy. The area was remote, and Parker had not yet become famous. A short distance away was a five-acre piece of pine woods for sale at \$500 an acre. I passed the word to a fellow reporter who was planning to build a house as soon as he and his wife could decide on a site. After looking at the property he said to me: "What are you trying to do, get us out in the sticks?" They built on a city lot where financing was easier to get and where utilities were no problem.

You needed a pioneering spirit to build on five acres in South Dade's countryside in 1951. Rattlesnakes lurked in the palmettos; and, in the fall, hunters shot quail and doves so close to our house that shotgun pellets showered upon our white gravel roof. When we complained the hunters laughed. They had no sympathy for anybody crazy enough to build a house "in the sticks." Hunters are a very special breed. After the hunting season they set fires in the woods to improve the hunting the following year, as well as to keep down the growth of understory scrub, and to "get rid of the rattlesnakes." Moreover, the fires were set in the dry season when the palmettos and tall grasses burned like tinder. Few things are more frightening than to see a wall of fire sweeping across the woods in the direction of your house. Fortunately we had firebreaks, and, with the help of neighbors and the county's "one-horse" fire department, we managed to survive. Eventually developers came, put in streets and built houses, leaving our five acres a wilderness oasis in a countryside of acre-size lots and expensive homes. Although the widespread clearing drove many of the wild animals and the quail from our woods, a greater number of song birds found sanctuary there.

We bought the property in 1948 from Colonel Robert H. Montgomery and his wife Nell, who lived on an 80 acre estate at the corner of Old Cutler Road and Red Road. Upon acquiring the property in the early 1930s, they had bought adjacent acreage to prevent undesirable development. Montgomery, a tax lawyer and a founding partner in the international auditing firm of Lybrand, Ross Bros. & Montgomery, now Coopers & Lybrand, was founder of the Fairchild Tropical Garden. I had become acquainted with him at the beginning of the Second World War when I was assigned by *The Herald's* city editor to cover a talk

about taxes he made before a group of Miami lawyers and accountants. Our friendship developed through my writings about horticulture, a subject of special interest to him in his advancing years.

Colonel Montgomery was reserved — even timid — except among friends and members of his professions of law and accounting. He dropped out of grammar school to help put bread on the table after the death of his father, and therefore, had to make his way in the world without the social experiences, affluence and confidence a college education is expected to provide graduates. Having no illusion about the worth of his name, he induced David Fairchild to give his to the Fairchild Tropical Garden. Yet Montgomery knew many persons in high places and had considerable influence behind the scenes, especially in Washington.

Few living today know that except for his influence, the large Air Force Base at Homestead would have been built at Chapman Field and on adjacent properties, within 10 miles of downtown Miami. Chapman Field had been a gunnery school during the First World War. After the war it became the United States Plant Introduction Garden. At the beginning of the Second World War, the military began building or improving airfields throughout the country. The Air Force (in those days it was the Army Air Corps) planned to build a major air base in Dade County. Resurrection of Chapman Field was immediately considered. But whereas old Chapman Field had covered only a few hundred acres, the new air base would require thousands of acres. This meant that large parcels of adjoining property would have to be purchased. Local landowners, real estate brokers, businessmen and politicians saw an opportunity to make a killing. They backed the project with all the influence they could muster.

Montgomery, aware the large base would destroy one of Dade County's delightful residential areas, including his own place, and at the same time endanger Matheson Hammock Park and the Fairchild Garden, went to work behind the scenes. Going to Washington, he pointed out to Air Force officials the disadvantages of building so large an air base on the old Chapman Field site. First, there was a serious disparity in elevations, resulting from an ancient shoreland escarpment running diagonally through the property. Second, it was located near the populous Miami area, which meant additional land would be expensive. Why not go a few miles farther south, where there were large areas of cheap, vacant, flat land? Air Force authorities took a second look. Seeing that Montgomery was right, they selected a site near Homestead.

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As a result, we have the Homestead Air Force Base rather than a Chapman Field Air Force Base.

Drafted into the military service in 1943, I wound up with the Marine Corps at Okinawa. From there I wrote to Colonel Montgomery and asked him if he would sell my wife and me an acre of land after the war, as he had sold an acre to an acquaintance who planned to plant a grove. He replied immediately that he would but added that since the property had not been subdivided, five acres was the smallest unit he and Nell could sell us.

Upon returning to Miami after the war, we were unable to see our way clear to buy and develop five acres of rural land in that area, so we waited a couple of years to take up the Colonel's offer. Although land prices had risen a bit in the meantime, he not only charged us the original price he had fixed but selected for us a piece of property facing Montgomery Drive that he considered the most attractive five acres he owned outside his estate.

Although we owned a beautiful piece of property, we lacked funds to begin building immediately. That, however, did not prevent us from making plans. First, we had to choose a site for our house, then draw a plan or find a plan that would fit aesthetically. We tried several sites and drew a multitude of floor plans and elevations, getting our ideas from magazines and books as well as from developers' models. While many of these plans might have been suitable for a city lot, all were inappropriate for five acres of woodland. Furthermore, there was the problem of cost. We had to think about the type and size of house we could afford. Most of our plans, as I recall, would have cost more to build than we could have hoped to pay for out of my low salary.

Frustrated after exhausting our ideas and our energy, we decided to rest for awhile. We felt no hurry. Before we could build we had to pay for the land. The Korean War began, followed by spiraling inflation. You heard predictions that the value of homes would go up by one-third within a year. Fearing we might have to wait for years to build if we failed to do so soon, we went into a flurry of activity.

In the meantime I had drawn a rough map of the property, showing the approximate differences in elevations and indicating the various plant communities, particularly the larger pines and the major groups of saw palmettos. In the southeast fifth of the property was an acre-sized swale whose lowest part, according to the U. S. Geological Survey, was four feet above sea level. Along the north, northwest and west borders of the swale, elevations rose gradually to 10 and 13 feet, the highest area

being in the northwest area. The swale, which one time had been a glade covered with sawgrass and willows around alligator holes, had been farmed off and on since the beginning of the First World War. But it had been abandoned after the Second World War, and was now covered with a dense growth of jumbee bean trees, a rapid-growing leguminous tropical species ten feet in height. The jumbee bean is adaptable to both dry and wet conditions and flourished in the swale although in the rainy season the lowest area was at times underwater.

After studying the map I had drawn, Evelyn got an idea. Why not build our house in the northwest area of the property, facing the jumbee bean-covered swale in the southeast section? If a vista were opened through the palmettos in the pine woods and the jumbee beans removed from the swale, we would have the longest possible view, extending some 500 feet, while with a suitable house design we would be in a position to enjoy the prevailing southeast breeze during the summer in that period before home air conditioning was affordable. Moreover, in the lowest part of the swale, where the water table was no more than 18 inches below the ground surface during the driest time of year, we could excavate a pond. We would need considerable soil to cover the rocky surface of the pineland about the house before planting grass and shrubbery. But what kind of house would be suitable for this location? We again went into a flurry of activity but came up with nothing we liked. Then I got an idea. Why not consult Alfred Browning Parker! While we couldn't afford Parker's complete architectural services, perhaps he might be willing to give us some helpful suggestions. I had known Al since before the Second World War while he was attending architectural school and courting the daughter of a one-time neighbor, Dr. John C. Gifford. I got the courage to call him and see if I could meet him one day while he was checking on construction in nearby Town and Ranch Estates. Although it was embarrassing to call an architect and ask his advice when you had no money, Parker couldn't have been more cordial. We met at the property and walked over it.

"It's a beauty," he said as we waded through waist-high palmettos.

When I showed him the site Evelyn had suggested, he looked about and said: "She couldn't have selected a better one. This is ideal."

"Yes," I replied, "but we have been unable to come up with a plan suitable for this site — at least a plan we can afford to build. We can't go higher than ten thousand dollars."

With \$10,000 you could build a house in 1950 that would cost eighty thousand dollars in the 1980's. Ten years earlier, however, we had built

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a five-room concrete block house, with garage and tile roof, on the edge of Coconut Grove, for \$3,500. We had paid \$500 for the two 50 foot lots on which the house set. After paying for the lots, we used them as a down payment to the First Federal Savings and Loan Association to get the house built.

Resting a foot on a charred stump, Parker made a quick sketch on a note pad he held on his knee.

"If I were planning to build a house here costing \$10,000 I would think of something like this," he said. Then, tearing the sheet of paper from the pad, he handed it to me.



Well-known Miami Architect Alfred Browning Parker, did not charge Smiley a design fee for his work.

Studying the sketch of a ranch-style house Al had done in a jiffy, I was wonder-struck. After that moment I was never again capable of being surprised by the genius of this architect.

"Good, very good," I commented in a low-key way that by no means reflected the emotion I felt. "I like this," I added, studying the drawing. "I like it very much."

"Then if you like the plan, take it home and draw the floor plan and the elevations," he said. "When you have finished, bring the drawings to my studio so I can check them. In that way your plans won't cost you anything. If I have to run them through my office I will have to charge, and it could be expensive."

Evelyn was as enthused with Parker's sketch as I was. We agreed it was an ideal plan for the location. Facing the southeast, its rooms would be swept by the prevailing summer breeze. I began immediately working on detailed plans, drawn to scale, until I came up with something that satisfied us and at the same time fulfilled zoning requirements for a minimum of 1,600 square feet of floor space. Although a small house for the location, with two bedrooms and one bath, it seemed large to us, perhaps because of its length— 80 feet. The bedroom section formed the cross of an off-center capital T, while the shaft, containing the living room and kitchen, was separated from the bedrooms by a 16-by-16 foot breezeway. At the kitchen end, the roof was extended to one side to form a carport. We also included a fireplace. After a couple of trips to see Parker and get the benefit of his advice, including the suggestion that we use redwood jalousies on the screened breezeway, I took the plans to a contractor I knew.

Although the contractor took six months to complete the house, we were more than repaid for waiting. In figuring the bid, the contractor had made an error that gave us 192 extra square feet of house that cost us nothing. He had figured the living room as being 16-by-24 feet, whereas it actually was 16-by-36 feet on the floor plan — and that's what the carpenter in charge built. But it was not until after the house was completed that the error was discovered. It was too late to do anything. Our \$10,000 had been spent to the last dime, so the contractor had to take his loss with whatever tears contractors shed over such dismaying miscalculations.

We would long remember how barny the raw, unpainted living room looked when we first moved in. What colors should we use, first outside, then inside? Situated deep in the woods, we had to consider our surroundings; we couldn't use colors that clashed with the pines and the palmettos. Why not use a palmetto green on the outside walls and a brown trim — like the color of the pine trunks — on the eaves and on the window frames? The inside we would think about later. I went to a paint store, found a "palmetto green," bought a gallon, took it home, and applied it to a section of an outside wall. The raw paint, the color of poisoned water, was atrocious. Frustrated, I sought advice from a friend, Gordon Bachelor, who operated an art supply store and framing business, the "Bachelor of Arts Shop," in Coconut Grove. He laughed when I recounted my experience.

"The fellow who mixed that palmetto green probably never saw a palmetto," said Bachelor, "and if he saw a palmetto he probably

wouldn't know what he was looking at. No, you can't buy a true palmetto green in a paint store. Decide on the brand of paint you're going to use and bring me a gallon — white. We'll start from there."



The completed pond became a wildlife center.

I bought fifty gallons of white paint, in five-gallon cans, and one five-gallon can of rich brown paint. I took a can of white to Bachelor, along with a palmetto frond. From a shelf of paint colors he found chrome yellow medium, ultramarine blue, and burnt umber. First he tinted a gallon of white paint, working in the yellow and blue that he had dissolved in a little turpentine. The result was a raw bright green. Then he added burnt umber, winding up with a gray-green tone that matched the color of the palmetto leaf I had brought. Satisfied, Bachelor tinted the remaining four gallons. I took the paint home and painted over the store-bought palmetto green. The new color went with our woods perfectly. We couldn't have been more pleased.

Since I had my job to go to five days a week, Evelyn wound up doing most of the painting, especially the exterior walls, as well as the eaves and trim. Karl cleaned up about the premises, and on my days off he and

I hauled soil in a trailer from the swale to grade about the house. As the work was completed, Karl sprigged centipede grass. Despite the quantity of work, we found time to clear an area of jumbie trees in the swale that fall and plant a garden, growing more tomatoes, pole beans, sweetcorn and other vegetables that we could eat or give away. Looking back, it seems like a lot of work, especially with my job as a reporter on *The Herald* and getting out a Sunday gardening section, but we were young, healthy and enthusiastic.

Furnishing our new house was a major problem. We previously had lived in a much smaller place on Biscayne Drive. Our furniture hardly made a show when we moved into the larger house. Moreover we discovered that just any furniture wouldn't do. Danish style furniture fit well, but we couldn't afford it. We were several years furnishing the house in a way that pleased us. Much of the furniture we had specially made, at half the price of Danish. A few pieces we bought at the Ramble, an annual benefit sponsored by the Fairchild Tropical Garden Association. Well-to-do persons often used the Ramble to get rid of furniture they had tired of, or which was no longer stylish, so we picked up some good pieces at prices we could afford.

One of our best breaks was in the acquiring of art. We already had bought several paintings by Jean Jacques Pfister, a Swiss artist, whose unsold works were liquidated by court order after his death in order to settle his estate. Piled unframed on tables in a dusty room in a Coconut Grove building, the paintings proved difficult to sell, and finally the prices were reduced to five dollars and less. It was the steal of a lifetime and very uncomplimentary to an able artist. The experience in buying these pictures I recount in *On the Beat and Offbeat*, as I do how we acquired a favorite painting by Beanie Backus. The Backus picture, of an old house in picturesque decay, hung unsold for several years in the artist's studio because it didn't "look" like a Backus. We acquired the painting in 1951. It occupied a prominent place in our living room during the twenty-six years we lived at Montgomery Drive.

The development of the grounds was a never-ending job. Our basic landscape design was accomplished through the removal of unwanted palmettos and the preservation of palmetto islands. Much care had to be exercised, for once palmettos were removed they could not be replanted. Karl and I, sometimes with the help of John Wesley, a black man raised in the Georgia cotton belt, did most of the work with the aid of a grubbing hoe. Only once did we employ a small bulldozer, but the careless operator did so much damage to the pines that we were fearful

to bring in another machine. Wesley taught us the art of removing palmettos. The saw palmetto has a reclining trunk that runs along the top of the earth, anchoring itself every inch or so with fibrous roots, each one as strong as a manila rope of the same size.

"You cut off the roots like you would cut off the legs of a centipede," said John. And he would chop along one side of a palmetto trunk with his grubbing hoe, then turn around and chop along the other side. When he got through he would lift the rootless trunk from the earth. "See?" he added, demonstrating how easy it was.

Most of our planting of broadleaved trees, palms and shrubs was restricted to the property borders when we sought to create a screen between us, the streets and the rapid growing housing developments. In time our acreage began to take on a park-like atmosphere. And then is when the problems began. As new people moved into the neighborhood, our woods proved to be a charm that attracted both children and grownups — to play, to picnic, to ride horses, to search for firewood, to plunk at songbirds with BB guns or .22-caliber rifles, and even to cut the small pines for Christmas trees. Whenever we said anything, the reply was nearly always the same: "I didn't know anybody owned this property." I really think they failed to notice that the property, although partly wild, was also cultivated, with a screen of plants growing along the borders and lawn grass in the vistas between the clumps of palmettos.

Up From the Sea

Viewing the pine woods from our house, no one could have suspected that almost solid limestone lay just beneath the surface of the grass-covered vistas. It was a distinct formation — oolite — which geologists have given the local name of Miami Limestone. Only the swale, where the mixture of marly soil and sand was two to three feet deep, could you turn the soil to make a garden or dig a hole with a shovel. On the slopes rising gently from the swale, where the pines and palmettos grew, the surface was covered by a thin layer of sand and brittle weathered limerock. This layer could be removed with the aid of a grubbing hoe, but whenever we tried to dig a hole in the white limestone beneath, deep enough to set out even a small plant, it yielded only to a railroad pick and a back tempered by hard work. When we first moved to Montgomery Drive, I used dynamite to blow planting holes, usually half a stick to make a hole large enough for a small plant. In the

1950s you could buy dynamite, fuse and caps merely by signing your name. Having learned explosives in the Marine Corps, I used dynamite without fear of disastrous consequences. Although a great labor-saving device, I eventually had to give up its use after the area became populated and neighbors expressed concern about the detonations.

Plants are unable to develop a taproot in limestone, as they may do in deep soil but must spread their roots in the thin mantle of loose, sandy material. Where this mantle is only an inch or two deep, thickening roots of trees may push to the surface, where they develop, snake-like, on top of the ground, becoming hazardous to a mower or to unsuspecting toes. The soil was so shallow about the pines in several places that I had to add topsoil every year or two, building up the ground about the exposed roots in order to mow the grass. With their roots firmly grasping the uneven surface of the limestone, however, pines are seldom toppled by hurricanes. They are more likely to have their trunks snapped. When a pine is blown down, its root system comes out of the ground as flat as the bottom of a pancake, revealing the white limestone beneath.

Early settlers in Dade County referred to the limestone as "coral," which it is not. Coral is created under the sea by minute animals that separate calcium from the water to build their own skeletons. When these animals die, their skeletons remain in place, and new generations of reef-building animals grow upon them. This arrangement between the dead and the living results in the unusual patterns that form the beautiful coral reefs. The underwater John Pennkamp Coral Reef State Park is a living coral reef. Several of the upper Florida Keys are remains of ancient coral reefs, formed when the sea was higher than it is today.

Miami Limestone owes its origin not to the activities of reef-building animals but to chemical and mechanical forces at play in sea water subjected to special conditions. When a boulder of Miami limestone is cross-sectioned, it has none of the beautiful patterns seen in sectioned coral, but is composed of limestone "sand" welded together. Examined closely, the individual grains resemble fish eggs in shape. Thus the name "oolite," a Greek word meaning egg-like. Miami limestone, or oolite, was formed a 100,000 years ago when the sea was 30 or 40 feet higher than today. Once a loose unstable oolite bar some 10 miles wide, it extended in a northeast-southwest direction for 50 miles — from just below present-day Fort Lauderdale to the interior of Everglades National Park. Upon being exposed by the receding sea, the bar became a consolidated ridge. The highest part of the ridge today is 25 feet above

sea level. It extends 10 feet below sea level, where it rests on an older limestone foundation.

The great bar that was the forerunner of the Miami limestone ridge was created in the turbulence generated by tides moving between the cool Gulf Stream and the shallow, warmer and highly saline area that is now the Everglades. In order to create a bar of such size — 500 square miles — the sea must have stood over the lower tip of Florida for thousands of years. Then, with a change in global weather conditions, ice began accumulating in the polar regions. The sea level gradually dropped, and tidal channels were cut through the loose bar. Meanwhile, as the sea retreated from the higher parts of the bar, percolating rain leached salt from the loose oolite and dissolved enough calcium from the individual grains to weld them together to form limestone. In time the sea dropped to its present level, leaving behind a ridge where today nearly two million people live.

The contours of our five acres — the swale and sloping pineland on three sides — owe their origin to the action of a tidal channel that swept through the area while it was still a loose bar emerging from the sea. This channel extended south from our property, across present Montgomery Drive and to the seashore, then less than a mile distant. Countless quantities of loose oolite were carried from either side of the channel by swift tidal currents and by eroding rains, actions that were accentuated as the sea level dropped. Then the mouth of the channel was closed off, perhaps by a great hurricane that washed up and left behind a ridge of oolite higher than the rest of the adjacent bar. As the sea level continued to drop, rainfall leached the sea water from the exposed ridge and dissolved enough lime to cement the individual grains of oolite together, leaving the swale closed off forever by a broad limestone dam.

Beneath the Miami limestone ridge, as well as under all of southern Florida, are successively older formations of limestone, extending to a depth of more than fifteen thousand feet. The oldest formation exceeds one hundred and fifty million years in age, having been created at a time when giant reptiles battled for control of the earth's feeding grounds. Oil has been found near the twelve thousand foot level in Collier and Hendry counties, but wells sunk in Dade have been unproductive. Of much greater value than oil to growing southeast Florida is the enormous supply of fresh water stored in the more shallow, permeable limestone formations beneath the Everglades and beneath the Miami limestone ridge. This great reservoir depends on rainfall for replenishment. When the rainfall is below forty inches a year, the level of the reservoir may

become dangerously low. South Florida's fresh water supply was at one time thought to be inexhaustible, but drainage, land development and population growth have dispelled that illusion.

At Montgomery Drive we drew both household water and irrigation water from wells sunk to 20 feet. Although the water was hard, containing considerable calcium, we drank it as it came from the well. We have never sampled better tasting water.

I suspect that before drainage of the Everglades, with the consequent lowering of the water table, the swale was under water most of the rainy season. An old hunter remembered that the swale was covered by sawgrass before the First World War, when he shot marsh hens here. Remnants of alligator holes and wallows could be seen, he added; but even then the former occupants had disappeared. During the fall of 1917, the hunter recalled, the sawgrass was burned off, the willows about alligator holes removed, and the dark soil turned for the planting of tomatoes. This, of course, proved fatal to the pristine ecology.

Karl and I moved uncounted trailer loads of soil from the lowest part of the swale to fill in the rougher areas of the rocky slopes before grass could be planted. After it became obvious that we could hardly live long enough to complete the job with shovels and a trailer, we paid a contractor to bring in excavating equipment and dig a round pond some 70 feet in diameter and four or five feet deep. The spoil was hauled by truck to the areas where Karl and I distributed it. The water level of the pond was the same as the ground water table, which varied from a foot above sea level at the driest time of the year to three feet above sea level during wet periods. So much rain fell during Hurricane Donna in 1960 that the water table rose to 6.67 feet above sea level, as measured by the U.S. Geological Survey. Not only was the swale and lower adjacent slopes of the pine woods flooded, but water rose two feet over Montgomery Drive, halting automobile traffic. Because of the permeable limestone, however, the high water quickly flowed underground to the sea and within a couple of days traffic was again using Montgomery Drive.

So permeable is the underground limestone that in normal times the pond level was affected by the ocean tide, although we were a mile from Biscayne Bay. A strong west or northwest wind, which lowered the level of Biscayne Bay along its western shore, likewise lowered the level of the pond, sometimes two to three inches, while a persistent fresh east wind raised the pond level the same amount.

Living and developing a place in so unique a location among the Dade County pines was a fascinating experience, and I tried to share what I observed, learned, and thought with Miami Herald readers. It is through the preservation of those columns as well as from notes I kept that I am able to write this. The following is taken from a column:

"Strolling through the woods in a leisurely way, I like to make myself aware of the physical and chemical elements at work and the roles they have played in the creation of this place, which only a few years ago was a small part of a wilderness covering much of the country. Each contributing element is a science in itself. First, there is the geology — the structure of the land, its elevation and history. There is the soil — the thin mantle over the limestone rock, created by the interplay of weathering, the decay of dead plants, and the physical and chemical activities of plant roots. There is the botany — the pines and the understory plants, including the underfoot things that grow and bloom without being seen unless you are particularly observant. There is the zoology — the microorganisms, insects, amphibians, reptiles, birds, and four-footed animals that live here. There is the weather, changing with the seasons, bringing sultry mornings and afternoon thundershowers in summer, sometimes tropical storms in August, September or October, then the usually dry, pleasantly cool days of late fall, winter, and early spring.

"While my acquaintance with any of these sciences is superficial when compared with the knowledge of an expert, I have learned enough about them to appreciate their contribution to the landscape. And I also know enough about the ecology of the pine woods — the interrelationship of all the living things and nature's forces — to realize how easily the balance of nature is upset by mankind's best intentions as well as by his worst. But because of their subtlety and complexity, it is virtually impossible to observe the various forces actually playing their roles, even as you view the landscape every day with discerning eyes. At any moment of experience the human is too insensitive to see more than the flight of a bird, to hear the rasping of a cicada, or be aware of a falling leaf wrenched from a twig by a passing breeze. Perhaps it is enough for the non-scientist to know that the interplay of nature's forces is taking place, and has been taking place for thousands of years in order to create a pine forest, together with the adaptation of the countless living things, both plants and animals, associated with it."

On another occasion I wrote that "sometimes as I walk through the pine woods, or while sitting idly on the breezeway late in the day,

martini in hand, I like to imagine how this place looked at the time it began emerging as a glistening white bar from the sea thousands of years ago. The sea birds, perhaps gulls, skimmers, sandpipers, and pelicans, must have been the first to set foot on the exposed oolite. In time, sea-borne seeds of strand plants were washed ashore to germinate, and, fertilized by bird droppings, established themselves. As the sea retreated, exposing more of the bar, rainfall leached out the salt, and highland plants tolerant to calcareous soil replaced the salt-tolerant strand plants, which, in turn, followed the edge of the retreating sea. Acids from decaying plant materials not only created a soil condition more desirable for plant growth in the limestone, but further dissolved calcium and hastened consolidation of the exposed bar. Life for those first plants must have been tenuous indeed. A few of the adapted species survived while the unadapted ones failed altogether. Through thousands of years this process of plant selection continued. Meanwhile the Florida slash pine and the saw palmetto moved southward down the peninsula, claiming land left by the retreating sea. The pine was not entirely adapted to the highly calcareous conditions of the limestone ridge, but, in the course of time a tolerant variety grew from the tens of millions of germinating seeds, and this one matured and produced seeds from which other limestone-tolerant pines grew. Today the Dade County slash pine is a distinct variety of *Pinus elliotti*, the most common tree of the Florida woods."

While the pines and the saw palmettos were the dominating plants of our woods, countless other native species thrived here when we built in 1951. Many of the native pine woods/plants, however, are dependent on fire for survival. At one time the pine woods burned regularly. Lightning set fires before the Indian arrived. Although the fires burned the understory plants, new growth sprang from the durable underground stems. Soon the woods again were covered with green shrubs, grasses and a great variety of annual and perennial species. Older pines were unhurt, of course, while pine seedlings, although perhaps scorched, recovered to grow for a time without undue competition.

When woods are protected from fire, understory plants and palmettos grow rampant. After a few years such a quantity of flammable material accumulates, principally pine needles and palmettos, that an accidental fire may produce enough heat to kill the largest pines. In the late 1960s neighborhood children, roasting wieners over a fire in the adjacent woods, let a wild fire get started that swept across the southeast corner of our property where the palmettos had grown head-high among

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the pines. Such a hot fire was created by the blazing palmettos and the accumulation of pine needles that flames shot to the tops of the trees, igniting a top-fire that leapt from tree to tree in angry, consuming fury. All the pines in this location were killed, much to our dismay. Only with the help of neighbors and the fire department was the fire prevented from leaping the swale and consuming the rest of our pine woods.

After we first opened vistas among the pines by removing palmettos, we could see many small underfoot things in bloom at almost any time of the year. Then we planted centipede grass that covered the ground in a dense carpet and had to be mowed at intervals. In time most of the underfoot things gave up the struggle. Here and there we might see a few bright green leaves of the fern-like zamia poking through the grass, while among the rank palmettos nothing grew but weed trees such as Brazilian pepper, strangler fig and wax myrtle, which we removed.

Our conservation-minded friends used to tell us that our place was "like a gem" because it had been left in a natural state. But although the place had a certain wild charm, in time it was no longer the natural landscape we found when we built. Thinking about the changes that occurred over the years, I wrote the following:

"Our place has only the appearance of being natural. To say these acres are in their original condition would be misrepresenting the facts. The pines, if protected from fire and bulldozers, will survive us, and perhaps survive another generation of humans, but in time they will go. The saw palmettos already have lost their original character, and are becoming tall, spindly, and, from an aesthetic standpoint, are no longer completely pleasing. We find we are removing more and more palmettos, even entire clumps, with increasing frequency. For one thing, these large clumps are a dangerous fire hazard and sure death to the pines about which they stand if they become ignited.

"Kindness to nature is not enough. You must know nature and understand its ways. What you may want yourself is of no concern to the wilderness. For the wilderness has its own laws, and these laws must be observed more strictly than mankind observes its own if the natural landscape is to survive."

The Landscape

When we moved to Montgomery Drive, I must confess I was under the influence of the late Dr. John C. Gifford, promoter of the "tropical subsistence homestead." I wouldn't want anyone to think I was naive

enough to believe it possible to subsist on the products grown on five acres. Still I respected the ideas of Professor Gifford, who preached "living on the land and using what you have at hand" to generations of students at the University of Miami who took his course in tropical forestry.

I had become acquainted with Gifford in 1942, when we lived on Southwest 27th Avenue a few blocks from the Gifford home in Coconut Grove. Gifford taught me a great deal about tropical horticulture that was to play a role in my experiences at Montgomery Drive and in my writing.



View from the screened porch.

Although I reached 40 in 1951, the year we moved to Montgomery Drive, the spell Gifford had cast upon me remained. With a great expenditure of energy, I propagated and planted more than two dozen species of tropical fruits, together with a number of varieties of mangos, avocados and citrus. Twenty years later we have half that number. Many we became disenchanted with, not only because of their questionable quality, but also because of the poor health of the trees. Some failed to thrive, partly because of competition by the pines, partly because of the limestone soil or the climate. Some were attacked by diseases or insects, and we got tired of their ratty appearance. More interested in esthetics than food production, we got rid of the "cats and dogs," as Isabelle Krome, our friend from Homestead, described them.

In the beginning we had a dozen mango varieties, but over the years eliminated several, winding up with the Haden, Zill, Irwin, Morris and Keitt.

We grew a number of citrus varieties but found grapefruit to be superior in quality to the oranges and tangerines, and the grapefruit trees had a more healthy appearance because they were less susceptible to insects and diseases.

Considering the cost and the problems of growing dooryard citrus, I thought then (and still do) that the South Florida home owner might do well to limit his citrus production to limes, preferably the key lime. When they are in season, you can find Persian limes in the supermarket. But key limes are seldom grown commercially and are rarely sold except at a roadside stand. Thornless varieties are propagated and sold by nurserymen, but some old-time Conchs in the Florida Keys insisted on planting seedlings, claiming they were better producers. Seedlings may have so many thorns that picking the fruit becomes a problem. We grew key limes not so much to use in drinks but for Evelyn to make key lime pie.

Among our most successful fruit trees were the lychees and jaboticabas. Two lychee trees we planted in the early 1950s grew rapidly; and in a few years were about equal in size to any in Dade County. Unfortunately they only yielded crops every other year. When they did produce, we had bushels of colorful fruit. The jaboticaba was more dependable, bearing its grape-like fruit along its trunk and branches two to three times a year. A very slow grower, the jaboticaba requires several years to reach fruiting size. In its early life, if planted in limestone soil, it may require applications of chelated iron to prevent its leaves from yellowing.

In the early years much of the development of the landscape consisted of clearing saw palmettos to create open areas about the house and vistas that carried the eyes into the distance. Usually this wasn't too difficult, since we knew before building what kind of effect we wanted. First, we cleared the palmettos in the immediate area about the house. Then we opened a broad vista extending southeast to the swale. Since we knew a street eventually would be built along the west property line behind the house, we removed virtually all the palmettos in the north-west area and began establishing what was to be a dense screen along the west and the north borders. This screen, of large shrubs, small trees, and cluster-type palms, proved to be as esthetically satisfying as it was effective in cutting out the view of passing cars. We later extended this

screen about the entire property. Between the back of our house and the screened borders was an area of about one-half acre in which we left only the pines. This open, uncluttered area proved to be very effective as the pines let in ample light for the centipede grass to thrive.

If it can be arranged, it's nice to have a pleasing view from every window in the house. We found the views from the breezeway to be the most important, while the view from the window over Evelyn's kitchen sink was second only in importance. This window framed a view that drew your eyes into a vista through pines and past palmetto islands to the open green swale in the distance. Eventually Evelyn had the pond in her view. Over the years she witnessed the growth of a screen of plants we set behind the pond. But the most dramatic development was the growth of three massive, gray-leaved medemia palms from Madagascar, planted along the south and southeast border of the pond. Behind the pond, beyond the medemias, and taller, were several royal palms that raised their heads above the screen of plants to more than 30 feet. Shifting her eyes to the right, her vision was stopped by a jungle of jumbie bean trees. But eventually a second colony of medemia palms, planted along Montgomery Drive, rose to tower over the jumbie trees. Both the medemia palms and the royal palms, which Karl and I set out in the early years, have stories behind them.

In the 1940s only two medemia palms existed in South Florida, a female at the U.S. Plant Introduction Garden and a male at the Robert H. Montgomery estate. Each flowered, but being more than a mile apart, no offspring were produced. Early in the 1950s H. L. (Loo) Loomis, director of the Plant Introduction Garden, took a flower stalk from the male palm and hung it among the fronds of the flowering female palm, leaving the role of Cupid to the bees. The bees did their work well; several hundred pollinated female flowers produced viable seeds. These seeds were planted and, after germination, were set in individual containers. After dividing with the Montgomery estate and the Fairchild Garden, Loomis distributed the remainder to individuals who promised to grow them. I received three potted palms, together with several late-germinating seeds that Loomis planned to dump. The three potted plants Karl and I set out behind the pond. The plants from the germinating seeds were later planted in the swale along Montgomery Drive. Fifteen years later these medemia palms made a striking show for passing motorists as well as for us, on more than one occasion curious admirers stopped to ask the name of this "beautiful" palm and where plants could be obtained. I told them to become members of the

Fairchild Tropical Garden Association, for I knew the botanical garden was growing a number of medemias that eventually would be distributed to members. When Harold E. Moore, Jr., palm authority of Cornell University, came to visit us, he looked for the medemia colony as a signal to slow down in order to turn into our entrance.

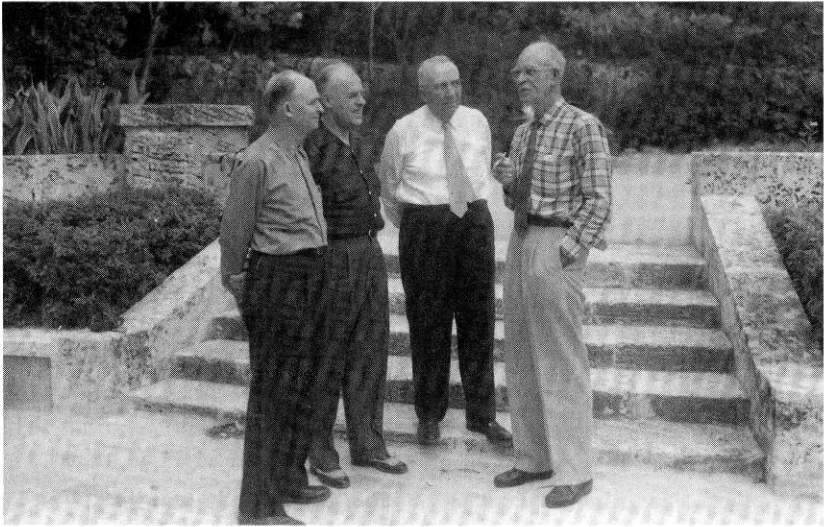
The royal palms were grown from seeds collected in the Everglades National Park by Dan Beard while he was superintendent. They were planted in the moist swale behind the pond soon after we got settled in our new house. Twenty years later, visitors found it hard to believe we had planted these palms ourselves; from their height and diameter of the trunks the palms appeared to be at least half a century old.

Upon moving to Montgomery Drive, in July, one of the first things we noted was the hot glare of the late afternoon sun upon our living room and breezeway. Shade was needed, the sooner the better. I got permission from Adolph Jordahn, superintendent of the Montgomery estate, to airlayer three six-foot-long branches of a rubber tree, or banyan, the same species (*Ficus altissima*) that forms a tunnel over Old Cutler Road just south of Cartagena Circle. To create a multiple-trunked tree, of "instant banyan" in character, I dug a large hole with the help of dynamite and planted the three rooted branches together. With generous quantities of fertilizer and water, they grew rapidly. Within two years, they reached a height of 12 feet, while the trunks welded together characteristic of the banyan. Then we began to discover banyan roots 30 feet from the tree. Whenever we set out a plant nearby, the banyan's roots were soon there to compete for fertilizer and moisture. Although the banyan already was beginning to provide shade, its vigor and aggressive roots frightened us. While driving to and from work, I observed the giant rubber trees along Old Cutler Road, and my conclusions frightened me: our tree would grow to monstrous size in a few more years, spreading its great branches over our house and doing enormous damage with its powerful root system. We would surely have to remove it, or at least keep it severely pruned, at a cost greater than we could afford. So it was agreed that our little giant should be sacrificed. But what would we plant in its place?

It so happened that Stanley Kiem, superintendent of the Fairchild Garden, had collected seed of *Bucida macrostachys* in British Honduras. About 40 plants were distributed to members of the Fairchild Garden, and we received one. This tree, a relative of the common *bucida* planted along parkways in the Miami area, was described by Stanley as a "desirable shade tree." Although rather odd shaped and scrubby, it had a unique individual character.

"Why don't we replace the banyan with Stanley's bucida?" Evelyn suggested.

Agreeing, I chopped off the banyan at ground level — this usually kills rubber trees — and planted the bucida. A vigorous tree, it grew rapidly. But pruning was difficult because of the contrary and unpredictable way the tree shot out its impetuous, zigzagging branches. Moreover the branches were armed with sharp spines, which I had to contend with when later I climbed into the tree to do severe pruning of heady branches that decided the sky was the limit in their determined reach. Meanwhile the lower branches drooped so low that I had to tie them up with wire run through sections of old garden hose so that we could walk underneath. Meanwhile the tree grew rapidly, and late in the day when the sinking sun silhouetted the zigzagging branches, we looked out from the breezeway upon this tree with admiration — and especially did Evelyn who was responsible for its planting.



William Lyman Phillips, right, was the landscape architect for Fairchild Gardens.

While I was a director of the Fairchild Tropical Garden, we frequently had William Lyman Phillips, the Garden's landscape architect, for lunch. Working at the Garden was a part-time job for me, for I had to continue with my duties at *The Miami Herald*. Thursday was my full day at the Garden, and this was the day that Phillips dropped in — nearly always just before lunch. I would telephone Evelyn so she could plan

for an extra person. Phillips and I would sit on the breezeway while Evelyn made last-minute preparations for lunch, he with a scotch and soda, I with a martini. If he was in the mood we talked. When Bill Phillips was not in the mood for conversation it was useless trying to force him. Then we contemplated the landscape in silence as we sipped our drinks. Phillips was erudite and very sensitive to the scene about him, but getting him to express his feelings was another matter.

A graduate of the Harvard School of Landscape Architecture, Phillips assisted Fredrick Law Olmsted, Jr., to lay out the gardens of the Mountain Lake Sanctuary at Lake Wales. He designed the major Dade County parks as well as the Fairchild Garden. Previously he had drawn the plans for the City of Balboa in the Canal Zone and worked on the landscape planting of the American military cemeteries in France after the First World War. In France he fell in love with a French girl, Simone Guillot, and married her. She bore him two daughters, but she had died before we had a chance to know her.

It was my hope to get some advice from Phillips that would be helpful in the design and planting of our grounds. I wanted to be able to say of some feature that "William Lyman Phillips suggested that." But I never got the slightest hint of advice from him, despite the countless times he ate with us. We did sometimes walk over the grounds, particularly during the pleasant, cool days of late fall or winter, but, although he appeared always to enjoy himself, he made no comment. If this seems strange, I hasten to say that I never heard Phillips make any comment about the plantings at the Fairchild Garden — except when a tree or a shrub was set in the wrong place. Then you heard from him. He would stop short, study the planting with an expression of surprise, disbelief and dismay on his face. "Who did that?" he would say in a dry tone, implying, "How could anyone be so stupid?" This got results. The offending plant was removed.

When I asked his advice about a landscape problem at the Fairchild Garden, he might answer or he might not. But he never forgot, and eventually — perhaps weeks or months later — he would give me an answer. Once, in a hurry for a decision, I pressed him for an answer, but he kept putting me off. "I do think about it," he said on one occasion, "but nothing original or worthwhile comes to my mind." He did come up with a decision eventually. The only answer I ever got from him when I asked his advice about improving the landscape at Montgomery Drive was, "Well, I don't see anything wrong with things the way they are."

Phillips made only one positive comment about the place that I heard. We had invited a long-time friend of Phillips to lunch on a Thursday when we knew Phillips would be present. He was Ray Ward, engineer in charge of the plans and designs department of the Dade County Parks Department. Ward had a dry, sardonic sense of humor that Phillips liked. On the day, they each took a second drink while they talked and Phillips chuckled as we sat on the breezeway. While I was in the kitchen preparing a second round of drinks, they apparently fell to talking about the place, which Ward was seeing for the first time. As I returned through the living room I heard Ward say:

"I think this place is unique."

"Yes," replied Phillips, "I particularly like the palmetto islands."

In the 1950s when the Dade County Parks Department adopted civil service for its employees, Phillips was given an opportunity to join civil service so that at 65, he would be eligible to retire on a pension, which was fast approaching. The offer was made because of his outstanding contributions to Dade County.

"No, I don't think I want to join," he told Douglas Barnes, director of county parks. Although Phillips had worked for the parks department since shortly after its inception in the 1930s, he had done so on a consulting basis rather than as a regular employee. "I don't want to punch a clock," he added.

"But, Bill, you won't have to punch a clock," said Barnes. "You don't have to make any changes at all in your routine."

"No, I don't think I want to be in civil service," said Phillips, unconvinced.

Later, I pressed Phillips for the reason he had turned down Barnes' offer.

"I didn't want to punch a clock," he replied.

"But, Bill, Barnes told me you wouldn't have to punch a clock," I argued.

"I would have felt like I should have done it, though, and that would have been even worse than going to the office every day and punching the idiot thing," he replied sharply, and in a way indicating he wanted to hear no more about the subject.

We enjoyed Bill Phillips' company at lunch off and on for the seven years that I was director at the Fairchild Garden and for some time after. An avid reader, he frequently filled us in on some new, old or ancient author, commenting with wry humor and a chuckle about something that had caught his fancy in the author's work. On rare occasions he

would quote a French author. Once I sought to guide him into talking about his experiences in France and of his meeting with Simone Guillot. This was a mistake, for he fell silent.

As Phillips' health began declining we saw him less frequently, for he lived in North Miami, nearly 20 miles from Montgomery Drive, and he reached a point where he dreaded the long trip. Moreover, I was home only on weekends, and Phillips' routine, driving to the Fairchild Garden on Thursdays, talking for awhile about some landscape problem, then accompanying me home for lunch, had been broken. In the fall of 1966 I was among newspapermen invited by the National Science Foundation to visit the Antarctic and write about what was happening at the bottom of the world. Shortly before I left, I visited Phillips. He was 81 then and in a nursing home. I could see that he had but a short time to live. I wrote his obituary before I left. Upon my return, one of the first things Evelyn said upon meeting me at the airport was:

"Bill Phillips died while you were away."

Old Friends, the Plants

"Strolling among the trees, palms, and shrubs I have planted over the years is like associating with old friends," I wrote in 1973, the year of my retirement from *The Herald*. "Many of these plants date back to the early 1950s. One tree, a lysiloma, now sprawls for 75 feet, some of its branches so long they rest on the ground, elbow-like, in order to reach farther out. I collected seed of this tree at Paradise Key in the Everglades National Park during an outing with my family. Starting the seed in a small container, I worried a hole in the rock with the aid of a railroad pick and planted the small tree. The lysiloma — it is also called wild tamarind — is the grandchildren's climbing tree. In our walks, Evelyn and I sometimes pass under this tree, whose small leaves make lacy shadows. Both of us have remarked that from its appearance it might have been here a century. Yet we have seen it make its scrambling, undulating growth, taking on the gnarled and tortuous insinuations of old age, during the time we have lived here."

A record book I kept of the plants acquired and planted over the years at Montgomery Drive has more than 300 entries. Many of them came from the Fairchild Tropical Garden, which distributes plants to its members each year. Quite a few were new to Florida at the time I

acquired them. Some were native, like the lysiloma. A good many were collected in the Bahamas where virtually all of Florida's tropical flora is repeated. A number came from friends or from other plant collectors with whom I made exchanges. Several came from the Montgomery estate or from the Kampong (David Fairchild's home). A few grew from seeds I collected in other parts of the world, particularly Central America which we visited frequently at one time.

As I walked over the grounds, I passed plant after plant that recalled a person who was no longer around. One such plant was a slender, single-trunked palm that bore quantities of bright red fruit in large clusters. David Fairchild gave it to me as a small plant a couple of years before his death in 1954. Like so many of the plants I grew, this palm had no common name, such as, for instance, the coconut or the royal palm. Fairchild had attached a tag bearing the name of *Ptychosperma elegans*.

"Take this palm home and plant it," he admonished. "Grow it and give the seeds to your friends."

I took the palm home and planted it. In time it grew to ten feet tall. It was indeed like an old friend, recalling to a fascinating personality.

"My old friends the plants are always the same, never changing in mood like people," I wrote. "And although they have chlorophyll rather than blood in their veins, they nevertheless are living things that react to the elements, in their way, the same as you and I. And, although they remain silent and motionless, except when a breeze passes through them, rippling their foliage and sometimes bending their branches, I am strongly attached to them, even more, I suppose, than I am to the birds and furry animals that live among them. Each species has its own personality, and, although I must admit having been as cruel as nature in their selection and cultivation, I have come to look upon them with respect as well as with wonder. The plants have become an ineluctable part of our lives. To leave here and have to give them up would be dismaying. I can't imagine living anywhere else in the contentment that I have experienced here. I know that some day I must leave them behind — if we have to move because of increasing taxes, because age makes it impossible to maintain the place, or if death intervenes. My hope is that the new owners will like the place and maintain the plants we have collected over the years and have watched grow into their present dimensions."

Among the earliest names on the list of persons from whom I received plants is that of Adolph Jordahn, superintendent of the

Montgomery estate. On January 19, 1953, I received from him four species of palms. The *Thrinax floridana* and *Thrinax microcarpa* were native to the Florida Keys. The others, *Coccothrinax fragrans* and *Veitchia winin*, were introductions. (I use the names Jordahn gave me. Botanists have since changed some of the names.) Jordahn later gave



Nixon Smiley working on the landscaping of his home, 1956.

me a *Veitchia montgomeryana*, a newly discovered species which was named in honor of Colonel Montgomery, but it eventually was so badly damaged by a frost that it failed to recover.

The plant I associate most with Jordahn was one grown from seeds I sent to him from Okinawa at the end of the Second World War. I had seen this small tree growing on the roadside outside Chimu, a small

village, in the spring of 1945. It was covered with flowers that resembled small apple blossoms, and after they were shed the tree was still attractive in its deep green foliage. In the fall of 1945, I stopped by this tree and found it loaded with ripening, pea-size fruits, each containing a single seed. Collecting several, I removed the pulp, put half a dozen seeds in an envelope and sent them to Jordahn. Upon returning home I called upon Jordahn, whom I found working among the orchids in the Montgomery greenhouses. He put aside his pipe to greet me then took me to another greenhouse where six healthy young plants were growing in individual pots.

"These grew from the seeds you sent from Okinawa," he said, pleased with his success. "Every seed germinated."

Eventually the plants were set out at the Montgomery place and at the Fairchild Garden. We still did not know the name because I had been unable to collect a botanical specimen from the original tree. When the first plant bloomed, I pressed and dried a specimen and sent it to the National Herbarium in Washington. The plant was identified as *Raphiolepis indica*, a small shrub of three or four feet in height that is widely grown in the United States as an ornamental. But the Okinawa plant continued to grow — to six feet, eight feet, ten feet. Eventually I sent a specimen to Dr. Richard Howard, director of the Arnold Arboretum at Harvard. He replied immediately, identifying the plant as *Raphiolepis liukuensis*, the name by which the plant was later distributed by the Fairchild Garden to its members. This tree proved to be well adapted to limestone soil. We grew several from seeds and planted them along the borders at Montgomery Drive where they helped to make a tall, dense screen. But I don't believe I have seen any plant bloom so profusely as the small tree at Okinawa, which miraculously escaped the shelling and the bombing that riddled so much of the southern part of the island during the final major battle of the Second World War.

Another native, the paradise tree (*Simarouba glauca*), was given me by Charlie Brookfield, National Audubon Society guide. I planted it near the northeast corner of the property, and it grew to 30 feet. A native of the Bahamas, West Indies and Central America, it is a common hammock tree in South Florida. It grows on Indian sites in Big Cypress Swamp. The fruit is rich in oil, which the Indians probably rendered by cooking in water and skimming the oil from the surface. Too bitter for most tongues, the oil may have been used by Indians as a protection against mosquitoes and sandflies. How the name "paradise tree" originated I have no idea; but its glossy, compound leaves and tall growth habit make it a handsome tree.

In the early 1950s, Hal Moore returned from Cuba with seeds he had collected from a rare palm growing at Harvard University's Atkins Garden near Cienfuegos. We planted several seeds and grew a fine specimen near a corner of our bedroom. With its several slender green trunks resembling large bamboo, this cluster palm grew to 20 feet. The origin of this mysterious palm was never solved. No one, including Hal, was able to find it growing wild in any part of the world, nor was it mentioned in botanical literature. Many years ago a ship's physician, a Dr. Cabada, collected the seeds while on a voyage — to Madagascar, Hal believed. At the time of Cabada's death a fruiting specimen grew in his garden at Cienfuegos. The garden was neglected, however, and the palm might have been lost except for the interest of Robert M. Grey, director of Atkins Garden, who collected seeds from the unidentified species and planted them. Hal immediately recognized the palm as being in the genus *Chrysalidocarpus*, but the species was as much a mystery to him as it had been to Grey. Hal waited 10 years to describe the palm as a new species and give it a name, hoping that someone in the meantime would discover its nativity. Meanwhile the palm was widely planted in South Florida as the "Cabada palm." When Hal finally gave it a botanical name, he honored the physician who introduced it to cultivation by calling it *Chrysalidocarpus cabadae*. Unfortunately the Cabada palm proved susceptible to the lethal yellow disease, which wiped out most of the common coconuts of South Florida and a number of other palms. We lost our beautiful Cabada palm along with all our coconuts except the Malay variety which is resistant to the disease.

One of our favorite small palms was the native *Thrinax floridana*, which grows abundantly in South Florida, the Bahamas and the West Indies. It is well adapted to limestone soil and to the warmer coastal areas and the keys. Once established, it requires no further attention — no sprays for insects or diseases and no irrigation during the dry season. Its growth is slow; but in its early years it makes an excellent screen; and you are reluctant to see it grow taller, raising new fan-shaped leaves above the screening level as older lower leaves die.

Bahama plants are particularly well adapted to South Florida because the soil and the climate of the two areas are similar. I grew 20 species of Bahama plants at Montgomery Drive, most of them collected by Dr. John Popenoe, who succeeded me as director of the Fairchild Garden. Once a Bahama plant is thoroughly established, it requires no further care, except a little fertilizer from time to time to promote growth.

One of the most wind-resistant plants I have ever seen is the Bahama silver palm, *Coccothrinax argentata*. It is an unbelievably tough palm. Once at Eleuthera during a northeaster, I saw the fronds of this slender palm whipped by a 50 m.p.h. gale like so many flags. After three days the wind suddenly stopped, and I was amazed to see how the fronds fell back into place and appeared to have suffered no injury whatever from the severe buffeting. This palm also is native to Florida, but only in the Florida Keys does it attain the height it does in the Bahamas. We had many of these native palms growing in our pine woods, but after a quarter-century they seemed no larger than when we moved to Montgomery Drive. The tallest trunk was under 18 inches. Twenty-foot specimens can be seen at Big Pine Key. I have wondered if the silver palm of the Dade County pine woods is a distinct variety. According to Hal Moore, it is botanically the same species as the silver palm of the Bahamas and the Florida Keys.

Of the Bahama trees my favorite is the eugenia, whose small, dense evergreen foliage remains the same all year even during the long dry season of winter and spring. Several of the eugenias are native to Florida Indian sites. What did the Indians use them for? Were the aromatic leaves and fruit used in Indian medicine? As condiments?

One of the most bizarre plants found anywhere is the spiny *Bucida spinosa*, sometimes called "bonsai tree." It is a relative of *Bucida macrostachya* but much smaller. Several years ago, Stanley Kiem and Gerard Pitt (the latter a plant collector and volunteer worker at the Fairchild Garden) found a large colony of this shrubby, oddly shaped tree growing along the rocky shore of a brackish lagoon near Freeport, Grand Bahama. Being in a low area, the trees were frequently flooded by high tide, attesting to their tolerance of salt water. Although varying greatly in form from tree to tree, even under natural conditions it develops a character like a Japanese bonsai. Once introduced to cultivation, it became immensely popular as a potted plant. But efforts to propagate the *bucida* from seed at first met with failure. The early introductions were confined to small plants that Pitt made special journeys to Grand Bahama to collect, following like a nursemaid through federal plant quarantine, then growing with delicate care in the Fairchild Garden's greenhouses. The entire lot of Pitt's plants were set out in two colonies in the lowland of the Garden, about the shore of a brackish lake. Here they thrived. Efforts to collect and germinate seed continued to prove a failure, but small plants did spring up beneath the established trees. In this way enough plants were collected and grown

to distribute to Fairchild Garden members. I obtained one of the plants, but mine never got beyond a pot where its characteristic bonsai form discouraged us from parting with it for some outdoors location.

In the mid-1950s while Leonard Brass, an Australian botanist and explorer, was collecting in New Guinea for Archbold Expeditions, he sent to the Fairchild Garden seeds of several palms new to botany. I was acting director of the Garden at the time, and I remember well how those seeds arrived — in packages of moist sphagnum moss, many of them having sprouted during the long journey. So clean were the seeds that federal plant quarantine passed them without fumigation. We lumped all the plants we grew from these seeds as "Brass palms," which otherwise were identified only by numbers — the FTG's accession numbers as well as by the Archbold Expedition's collecting numbers. Brass, of course, had collected and sent botanical specimens to other institutions, including Cornell University, with expedition numbers. The FTG did not at that time have a herbarium. According to the botanist's notes, most of the seeds had been collected in wet tropical forests. We rigged up sprinklers in the branches of a colony of live oaks, and, to further simulate wet tropical forest conditions, we covered the ground beneath the sprinklers with a thin blanket of leaf mold and wood chips. Here we planted half of the Brass palms, watering them from the overhead sprinklers. The remaining palms were planted in dissimilar situations. It so happened that all thrived, but those in our wet forest did best. As a result, we wound up with a "rain forest," a feature that is still one of the Garden's finest displays.

In time, botanists got around to classifying and naming the Brass palms, among which was found a new genus that, appropriately, was named after the collector — *Brassiophoenix*. All of these New Guinea palms eventually fruited, and their offspring have been distributed among Fairchild Garden members. A *Brassiophoenix drymophoeides* grew just outside a window of my study, while another Brass palm, a then-unnamed *Ptychosperma species*, was planted near the north border of our property. Whenever I looked out a window to rest my eyes and relax my mind, my gaze often fell upon one or the other of these palms and I recalled the quiet, intelligent botanist. Brass, who worked at the Archbold Expeditions headquarters near Lake Placid, Florida, when not on collecting trips, became ill. He returned to Australia to be buried beside his deceased wife. The several fine "brass palms" he sent from New Guinea still thrive in South Florida gardens.

One family of plants I wanted to collect were the cycads, oldest survivors of the seed-producing plants, but I never got seriously involved with them except in the building of collections at the Fairchild Garden and at the Montgomery Foundation established at the Montgomery estate in 1959. During our early years at Montgomery Drive, we were interested mainly in plants that would provide screen, a lush tropical effect about the house and harmonize with the dominant natural landscape of pines and palmettos. I did manage to collect a few cycads but only in the later years that we lived there, not enough to say that I had anything like a collection. My prize cycad was a *Dioon spinulosum* from Mexico, given me in 1967 by Henry Coppinger, one of the rare personalities I met as a newspaperman. His father planted and maintained the gardens of Flagler's Royal Palm Hotel, built in 1896 in downtown Miami. The elder Coppinger later opened a tourist attraction on the Miami River where visitors strolled through lush tropical gardens, viewed caged native wildlife and gazed at a family of Seminoles living in an open chickee.

Here Henry Coppinger grew up, working with the plants, which he loved, and caring for the wildlife, including a pen of alligators. In his early teens he got the idea of wrestling alligators as a possible tourist attraction. Observing that an alligator grew about a foot in length each year, he began wrestling a four-footer, and continued to wrestle it as it grew to five, six and seven feet long. Tourists loved the show, and Coppinger began making national tours as the "alligator boy from Miami." By this time he was no longer wrestling a "tame" alligator. He would go into a lake, creek, tank or swimming pool after the wildest kind of 'gator, so long as the reptile was no longer than eight feet. As he grew older, the public forgot his exploits, and most people assumed the Seminoles developed the art of alligator wrestling. Coppinger taught Seminole youths to wrestle alligators and the Indians have been wrestling ever since.

When I met him, Henry Coppinger was in his upper 70s, living a couple of miles south of us on Old Cutler Road. With his alligator wrestling days behind him, he spent most of his time working among his plant collection, mainly cycads, that he had spent years developing. One day I dropped in to see Coppinger. After some embarrassment, he got out his scrapbooks and began showing me the write-ups he had received, including one by Grantland Rice in Old *Collier's* magazine. Coppinger couldn't have been happier when an article about him came out in *The Herald*. Having remembered that I showed an interest in a

fine cycad — a *Dioon spinulosum* growing in a large tub — he loaded it on his pickup truck and delivered it to me.

This cycad was one of the most striking plants on our five acres. Whenever I passed it, I was likely to think of Henry Coppinger, forever smoking a cigar as he worked in his jungle of plants, growing in tubs or in halves of oil drums. I also thought about the history of the cycad family, which covered much of the earth during the time of the dinosaurs, pterodactyls and other incredible reptiles. Somehow it made me feel that collecting cycads and wrestling reptilian alligators was esthetically right.

Even at his age, Coppinger was a singular man. Day after day, he worked among his collection of cycads and other plants with amazing energy and unstinted devotion. While I liked plants, I sought to use them not so much as individual "collector's items" but as an integral part of a unified landscape, an effect I sought to achieve at Montgomery Drive.

To Be Continued