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Albert Charles Smith (1906–1999): a Monumental Botanist

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Albert Charles Smith has received numerous distinguished awards and honors during the course of his career, and considerable biographical information has been published about him, both in his own words and by others (e.g., Darwin 1993; Smith 1979, 1996; Theobald 1979). In this tribute to Dr. Smith we focus on his career and association with the National Tropical Botanical Garden (NTBG). We also present a list of his botanical research publications (excluding book reviews) in Appendix 1, as no full bibliography has yet been published.

Albert Smith much admired such 19th century botanists as J. D. and W. J. Hooker, A. Gray, and G. Bentham, and extolled their works as models of meticulous observation and perceptive interpretation. From his early days as a student and then for more than a half century he led an exemplary professional life which any one of these eminent botanists would have been impressed with. He is best known for his botanical exploration of South America and Fiji, monographic studies, morphology and relationships of basal angiosperms, administration, and the lastly the work on which he spent much of his career, the Flora of Fiji. Much of his taxonomic work focused on the basal angiosperm families in the Magnoliales such as Degeneriaceae, Himantandraceae, Monimiaceae, and Myristicaceae, the Illiciales (Illiciaceae and Schisandraceae), the Ericaceae, and the Celastraceae. He was a proficient and prolific taxonomist, a gentleman, and a scholar.

Born in Springfield, Massachusetts, on 5 April 1906, Albert Smith was the eighth child of first generation United States parents. His grandparents emigrated to the United States from Germany and England. His parents, equipped with only elementary school educations, nevertheless aided their six surviving children to complete their college educations. His father, a machinist, became an officer in the Ordnance Department during the First World War, and Albert's public school education was accompanied by frequent moves, spending his early years in Springfield, New Haven, and Bridgeport, as his father supervised small arms manufacture in the factories of those cities.

Albert graduated from Classical High School in Springfield and entered Massachusetts Agricultural College in 1922. He sought a transfer to Columbia College and transferred there beginning with his sophomore year. He initially intended to major in English and become a journalist, but he also took enough courses for majors in botany and zoology. He was strongly influenced by several of his professors including Mark Van Doren and Henry K. Dick in English composition,

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Albert Charles Smith in ca. 1979

and in biology by C. C. Curtis, R. A. Harper, Sam Trelease, and Edmund W. Sinnott. In his senior year he took a course at the New York Botanical Garden (NYBG), and it proved to be a turning point in his life, although the position consisted largely of improving the arrangement of the fern herbarium. At the NYBG, Smith became acquainted with an impressive array of North American botanists, including J. H. Barnhart, N. L. Britton, H. A. Gleason, A. Hollick, M. A. Howe P. A. Rydberg, J. K. Small, and P. Wilson of which Gleason became the most important influence in Smith's developing career.

In 1926, as Smith neared graduation, E. P. Killip of the Smithsonian Institution needed a field assistant for a field trip to Colombia jointly funded trip by the Smithsonian Institution, the NYBG, the Gray Herbarium, and the Arnold Arboretum. Smith was recommended and spent several months collecting with Killip in the eastern cordillera of Colombia. In 1928, Smith became an Assistant Curator as Gleason's assistant, and during this period made several more expeditions to south America (with Killip in 1929 to Peru and Brazil in 1933, and to British Guiana with the Terry Holden Expedition of the American Museum of Natural History in 1937–1938). In 1933 Smith received his Ph.D. from Columbia. His committee accepted a 1932 publication on South American *Thibaudieae* (Ericaceae) as his thesis.

As Director of NYBG, E. D. Merrill had a great influence on Smith's future career, encouraging him to continue work on the Fijian flora begun by J. W. Gillespie, who died at an early age after completing only preliminary work in the area. With the aid of a Bishop Museum Fellowship from Yale University and additional support from the Yale School of Forestry, Smith undertook his first Fijian field trip in 1933–1934. Merrill had gone to the Arnold Arboretum in 1935 and offered Smith his next position in 1940, that of the retiring Alfred Rehder as Curator of the Herbarium at the Arnold Arboretum. He accepted Merrill's offer with some mixed feelings. He ultimately left the NYBG in part because he had been asked by the Director W. J. Robbins to write the ferns for a new edition of *Britton & Brown's Illustrated Flora of the Northern United States* being prepared by Gleason. This would take considerable time from his deep commitment to continue on his South American projects, not to mention that he had no real interest in ferns.

Between 1940 and 1948 Smith made many new contacts at Harvard, including Irving W. Bailey and such of his associates as Charlotte Nast and B. G. L. Swamy; with these colleagues he developed an interest in angiosperm phylogeny, especially of what we now refer to as the basal angiosperms, that resulted in many publications. As soon as travel was again feasible after World War II, Smith obtained a Guggenheim Fellowship used for a second collecting trip to Fiji (1947–1948).

In 1948 reorganization at the Smithsonian Institution created a new Department of Botany separate from Zoology, with Killip as Head Curator and subdivided into four Divisions (grasses, ferns, other cryptogams, and phanerogams). Smith left Arnold Arboretum to go Washington and take up the new position of Curator of the Division of Phanerogams. Soon thereafter Smith sought support from the newly developing National Science Foundation that enabled him to make a third

(1953–1954) and subsequent Fijian excursions. By the early 1950s Smith began to think of taking his first administrative position. When the National Science Foundation asked him to succeed his close friend Rogers McVaugh as a temporary Program Director for Systematic Biology in 1956, he obtained a year's leave from the Smithsonian to take it. The rotating position was extended, and Smith continued at NSF through 1958.

At the Smithsonian, the U.S. National Museum had flourished under the prudent Directorship of Remington Kellogg to such an extent that two separate bureaus were established. One of the new museums, the Museum of History and Technology, was to be directed by its developer, Frank Taylor, while Smith was offered the Directorship of the sister Museum of Natural History, which was on the point of doubling its research space by the construction of two new wings.

The five years (1958–1962) that he spent as Director of the Museum of Natural History are recalled by Smith as the most satisfying of his career. As he became better conversant with an outstanding staff of about 50 scientists he facilitated the progress of exceptional research, and played a part in exhibits programs and in proposing new appointments. He believed that the Museum of that period had no equals in its field. In 1962 he accepted appointment as Assistant Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, a step that he later regretted, finding little satisfaction in the duties of the position.

When the University of Hawaii offered him a newly created position as Director of Research and Professor of Botany, in 1963, Smith reluctantly left the Smithsonian. He started a new career as an academic with his appointment as Gerrit Parmile Wilder Professor of Botany at the University of Hawaii, a position he held from 1965 to 1970, until his first retirement. An inexperienced teacher, he nevertheless produced two graduate students during this period, L. E. Bishop (now deceased) and S. H. Sohmer. He also was able to resume his research on the Fijian flora.

With his 1963 move to Honolulu, Smith had immediately become involved with the efforts of the Hawaiian Botanical Gardens Foundation to establish in Hawaii a major tropical botanical garden that would combine significant horticulture with basic research. Thanks in large part to the determined W. W. Goodale Moir and to Senator Spark M. Matsunaga, the Pacific Tropical Botanical Garden in 1964 obtained a Congressional Charter, a steadfast group of Trustees, and a skillfully worded directive. Several groups of botanists were charged to seek promising sites, one of them composed of Smith and his University colleague Charles H. Lamoureux, who examined four potential sites and prepared reports on them for the Trustees, without recommendations. The ultimate selection was the beautiful, but sugarcane-filled, Lawai Valley on Kauai adjacent to the fine estate of Robert and John Gregg Allerton. The Allerton Gardens are now incorporated into the National Tropical Botanical Garden (so renamed in 1988 because the U.S. Congress wished it to assume responsibilities beyond Hawaii).

The University of Hawaii at that time had enforced retirement at 65, so in 1970, not ready for retirement, he accepted the Ray Ethan Torrey Professorship of Botany at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. The ensuing six years provided fond memories of a strong and congenial botany faculty, opportunities

to work in the herbaria in Cambridge, New York, and Washington, and visits to England in 1971 and 1974. It was during this period that he oversaw the work of his final two graduate students, Steven Darwin and Judith Haas.

In the summer of 1975, as another mandatory retirement loomed and as Smith was not yet finished with his botanical work, he and his wife moved a final time back to Honolulu, Hawaii where he settled for the remainder of his life. A visit to the Pacific Tropical Botanical Garden on Kauai brought the welcome suggestion from its Director, William L. Theobald, that Smith assemble his Fijian Flora under the Garden's sponsorship. The offer was no sooner suggested than accepted, thanks to the enthusiastic approval of John Allerton and other scientifically oriented Trustees of the Garden. For the next decade and a half he worked through what became his final and largest work, *Flora Vitiensis Nova*.

A.C. Smith was actively involved with the National Tropical Botanical Garden (NTBG) from its inception, and his influence on the Garden over the years has been profound. In his "retirement" Albert held the Garden position of editorial consultant and senior staff associate for the Flora of Fiji project, while his second wife, Emma van Ginniken Smith, served as his research assistant. Based in Honolulu, the Smiths were able to utilize the collections housed at the Bishop Museum herbarium (most of the Fijian plant specimens at BISH actually were collected by Smith), the literature and archives at the University of Hawaii, and his copious notes compiled from five field trips to Fiji. These resources were used to begin assembling the *Flora Vitiensis Nova: a new flora of Fiji (Spermatophytes only)*. This monumental five volume work summarizes years of study by Smith and is undoubtedly his greatest achievement. It also includes contributions from several colleagues who prepared or collaborated on several family treatments (Darwin 1993).

After publication of the fifth and final volume of the *Flora* in 1991, Smith presented his personal collection of books and reprints to the NTBG library to avoid the temptation of taking on additional botanical projects. He subsequently devoted his full time to caring for his wife and enjoying their retirement together. In 1994 Smith requested that his name be removed from the NTBG roster, thus marking his "official" retirement from botany at age 87, although he assisted with preparation and proofreading of the *Comprehensive Indices*, the last volume of the series published in 1996. He passed away peacefully on 23 May 1999 in Honolulu with Emma by his side.

During his career Dr. Smith served as editor of four distinguished botanical journals for a total of some 30 years, a task that not many of us would be willing or able to assume. He served as editor of the Garden's journal *Allertonia* from 1977 until 1988, when the second author (DL) assumed the responsibility. Smith was a patient and understanding mentor to a newcomer in the editorial field. Although it was a challenge to follow his stringent standards for excellence, using Al Smith as an editorial role model ensured that the high quality he established for *Allertonia* would be maintained.

Smith was a delegate to International Botanical Congresses in 1935, 1950, and 1959, and was a founding member of the International Association for Plant Taxonomy (Vice President 1959–1964; member of Editorial Committee 1954–

1964) and the Association for Tropical Biology (President 1967–1968). He was also active in the establishments of the American Society of Plant Taxonomists (President 1955) and of Flora Neotropica. He was a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (since 1944) and of the Linnean Society of London (since 1974) and a Member of the National Academy of Sciences (since 1963). He served as President of the Botanical Society of Washington (1962), the Biological Society of Washington (1962–1964), the Washington Biologists' Field Club (1962–1964), and the Hawaiian Botanical Society (1967). He has been the Editor of *Brittonia* (1931–1940), the *Journal of the Arnold Arboretum* (1940–1948), *Sargentia* (1941–1948), and *Allertonia* (1977–1988). He is survived by his wife, Emma van Ginneken Smith of Honolulu, Hawaii.

Dr. Smith clearly represented the best of a great tradition of excellence in the pursuit of science, and it has been an honor and privilege for both of us to have known and worked with him.

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APPENDIX 1

A. C. Smith's botanical research publications (excluding book reviews).

1. 1928. A visit to the mud volcanoes of Turbaco. *Sci. Monthly* 27: 42–46.
2. 1929. With E. P. Killip. The genus *Viburnum* in northwestern South America. *Bull. Torrey Bot. Club* 56: 265–274.
3. 1929. With E. P. Killip. The genus *Weinmannia* in northern South America. *Bull. Torrey Bot. Club* 56: 361–377.
4. 1930. With E. P. Killip. The identity of the South American fish poisons 'Cube' and 'Timbo'. *J. Wash. Acad. Sci.* 20: 74–81.
5. 1930. A collecting trip across Peru. *J. New York Bot. Gard.* 31: 81–93.
6. 1930. With H. A. Gleason. Methods of preserving and arranging herbarium specimens. *J. New York Bot. Gard.* 31: 112–125.
7. 1930. Mountain tops and lowlands of Colombia. *Economic Geography* 6: 398–407.
8. 1930. With E. P. Killip. A botanical trip to eastern Peru and Amazonian Brazil. *Bull. Pan.-Am. Union* 64: 997–1009.
9. 1930. Notes on Mt. Roraima Pteridophyta. *Bull. Torrey Bot. Club* 57: 177–180.
10. 1931. With E. P. Killip. The South American species of *Viburnum*. *Bull. Torrey Bot. Club* 57: 245–258.
11. 1931. With E. P. Killip. The use of fish poisons in South America. *Smithsonian Report for 1930*: 401–408.
12. 1931. Studies of South American Plants, I. New or noteworthy species from Peru and Amazonian Brazil. *Bull. Torrey Bot. Club* 58: 87–110.
13. 1931. Pteridophyta, for Gleason's "Botanical results of the Tyler–Duida expedition." *Bull. Torrey Bot. Club* 58: 299–315.
14. 1931. Ericaceae (part) and Vacciniaceae, for Gleason's "Botanical results of the Tyler–Duida expedition." *Bull. Torrey Bot. Club* 58: 436–444.

15. 1932. The American species of *Thibaudieae*. Contr. U. S. Natl. Herb. 28: 311–547.
16. 1932. Botanical studies in Europe. J. New York Bot. Gard. 33: 153–155.
17. 1932. With P. C. Standley. *Schizocardia*, a new genus of trees of the family Clethraceae. Trop. Woods 32: 8–11.
18. 1932. Studies of South American Plants, II. New Loranthaceae and Monimiaceae from the northern Andes. Bull. Torrey Bot. Club 59: 513–524.
19. 1932. The genera *Sphyrospermum* and *Disterigma*. Brittonia 1: 203–232.
20. 1933. Studies of South American Plants, III. New Ericaceae and Vacciniaceae. Bull. Torrey Bot. Club 60: 99–121.
21. 1933. With H. A. Gleason. *Plantae Krukovianae*. Bull. Torrey Bot. Club 60: 349–365, 379–396.
22. 1933. Three new species from the A. E. Lawrence Collection. Phytologia 1: 20–22.
23. 1934. *Macleania cordifolia*. Addisonia 18: 47.
24. 1934. With H. A. Gleason. *Plantae Krukovianae*, II. Bull. Torrey Bot. Club 61: 191–196.
25. 1934. Plant collecting in Fiji. J. New York Bot. Gard. 35: 261–280.
26. 1935. *Plantae Krukovianae*, IV. Phytologia 1: 113–126.
27. 1935. Studies of South American Plants, IV. New Monimiaceae, Trigoniaceae and Vacciniaceae. Phytologia 1: 126–132.
28. 1935. *Hornemannia*, a much-described West Indian genus. Amer. J. Bot. 22: 9–11.
29. 1935. Botanical exploration of the Fiji Islands. Trop. Woods 41: 1–5.
30. 1935. With E. P. Killip. Some American plants used as fish poisons. (mimeograph) Bureau of Plant Industry, U. S. D. A., p. 1–27.
31. 1935. With M. F. Koch. The genus *Espeletia*: a study in phylogenetic taxonomy. Brittonia 1: 479–530.
32. 1936. *Plantae Krukovianae*, V. Brittonia 2: 145–164.
33. 1936. Studies of South American Plants, V. Additional notes on *Thibaudieae*. Bull. Torrey Bot. Club 63: 307–316.
34. 1936. Notes on North American Araliaceae. Brittonia 2: 247–261.
35. 1936. With W. H. Camp. A note on the genus *Themistoclesia* Kl. Brittonia 2: 263–264.
36. 1936. *Carapa procera*. Addisonia 19: 51.
37. 1936. *Stiffia chrysantha*. Addisonia 19: 63.
38. 1936. Fijian plant studies. Bernice P. Bishop Mus. Bull. 141: 1–166.
39. 1937. With B. A. Krukoff. Notes on the botanical components of Curare. Bull. Torrey Bot. Club 64: 401–409.
40. 1937. Three new species of Vacciniaceae. Phytologia 1: 209–212.
41. 1937. *Cavendishia skutchii*. In: C. V. Morton, “New species of Costa Rican plants.” J. Wash. Acad. Sci. 27: 308–309.
42. 1937. A Colombian species of *Cervantesia* R. et P. Trop. Woods 51: 12–14.
43. 1937. Mayacaceae. N. Amer. Flora 19: 1–2.
44. 1937. With B. A. Krukoff. Rotenone-yielding plants of South America. Amer. J. Bot. 24: 573–587.
45. 1938. With R. P. Wodehouse. The American species of Myristicaceae. Brittonia 2: 393–510.
46. 1938. Myristicaceae. In: J. F. Macbride, Flora of Peru. Field Mus. Publ. Bot. 13 (2): 766–784.
47. 1938. *Sciadophyllum chartaceum*. Field Mus. Publ. Bot. 18: 1562–1563.
48. 1939. Plant collecting in British Guiana. J. New York Bot. Gard. 40: 10–21, 35–59.
49. 1939. Botanical exploration of interior British Guiana. Trop. Woods. 57: 6–11.
50. 1939. Studies of South American Plants, VI. Preliminary notes on Hippocrateaceae. Bull. Torrey Bot. Club 66: 231–249.
51. 1939. With B. A. Krukoff. Notes on the botanical components of Curare, II. Bull. Torrey Bot. Club 66: 305–314.
52. 1939. Studies of South American Plants, VII. Notes on Quinaceae. Trop. Woods 58: 25–32.
53. 1939. Studies of South American Plants, VIII. New and noteworthy species of Lecythidaceae. Amer. J. Bot. 26: 407–412.
54. 1939. *Plantae Krukovianae*, VI. J. Arnold Arbor. 20: 288–303.
55. 1939. Polypodiaceae and Lycopodiaceae. In: H. A. Gleason and E. P. Killip, “The flora of Mount Auyan-tepui, Venezuela.” Brittonia 3: 145–149.
56. 1939. With W. H. Camp. Ericaceae and Vacciniaceae. In: H. A. Gleason and E. P. Killip, “The flora of Mount Auyan-tepui, Venezuela.” Brittonia 3: 178–188.
57. 1939. Supplementary notes on Myristicaceae. Brittonia 3: 339–340.
58. 1939. Notes on a collection of plants from British Guiana. Lloydia 2: 161–218.
59. 1940. A collection of flowering plants from Mount Roraima and adjacent Venezuela, British Guiana, and Brazil. Bull. Torrey Bot. Club 67: 283–299.

60. 1940. Notes on the genus *Amburana* Schwacke et Taub. (*Torresea* Fr. Allem.) Trop. Woods 62: 28–31.
61. 1940. Stability in nomenclature. Science 91: 572–573.
62. 1940. Studies of South American Plants, IX. New and noteworthy species from the northern Andes. Amer. J. Bot. 27: 541–547.
63. 1940. Three new species of Panama plants, for inclusion in a paper by R. E. Woodson, Jr. Ann. Missouri Bot. Gard. 27: 324–328.
64. 1940. The American species of Hippocrateaceae. Brittonia 3: 341–555.
65. 1941. Studies of Papuasian Plants, I. J. Arnold Arbor. 22: 60–80.
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70. 1941. Studies of Papuasian Plants, III. J. Arnold Arbor. 22: 343–374.
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84. 1943. Studies of Pacific Island Plants, II. Notes on the Pacific species of *Piper*. J. Arnold Arbor. 24: 347–361.
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93. 1945. Studies of Pacific Island Plants, IV. Notes on Fijian flowering plants. J. Arnold Arbor. 26: 97–110.
94. 1945. A taxonomic review of *Trochodendron* and *Tetracentron*. J. Arnold Arbor. 26: 123–142.
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96. 1945. With I. M. Johnston. A phytogeographic sketch of Latin America. In: I. C. Verdoorn, *Plants and plant science in Latin America*. p. 1–18.
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119. 1952. Studies of Pacific Island Plants, XI. Further notes on Fijian flowering plants. *J. Arnold Arbor.* 33: 97–118.
120. 1952. Studies of Pacific Island Plants, XII. The Cunoniaceae of Fiji and Samoa. *J. Arnold Arbor.* 33: 119–149.
121. 1952. Studies of Pacific Island Plants, X. The Meliaceae of Fiji, Samoa and Tonga. *Contr. U. S. Natl. Herb.* 30: 469–519.
122. 1952. Studies of Pacific Island Plants, XIII. Notes on Fijian Euphorbiaceae. *J. Arnold Arbor.* 33: 367–402.
123. 1952. Dr. Francis W. Pennell’s botanical work in South America. *Bartonia* 26: 7–9.
124. 1953. Studies of Pacific Island Plants, XIV. Notes on the Fijian species of *Cyrtandra*. *J. Arnold Arbor.* 34: 37–51.
125. 1953. With I. W. Bailey. A new Fijian species of *Calyptosepalum*. *J. Arnold Arbor.* 34: 52–64.
126. 1953. A new species of *Vaccinium* from Honduras. *Ceiba* 3: 185–187.
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