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5th Floor, Hunt Library
Carnegie Mellon University
4909 Frew Street
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Email: huntinst@andrew.cmu.edu
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About the Institute

The Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation, a research division of Carnegie Mellon University, specializes in the history of botany and all aspects of plant science and serves the international scientific community through research and documentation. To this end, the Institute acquires and maintains authoritative collections of books, plant images, manuscripts, portraits and data files, and provides publications and other modes of information service. The Institute meets the reference needs of botanists, biologists, historians, conservationists, librarians, bibliographers and the public at large, especially those concerned with any aspect of the North American flora.

Hunt Institute was dedicated in 1961 as the Rachel McMasters Miller Hunt Botanical Library, an international center for bibliographical research and service in the interests of botany and horticulture, as well as a center for the study of all aspects of the history of the plant sciences. By 1971 the Library's activities had so diversified that the name was changed to Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation. Growth in collections and research projects led to the establishment of four programmatic departments: Archives, Art, Bibliography and the Library.



DIVISION OF TROPICAL RESEARCH
VINING C. DUNLAP LABORATORIES

TELA RAILROAD COMPANY
LA LIMA, HONDURAS

July 11, 1959

N. C. THORNTON
DIRECTOR

Dr. Wilson Popenoe
Antigua, Guatemala

Dear Dr. Popenoe:

We are currently preparing a rather elaborate brochure, profusely illustrated with color photographs, and a magazine article which we expect to place in National Geographic, on Lancetilla.

I am accumulating information from our files here and from conversations with Alfred Butler, V. C. Dunlap, and Mark Trafton. The article would not be complete without some of your personal comments and reminiscences, nor would the illustrations be complete without an up-to-date photographic portrait of you.

With a view toward acquiring this material, I would very much like to visit with you at your earliest convenience. Chances are I can make my schedule conform to any dates you suggest. Be assured that your help will be invaluable and your cooperation will be deeply appreciated.

Sincerely,

D. H. Radler
Assistant to the Director

cc: Dr. J. E. Hobson
Dr. N. C. Thornton
DHR:kb

Antigua, Guatemala, 20 July 1959

Dr D H Radler,
Tela Railroad Company,
La Lima, Honduras.

Dear Doctor Radler:

Yours of the 11th has just come. I shall be most happy to see you here and tell you anything I can about the genesis of Lancetilla. Alfred Butler is quite familiar with its history since he was in on the ground floor, but there are perhaps a few details I can add.

When I was in Venezuela I invited the agricultural chief of the Fundación Eugenio Mendoza (for which I worked down there) to come here for a few days, and we set the tentative date at 20 July - which is today. This man has not shown up yet but I feel sure he will be here very shortly, and I will need three or four days with him. Just as soon as I am free I will write or telegraph you, and we shall be glad to see you here; and I say we because Mrs Popenoe urges that you plan to stay overnight so you can eat black bean soup with us and sleep in our little guest bedroom. Please do this if you can.

Sincerely,

Wilson Popenoe



DIVISION OF TROPICAL RESEARCH

VINING C. DUNLAP LABORATORIES

TELA RAILROAD COMPANY
LA LIMA, HONDURAS

September 16, 1959

N. C. THORNTON
DIRECTOR

Dr. Wilson Popenoe
Antigua, Guatemala

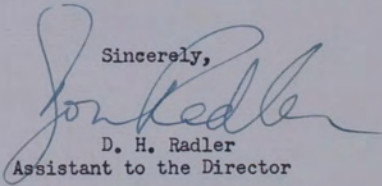
Dear Dr. Popenoe:

I am not too keen about the enclosed shots but thought you might like to have them despite their lack of professional sparkle. If there is anything better on the color rolls when developed, I will send it on to you.

I am finding the information and the reprints you gave me about Lancetilla most valuable. I trust our efforts and those of others will maintain the Company's awareness of the value and importance of the station.

Again, heartfelt thanks for your generous hospitality and that of your wife and for your kind offer to entertain my wife when she is in Guatemala. She and her paints and brushes will undoubtedly take you up on it at the very earliest opportunity. (As I told you, I have never liked any house as well --- if I were to follow my inclinations we would move in bag and baggage!)

Sincerely,



D. H. Radler
Assistant to the Director

Encl: 5
DHR:kb



DIVISION OF TROPICAL RESEARCH

VINING C. DUNLAP LABORATORIES

TELA RAILROAD COMPANY
LA LIMA, HONDURAS

N. C. THORNTON
DIRECTOR

October 7, 1959

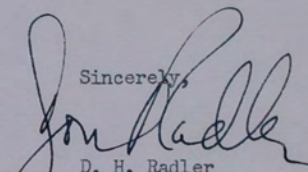
Dr. Wilson Popenoe
Antigua
Guatemala

Dear Dr. Popenoe:

Under separate cover I am sending you some extra color transparencies shot at Zamorano by one of our photographers, since I am sure that you will be interested in having these as a memento of the wonderful school you did so much for over the years.

Best regards,

Sincerely,



D. H. Radler
Assistant to the Director

cc: Dr. J. E. Hobson - Dr. W. C. Paddock
DHR:kib

Antigua, Guatemala, 20 October 1959

Mr D H Radler
Tela RR Co, La Ljma, Honduras.

Dear Mr. Radler:

Those photos you took here are darn good, even if you did have to lie on your back to get them. Thank you very much. And now the transparencies from Zamorano. Also very good. Thanks again. My only mick is that the citrus orchard, the last thing I planted at Zamorano, doesnt look too hot.

I have had a fine letter from Dr Hobson, in which he more or less lays himself open to some old-timer stuff from my end, and to a discussion of Lancetilla. I may send you a copy of my dissertation. From all I have heard I believe Dr Hobson is interested in Lancetilla, but I suspect some members of the Board of Directors may need some convincing. Reminds me of the time one of our Manager's came to the station and looking at a plant asked: "What's this? Can you sell it? Can you eat it? No? Then what the Hell is it here for?"

Now, the following is in writing therefore constitutessvalid evidence in any Honduran court of Law: Helen and I are going over the Salvador and Honduras, leaving here on the 30th instant and returning not later than 15 November. Any time after that your sefiora will be more than welcome to show up here with a full stock of paints and brushes and stay as long as she can; and th weather will be good by the middle of November (it has been vile for the past week). And it would be even better if you could come along for a time at least, provided you wouldnt feel cramped in that little guest bedroom.

Ever yours,

DIVISION OF TROPICAL RESEARCH

LP. 385-A

To: Dr. J. E. Hobson Copy: Dr. N. C. Thornton
Mr. M. Trafton Date: May 12, 1960
From: D. H. Radler Dr. V. C. Dunlap
cc: Dr. W. Popenoe ✓ Place: La Lima, Honduras
Subject: Lancetilla brochure

Enclosed is copy for the planned Lancetilla brochure which you might be going over while final details are arranged with Bentill Press for presentation dummy, price quotations, etc.

The manuscript includes information gathered from Messrs. Trafton, Dunlap, Butler, Moscoso and Dr. Wilson Popenoe, who has been of great help. In addition, the manuscript has been checked by and incorporates the suggestions of Trafton, Moscoso and Popenoe.

The Spanish version, which with few exceptions is a literal translation of the enclosed, is complete and being held here.

Supplementing this copy will be a catalog of plants named and depicted in the brochure, with the common English and Spanish, and scientific names. This listing is currently being completed.

I would hope that by early fall Bentill will have supplied all necessary prints, paper stock from the States will have reached here and the presentation dummy with copy hand-lettered in exact location and exact size will be ready for you to present to Mr. Sunderland and/or the Management Committee.

I think it would be preferable not to solicit the advice or approval of anyone outside the Research Department on the basis of the enclosed manuscript alone, reserving this for the much better sales job that can be done by the completed presentation dummy.

DHR:kb
Encl:1



You stand on a grassy lawn, held in place by the warm hand of the sun. All around you, lush tropical growth --- palm trees of every shape and size; citrus, mahogany, teak; flowering shrubs galore; delicate orchids; familiar lacy ferns; strange plants with strange names like frangipani and durian; drug plants such as the strychnine tree and cocaine shrub. You shuffle your feet --- if you stood still too long, you, too, might sprout.

This is Lanctilla.

One thousand acres of rich Honduran valley, bordered by mountains and rivers, only three miles inland from the Caribbean port of Tela. On these thousand acres, as many different varieties of plants --- the world's largest collection of economic tropical crops. Botanists, plant physiologists, agriculturalists of all kinds, from all over the world, come here to look, to ask questions, to learn. They bring or send new additions to the ever-expanding collection; they take or have sent literally millions of seeds, cuttings, grafted trees, thereby spreading new varieties throughout the tropics.

From this ceaseless flow of people and plants stems new progress for science, new diversification for tropical agriculture, new sources of work and income for tropical countries and their people.

Lanctilla introduced the African oil palm to Central America. Today, Honduras produces four million pounds of palm oil a year --- Costa Rica, ten million. The nearly ten thousand acres devoted to palm oil production in the two countries once were useless jungle. Now they are richly productive, attractive farms, dotted with the homes, schools, commissaries

and dispensaries of the hundreds of workers and their families who live there. Without this one imported tree, any of these people might have had no job, no income, no hope.

This, too, is *Lancetilla*.

Its name ("Little Lance") comes from the spiny palm found here, but *Lancetilla* means more than just a palm --- it means life. Any of its thousand varieties could, as oil palm did, explode into new-found productivity for the people of the American tropics.

Take the black pepper grown here --- a variety carefully selected from Oriental origins, perfectly adapted to the climate and soils of Central America, highly resistant to disease. Each grain so like the next they might have been stamped from a mold --- all full of hot spicy flavor to titillate the palate of any gourmet. A potential treasure trove, growing so full, so fast, you feel you must run to harvest the crop.

Or the pill nut --- another Oriental introduction. Nut-fanciers fortunate enough to know them prefer them to cashews or Brazil nuts. Rich? Their content of fine oil is so high they can be burned like candles. Better, though, with apples and coffee, or with a drink.

Or teak, imported into Central America by *Lancetilla* back in 1926. Wood researchers declare this teak even better than its proud Burmese forebears --- finer grained, harder, stronger. The warm sun, dependable rain and fertile soils of Central America at work again

Honduran mahogany, smooth, hard, beautifully grained --- and growing lush and full in its comfortable native habitat.

Eucalyptus trees, their patchwork barks looking for all the world like a war-time camouflage job. One of the fastest-growing trees in the world, source of good wood, cool shade and natural beauty.

And mangos, "the apples of the tropics". Virtually every really tasty variety of mango in Central America originated from stock imported and propagated by Lancetilla.

The litchi (or lychee), familiar to Chinese restaurant-goers in its dried form, equally or more delicious fresh, white and sweet. And its tasty cousins, the rambutan and pulasan.

Mangosteens, their flavor something like banana and peach and pineapple mixed together, only better --- the whole more than the sum of the parts. From Southeast Asia originally; Lancetilla's 8-acre planting is the largest in the world. And productive --- in recent years, 70,000-pound crops have become routine.

Cacao --- source of chocolate and cocoa, with such a special flavor that years of effort by chemists all over the world have failed even to approach duplicating it. Lancetilla's carefully-selected varieties are the best in this hemisphere by any measure: size, uniformity, flavor or yield.

Nutmeg, one of the most useful spices, best-known, perhaps, for Christmastime eggnog, pumpkin pie and all sorts of baked goodies.

Cinnamon --- the "stick" from the bark of the tree, the essence from the leaves and twigs. Crumble a leaf in your hands and catch a nostalgic whiff of childhood, Mom baking coffee cake and filling the air with sweetness.

Keppel fruit --- again, of Oriental origin. An internal deodorant --- eat enough of it and you'll smell sweet for days, they say.

All this began in 1925 when the United Fruit Company started a research department to study the diseases of bananas and to investigate other tropical crops of potential value. Dr. Wilson Popenoe, then a young U. S. Dept. of Agriculture plant scientist, now "Mr. Tropical Agriculture" himself, was the first director. He chose the site, launched the enterprise on 40 acres of land containing a variety of representative Central American soils. Today, despite the lengthy list of his accomplishments (for which he has received decorations from seven different countries), "Dr. Pop" still looks upon Lancetilla as one of his favorite places and perhaps his greatest contribution to the American tropics which he loves so much.

Look at the record. In its first 30 years, Lancetilla accumulated a thousand varieties of economic plants, tended, selected, propagated, improved --- and distributed. Several million pieces of planting material, most of them budded and grafted trees, have gone out from the station. Many of these represent new crops for one or another country, new sources of food, of income, of productive work. All of these represent new beauty and variety for the tropical landscape, new knowledge for science.

Lancetilla has grown during the first three decades, in line with the research effort of which it was the nucleus. Today, the botanical garden is one sub-station in a 400-man team that extends from Norwood, Massachusetts, U.S.A., to Guayaquil, Ecuador, with tropical research headquarters in La Lima, Honduras, and other sub-stations in Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia and the Dominican Republic.

The Company has taken advantage of Lancetilla only to a limited extent --- it produces much of Central America's palm oil, some of the cacao, will shortly harvest a minimal teak crop. More important has been the outside exploitation --- Lancetilla served as the source of rubber seed during World War II when U.S. supplies of this vital crop were threatened; citronella grass and lemongrass were grown then for their essential oils. Now all three, out of uniform, are staple crops for independent farmers in Central America, especially Guatemala.

Much of the better citrus in Central America was introduced by Lancetilla --- notable are the orange groves of British Honduras, started from Lancetilla stock. The bamboo raised commercially by farmers throughout the American tropics is not the native species, but superior Chinese and Indian varieties --- again, introduced by Lancetilla.

These are the factors that attract scientists to Lancetilla by the hundreds. To the layman, however, it is beauty --- the beauty of life --- and the intrigues of exotic names that conjure up the atmosphere of strange places.

The Queen of Flowering Trees, for example, native of India, named "Amherstia" after the Countess Amherst and her daughter, Lady Amherst. The Queen's delicately elegant blossoms surpass even the orchid. . . .

The numerous species of Heliconia, with their vividly colored, rigid, wax-like flowers. A member of the same family as the banana, as the huge, fan-like leaves testify, but a more colorful (although less edible) relative. Some, with their claw-like scarlet blossoms, reminiscent of another favorite food, the lobster.

Red Brownea blossoms, glorious starbursts that seem surely to be the creation of an imaginative artist rather than the product of Nature's dice game, evolution.

Cannonball flowers, vigorous explosions of color from the tall, stately cannonball tree. Flower and tree named after the fruit, great showy brown balls.

Bamboo groves, dark lacy tunnels, hushed and cool, a little frightening

Rocky tropical streams removed from all humanity, where only the bubble of cascading water and the calls of visiting birds disturb your solitude.

This is Lancetilla.

So is the human side, the sad and funny and touching tales that are part of Lancetilla's history.

"Dr. Pop" recalls Prohibition days in the States, when the head of a soft drink firm came here in search of "something to make bathtub gin taste good". He suggested guanabana juice, a popular Cuban soda fountain drink, but Repeal was in by the time the visitor got home again, thereby depriving Americans of the Flaming Twenties of a new taste sensation.

"Dr. Pop" still sees guanabana and numerous other tropical fruits as real breadwinners in the form of juices or extracts

And the time a former Company official dropped in, had his eye caught by a flowering shrub, asked, "Can you eat it? Can you sell it? Then what the hell is it doing here?"

This was the beginning of the Depression. Shortly afterward, research in the Company was cut to minuscule proportions and Lancetilla began a subsistence-level existence from which it didn't emerge for several years.

The early years were full and productive, however. Alfred Butler, one of the first employees to be hired by "Dr. Pop" in 1926, now chief agronomist for United Fruit and scientific director of the research station in Changuinola, Panama, remembers his early colleagues --- Otto Reinking, Frederick Coville and Marston Bates, some beginners then, all now among the grand old men of tropical agriculture.

And the serpentarium launched in 1928 (since discontinued) in cooperation with Harvard University and a drug company. "Imagine an agronomist collecting venom from beasts like the barba amarilla (for-de-lance) and the Central American rattlesnake!" Mr. Butler exclaims.

Despite the more obvious and dramatic success of the African oil palm, Mr. Butler feels that Lancetilla's greatest contribution to date has been the introduction into Central America of new varieties of tropical fruits, particularly oranges, lemons, grapefruits and numerous mango varieties. "I wouldn't be surprised if most of the better-tasting fruits grown throughout Central America now didn't originally come from Lancetilla," he declares.

Dr. Vining C. Dunlap, now senior consultant to the Company, became tropical research director in 1935. Lancetilla, formerly 50 flourishing acres, was then a Depression casualty, almost jungle once more. Dr. Dunlap, an eager exponent of crop diversification, wanted to use Lancetilla as a source of new plant materials. In the early 1940's he assigned Mark Trafton, now research extension chief, to this program. In the next ten years,

Lancetilla expanded to its present 1,000 acres, re-labeling the collection, selecting the best specimens, expanding their numbers. The Honduran and Costa Rican palm oil mentioned earlier was selected during this period; from 1942-1945 the war-time rubber, manila hemp, citronella and lemon grass program was carried; after the war, the teak that is soon to be harvested was selected and planted. These were Lancetilla's most vigorous years --- yet Dr. Dunlap and Mark Trafton, who were responsible for much of it, speak of it modestly, if at all.

Spend a weekend at Lancetilla with these men and you will see the collection, hear anecdotes of its history, listen to hopes for the future. Somebody else will have to tell you that Trafton planted that stand of teak, that Dunlap is the man in whose honor that particular species of ornamental palm was named.

But with or without these men, your time at Lancetilla will be filled with wonder at Nature's million faces, her wealth of beauty, her love of life, her bounty of joy.

Jorge Moscoso, graduate of the Escuela Agricola Panamericana at Zamorano, Honduras (founded by United Fruit in 1941 now under Dr. Popenoe's direction), Lancetilla's overseer, loves his job. He tells you why every time he shows you a plant.

"This one," he'll say, "had a bad start. Too much rain right after we planted it. Pero ahora esta feliz. (But now it is happy)."

You need only look to know that all of Lancetilla's plants are happy.

Antigua Guatemala, 10 June 1960

Mr. D. H. Radler,
Division of Tropical Research,
United Fruit Co,
Tela RR Co, La Lima,
Honduras, C. A.

Dear Mr. Radler:

Many thanks for the copy of your first draft of the Lancetilla brochure dated May 12th. I like this MS very much and I sincerely hope the Company will see fit to publish it.

In our talks we have discussed the possibility of Lancetilla becoming self-supporting. The more I think about it, the more I would like to ask this question: How many experiment stations in the United States or anywhere else in the world are self-supporting year by year? If an experiment station, after 25 years has not produced any results of value, then I would say the time might well have come to close it down. But look at the work Lancetilla did on Banana culture during its early years on rubber, on African Oil palms, on tropical fruits, and numerous other things. I think if someone could figure out what all this work has meant in cash profits to the company, and at the same time would look ahead toward the many promising projects still in sight, there could be no argument against continuing the expenditure of \$25,000 to \$50,000 dollars a year on Lancetilla, provided this money is spent on projects carefully studied by the Research Department and handled by a first class technical man at Lancetilla, and I mean Paul Allen.

Sincerely yours,

Wilson Popenoe

D.H. Radler
La Esperanza
Intibucá
Honduras, C.A.

Dr. Wilson Popenoe
Antigua
Guatemala
C.A.

Dear Dr. Pop -

As you probably know from the demise of the old Research Newsletter, etc., the policy of the new UFCO. president is that research results should remain a deep, dark secret. Unfortunately, that, plus the usual economy drive, sounds the death knell for the Lancetilla brochure on which you so kindly gave me so much help. (I did manage to salvage a full-color dummy, however, which I will bring with me to show you next time I hit your part of the world.) And taps played for my function; they tossed me onto the ash heap, young as I am, last October.

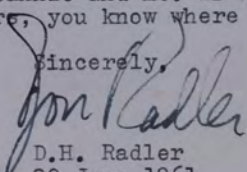
We didn't want to leave these parts, so we came up here (for reasons you will well understand) and I have been doing some free-lance writing. So far, three articles (you can see 'em this summer in Harper's and The Reporter), some dozen short stories, one complete novel and part of another have ground through my mill --- all set in the tropics, of course, most here in Honduras. You know what the financial returns are from writing; up 'til now, it's a skin of our teeth affair, but we hope to hang on a while yet.

All this is to bring you up to date for a request. I have a query from one of the magazines about the political state of things in Guatemala --- since the termination of the old anti-Commie laws and the return of some of the Arbenz crowd, what are chances that a Castro-type deal is in the making there? If it looks like a story, I'll come over and dig around a while. But is it, in your view? (When you played host to me last, in your inimitable manner, bombs were going off downtown. Since that, I haven't been in the country and all my information comes by way of the press --- which, as a working member thereof once more, I know to be thoroughly unreliable!)

In brief, how does it look to you? Can Ydigoras hold the Reds down without strong laws to lean on, and in his current state of something less than complete popularity? Is the Arbenz crowd back again because they're dying to see quetzal birds once more or are they actively fomenting something? If Mary refuses his attentions, will John, wealthy, handsome and suave, walk out on her? You know what I mean....

And finally, best personal regards from Jeannie and me. If we can ever start to repay your several favors, you know where we are.

Sincerely,


D.H. Radler
20 June 1961

Antigua, Guatemala
July 29, 1961

Mr. D.H. Radler
La Esperanza
Intibucá
Honduras

Dear Mr. Radler:

Your letter of 29 June is slow in having an answer, because I was as sick as a dog for some weeks in May and June.

Naturally, quite a few of us - we call ourselves farm-rejects - few with alarm the trends in the Boston office. The last company newsletter came out with a pretty frank statement to the effect that they were going to bring in plenty of good, young blood and develop a new program. I can see reasons for some of this but perhaps not for a wholesale job.

As for a story on Guatemalan politics, I would not touch it with a barge pole. The situation is very difficult. In my opinion we have too many political parties in the country. I think President Ydigoras Fuentes is doing as good a job in the circumstances as any one could be expected to do. If I were a Guatemalteco I would try to help him rather than stir up trouble and create more problems for him.

You may not have heard that Mrs. Popenoe died suddenly on 24 March and I am getting ready to fly up to Florida on 7 August to stay with my son Hugh at Gainesville. I will probably spend the first semester there if not longer and do a little lecturing and writing if I feel up to it. My address in Gainesville will be: 1722-A NW 2nd Ave., Gainesville, Fla.

Sincerely yours,