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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.

San Salvador
September 20, 1958

Dr. F. R. Fosberg
212 Holmes Run Road
Falls Church, Virginia

Dear Ray:

Your recent generous sending of reprints has been added to my growing file of gleanings from better men's brains, and is particularly appreciate, since many of your thoughts on vegetation survey problems are equally applicable to Central America, or for that matter to probably most tropical areas of the world.

You may be as thunderstruck as I was when the offer was first presented to me, to learn that I am here on the invitation of the Salvadorean Ministry of Agriculture to prepare a manual on the timber resources of the country, more or less along the lines of that done for the Golfo Dulce area in Costa Rica.

This is the first tangible evidence that has ever come to my attention of any serious interest on the part of a Central American Government in their renewable natural products, but I jumped at the chance, as you might imagine.

Working facilities are rather primitive, but they do have a small but surprisingly good local herbarium of some seven or eight thousand specimens that simply needed to be ordered up and partly identified, and a preliminary check list prepared by Standley and Calderon some thirty years past, which are just a whole lot better than nothing.

This is going to have to be kept on a very practical basis, but I hope to be able to move on from this to the completion of a similar chore for Panama, which presents an immeasurably greater problem in the tremendous complexity of the vegetation, and the general inaccessibility of some of the botanically most important parts of the country. Much of this will have to be done by hit-and-run tactics, involving the felling of test blocks of timber en masse in representative locations, which will in turn require some sort of system for tracing sterile material. This is in the "works" for my present assignment and should be good training for the other job, if it materializes.

Dr. Robbins says I have developed an obsession on this particular subject, but I frankly can't see any other approach to the problem that would be within the financial limits of our time. I manage to find it all extremely stimulating, in any event, and am increasingly convinced that there is an easier way to identify known associations of tropical trees, and possibly unknown ones as well. With these

famous last words, + will close, with renewed thanks and regards.

As ever,
Paul
Paul H. Allen
Botanical Consultant to the
Ministry of Agriculture, El
Salvador.

P.S. My mailing address is c/o the Centro Nacional de Agronomia, Santa Tecla.

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