

## THE GOLDEN GROVE TEA FARM OF JUNIUS SMITH: PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

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In the mid-nineteenth century, Greenville County was the site of a four-year experiment in tea cultivation by a self-taught horticulturist who had been a law school classmate of John C. Calhoun. The Golden Grove Tea Plantation, in Piedmont, was owned, designed, and managed by Junius Smith, an entrepreneur who had established a reputation for himself as the initiator of commercial steamship travel between the United States and England.

Junius Smith was a native of Connecticut, born in the town of Plymouth, on October 2, 1780.<sup>1</sup> His father had a distinguished career in the Revolutionary War and had later run a successful mercantile business in Plymouth. Junius attended Yale College, graduated there in 1802, and proceeded to study law in Litchfield, Connecticut, at the Tapping Reeve School. There, he established a lifelong friendship with John C. Calhoun, a fellow student.

Junius opened a law office with his brother in 1804 and was sent one year later to London to appeal for damages at the British Court of Admiralty for the seizure of the American ship, the "Mohawk." He was successful in the suit and established a name for himself and his law firm. He decided to stay in London and was primarily engaged in importing and exporting, although he dabbled in a variety of commercial ventures. At the age of thirty-two, he married Sarah Allen of Yorkshire and they had one daughter, Lucinda.<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Smith died in 1836.

As an importer/exporter, Junius was constantly seeking faster and more efficient transportation for goods. Convinced that steam navigation was the wave of the future, he formed with MacGregor Laird, the British and American Steam Navigation Company. The company started transatlantic steam service in 1838 with a rented steamship of seven hundred tons. The following year, it commissioned and put into service its own ship, "The British Queen," which weighed 1,700 tons and held

five hundred passengers. To honor Smith's maritime accomplishments, Yale awarded him an honorary doctorate (LL.D) in 1840.<sup>7</sup> One year later, he faced major financial setback with the disappearance at sea of the "President," the prime ship of his fleet and the largest ship in the world at the time. This disaster, along with competition from Samuel Cunard, ended Smith's entrepreneurial adventures at sea.

In 1843, Junius Smith left England. He had no family ties there since his daughter had married years before and had moved to India with her husband, an army chaplain. Junius moved to New York where he lived on Long Island with his nephew, Henry Smith. Not entirely removed from steamships, he lobbied successfully in Congress for government contracts for mail service via steamships, but he spent most of his time writing and gardening. He was active in the American Institute in New York and published numerous articles in *Hunt's Merchant Marine* and other periodicals: "The Warehousing System," "Production and Export of Bread Stuffs," and "Origin of Atlantic Steam Navigation."<sup>8</sup>

In 1846 Dr. Smith's daughter wrote a letter which served as the genesis of the idea to grow tea in the South.<sup>9</sup> She described the situation in which tea was being grown in the Himalaya mountains of India. Dr. Smith later wrote that "no sooner had I perused the letter than the idea burst upon me, that if the tea plant could be successfully cultivated upon the mountains of the Himalaya, there could be nothing in the ordinary course of vegetation to prevent its growth in the United States."<sup>10</sup> He added that the idea had sought him out.

For at least one year, Dr. Smith studied tea, returning to England to do research at the East India House and the British Museum. He published his results in an essay, "On the Cultivation of the Tea Plant in the United States," which was published widely and offered for sale in all of the southern states (at a price no lower than fifty cents).<sup>11</sup> In the essay, he dealt with the history of tea in China and other countries and made a case for its growth in fourteen states. He also mentioned steam navigation and solar curing of the leaves as means of expedient exporting. He was firmly convinced that the United

States could become the major grower and exporter of tea, even stating that American labor was cheaper and more efficient than that in China and India.

While in London, Junius ordered tea seeds from various parts of the world and also stumbled across about five-hundred Chinese tea plants which were being grown in pots by an immigrant horticulturist.<sup>8</sup> He promptly purchased all of them and prepared them for shipment to the United States, leaning toward Texas as the site of the experiment.<sup>9</sup> In October, 1848, he returned to the United States, staying in New York only briefly and traveling south by way of Baltimore. He arrived in Charleston in November and reportedly made an address on tea cultivation to the South Carolina Agricultural Society, which presented him with an honorary membership.<sup>10</sup> He is first mentioned in the *Greenville Mountaineer* (on December 9 in a story from the *National Intelligencer*) as a gentleman who was traveling to Georgia and Alabama with five-hundred tea plants, one to two feet in height.<sup>11</sup> One week later, it was stated that "we are happy to learn that a new and important experiment has commenced in the vicinity . . . we allude to the cultivation of the tea plant. A gentleman is now on a visit to this place for the purpose of testing the adaptation of our soil."<sup>12</sup>

Dr. Smith wrote that on the fifteenth and sixteenth of December, he planted the tea seeds on a plot of land (approximately one acre), which, along with a small cottage, was given for his use by Dr. Charles B. Stone.<sup>13</sup> The tea plants from London arrived later and were planted the day after Christmas. The location of the tea garden was described as being "a mile outside the village of Greenville." Dr. Smith left the area briefly and returned in April, to find that most Greenvillians thought that the experiment was doomed, primarily because there were no leaves on the tea plants. He also lost twenty to thirty plants because of drought and cold weather.<sup>14</sup>

Dr. Smith was a self-promoter who detailed his ventures in many letters which were published in the press and through the publication of his essay on tea.<sup>15</sup> He also encouraged people to

visit his tea garden and to report on it.<sup>16</sup> By December 20, 1849, Dr. Smith reported that he had sixteen plants in full bloom, and a plantation under cultivation.<sup>17</sup>

The plantation was formally purchased and the deed recorded on August 26, 1850.<sup>18</sup> Consisting of two-hundred sixty-nine acres, it was located "on the waters of Golden Grove Creek and the Saluda River on both sides of the Wilson Ferry Road, adjoining lands of Silas Holloway and Colonel B. D. Garrison."<sup>19</sup> The land was part of the original land grant to Francis and James Blassingame and was sold by its owner, Willis Benson, to Dr. Smith for five-hundred thirty-eight dollars. John T. Coleman held the mortgage in the sum of \$1,072. Dr. Smith was enumerated in the 1850 census and John Brundle, apparently an assistant, was also listed in the household.<sup>20</sup>

Dr. Smith did not harvest any of his tea; instead, he chose to grow the plants for seeds. He also continued to import plants from China, noting that he was "laboring to form an American system of planting and cultivating."<sup>21</sup> He reported that the plants in the city had been reduced to about eight, and that he was using them for seeds. Very proud of his efforts he described his farm:

"The capabilities of this small plantation of 300 acres is most extraordinary. My small crop of corn, oats, buckwheat - mind the cakes - peas, beans, etc. look well. It would do your heart good to see my loaded fruit trees. I have just finished a cider mill. I planted out, during the summer and spring, as choice a collection of all kinds of fruit trees as I could find from Long Island to California, and shall probably have as fine a fruit orchard of pears, peaches, plums, apricots, nectarines, almonds, quinces, damson, cherries, strawberries . . . as can be found in this part of the country."<sup>22</sup>

Dr. Smith also commented on the local reaction to his horticultural pursuits:

"The people here know nothing but to plant corn and cotton, and have recently, so I hear, given out that the tea cultivation is a total failure. Why, they do not appear to know the difference between a tea plant and its cultivation from a saw mill. No one, or very few, understands or appreciates my undertaking, can enter into my views, or cares a pin whether it succeeds or not, but rather looks jealousy and contempt upon a blockhead dreaming of future results."<sup>23</sup>

Dr. Smith also attested in a letter to the fact that he planted every tea plant himself and had made one-hundred gallons of cider and twenty-five gallons of vinegar in one week.<sup>24</sup>

In the third year of tea farming (1851), Junius wrote several letters to the *Southern Patriot* and also wrote to a friend that on Independence Day he was brewing a pot of fresh tea from his own plantation, having perfected the curing of the leaves by solar heat.<sup>25</sup>

Benjamin Perry visited the tea farm and wrote that he expected a present of some of the tea. He added: "What a delightful beverage it will be to take just before writing a patriotic essay or editorial on the folly and madness of secession."<sup>26</sup> The *Southern Patriot* also notified readers that Dr. Smith had made available his essays on tea and steam navigation. Dr. Smith continued to write letters to the *Southern Patriot* and occasionally advertised his tea nuts for sale.<sup>27</sup>

Almost exactly three years after the arrival of his first tea plants, Junius received a severe beating from an unknown assailant. The attack was not reported locally but was carried in national publications by way of Dr. Smith's description of the event in a letter to the *New York Journal of Commerce* (dated February 9, 1852).<sup>28</sup> The attack occurred in the evening of December 23, 1851 while Junius was replying to a letter. Hearing a noise, he arose to investigate and was knocked down and severely beaten in the face. He bled profusely and went for help the following morning at Colonel Garrison's home, some

three hundred yards away. Neighbors responded by tending his wounds and by sending him prepared food. Physician Michael Bayliss Earle came from Greenville when he heard of the attack. The motive for the attack appeared to be theft, although very little was taken. Junius wrote that he had recovered from the incident and was sending tea nuts to Texas, Arkansas, Tennessee, Alabama and other places.<sup>29</sup>

By August, however, Junius' health had deteriorated and his nephew in New York insisted that he return to the Astoria. There he progressively lost touch with reality and was placed in Bloomingdale Asylum where he died on January 22, 1853.<sup>30</sup> His death was reported in the *Southern Patriot* a few weeks later.<sup>31</sup> His personal possessions were sold by the Sheriff. They included: 1 horse, 1 horse wagon, 2 large plows, 1 pair of oxen, 1 clock, 2 cows, 1 box, several agricultural implements, 3 barrels of cider, 1 grind stone, 3 boxes of tea nuts, and 97 volumes of books, including works on Milton, William Pitt, Duncan's Logic, Humboldt's Expedition, Chemistry, navigation, poetry, and French.<sup>32</sup>

Smith's biographer, E. LeRoy Pond, sought information in Greenville regarding the motive for the attack. After researching the issue, Alton Smith Rowell, historian, editor of *The Bridge*, writer (with the pseudonym of "Old Coins"), and Postmaster for the town of Piedmont, reported finding two people who remembered Dr. Smith and the incident which led to his death. Mr. Rowell surmised from his information that Dr. Smith had been attacked by patrollers who did not appreciate his liberal attitude toward Blacks. Dr. Smith favored abolition and was thought to be a life member of the American Colonization Society.<sup>33</sup>

The Golden Grove Tea Plantation was sold by John T. Coleman on January 18, 1854 for \$1,614 to Michael Bayliss Earle, David G. Westfield, and John Westfield. Still referred to as the Tea Farm of Junius Smith, it was subdivided two years later in a series of sales.<sup>34</sup>

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>The standard biography of Junius Smith is E. Leroy Pond, *Junius Smith, A Biography of the Father of the Atlantic Liner* (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1927, reprint 1971.) Short biographies are also available in standard anthologies such as *Dictionary of American Biography* and *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*.

<sup>2</sup>Lucinda became Mrs. Edward K. Maddock, who had three children, Henry Edward, Junius Arthur, and Emily Mary. (Pond, *Junius Smith*, pp. 235, 264.)

<sup>3</sup>At one point in his life, Junius Smith hoped to be knighted for his achievements. Pond, *Junius Smith*, p. 187.

<sup>4</sup>Smith's letters to his nephew are the primary source of information in Pond's biography.

<sup>5</sup>*Report of the Comissions of Patents for the Year 1850*. Part II, Agriculture. Document No. 32. (Washington: Office of Printers to House of Representatives, 1851). pp. 192-94.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup>Pond, *Junius Smith*, p. 244.

<sup>8</sup>*Southern Patriot*, 15 January, 1852.

<sup>9</sup>Pond, *Junius Smith*, p. 245.

<sup>10</sup>*Charleston Mercury*, 4 December, 1848; reported in *Greenville Mountaineer*, 15 December, 1848.

<sup>11</sup>*National Intelligencer*, reported in *Greenville Mountaineer*, 8 December, 1848.

<sup>12</sup>*Greenville Mountaineer*, 15 December, 1848.

<sup>13</sup>Pond, *Junius Smith*, p. 258. Dr. Stone owned land on Rutherford Road.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup>Dr. Smith advertised several times in the *Greenville Mountaineer* (June 1, 1849, January 1, 1850, January 11, 1850).

<sup>16</sup>*New York Picayune*, reported in *Southern Patriot*, 8 August, 1851.

<sup>17</sup>Pond, *Junius Smith*, p. 260.

<sup>18</sup>*Greenville District Deed Book*; W (1850-1854) p. 8. Willis Benson had purchased the land in 1845 for \$300 (*Ibid.*, pp. 11-12). John Coleman was the owner of the Mansion House (1836-1854).

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.* (Located in the present-day Golden Grove Community off Highway 20.)

<sup>20</sup>*Census of the United States*, 1850. Entry No. 1274.

<sup>21</sup>Pond, *Junius Smith*, p. 262.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 262.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 264.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 265.

<sup>26</sup>*Southern Patriot*, 26 September, 1851.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 13 June, 1851; "Tea nuts received from China and India daily expected in Greenville . . ." 9 September, 1852.

<sup>28</sup>*New York Journal of Commerce*, 9 February, 1852.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup>Pond, *Junius Smith*, p. 269.

<sup>31</sup>*Southern Patriot*, 10 February, 1852. (reported from *Charleston Courier*)

<sup>32</sup>*Greenville District Sheriff's Sale Book (1848-1856)*. Advertised 4 August, 1852; sold 6 September, 1852 and 4 October, 1852.

<sup>33</sup>Pond, *Junius Smith*, pp. 277-278.

<sup>34</sup>*Greenville District Deed Book*: X (1850-54) pp. 31, 232.

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