

1927

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### Recommended Citation

Dupont, Charles H. (1927) "History of the Introduction and Culture of Cuba Tobacco in Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly*. Vol. 6 : No. 3 , Article 5.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol6/iss3/5>

## HISTORY OF THE INTRODUCTION AND CULTURE OF CUBA TOBACCO IN FLORIDA

*[An address delivered before the Florida Fruit Growers Association, at Jacksonville, January 20, 1875, by Ex-Chief Justice Charles H. DuPont of the Supreme Court of Florida, and taken from the Proceedings of that meeting.]*

*It is now believed that in the history of a people a record of the lives of the people themselves is of greater import than that of those in authority. The facts regarding early tobacco growing in Florida are now generally unknown, but of greater importance is the record of Judge Dupont's observations extending over a period of forty years on "the influence of tobacco culture upon the moral and intellectual status of the population" of Gadsden County.]*

The seed of the Cuba tobacco was introduced into the State about the year 1828 by Governor William P. Duval, one of the early civil governors of the then territory. The product of this seed was a short, narrow leaf, possessing in an extraordinary degree the delightful aroma of the best Havana cigar. It for a long time bore the name of its distinguished introducer, and was currently known as the "Little Duval", to distinguish it from a larger variety, afterwards introduced, and known as the "Florida Wrapper".

The first reliable experiment that was made with the Cuba tobacco as a market crop, was inaugurated about the year 1830 by Mr. John Smith, a citizen of Gadsden county, who had recently immigrated from the State of Virginia, and was well acquainted with the culture of the Virginia chewing tobacco. His first experiment was with the, "Little Duval," but the demand for the "Wrapper" leaf becoming urgent, and the product per acre being much larger, he abandoned the former and confined his attention exclusively to the latter. His extraordinary success attracted the attention of the non-slaveholders and other small planters, and with them it soon became a staple market crop, and with the large cotton planters an extra

crop, which without curtailing the amount of cotton produced, usually paid all the expenses of the plantation.

*Statistics of Production.*-By reference to the census report of 1850, it will be seen that the total amount of tobacco produced in the State at that date is set down at 998,614 lbs., and that the amount credited to Gadsden county is 776,177 lbs., being over three times as much as was produced in all the other counties of the State combined. I have had no access to the census report of 1860, and if I had, I doubt if the statistics of Southern products could be relied on as perfectly accurate, owing to the sectional difficulties occurring in the latter part of that year. But from information obtained from intelligent and reliable merchants of Quincy, I feel authorized to place the crop of Gadsden county for that year at over 1,200,000 lbs. It will thus be seen that from the single crop of tobacco, independent of the cotton and other market crops, the planters and farmers of Gadsden county realized (estimating the price at twenty-five cents per pound) the comfortable sum of \$300,000. It was this accession to the value of her products that enabled her people to make such rapid advancement in the accumulation of wealth, and its attendant comforts and benefits in the decade reaching from 1850 to 1860 ; and it teaches a lesson which should not go unheeded, viz: the importance of diversifying the products of the farm.

Down to the year 1865 tobacco continued to engage the attention of the farmers and planters, but with the proclamation of emancipation it ceased almost entirely to be cultivated, it being found that the labor was too unreliable to risk it as a market crop. It has only been within the last few years that its cultivation has been resumed, and it now bids fair to occupy its former status in the program of our agri-

cultural products. The crop of the county in 1873 was less than 100,000 lbs.; the crop of 1874 is estimated at not less than 200,000 lbs., and, from present indications, this latter amount will be fully doubled the present year.

\* \* \* \* \*

There is an error of opinion very current in the country which I desire to correct. It is that the product of seed procured in Cuba tends to deterioration in the soil and climate of Florida. This opinion I unhesitatingly pronounce to be unfounded in fact, and in proof of the assertion I assert of my own knowledge that the variety known as the "Little Duval" after twenty years or more of successive reproduction, was found to have lost nothing of that peculiar aroma and delicate fragrance which it exhibited upon its first introduction. The seed of that variety has become extinct, and I consider it a great loss, to the county. There is, however, a variety introduced during the late war, and cultivated by one or two planters, which is very highly praised by the lover of a strong cigar. It lacks the mild and delicate fragrance of the "Little Duval," but is highly aromatic and somewhat pungent, making a very strong cigar, and for that reason is perhaps better suited to the prevailing taste of the present day. The cigars made from this variety have readily commanded eighty dollars per thousand.

*Influence of the Tobacco Culture Upon the Moral and Intellectual Status of the Population.*-- Under this head I shall confine my remarks to Gadsden county, for the reason that in no other county of the State was the production of sufficient importance to have exerted any appreciable effect, either moral, intellectual, or economical. The undulating character of the country embraced within the territorial limits of

Gadsden county rendered it uninviting to the occupancy of large cotton planters and extensive slaveholders ; and hence the early settlers were of the class usually denominated farmers. Being of limited pecuniary means, which prevented them from entering upon large enterprises, they were content, if by industry and economy they could succeed in providing for the physical comfort of the family. Their highest ambition was to attain to and maintain the position occupied by their fathers who had gone before them. The struggle was for the comfortable support of the physical man ; the lack of pecuniary means checked the effort and even the desire for advancement. There was an evident lack of that social refinement and intellectual culture which is the concomitant of wealth. Just at this juncture there was introduced a *new industry* (the cultivation of Cuba tobacco) which exactly met the necessity of their condition. While it required no outlay of capital, it gave a return for the labor expended beyond the most sanguine anticipations. It furnished light and pleasant employment for the entire family, embracing wife and children, and by their united efforts they were greeted at the end of the year with a cash surplus over and above the provision necessary to be made for the supply of their physical wants. With this surplus annually accumulating comes the budding of a manly and commendable ambition. The father contemplates himself, and then looks upon his children as they gather around the domestic hearth: he becomes conscious of his own deficiencies, and forthwith registers in his swelling bosom the manly resolve that his children shall realize advantages which he never enjoyed. Soon the little log meeting-house undergoes repairs and enlargement, and others are erected for the more comfortable accommodation of the neighborhood. The preacher, in his visits to his weekly appointments, receives a warm-

er pressure of the hand that greets him, and a more cordial invitation to partake of the hospitality of the farm-house. The cry goes out, too, for the inauguration of a higher grade of schools than is usually found in the sparsely-populated new country. The cry increases and increases until it reaches to an imperative demand. Then the few educated men of the county meet in council to deliberate on the subject, and the result of that, deliberation is an application to the Legislative Council for a charter of incorporation for the establishment of the "Quincy Academy." The site is selected, the funds required for the erection of the building come rolling in, and largely from the accumulated surplus before referred to. The building is completed, and the occasion is celebrated by a "feast of fat things" at which the presiding spirit was that of one whose 'mortal remains have long since slumbered far away from the loved home of his adoption. Could he have lived out but half the days allotted to man his large heart would have bounded with joy at beholding the full consummation of his most cherished hopes. But he has gone to his reward, and I can but exclaim: All honor to the memory of James A. Dunlap.

In due course of time the doors of the institution were thrown open for the reception of pupils, and soon its spacious halls were crowded with robust, rosy-cheeked boys and lithesome lassies fresh from their rural homes. The first public examination comes on, and is a notable occasion throughout the community. Watch that rough-looking old countryman, dressed in his homespun suit, and sitting on the front bench, as that bright-eyed boy marches with confident step up to the "blackboard". Mark the intensity of that gaze as it follows the chalk that traces the lines of the forty-seventh proposition in the first book of Euclid. See how he bends forward to catch the utterances as

the boy begins to speak of the straight line AB; the angles CD and EF; the hypotenuse GH, and the tangent XY. See how the muscles of his face twitch. But mark him particularly as the little fellow turns from the board to the teacher and emphasizes the (to him) cabalistic words *quod erat demonstrandum*. It is well for the old father that the strong box containing the accumulated surplus of years was safely reposing under lock and key at the farm-house. Had it been within his reach at that moment of his supreme exultation, its contents would all have gone into the treasury of the academy.

But let us pass into the adjacent hall. Mark that sedate and matronly-looking woman, arrayed in her Quaker bonnet and calico gown. Mark her well as that slender maiden, with lithe and elastic form, raven tresses and sparkling eyes, that tell of her semi-tropical nativity, advances to read a composition: See the rising and falling of the mother's bosom as the maiden progresses in her task. There is a tear in her eye, but it is not the tear of sorrow or grief; it is the involuntary outgushing of a grateful heart—the manifestation of a gratified aspiration.

But the sketch is not yet completed. Follow the party on their return to the old homestead. See the little white heads as they come rushing to greet the brother and sister who have returned to spend vacation at home. Soon the family circle is formed around the cheerful hearth, and then occurs such a plying and answering of questions as rivals the "Babel" of ancient days. From that moment the old homestead puts on a new aspect. The younger children are taught the observance of good manners and the conventionalities of polite society. The interior becomes more tidy, while the front yard begins to be beautified with flowers. The old father, catching inspiration from the scene, rises to higher aspirations and redoubles his diligence,

and soon fortune, with its concomitant comforts and advantages, crowns his well-directed efforts. Then the children being prepared by proper culture, take their places in respectable society, with the fair promise of transmitting that respectability to future generations. There is no "shoddy" in that, no training of the "tamed bear," no bounding to the top at one leap and "kicking the ladder from beneath," only to look down with contempt upon those who have been less fortunate in trade or speculation. In this case, moral, social, and intellectual culture have kept pace with the accumulation of wealth, and the effect is seen in the after life and conduct of the participants.

This is no fancy sketch, but the embodiment and illustration of a *fact*- that claims the serious attention of the political economist, viz.: the importance of inaugurating *new industries* suited and fitted to the condition of the population. The importance of this fact is as applicable to the mechanical and manufacturing classes as it is to the agricultural.

But I owe an apology. Led off by the crowding reminiscences of more than forty years, I had well nigh forgotten the task specially assigned to me. . . .

[There follows in detail-The best soil. Preparation of the land. Planting. Cultivation. Worming, topping, and succoring. Housing and preparing for market. Average product and price.]