

Edward Avery McIlhenny **Pioneer Bamboo Planter**

By Andrew D. Ringle



E.A. McIlhenny, 1934 (EAMC)

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ABSTRACT

You have been the great pioneer bamboo planter of America and posterity will give you the honor that is your due for the great work you have done, not only for the Southern States but for the American public at large.

So wrote plant explorer David Fairchild to E.A. McIlhenny in October 1946, reflecting on their professional association of over thirty-five years. This historical study, which focuses on the correspondence between McIlhenny at Avery Island and Fairchild and his colleagues at the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Office of Seed & Plant Introduction, offers support for Fairchild's assessment.

*The author is a cousin of the late E.A. McIlhenny and lives at Avery Island, Louisiana, where he grew up next to the grove that contains McIlhenny's earliest bamboo plantings. The restoration of this privately owned grove has been an ongoing project of the American Bamboo Society's Louisiana-Gulf Coast Chapter for the past several years.

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I. Introduction

A. Opening Remarks, or, How I Got Into This

Ladies and gentlemen – fellow *bambouistes* – it is an honor indeed to address you this morning. For it allows me to discharge a debt of gratitude not only to you of the Society, without whose mentoring and encouragement I would not be here, but also to that relative I never knew who left my family a magnificent bamboo grove that we had no hand in planting.

Edward Avery McIlhenny and my grandfather were first cousins. (It was their grandfather, Judge Daniel Dudley Avery, for whom Avery Island is named, who in 1868 first brought the Island under a single ownership and was the patriarch of all the Avery and McIlhenny descendants who live there today). The year I was born my mother and father took out a home-site lease at Avery Island on acreage that included what we now know to be the very first grove of bamboo that Uncle Ned had planted so many years before. I grew up next to this grove and knew it as a place of adventure and fantasy, but as small boys will do I took it all for granted: didn't everybody have bamboo in their back yard? To be sure, it was huge stuff: my father would go back into the grove to cut the occasional culm for the making of a planter or a fireplace screen, or what he was most proud of, the slip-covering of his barbed wire fences. But the true significance of what we had escaped us. After years of neglect, the grove had become a crisscrossed chaos of living and dead culms all tangled together – nothing serene or eye-catching.

It was years later, in the late 1980's, that Marler Spence first visited my mother and began to open our eyes to the treasure behind our house. (And here I want to pay tribute to that friend and tutor in bamboo and collaborator in research without whom the full significance of all this would have eluded me.) Working with Marler and the members of the Louisiana-Gulf Coast Chapter who "adopted" our grove and began coming with him on annual visits to restore and rejuvenate it, I became increasingly curious as to the age of the grove and the varieties of bamboo planted there and elsewhere on Avery Island. It was the generous support and encouragement of Ned McIlhenny's grandson Ned Simmons, who graciously granted me access to his grandfather's papers, that enabled Marler and me to carry out the research necessary to begin answering the questions my curiosity had raised. To Ned Simmons, as to the rest of Uncle Ned's descendants and heirs, this Avery cousin is affectionately grateful.

B. Thesis: David Fairchild's Assessment of E. A. McIlhenny

In a letter he wrote to E.A. McIlhenny in October of 1946, plant explorer David Fairchild looked back over forty years to his initial efforts working with Barbour Lathrop to introduce bamboo for cultivation on an economically significant basis in this country. In the context of these reflections he had this to say to McIlhenny:

You have been the great pioneer bamboo planter of America and posterity will give you the honor that is your due for the great work you have done, not only

for the Southern States but for the American people at large.¹

My purpose this morning is to shed light on E.A. McIlhenny's pioneering work at Avery Island in the cultivation of bamboo and to offer support for the assessment just cited.

My presentation will be an historical survey of the correspondence between McIlhenny and Fairchild and his colleagues in the U. S. Department of Agriculture's Office of Foreign Seed and Plant Introduction, as found in the E. A. McIlhenny Papers in the Louisiana State University Libraries Special Collections in Baton Rouge, and the E. A. McIlhenny Collection in the Avery Island Inc. and McIlhenny Company Archives at Avery Island.

C. A Brief Overview of Where We Are Going

I am going to begin by introducing the principal correspondents and discussing briefly the particular nature of their relationship.

Then I will trace the development of that relationship – and of Ned McIlhenny's bamboos – over a period of nearly forty years as documented in the correspondence, and discuss briefly what has happened to his bamboos in the years since his death.

Finally, I will sum up the supporting evidence for Fairchild's assessment and offer suggestions for further research.

II. Dramatis Personae

Before looking at the correspondence and related documents let us meet the principal characters.

A. David Fairchild and the Office of Seed and Plant Introduction

David Fairchild and his colleagues in the Office of Foreign Seed and Plant Introduction were responsible for the introduction and propagation of new plant species with economic potential for this country. Given their training and experience they were arguably among the best qualified to evaluate McIlhenny's work with new plant species in general and bamboo in particular. Thus, their correspondence with McIlhenny and their professional assessments take on a special significance for us.

Fairchild himself, son-in-law of Alexander Graham Bell, friend and protégé of Barbour Lathrop, and founder and first director of what was to become the Office of S.P.I., accomplished the introduction into the United States of literally thousands of new plant species. His scientific and administrative achievements, his world-wide voyages of plant exploration, and, more specifically for us, his pioneering introductions into this country of new species of bamboo are all well known and documented, and need no further elaboration here.²

Beverly Galloway and Robert Young are the other two key individuals in S.P.I. who were in correspondence with McIlhenny. Galloway, formerly Director of the Bureau of Plant Industry and Fairchild's immediate superior at the U.S.D.A., served briefly as Assistant Secretary of Agriculture and then left the Department to take a university position, returning two years later to work as a Senior Plant Pathologist with an ongoing involvement in new plant introductions. During the 1920's, when Fairchild was away on his worldwide voyages of plant exploration, Galloway took his place as McIlhenny's principal correspondent at S.P.I.³

Robert Young appears in the correspondence as an Associate Horticulturist working variously from Gainesville, Savannah, and Washington, D.C. Known best, perhaps, as the namesake of a beautiful and beloved variety of *Phyllostachys viridis*, this highly respected researcher authored numerous works on bamboos including a frequently cited series of articles published in **The National Horticultural Magazine** in the 1940's.⁴

Other well-known bamboo names that appear in the correspondence include Peter and David Bisset and Floyd McClure. Save for McClure all those mentioned are documented as having visited McIlhenny at Avery Island.

B. The Relationship Between Explorer and Grower

“Plant introduction,” David Fairchild wrote, “has two distinct phases. First, the securing of plant material in foreign countries and landing it alive in America; and second, the dissemination and establishment of the plants in the fields, gardens, dooryards, and parks of this country. The first phase is a comparatively simple one, but the discovery of where and how to grow these plants, and how to utilize them, requires years of patient investigation.”⁵

Barbour Lathrop, David Fairchild, Frank Meyer, and Floyd McClure are representative of the first of these phases of plant introduction. E.A. McIlhenny and his experiments at Avery Island represent the second and complementary phase. Neither phase, it may be argued, can be fully understood or appreciated apart from the other.

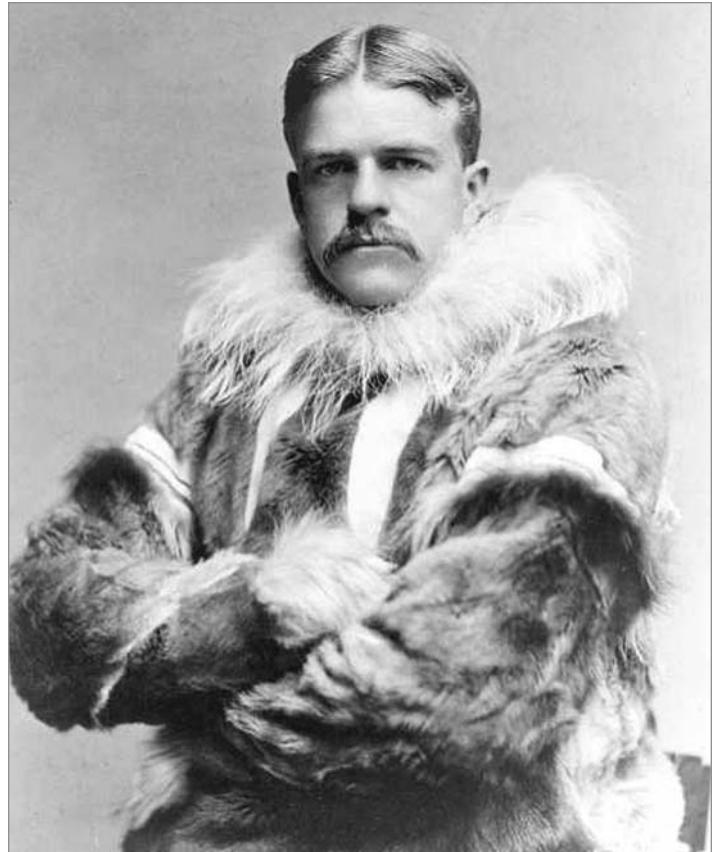
Frank Linton, of the University of Georgia's Bamboo Farm and Coastal Gardens at Savannah, GA, has researched extensively the history of the early bamboo introductions. He has observed that Fairchild, while traveling the country in search of the right environments for growing and propagating new plant introductions, picked out a limited number of trusted growers as “cooperators” with whom he entered into contracts for growing and propagating new plants under U.S.D.A. auspices. (This was particularly so in the years before the establishment of U.S.D.A.-owned plant introduction stations.) One of these “cooperators” was Ned McIlhenny.⁶

C. E.A. McIlhenny

If E.A. McIlhenny's work as a grower and horticulturalist must be considered in relation to the S.P.I. plant explorers who were supplying him, it is likewise true that his work with bamboo must be considered in the context of his much wider interests and achievements. As David Farrelly has observed, the early bamboo pioneers – Barbour Lathrop, David Fairchild, Frank Meyer, Robert Young – were all generalists for whom bamboo was but one of many interests: a significant one, to be sure, but by no means the only one. This was especially true of Ned McIlhenny, as the following résumé will make clear.⁷

Born and home-schooled in an environment incredibly abundant in wildlife and plant life, McIlhenny spent much of his free time as a boy exploring Avery Island and the surrounding marshlands, away from home sometimes for days at a time.

In 1892, at the age of twenty, McIlhenny established what was to become the great protected rookery famous as Bird City, in response to the depredations of hunters who were slaughtering egrets by the thousands to provide plumes for the ladies' hats then in fashion. After gathering and raising in captivity eight



E.A. McIlhenny at the time of his Point Barrow expedition, c. 1897. (EAMC)

young egrets, he released them that fall to migrate south. The following spring they returned with others of their species in a migratory pattern that continues to this day. This was the first step in his ultimately successful efforts to save the snowy and American egrets from extinction.

In 1894, after two years of study at Lehigh University, McIlhenny withdrew to accompany the explorer Frederick A. Cook to the Arctic, and was with Cook when his ship *Miranda* was wrecked off the coast of Greenland. In 1897, McIlhenny organized his own Arctic expedition to collect bird and mammal specimens and ethnological materials at Point Barrow, Alaska. While he was there, several whaling ships were trapped and wrecked in the ice of an early winter, stranding over 100 men at that outpost for months. McIlhenny's hunting skills were critical in securing sufficient food for that large company to survive until rescued.

The literally hundreds of specimens and artifacts McIlhenny collected on these and other expeditions can be found today at the Academy of Natural Science in Philadelphia, the University of Pennsylvania's Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, the Smithsonian, and the American Museum of Natural History.

McIlhenny was to play a key role in establishing Louisiana's first wildlife refuges, working with other private donors including the Rockefeller Foundation to secure the purchase of over 174,000 acres of marshland in southwestern Louisiana, all of which were donated to the State and placed under public administration.

McIlhenny conducted original research into the feeding and life habits of numerous different birds, publishing his

findings in various ornithological journals. According to noted ornithologist George Lowery, however, “one of his greatest contributions to ornithology was...his laborious and long-continuing bird-banding operations that culminated in the banding during his lifetime of the phenomenal number of 189,298 birds.”⁸

McIlhenny’s competence as an amateur naturalist was internationally recognized and his findings confirmed by professionals repeatedly. His 1914 book **The Wild Turkey and Its Hunting** remains a standard reference. His **Alligator’s Life History**, originally published in 1935, was more than forty years later acknowledged by one zoologist to be “the best existing account of the natural history of one of the world’s most versatile reptiles,” adding that “in recent years, growing numbers of alligator specialists have realized that the work was a tour de force...”⁹ His skills in bamboo taxonomy were similarly confirmed by no less than Floyd McClure.¹⁰

McIlhenny established Jungle Gardens initially as a private experimental garden and working nursery, to which he eventually added a branch office in Houston. Major landscaping projects, for which he provided plantings, include the grounds of the Louisiana State Capitol in Baton Rouge; the Louisiana State University’s main campus; the Bayou Bend estate in Houston; and City Park in New Orleans. It was in 1935 that he first opened his gardens to the public.

Internationally recognized for his work with camellias, azaleas, and irises, McIlhenny published in 1945 an English translation of the text of Alexandre Verschaffelt’s thirteen-volume *Nouveau Iconographie des Camélias*. His extensive collection of rare books on ornithology, botany, and horticulture now constitutes the core of the present McIlhenny Natural History Collection at Louisiana State University.¹¹

In addition to all this, of course, McIlhenny served for over fifty years as President of McIlhenny Company, manufacturers of Tabasco.¹²

III. The Correspondence

How then, did McIlhenny first come to be involved with bamboo? The details of his first exposure to the plant are sketchy; however, what is a matter of record is that in January 1909 he wrote an inquiry to the U.S.D.A.’s Bureau of Plant Industry that was turned over to David Fairchild, culminating in a carload of bamboo plantings being shipped to him the following year. These were set out in April 1910, and as of July 1, McIlhenny was under formal contract with the U.S.D.A. for the growing of bamboos. The discovery of a signed Notice of Renewal of McIlhenny’s original 1910 contract, which precisely locates the contracted plot, has enabled us to correctly identify and date this oldest of his bamboo groves.¹³

The earliest letter to David Fairchild in McIlhenny’s papers is dated three years later, June 24, 1913. Already McIlhenny’s efforts with the new plants were showing results:

I was very gratified to have with me last Monday Mr. Peter Bisset of your department, and was gratified to have him say that he found the Bamboo experiment here in better shape and further advanced than any other experiment the Department has in the United States.¹⁴

By February 1915 McIlhenny was propagating Moso plantings for Fairchild and SPI. Charles Deering, who owned a large

estate in Miami, had sent a Mr. Mosier, his horticulturist, to collect Moso plantings at Avery Island on arrangements set up by Fairchild. McIlhenny wrote to Fairchild:

Mr. Mosier...took 112 plants of Phylo-Mitis [i.e., Moso] under SPI 24759. This as you know is t[he] edible variety, and the one that has taken the longest to recover of any variety planted here...

I think this edible bamboo will be a distinct success, and if you are in Washington in April, may I not send you some of the young shoots, so that you can try them in comparison with those you have obtained abroad.¹⁵

Fairchild replied immediately:

Nothing will give me more pleasure than to have a few shoots of the edible bamboo for trial. I have been interested in this bamboo proposition since 1902, and nothing would please me more than a taste of American-grown bamboo shoots.¹⁶

By April the shoots were ready for shipping. McIlhenny wrote to Fairchild:

I am sending you by Parcel Post to day one dozen shoots of the edible bamboo Phyllo-Mitis from your grove at Avery Island...¹⁷

Fairchild was delighted with the shipment:

I am ever so much obliged for the shoots of the Moso bamboo, *Phyllostachys mitis*...

I have had a photograph taken of these shoots and will send you a copy of it for your own use. [See below.]



First fruits: four Moso shoots (two peeled, two unpeeled) from E.A. McIlhenny’s initial shipment to David Fairchild, April 1915. (EAMC)

Now that we have proven that the bamboo can be successfully cultivated in Louisiana, I am going after all the best varieties for shoot producing purposes, and I hope, although I am not confident, that they will prove as hardy as this Moso which you have been growing.

It is quite probable that during the summer sometime Mr. Bisset, or possibly Mr. Meyer, if he is back from China by that time, will visit you and talk over with you the enlargement of your plantation. In working with bamboos it is perfectly evident to me that we must move on a large enough scale to be sure of getting something before we die. It is now thirteen years since I began working with these bamboos in Japan and we have not yet a decent sized bamboo grove...

P.S. I served these Moso bamboo shoots at one of Mr. Graham Bell's "Wednesday evenings," a soirée at which there were present about forty men and several well-known society women. The number of shoots was so limited that each guest got only a few thin slices, but they were very crisp and of good flavor, and the butler who tended to the cooking of them remarked that he had never cooked a vegetable which during the process of boiling gave off such a delicate and nutty aroma. This is the first time that this aroma has been called to my attention. Have you noticed it? I believe sincerely that if properly advertised and properly exploited, the bamboo shoots could be sold profitably on the American market. I should like to try again next year a larger number of shoots, if possible.¹⁸

By January 1918, Fairchild was beginning to have reservations about the Brooksville, FL, station:

I had planned to come South and, if possible, be at your place about the same time, my idea being to make another investigation of the bamboo situation with a view of finding in Louisiana more suitable sites for our bamboos than we have in Florida...¹⁹

McIlhenny replied:

Come by all means, as I think the bamboo situation here is encouraging, and I am looking for an especially strong growth this spring.

We have had a temperature as low as 16 during this past cold spell, and it has not hurt the bamboos at all.

I have sufficient plants here now for a distribution if your Department wishes to send them out. There can perhaps be taken a thousand plants without hurting the grove.²⁰

This next letter of McIlhenny's to Fairchild, written in April 1920, gives us the date of the earliest bamboo plantings in Jungle Gardens as 1918, eight years after McIlhenny's original plantings on the south side of Prospect Hill:

I am sending you by parcel post, special delivery, today, a couple of dozen Bamboo shoots...These come from the original plantings on the top of the hill...

The plantings which are two years old, below my house [in Jungle Gardens], the same kind of bamboo, is sending up shoots now fully as large as the ones I am sending you but [I] don't think I will cut out any of these large shoots this year.²¹

By July 1921 McIlhenny was able to write Fairchild:

I have now about 40 acres of bamboo planted...²²

The following letter, written September 10, 1923, was McIlhenny's response to an initial letter from Beverly Galloway, who was now apparently in charge:

I have yours of September 5th. My bamboos are in fine shape. I think I have conducted my experiments in these plantings with some intelligence, and I have now quite a large variety of bamboos, covering almost 45 acres.

The last Department officials to visit my bamboos were Doctor Hitchcock and Mr. Peter Bisset. Doctor Hitchcock made an investigation of my plantings, and classified some of them. I have some varieties that are not found elsewhere in the United States, notably *Phyllostachys Henri* [henryi]²³, of which I believe only three plants have been brought to the United States, and all of them are dead except my planting which now numbers several hundred three-year-old plants... Through my bamboo plantings I have learned a lot about what land and what amount of moisture bamboos like. I think some of my ideas would be interesting in your plan to revivify your bamboo project. If I can be of assistance please command me.²⁴

The following April 1926 letter from Galloway, together with receipt of Galloway's 1925 bulletin on bamboos, drew a somewhat piqued response from McIlhenny. With reference to a shipment of Moso shoots just received from McIlhenny, Galloway had written:

I presume this bamboo is what we now call *Phyllostachys edulis*, and what was formerly called *P. mitis*. You are fortunate in having plants of this useful variety. After all our work I think we can show just two small clumps, one at Savannah, Ga., and one at our Bell [Md.] Garden near Washington, D.C...We are very anxious to get this bamboo more widely established throughout the country...²⁵

McIlhenny responded:

These shoots [sent to Galloway] came from the bamboo now known as *Phyllostachys edulis*, of which I have a very large quantity, and have distributed this plant quite extensively over the State of Louisiana.

In reading your bulletin on bamboos, No. 1329, I judge that you know very little of my bamboo work at Avery Island, although I have been pretty closely in touch with the Bureau of Plant Introduction regarding bamboo culture for a great many years. I have made a considerable study of the growth of certain varieties, and have had a number of the most vigorous varieties reduced to pulp and paper, and worked out the yield of both dry and green canes, and this way got together some interesting data.

In your monograph on bamboos, you state that you doubt if there is a grove in the United States of *P. Mitis*. It may interest you to know that I have a large amount of this bamboo now growing, and it is probably the most easily transplanted and most rapid spreader of all the bamboos I have under culture. I enclose a partial

list of the bamboos that I am growing in quantity.

By far the most valuable of the edible bamboos is *Phyllostachys henryi*, and I do not find this variety listed in your bulletin. I have also many other varieties here that you do not list, that have great merit.

Perhaps some time it would be to your advantage to look over my bamboo plantings, if you are really interested in this plant [!!], as I have considerably over fifty acres now devoted to bamboo culture. If there is any information regarding any variety of bamboo that you would like, I would be glad to furnish it.²⁶

The next letter from the hapless Galloway, provoked yet another dig from McIlhenny. Galloway:

I received the box of [Moso] shoots which you kindly sent us...We placed samples of the shoots in the hands of several of our office force, and I took some home and cooked and served them...We found considerable difficulty in getting the sliced shoots sufficiently tender; we also found some little difficulty in getting rid of the innumerable hairs on the shoots.²⁷

McIlhenny's response:

I have yours of April 22, and am much interested in your report on your attempt to cook the bamboo shoots. From your statement, "we found some little difficulty in getting rid of the innumerable hairs on the shoots," I take it that you sliced the shoots without first peeling them...²⁸

Galloway finally decided to review his McIlhenny files and then composed the following concession:

It is interesting to note that of all the pioneer work done on bamboos yours is outstanding...

So far as bamboos are concerned, the Brooksville, Fla. garden was a failure. The Savannah garden has a beautiful small grove (about one acre) of the giant timber bamboo but no variety collection yet such as yours...²⁹

Galloway followed up a week later, asking McIlhenny to send him plantings of *Phyllostachys henryi*:

We would like very much to get a start of this, as all the plants we had have been lost. The Brooksville Garden, which was selected for bamboo growing, proved a veritable graveyard for many of our introductions.³⁰

McIlhenny responded:

I will be glad to send you plants of *Phyllostachys henryi* whenever you may wish them, or any of the other bamboos which I have that you may not have. I have in all about thirty varieties. Why not carry on your bamboo experiments here. My soil seems to be especially adapted to the growing of this plant and my experience in growing them will be of value and save many plants that otherwise would be lost. This is true of the plants I have of the *Phyllostachys henryi*. At the time I was given one of these plants the planting was made at Brooksville and Chico. I understand the plants at both of the latter places bloomed themselves to death. Mine started to do the same thing and the only way to stop bamboo blooming is to cut it back severely,

take the roots to the green house and propagate a new set of plants. I have saved a number of plants by doing this.³¹

The following from Robert Young to McIlhenny in May 1926, initiated a long and increasingly cordial correspondence seasoned with much technical detail:

I am hoping to get out as far as Avery Island sometime between the 10th and 18th of June and shall want to get there at a time when you are there if possible. Bamboo will be my chief interest, but anything relating to foreign introduced plants is in my line.³²

Young visited Avery Island in June as scheduled, and then sent McIlhenny a letter of detailed follow-up questions. McIlhenny responded in part:

In your letter of July 5 you asked for the area I now have planted in *Phyllostachys* Bamboo. Of *P. edulis* and *P. pubescens* I have perhaps close to seven acres each.³³

Four months later, Young wrote that he would be calling upon McIlhenny shortly for plantings of *P. henryi* for Savannah. He then addressed the issue of the current confusion of nomenclature among bamboos:

I hope...that Dr. Galloway will be able to get a great deal of information, when he visits your place, that will help toward straightening out the tangle so far as bamboos now growing in this country are concerned. Your experience with the large number of kinds you have will surely be of immense help to one who has any real foundation in the study of the group.³⁴

On March 19, 1928, Young visited Avery Island for the purpose of propagating three new bamboos. Two weeks later, McIlhenny received the following playful comment from David Fairchild, who wrote from Savannah to say that he too was planning a visit:

I have heard so much about your bamboos that I'm eaten up with curiosity to see them. Young is so loud in his praise that I cannot hear myself think when he is about.³⁵

Fairchild and his wife Marian, visited McIlhenny at Avery Island the following month, accompanied by Francis Fant of Anderson, S.C.³⁶ The following exchange with Floyd McClure, who was not able to join them, sums up the visit. McClure wrote:

This note is simply to inform you that, after all, I am having to give up my plan to visit your bamboo garden this Spring. It is a keen disappointment to me and I shall cherish the hope that I may yet, when I return from China, be able to come there.³⁷

McIlhenny responded:

I am much disappointed to learn from your favor of April 23 that I am not to have the pleasure of having you at Avery Island this spring. The Bamboos are now in full spring growth, and would interest you greatly.

Dr. and Mrs. Fairchild have just left, after a visit of several days with me, and expressed themselves delighted at the Bamboo growth. I have now more than fifty varieties, in my gardens.³⁸

The following 1929 letter to Galloway accompanied one of the most historically important documents relating to bamboo in McIlhenny's papers:

I enclose for your files a list of the bamboos now growing at Avery Island. [The list, dated April 15, 1929, totals 64 varieties, with plant identification numbers and dates and places of acquisition. See Page 11.] All of these are planted in the field, and as they are all now living, I think they will show what they can do in another year. Some of them already show very interesting characteristics, and others show that they are not worth much here, and never will be, commercially. A number of the varieties which your department has sent me, from time to time, are too tender for this climate, and some few have died from being too weak when received to survive.

Perhaps from time to time you can assist me in rounding out my collection of hardy Bamboos, and as I am giving each variety a plot to itself, with careful cultivation, in time, we will have a very fine study group.³⁹

In June of 1931, Beverly Galloway wrote to McIlhenny that Floyd McClure had collected plantings in China of *Arundinaria [Pseudosasa] amabilis*, the highly sought-after Tonkin Cane, and was propagating them on a plot at Lingnan University, outside Canton.⁴⁰ Three years later McClure sent a shipment of these plantings to the United States. McIlhenny wrote eagerly to Robert Young:

I am very glad to know that you have an importation of *Arundinaria Amabilis* on the way, and I would like to get some of these plants just as soon as they can be released from quarantine.⁴¹

Shortly thereafter, McIlhenny received a shipment of the long-awaited plantings and began growing them on Avery Island. Within five years, he was ready to ship them himself. In October 1939, he received the following letter from Young:

Your letter of September 26th came in due time and I thank you for your kind offer to send us some plants of *Arundinaria amabilis*, balled and burlapped, this winter, if we should desire them...⁴²

The following excerpt from a 1946 letter to David Fairchild (by now retired) gives us a culminating picture of McIlhenny's bamboo operations at the end of World War II:

My bamboo plantings have been increasing largely, but, unfortunately, for the last four years due to extreme lack of labor – both skilled and common – I have not been able to give them the attention they should have had, and the office work which has fallen on me due to the increase in the various branches of my family's business has kept me tied down to being purely an inside man...[However] I am hoping that in the next year I will have sufficient labor to get my bamboos straightened out.

I am enclosing a couple of reprints of [the two **National Horticultural Magazine** articles he had recently written] so that you may get a little better knowledge of how my bamboo plantings have increased; in fact, I understand that I have the only commercial bamboo plantings in the United States, and have sold a great

many thousand dollars worth of bamboo to various industries during the past four years. I am supplying practically all of the Tuna poles to the Pacific Coast tuna fishing boats, and I am supplying large numbers of timber bamboos of the larger sizes for specific work. When the people in Washington were looking for a suitable bamboo pole to use as ski sticks, they could find nothing in the United States. McClure was sent to Mexico and South America. He could find nothing. The outcome was that I shipped several carloads of timber bamboos to the government, and they used them by splitting them into sections and having them laminated together. They thus got the resilience and strength of the bamboo stick that is usually used for this purpose, which variety, I believe, is *Arundinaria amabilis*. You will be interested to know that I have a very good stock of this variety growing here now.⁴³

IV. Epilogue

The shortage of available labor that Ned McIlhenny mentioned to Fairchild was to continue, however, and he was never to resume operations in Jungle Gardens on anything approaching his previous scale. Following his death in August 1949, his daughter Polly McIlhenny Simmons took over management of Jungle Gardens, continuing the nursery operations until her death in 1980, when her son Ned Simmons succeeded her.

Aside from plantings for erosion control purposes, there has been no significant experimentation with bamboos on Avery Island since Ned McIlhenny's death. Varieties in adjacent plots have grown all together over the years, rhizomes intermingled in confusion. While groves within Jungle Gardens have been maintained, some groves outside Jungle Gardens have been altogether cut down and plowed under as new priorities have dictated other uses for the land.

In April 2002, Marler Spence and I walked around Avery Island carrying in hand a detailed planting list that E.A. had drawn up in October 1948, less than a year before his death, which specified the locations of individual species. Fifty-four years later, we could find little correlation between what was on the list and what was on the ground. Certain key varieties, notably *Phyllostachys bambusoides* and *Phyllostachys dulcis* (which E.A. knew as *Phyllostachys henryi*) we could not find at all.

Yet surprisingly much remains, and large stands of "Mr. Ned's" bamboo, now all but taken for granted, still contribute significantly to the beauty and serenity of the landscape.

V. Conclusion

A. A Summary of the Evidence

What do we find then, in support of Fairchild's assessment of McIlhenny's work?

First of all, we have the early testimony of Peter Bisset (1913) and Fairchild himself (1915) that McIlhenny was achieving results with his bamboos surpassing those of any other grower in this country at the time.

Then we have successive indications of the ever-increasing scale of McIlhenny's bamboo operations, frequently contrasted to the lesser work being done elsewhere.

Finally, and most importantly, we find continuous mention of McIlhenny's ability to achieve successful results with

bamboos that had failed everywhere else, as, most notably, with *Phyllostachys henryi*, or *dulcis*. Robert Young, for example, lists five bamboo introductions for which McIlhenny produced the sole surviving propagations: *P. dulcis* (McClure), *P. congesta* (Rendle), *P. vivax* (McClure), the 1908 Henon introduction, and the 1909 Moso introduction. When other centers such as Brooksville failed, it was McIlhenny who provided the plantings of these varieties that enabled the remaining centers such as Savannah to begin to rebuild their stocks.⁴⁴

B. Areas for Further Research

What can we learn today from Ned McIlhenny's bamboos? I would suggest three areas of historical interest for further research:

- 1.....Inventorying and accurately mapping the bamboos currently growing on Avery Island. This would include in particular returning during spring sprouting season and systematically collecting and identifying the multiple varieties found in the big groves next to the pepper field road.
- 2.....Tracing in detail the propagation of specific bamboos from Avery Island to the other key bamboo centers such as Savannah, as documented by existing correspondence and the PI numbers on E.A.'s inventory lists.
- 3.....Chronicling E.A. McIlhenny's research into bamboo as a source of paper pulp. Gil Lovell and Mike Hotchkiss in their recent article⁴⁵ described the bamboo pulping experiments carried on at the Savannah Station in the 1940's, '50's and '60's. However, there are existing records dating as early as 1920 of E.A.'s research into bamboo as a possible source of paper pulp, including a full-scale study by consultant Arthur D. Little which he personally commissioned; detailed correspondence which he carried on over twenty years with corporate representatives of Champion and Celotex; and even solicitations of capital for a paper mill to be built at Morgan City, Louisiana, at the mouth of the Atchafalaya Basin.⁴⁶

C. The Assessment, In Context

Clearly the man was a visionary. His April 1945 article in **The National Horticultural Magazine**, recently reprinted in **Bamboo**, shows us just how far ahead of his time he was in his thinking. But age and infirmity were catching up with him. By then he was seventy-three and had but another four years to live. It was in response to reports of his poor health the following year that David Fairchild wrote to him the letter from which I quoted at the beginning of this presentation and with which I now close.

October 20th, 1946

My Dear Mr. McIlhenny;

Twenty seven years have come and gone since in November 1919 I spent those unforgettable days in your plantations of bamboo and you took me to watch the Egrets plunge downward from the sky and land in your wonderful bird refuge...

Marian and I stopped [recently] at the Barbour Lathrop Bamboo Grove south of Savannah, and David Bisset and I talked much about you and your large bamboo plantings at Avery Island. I was amazed at the growth which the bamboos at Savannah had made, but judging

from the differences in soil between your plantations and that at Savannah, yours must be far larger and more imposing than anything to be seen at Savannah...

I am prompted to write this note in apology for such a long silence. I have drifted far from the bamboos during these years and been engrossed by the great world of the Tropics with its palms and giant ficus trees and the mangos and mangosteens and the host of other fruit and ornamental species which are scattered through the jungles of the Oriental world. But dear McIlhenny I have never had so much enjoyment out of any group of plants as I have out of the experiments with the bamboos whether in Ceylon or Java or Japan or West Africa or Colombia. And it is always to your experiments that my mind turns with the greatest satisfaction for their beginnings touches the days in Japan when Mr. Lathrop and I made a collection of the various species there and shipped them to San Francisco.

You have been the great pioneer bamboo planter of America and posterity will give you the honor that is your due for the great work you have done, not only for the Southern States but for the American public at large.

I find to my chagrin in looking at my books which I have published that I have devoted altogether too little space to the bamboo introductions which were made in the beginning years of the century. They were largely books of foreign exploration and concerned themselves too little with [these] accomplishments or they would have given full credit and photographs of your successful experiments...

Accept my congratulations for the great work you have done and with the very best regards to Mrs. McIlhenny and your daughter and yourself I remain

Very Sincerely Yours,

David Fairchild.⁴⁷

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Along with Ned Simmons and Marler Spence, I want to thank my brother and sister, Kenneth Avery Ringle and Sally Ringle Hotchkiss, current leaseholders of Ned McIlhenny's original grove; Shane Bernard at the Avery Island archives; Elaine Smyth and Judy Bolton of the LSU Libraries Special Collections; Mike Hotchkiss and Frank Linton and Pat Hillery for their help in tracking down elusive sources; and finally my daughters Rebecca and Aimée for their cheerleading and well-honed skills in the slicing and dicing of elephants.

Endnotes

¹ David Fairchild to E.A. McIlhenny, October 20, 1946, typewritten letter, signed [TLS], E.A. McIlhenny Collection [EAMC].

² For a more detailed understanding of Fairchild's work and of the early history of SPI see Fairchild 1903, 1928, 1938; Douglas 1973; and Lovell & Hotchkiss 2002.

³ "The Papers of Dr. Beverly Thomas Galloway: Biographical Sketch," www.nalusda.gov/speccoll, accessed October 12, 2002.

⁴ Young 1945a,b and 1946a,b,c.

⁵ Fairchild 1938:205

⁶ Frank Linton, telephone interview, September 17, 2002.

⁷ Farrelly 1984:9.

⁸ Lowery 1951.

⁹ Archie Carr, “Excerpts from the life of an alligator: a re-appraisal of “The Alligator’s Life History,” McIlhenny 1935[1976]:v.

¹⁰ Robert Young writes that at one point *Phyllostachys vivax* had been considered merely a variety of *P. bambusoides*. “Mr. McIlhenny’s careful observations over a long period, however, convinced him that it was a quite different bamboo, and when a critical study of adequate vegetative specimen material was made by Dr. F. A. McClure, Mr. McIlhenny’s judgment was fully confirmed.” (Young 1946a:60.)

¹¹ Verschaffelt 1848-1860[1945], Perrault 1987. Marler Spence (see Bamboo 23(3):12) has alluded to EAM’s search for A.B. Freeman-Mitford’s rare book **The Bamboo Garden**. Whether McIlhenny ever acquired the book is unclear; it is in any case not listed in the McIlhenny Natural History Collection.

¹² Sources of biographical information on EAM in addition to those already cited include: “A Synopsis of the Life’s Work of Edward Avery McIlhenny – for Mr. Townsend,” no date, typewritten document, EAMC; Bernard 1969; “Mr. Ned’s’ Legacy,” www.tabasco.com, accessed October 12, 2002; Murray Lundberg, “Dr. Samuel J. Call in the Arctic Seas,” www.explorenorth.com, accessed October 12, 2002; “Louisiana Department of Wildlife & Fisheries: Fur & Refuge Division,” www.wlf.state.la.us, accessed October 12, 2002.

¹³ B.T. Galloway to EAM, May 3, 1926, TLS; McIlhenny 1945a: 1; USDA Notice of Renewal, for the period July 1, 1913 to June 30, 1914, of a “parol [sic] instrument dated July 1, 1910, the conditions and provisions of which provide for...the furnishing by you of one acre of land located on your farm situated at Avery Island, in the State of Louisiana, the said acre of land being located on the southern slope of the Prospect Hill ridge, facing Little Hays Swamp, for the purpose of planting, growing, and propagating bamboo plants...,” TDS, n.d. (Unless otherwise indicated, all items of correspondence cited will be found in the E.A. McIlhenny Papers [EAMP]).

¹⁴ EAM to David Fairchild, June 24, 1913, TL.

¹⁵ EAM to DF, February 4, 1915, TL.

¹⁶ DF to EAM, February 10, 1915, TLS.

¹⁷ EAM to DF, April 8, 1915, TL.

¹⁸ DF to EAM, April 19, 1915, TLS.

¹⁹ DF to EAM, January 5, 1918, TLS.

²⁰ EAM to DF, January 10, [1918], TL.

²¹ EAM to DF, April 13, 1920, TL.

²² EAM to DF, July 4, 1921, TL.

²³ (An earlier synonym for *Phyllostachys dulcis*.)

²⁴ EAM to B.T. Galloway, September 10, 1923, TL.

²⁵ BTG to EAM, April 9, 1926, TLS; Galloway 1925.

²⁶ EAM to BTG, April 19, 1926, TL.

²⁷ BTG to EAM, April 22, 1926, TLS.

²⁸ EAM to BTG, April 27, 1926, TL.

²⁹ BTG to EAM, May 3, 1926, TLS.

³⁰ BTG to EAM, May 11, 1926, TLS.

³¹ EAM to BTG, June 2, 1926, TL.

³² Robert A. Young to EAM, May 28, 1926, TLS.

³³ EAM to RAY, July 8, 1926, TL. EAM’s referring to two synonyms for Moso as separate varieties is admittedly puzzling.

³⁴ RAY to EAM, November 1, 1926, TLS.

³⁵ DF to EAM, April 1, 1928, autographed letter, signed.

³⁶ DF to EAM, April 5, 1928, ALS; EAM to DF, April 9, 1928, TL. Francis Fant was son of Rufus Fant, planter of the earliest known Moso grove in the United States, source of the so-called ‘Anderson clone’.

³⁷ F.A. McClure to EAM, April 23, 1928, TLS.

³⁸ EAM to F.A. McClure, April 25, 1928, TL.

³⁹ EAM to BTG, April 26, 1929, TL.

⁴⁰ BTG to EAM, June 22, 1931, TLS.

⁴¹ EAM to RAY, October 30, 1934, TL.

⁴² RAY to EAM, October 9, 1939, TLS.

⁴³ EAM to DF, October 30, 1946, TL, EAMC.

⁴⁴ Young 1946a: 40, 46, 52, 56, 58-60.

⁴⁵ Lovell & Hotchkiss 2002:16-17.

⁴⁶ For EAM’s paper pulp research and correspondence: EAMC, EAMP.

⁴⁷ DF to EAM, October 20, 1946, TLS, EAMC.



Ned and Fisher Simmons, grandsons of E.A. McIlhenny, standing in a grove of giant timber bamboo below McIlhenny’s house in Jungle Gardens, c.1933. (EAMC)

List of Growing Bamboo on Avery Island, Louisiana as of April 15th, 1929.¹

Date & Year	From Whom Received	Quantity Received	Identification Number[s] ³	Name ²
1910	Miami, Fla.	129	SPI 24759	Moso bamboo
		63	SPI 24760	Hachike
		162	SPI 24761	Madake
		1	SPI 23243	<i>Phyllostachys henryi</i>
4-16-27	Bell, Md.	25	SPI 55713	<i>Phyllostachys nevinii</i>
		25	SPI 23234	<i>Phyllostachys</i> sp.
4-14-27	KEW, Eng.	8	SPI 75161	<i>Sasa auricoma</i>
		1	SPI 75166	<i>Sasa pumila</i>
		1	SPI 75164	<i>Sasa humilis</i>
		1	SPI 75162	<i>Sasa chrycantha</i>
		1	SPI 75163	<i>Sasa disticha</i>
		1	SPI 75169	<i>Sasa veitchii</i>
		1	SPI 75165	<i>Sasa japonica</i>
		6	SPI 75157	<i>Phyllostachys kumasasa</i>
		1	SPI 75153	<i>Phyllostachys aurea</i>
		6	SPI 75159	<i>Phyllostachys puberula nigra</i>
		1	SPI 75148	<i>Arundinaria macrosperma</i>
		6	SPI 75146	<i>Arundinaria fastuosa</i>
2-6-28	Savannah, Ga.	5	SPI 49357	<i>Phyllostachys mitis</i>
		5	SPI 52686	<i>Phyllostachys flexuosa</i>
		5	SPI 49505	FHB 35931, <i>Phyllostachys nigra</i>
		2	SPI 38921	<i>Arundinaria simonii variegata</i>
		3	SPI 38913	<i>Arundinaria fastuosa</i>
		2	SPI 42659	<i>Phyllostachys bambusoides castillonis</i>
5-22-28	Bell, Md.	2	FHB 61411	SPI 66787 <i>Phyllostachys</i> sp.
		5	FHB 61402	SPI 66786 <i>Phyllostachys</i> sp.
		5	FHB 57753	SPI 66902 <i>Phyllostachys</i> sp.
		4	FHB 61399	SPI 66784 <i>Phyllostachys</i> sp.
		4	FHB 61401	SPI 66785 <i>Phyllostachys</i> sp.
		8	FHB 56606	SPI 63757 Undetermined
		8	FHB 61396	SPI 66781 <i>Arundinaria</i> sp.
		8	FHB 56341	SPI 63698 Undetermined
		8	FHB 56340	SPI 63697 Undetermined
		8	FHB 56339	SPI 63696 Undetermined
		2	FHB 56342	SPI 43699 Undetermined
		2	FHB 60155	SPI 67399 <i>Phyllostachys</i> sp.
		7	FHB 60176	SPI 67399 <i>Phyllostachys</i> sp.
		7	FHB 60219	SPI 67399 <i>Phyllostachys</i> sp.
5-22-28	Bell, Md. (Cont'd)	8	FHB 60174	SPI 67398 <i>Phyllostachys</i> sp.
		7	FHB 60216	SPI 67398 <i>Phyllostachys</i> sp.
		4	FHB 60173	SPI 76648 <i>Arundinaria</i> sp.
		2	FHB 60175	SPI 76649 <i>Phyllostachys</i> sp.
		1	SPI 38912	<i>Phyllostachys sulfurea</i>
9-1-28	Bell, Md.	1	SPI 77002	Undetermined
		1	SPI 77004	Undetermined
		1	SPI 77005	<i>Phyllostachys nidularia</i>
		1	SPI 77006	Undetermined
		2	SPI 77008	Undetermined
		1	SPI 77009	Undetermined
		3	SPI 77010	Undetermined
		1	SPI 77013	Undetermined
6-16-27	Savannah, Ga.	1		<i>Sasa disticha (Bambusa nana)</i>
4-19-27	Gainesville, Fla.	1	100 lb. clump	<i>Bambusa thouarsi</i>
	Avery Island, La.			<i>Phyllostachys henryi</i>
				<i>Phyllostachys henonis</i>
				<i>Phyllostachys aurea</i>
				<i>Phyllostachys heterocycla</i>
				<i>Arundinaria japonica</i>
				<i>Bambusa nana</i>
				<i>Bambusa madake</i>
				<i>Bambusa alphonse karri</i>
				<i>Bambusa argentea</i>
				<i>Bambusa Argentea striata</i>
5-7-27	W.A. Manda, Inc., S Orange, NJ	50		<i>Bambusa veitchii</i>

¹ EAMC. This list is a faithful reproduction of the original; errors in the original have not been corrected.² Plant names are those current in 1929 when the list was drawn up.³ SPI numbers and Plant Introduction (PI) numbers are identical. FHB numbers pertain to Floyd McClure's introductions.

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