

# AMERICAN PAULOWNIA ASSOCIATION

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## PAULOWNIA IS NATIVE TO NORTH AMERICA

"A Record of Paulownia in the Tertiary of North America"

American Journal of Botany  
48(2); 175-179 Illus. 1961

Charles J. Smiley  
Macalester College; St. Paul, Minnesota

Reviewed by Ralph Donaldson

First, the writer is incompetent as a reviewer of a juried paper on paleobotany in a scientific journal. He is neither paleontologist nor botanist. He is a farmer. The language of the paper being reviewed is alien to him. This attempt is to extract some bits of information that may be of use to growers, promoters, and protectors of Paulownia.

First, some definitions. Pre-history has been divided into periods for convenience of study. Often the divisions used correspond to geologic changes-changes being a relative term since many of the "changes" occurred over many millions of years. There have been several such schemes of dividing up the past. As a matter of fact, the Tertiary Period referred to in this 1961 article is part of an obsolete scheme. The Tertiary Period in this article went from about 66 million years ago to about 26 million years ago. Fossils attributed to this time are found in rock strata that are associated with geologic events that can be tied to this period of pre-history.

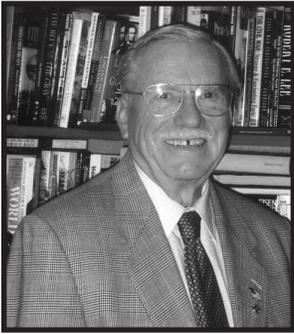
Fossils themselves are rocks; rocks whose formation was influenced by the remains of living matter that was present during their formation. Animal bones buried under sediment eventually-over many, many years, maybe millions-have their cellular structure chemically replaced by chemicals in the sediment and often a clear representation of the remains is left. This is a permanent record of what, compared to stone, was soft tissue.

The tissue structure of plant matter can also be buried in sediment. Remember that the earth was a very busy place during its development, and a lot of rock, soil, etc., was moving around. The shape of the tissue, even minute vein structure, is preserved this way. The fossilized preservation is precise enough for exact botanical identification to be made, even millions of years after the sediment is laid down.

In this February 1961, article in the American Journal of Botany, Charles J. Smiley

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## President's Message . . .



Hello Members and Friends,

This issue finds the growing season nearing an end as we prepare for the dormant season. Actually, there is activity in the Association in preparing for the Spring meeting.

The Board of Directors had a meeting in early September at Wytheville, Virginia doing business of the Association. This is the occasion where input from members and other sources are built into the future deliberations and operations. Our major task is to plan for the Spring meeting. We had our first Spring meeting in South Carolina last year and it was a huge success due to Ralph, Grady, and Buck. It also

seems like our new corporate format is working well with the organization headquarters at Hagerstown with Past President Danny and Secretary-Treasurer Sharon continuing their excellent support.

We think you'll find some very interesting news in this issue, and we pledge to continue searching for the best information to inform members and make their jobs more interesting and rewarding. I've been giving talks and writing about my branding initiative, projecting Paulownia as the "wonder wood". More will be in a later issue.

Have a good Fall and Winter. Thanks for your membership, cooperation, and support.

Vince Luchsinger

## Let The Buyer Beware

Once before in this newsletter, I wrote about the importance of considering the source of information as well as being generally critical of the vast amount of Paulownia information available. Because it is so easy to widely disseminate information instantly these days, anybody can do it. And that makes it critically important to evaluate the source of the information in judging its credibility. It is a "buyer beware" world, and the Paulownia business is no different.

Before you hire someone, it is prudent to check references-more than one or two, and beyond those offered by the applicant. Before you rent to someone, it is prudent to check references-more than one or two, and beyond those offered by the applicant. Before you put your life savings into someone's hands, is it not prudent to check references-more than one or two, and beyond those offered by that person? This is so very important.

Are Paulownia trees "chinchillas without fur" or "emus without feathers?" They have been called that, and you know they can be if you permit an unscrupulous person or company to take advantage of you. It depends in large part on the truthfulness and integrity of the person or company you are dealing with. Chinchillas and emus enriched a few people who got in quick, sold a lot of breeding stock, and got out quickly, before their commitments became due. You must have a written, valid and legal contract. And you must have a contract with someone who respects that contract as much as you do to minimize future misunderstandings and unforeseen disagreements.

How can we know whom we can safely deal with? Just like hiring and renting, one very effective tool is references; and again, more than one or two. The American Paulownia Association publishes and distrib-

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reported finding fossils, over 500 fossils of leaves, of Paulownia Tomentosa in Tertiary strata of Ellensburg Canyon of Washington state, U.S.A. Dr. Smiley described the structure of the leaves and, ruling out all similarly structured leaves, identified them positively as Paulownia. He examined fossils of many more trees in the Ellensburg formation and identified them as trees that normally co-habitate with Paulownia. He described the climate of what is now the northwestern United States during the Tertiary Period as being essentially ideal for the growth of Paulownia. And he attributed extinction of northwestern North American Paulownia to glaciation in later ice ages.

Well, there it is. There has been scientific evidence that Paulownia is native to what is now the continental United States for 45 years! Designation of Paulownia as a non-native species by the United States Department of Agriculture was either in spite of the facts, or in ignorance of the facts; thereby, raising questions concerning the lack of "due diligence" with respect to any plant, insect or animal species labeled non-native. The designation of Paulownia as a non-native to North America should be retracted immediately.

The reviewer has already admitted to being neither botanist nor paleontologist. He also is neither politician nor bureaucrat. The idea that such harmful labeling might be practiced and held on to by agencies chartered to protect the public good is as alien as some of the language of this article to a South Georgia farmer.

**Credits:** Danny Blickenstaff has thought for years that fossil evidence of Paulownia growing in North America in pre-historic times should exist. Jack Dickey, having spent some of his early years nearby, had heard something about Paulownia fossils in Ellensburg Canyon, Washington. George Newsome actually found the Journal of Botany article and shared it with Danny Blickenstaff. The author of this review merely held the pen during the writing.



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# The Paulownia Mail Box

Mr. A. wrote on 8-29-2006:

Subject: Seeking Paulownia information

Just last spring, I learned of the Paulownia. That single, beautiful tree has lead to much research time on the Internet.

My family has some unplanted acreage southwest of Fort Worth, Texas. As I browse the Internet for information, I see quite a lot of conflicting information. Your site seems to be very positive about the commercial potential of these trees, while I have also found articles comparing them to Emus (and the large sums of money lost on that "crop"). Further, I have been completely unable to find any information on their water needs

(looking for inches per year, gallons per week, etc). Nor have I found a single site offering to purchase logs or lumber.

To further confuse matters, I find that some of the sellers of these trees do not respond to email, and/or have not updated their websites in a couple of years. This seems to suggest that these people are out of the business. Also, some bulletin boards suggest that the trees are very weak, and subject to limb-breakage in wind (causing one to wonder about the strength of the wood).

So, given all of that I found a couple of key questions that I'm hoping you can answer:

\* In objective, measurable, terms how much water is required by a tree subject to consistent summer temperatures in excess of 100-degrees, in full sun?

\* Is Paulownia suitable for log homes?

My thinking is that any tall, upright tree that we can grow successfully will add character to our land. And, if a market for the timber never develops, I could at least build a log-house in 10-15 years.

Thanks in advance for your time.

\*\*\*\*\*

Dear Mr. A.

Thank you for your inquiry regarding Paulownia, the water needs and marketing issues.

You are correct in stating that there are numerous sites with conflicting information out there. The American Paulownia Association is committed to providing honest, timely and substantiated information about Paulownia. We are also a group of dedicated individuals such as; researchers, growers, buyers, sellers, fabricators, etc. I have attached a list of publications and newsletters that are made available to the public so that an informed decision may be made before committing to an investment in Paulownia. As for some of the web site contacts being non responsive or out-of-date, that is solely an individual responsibility to maintain current posted information.

Water needs of Paulownia will vary with species selected and the general climate in which they are grown. All species require good drainage and a soil that allows for deep root system develop-

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## MEMBERSHIP DUES

Just an advance reminder that annual dues are payable in the Association's office on-or-before February 1, 2007. Your dues are what pay for the publication of the quarterly newsletter, postage, and other basic costs of operating our non-profit organization. All of our loyal members participate at some level. Officers and State Directors serve by donating their time and energies in the conduct of the organization's business, some members provide information for publication, some conduct research, and some provide presentations and host field trips at our conventions. All the while, all members pay their annual dues that keep our Association viable and moving forward.

Yearly dues remain at a modest \$25.00 US for members residing in the continental United States while those in US territories and foreign countries remain at \$50.00 US. Send your dues in now and save the Secretary the time and postage necessary to send you a reminder next year.

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utes to members an annual Membership List. Call three or so members and check out who you are considering doing business with. It might save you a lot of heartache, or worse.

Predatory business practices have left many "good intentioned" people with abandoned plantations throughout the country. Certification of business practices, member sanctions, and removing members are all beyond the scope of the Association. However, always know whom you are dealing with. Know their history and reputation. Insist on visiting plantations they have established and maintained, if that is to be part of your deal. If the financial commitment warrants, insist on names and businesses with which they have had similar business relationships with in the past, and if they refuse to provide that information, be forewarned. And, for goodness sake, get references other than those they offer, and do not forget the Better Business Bureau.

When it comes right down to it, your money and assets are your responsibility. The Association and your member friends do not want to see you get hurt, but "due diligence" on your part is absolutely essential.

Let the buyer beware!

**PUBLICIST NOTE:** On more than one occasion, letters, phone calls and e-mails from both Association members and the public alike have been received expressing concern and disfavor over certain members private business practices. I consistently respond by stating that, "The American Paulownia Association does not endorse the business practices of individual members and businesses." After reading the above article, so eloquently written by our Editor, the following statement, also by our Editor, following the last Board of Directors meeting, further places the whole issue into proper context:

"The American Paulownia Association is a membership organization of people who express interest in the organization, give a valid address, and send a good \$25 check. The organization cannot police the business practice of its members. Those wishing to do business with anyone they do not know, or with whom they have not done business with previously, should get and check references conscientiously."



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ment. As a rule of thumb, Paulownia will survive on as little as 45 inches of moisture per year during the growing season, they prefer 60-80 inches and can even suffer heavy rainfall climates in the 125 inches plus if well drained. There have been failures in the past with growing Paulownia in the Texas region because of inadequate irrigation, wrong species selection and poor site and plantation maintenance. All of these failures could have been prevented with appropriate planning and follow through, this is one reason that the American Paulownia Association was formed 15 years ago to provide that information to its members.

Paulownia is a relatively new wood for the United States and until very recently, only wild slow growth trees were harvested and exported to the Far East. Paulownia plantation trees in this country have yet to come to market in large quantities necessary to impact and establish a robust domestic market. There are very active regional niche markets for the highest-grade lumber. Current uses include house siding, garage doors, boat building, furniture, OSB and veneer plywood fabrication, snow and surf board cores, etc.

There are members in our Association that do use Paulownia logs for log cabin construction and post-beam furniture. I have personally used Paulownia wood for new home construction including; rake board, siding, fascia board and porch beam fabrication. I also have a business engaged in the growing of Paulownia nursery plants, timber production, buying Paulownia timber and brokering Paulownia lumber worldwide. It has been a profitable venture for me and I anticipate that the domestic market will continue to increase rapidly in the years ahead.

My advice at this time would be for you to join the Association and avail yourself of all of the information at membership rates before beginning your venture. Attending an Association conference would also be very helpful so that you may meet, discuss and have any questions answered by knowledgeable members.

Best Wishes For A Successful Venture,  
D.B.



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