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A Pacific Tropical Botanical Garden

Public Law 88-449, signed by President Johnson on 14 August 1964, incorporating the Pacific Tropical Botanical Garden, sets in motion a proposal dating back to the mid-19th century. At that time William Hillebrand urged the importance of such a garden. The Foster Botanical Garden in Honolulu, a beautiful but small park, contains many of the exotics which he brought in. Since his day the need for an adequate collection of tropical plants and for facilities for their study has been urged by individuals and groups, both in the Islands and on the mainland.

The intrinsic attraction of tropical plants is obvious to any visitor to the Fairchild Gardens in Florida, or to the less accessible but superb horticultural garden at Lancetilla in Honduras. Not so widely understood is the scientific and economic importance of tropical plant life. During the vicissitudes of climate in cooler latitudes, the tropics have stood as a continuous reservoir of evolutionary process, producing a flora of incomparable richness, still imperfectly known. Our concepts of plant biology have been, and still are, largely based on experience in more impoverished regions. In that respect they are provincial and should be revised continually through the establishment of proper scientific facilities in the tropics and subtropics.

The enormous economic importance of plant life is often forgotten. The economy of our 50th state rests upon members of the plant kingdom—sugar cane and pineapple, not to mention beautiful cabinet woods and the lush green that delights thousands of visitors from the mainland. In future, it may become vital for Hawaii to diversify her production by developing resources other than cane and pineapple. Much of the superb and valuable indigenous growth of Hawaii was destroyed by livestock which Cook and Vancouver introduced before 1800. To protect her soils and water supply she has improvised a quick forest cover of eucalypts and other foreign trees whose dry, undecomposed litter does little to promote infiltration and storage of vital ground water. The economic potentials of her native species have been neglected and require investigation, as do those of a wide variety of non-native plants which could be grown in her soil. A proper botanical garden should be an asset not only to science but to the state and national economies.

A difficult but highly desirable aspect of the proposal is that the garden must be established and maintained by private gift. Through the generosity of Robert Allerton of Kauai and Chicago, a substantial sum has been made available to initiate study and work. The small group of incorporating trustees includes representatives from the Islands and the mainland, who use the offices of Oscar Chapman in Washington as their present clearinghouse. Active endorsement by individuals and groups from the several islands of Hawaii augers well for future voluntary support of the project.

It is perhaps in order to note that if a reasonable share of the wealth extracted and exported from Appalachia had been reinvested in the science, economy, and esthetics of that region, it would not be the distressed area that it now is. Hopefully, there are enough public-spirited citizens of Hawaii, and friends of the Islands on the mainland, to forestall so needless a deterioration in our new and beautiful Pacific state.—PAUL B. SEARS, *Department of Biology, Yale University*