

FOSTER BOTANICAL GARDEN

OVERVIEW

As noted on its National Historic Register nomination, **Foster Botanical Garden is a significant historic place for its association with the development of landscape architecture** and horticultural research in Hawai'i. It is also significant for its involvement **with historically significant people in Hawaiian history--Dr. William F. Hillebrand, Queen Lili'uokalani, Mary E. Foster, and plant pathologist and botanist Harold L. Lyon** were all involved with the development of the property. This property is important to the historical conservation of the Hawaiian Islands through the preservation, care and management of the unique plants contained within.

The tropical garden is divided into two sections. The southernmost section, Foster Garden, is 13.5 acres in size. The northern section called Lili'uokalani Garden is close to 7.5 acres. The two gardens were altered with the development of the Lunalilo Highway and the widening of Vineyard Blvd.

Although it has no major architectural features, Foster Garden's historic landscaping which includes a large number of **Exceptional Trees** makes this area significant to the history of Hawai'i. Many of these trees are listed on the Self-Guided Tour (show brochure).

Fun fact: The Garden is the inspiration for a line in Joni Mitchell's 1970 folk song "Big Yellow Taxi": *"Took all the trees, put 'em in a tree museum / Then charge people a dollar and a half just to see 'em."* (Source: Wikipedia)

FBG's features:

1. **Upper Terrace:** the oldest section, where the Hillebrands built their home in 1855.
2. **Middle Terrace:** tropical palms, aroids, heliconia, ginger
3. **Economic Garden:** different herbs, spices, dyes, poisons, coffee and cocoa plants
4. **Prehistoric Glen:** primitive plants from all over the globe. Cycads – world's oldest seed-bearing plants, some dating back 250 million years (older than dinosaurs).
5. **Lyon Garden** – collection of Old and New World orchid species.
6. **Conservatory** – indoor greenhouse featuring an array of tropical flowers and plants.

Foster Garden is also home to about 25 Exceptional Trees – historic trees protected by law. Include the Tropical Almond tree, Loulu Palm (only found in Hawai'i), Baobab tree, Bodhi tree.

The Bodhi Tree

- The sacred tree in Bodh Gaya, India under which Siddharta Gautama (the Buddha) reached enlightenment: Tree of Awakening/Enlightenment *Ficus Religiosa*

- Sri Lankan Buddhist revivalist Anagarika Dharmapala brought the first cutting of the Bodhi tree to Honolulu in 1913 as a gift to Mary Foster. She planted it here.
- Most Buddhist temples in America have a cutting from this tree.
- The tree has heart-shaped leaves; broad umbrella-like shape

Anagarika Dharmapala

- Born 1864 Sri Lanka
- National religious hero as Buddhist revivalist
- 1893 keynote speaker at World Parliament of Religions in Chicago
- On the way home stopped in Honolulu and met Mary Foster. Gave her Bodhi tree branch. She became his patron and friend for 40 years. She is purported to have donated \$10 million to Buddhism around the world.

HISTORY

I. Queen Kalama (1817-1870)

- Wife of King Kamehameha III
- She received a great deal of land during the Great Māhele of 1848; she eventually leased property to Dr. Hillebrand (see below).

II. William Hillebrand (1821-86; owned FBG 1853-80)

- A German (Prussian) physician and botanist who moved to Hawai'i in 1850, seeking a warmer climate. (He had TB) Young doctors were also trained in botany.
- 1853: Queen Kalama (wife of Kamehameha III) leased approximately 6 acres of land to him where he built a home for himself and his wife – the area known today as the upper terrace of the garden. He propagated trees and cultivated a botanical garden.
- In 1858 he was appointed as the royal physician to the royal family of King Kamehameha IV. In 1862 he advocated for “some efficient, and at the same time, humane measure” by which to isolate people affected by leprosy. This led to the establishment of Kalauapapa.
- In 1865, he travelled throughout Asia and the East Indies to find new labor sources for the sugar cane industry and to find a cure/study treatments for Hansen’s disease. He returned with/sent back herbs, plants, birds and animals (including the mynah bird). Many were planted in his garden.
- Although he was a medical doctor, he devoted much of his time to the development of agriculture and horticulture in Hawai'i. He introduced numerous varieties of trees and plants, including ornamental, shade, fruit and flowering trees, and furnished them to growers all over the Islands.

- After he returned to Germany, he compiled a record of his years of botanical research and propagation in Hawai'i in a definitive book, the *Flora of the Hawaiian Islands*, published in 1886.

III. Queen Lili'uokalani

- In 1884, the land which now comprises the Lili'uokalani Garden was purchased by Princess Lili'uokalani from the estate of Queen Kalama. During most of her adult life, Lili'uokalani kept a small house on this property, just above the waterfall.
- In 1912 (5 yrs prior to her death) Lili'uokalani Trust transferred the property to the Civic Federation of Honolulu as a park and recreation ground. In 1916 became known as Lili'uokalani Garden. Became part to the Foster Botanical Garden during the 1950s.

IV. Mary Mikahala Elizabeth Robinson Foster (1844-1930)

- Daughter of British shipbuilder John James Robinson and Rebecca Prever, descendant of Hawaiian royalty. She married shipbuilder Thomas Foster (from Nova Scotia) at age 16. They had no children.
- The Fosters purchased Hillebrand's estate in 1880.
- She expanded the acreage of the property and planted additional trees. Added an irrigation system. In 1919, she leased two of her acres to the Hawaiian Sugar Planters' Association for its experiment station.
- Close friend of Queen Lili'uokalani – the queen kept a home just north of her estate.
- She became a follower of Buddhism, which prompted her to promote tolerance and education.
- She was a major philanthropist: helped finance the first Buddhist temple in Hawai'i, the Honpa Hongwanji Mission on Pali Hwy. Funded schools for children of immigrants. Sponsored Hawaiian children to attend the newly formed Kamehameha Schools. Founded hospital for the poor in Sri Lanka. Helped fund the renovation of the Mahabodi Temple in India.

V. Dr. Harold L. Lyon

- Dr. Lyon was a key figure in the evolution of the garden from the Foster estate to the keystone of the O'ahu Botanical Gardens. During his 27-year tenure as director of the gardens, he led significant research for agricultural development in Hawai'i. His special passion was orchids. In all, he introduced over 10,000 new plants to the islands.
- 1919 – 1939: Lyon managed the experimentation center for the Hawai'i Sugar Planters' Association on Foster's land. In 1920 he reported that Dr. Hillebrand had established one of the most remarkable gardens in the world, full of unique and rare plants, which he helped identify.

- By 1925 he had developed what he considered the best equipped plant nurseries in the Islands. Produced over a million trees; distributed hundreds throughout the islands. Raised new plants to see if they could become a new crop and industry to replace sugar cane. HSPA contributed over 150,000 plants to this research.

VI. Foster Estate becomes Foster Garden

- In 1930, Mary bequeathed her home and garden, comprising 5 acres, to the City of Honolulu on condition that it be maintained as a public park.
- The Hawaiian Botanical Society stepped in and supported the park as a community asset. An additional 8.5 acres was eventually added to Mary Foster's bequest by the City.
- Foster Garden was open to the public on Nov. 30, 1931.
- From the 1950s, the Garden Club of Honolulu and Outdoor Circle helped develop the Gardens and provide volunteer support.
- Since around 1957, Paul Weissich succeeded Dr. Lyon in his work and managing FBG. He was appointed director of FBG in 1961. He followed through with Lyon's plan to form Honolulu Botanical Gardens (Foster, Wahiawā Botanical Garden and Mānoa Water Reserve).
- Today, the Honolulu Botanical Gardens is 650 acres with five gardens: Foster BG, Lili'uokalani Garden, Wahiawā BG, Koko Crater BG and Ho'omaluhia BG.
- Taken as a whole, these five gardens feature rare species from tropical environments ranging from desert to rainforest, comprising the largest and most diverse tropical plant collection in the United States.

So you can see that Foster Garden is the "mother" of our botanical gardens on O'ahu.