

# ***Bodhi Trees Around the World: Hawaii – Foster Botanical Garden***

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For the tourist in Hawaii, here in Honolulu, one can find amazingly numerous free magazines like *Oahu*, *100 Things To Do*, and *This Week*. Several of the most famous attractions are diverse open-air shopping malls with ocean views, Punchbowl Crater Cemetery, Aloha Tower at the Harbor and Arizona Memorial. A less great attraction but not less of interest is right in the city, a garden, called Foster Botanical Garden (FBG), not too small but also not that big, but beautiful.

Although on my first visit, I had my first shelter, so to say, around the corner, I found it of not too much interest for me as I have been visiting the maybe largest Botanical Garden in the world, which is the Peradeniya Botanical Garden, at Peradeniya-Kandy, in Sri Lanka. Just to go through one would need the whole day, not having too much time to enjoy the very beautiful different sections, especially the several kinds of Bamboo. One great attraction is the giant Jawa Willow Tree, shading an area of over 1,900 sq.m.

Yet, recently I became very interested in the FBG, hearing from friends that there is a Bodhi-Tree, which of course aroused my interest to visit one day the Garden. And, there is a great story behind connected to Sri Lanka.

It is the story of Mrs. Mary Mikahala Foster and Anagarika Dharmapala. A part of her residential property was first designed as a garden with some indigenous Flora and ornamental plants. It has been taken care of by Mr. F.C. Rock and Harald Lyon. But as surprises come, during the 1850s, some magnificent trees were planted by the German Dr. William Hillebrand. But let us go back to Mrs. Foster and Anagarika Dharmapala. Mary Elizabeth Mikahala was born in the mid 1800s and came from a prominent family that was partly descended from Hawaiian royalty. After her husband, Capt. Thomas Foster, passed away in 1889, she became interested in Buddhism, also being a member of the Theosophical Society.

In 1893 Chicago came in the spotlight of the world as the guest home for the World Parliament of Religions. Anagarika Dharmapala was invited as the Buddhist Delegate from Sri Lanka. His success was radioed across the globe resulting in lecture tours to Japan and China. He returned onboard of the steamer from Chicago to Japan via Honolulu as a stopover. On boarding the S.S. Oceanic in the Harbor of Honolulu, he met Mrs. Foster. She approached him wishing to know whether Buddhism could help her to subdue her anger. Practicing the advice given, she found amazing results.

As a result, she began to send small contributions to Dharmapala. In 1902, upon Dharmapala's request; Mrs. Foster provided donations to establish facilities for children in India and Sri Lanka, facilities and a new Vihara for the Maha Bodhi Society, Sarnath, which was founded by Anagarika Dharmapala in 1893. Also a first Vihara in Calcutta was built as well as a first Theravada Vihara in London. In June 1913, when Anagarika visited Honolulu, he received another generous donation for a Hospital to be named in memory of her late husband. In 1920 Mrs. Foster donated \$50,000 and in 1923 \$100,000 "with a covering letter asking the Anagarika to live in comfort and for the good work he was doing", from which a house in Dandy was purchased and converted into the Foster Buddhist Seminary. Mrs. Foster is still loved and honored in Sri Lanka and India as the twentieth century Visakha for her great generosity, celebrating her birthday anniversary. Mrs. Foster passed away in Honolulu on Dec. 19, 1930.

Mrs. Foster noble and sacrificing spirit to the Teaching of the Buddha, contributed the Most precious gift to Hawaii . She once even visited Sri Lanka in 1893, studying' with the Theros at the monastery of Anuradhapura. The Theros from the Anuradhapura Vihara sent in gratitude through A.Dharmapalas visit to Honolulu in 1913, a cutting from the Bo-Tree which is the scion of the historic tree in Bodh Gaya, under which the Buddha had attained supreme Enlightenment. From this historic tree an offspring was brought to Sri Lanka in 288 B.C. by the Arahat bhikkhuni Sangarnitta. At the Foster Garden , the cutting from Anuradhapura was carefully planted and nurtured over the years by loving and dedicated hands, growing to a really huge bo-tree, that graces the Foster Botanical Garden in Honolulu till today and hopefully for centuries.

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