

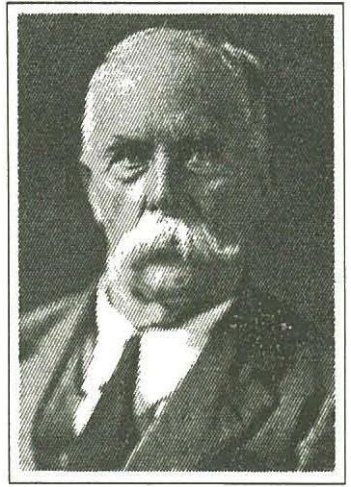
Walter Elias Broadway - Botanist/Naturalist Extraordinaire

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Introduction

From humble origins, Walter Elias Broadway worked his way from England to the islands of Trinidad & Tobago to become one of the most important botanical collectors for Trinidad, Tobago, Grenada, French Guyana and Venezuela during the period 1888-1935. Born on 3 May, 1863 in the small village of Exbury, in the New Forest District, in the county of Southampton (now the county of Hampshire), he was the eldest of four children born to Elias and Lucy Ann Broadway. Little is known about his childhood and early schooling but he followed in his father's footsteps to become a gardener and by the

age of sixteen he was employed for one year at a garden in Hampshire, followed by another five years in Devon. From the latter address he successfully applied to The Royal Gardens, Kew for employment, spending four years excelling as a gardener and attaining the position of sub-foreman. When the post of Assistant Superintendent of The Royal Botanic Garden in Trinidad was created by J.H. Hart on the latter's



appointment as Superintendent of The Botanic Garden in 1887, Broadway was highly recommended for the job by W.T. Thistleton-Dyer, Director of Kew Gardens. Armed with good qualifications, wide experience, agreeable disposition and youthful enthusiasm, Broadway departed from Southampton on 28 June, 1888 for Trinidad.

Starting Life in the Tropics

Upon his arrival in Trinidad he found an established botanic garden and a good herbarium to launch his career. A newcomer to the tropics, he was awed by the richness of the flora and fauna, made all the more difficult to identify without definitive guides. He immediately plunged into learning *all* he could about the plants and animals which surrounded him in his new territory. Eager to have identifications for his collections Broadway sought assistance from specialists at Kew and the British Museum independently of Hart who overruled him, insisting that all material collected by Broadway be screened (by Hart) before it was sent abroad. Naturally Broadway protested and this incident marked a turning point in their relationship.

The first year, however, seems to have passed agreeably between Broadway and Hart, for by this time the former is engaged to Ethel J. Philip eldest daughter of Maxwell Philip, Solicitor General. The wedding took place on the 1 January, 1890 and a year later their daughter Elsie was born. Alas, the comfortable, idyllic conditions that Broadway was beginning to get accustomed to, after three years in the colony, began to crumble when Hart decided to enforce strict control over his subordinate's leisure hours. In a lengthy exchange of memos between the two men a clear picture emerges of their contrasting personalities. Hart could be described as paranoid and vindictive. Broadway, young, ambitious, willing to comply with his seniors to secure and promote his career, was not prepared to sacrifice his free time entirely to the garden when he could be out collecting plants and insects. Tension between the two men mounted as Hart's conniving to portray Broadway as incompetent became unbearable. The conflict reached the Colonial Secretary, Henry Fowler, who counselled the men to settle their differences. This early confrontation with the authorities may well have sullied Broadway's career in the Colonial Service, for he never achieved the positions to which he aspired thereafter. Instead he directed his energies to becoming the assiduous collector for which he is best remembered.

The absorbing interest Broadway took in the natural history of Trinidad sought expression and support from other nature enthusiasts and together with Henry Caracciolo, T.I. Potter, R.R. Mole, P.L. Guppy and F.W. Urich he founded the Trinidad Field Naturalists' Club

(renamed The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalist Club in 1974). One of their early objectives was the production of a journal with the first issue appearing in April 1892. Broadway's contribution surprisingly was not on plants but "Classification of Insects" [J. Trin. Field Naturalists' Club 1(1): 5-7, 1892), followed by "The Mole Cricket" [J. Trin. Field Naturalists' Club 1(2): 36-38, 1892). Later on he wrote on "The natural Order of Compositae" [J. Trin. Field Naturalists' Club, 1(8): 190-198, 1893 and Part 2, 1(9): 208-216, 1893]. Although the Club continued to function until 1907, the journal was discontinued in 1896. It is interesting to note that the club was dormant from 1907 to 1924 a period which approximates Broadway's departure from Trinidad in 1894 until his return in 1914 and retirement in 1923. The Club was revitalized in 1924 and Broadway relieved of his administrative responsibilities devoted much time to the organization.

Exploring New Ground

In 1894 Broadway arrived in Grenada to take up the post of curator of the Botanic Gardens. Left to his own devices, the collection of the flora commenced. By 1896 his plant collecting went commercial. Several herbaria in the United States and Europe were approached to purchase unmounted plant specimens with freight charge extra. This was not a very lucrative business although customers included herbaria in Berlin, The Paris Institute, The New York Botanic Gardens, The Grny Herbarium at Harvard and The British Museum; yet it was not enough to keep him solvent for long periods of time. Latterly his performance in Grenada did not live up to expectations and he was forced to retire in 1904 "having given way to drink" (Morris 1904). Broadway was offered a transfer to St. Vincent to take charge of the Agricultural School but he refused, preferring to remain in Grenada supplying dried specimens to overseas herbaria and running his own nursery. He departed from Grenada in 1906 and returned to Trinidad where for one year he employed himself by selling dried specimens to botanical institutions whenever he got orders.

Back Again

The year 1908 was a turning point for Agriculture in Trinidad. Hart was required to retire two years and four months before his time in July 1908, Broadway was reinstated in the Colonial Service and posted to the Botanic Station in Tobago as Acting Curator, and the Botanical Department was subsumed into a larger new Department of Agriculture with Professor P. Carmody as its first Director. Stationed in Tobago, the opportunities to collect extensively a hitherto underexploited flora was of great advantage to Broadway and distribution of plant material to herbaria abroad resumed. His supplies now

included mosses to Elisabeth Britton, a specialist in mosses of South America & The West Indies, who was attached to The New York Botanic Garden. While stationed in Tobago the Plant Protection Ordinance came into effect in December 1911 and the following diseases and pests were singled out for eradication – bud rot, stem bleeding disease of coconut and bird vine. A chief inspector was appointed along with four inspectors, among them Broadway, who tackled the problem in Tobago with great success. The Tobago era ended in 1915 and he was transferred back to Trinidad and given the additional post of Horticulturist and Assistant Botanist to W.G. Freeman, then Government botanist and Assistant Director of Agriculture. Wearing all these 'hats' Broadway was engaged fulltime in the field. Not only was he expected to control pests and diseases but to collect living plants such as ferns and orchids for the Botanic Garden as well as specimens for the herbaria. There is no doubt those duties served his interest well and allowed numerous forays into remote parts of the island with no corner left unexplored.

An ambitious project involving the United States National Herbarium, the Gray Herbarium and The New York Botanical Garden in a study of the flora and plant products of northern South America and adjacent islands brought Dr. N.L. Britton, Director-in-Chief of The New York Botanical Gardens, and his colleagues to Trinidad in the winters of 1920 and 1921. Among the local guides lending valuable assistance to the team was Broadway. Following Dr. Britton's visit, Broadway was jointly sponsored by the above-mentioned institutions to collect plant specimens in French Guyana (1921) and Venezuela (1922-1923) for their respective herbaria. An account of the French Guiana expedition was published (Journal of The New York Botanical Garden Vol. XXII, No 262, Oct. 1921) but no account of the Venezuelan trip has been located.

The Last Years

Broadway retired from the Colonial Service in Sept. 1923 and continued to reside in Trinidad. His involvement in the fields of natural history, horticulture, and agriculture never flagged. In 1924 he became secretary of the Horticulture Society and The Beekeepers' Association while still maintaining the sale of plants to overseas herbaria as a source of income which kept him on the alert for new plants. His expertise in horticulture extended to individuals and teachers in the care and management of school gardens and he was a judge for the annual award of The Agricultural Society Medal for the best school garden. Today, The W.E. Broadway Memorial Trophy is awarded for the best foliage plant exhibit at the annual flower show of The Trinidad & Tobago

Horticultural Society. (This Society was founded in 1915 with Broadway being one of the founding members).

Undoubtedly Broadway's botanical collections remain unmatched even today and "in terms of quality, quantity and range of specimens, Broadway was perhaps the most important collector of Trinidad and Tobago plants to date. Replicates of his specimens are lodged in quantity in more than twenty five foreign herbaria with especially long sets in large South American institutes, the British Museum and Kew, but Trinidad's herbarium (unfortunately) lacks much Broadway material" (Adams 1980).

Numerous new species of plants and a few animals which he collected bear his name, for example, *Gonolobus broadwayae*, a vine endemic to Trinidad that belongs in the family Asclepiadaceae, *Tococa broadwayi*, a shrub endemic to Tobago (Melastomataceae), *Vriesia broadwayi*, a bromeliad endemic to Trinidad and Tobago, *Marptusa broadwayi* (a spider) and *Napata broadwayi*, a ctenuchid moth (pers. comm. M.J.W. Cock).

Although not a prolific writer he did write a few articles throughout his career on various subjects – bromeliads, palms, cacti – and was a regular contributor to The Orchid Review on local orchids. Ironically, he never participated in the compilation of the local Flora published in 1928 in which the majority of records cited were based on his collections.

Much is recorded about his civic-mindedness and dedication to duty for which he was honoured by King George V in 1934 as a Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (MBE) but his private life remains an enigma. A.T. Carr describes him as "an exceptionally fine man. Entirely unselfish in spirit, he was always ready to share his vast knowledge of the botany of the island with other interested persons. I shall never forget his joy at discovering a new species of moss in a drain in Oxford Street. He was regarded, and justifiably so, as a walking encyclopedia on the botany of these parts..."

His sudden death on 1 January, 1935 came as a shock to his friends and associates here and abroad. Society members met to pay tribute to his outstanding achievements and deliberated on a suitable memorial. Members of The Trinidad Field Naturalists' Club decided on a tombstone while "Mr. Williams at the Botanic Gardens was willing to acquire a collection of Broadway plants to be grown in some part of town where Mr. Broadway liked to frequent" (Trinidad Guardian 1935). Whether these plans materialized is uncertain. He was interred at the Lapeyrouse Cemetery predeceased by his wife a year earlier. Elsie, his only daughter, a sister residing in England (Mrs. Theiz) and a nephew residing in England (Mr. Fogarty) were the only family members

recorded as attending the funeral and to date no extant relatives have been traced. His botanical legacy, however, lives on in many modern revisions and monographic works published for this region.

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- Morris, D. 1904. *Kew Miscellaneous Report (1875-1915) / Bk 172.*

• Guppy's discovery of the fish in Trinidad was in fact preceded by the discovery of the same fish in Venezuela. See "Agouti to Zandoli" in this issue – Ed.