



GARDENS OF THE DUTCH EAST INDIA COMPANY IN CAPE TOWN,  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

EWA DANKOWSKA, TADEUSZ BARANOWSKI

*E. Dankowska, T. Baranowski, Department of Plant Protection Methods, August Cieszkowski Agricultural University, Zgorzelecka 4, 60-198 Poznań, Poland, e-mail: kmor@post.pl*

(Received: May 23, 2007; Accepted: June 2, 2007)

**ABSTRACT.** The Garden of the Dutch East India Company in Cape Town is an important natural, educational object and a place of relaxation for the inhabitants and tourists. The authors of this presentation have attempted to describe, in an interesting way, the history and characteristics of the Garden as well as its special attractions for the visitors.

**KEY WORDS:**

INTRODUCTION

This paper is a continuation of our reviews of interesting and not very well known botanical gardens. Here, we present the Garden of the Dutch East India Company in Cape Town, Republic of South Africa. This area of green land and shade lying in the middle of a busy postcolonial town constitutes a part of the Garden established in the 17th century by the Dutch East India Company.

So far, the following publications referring to interesting botanical gardens have appeared: "Cactus Garden in Lanzarote (Canary Islands)" (BARANOWSKI and DANKOWSKA 1999); "Botanical Garden La Orotava on Tenerife (Canary Islands)" (BARANOWSKI 1999); "Kibbuc Ein Gedi (Israel) – International Botanical Garden" (DANKOWSKA and BARANOWSKI 2000); "Pearl of the Crown Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam Botanical Garden Pamplemousses – Mauritius" (DANKOWSKA and BARANOWSKI 2005); "Plant Curiosities from Mauritius" (BARANOWSKI and DANKOWSKA 2006).

SOME HISTORICAL DATA

Republic of South Africa occupies southern part of the African continent. When a Portuguese sailor who was hoping to find a sea road to India discovered by chance the Cape of Good Hope, vast areas of the present Republic of South Africa were uninhabited. On the 6th of April 1652, there arrived to the Cape country, the first Dutch colonists under the leadership of Jan van Riebeeck, who were called the Boers; today they are referred to as Afrikaners. The first colonists established a town called Cape Town. It was situated amphitheatrically at the foot of the Table Mountain. This mountain is a worldwide known land mark rising 1087 meter above the sea level. Rains falling on the Table Mountain ap-

pear in the valley in the form of streams. These streams were an important factor attracting people to that area since the Stone Age. Cape Town was established by the Dutch East India Company as a food providing station for the Company's ships during their cruises to and from their Dutch possessions in Asia. This place was selected because of its localization in a bay making it a tranquil place sheltered against strong winds, because the sea around Cape Town enjoyed a bad fame among sailors who called it the Storm Cape. Cape Town is the oldest European town in South Africa.

ORIGIN OF THE GARDEN

Jan van Riebeeck brought from Holland to the Cape of Good Hope a gardener Handrick Boom and immediately after their arrival, he ordered to cultivate the soil to produce fresh vegetables and fruits. The first attempts were not successful because the seasons of the year were different there than those on the northern hemisphere and strong winds destroyed the crops. Slowly and with great patience, gradual improvements were introduced, e.g. canals were dug to lead water to the streams. Those canals decided about the form of the first roads giving in effect a network of routes and in many cases, they were responsible for the spatial planning of the town centre.

At the end of the 17th century, the Garden was extended as far as the Table Valley. Less fertile soils between the Castle and the present Wale Street were taken for different public and private purposes. New constructions included a town quarter called the Slave Lodge, a church, a cemetery and a hospital for sick sailors built at the crossing of Adderley and Wale Streets vis-à-vis the Slave Lodge. Areas lying on both sides of the Company's Garden, from Hatfield Street to Queen Victoria Street were designed for private purposes. In 1693, Hendricks

Oldenland took over the position of the head gardener and he planned new pathways and fountains. In 1700, in the upper part of the Garden, an aviary was installed.

In mid-18th century, the Garden became famous. Admiration was evoked by its decorative values. At the same time, the Garden was a place where plants were intensely reproduced and exported to Holland. This was done under the leadership of the gardener Andreas Aule. Bulbs and seedlings of plants were exported to the increasingly lucrative European markets. In Europe, the growing of geranium and its hybrids, as well as other cape plants dates back to about that period. At the end of the 18th century, the Dutch East India Company was in debts and the Garden became neglected. In the years 1795-1803, the Cape started to be occupied by the British and they stopped to invest in the Garden, so its condition kept deteriorating. The English governor Yonge tried to take over the Garden as his private possession. However, in result of a violent protest, his plans failed and the traditions of public access to the Garden remained to the present days.

The return of the Garden to the Dutch Batavian Republic in 1803 reactivated its splendors. The Central Government Avenue was extended to Rotanga Street where it remains until present days connected with the impressive Nelson Gate. Funds were also found for the construction of the ornamental gateways called the Lion Gateways leading to the aviary and the paddocks.

In 1806, the British returned again to the Cape and they started to assign part of the Garden terrains to the construction of important buildings. In this way, in 1827, St. George's Cathedra was erected, then, in 1838, in the place of the aviary, South African College was built, in 1860, the Public Library, in 1879, the Houses of Parliament and then, the South African Museum were built. It is believed that the Museum was erected in the most ornamental part of the Garden, being the last investment on that area. In 1892, the Garden was transferred to the municipal authorities and it remains in their hands until present days.

#### BOTANICAL GARDEN

The public had always supported the idea of a public garden. In 1848, the lower part of the Garden was turned over to public use. It was called the Botanical Garden and it included a great variety of local and exotic plants, shrubs and trees. All trees were marked with informatory plates containing their common and scientific names and their place of origin. James McGibbon, the head gardener and most probably also the designer of the garden created a Dutch geometry characterized by straight pathways imposed on the Dutch garden grid, with a sun-dial and fountain at the cross-roads. He extended the lawns to the borders of the pathways, he planted picturesque clusters of shrubs with imposing trees among them and he made a sinuous pathway around the Garden. A subtle but "powerful" change took place in the 1920-ies when many old trees were removed and, therefore, in many places, colourful flower-beds can be planted several times during the year. The Public Botanical Garden is a classical one due to its landscape and

basically it does not differ from that shown in the map of 1862.

The construction of the "Delville Wood Memorial" in the 1920-ies required a redesigning of one part of the Garden. Actually, it has a wide axis with South African National Gallery at its end.

At present, the Garden is covered by a special protection by the administrative authorities who ordered the elaboration of a policy aiming to protect all values of the Garden. The Garden is also a place of relax and recreation for the inhabitants and tourists (Phot. 1, 2).



PHOT. 1. Place of repose (photo by T. Baranowski)



PHOT. 2. Rest site at the foot of Table Mountain (photo by T. Baranowski)

#### TOURING AROUND THE GARDEN

We enter the Garden through the Gateways erected in 1911 (Phot. 3, 4). A diagonal pathway is connected with the central pathway of the Garden. We follow the sinuous way to the right and we arrive to the well and pump from 1842. The well was built as a sediment trap using bricks and shale, so that groundwater can percolate. Presently, the well is lifted by the roots of an oak growing in it.

In the central place of the present Garden, there is the statue of Cecil Rhodes (1853-1906). He was a sickly son of an English pastor and at the age of 18 he was sent to South Africa for the purpose of improving his health. In 1871, in the surroundings of Kimberley where





PHOT. 3. Map of Botanical Garden in Cape Town (photo by T. Baranowski)



PHOT. 4. Entrance gate to Botanical Garden (photo by T. Baranowski)

he stayed at that time, a **diamond mine was uncovered**. Cecil Rhodes, who became 19 years old at that time, got involved in that industry and he established a Company De Bors Consolidated Mines. After twenty years, he became the richest man in Africa and he kept in his hands the whole diamond mining industry. He saw in his imagination the British domination on that area from the Cape of Good Hope to Cairo. This idea is expressed by his statue which conveys the message to the newcomers: "Your hinterland is there" (Phot. 5). Although Rhodes and his imperialism are questioned today, his lasting gifts to South Africa remain. They are: Groote Schuur, the landscape including the eastern slope of Table Mountain and the Rhodes Scholarship which permits the best students to study at Oxford University.

A great attraction of the Garden is the "Rose Garden" established about 1658 (Phot. 6). One year later, the first rose was picked in the garden. It was probably a **hybrid** of *Rosa contifolis* and *Rosa alba*. For a long time, roses were the visiting-cards of the Garden because during the Dutch administration on the Cape, from roses grown there, rose water was produced and exported worldwide. The present arrangement of the "Rose Garden" was designed in 1929. The colours of the roses were selected according to the colours of a rainbow. In the central part of the rose bed, there is a small red ribbon memorial to those who have died of AIDS and HIV-related disease.



PHOT. 5. Statue of Cecil Rhodes (photo by T. Baranowski)

#### THE MOST INTERESTING PLANTS OF THE GARDEN

**Saffron pear tree**, *Pyrus communis* cv. Saffron (*Rosaceae* family). It is the oldest tree grown in South Africa. It is supposed that it might have been planted by Jan van Riebeeck after his settlement in those areas. Saffron pear tree is mentioned by many travellers. Because of its old age, the tree is protected by a fence. It still blossoms abundantly every spring (Phot. 7).

**African flame tree** (= African tulip), *Spathodea campanulata* (Pal.) (*Bignoniaceae* family) – evergreen tree covering by its reach the tropical and subtropical Africa. It reaches the height of 25 m. Brown-green velvet flower buds are gathered into top clusters. Flowers are big, asymmetric, scarlet to blood-red with yellow edges.





PHOT. 6. Rose Garden (photo by T. Baranowski)



PHOT. 7. Fenced "Saffron" pear tree (photo by T. Baranowski)

They supply nectar and they appear in spring and summer. Their leaves are very large, up to 45 cm long, each leaf consists of 9-19 leathery intensively green leaves. The fruits consist of a longitudinal bag breaking after maturity and seeds fall out of it. The fruit size can reach 20 cm. The fruits are toxic. These trees are used as alley trees. They grow very quickly on fertile and penetrable soils and they are very decorative (Phot. 8).



PHOT. 8. African flame tree – *Spathodea campanulata* (photo by T. Baranowski)

**Wild date tree** (= African date tree), *Phoenix reclinata* (Jacq.) (*Palmales* order). It is a typical South-African palm-tree reaching 10 m height. It produces curved logs from the middle of a cluster. Its fruits are small, red or yellow; for the indigenous people they are a substitute of coffee. The fruits are also a delicacy for monkeys (Phot. 9).



PHOT. 9. Wild date palm – *Phoenix reclinata* (photo by T. Baranowski)

**New Zealand Christmas tree**, *Metrosideros excelsa* (Banks ex Gaert) (*Myrtaceae* family). It originates from New Zealand where it blossoms in mid-summer, i.e. for Christmas taking place at that time in that country. Hence its common name is "Christmas tree". It has red leaves with long scarlet stamens. The tree is rich in nectar, it can reach 12 m height. Stems of these trees are short, silvery and picturesquely twisted (Phot. 10).



PHOT. 10. Twisted stem of New Zealand Christmas tree – *Metrosideros excelsa* (photo by T. Baranowski)



Already Joseph Banks, during Cook's voyages in 1769, called attention to the possibility of utilizing the stems of pohutukawa for ship building. Its wood is perfectly suited for arched or irregular elements such as hooks, ribs and the most important is that the wood of this tree is saturated with sea water and it is resistant to molluscs which destroy the construction elements of wooden ships, or the coastal poles. The Maori used pahutukawa sap for treating wounds and inflammations, while sucking of its phloem tooth ache mildened. This species is sensitive to frosts, but it tolerates acid rains and winds.

**Outeniqua yellow-wood**, *Podocarpus falcatus* (Thunb.) R. Br. ex Mirb. (*Podocarpaceae* family). It is a protected species. Because of a high value of its yellow wood, it was used as building material. In the south of the Cape and in the surroundings of Tsitsikamma, it reaches 60 m height. The oldest tree in Africa is more than 800 years old (Phot. 11).



PHOT. 11. Outeniqua yellow-wood – *Podocarpus falcatus* (photo by T. Baranowski)

**Norfolk Island pine**, *Araucaria heterophylla* (Franco) – (*A. excelsa*) (*Araucariaceae* family). It originates from Norfolk Island in the South Pacific Ocean, where it was discovered in 1773. It is a high evergreen tree with a verticillate very regular branching. It reaches 60 m height. Its needles are soft, up to 1.30 m long. Its cones are egg-shaped disintegrating after maturity, its seeds are without wings (Phot. 12).

**Moreton Bay chestnut**, *Castanospermum australe* (A. Cunn and C. Frasen ex Hook) (*Fabaceae* family). It originates from Australia where it was discovered in 1830 and it is called Black Bean. Its leaves are dark-green, odd-pinnate compound leaves. In spring or in early summer,



PHOT. 12. Norfolk Island pine – *Araucaria heterophylla* (photo by T. Baranowski)



PHOT. 13. Moreton Bay chestnut – *Castanospermum australe* (photo by T. Baranowski)

it produces big orange butterfly flowers. In that time, it is very decorative. In autumn, the plant creates pods, up to 18 cm long and inside the pods, there are 3-5 brown seeds reaching 5 cm width and 30 g weight. Fresh seeds are toxic (Phot. 13).

**Tree aloe**, *Aloe bainesii* (*A. barberae*) (*Liliaceae* family). The plant was found in forests on the eastern sea-coast of South Africa. It is the highest species of aloes reaching 18 m length and it is one of the few ones which have rose-orange pipe-like flowers gathered into clusters and set on long shoots of inflorescences of about 60 cm length (Phot. 14).





PHOT. 14. Tree aloe – *Aloe barberae* (photo by T. Baranowski)

#### REFERENCES

- BARANOWSKI T. (1999): Ogród Botaniczny „La Orotava” na Teneryfie (Wyspy Kanaryjskie). Biul. Ogród. Bot. 8: 87-90.
- BARANOWSKI T., DANKOWSKA E. (1999): Ogród kaktusowy na Lanzarote (Wyspy Kanaryjskie). Biul. Ogród. Bot. 8: 85-86.
- BARANOWSKI T., DANKOWSKA E. (2006): Ciekawostki roślinne z Mauritiusa. Pr. Inst. Zarządz. Inż. Roln. PWSZ Sulech. Kształt. Ter. Ziel. 1: 13-22.
- DANKOWSKA E., BARANOWSKI T. (2000): Kibbutz Ein Gedi (Izrael) – Międzynarodowy Ogród Botaniczny. Roczn. AR Pozn. 322, Bot. 3: 95-99.
- DANKOWSKA E., BARANOWSKI T. (2005): Pearl in the crown Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam Botanic Garden Pampelmousses – Mauritius. Roczn. AR Pozn. 372, Bot.-Stec. 8: 43-53.
- HARRIS S., PISTORIUS P. (2005): Company’s Garden Self-guided Walk. Dominique Le Rouy. City of Cape Town.
- VAN WYK P. (2001): Trees of Southern Africa. Struik Publishers, Cornelis Struik House, Cape Town.

For citation: Dankowska E., Baranowski T. (2007): Gardens of the Dutch East India Company in Cape Town, Republic of South Africa. Roczn. AR Pozn. 386, Bot.-Stec. 11: 171-176.