



# THE BROTHERS OF LA SALLE AND CARIBBEAN BOTANY

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**ABOVE (L-R)**  
Jacques Rousseau and Brother Marie-Victorin in one the hammocks of Florida,  
January 1933. Jacques Rousseau (1905–1970) became Director of Montreal  
Botanic Garden when Brother Marie-Victorin died in 1944.  
Courtesy of the Université de Montréal, Division de la gestion de document et des archives.



#### ABOVE (L-R)

From left to right: Brother Néstor María, Dr. Thomas Barbour, Dr. David Fairchild, and Brother León at the main courtyard entrance of the La Salle school at El Vedado, Havana. February 23, 1935.

Courtesy of the Fairchild Botanic Garden Archives.

Main courtyard entrance of the La Salle school at El Vedado, Havana, May, 2015.

Courtesy of Brother Agustín Enciso Archives and Library.



Seal of the La Salle Brothers

The Brothers of La Salle is a Catholic teaching order that focuses on education from elementary to university levels and reaches more than one million students worldwide. Traditionally, this order has promoted natural history studies, and they currently run museums and research journals in this field.

Three La Salle brothers were among the most important figures engaged in botanical research in the Caribbean Islands. Our current historical research activities center on the botanical contributions made by these three outstanding naturalists. Our studies have been mostly based on documents and photos housed in the archives of Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden and of the University of Montreal in Québec, Canada.

Two of these brothers, Brother León (Joseph Sylvestre Sauget, 1871–1955) and Brother Alain (Henri Alain Liogier, 1916–2009), were born in France but worked in the La Salle

school located in the neighborhood known as El Vedado in Havana, Cuba. They dominated the botanical studies of this island in the first half of the 20th century. The La Salle Brothers were driven out of Cuba in 1961 shortly after the revolution that overthrew Fulgencio Batista. One of us (J. Garrigó) studied in one of La Salle schools in Havana and met these two great naturalists. Brothers León and Alain produced the first comprehensive Flora of Cuba (five volumes and one supplement published between 1947 and 1969).

After Brother Alain left Cuba, he worked for the National Botanic Garden of the Dominican Republic and for the Botanic Garden of the University of Puerto Rico. Indeed the fifth volume of his Flora de Cuba was published in Puerto Rico. Brother Alain became one the most important and knowledgeable plant taxonomists in the botanical history of the West Indies. He published the latest floras for the islands of Hispaniola (9 volumes, between 1981



and 2000) and Puerto Rico (five volumes, between 1985 and 1997 and a synopsis in 1982–2000).

The third La Salle Brother, Brother Marie-Victorin (Conrad Kirouac, 1885–1944), was from Canada. He was the founder of the Montreal Botanic Garden and had an extraordinary friendship with Brother León. Brother Marie-Victorin visited Cuba seven times and wrote three books coauthored with Brother León about his botanical expeditions to this island. Two other brothers from France need to be mentioned as they also made contributions to the study of the Cuban flora: Brother Clemente (Augustin Clement Teteau Monet, 1878–1951), and Brother Hioram Juan (Jean Frange Lagorge, 1875–1936). Brother Clemente amassed an extraordinary collection of Cuban butterflies and also had a great interest in land-snails. He also specialized in ferns. Brother Hioram Juan mostly studied mosses and lichens. Brother León and Brother Hioram Juan were part of the initial group of La Salle Brothers who came to Cuba in 1905. They moved from France, as many of La Salle schools were closed down in that country in 1904 as a result of secularization laws.

David Fairchild had strong ties with Cuba, particularly through the Botanic Garden of La Soledad (located near Cienfuegos and owned by Harvard University). This garden had Fairchild's long-time friend Prof. Thomas Barbour (1884–1946) as its custodian. As a result of this friendship, Fairchild travelled to Cuba at least three times. In one of these trips (in February 1939), he came across the brothers Marie-Victorin and León at La Soledad. Barbour and the famous American tropical botanist Prof. Elmer Drew Merrill (1876–1956) were also in this garden with Fairchild. Merrill was then the Administrator of the Botanical Collections of Harvard University and the Director of the Arnold Arboretum. One of the photos found in the Garden archives was taken in February 1935 and shows Brother León with David Fairchild, Thomas Barbour, and Brother Néstor María. The latter was the principal of the El Vedado school.

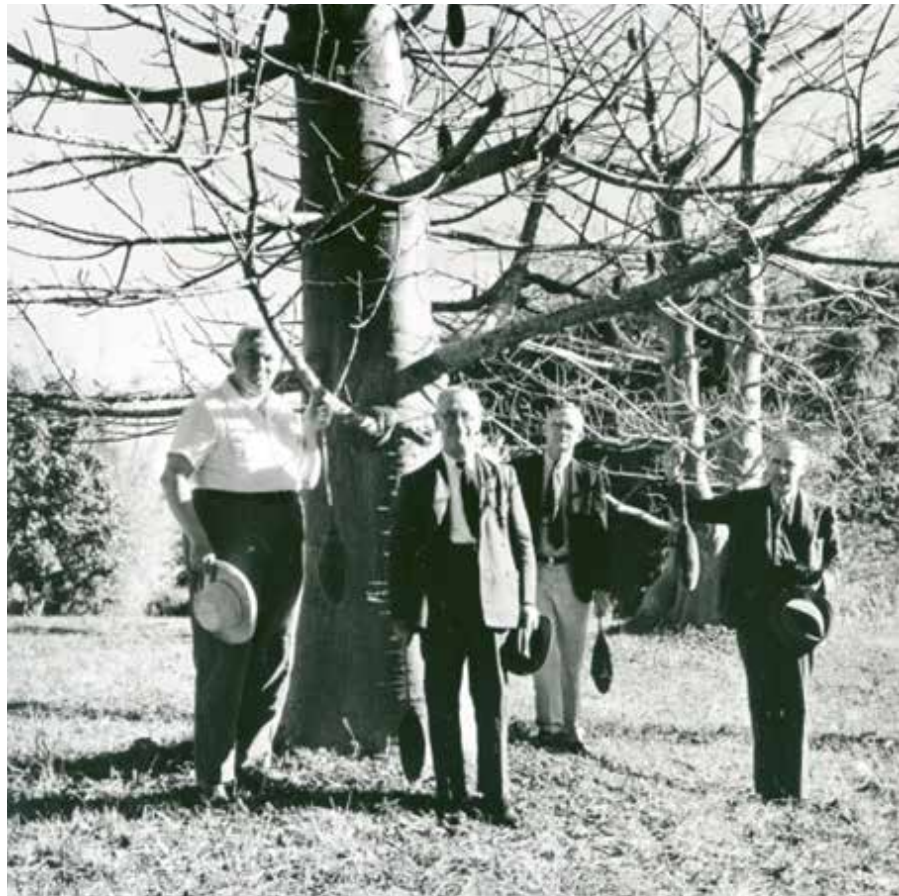
In Fairchild's pocket diary recording for his 1939 trip to Cuba, we discovered an entry in which he wrote the postal address of Brother Marie-Victorin in Montreal. The Garden's archives have a total of 13 letters sent by Brother León to Fairchild dating from April



**ABOVE**  
Stamp of Brother Marie-Victorin issue by the Canada Post in 1981.

**RIGHT (L-R)**  
Dr. Thomas Barbour, Brother León, Dr. Elmer D. Merrill and Brother Marie-Victorin standing near a baobab tree (*Adansonia digitata*) at La Soledad Botanic Garden, Cienfuegos, Cuba. February 19, 1939.

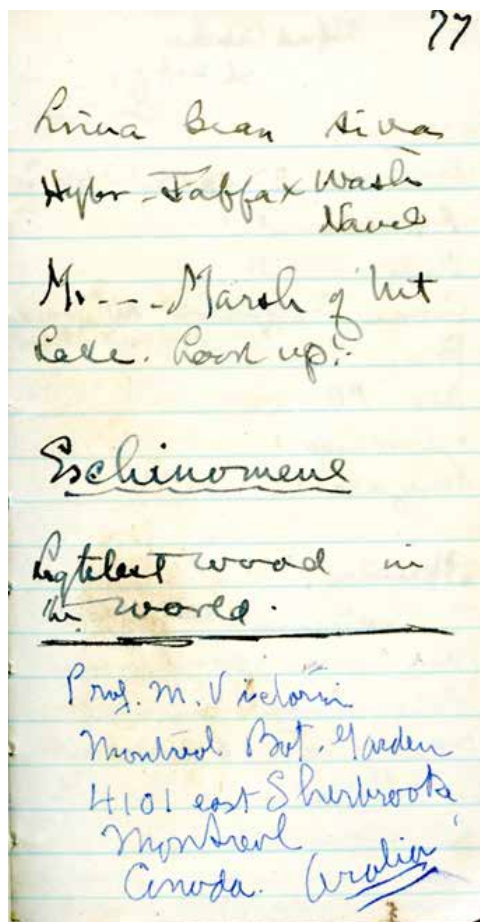
Courtesy of the Archives and Library of Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden.




Page from the pocket diary of Dr. David Fairchild for his 1939 trip to Cuba; it shows the address of Brother Marie-Victorin.

Courtesy of the Archives and Library of Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden.

Portrait of Brother Alain as published by J.A. Conde (Historia de la Botánica en Cuba. 1958)



(December 1937–January 1938), when he travelled to both Haiti and the Dominican Republic. In Florida and these islands, he took hundreds of photos that were never published. In addition, the archives have a condolence letter sent by Fairchild to Jules Brunel (1905–1986), Acting Director of the Botany Institute of the University of Montreal after the sudden death of Brother Marie-Victorin in a tragic car accident in Canada.

Starting in 2015, the authors of this article began developing several research projects focusing on the archives of Marie-Victorin located at the University of Montreal. Led by one of us (Santiago-Valentín), we investigated the trip that Brother Marie-Victorin made to Puerto Rico, and the results of this research have recently been published in the Revista del Jardín Botánico Nacional, Cuba. With the support of the University of Montreal, the Kimberly Green Latin American and Caribbean Center from Florida International University (FIU), and the College of Arts and Sciences of FIU, two of us (Francisco-Ortega and André) have made our first research trips to Montreal to study part of this material. Our research also involves undergraduate students from FIU. 

1935 to February 1951, but it seems that David Fairchild did not exchange any correspondence with Brothers Alain and Marie-Victorin. The herbarium of the La Salle Brothers is currently located at the Instituto de Ecología y Sistemática in Havana. This research center houses the historical herbaria of the country.

Brother Marie-Victorin also made trips to the Dominican Republic (in January 1938), Haiti (in December 1937–January 1938, and Spring 1942), Florida (at least two trips in January 1933 and in 1937), Jamaica and Trinidad (both in April 1941), and Puerto Rico (in May 1942). We have found an unpublished travelogue from Marie-Victorin's first visit to Hispaniola

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Read more about the La Salle Brothers and Dr. David Fairchild at [www.fairchildgarden.org/Botanists-in-Cuba](http://www.fairchildgarden.org/Botanists-in-Cuba)