Dr. David Fairchild’s career as a field botanist led him to collect plants from all over the tropics. During these plant-hunting expeditions, he met professional botanists and plant-oriented aficionados, many of whom became lifelong friends. Fairchild often conducted his Caribbean Islands botanical activities at the Atkins Institution of the Arnold Arboretum, Soledad in Cienfuegos, Cuba (also known as La Soledad Botanic Garden). After the Cuban revolution of 1959, the Cuban government appropriated this site. It is currently the Jardín Botánico de Cienfuegos.

In February 1939, Fairchild met Brother Marie-Victorin (Joseph Louis Conrad Kirouac, 1885–1944) at the Atkins Institution. Brother Marie-Victorin was a member of the Catholic congregation of La Salle, or Brothers of the Christian Schools. Christian Schools. Founder of the Montreal Botanical Garden, he was one of the most important figures in the botanical history of both Canada and Cuba. Brother Marie-Victorin visited Cuba seven times between 1938 and 1944. His documents, photos and manuscripts are archived at the University of Montreal. During the last three years, author Dr. Javier Francisco-Ortega has been researching Brother Marie-Victorin’s documents at these archives, with support from Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden and three academic units of Florida International University: the College of Arts, Sciences, and Education; the Kimberly Green Latin American and Caribbean Center; and the International Center for Tropical Botany.

On March 7, 1939, a few days after Brother Marie-Victorin met Fairchild at the Atkins Institution, he left Cuba for Key West, continuing on to Montreal, where he arrived on March 15. As he drove to Canada via Miami, he visited Fairchild at his home at The Kampong in Coconut Grove. In March 2017, Francisco-Ortega found evidence of this visit in the University of Montreal’s archives: four color glass slides (2-inch by 2-inch Kodachrome) of Dr. Fairchild at The Kampong. To the best of our knowledge, these are the earliest-known color photographs of Dr. Fairchild. The Kodachrome system had been commercially released in 1935, and made color photography a popular alternative to black-and-white photography. Some of the four discovered photos are the earliest color photos of Dr. David Fairchild.

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reproduced for the first time in this article and as an online supplementary document available at www.fairchildgarden.org/Research-Publications.

The discovery of these historical photographs in Montreal encouraged co-author Larry Schokman to examine other photographs and documents of Dr. Fairchild from the same period. These also include 2-inch by 2-inch Kodachrome glass slides of the Cheng Ho Expedition (which went to Indonesia’s Molucca Islands and was sponsored by Ann Archbold) discovered in 1974 in a corner of the attic of the Fairchild/Sweeney House at The Kampong, as the house was being cleared for renovations. These old glass slides, dated to 1939-1940s, were converted to regular slides and later digitized for a presentation titled, “The Kampong—Historical and Horticultural,” delivered at The Kampong in 2011. The colors in these old Kodachrome slides are still excellent, despite the fact that they had been tucked away in that hot, humid attic for more than a quarter of a century. The color images provide a new glimpse into plant exploration in pre-World War II Southeast Asia. They complement the thousands of black-and-white photos and documents from the same time period that are stored in the Garden’s archives. One of the color photos (dated 1947) from The Kampong collection is also shown in this article.

Fairchild documented his travels and plant collections during the Cheng Ho Expedition in his book, “Garden Islands of the Great East” (1943). His travels continue to fascinate us. In 1994, Schokman and Miami-Dade College Professor Dr. Monroe Birdsey spent six weeks “Following the footsteps of David Fairchild—from Bali to Borneo” (Kampong Notes, vol. 21, issue 4, February 15, 1996). This trip was sponsored by Wallace Coulter and The Batchelor Foundation. In 2016, Dr. Carl Lewis, the Garden’s director, led a group of plant enthusiasts—including The Kampong’s current director, Craig Morell—to the Molucca Islands (known at the time of the Cheng Ho Expedition as the Spice Islands), and followed the same route taken by the Cheng Ho. You can read more about their trip in The Tropical Garden, vol. 72, issue 1 from 2017, or online at fairchildgarden.org.

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