Between 1931 and 1933, Dr. David Fairchild made two extensive trips to the Caribbean Islands. These were the last voyages that he made on Utowana, a famous research yacht that was owned by philanthropist and businessman Allison V. Armour. Armour was a long-time friend of Dr. Fairchild who also joined these two Caribbean expeditions. The first voyage (1931–1932) included Panama. The second one (1933) also targeted the British and Dutch Guyanas. Haiti was explored during both voyages.

Through our research, we have catalogued and interpreted all of the documents and photographs found in the Garden archive and library pertinent to Fairchild’s visits to Haiti. Furthermore, we have found relevant documents in the U.S. National Archives and in the U.S. National Agriculture Library Special Collections (both in Maryland) that provide extra details about these trips. Unfortunately, Dr. Fairchild did not publish any account about these visits, and to reconstruct his itineraries and accomplishments we needed to rely mostly on archival research.

Fairchild’s first stay in Haiti occurred during March 26–27, 1932, during his return trip to Miami, en route from Guantanamo, Cuba, to the Bahamas. Expedition members included USDA scientists Harold Loomis...
and Pamelon Howard Dorsett; David Fairchild’s wife and daughter; and Leonard R. Toy of the Florida State Experimental Station at Homestead. This short visit focused on northern Haiti, where Utowana called at the port of Cap-Haïtien. In the U.S. National Archives, we located Dorsett’s travelogue, which provided us with insights about this visit. Expedition members were hosted by F. C. Barker, who was a USDA agriculturist working on a major program focused on the rubber tree. Dorsett’s travelogue has 27 photographs from Haiti, five of which are also found in the Garden archives. All told, the Garden’s archives contain 21 photos taken by Dr. Fairchild during this visit. The expedition resulted in 13 plant samples and four herbarium specimens for the USDA collections and the U.S. National Herbarium (Smithsonian Institution), respectively. During this short stay, Fairchild and his colleagues visited two of the most relevant historical sites in Haiti: the Citadelle Laferrière fortress and the palace of Sans-Souci. Both buildings were made under the rule of King Henri Christophe—one of the leaders of Haitian independence. These buildings have received international recognition as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Dr. Fairchild’s second visit to Haiti took place between February 28 and March 4, 1933, and it focused on Port-au-Prince and Jérémie. Other members of this expedition included Dorsett and two zoologists from Harvard University: herpetologist Thomas Barbour and ornithologist James C. Greenway. On this visit, Utowana called first at Port-au-Prince and subsequently Jérémie, en route from the Bahamas to Jamaica and Panama.

The Garden’s archives contain 30 photos taken in Haiti by Fairchild during this second visit. He collected a total of 15 accessions for the USDA, and we have located nine herbarium specimens—most of them in the U.S. National Herbarium. In addition, Fairchild’s unpublished travelogue for this voyage devotes two pages to Haiti. The people he met during this second visit included F. C. Barker (who hosted Fairchild during his first visit to Haiti) and Henry D. Barker (author, with William S. Dardeau, of the first comprehensive flora of Haiti). Fairchild’s visit happened during carnival, and he took photos of this festival of parades. During this visit, the USDA had a very active presence in Haiti, and Fairchild met with scientists from the department who were working on cotton and banana diseases. We also know that Barker worked primarily with the rubber tree, as Haiti and the U.S. were interested in developing this as a cash crop to target U.S. markets.