

For Immediate Release
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Britton's Botanical Empire

New Scholarly Book Describes the Origins of The New York Botanical Garden And its Role Within History of American Science, 1888–1929

Britton's Botanical Empire: The New York Botanical Garden and American Botany, 1888–1929 describes the conception and founding of The New York Botanical Garden through its early formative years from the 1890s up until the Great Depression. Positioned within the context of the development of New York City and of botanical science, it chronicles an important era for American science and cultural institutions. This new 318-page book by former Rutgers University research historian Peter Mickulas has been published by The New York Botanical Garden Press.

Britton's Botanical Empire is volume 94 of the *Memoirs of The New York Botanical Garden*, a series published since 1900. The *Memoirs* include comprehensive, original research papers focusing on taxonomy and floristics with an emphasis on New World plants.

In the 1890s botanist Nathaniel Lord Britton united New York City's private Gilded Age wealth with the expertise of its increasingly well-respected scientific community in order to realize his vision of a world-class botanical research institution situated within the landscaped confines of a newly annexed Bronx park. The resulting New York Botanical Garden was constructed, in part, with municipal funds, as a grand and prestigious outdoor urban space for the enjoyment and education of a wide citizen base. Britton's foremost concern, however, was the establishment of a New York venue for botanical science.

Convinced of the necessity of scientific independence from European centers of knowledge, Britton used the Botanical Garden to create a decidedly American place for the practice of New World botany by mounting a series of expeditions that catalogued the flora of the Western Hemisphere, most significantly the US colony of Puerto Rico. Britton sought to position the Garden to take advantage of the emerging philanthropic support of practical science at that time; in doing so, he emphasized that the needs of a scientific institution should take precedence over those of a picturesque public park. Britton's success in establishing the Garden illustrates the ways in which taxonomic botany remained a priority among scientific endeavors into the twentieth century and beyond. Today, thanks to this auspicious beginning, The New York Botanical Garden ranks among the most important institutions in New York City as well as the botanical world.

Dr. Scott A. Mori, the Nathaniel Lord Britton Curator of Botany at the Botanical Garden, comments, "Above all, Nathaniel Lord Britton and his wife Elizabeth Knight Britton were plant scientists. In addition to making the Botanical Garden a place to appreciate the beauty of plants and to learn about them, they established one of the world's leading research facilities for the study of plants. I am privileged to have been able to make use of these facilities in my research on tropical plants over the 33 years that I have been associated with the Garden and thankful that the Brittons had botanical research as part of the vision they had for the magnificent garden they established for the people of New York City as well as for the entire world."

Britton's Botanical Empire, by Peter Mickulas. *Memoirs of The New York Botanical Garden*, volume 94. The New York Botanical Garden Press, 2007. 318 pages, hardbound, \$45 per copy, available online at www.nybgpress.org and at the Botanical Garden's Shop in the Garden.

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About the author

Peter Mickulas received his Ph.D. in history at Rutgers University, where he also served as an Assistant Research Professor. He was an assistant editor of the Encyclopedia of New Jersey (Rutgers University Press, 2004), and contributed numerous articles to that publication. Author of several articles and reviews on the history of gardens and botany, he is also book review editor of H-New Jersey, an online resource for researchers in the history of the state. He currently serves as Senior Research Associate at the New Jersey Historical Commission, a division of the New Jersey Department of State, in Trenton. He lives with his wife and son in Highland Park, New Jersey.

About The New York Botanical Garden Press

The New York Botanical Garden Press (www.nybgpress.org) has one of the largest publishing programs of any independent botanical garden in the world and provides a means for communication of research carried out by scientists at The New York Botanical Garden and elsewhere. Begun in 1896, the program focuses on advances in knowledge about the classification, utilization, and conservation of plant life.

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The New York Botanical Garden is a museum of plants located at Bronx River Parkway (Exit 7W) and Fordham Road. It is easy to reach by Metro-North Railroad or subway. For more information, please call 718.817.8700 or visit our Web site at www.nybg.org

The New York Botanical Garden is located on property owned in full by the City of New York, and its operation is made possible in part by public funds provided through the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs. A portion of the Garden's general operating funds is provided by The New York City Council and The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. The Bronx Borough President and Bronx elected representatives in the City Council and State Legislature provide leadership funding.

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