

The Honble
Sir T. S. Raffles, Kt.
Lieut. Govr. of Sumatra,
etc., etc., etc.

Honble Sir,

I request your indulgent attention while I take the liberty of submitting for your consideration some ideas, which have occurred to me relative to the expediency of establishing a Botanic and Experimental Garden on this Island.

It would perhaps be impossible to picture to the mind a situation better calculated in every respect to accomplish the ends of such an institution than that, which Singapore represents in reality, placed under circumstances the most favourable for indigenous as well as foreign vegetation and forming part of the richest archipelago in the world, its soil yielding to none in fertility, its climate not exceeded by any in uniformity, mildness and salubrity. It abounds in an endless variety of plants equally interesting to the botanist, the agriculturist and the gardener, with unrivalled facilities and opportunities of disseminating these treasures and exchanging them for others. To form a just estimate of natural curiosities would require the labours at least of some years ...

Fortunately the researches of barely a few weeks, instituted by my only predecessor in this interesting field and amply verified by my own personal observations are more than adequate to exemplify what has been advanced above, both as to the wonderful resources of the Island and the ease with which they might

[Singapore November 1822]

My dear Wallich

I enclose for your perusal the Draft of my official Letter to Bengal on the subject of the Garden - I require another Letter from you to complete the Enclosures; it is necessarily stiff and cold but enthusiasm will not always succeed with such grave Authorities - Some caution is therefore necessary.

Shall we not see you to Breakfast - & Dinner tomorrow.

Yrs v sy
T S Raffles

To Nathaniel Wallich Esq
& ^{ca} & ^{ca}
Superintendent of the Botanic Garden

Sir,

I have to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 2nd Ins submitting for my consideration the advantage of establishing a Botanic and experimental Garden at this Settlement. Situated as Singapore is, in the very heart of the Malayan Archipelago and midway between India China and New Holland it is hardly possible to conceive a position more admirably calculated for such an establishment as your active zeal in the cause of Science has prompted you to suggest. —

The advantages are obvious and I rejoice that I am enabled to avail myself of your superior genius and experience in laying down a Plan for its' commencement. —

be still further augmented. Here may I hope to be forgiven while I indulge a few moments in rendering a feeble tribute of respect to the memory of a departed friend ...

In this view alone the proposed establishment would deservedly claim every attention which could be bestowed on it by a liberal Government, independent of the numerous other advantages which it would possess in common with all similar institutions and which it would be perfectly unnecessary to take up your valuable time in enumerating here. It will be presently seen, however, that there are considerations of an agricultural and commercial nature of such importance to this most flourishing settlement as to render an experimental garden an object of no common interest to its prosperity. I allude to a vast number of trees, constituting the bulk of these primeval forests, which fully deserve the trial of an extensive cultivation. Among them there are many, which yield timber fit for ship and house buildings and for all purposes of carpentry and joinery; if the Teak is not among their number, others will be found, so closely resembling it in its principal features, as to be little inferior to that celebrated wood. Indeed I have no hesitation in asserting that the spontaneous productions of the Island would afford abundance of every material for the construction of Ships of every description and size, and that the Teak, Sisso, mahogany, Bamboo and a great variety of others, might with the fairest prospects of success be introduced and cultivated here.

The experiments which have already been made by the Resident, Lieut. Col. Farquhar,

The Plan must necessarily be limited by the means afforded for the support of such an Establishment and in the present circumstances of the Settlement I do not feel myself justified in holding out to you a larger Sum than 60 Dollars as a donation in the first instance for the purpose of enclosing and laying out the ground in such manner as you may think proper. —

A Grant of the Ground shall be made out in the name of Nathaniel Wallich and his successors in the superintendence of the Company's Botanic Establishments under the Bengal Presidency and in submitting the same for the information of the Most [Noble] Governor General in Council I shall have great satisfaction in conveying to that Authority the very high opinion which I entertain of your Botanic researches in the Eastern Archipelago and of the advantageous results which may be contemplated by the formulation of so rational and useful an Establishment under such favorable auspices. —

to whose unbounded hospitality and most cordial cooperation I am indebted for whatever success has hitherto attended my enquiries on the Island abundantly prove, that the Clove and Nutmeg thrive here uncommonly well ... In fact there are neither mountains, ravines, ferocious animals, or any other impediments in the way of cultivating these valuable trees; on the contrary the frequent hills which lie scattered over the whole of the Island, in one of them, probably exceeding 150 feet in perpendicular height, present the most advantageous situation for their growth. How well the Pepper, Gambier, even the Sugar-cane succeed is obvious from the number of their flourishing plantations, and that the best cotton in the world, the Pernambuco sort, thrives luxuriantly may be seen from the individuals that have been raised from seeds, imported by yourself a few years ago at the very commencement of the Colony. The Coffee shrub promises to succeed as well here as it does in Java; even Tea grows freely and seems to lose nothing in luxuriance of flower and fruit by the change from its natural climates. Similar observations apply to a vast number of Malayan and exotic fruits and vegetables cereal grains and other objects of husbandry and horticulture, which offer themselves as well deserving of a judicious and efficient trial. In short wherever the eyes are turned, we behold a most enchanting scene of nature bountiful almost without a parallel and holding out unfailing reward and success to every one, who may choose to draw on her riches.

With reference to these facts and deeply impressed with the conviction, that the cause of science and the arts will always continue to

With this understanding you will be pleased to select the most advantageous Site which offers for the purpose keeping in view the advantage of the Establishment being as near the Town and the intended residence of the Chief Authority as circumstances admit and the propriety of defining the Boundaries with exactness. The spot already occupied as a Government Garden offers considerable advantages with reference to the whole of the Hill having been reserved for the accommodation of the Chief Authority except in as far as it may hereafter be required for defences I am induced to suggest for your consideration the facility with which the proposed Establishment may be formed in that direction by extending the present Garden so as to include as much ground as may be required [U]nder this arrangement the Garden might include the Eastern side of the Hill and extend as far as the Fresh Water Stream or the road leading to Bukit Salegi; Northerly it might include any extent of ground required and towards the

derive the utmost support and encouragement from your enlightened Government I beg leave to recommend that a suitable piece of ground may be appropriated in the neighbourhood of the European town for the purposes of a botanic garden and for the experimental cultivation of the indigenous plants of Singapore and the adjacent Islands, as well as of such other of foreign growth, as it might be desirable to submit to a skilful trial, previous to encouraging their general introduction.

The expenses of such a garden would, I imagine, be moderate; that they would in the event be infinitely compensated by the beneficial results, which the public at large would derive from its influence, I am certain. They would be limited ... to the support of an efficient establishment and to a few monthly contingencies, and might be defrayed by a number of spice trees expressly cultivated for that purpose. I am confident that the Supreme Government would willingly authorize my supplying some botanical apprentices and a couple of experienced gardeners from the Honble Company's botanic garden at Calcutta and finally I should feel the highest pride and satisfaction in being honored with the general superintendence of an institution which promises to prove so ornamental and so beneficial to this settlement.

I have the honor to be
Honble Sir,
Your Most Obedient and Humble Servant,
(Signed) N. Wallich. M. & PH.D.
Supt. Bot. Garden, Calcutta
Singapore, 2nd November. 1822.

Sea the front might be formed by a handsome railing at the distance of 20 or 30 feet from the Cantonment Road which runs from the Water Course to the small Bridge. —

Within this space the Establishment would have the advantage of Hill and Dale of level and swampy ground as well as of a copious perennial stream of water. In defining the Boundaries and laying out the ground on this or any other more advantageous spot that you may fix upon you will be assisted by the Assistant Engineer who has been directed to attend to your requisitions whenever called upon. —

Allow me to express my obligation to you ...

I have the honour to be
Sir,
Yours most Obedient Ser.
(Signed) T.S. Raffles
Singapore, 15th Nov. 1822

Some Caution

1823 Work started on the Garden

1827 Report on the Garden to the East India Company, “by no means in good order, and very confused”⁸

1829 The Garden closed

1836 The Garden re-opened on a small 2.8 ha portion of its former grounds

1846 The Garden closed (again)

Since 1819, Raffles already had nutmeg and cloves planted on the hill. However, he desired a full-fledged Experimental and Botanical Garden (“the Garden”), an institution backed by the government.

Raffles cultivated in Nathaniel Wallich an ally. The latter, a voice of considerable influence as East India Company’s Superintendent of the Botanic Gardens in Calcutta, did not disappoint. He exchanged formal letters with Raffles, farcical in how the correspondences were orchestrated to win the government over to endorsing Raffles’ plan.

Wallich played the role of enthusiastic initiator of ideas for the Garden, while Raffles, the tempered administrator who was delighted to acquiesce to the brilliant proposals which likely originated from himself.

Their correspondences laid bare their devices, which succeeded, for a short while.