

DAVID DOUGLAS

Otto & Isa Degener

David Douglas is so famous for his plant introductions that published copies of his biography and of his diary are to be found in about every larger botanical library in the World. To repeat any of these accounts would be redundant. We in Hawaii noted a few obscure observations that we wish to add to the internationally known story of his tragic death.

The late \*Mrs. Albert Pierce Taylor, an akamai alii or brilliant Hawaiian lady related to King Kamehameha I and the widow of the local historian Albert P. Taylor, told the kane writer in the early '30s the natives' version of Douglas' death as she knew it. The Caucasian Botany Bay convict, who hunted feral cattle for a living on the slopes of Mauna Kea, according to Mrs. Taylor, had a Hawaiian as wife. Douglas made such a favorable impression on the latter that the disreputable husband became jealous. This was an element in causing Douglas' murder, a crime none of the Hawaiians at the time had the courage to report. Obviously the major motive for the murder was robbery as the following note, in an obscure column in the Hawaiian Herald for May 14, 1906, indicates:

"A.B. Loebenstein takes issue with Dr. Lyman who in 'Hawaiian Yesterdays' speaks of the death of the famous explorer Douglas, after whom the Douglas pine was named. Of course it is well known that he was killed here in Hawaii and is buried in the Kawaiahao cemetery in Honolulu. Dr. Lyman repeats the story that he was found dead in a cattle trap where he had been gored by an animal which had previously fallen in.

Loebenstein, who knows every inch of the country, says that this story is absolutely wrong as he has heard from natives. Douglas he insists, was murdered in cold blood by a white man, a bullock hunter who was an escaped Botany Bay convict. Douglas stayed at this man's house and was incautious enough to show some money. In the morning he started out and was never seen alive again. The bullock hunter was seen following him but the natives were so afraid of the man that they never dared tell of it.

When Douglas' body was found there was no money on it and the wounds which caused death were not made by goring.

Such is the story anyway but after all at this late date it does not really make much difference. Both murdered and murderer have been judged in a very high court long ago."

We know that his mangled corpse was preserved in salt on Hawaii for shipment to Honolulu. In fact, Gorman D. Gilman, in his journal deposited in the Hawaiian Historical Society, reports that "Dr. Da-

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\*Emma Ahuena Taylor, friend of King Kalakaua and of his successor, Queen Liliuokalani.



vid Douglas was found dead in a pit dug as a trap for wild cattle, on July 12, 1834, and his body was taken to Honolulu and buried in the Kawaiahao churchyard." Few know that by the time a fitting grave stone had been fashioned and shipped by sail from Europe around Cape Horn, no one remembered the location of his grave!

After recently attending the funeral of a friend in historic Kawaiahao Church in Honolulu, we noted as part of the inner wall near the entrance a slab of white marble showing in low relief a likeness of David Douglas with appropriate inscription. We assume that this is the sculpture donated about 1856 by Julius L. Brenchley in Douglas' memory. Visitors to Honolulu should spend a few Sunday hours, no matter their faith, viewing the monument, thinking about Douglas, and listening to the unexcelled Polynesian voices of the Congregation in song.



Degener, Otto and Degener, Isa. 1971. "David Douglas." *Phytologia* 22(2), 83–84.

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