

THE FIRST HOSTAS IN NORTH AMERICA THOMAS HOGG, AMERICAN HOSTA PIONEER

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(Revised and expanded from Chapter 5, *The Genus Hosta - Gibōshi Zoku* (ギボウシ属) 1991)



***Funkia grandiflora* Siebold
ex Lemaire 1846**

in *Flore de Serres* 2:10 (1846)
tab. 158-159 (ic. M. Van Houtte del.)
(original in the Schmid collection)

The North American botanical and horticultural literature of the 18th century mentions nothing about hostas. A diligent search under all the names given to the genus *Hosta*, namely *Aletris*, *Hemerocallis*, *Niobe*, *Bryocles*, *Hostia*, *Funckia* and *Funkia* located no specific references.

In the early 19th century, however, hosta names begin to appear in the horticultural literature. Surprisingly, already in 1839, just a few years after von Siebold's return to Holland from Japan, an entry on *Funkia* shows up in *The American Flower Garden Directory* edited by the U.S. florist Robert Buist. He mentions "three species, all beautiful." One was *H. ventricosa* (as *Funkia caerulea*), "with blue flowers." also *H. plantaginea*, (as *Funkia japonica*) and *H. 'Undulata'*, (as *Funkia variegata*). Buist annotates the latter with the note: "The latter is yet rare, and but recently introduced (into Europe) from Japan." Also mentioned is the fact that "this genus has been separated from *Hemerocallis*." In the 1854 edition, Buist added one new species to that year's edition of his directory: *Funkia laurifolia*, "early blue," its identity not known definitely, but I daresay it was probably *H. 'Lancifolia'*.

Edward Sprague Rand's *Garden Flowers* appeared in 1866 and shows that the selection available in the United States had increased as compared to Buist's listings. E.S. Rand includes the following:

Hosta ventricosa ►
(in Sprague 1866 as
Funkia ovata)



Cultivated mass
planting at Hosta Hill
2007.06.22 ►

H. ventricosa as *Funkia ovata*.
H. plantaginea as *Funkia subcordata*.
H. sieboldiana as *Funkia sieboldiana*.
H. 'Undulata' as *Funkia undulata*.
H. 'Lancifolia' as *Funkia lancifolia*.
H. sieboldii as *Funkia albomarginata*.

These accounts indicate that hostas were imported into the United States from Europe in the early 1800s though some actually may have come earlier: *H. plantaginea* (as *Hemerocallis plantaginea*) and *H. ventricosa* (as *Hemerocallis caerulea*), both in the 1830s.

In the 1850s U.S. horticulturists and plant collectors gained access to Japan. Among them was Hall (George R. Hall, 1820–1899, physician and plant collector, U.S.A.), who came to Japan in 1855. By 1860 he had a large collector's garden in Yokohama and according to Keough et al., (1982) the first plants sent directly from Japan to America arrived in 1861 and probably came from Hall. Many new plants were represented in this garden and it was there that Fortune found his celebrated male *Aucuba japonica*. It is not known if Hall cultivated hostas.

In addition to the hostas imported by Thomas Hogg directly from Japan in the 1870s, additional hostas originating with von Siebold were also imported into the United States from Holland or by way of England. This we can postulate with some certainty, because many hostas were labeled with and retained the names given by von Siebold.

By the 1890s several other hostas made an appearance in North America and by this time the unstable *H. 'Undulata'* certainly had sported to the variety *H. 'Undulata Erromena'*, which was sold under a number of different names. Plant exchanges between U.S. botanists and their European counterparts increased thanks to improved technology for maintaining plants in good health and improved transportation in the late Victorian era. No doubt, additional hostas were brought into the country by early travellers visiting Europe. By 1900 the hosta selection in North America reflected the European selection very closely, right down to the names used.

One notable example is that of *Funkia lanceolata*, offered by the nursery of Jacob W. Manning of Reading, Massachusetts. I examined a specimen, which the Bailey Herbarium obtained in 1897 and found it labeled: "*Funkia lancifolia* Sprengel; trade name *Funkia lanceolata*. From the nursery of Jakob W. Manning, Reading, Mass. cat. 1897; Sep. 26-27 1898." Von Siebold imported this hosta in 1829 and listed it in his first catalog of 1844 also as *Funkia lanceolata*. In this case the European source is proven, because the epithet *lanceolata* was never used in Japan. Thus, with exception of Hogg's importations, all of the hostas in the United States around 1900 originated from European stock.

As pointed out earlier, hosta names had been included in North American garden directories since at least 1839. Hosta advertising by way of catalog listings probably began with Hogg, although a date cannot be established. But even before his time some plants and seeds were certainly imported or brought in by travellers returning from Europe and Japan.

A few hostas found their way to the United States not by way of Europe but through direct importation from Japan. One of the leading plant collectors and Hosta Pioneers involved was Thomas Hogg.

THOMAS HOGG, JR. (1819-1892)

A few years after Commodore Perry's first expedition to Japan, the "Opening of Japan" had begun in earnest in 1862, the same year both von Siebold and Fortune returned to Europe. The days of the "Great Collectors" of Japanese flora were about to end. The Russian Maximowicz (Carl Johann Maximowicz, 1827-1891, botanist, USSR) prepared to leave Japan in 1864. The Englishmen Richard Oldham (1838-1864, botanist, United Kingdom) and John Gould Veitch (1839-1870, botanist and nurseryman, United Kingdom) had sent back their collections. The American Hall, (mentioned earlier), who conducted a nursery business in Yokohama, had also left for home in 1862. Collecting in the countryside of Japan had become a very dangerous task. What the Japanese called "the Invasion of the Barbarians," which began in 1855 with Commodore Perry generated a lot of ill will and the feudal princes, seeing their political power and status taken away by Europeans and Americans had a fanatical hatred for the foreigners. Many naturalists and plant collectors felt it was time to go.

Thomas Hogg, Jr. was the oldest son of the celebrated English florist and horticulturist Thomas Hogg of Paddington, who at one time was head gardener to William Kent. Thomas was born in 1819. Shortly after his birth, his family emigrated to the United States where in 1820 they established a nursery and florist business on Manhattan Island, not far from where 23rd Street and Broadway intersect today. There was considerable demand for nursery stock and the business soon flourished and had to move to larger grounds at Seventy-ninth Street and the East River. The elder Hogg made important connections with plant collectors who supplied him with all kinds of new plants. Among them David Douglas, (1798-1834, botanist, Scotland, UK) of Douglas Fir fame, who collected in North America during the period from 1823 to 1834. The elder Thomas Hogg died in 1855 and left his nursery to Thomas, Jr. and his younger son James, who was born shortly after the arrival of the Hogg family in America.

In 1855, Commodore Perry made his first expedition to Japan and regular trade between the United States and Japan soon developed. When the American Consul and U.S. Marshal Townsend resigned in 1862, President Lincoln sent Thomas Hogg, Jr. to Japan to take over the post of U.S. Marshal for Japan. By then, Fortune and von Siebold were safely back in Europe. Hogg remained until 1870 but returned in 1873 for another stay in a private capacity remaining until



***H. 'Undulata'* (as *Funkia undulata*)**
(a von Siebold import 1829)

1875, during which time he reportedly served as an agent for the Japanese Customs Service. Hogg sent many fine plant discoveries back to America, where his brother James built the Hogg nursery into one of the best sources for Asiatic and Japanese plants. Among his introductions were a number of lilies, of which he made a special study. He also brought into horticultural use the Kousa dogwood (*Cornus kousa chinensis*), umbrella pine (*Sciadopitys verticillata*), several wisterias and clematis, and many other plants, including hostas. As with Fortune, Hogg found it easier and safer to purchase his plants in the nurseries of Tokyo and Yokohama so did very little collecting in the wild.

By the 1860s, the Japanese were beginning to realize the great commercial value of their plants, so began to collect them and give them fancy names for the sole purpose of selling them to Western collectors.

These names were virtually entirely descriptive in nature. Several Japanese descriptive words were used: *Shirofukurin* (白覆輪擬宝珠) (white margin) and *Kifukurin* (黄覆輪擬宝珠) (yellow margin). The trade in Japanese plants became so important that most plants exported after 1862 were bought from dealers, rather than collected in the wild. Oldham reported a flourishing plant business in the streets of Yokohama taking place as early as 1863. But even before this floral trade, collecting in the wild had become risky business, as described earlier, so many collectors, including Hogg, preferred to purchase their plants.

The Japanese plant vendors also realized that variegated plants commanded higher prices and Hogg, who was looking for variegated plants to expand his already extensive Asiatic plant offerings, bought a number of his variegated hosta introductions from these street merchants. It is not known exactly, when Hogg brought what was to become his famous introduction, what the Japanese called *Fukurin Giboshi* (覆輪擬宝珠) to America. Undoubtedly, Hogg brought at least 2 hostas under this name from Japan: One is now identified as *H. 'Decorata'*, another is *H. 'Undulata Albomarginata'*. Both have green leaves with white margins and may have been identified by the same name *Fukurin Giboshi* (覆輪擬宝珠) by uninformed Japanese sellers. Since Western gardeners had difficulty with the Japanese name it was quickly changed to *Funkia* 'Thomas Hogg' and it should be noted that to casual observers young plants of these two cultivars are virtually identical which may explain why both were sold as *Funkia* 'Thomas Hogg' by the nursery. The plants, being rare, were probably never allowed to grow to maturity due to constant propagation. Cultivars under this name in England are considered to be *Hosta* 'Undulata Albomarginata', while in North America the name is applied to *H. 'Decorata'*.

The time of Hogg's importations is most commonly quoted as in the horticultural literature "around the turn of the century" but this is incorrect. He unquestionably brought hostas with him when he returned from his second trip in 1875 (Hansen and Müssel 1964, 1974), or had them shipped back shortly before or after his departure and reports indicate a *Funkia* 'Thomas Hogg'



H. 'Crispula' ▲▲▲

Hosta Hill 1989



H. 'Decorata' ►►►

was growing at the Lexington Botanic Garden in the early 1880s described as a “deep green Funkia with the edge white.” The Hogg nursery experienced its peak of prosperity as one of the leading suppliers of Asian plant material in the 1870s. Hogg travelled to Europe several times after 1875 and he undoubtedly brought his *Funkia* ‘Thomas Hogg’ and other plants with him.

Hogg died in 1892 at the age of 73. The nursery carried on for some time after his death before it ceased to operate. The Hogg nursery exported hostas to Europe; *Hosta* ‘Undulata Albomarginata’ went to England as “Thomas Hogg’s Funkia” and is still called by that name on occasion. Probably because they look so much alike as small plants, both *H. 'Decorata'* and *H. 'Undulata Albomarginata'* went to Holland, also under the name “Thomas Hogg’s Funkia.” The presence of *H. 'Decorata'* is confirmed by the account of the German geneticist A. Ernst, who published a paper in 1918, (*Bastardierung als Ursache der Apogamie im Pflanzenreich*, Jena, pp. 446–447. 1918.) describing genetic experiments “mit einer von Tubergen in Harlem, Holland, bezogenen ‘Thoss. Hoegg Funkia’,” i.e. a hosta named ‘Thoss. Hoegg Funkia’ he obtained from the Tubergen nursery in Holland which turns out to be *H. 'Decorata'*. Ernst’s research involving pollination of hostas took a number of years to complete so he would have acquired his hostas around 1910. It can be safely assumed that “Funkia Thomas Hogg” (= *H. 'Decorata'*) was in Holland before 1900. This date fits agreeably with de Noter’s 1905 date for his *Funkia alba* “Thomas Hogg” hort., described as a white-flowered cultivar in his work *Hemerocallis an Funkia in Vertaald en van opmerkingen voorzien door H. Witte. Nederland Tuinbouwblad Sempervirens*, No. 3:445–447. Hylander (1954), in his synonymy for *H. 'Decorata'*, stated this taxon was not conspecific with the hostas labeled today *H. 'Thomas Hogg'*. Although de Noter’s descriptions are quite difficult to interpret, I believe that the “French Thomas Hogg” was in fact *H. plantaginea* so the name attached by de Noter suggests this hosta also came from Hogg. In this way *H. plantaginea* came full circle: from Europe to America where it was mentioned as early as 1839 (Buist, 1839, 1854; Rand 1866), only to be exported back to Europe around the 1880s as “Funkia Thomas Hogg” or “Funkia Alba Thomas Hogg.”

Recorded use of the name “Thomas Hogg” for at least three cultivars gave rise to considerable confusion. For this reason, the name has been eliminated as a cultivar name. This should in no way diminish the great contribution Hogg made to the introduction of hostas into U.S. commerce. Thus, Thomas Hogg was one of the first to introduce hostas to the U.S.A.

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Early Imports from Japan: The three variegated “Undulatas”
L to R: *H. ‘Undulata’*; *H. ‘Undulata Albomarginata’*; *H. ‘Undulata ‘Univittata’*
Hosta Hill @ W.G. Schmid 1987.05.16