INTRODUCTION

Not much is known about José Antonio de la Ossa, except that he was born in Havana, entertained Baron Alexander von Humboldt and Aimé Bonpland during their stay in Cuba in 1800-1801 and was appointed Director of the first Botanic Garden of Havana (HBG) in 1817. Replaced by Ramón de la Sagra in 1824, he died in 1829, ALVAREZ (1958), IZNAGA (1974). Further investigations on his background, qualifications and public life are needed. However, his work as a botanist can be inferred from a manuscript, deposited at the Archivo General de Indias, Santo Domingo, legajo 1714, which also allows the reconstruction of the HBG; both are the main objectives of this work. BLANCO & al., (1993: 118) have also mentioned this manuscript.

Ossa's manuscript

The manuscript, which is transcribed in annex I (except the list of cultivated plants), is entitled:

Noticia de las plantas cultivadas y espontáneas que hay en el día en el Jardín Botánico de la Habana, clasificadas según el sistema de Linneo.

dated «30 de Julio de 1821» and signed by José Antonio de la Ossa himself. This manuscript consists of two letters and Ossa's report on the condition of the HBG at the time (1821), plus a list of the plants grown in the Garden, and a map of the Garden itself with explanatory notes. A discussion of each of these items follows. Concerning the map, I drew a sketch, as a photocopy of a photocopy would not have been clear; such a sketch is included in this work.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A chronology of the history of the Garden, taken from Ossa himself (in his report and