

A Bit of Vancouver Tree History

Clive L. Justice

In 1923 when Harland Bartholomew appeared before the Point Grey Town Planning Commission, he spoke of a city's need for passive recreation in the form of "... grass, trees, flowers and water (where possible) forming a restful background." When he prepared the Town Plan for amalgamation of the municipalities of staid Point Grey and unruly South Vancouver with the city, Bartholomew proposed two additional passive recreational features for the new amalgamated Vancouver: street and boulevard trees, and a system of dual carriageway, wide-treed medians, with tree-lined sidewalks on each side.

This grid of recreational drives is an important urban landscape element, unique in its scope, that remains largely intact 75 years after these street parks were proposed. These landscapes present a great diversity of tree species, particularly flowering trees, that make life in the city particularly attractive to both visitors and residents. Some or all, in the opinion of the writer, have be-

come heritage urban landscapes, but only one, Cambie Street, has heritage status due to the efforts of the Cambie Boulevard Heritage Society and is already under threat of destruction. King Edward Avenue (25th), also qualifies, but so far the Vancouver heritage community, has seen fit to confine heritage status only to buildings, some of dubious architectural merit.

Post World War II development in Vancouver resulted in tree planting of the smaller and faster-growing flowering trees along residential streets. The oriental cherry varieties 'Akebono', 'Shirotae', 'Ranchero', 'Accolade' and 'Ukon' were among the 26 varieties that were favoured. The devastating Dutch Elm Disease that ran rampant, destroying the avenues of majestic American Elms planted earlier in the century on streets in Eastern Canadian and US mid-western cities and towns, fortunately never reached Vancouver, but it highlighted the danger of a monoculture approach to street planting; the French passion for order versus the English passion for diversity. Because of Vancouver's strong British settler and Scottish gardener heritage the city has always favoured and savoured tree diversity.

In 1967 the B. C. Society of Landscape Architects proposed an inventory of Vancouver's Heritage trees in honour of Canada's Centennial of Confederation, but it took a decade and a half before funding was secured. Through the BC Heritage Trust, BCSLA employed two students during the summers of 1982 and '83 to measure, photograph and identify over 150 heritage trees found in the 22 Vancouver residential districts, Stanley Park and on the UBC campus. This inventory is only a representative sample of Vancouver's heritage trees but does not include street trees and provides little protection for any except for those in parks and public grounds.

In 1988 the City employed an arboricultural firm to draw up an inventory and assess Vancouver's street trees, and to prepare a comprehensive plan for care, maintenance, renewal and replacement of over 500 species and varieties of trees planted in parks and on city streets. The plan was adopted in 1990 and there is now some regulation of trees on private property, a measure designed to combat the loss of mature landscape elements, especially trees, by residential redevelopment. Although there is a one mature tree removal per year loophole, this has resulted in the retention of many trees and protection for existing trees at or near construction sites. There is also the concept of diameter for diameter replacement requirements during redevelopment, which has increased awareness of tree heritage and replacement values by developers and homeowners.

In 1992, to celebrate the bicentennial of the arrival in these waters of Capt George Vancouver and his Surgeon-Botanist, Archibald Menzies, the Rotary Club of Vancouver South (Marpole) initiated a tree planting programme as part of the landscaping around the highway 401 tunnels project under Hastings Street. During the autumn and winter, pupils from 35 Vancouver and Burnaby Schools came to plant a tree each, and learnt how to install protective tubes around them; they also learnt the name of their tree. The 7000 tree seedlings they planted included five of the native conifers and three of the

native deciduous trees that Menzies found growing here. Instead of the Pacific Dogwood, also a Menzies discovery, the students planted Vancouver's Centennial tree, a locally created floriferous hybrid of the Pacific Dogwood *Cornus* 'Eddies White Wonder'.

A subsequent educational project, named the Tree Keepers, involved school children in the stewardship of the Rotary Heritage Forest. Annual field trips took place in which pupils learnt to identify and count the living and dead trees, and to remove the protector tubes in the third year (they had failed to biodegrade as they were supposed to) as well as mulching the trees with wood chips after the fourth year. This stewardship extended over 9 years from 1993 to 2001, and at the last count there was a 60% survival rate (of trees, not children!). Today we have a young urban forest of 4700 native trees by the approach to the bridge over Burrard Inlet (named by Captain Vancouver for his naval friend Capt Sir Harry Burrard who became an Admiral in 1830).

The Tree Keeper Programme, originally initiated to counter tree vandalism in newly-landscaped neighbourhood schools and parks, was continued in some of the older schools that have mature trees in the grounds and in the surrounding streets. The programme taught awareness, understanding and respect for the natural things that make the urban environment beautiful, healthy and inhabitable. Each child was given a named tree, growing in the school grounds or in nearby streets, and over the year they observed, researched and measured it, in addition to noting seasonal changes.

The trees in Vancouver parks, on streets and boulevards along with those trees on private grounds and gardens are the most precious living heritage that we have in our city. My family and I have lived here for 50 years, and the trees in the city are features, unlike the rest of us, that have improved in greatness and beauty with age - we cannot afford to lose them!

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