

## A Walk Through Time

### The University of British Columbia Campus 1920s-2004

UBC was a busy place in the mid-1920s. With the construction of new buildings, landscaping was soon to follow. The first gardens to evolve were the pocket gardens on the north and south sides of the main Library. These were designed by the University's first Landscape Architect, Frank E. Buck (on the new campus from 1926 - 1949). The gardens were designed and planted in a hybrid Japanese - English style with rock walls, bridges, ponds, creeks and winding pathways. Because of a lack of funding these features are now in decline. Many of the trees and shrubs remain, including *Cunninghamia lanceolata*, *Cercis siliquastrum*, *Salix babylonica*, *Ulmus glabra* 'Camperdownii', *Sciadopitys verticillata*, *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* 'Intertexta', *Chamaecyparis pisifera* 'Filifera' and various cultivars of *Acer palmatum*. Some of these Japanese maples are the largest on campus. The five *Laburnum* × *watereri* 'Vossii' seen outside the garden beds were brought in as seedlings from F. Fopma, Boskoop, Holland in 1958.

Not many herbaceous perennials or shrubs from the 1920s, 1930s or even the 1940s have survived. It is the trees that were planted in those decades that now embellish the campus with history. The two rows of *Quercus rubra* on Main Mall were planted in 1927, the rows of *Quercus robur* on East Mall 1931 - 1936, and the specimens of *Ulmus americana* on University Blvd. in the early 1930s. The rows of *Prunus* × *yedoensis* that decorate Lower Mall came as part of a gift of 400 trees donated to the University of British Columbia in April 1958 by the City of Tokyo and the Tokyo Chamber of Commerce, through Mr. Tanabe, the Japanese Consul.

It was not until the mid-1950s that the campus saw a dramatic change in its landscape style. In 1949, an energetic gardener named Nick Weesjes was hired. By 1956 he was Head Gardener for lands and buildings, a position he held until his retirement in 1981. Nick lived for horticulture, he was excellent

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at garden design, had a keen interest in rare plants, insisted on proper nomenclature and kept impeccable records. During his tenure on campus he was responsible for obtaining and planting out literally thousands of rhododendrons and azaleas, of which more than 4000 were different species and hybrids. It was the largest collection in North America. His interest did not stop with rhododendrons and azaleas. He ordered seeds and cuttings for conifers, herbaceous plants, trees and shrubs from almost every horticultural institution in the world. Most of the plants were propagated and grown in the Plant Operations nursery at the south end of the campus.

Evelyn Jacks was the campus Plant Propagator/Horticulturist from 1956 to 1981. A large planting of mature rhododendrons and conifers can still be seen at the nursery. One of the better original plantings of rhododendrons and shrubs is at the Place Vanier student residence (1961). A few of the species rhododendrons seen there are *R. ponticum*, *R. sutchuenense*, *R. fortunei*, *R. vernicosum*, *R. fargesii*, *R. wardii*, *R. schlippenbachii* and *R. thomsonii*, as well as cultivars ‘Blue Peter’, ‘Pink Pearl’, ‘Unique’, ‘Van Weerden Poelman’ and ‘English Roseum’. Other original trees and shrubs include masses of *Azalea mollis*, *Azalea* ‘Christopher Wren’, *Enkianthus campanulatus*, *Osmarea burkwoodii*, *Cotoneaster salicifolius* ‘Repens’, *Pieris japonica*, *Acer palmatum*, a wonderful specimen of *Metasequoia glyptostroboides* and three *Stewartia monadelphica* (Figure 6), which were purchased from Tingle Nursery Co. Pittsville, Maryland in April 1956, and planted in their present sites in October 1961.

The 1970s saw the campus landscape at its zenith. The trees planted in the 1920s and 1930s were healthy and at a semi-mature age. The thousands of Rhododendrons and Azaleas planted were floriferous without being woody and overgrown. In 1974, Nick Weesjes received an award for best maintained campus by **Groundskeeper** magazine.

The 1980s and 1990s saw budget restraints and the succession of two new Head Gardeners. Both were very committed to the functions and aesthetics of the landscaped campus, but neither were plantsmen in the traditional sense. They viewed the campus for its overall landscape appearance rather than for its horticultural merits. It was during this period that what many consider to be a more pedestrian look slowly appeared on campus. Mass plantings of *Prunus laurocerasus* ‘Zabeliana’, *Pinus mugo*, *Genista lydia* and cultivars of *Euonymus fortunei* were replacing the more expensive and unique plants.

There were several large landscape installations on campus in the 1980s and 1990s that do merit discussion; the Chan Centre for the Performing Arts, the Asian Centre, C.K. Choi Centre and Liu Centre for Global Issues to name a few. The Vancouver architect Bing Thom's original intentions for the Chan Centre were that it be built one storey deeper in the ground. The idea was that a lower building would harmonize better with the existing landscape. Monetary restraints prevented this and the building was built one storey higher than anticipated, but as Bing is quoted: "You can hide a lot of ugly architecture with landscaping." Bing and the landscape architect for the project, Liz Watts, insisted on transplanting the tallest trees possible. They had the advantage of using the mature (25 – 40 year old) plant material at the UBC campus nursery. Liz chose over 300 rhododendrons, 200 azaleas, 5 metre specimens of *Acer palmatum*, 10 metre specimens of *Pinus koraiensis* and *Pinus nigra* and 6 metre *Thuja plicata* 'Excelsa'. The project eventually linked very well with the existing second growth forest. The rhododendrons in this planting include the species *R. augustinii*, *R. lochmium*, *R. clipenense*, *R. yakushimanum*, *R. villosum*, *R. wardii*, *R. williamsianum*, and *R. xanthocodon*, as well as the cultivars 'Electria', 'Golden Belle', 'Edith Berkeley', 'Pink Moonstone' and 'Renaissance'.

The C.K. Choi, Liu and Asian Centres were all being built on the edge of the same forest (most likely planted by Dr. Malcolm Knapp and John Davidson in the 1920s). The three have different styles in their landscape but are united by this wonderful forest.

The Asian Centre was built in 1981 and is a compliment to its neighbour the Nitobe Memorial Garden. Its landscape style is, as expected, Asian; waterways almost surround the building. Various types of stone pathways, flagstone, boulders, pea gravel and a hand fitted bell tower complement the plants that are coiffed annually to give a Bonsai effect. The landscape extends well into the forest giving the illusion that the garden is larger and older than it is. Some of the plants used here are: *Ilex aquifolium* var. *myrtifolium*, *Ilex crenata*, *Pinus thunbergii*, *Fagus sylvatica* (top graft), *Cercidiphyllum japonicum*, *Metasequoia glyptostroboides*, various upright forms of *Acer palmatum* and a healthy collection of rhododendrons, azaleas and camellias.

The Liu Centre has been very sparsely landscaped, it is completely dependent on the surrounding natural landscape for its softening effect.

Seven standing and reclining rocks with gilded engravings are at the southern end of the C.K. Choi Centre. The combination of these, the Choi memorial bell and six specimens of *Acer griseum* make a dramatic entrance to the forest.

The success of the landscaping and tree retention at these three centres was the result of harmonizing efforts by everyone involved. At the planning stages the architects, contractors, Campus Planning and Design Department, landscape architects and arborists discussed what each wanted. This process required compromise from everyone, but the end result was very satisfying. These centres combined are probably the best designed areas on campus.

### **Present and Future**

At present massive construction is taking place on campus, and entire landscapes, hedges, specimen trees and sections of native forests are being removed. If future campus landscaping quality is to improve or stay at its present level a landscape protection/retention policy is essential. The University should beware of allowing donors of new building development to dictate what landscape features stay or are removed. Obviously, new development will always occur, but concerted efforts must be made at the planning stages for the preservation of the existing high quality landscape. Landscape retention and design of each new project can only benefit from open discussion with everyone involved at the planning stage. If this can be accomplished, the University can continue as a world class learning centre and keep the campus landscape that remains the envy of many world-wide.

### **A Walk on the North Campus: Plants and Bits of History**

A walk that shows a good representation of old and new landscapes on campus: start at Cecil Green Park, cross over to the Chan Centre, continue on to the adjoining Rose Garden, then go down Crescent Road to the C.K. Choi Centre and into the Asian Centre Gardens. For the walk back, cross Marine Drive, cut through the native forest at the Museum of Anthropology, then along the cliff top pathways returning to Cecil Green Park. Approximate walking time one hour.

Cecil Green Park House was designed in 1912 by the renowned architect Samuel MacLure. The residence's original name was Kanakla, meaning house on a cliff (Figure 9). Its present name recognizes two of the university's

major donors, Cecil and Ida Green, who gave the residence and grounds to the University. The gardens here and at Green College (which incorporates the former Graham House) have some of the oldest plantings on campus. The garden beds and grounds are complimented with a collection of dwarf conifers mixed with *Morus alba* 'Pendula', *Viburnum* × *bodnantense* (Figure 10), *Oxydendrum arboretum*, *Thujaopsis dolabrata*, *Mespilus germanica*, *Ulmus glabra* 'Camperdownii', *Liriodendron tulipifera* 'Aureomarginatum', *Magnolia grandiflora*, *Trachelospermum jasminoides* and an assortment of old rhododendrons and azaleas.

The gardens to the northwest of the Chan Centre contain a mixture of large rhododendrons and some of the tallest native conifers on campus. The adjoining Rose Garden is well maintained, but is a formalized, some would say sterilized version of the original garden. The amount of concrete used here makes the garden harsh and stark, but the redeeming feature is the ocean and mountain views.

From the Rose Garden down Crescent Road are three gnarled specimens of *Carpinus tschonoskii* (Figure 12). These trees came in as seed from the Botanischer Garten, Kolnriehl, Germany in April 1954. They were grown on in the Plant Operations Nursery and planted on site 1961. The three *Syringa vulgaris* beside them came from the famous Lemoines Nursery in France in 1958. There were originally seventeen *Syringa* cultivars planted in this area, including 'Charles Joly', 'Etna', 'Madame Lemoine', 'Marschal Foch' and 'Vestale'. When the surviving three bloom this spring (2004), they will be identified and labeled. Across the street in front of the Frederic Wood Theatre is a large *Ptelea trifoliata* 'Aurea'. Under its canopy are *Rhododendron clipenense*, *R. indicum*, *R. schlippenbachii*, as well as the cultivars 'Vulcan', 'Elizabeth', 'Blue Tit' and 'Cynthia'.

The turn south at West Mall takes the walker along a boulevard planting of young *Ginkgo biloba* leading to the unique rock sculptures at the south end of the C.K. Choi Centre and entrance to the Asian Centre Gardens.

Returning north along West Mall leads to the Museum of Anthropology, which was designed in 1976 by one of Canada's best known architects, Arthur Erickson. The landscaping surrounding the building was designed by the equally renowned landscape architect, Cornelia Oberlander. The landscape here is an excellent duplication of what a native forest on Point Grey may

have looked like 150 years ago (minus the *Cytisus scoparius*!).

At the back of the museum is a dry lake, that was originally intended to be a reflecting pond, but engineers feared that the weight of the water would collapse the cliffs. The landscaping along the cliff edge has been left with very little maintenance. Below the cliff edges extensive work has been done to prevent soil erosion.

The last of the cliff pathways leads back to Cecil Green Park. The new landscaping in front of the Coach House and residence were designed by the students in the University's Landscape Architecture programme.

### **Postscript**

Early Plant Operations policy stated that a married couple could not work in the same department. Nick Weesjes and Evelyn Jacks married after their retirement in 1981. They have a 10 acre garden outside Sidney on Vancouver Island. Their garden has close to 4000 species and hybrids of rhododendrons and azaleas. Nick has been awarded the Iron Cross and Evelyn the Gold Medal from the American Rhododendron Society. UBC was surely privileged to have had the services of two such talented and committed plantspeople.



Figure 1. *Tilia tomentosa* (silver linden) at Riverview.



Photo: Norma Gillespie

Figure 2. "Sanctuary Feeling" at Riverview.



Photo: Norma Gillespie

Figure 3. Tree tour at Riverview's "Treefest 2002". The large tree in the background is an unidentified elm. In the foreground is *Ulmus glabra* 'Camperdownii' (Camperdown elm).



Figure 4. Magnolias in bloom near the East Lawn Building of Riverview. A *Ginkgo biloba* is in the background.



Photo: Norma Gillespie

Figure 5. *Ulmus glabra* 'Camperdownii' (Camperdown elm) at Riverview.



Photo: Collin Varner

Figure 6. *Stewartia monadelpha* at Place Vanier Residences, UBC campus.



Photo: Collin Varner

Figure 7. *Sorbus oligodonta* 'Pink Pagoda' at Plant Operations Nursery, UBC campus.



Photo: Collin Varner

Figure 8. *Styrax japonicus* near University Boulevard, UBC campus



Photo: Collin Varner

Figure 9. View from Cecil Green Park, UBC campus.



Photo: Collin Varner

Figure 10. *Viburnum* × *bodnantense* in Cecil Green Park, UBC campus.



Photo: Collin Varner

Figure 11. *Ilex aquifolium* in Cecil Green Park, UBC campus.



Photo: Collin Varner

Figure 12. *Carpinus tschonoskii* near Thea Koerner House, UBC campus.



Photo: Collin Varner

Figure 13. *Hedera helix* in Cecil Green Park, UBC campus.



Photo: Collin Varner

Figure 14. *Taraxacum officinale*, UBC campus.