

A Retrospective Look at the Park

As we move into our second century, it might be worthwhile looking back at our beginnings.

Canada as a whole experienced a depression in the 1870s which resulted in numerous farming failures and as farming was the most important national industry with half the nation engaged, it needed help.

Through the House of Commons in 1886, an Experimental Farm Stations Act was passed and the Central Experimental Farm at Ottawa came into existence. The Act called for four farms across the country, Nova Scotia, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Agassiz, BC.

An article in the Colonist newspaper of April 22, 1888 said: "There is every possibility of an experimental farm within easy reach of Victoria. We have long fought for this, basing our arguments on the fact that the different climate conditions of the Mainland and Vancouver Island necessitated a branch for each". The Victoria Board of Trade lobbied strongly and finally in 1911, the BC Electric Company offered the government the Saanichton site which was officially purchased in February, 1912. The BC Electric Company had purchased the land from a Mr. Veitch who in turned had purchased the 120 acres from Mr. Andrew Jackson Bennett, a black man from the USA. Mr. Bennett's cabin could only be approached by walking on a fallen tree across the ravine. The same ravine we are hoping to restore.



Pond - 1916-1918 Courtesy Sidney Archives



Pond - 2010

The agricultural development of Vancouver Island was influenced by the tenure of the Hudson's Bay Company by the fact that transportation to and from the area at first was by sea along the United States coast and by the California, Fraser River, Cariboo and Alaska Gold rushes. Later the construction of the transcontinental railway

added another factor. The HBC had a mandate to promote colonization and was obliged to engage in and encourage farming. Later, huge influxes of people on their way to the gold fields created sudden large markets for goods.

Clearing the new Farm site began on October 1, 1912. Almost every team of horses on the Peninsula were hired and they worked through the winter, 3,000 feet of ditches were dug, roads and fences were put in, a road was made through the section to the west of East Saanich Road which was intended for horticultural grounds and another winding through the proposed 11 acre park. A road which ran from East Saanich Road down to the beach, past the two railway stations was widened across the property: the Victoria and Sidney train and BC Electric Railway which had a station roughly in the centre of the Farm (now our picnic shelter)



Courtesy Sidney Archives

At the beginning of April, 1913, William T. Macoun, Dominion Horticulturist, visited the Farm and planned a nursery, small fruit plantation, vegetable and ornamental plantings. After returning to Ottawa, he prepared the planting plan for the entire 120 acre site.

He recommended that the avenue down to the beach be planted with Oriental plane trees and Western Flowering Dogwood. Due to the World War, these plans were not completed but we have three remaining Oriental plane trees in the Park.

The list of plants and trees ordered by Macoun by the end of 1913 are fascinating for their variety and their prices. From Yokohama Nursery in Japan, 51 varieties of peonies were ordered for a total price of \$27.50 (which, however, was more than a week's wages for a labourer) and the catalogue used for that order is now worth \$3,500. From the same source came iris, camellias, maple, hydrangeas, 17 varieties of magnolia, cherry, conifers, evergreens, bamboo, cinnamon, some semi-tropical fruits such as oranges and persimmons. These were to be tested to see if they could be grown in the Island climate. Pears, peaches, apricots, plums were ordered from Layritz Nurseries of Victoria, one of the oldest nurseries in BC. From Spaeth in Berlin came fruit and ornamental trees, shrubs including 160 separate cultivars of lilacs. Iris and bulbs from France. The Arnold Arboretum at Harvard University presented over 60 different rhodos and many other ornamentals (our famous Ernest Wilson rhodos), including rubber trees and *Actinidia chinensis* (kiwifruit). Over the next few months more fruits and nut trees, roses and ornamentals arrived from nurseries in France, the United States, Germany, eastern Canada, England, the Netherlands and other parts of BC.

Holly and Cascara (locally sourced), *Eriobotrya japonica* (loquat), *Cinnamomum camphora* (camphor), *Rhus verniciflua* (laquer) pomegranate, *Camellia sinensis* (tea), *Edgeworthia papyrifera* and *Broussonetia papyrifera* (both used for making paper) and much more were just a few of the originally order items exotic – after all, it was an Experimental Farm and Park. 19 varieties of fig, nuts included almonds, chestnuts, walnuts and filberts. Autumn cereals, tree fruits, small fruit, vegetables, ornamentals, bulbs and fodder crops were planted by 1915. We are fortunate to have a few of the original invoices to show the breadth of material that arrived in the very early years.

The results of the work at the Farm were communicated to the public in various ways. From 1915 to 1932, the Department of Agriculture published 'Seasonable Hints', a newsletter. Results of experiments were written up in very meticulous fashion and printed and distributed. Talks, tours, demonstrations, travelling exhibits and

open meetings were part of the mandate to inform the public.

Over the next decades, the Farm's list of accomplishments in experiments on vegetables, small fruits, tree fruits, bulbs, greenhouse crops, fodder, soil nutrition, holly, seed production, etc. was extensive. It would take 70 plus pages to even touch briefly on the work done. In the later years, the emphasis was on research and quarantine function and by 1987, all functions were directed toward the national plant health program and specifically the exclusion from Canada of virus diseases affecting tree fruit, grapevines, small fruit and woody ornamentals.

During this time the Park continued to part of the research and thousands of annuals, perennials, shrubs and trees were planted, research done and results published. Some successful, others less so as the more tropical of shrubs and trees did not survive – with a few exceptions such as our *Illicium religiosum*.

From the very beginning the Park was a 'go to place' to gather. Gala Field Days were held in the Park with exhibits, speeches, music and lunch served on the lawn. In 1919 it was recorded that 3000 people visited the Park during summer. Weddings, family picnics, staff outings, church events, classes, competitions, school children, horticultural studies and those just out for a stroll have been part of Park landscape for 101 years.

The restoration of the Park continues into its 13th year with plans for new plantings and the necessary work of maintenance of the older specimens. With our volunteers, members, supporters and the co-operation of the District and Centre for Plant Health, we are looking at the next hundred years for Dominion Brook Park to be a feature on the Peninsula for everyone to enjoy.

2013 Annual General Meeting Coming Up !

The Annual General Meeting of the Friends of Dominion Brook Park Society is April 24, 7pm, in the Pavilion of the Centre for Plant Health, 8801 East Saanich Road

The Board has made a motion to increase the membership fee from \$15 to \$20 per individual/family. The reason is the increase in mailing and printing costs. Our membership, over all, has agreed they wish to receive the newsletter by mail.

Proposed Slate of Board Members, 2013-14

Chairperson: David Lye
Vice-Chairperson: Vacant
Treasurer: Owen Redfern
Secretary: Penny Boone
Directors-at-Large:
John Romeril
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

We do need a Vice-chairperson and three more Directors-at-Large. If you would like to be part of an exciting on-going project, do let us know.

This issue is much better in colour: www.dominionbrookpark.ca/newsletter37.pdf

We'll Never Know....

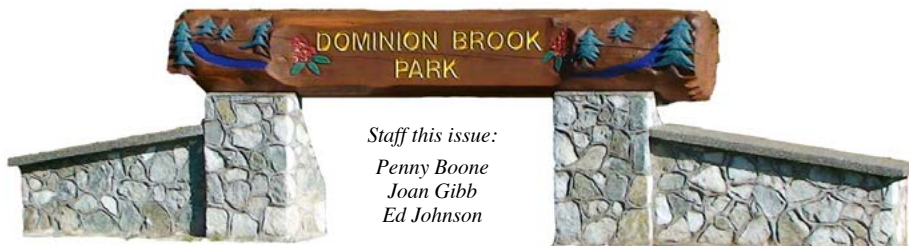
When and who planted the Monterey Cypress at the bottom of the Pond. There are no records discovered even though every specimen was recorded in as many as three locations.

The name of the white climbing rose planted from the 1913 Dingee and Conard shipment and found in 2011 along the north fence. In 1922 the Farm published results of the best roses to propagate and maybe our white beauty was among that list.



The identity of four Piceas in the North Border. We have all their information but even the experts are stumped as to which is which. All are hybrids and planted in the early 60s.

Who returned from WW 1 with a European Beech seed collected at Flanders and planted in the Park in 1922? We do know of a 1912 employee, William Beswick, wounded in battle, returned to work at the Farm in 1922. Maybe? Also, there was a veterans' picnic held in the Park in 1921. Another maybe?



For more information on Dominion Brook Park, please visit <http://www.dominionbrookpark.ca/>
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