

University Finnerty Garden Friends

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JANUARY 2007

Dear Friends,

May I wish you all a very Happy and Prosperous New Year. And let us hope that the weather will be a bit kinder to our gardens than it has been recently.

As I am sure you read in the newspaper, the Finnerty Gardens took a real beating from the storm. The snow was so wet and heavy that it broke dozens of branches from the big firs and oaks. These fell on the shrubs underneath them, and a great number were broken. Many of the rhododendrons were severely damaged, but can probably be saved by judicious pruning, although it will be some time until they return to their former glory. There is an enormous amount of debris down and it will take a long time to get it all cleaned up. I suspect that many of you also suffered extensive damage in your gardens, as did I on Galiano. The woods there look very different—much more open—since I lost huge branches from most of the Douglas firs.

I was very surprised to find two large yew trees and an old oak down on the ground. All of the rain we had earlier in November made the ground very soft so the extra weight caused by the snow

was enough to topple many trees, especially those growing on an angle. Other oaks were severely damaged—a surprise because I always think of them as being very strong. On Galiano and the other Gulf Islands, the falling trees took out hydro power, and it was slow in being restored in some areas—mine was out from Sunday morning to Saturday afternoon.

The Finnerty Calendar has been selling well, and is very love-

ly. Daphne has, as usual, caught the essence of the gardens. Her beautiful pictures will serve as a memorial to their former glory, and give us a goal to work towards in restoring them. If you do not yet have a copy, plan to pick one up. It is available in many retail outlets in town, and makes a wonderful gift for anyone who loves beauty.

Betty Kennedy



UVic's Finnerty Gardens calendar is available at the UVic Bookstore as well as many other retail outlets in town.





Unlikely Connections

Margaret deWeese

A former professor at UBC once tried to impress on me the idea that writing is a lonely profession. But writing about gardening and gardeners has always kept me in touch with fascinating people and events and has never been a lonely occupation. The following experience concerning a well-known Vancouver Island gardener is a particularly poignant example of why this has been the case:

Recently I had an email from a person in the United Kingdom, asking me if I had the email address of John Trelawny. He had "Googled" John Trelawny's name and the University of Victoria Finnerty Gardens newsletter (July 2005) had come up with the article I had written on the Trelawny Garden plus the editor's name and contact email. Sam Macey then contacted the writer of the Trelawny article asking him to pass on the information to John via me. The email was from the son of Tommy Horne about whom John has spoken most caringly. What this wonderful email was about was to tell him that Tommy's first grandchild will be born in February. You see, during World War II Tommy saved John's life.

This is part of what John wrote to Tommy's son:

"I owe my life to your father. Tommy was the most selfless caring person that I have ever had the good fortune to be associated with. On 2nd Nov. 1943, I was severely wounded in

both legs and taken prisoner-of-war by the Herman Goering Parachute Division in the Appenine Mountains some miles from the Adriatic Coast. The German army was retreating in a hurry and transportation for wounded was slow to say the least. Some days later, I remember being in Rome in a corridor in a large building crowded with beds. There I had the field dressings removed from my legs, and replaced by clean bandages, but I never saw any of my Company again, no one but German soldiers. That night I was put on a hospital train and the next night we pulled in to Verona in North Italy and were taken from there to the Grand Hotel, Gardone on the far side of Lake Garda. I ended up in a small room on the second floor with two other beds. In the course of time, one of those beds was occupied by another British officer with a serious wound in the buttocks and the other by Tommy Horne. Tommy had been taken prisoner in the Western Desert, then on the way from an Italian POW camp in Italy to Germany after the Italian surrender. On the way, the train was strafed by RAF Spitfires and he suffered a suspected fractured skull. He ended up in the third bed in our room

and there he stayed for six months, being employed to look after the two of us. I never once left this room for the next eight months.

Tommy was the best nurse that any one could wish for. He was our only connection with the world outside our little room. He fetched our meals, dressed our wounds and cheerfully performed all the mundane and unpleasant chores required by two completely helpless patients. It was not long before I became very seriously ill and I was rapidly wasting away. There was one single doctor in the hospital, a surgeon named Dr. Kreig (ironically German for War). He had operated on me when I arrived with many other seriously wounded, and he told me that he had completely removed my knee from my right leg which would now be four inches shorter if the bones fused successfully.

Now Tommy had to find him and tell him that I was not going to make it without some drastic help. It was obvious that I was in the fatal throes of gangrene. Dr. Kreig was the only doctor in the hospital, working round the clock, but he had me in the operating room within the hour. Sometime later I awoke to find my right leg missing



from above the knee, and in time, as winter turned to beautiful spring days on the lake, I really felt I was going to live. I got better and better and never looked back.

I was most interested to see your pictures of the Grand Hotel. I have an old post card picture of the front that must have been taken before the war. It must have had a very extensive face-lift fairly recently. But I never saw the outside of the building. I was brought in on a stretcher at night and was taken out on the road side eight months later. One thing I do remember is the giant *Magnolia grandiflora* which nearly blocked our view even in those days. It had a large and beautiful bloom just outside our window. I am sure that it helped my recovery."

John's affectionate memory of the *Magnolia grandiflora* already marks him as a future gardener. Another Victorian, Peggy Abkhazi, has recounted a similar experience. In her case, she survived her internment in a camp in Longhua, Shanghai by tending a climbing rose outside her barracks window.

I think gardeners have friends in both the horticultural world and the friends with whom we associate in our gardens. And, I am glad my writing is not a lonely occupation.

(Readers will be sorry to hear that John Trelawny died in hospital on the first day of December. John seemed so invincible and so full of life, that it is hard to believe we will not enjoy his company again. He was pleased that the above article was to be published in this issue of University of Victoria Finnerty Gardens newsletter. John was a great supporter of Finnerty Gardens and an inspiration to all who visited

him and Ruth, his beloved wife, in their beautiful North Saanich garden.)

Wood Anemones

Margaret deWeese

As I walked along the dock in January

I noticed the translucent sea anemones

Waving in the water.

And I hugged the thought of April ahead

With the white Wood Anemones

Waving in the breeze.

What is it about our minds

Which hold on to the best

When our lives are cold?

Pleased to Know You

Norman Todd

Different cultures have adopted a remarkable range of ways for acknowledging an introduction. Some rub noses, some kiss cheeks, some salaam, Thais wie; North Americans are content with a handshake. The welcoming introduction to cultivation of a newly discovered species of plant often precedes its official recognition by the botanical authorities. With over 400,000 recognized species of plants one might think that there would not be many more discoveries to be made and therefore no further introductions required. However,



the genus *rhododendron* has grown a little of late and the scientific and horticultural communities figuratively welcomed the plants with a combined nose rub, cheek kiss and handshake.

It may be that this initial excitement will prove to be a bit overblown. Writing about a plant, which is sketchily known, is a presumptuous undertaking. Still, spreading the word that these new things are becoming available may compensate a little for the ignorance of the word dispenser.

Rhododendron coeloneurum is native to Sichuan, China and was first discovered in 1891 but was not introduced to cultivation until the 1990s. Taxonomists have not yet decided quite where it fits into the classification system. I have had a plant for seven or eight years. The foliage is certainly handsome. For those who know *floribundum* there is a similarity. The upper leaf surface is rugose with deeply indented veins; the underside has a fairly thick indumentum of a biscuity, rawhide colour. I am not aware of this plant having bloomed in the Victoria area. The



flowers, we are told, will be pink or mauve, quite large, arranged in a somewhat loose truss. The plant will grow to a stature of significance—the native ones are recorded as being seven or eight meters at maturity.

Rhododendron kesangiae is an even larger plant. Old plants are recorded as reaching 12 meters. This magnificent plant—a large shrub or small tree—was first introduced to the botanical world in 1967. At that time it was thought to be a natural hybrid between *hodgsonii* and *falconeri*. It grows only in Bhutan and its name commemorates the Bhutanese Queen Mother. It is now recognized as being a good taxon and has become avidly sought for by the rhododendron cognoscenti. This is a first-rate plant for a woodland garden in the Victoria area being cold hardy to -15°C. My plant which is almost 3 meters high has never bloomed but a truss was exhibited in the Victoria Rhododendron Society's show five or six years ago. The flowers are a deep pink; there are 15 to 20 in the truss. I moved my plant from a very free draining, humus-poor site to one that was flatter and had richer, darker soil. There is now better annual growth and the indumented leaves are reaching the prescribed 22-25 cm. length.

A plant that tops *kesangiae* for leaf size is *sinofalconeri*. The plant was found in Vietnam in 1995 and then in S.E.

Yunnan in 1998. This is a collector's must-have. Probably the only source for obtaining it is the Rhododendron Species Foundation at Federal Way in Washington, USA. The plant has daffodil yellow flowers. It will easily grow 25 cm. in a year. The best local specimen that I know about is in a seaside garden near French Beach.

Peter Wharton of the University of British Columbia has been responsible for finding and introducing many exceptionally fine plants in the last few years. He has received some financial support from UVic and the Victoria Rhododendron Society. In return, we shared in the seed he collect-

ed. I will mention only one of his now resident and growing treasures, *r. glanduliferum*. Some of the seedlings have attained 1.5 meters or more. The long, narrow, shiny foliage is very impressive, proudly arrayed from stout well-spaced branches. Even if it never flowers it makes a choice garden statement. Very little is known about *glanduliferum* having been found in only three locations in N.E. Yunnan. The Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Species by Cox & Cox has a short entry with a tantalizing photograph, which shows a large, wavy-edged white, yellow-throated flower, said to be scented. It is a member of the *Fortunea* Subsection and it being

fragrant is not therefore surprising. It may be late blooming like *diaprepes* and discolor and could add splendour to the garden in July.

The next plant worth mentioning is, I think, worth growing for the name alone—*r. flinkii*. Mr. Flink was a Swedish gentleman. This plant was first introduced in 1915. It is rare in the wild and still uncommon in gardens. I don't think it will stay that way, as it is a most desirable acquisition. *Flinkii* was first described in 1915 where it was found growing in *Abies* forest in Bhutan. For many years it was considered to be a form of *lanatum*. However, it has since been promoted to full specific status and, upon new collections being made in the 1980s and 1990s, it has now climbed



to the top of the hit parade. This is not a large plant; photographs of very old specimens growing in the wild show it to be about 2 meters high. With us it makes a fine container plant where its heavily rust-brown indumented leaves can be fully appreciated. The flowers are yellow, grouped in a truss of three to eight.

The last plant I want to mention is called *r. monanthum*. Very little has been written about this plant. The RSF is propagating it and the famous Scottish nursery of Glendoick owned and run by the legendary Cox family lists it on their website. This is a tiny plant with a single or at most double flower, yellow in colour. It is native to SE Xizang and NW Yunnan and is evidently found occasionally growing epiphytically. Most of its kudos derives from a late-blooming characteristic, since it blooms from October to December. Thanks to the generosity of a fine plantsman I now have a young specimen. In time *monanthum* may be regarded as a curiosity but gardeners are always looking for the unusual—in fact I am convinced that the freaks generate the most lust.

As indicated at the beginning I find it remarkable and stimulating to hear about these recently discovered plants and to be able to have some of them in my garden and watch their progress. These intrepid latter-day plant hunters tell us that there are still interesting finds to be made so the story is far from ended. To these that have so recently arrived, I say: “Welcome”.



Transitory Time in the Garden

Margaret deWeese

What is it about the garden that so attracts people to devote their time to its care? Surely it cannot be the few moments in time when people drop by, or come for a special party in the garden? I think it must relate to something deep rooted in our consciousness to remind us of time. And not just time passing but the time ahead so we may anticipate, as well as appreciating time passed, which shows us change. Also, the gardening experience is a reminder of our own time on this beautiful planet, Earth. I wonder if it isn't a feeling of faith in renewal when the flowers lie spent, that we trust they will be back next year. Of course, there are some which will not; such as those

who live their lifespan of x years as the *Cardiocrinum giganteum* until it flowers in glory, and then succumbs. But the Giant Himalayan Lily, too, has given new life in bulbets to continue itself. In the main, the perennials, the flowering shrubs, the trees which wilt, lose their foliage and leaves, will grow in beauty the following year to bring us joy and excitement once again when we discover them in the garden and confirm their renewal of life as well as our own. What we hope in the Spring is also that there will be another year of life for ourselves. I know that after the winter rain, snow, fog and dreary skies, that is what I look forward to—the new seasons of harmony and maintenance!



Finnerty: A Family Connection Remembered

Chris Thackray

Three generations of the Finnerty family gathered in Finnerty Gardens to unveil a plaque in memory of their pioneering ancestors who farmed the land that is now UVic.

During the 1860s and '70s, the Finnertys were among the earliest settlers and farmers in the Mount Tolmie area. In the 1890s, Mike and Mary Ann Finnerty, along with John and Hanna Finnerty, ran a successful orchard and dairy farm on land that is now the UVic campus. Two apple trees from the family orchard still stand in the quad just south of the Cornett building.

The Finnerty name is ever-

present at UVic: Finnerty Road is the northern entrance to the campus, fronted by Finnerty's Coffee bar; Finnerty Gardens is a beautiful oasis on the south end of the campus.

David Pollock (B.Ed,79), great grandson of John and Hanna Finnerty, established the Annie Finnerty Bursary in the Faculty of Education and is a friend of the Finnerty Gardens. Many descendants of this pioneer family are UVic Alumni.

An Introduction to Friends of Finnerty Gardens

R. Bentley Sly, Curator

I would like to thank Sam Macey for inviting me to say a few words to all of the Friends of Finnerty

Gardens in his newsletter. I would also like to thank all those associated with the Gardens whom I have met since assuming my responsibilities as Manager of Grounds, for their kind words of welcome and encouragement. I very much look forward to working with everyone to enhance and "grow" the stature of the Gardens.

The early fall mild weather certainly gave us good reason to reflect on how fortunate we are to live on the West Coast in such a temperate climate. The Victoria area climate supports a diverse and abundant range of botanical material that affords us ample opportunity to indulge in a variety of outdoor horticultural activities on an almost year-round basis. However, the recent November rain and snow was quick to remind us that the natural climatic influences that we normally associate with the rest of the country at this time of the year are never very far away from the realm of possibility here. Happily, these influences only serve to remind us of our good fortune and do not remain.

I recently attended my first Finnerty Gardens Advisory Board meeting and met the members. They are hard at work planning a variety of initiatives to improve garden design, add plant selection and increase protection of existing plant material from the deer and rabbit populations. Rhonda Rose, gardener with the University Grounds Section, is busy planning and organizing all those activities associated with the annual plant sale in May. She is also preparing to implement the current initiatives being developed by the Board.



l-r Kimberly and Erika Gent, Hanna MacDonald and David Pollock. Erika is the great, great, great grand daughter of John and Hanna Finnerty.

The recent wet heavy snow fall, however, has not made her job any easier as the garden did sustain some damage. I expect that Rhonda will be applying her customary gardening magic to restore everything to its former condition. For my part, I am starting my third month in the Grounds Manager position and continue to work on getting a complete understanding of what is required to maintain the grounds for the entire campus. I have come to appreciate that my predecessor, Tony James, was indeed a very busy fellow. I also thank him for the insight and the history that he has provided for me during a couple of meetings since his retirement at the end of September.

As an update, I should mention that the University of Victoria is currently experiencing a peri-

od of exciting development with four new buildings in various stages of planning and construction. Renovations to several of the older buildings are also being planned. Increasingly, new students and faculty will be coming to this campus from far-away places to benefit from the vitality generated by this new development. Finnerty Gardens is destined to continue to play a unique role in helping to connect the campus community with those who live in the surrounding communities.

I close with a few words that speak to my initial impressions of Finnerty Gardens after arriving at the University. The stature of Finnerty Gardens has grown along with that of the university and this is now a recognized botanical garden within the horticultural community as

well as outside. Students and visitors alike enjoy its tranquil environment. The plant material collection is diverse and well supported as witnessed by the frequency of visitors arriving from both on and off the campus. Finnerty Gardens is maintained and managed by people who are passionate about horticulture and the enjoyment that the Gardens bring to both the campus and surrounding communities.

I look forward to joining with the Advisory Board and all of the Friends of the Gardens in guiding Finnerty Gardens through this exciting period of its history.





Umbrellas: It Isn't Raining!

Margaret deWeese

In Japan in the month of May, there are many umbrellas in the gardens. This is not because of the monsoon rains which normally come a little later, or for pretty decoration, but to protect delicate peony petals from the sun, and to preserve their short bloom for a little longer.

As July begins, a sunny bank has umbrellas sticking through tomato frames plus the expensive canvas umbrella to shade guests, all pressed into service for those in need. The guests have legs and can move into the shade. The fresh leaves of the rhododendrons and the new planting of Magnolia wilsonii were installed on a hot sunny shale bank and therefore show their brown baked curling leaves to me before I rush to get the umbrellas.

The hot sun doesn't last too long during the summer months and as long as the roots or root-ball is kept watered the browned, crisp leaves will regenerate fresh new leaves and the unsightly sunburned ones may be snipped off. Summer after summer, poor R. hematodes, R. "Bow Bells" and R. "Half Dan Lem" look terrible and are a reproach to their neglectful owner. Sun screen for gardeners and umbrellas or tree shade for sensitive plants is the new order for global warming.

Events

The Abkhazi Garden, in partnership with Continuing Studies at the University of Victoria, is offering two events in March that promise to be fascinating:

1. MAKING MAGIC IN THE CITY

In this public lecture, Lynden Miller—a plantsperson and public garden designer in New York City—tells the story of the restoration of many previously neglected and avoided public spaces over a twenty year period in New York City. She emphasizes how plants can be used to soften and civilize city life.

Date Wednesday, March 28, 8 to 9 pm, Course Code: CMCR233 2007S C01

Fee \$18 plus GST for the one session

2. CREATING URBAN OASES

Lynden Miller is also offering a half-day workshop the following day for professionals working with public spaces. Please visit the Continuing Studies website at www.uvcs.uvic.ca re Course Code: CMCR234 2007S C01 for further information.

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For detailed itinerary contact Norm at Far and Away Adventures
Tel: 250-386-5555 or visit www.FarandAwayAdventures.com