



University
of Victoria

University Finnerty Garden Friends

Fall 2009

Dear Friends,

It seems a long time since I last wrote to you all, probably because so much has happened in the interval. The weather was very different from usual, as we all know, and it produced some astounding garden growth. The rhododendron bloom was fantastic, and lasted a long time since the flowers were not damaged by rain. I had 10 new raised beds made, and grew so many vegetables that I had to buy a new freezer to store them. Keeping everything watered has been a real challenge, and the system will have to be improved next year because dry patches were left. The heat made many of the vegetables like squash and tomatoes become enormous and produce very heavily.

The irrigation system has worked surprisingly well, and I still have about 16,000 gallons left—enough to last until the first week of September. I hope for rain, not only for the garden but for the native vegetation which is suffering from the drought. For several weeks the fire hazard was extreme, and that scares us all, especially when there are so many visitors to the island.

We had an interesting and busy season with the hummingbirds. This year, I mixed 262 litres of syrup, using 131 pounds of sugar—yes, I know I have mixed up my units, but I always think in imperial measure in recipes. The birds were late arriving this year—the first banding session had to be canceled—but then came in great numbers. By the middle of May, I was mixing eight litres a day. Then, all of a sudden, near the first of June their numbers dropped all over the island. We

all have theories about the cause of this unusual behaviour, and suspect that the extreme heat may have been too much for the babies in their nests. The numbers stayed low for several weeks and then started to climb again, most of them appearing to be migrants. The birds have stayed around for much longer this year—in fact, I continue to have a few here. I still have no Annas. Many of the birds caught had been banded here in previous years, but we have yet to catch one that was banded elsewhere.

This year, I was very pleased to find that our eagles had reared a baby. I watched as he flew for the first time, landing upside down in one of the trees—very undignified! I saw him a number of times over the next few days, and am always amazed at how quickly they learn to fly well. The parents are still feeding him.

I visited the Finnerty Gardens a couple of weeks ago and was thrilled to see how well the Kreiss rhododendrons have done. Rhonda and her crew are to be congratulated. A plaque for the collection has been installed. I was also thrilled to see the Gardens looking so well—they are certainly worth a visit at any time of the year, and Carmen and the committee are doing a great job adding plants to give interest at all seasons. If you haven't been there recently, do make a visit soon and then again later to enjoy the fall colours.

Betty Kennedy



A Happy Celebration

Carmen Varcoe

On the last day in July, a hot one, the Kreiss family gathered to honour and acknowledge their parents Bob and Dora's contribution of species rhododendrons to Finnerty Gardens. The children numbering five and several grandchildren managed to coordinate their very busy professional lives from all over the United States to meet in the gardens and see the final result of the extraordinary relocation of over 120 mature and rare species rhododendrons.

The enormous task of moving all these plants took place last January and February after much preparation of a new area in Finnerty Gardens by the dedicated Grounds staff under the guidance of Rhonda Rose. To see how these rhododendrons have settled in is really a testament to the care that all of these people have given them.

A plaque has been placed in front of the bed to commemorate Bob and Dora. Tom Smith, Executive Director of Facilities Management, was really impressed with the collection and was especially appreciative of the Grounds staff for their dedication. Norm Todd mentioned Dora's love of the rhododendron and her instrumental help in forming the Victoria Rhododendron Society.

Early on, this group met regularly on campus. It's not very often that such events take place with so few glitches, and it was indeed humbling to see what a spectacular collection this is. Most gardens must wait a good 20 to 30 years to see such specimens and here in Finnerty we have been blessed with a ready-made top notch mature rhododendron species collection that probably exceeds any public garden in the northwest.

After the official ceremony, our group gathered at the University Club to enjoy coffee and refreshments.

When you have the time, please walk through the Gardens and have a look. You won't miss this collection if you turn right on entering the Gardens through the Chapel entrance and veer right to the end of the woodland pond. Although not in bloom, they are spectacular in their size, foliage and rarity, and they are certainly assured of a good home with us thanks to the great generosity of the Kreiss family.

"Most gardens must wait a good 20 to 30 years to see such specimens"



Carmen Varcoe, Advisory Board Chair and the Kreiss family



Norm Todd, family and friends



The rhodos in their new permanent home

Stamps

Margaret de Weese

Letter writing is becoming an occupation of the few due to email. But occasionally the right circumstances, the right motivation such as a wonderful stamp and the mood for putting your thoughts on paper in the form of a letter, compel a visit to the post office and the feeling of how pleased the recipient will be!

Last year and this Spring, Canada Post came out with booklets of Paeonies and Rhododendrons. I did ask last year when they would bring out the rhododendron although I am not taking credit for the suggestion! Maybe thousands of letter writers did the same.

Fresh Rhododendrons bloom for your collection

March 13, 2009



OTTAWA—To welcome the pending arrival of spring, Canada Post today issued a set of two blooming stamps. With its delicate flaring petals, clusters of vibrantly coloured blossoms and deep evergreen leaves, the rhododendron (*Ericaceae* family) is one of the most beautiful flowers ever to set root in Canadian soil. But the rhododendron is far more than just a pretty face.

The rhododendron—the name is derived from the Greek word meaning red rose—has blooms that can be found in magenta, purple, pink and white shades, often infused with blotted speckles and splashes of colour. The rhododendron is a genus of flowering plants with more than 700 species (of which only eight are native to Canada), including more than 300 which are believed to have medicinal value when used in treating gouty rheumatic conditions. They can be found throughout the Northern Hemisphere, but are mostly seen in China and the Himalayas. It is also the national flower of Nepal.

Stamp designer Isabelle Toussaint visited the 2008 Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada exhibition in Kentville, Nova Scotia, when the rhododendrons were in full bloom. The hazy day offered a few brief intervals of sunshine, which in turn provided Toussaint with enough natural light for the photo shoot.



“Having worked on many flower stamp projects over the years, I have relished the beauty of each and never become bored,” said Danielle Trottier, Manager of Stamp Design and Production at Canada Post. “As a gardener myself, I have found that the pleasure of working on these floral projects is often what gets me through our harsh winter months.”

The first Canadian stamps depicting flowers were issued in 1964 under the name “Floral Emblems”, as a series of 14 stamps for each province and territory that featured their coats-of-arms and respective flowers. Since then, flowers have been blooming throughout the Canada Post Stamp Program as they are a beautiful addition to any mailing.

The 54-cent stamps measure 32.25 mm x 26.25 mm (horizontal) with simulated perforations. Lowe-Martin printed 13 million stamps which will be sold in booklets of 10. The self-adhesive pressure sensitive stamps were printed using lithography in six colours on Tullis Russell paper. They are general tagged on all sides. The Official First Day Cover will bear the cancel KENTVILLE NS.

Additional information about Canadian stamps can be found in the News section of Canada Post’s website, and photos of these new stamps are also available. Stamps and other products will be available at participating post offices, or can be ordered online by following the links at Canada Post’s website www.canadapost.ca/collection, or by mail order from the National Philatelic Centre. From Canada and the USA, call toll-free: 1 800-565-4362, and from other countries, call: 902-863-6550.

I am not a philatelist but I know what appeals to me. I have happily bought stamps of Species Rhododendrons from China, Nepal and from Indonesia of the tender *Vireya* subsection at rhododendron conventions. Although these stamps are not for using, the Canadian rhododendron ones certainly will be employed.

Behind the Plaque

David Pollock

There is a plaque near the Henderson Road Gate into Finnerty Gardens that reads: "In memory of the Finnertys, John and Hannah, Michael and Mary Ann, who once tilled this soil." A number of names were considered for this garden. Finnerty recognizes two brothers who arrived from County Mayo, Ireland, and carved out a place in colonial Victoria for their families. I could not have been more pleased with the choice of name since John Patrick Finnerty was my great grandfather.

The name itself has Celtic origins. O'Fionnachta, literally means son or daughter of the white haired one. This Celtic name was anglicized to "Finnerty" as early as 1630 when John Finnerty was the Bishop of Elphin. My great grandfather preferred to spell his name Fenerty. St. Andrew's Cathedral has a stained glass window dedicated to John's memory "by his children and his brother Michael." Michael, who could neither read nor write, was known by Finnerty and as he was the last of his family to occupy the grounds which now honour his name, FINNERTY it shall be.

Who were these people? The answer is that they were simply among the thousands of pioneers whose deeds have hitherto gone unheralded. Neither saints nor sinners, their lives were ones of unremitting toil. They have left their marks, alternate spellings and muddy footprints through Victoria's history more by accident than design. That a beautiful garden now honours their name would have surprised John and Mike. My grandmother Anna Maria Finnerty had a passion for her own gardens and flowers and this would have pleased her very much.

At a Finnerty reunion several years ago, Michael's side of the

family retold the epic tale of how Big Mike Finnerty, the first man to fall a tree on Gordon Head, single handedly established his Spring Park Farm and then sent to Ireland for his childhood sweetheart. My father remembered his great uncle by saying Uncle Mike was always a head taller, a thousand dollars richer and ten years senior to the next man. That Mike was a great raconteur, possessed of a lively Irish wit is undisputed. That he never let the truth impede the flow of a good story was also one of his traits. When I, as a representative of John's side of the family, rose to clarify some of these dearly held perceptions I almost became the first cousin "once removed".

Legends can crumble when dates and time lines are laid beside them. Michael claimed to be 100 in 1929. If this were so, then he was 30 when he left Ireland with John in 1859. His bride to be was only 15. If they were indeed childhood sweethearts then it is likely Mike was actually the younger of the brothers. Census documents and other evidence bear this out. Mike's age is recorded as 101 in the Ross Bay Cemetery records, so perhaps he is entitled to the last laugh.

Beginning in 1863, the Finnerty brothers operated a vegetable garden and fruit orchard in the Fernwood area. Their home was at the corner of Richmond Road and Denman Street with the garden and orchard in behind. Seeking to expand their enterprise, they took up land in Gordon Head for a dairy operation by agreeing to construct a roadway, part of which still bears their name.

John and Hannah's first son was born in 1868. At that time, John was operating a market called Island Vegetable Store in Waddington Alley which I found to my surprise to be only



Zena Finnerty and baby Marion (about 1913) (Standing in front of the Finnerty cottage and apple tree)



John Joseph (son of Mike Finnerty) and baby Marion (about 1913) (John has his back to where the Elliot building now stands)

two miles distant from Denman St. By 1874, they had a thriving business and were well known for the quality of their produce. Hannah was expecting their fifth child when John contracted tuberculosis and died just after Christmas. This tragedy left the family in turmoil but to make matters worse, all the family's assets were in John's name and he had left no will. Michael had to go before the courts to prove that he was an equal partner.

Michael could not expect his sister-in-law to provide him with domestic help even if she were willing and he could certainly not live under her roof. He did the only thing possible and sought to establish his own family. In 1880, he went to San Francisco where he married Mary Ann Casey, age 36. He returned with her to Spring Park farm at Gordon Head. There they had three children, William Francis, John Joseph and Mary Ann. About 1901, Michael had a house built at 1530 Bank Street that stands in perfect condition today. He continued to farm the Gordon Head land until about 1926.

John and Hannah's children were Patrick Sarsfield, Joseph John, Catherine Cecilia, Anna Maria and John William. Hannah had three more children by her second husband Patrick Houlihan. These were James Joseph, Rosetta Louise and Mary Ellen. For reasons best kept in the family, James legally changed his name to Fenerty. He and Joe operated a store called Fenerty Brothers' Market on Pandora Avenue until 1934. Jim Fenerty and his wife Maggie lived in the family home at 1784 Denman St. until Jim's death in 1966.

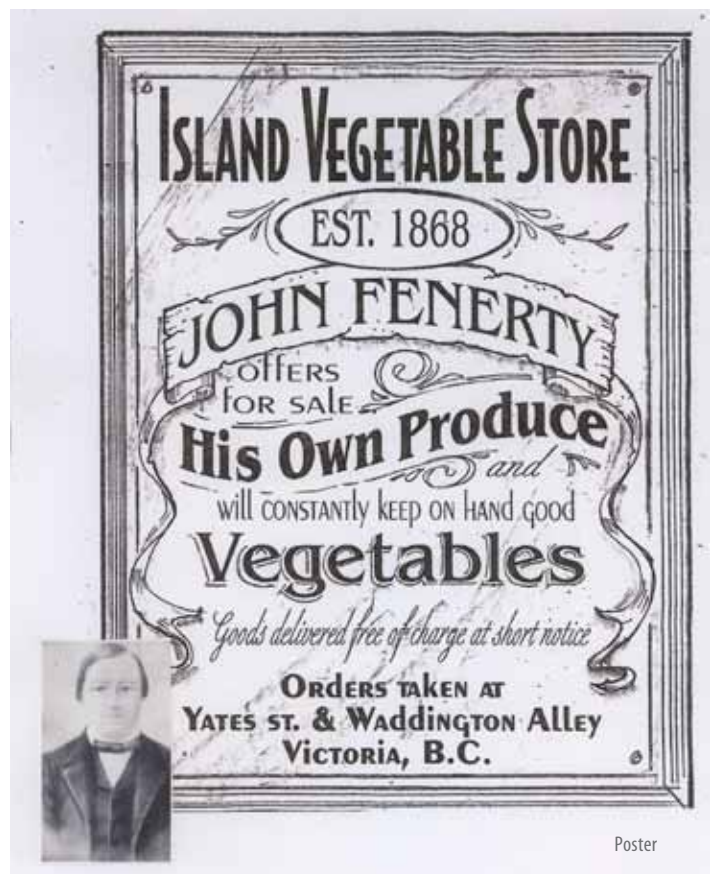
The only Finnertys now living who can claim a connection to this family are Michael's descendants through his son John Joseph; however, there are a significant number of Anna Maria's descendants living nearby and a surprising number of them are UVic alumni. Also living in this area are descendants of Catherine Cecilia and of Mary Ann. The family is to have our next reunion in 2010 and a tour of Finnerty Gardens is already foremost on our agenda.

The Finnerty headstone in Ross Bay Cemetery is inscribed: "Their Footsteps Echo Through Time" gleaned from Longfellow's "The Day is Done." May you hear them as you walk through Finnerty Gardens. They are not just the echoes of John and Michael or Hannah and Mary Ann or even those of their draught horses Prince and Dave who pulled the stumps from the ground under your feet. They are the echoes of all the ordinary people who simply wanted a better place for their children.



John Fenerty

Image A-01287 courtesy of
Royal BC Museum, BC Archives



Poster

The Origin of Species—150th Anniversary

M.J. Harvey

2009 is the sesquicentennial of the publication of Charles Darwin's book *On the Origin of Species*. It has been called one of the books that changed the world and provides the unifying theory on which the science of biology is based. As a retired biologist who taught evolutionary theory, I thought I should use the occasion to reminisce about my experiences. What follows is more biography than biology but if anyone wants the theory I can recommend the book as it is still in print and still generating discussion.

My first experience of controversy surrounding the theory was at King's College, Newcastle upon Tyne (now the University of Newcastle upon Tyne), where the Botany Department employed a strange and wonderful assortment of characters including the redoubtable Dr. Fothergill. He was a mycologist but his sideline was writing books on evolution and being a Roman Catholic in good standing his books had the official Vatican imprimatur. This is in contrast to Darwin whose books seem to have been banned by most major religions at one time or another.

Students in England in the 1950s were an unruly lot, anything but submissive, and we would ask him deliberately challenging questions. We arranged a debate through the Science Society between Dr. Fothergill and a proponent of evolution who came up from London. It was an electric occasion. Fothergill maintained his ground which was, if I remember correctly, that evolution occurred, with one exception: that the human race was created.

Being young and rebellious this got me interested in the subject and trips in the 1950s to London had me heading to Charing Cross Road, the centre of the secondhand book trade. I would go into each shop in turn searching out Darwiniana. Books by Darwin were plentiful and cheap since once he became famous his books were in great demand as prestige items to have on show on bookshelves. Many of these books were never read, not even cracked open. How do I know? I have a couple of cheap editions with the pages uncut, making it impossible to read them. This struck me as so strange that I decided to keep them as is. My copies still have the secondhand prices penciled inside them: 2/6, 10/6 (say 50 cents, \$2).

The fact that the *Origin* was published in 1859 (24 November) was an accident of sorts. Darwin had planned a multivolume treatise containing a massive amount of supporting material and had been taking his time accumulating this. His hand was forced in 1858 by a letter from Alfred Wallace who had also thought up the hypothesis of natural selection (as "survival of the fittest") while on an expedition to the Malay peninsula col-

lecting bird and mammal skins.

It was therefore arranged that the initial public announcement of the hypothesis would be a joint one and this took the form of the reading of their papers on 1 July 1858 at a meeting of the Linnean Society of London in Burlington House, Piccadilly, London. Incidentally the Society still occupies the same grace and favour rooms.

In his autobiography, Darwin comments that the initial announcement produced little reaction (contrasting with the book the next year). He wrote, "the only published notice which I can remember was by Professor Haughton of Dublin whose verdict was that all that was new in them was false, and all that was true was old." I should add though that he wrote his autobiography partly to amuse his grandchildren.

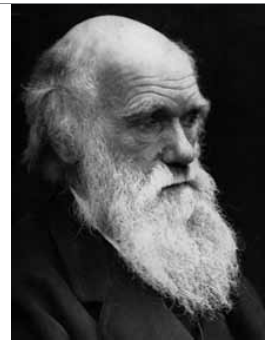
After the Linnean Society reading, Darwin got down to concentrating his notes from some eleven years into the short volume that we now call the *Origin of Species*.

In 1957 I got a summer job at the Natural History Museum in London—what would now be called an internship. Dr. Dandy was Keeper of the Herbarium and in showing the two summer students round commented that the stack of wooden boxes by the door contained Darwin's plant specimens collected during the voyage of the *Beagle* 1831-36. These were the original packing cases from the *Beagle*. Dandy commented that he intended to get round to sorting and identifying the specimens before he retired. I have often wondered whether he did.

Darwin was not one of the great plant collectors and was more famous for the fossils, birds (he was a good shot) and invertebrates that he collected. For instance he became the world authority on Cirripedia—the barnacles. His plant studies carried out at Down were on pollination mechanisms and physiology, particularly in carnivorous plants, and formed the subjects of his later books.

In 1963 I moved to Halifax, NS to take up a position in the Department of Biology, Dalhousie University. There I taught ecology, genetics, evolution, taxonomy and first year biology. Each year the department was visited by representatives of the major textbook publishers and during discussions with one representative he pointed out that in first-year books the chapter on evolution was always placed last. This, he explained, was so that it could be omitted in certain states of the union and thus give the books a chance of being adopted as a text.

The little isolated village of Down in Kent is where Darwin and family moved after his physician suggested that for his



health's sake he should move away from London's polluted atmosphere. Darwin spent the remainder of his life there as a semi-invalid. The suggestion is that he contacted Chaga's disease from a bug bite in South America. The house and property were willed to the Royal College of Surgeons which maintains the lower floor as a museum.

Darwin's writing chair is one of the curiosities on display. He had a carpenter make it so that he could be comfortably relaxed and have a swiveling writing surface move across when he wished. On this he would do most of his writing and correspondence.

I had visits to Down to see the museum and take photographs for talks to my students and on one occasion I was having difficulty with the reflections from a glass display case. The curator took pity on me and suggested that I could take the object out and photograph it on the flagstones of the patio outside. The object in question was a molar tooth that Darwin had pried from a cliff in South America. It had belonged to a now extinct giant ground-sloth which had used it to grind twigs. The tooth must have weighed a couple of pounds. This was one of the finds the young Darwin made that impressed on him how much things had changed. I don't think that nowadays a visitor would be permitted to handle such a historic object, so I feel privileged.

The initial hypothesis of Darwin and Wallace on natural selection has over the years developed into the theory of evolution by the accretion of methods and evidence from many other fields of science. These include genetics, anatomy, geology, chemistry, DNA etc. In terms of the philosophy of science it is what is called a "robust" theory, from the support it receives directly and indirectly from other fields.

The original statement on selection was very simple. When Huxley was told of it he exclaimed, "Why didn't I think of it!" Since the trend now is to communicate via Twitter, I have reduced it to a tweet. Here goes: Organisms over reproduce Most die young Individuals differ Ones with favourable genes have more offspring Populations change.

Surely, some readers must be thinking, the gentle art of gardening is untouched by science in general and controversial ideas such as evolution in particular. Cannot the rhododendrons in say, the Finnerty Gardens, be grown just to look at and to appreciate their flowers? Of course they can and the majority of the population does just that. Appreciation is a legitimate part of gardening, maybe the most important part.

On the other hand look up the latest books on classification

or read about the difficulties of making certain hybrids (my hobby) and you land straight into ideas of migration, divergence, isolation, genetic drift, DNA and cladistics. You don't need to know about any of these but they are part of modern life, even gardening.

I look back on my career and wonder at how much things have changed in my lifetime, let alone 150 years. I do remember that after World War II the hope was that the general population would become more literate in science and that the schism between the arts and the sciences would be healed. But this did not happen.

The gap between science and non-science is an almost insoluble problem given how much individual sciences have expanded over the past 150 years. One person can no longer encompass say, the whole of chemistry, or even just organic chemistry but must find a gap in a tiny specialization in one fragment of organic chemistry.

The population's ignorance of science one can say is the "fault" of scientists in not explaining what they do in simple terms. This begs several questions, and is a misunderstanding of the nature of the scientific system itself. Science is an enormously competitive enterprise, more so than any Olympic sport or the Tour de France. The pressure to perform is great enough to preclude time off to explain say, quantum thermodynamics, to the public. But I'm wandering from the original topic. Happy anniversary Darwin, your book is still topical.

An invitation to submit articles for the Finnerty Gardens Newsletter

All Friends of Finnerty Gardens—including present and past Members of the Advisory Board—are invited to submit articles of interest to horticulturists for publication in the Newsletter. The purpose is to maintain the eclectic range of horticultural interests that the Newsletter has espoused in recent years.

Ideally, articles should be of 500–1,000 words in length, and should be emailed to the editor as soon as they are ready. When articles are accepted, they will be published as quickly as space becomes available. Since the editor is an English professor rather than a horticulturist, authors must hold themselves responsible for the accuracy of the horticultural content.

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