

ONE OF CANADA'S GREATEST HORTICULTURISTS PASSES AWAY

Bill Livingstone died on October 30 1990 at the age of 79. He had retired from his position as deputy superintendent of the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation in 1973. But, William C. Livingstone was a great deal more than the number two man in parks in Vancouver. He was also the father of at least three great garden parks or gardens in that most beautiful city. Over his 35 year career with the Vancouver Board, he was directly responsible for the conception, planning and development of: Queen Elizabeth Park, the Bloedel Conservatory and VanDusen Botanical Gardens.

Bill became famous for being able to walk a potential garden site and virtually do the master plan 'in his head' right there on-site during the first walk.

He was also very much a team with the Board's superintendent Stuart S. Lefeaux. Of the Bloedel Conservatory, Stu once told me that it had been Bill's dream, and together they went to visit Mr. Bloedel, and that it was quite simply Bill's descriptions and conceptualizing that sold the pulp and paper magnate on donating most of the cost of the facility.

Bill was almost totally self-taught! His knowledge and skills were extensive! He had apprenticed in horticulture in Portland, Oregon. Prior to that he attended Vancouver Technical School--his parents having moved to Vancouver from Scotland in 1911, when he was only six months old. Horticulture was already in his blood then, his father having been a nurseryman in Scotland.

One of his trademarks in my mind, and about which he was always conscious but unconcerned, was his pronunciation of botanical names. And, I will always remember him talking frequently about the "rhody-dendrons!"

It was in the year 1939,

when the then superintendent of the Vancouver Board --the late Phil Stroyan--recruited Bill, then self-employed as a landscape gardener. Phil, an engineer, appointed Bill landscape supervisor right from the start. To gain an idea of Bill's nature, one only needs talk to any of the Parks Board employees who were there during his time tenure. They all love him!

Although Queen Elizabeth Park, and its Quarry Gardens, may be considered by



some to be his best creation, I think he was likely most proud of the VanDusen Gardens, which were opened in August 1975. Bill began work on the city's botanical display gardens back in 1966. He invited Dr. A. Fletcher, then director of the Edinburgh Botanical Gardens, to tour the site and to confirm his thought of the ideal setting the abandoned 28 ha Shaughnessy golf course would provide a garden.

For the next five years, an impasse on funding the garden resulted in little action. Finally, in January 1971, an agreement was signed between the three major contributors: the province, the city, and the Vancouver Foundation. The garden was named in honour of W. H. VanDusen, then president of the Vancouver Foundation, on whom Bill had worked diligently for the funding.

Though Bill retired on December 31 in 1973, he continued with the Parks Board in a consultative capacity all through 1974 and until the opening of VanDusen Gardens in August 1975.

In 1972, during development of VanDusen, he wrote an article about that work for me, in which he said, "If our cities are to remain liveable then we must provide the amenities that are basic to humanity. The importance of plants and their relationship to a better city environment has to be demonstrated not only to children but also to all age groups. To stimulate this interest botanic gardens must broaden their scope of activities, and assume a closer relationship with all segments of the community. In this age of electronics and mass distribution of news services, it is now possible to attract a much wider and more interested public participation than was possible in the recent past.

"Vancouver with a climate unique in Canada, lends itself to a much wider selection of plant material than is possible in cities of the Prairies or the eastern provinces. Plants indigenous to many of the temperate zones of the world do well in the local area. To exploit this unique horticulture potential fully, we have assembled a number of interesting plant collections. While such collections are not uncommon to the Vancouver area, the opportunities to display these in public gardens have been limited because of the lack of locations that provided the ideal landscape setting and protection against vandalism. This, we feel, can be provided in the new VanDusen Botanical Gardens now under development."

Bill retired to Tsawwassen south of Vancouver, to his own lovely garden. We all owe Bill Livingstone a great deal for setting the pace. Ave atque vale!•