

Publishers Note

Forest History Association of BC

March 1, 2021

This document contains a copy of the article entitled *Gerry Wellburn and the 1300+ year trees* by Bruce Devitt, published in the FHABC Newsletter Issue 109, dated March 2021, followed by several of the references mentioned in the article.

These documents were kindly provided to the author, Bruce Devitt, by the BC Forest Discovery Centre for this article.

We regret the barely legible copies, due to age, but they may be of interest to researchers.

As the newsletter team prepared this article, Eric Andersen spotted this item in our newsletter archive:

Newsletter No. Six, November 1983:

FOREST HISTORY ASSOCIATION OF B.C. HOLDS FIRST ANNUAL MEETING

A tour of the [Duncan] museum grounds was followed by a preview of a new exhibit (which was in the final stages of preparation) in the main building. At the evening banquet in the Cowichan Valley Inn, Gerry Wellburn was given the position of Honorary President of the Forest History Association of British Columbia. The members were then treated to an excellent after-dinner presentation by Mr. Wellburn which gave a fascinating view of history as shown in manuscripts, stamps, and coins.

Gerry Wellburn's collections have been showcased by **All Nations Stamp and Coin** in their auction programs the last few years -- with *Vancouver Sun* history feature writer John Mackie often joining in to celebrate and help bring awareness of these treasures and Gerry Wellburn to the public:

<https://www.allnationsstampandcoin.com/gerald-wellburn/>

References:

Page 4 1957 Certification of 1300+ year tree

Page 5—CIF certification of seedlings collected from 1300+ year trees

Page 6 BCFDC old tree cookie

Page 7 1957 old tree plaque

Page 8 Map of Duncan area showing Waterloo Mountain and the old tree locations

Pages 9,10—Pamphlet



Gerry Wellburn and the 1300+ year trees

By Bruce Devitt RPF (Ret), was President of the BC Forest Museum Society in Duncan from 1982-1984. He has been a long-time active contributor to FHABC and provides this anecdote about Gerry Wellburn (1900-1992), whom Bruce described as “a distinguished BC philatelist and lumberman, a master collector and story-teller”. As Bruce said, “old trees and old forests are once again in the news. Here is a story about a man and old trees”

Gerry Wellburn, founder of the BC Forest Discovery Centre in North Cowichan near Duncan BC, was an extraordinary collector; his collections included stamps, old trees, forestry, and logging equipment. These collections were extraordinary because he chose them to create and illustrate a story. His insight as to what was important to collect and how to use it to tell a story was a special gift.

He is probably more widely known for his Canadian historical stamp albums, which included, for example, the “1858 Fraser River Gold Rush”, The “Historic (1862) Vancouver” (transformation from forest to city) Album and he once showed me items from an album that covered the period of mail delivery across Canada by Hudson Bay Company fur trade canoes; by sail around South America and by rail to the west coast. All of his albums were thoroughly researched and were hand-illustrated by him. Today the collection remains in several private hands and the only accessible ones are photocopies of eleven Wellburn collections in the National Archives of Canada. One album - the “Panama Railway Connection” - was recently offered for sale on December 12, 2020.

Gerry's largest collection and story by far covers BC logging and forest history located in a forest history museum that includes life-sized equipment, operating steam locomotives & speeders on a railway that goes over a lakeside trestle and loops around 100 acres, an old working sawmill camp buildings, a BCFS Ranger Station and fire lookout tower, post office and trapper's cabin, dioramas, and other memorabilia. Gerry told me he wanted this place to tell the complete story of people and the forest through logging and forestry on the BC West Coast. The BC Forest Discovery Centre has now been in operation for over

55 years.

But little known is his story of the “oldest” Douglas-fir trees in Canada. Some will recall that Gerry Wellburn had the beginnings of the museum up in Deerholme at his homestead, which is where I first met him. George Silburn, the head of the BC Forest Service Reforestation Division and my boss, was a friend of Gerry from the old Victoria swim club days on the Gorge. Early in 1960, Gerry needed some trees planted so George sent me up to see if I could give him a hand. Little did I realize then that this job, planting trees at his place, would become more demanding and occupy a great deal of my time until my work, then as Chief Forester for Pacific Forest Products, took me to Vancouver in 1985.

In 1964, the Cowichan Valley Forest Museum Society was formed to house Gerry's logging/forestry collection. The property on Somenos Lake was purchased with industry donations and community support. Jim Macfarlane (Forest Engineer, MacMillan Bloedel, Shawnigan Division) and I (BCFS Forester at the Duncan Nursery) were the Engineer and Forester that Gerry relied on in the early stages of the development of the Museum property.

As I said, Gerry was a unique collector in that he collected things that told a story. It was a great experience just to hear him & see the world through his eyes. The “1000-year-old Mothers” exhibit in the museum was a good example. Gerry had saved an area containing 1000-year plus Douglas-firs on Waterloo Mountain behind Deerholme on the former Wellburn Timbers holdings, then MacMillan Bloedel, Shawnigan Division. Gerry and I and, if I remember correctly, Jack Phillips his son-in-law, went up one weekend in the Spring of 1967, just after snowmelt, and dug up some Douglas-fir seedlings that had grown



[From BC Forest Discovery Centre History](#)

along the roadside under the old tree. We stored these lifted young trees in the seedling-cold storage plant at the BCFS Duncan Nursery until summer and then had 12 planted at the Forest Museum on July 01, 1967, as part of Canada's Centennial Celebrations. Wow! What a story that made – seedlings from “1000-year-old mothers”. Although coming from cold storage, the seedlings were in good shape, so they survived and grew well.

I did not realize until recently the full details of how the old trees came to be in this story. In 2019 I received an email asking me if I knew the source of the big Douglas-fir cookie in the Canadian Forest Service's Pacific Forestry Centre in Victoria. I thought it might be the same source as the one in the Duncan BC Forestry Discovery Centre. (A “cookie” in this context is a round of wood cut from a tree trunk showing the annual growth rings which can be counted to determine the age).

(Continued on page 3)

(Continued from page 2)

I contacted Neil Maldon at the BC Forest Discovery Centre and obtained the following information from their collection: A certificate on MacMillan Bloedel stationery dated October 03, 1957, and signed by Ralph Schmidt, RPF, BCFS Research Forester certifying the age of a tree over 1300 years and notarized by David Williams QC. Then there was a pamphlet “*Tour of the forests*” by the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, which was meeting in Victoria. Gerry led the tour dated October 04, 1957, through the MacMillan Bloedel Shawnigan Division woodlands. This was followed by a picture showing the placement of a plaque on the Waterloo Mountain tree commemorating its age and the tour. There were also a map showing old tree locations. And last, on Canadian Institute of Forestry stationery dated April 1978, there is a notarized plantation certificate signed by Ralph Schmidt, then head of the BCFS Research Division, sealed by David Williams QC, a local Lawyer and museum supporter, and me stating the seedlings planted came from 1000-year-old mothers.

This brief summary shows the detailed attention that Gerry devoted to his storytelling and collecting. I am also sure that he designed the tour

pamphlet and organized and led the tour on behalf of the local Chamber. He also had created a 1000-year tree cookie from an adjacent Waterloo Mountain tree which is now on display in the BC Forest Discovery Centre.

Now you know the full story about the plantation in the BC Forest Discovery Centre located south of the big log building past the big “General Grant offspring” Sequoia in the crescent near the railway track. And, you can appreciate more about Gerry’s unique storytelling and collecting gifts. He was indeed a master collector and storyteller and he was also a master at knowing whom to contact for help.

By the way, as others found out later, the Douglas-fir tree cookie at the Pacific Forestry Centre did not come from Waterloo Mountain.

Thanks and credit goes to Neil Maldon, Collections Curator, BC Forest Discovery Centre, for providing me copies of the items from their collection.

Mosaic Forest Management foresters recently have confirmed that the ancient Waterloo Mountain tree is still to be found on the Mountain.

REFERENCES

(on following pages)

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Pages 9,10—Pamphlet

Additional images associated with this story can be found [on our website here](#).



MACMILLAN & BLOEDEL LIMITED

SHAWNIGAN DIVISION

DEERHOLME, DUNCAN, B.C.

October 1, 1957

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT THE OLD GROWTH DOUGLAS FIR TREE,
SITUATED ON THE LOWER SOUTH SLOPE OF WATERLOO MOUNTAIN, TO
WHICH A BRONZE PLAQUE IS ATTACHED IS AT LEAST 1300 YEARS OLD.
THIS CERTIFICATION IS BASED ON AN ACTUAL RING COUNT OF A
SAMPLE BORING OF THE TREE AND COMPARED WITH A FULL CROSS-SECTION
OF A SIMILAR DOUGLAS FIR TREE WHICH GREW IN THE SAME LOCALITY
AND WAS FOUND TO BE 1310 YEARS OLD.

Signed

R. Schmidt

R. Schmidt B.S.F., P.C.R.F.
Assistant Forester
Research Division
British Columbia Forest Service

Signed

G.E. Wellburn

G.E. Wellburn
Manager
Shawnigan Division
MacMillan & Bloedel Limited

Signed Before

Lawrence

Notary Public





Canadian Institute of Forestry/Institut Forestier du Canada

VANCOUVER ISLAND SECTION

APRIL 28, 1978

THIS NOTE CONFIRMS THAT THE 12 DOUGLAS-FIR TREES LOCATED IN THE CRESCENT ADJACENT (EAST) TO THE BIG LOG BUILDING AT THE B.C. FOREST MUSEUM TO BE OFFSPRING OF THE 1300 YEAR OLD GROWN DOUGLAS-FIR SITUATED ON WATERLOO MOUNTAIN AND DEDICATED TO BE PRESERVED BY THE CANADIAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE IN 1957.

THE 12 TREES WERE GATHERED AS SEEDLINGS BY GERRY WELLBURN AND BRUCE DEVITT AND PLANTED JULY 1, 1967 TO MARK THE CANADIAN CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION.

THE PLANTATION OF SEEDLINGS FROM OVER A 1,000 YEAR OLD MOTHER IS THUS A FITTING TRIBUTE TO MARK CANADA'S 100 YEARS.

SIGNED

R. L. Schmidt

R. L. Schmidt, B.S.F., B.C.R.F.
Forester 2 i/c Research Division
Ministry of Forests

I CERTIFY THAT THE SEEDLINGS
WERE PLANTED IN MY PRESENCE

WITNESSED

Gerry Wellburn

G. B. Wellburn, Director
B. C. Forest Museum

David R. Williams
David R. Williams, O.C.
Notary Public

SIGNED

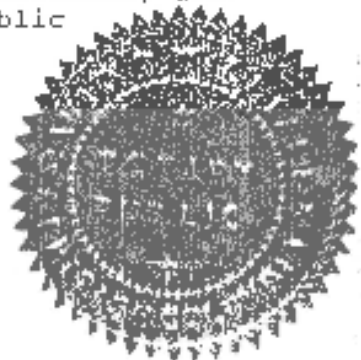
Bruce Devitt

Bruce Devitt, B.S.F., B.C.R.F.
Chief Forester
Pacific Logging Company Limited
Vice-President, B.C. Forest Museum

WITNESSED THEREFORE

David R. Williams

Notary Public





89/128

THIS DOUGLAS FIR
IS 1,300 YEARS OLD.
IT STARTED LIFE
AS A SEEDLING IN
APPROXIMATELY
THE YEAR 650 A.D.
AND IS BELIEVED
TO BE THE OLDEST
OF ITS KIND IN
CANADA.....
IT IS LOCATED IN
THE SHAWNIGAN
DIVISION OF MAC
MILLAN & BLOEDEL
LIMITED.....

THIS 1300 YEAR OLD DOUGLAS FIR
(PSEUDOTSUGA TAXIFOLIA),
STARTING LIFE AS A SEEDLING
ABOUT 650 A.D., IS BELIEVED TO
BE THE OLDEST LIVING TREE OF
ITS KIND IN CANADA.
THE TREE IS NOW SET ASIDE TO
REMAIN IN ITS NATURAL STATE

DATED OCT. 4, 1937
MACMILLAN & BLOEDEL LIMITED
SHAWNIGAN DIVISION

One of Canada's most highly integrated organizations in the forest products field, MacMillan & Bloedel Limited was formed in 1951 by the merger of two well established Canadian companies, Bloedel Stewart & Welch, which began as logging operators in 1911 and the H. R. MacMillan Export Company, which in 1919 became the first direct merchant exporters of S. O. lumber to the world markets.

The Company now has 13 logging operations, four sawmills, two shingle mills, two plywood mills, two pulp mills, a paper mill, and a paper converting plant on Vancouver Island and the lower mainland. In addition, wholesale warehouses are maintained in principal cities across Canada and sales representatives in many parts of the world.

M. & B. products are sold in over forty countries, with the United States and the United Kingdom providing the principal market for lumber, shingles, pulp, and newsprint. Canada is the major market for the Company's kraft paper and grocery bags.

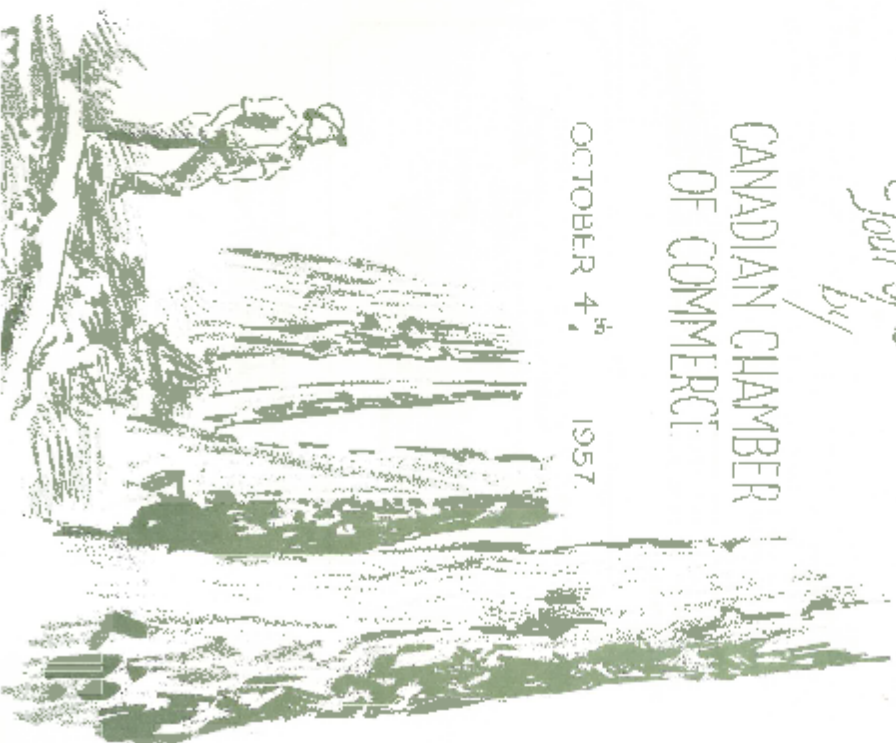


MacMillan & Bloedel Ltd. SHAWINIGAN LOGGING DIVISION

*Guard of Forests
by*

CANADIAN CHAMBER
OF COMMERCE

OCTOBER 4th 1957.



Shawmigan Division forms part of the MacMillan & Bloedel tree farm on the east coast of Vancouver Island. This Division started logging in 1890 with three yokes of oxen, and has continuously pioneered the development of modern logging equipment, including the powerful diesel machines you will see operating today.

Over 200 miles of logging truck roads are maintained at this Division. The logs are trucked from the logging sites to the log dump at Cowichan Bay. There the logs are sorted into species and grades, made up into booms, and finally towed by large tugs to the most appropriate M. & B. converting plant at Chemainus, Nanaimo or Vancouver.

The forests are managed on a scientific basis of sustained yield, and after logging the natural regeneration is reinforced by hand planting to provide for a perpetual crop of trees.

THIS 1300 YEAR OLD DOUGLAS FIR (PSEUDOTSUGA TAXIFOLIA), STARTING LIFE AS A SEEDLING ABOUT 650 A.D., IS BELIEVED TO BE THE OLDEST LIVING TREE OF ITS KIND IN CANADA
THIS AREA IS NOW SET ASIDE TO REMAIN IN ITS NATURAL STATE
DATED OCTOBER 4, 1957
MACMILLAN & BLOEDEL LIMITED
SHAWMIGAN DIVISION

*Bronze plaque to be placed
on oldest fir tree*

TOUR OF THE FOREST, OCTOBER 4, 1957.

This brief summary has been prepared to assist you in the enjoyment of today's trip. Points of interest are numbered on the sketch map on next page, and identified below:

- 8.30 a.m. Leave Victoria by bus over scenic Malahat Drive (40 miles)
- 9.45 Arrive #1 - Shawmigan Logging Division
Have stop and morning break
- 10.00 Leave for trip through MacMillan & Bloedel Ltd. Tree farm by private logging road (16 miles)
- 11.00 Arrive #2 - Scene of logging
Topping of Douglas fir trees by high power logging of big trees by tractor & mobile loader
logging and loading trucks by high lead system
- 11.45 Board buses for stop at 1,300-yr.-old Douglas fir trees (4 ml.)
- 12.00 noon Arrive #3 - Dedication ceremony of oldest Douglas fir trees in Canada
- 12.20 p.m. Reboard buses for return trip to camp for lunch (19 miles)
- 1.15 Arrive #4 - Loggers' lunch of barbequed salmon

LUNCH MENU
Barbequed Cowichan Bay Salmon
Baked pork and beans
Italian spaghetti
Hot boysenberry pie
Coffee
- 2.15 Visit of old-time logging exhibits adjoining camp
- 2.30 Leave for Duncan, Tzouhalem Hotel, guests of Duncan-Cowichan Chamber of Commerce (4 miles)