



Logo design and drawings courtesy of  
Brenda Gillespie and Kiyoshi Takahashi

# The Riverview Horticultural Centre Society

Spring 2011  
Volume 19, Issue 1

## LEAVES Newsletter



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### RHCS Campaign Update

With sincere thanks to all our members who took the time to ensure your voice be heard and wrote a letter to the government of our province encouraging endorsement of the City of Coquitlam's application to HSMBC for National Historic Designation of the Riverview Hospital Lands.

With every new start comes new and promising opportunity. We have a new leader governing the liberal party and our province. Our ongoing campaign to put pressure on our provincial government to endorse the City of Coquitlam's application to the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada for National Historic Site Designation of the Riverview Lands is now at a critical stage.

To date we have sent out 300 letters asking our own members to inundate the government with letters supporting the application. Our second wave we are optimistic will create a tsunami of letters which our new leader will not be able to ignore. In March we sent out an insert with the BC Historical Federation's quarterly magazine asking for support from the 1150 subscribers many of which are historical organizations representing many thousands of members throughout the province.

Now more than any other time it is critical that we keep the pressure on the government to endorse the application. We need you to please put the power of your pen to paper again today to send your personal message of support for the application.

Your voice needs to be heard loud and clear by the "New Leader" of our government. You have the opportunity right now to insist that the historical legacy left behind on this 244 acres is protected and enhanced for the future good of all British Columbians and Canadians. Together we have the power to make this a reality, please write your letter today.

Ken Baker  
Vice President RHCS

Thank you to all who have written the Premier and to those of you who have not written yet, please do so.

### FORWARD OUR LETTER TO YOUR OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

If you belong to another organization that would be interested in supporting this campaign please let your executive know!

Contact us so we can send them a pdf of the action letter.

[www.rhcs.org](http://www.rhcs.org)

## Provincial Treasures - John Davidson & the Riverview Lands A Century of Growth in Jeopardy

by Val Adolph

John Davidson, British Columbia's first Provincial Botanist, is a seminal figure in the field of botany and natural history in this area. While the focus of his interest was botany, he took an interest in everything from taxonomy to mountaineering, to preserving the Capilano watershed to establishing Arbor Day in Vancouver schools and setting up an international seed exchange. He developed not one but two botanical gardens for the province and saw them both torn apart.

He was born in 1878 in Aberdeen, Scotland, the son of a cabinet maker too poor to educate his son past the age of 14. John had, however, picked up woodworking skills from his father and got a job as boy attendant and model maker at the Museum of Marischal College, University of Aberdeen. He began carving models of plants and flowers that could be assembled and disassembled by botany students and this fired his life-long passion for botany.

He attended botany classes and within a year became Botany assistant. By the age of 29 he had been appointed Curator of the Botanical Museum at the University of Aberdeen, performing the duties of a North American Assistant Professor and directing the laboratory work of students studying for B.Sc. finals. He was also in demand as a teacher and lecturer - partly because of his rich sense of humour, partly because he illustrated his lectures with the new technology of photographs and lantern slides. People called him "Botany John", a name that followed him throughout his life.

Upset that his lack of a university degree prevented him from being appointed Assistant Professor, he moved with his wife and children to Vancouver in 1911, armed with glowing references from the faculty at the University of Aberdeen. Within days Dr. Henry Esson Young, Provincial Secretary, had appointed him Provincial Botanist with the understanding that he would become a professor of Botany at the new provincial university, whenever it should come into being.

Coming from Scotland with its illustrious tradition of botanists and plantmen, he was the beneficiary of a very rich background of botanical knowledge and expertise. While few botanical surprises can have remained for him, here he was, botanist in charge of finding and naming correctly the plants in this vast new area. On top of that he had the opportunity to develop a botanical garden from scratch. Some people might have been overwhelmed but John Davidson, the quintessential autodidact, got busy creating a botanical garden to accommodate plants from coastal marshes, Okanagan desert, Rocky Mountain alpine meadows and everything in between. That garden was part of the complex then called "Essondale"; the "mental" hospital, experimental farm and botanical garden named after Henry Esson Young. Today what's left of it is called Riverview.

John Davidson was a man blessed with a high energy level, independence, initiative and, best of all, a vast curiosity and a wide ranging vision. He knew he had a unique opportunity to influence the future of British Columbia not just botanically but ecologically, although this was not a term in general use at the time. The value of trees was clearly apparent to him - not only individual species or specimens but trees generally. He was as passionate about

maintaining the forest in the Capilano watershed as he was about planting street trees in Vancouver. Eighty years ago he was preaching the gospel of forests affecting climate and indiscriminate logging causing erosion and flooding. He saw the city of Vancouver expanding rapidly and some plants, notably the *Cornus nuttallii* (dogwood) and *Rhamnus purshiana* (cascara), being decimated and possibly facing extinction. It was John Davidson who put the brakes on the ignorant "slaughter" (his words) of trees.

Within a very few years of his arrival he had a good grasp of the BC flora, partly through the plants sent to him by teachers and surveyors from around the province and partly from his own explorations. When Point Grey was selected for the site of the new provincial university, about 25,000 plants of some 90 species from his original botanical garden at Essondale were moved on horse drawn wagons to the new site. His trees, however, were already too large to move; they were left in elegant clusters of similar and contrasting species. And he continued what he had done so successfully in Aberdeen - he taught. He taught botanical students and school children, he lectured to dozens of clubs and associations. He established the Vancouver Natural History Society and taught generations of men and women with an interest in natural history. At his behest Vancouver's Arbor Day was established.

As he taught he shared his vision. Having, as he once said, "the benefit of a good, old-fashioned Scotch (sic) religious training" he compared British Columbia to the Promised Land of the Bible, "a land of wonderful fertility, flowing with milk and honey". His vision was that we might maintain this, that the short-sighted greed of grabbing and selling off resources might cease if people learned and understood more about the value of maintaining those resources. His vision was that with learning might come respect for the land and the plants that grow on it.

Since then our formal knowledge of plants and botany has increased exponentially. Our wisdom, however, does not seem to have increased. Naturalists and botanists still teach the same message, but the financial bottom line still trumps the responsible use of our lands and plants, immediate provincial revenue still beats out future benefits and greed still sings louder than conservation. At the same time our technology removes us from the immediacies of life as our predecessors knew them. Very few people could tell you the phase of today's moon or which tree will grow best to make a windbreak for a house, or to bind a slope. Our ancestors knew multiple attributes for every tree - what you might build from the wood, what medicine and food it supplied, what wildlife it attracted or repelled. Most people today couldn't name more than a dozen trees and don't understand their attributes or value other than "wood chips," or "lumber".

More than ever now we need to follow John Davidson's vision of educating British Columbians about the value of our native plants and trees as well as the large number of plants imported for our

con't...

**Membership Renewal Due**  
**April 1st, 2011**



Page 2 con't

gardens and landscapes. And waiting to support this are the trees he left behind at Essondale. His first botanical garden, undisturbed for nine decades and the oldest continuously operating arboretum in Canada, stands in mature glory around what is now called Riverview Hospital. It is a perfect botanical classroom, waiting to be used. The trees have grown to their mature size and form, only minimally bothered by the invasions of man. Root compaction and interference by roads and drains is minimal.

But a decade ago (19 years ago) none of this was known and the past seemed forgotten. However, a small group of people who each loved the Riverview trees for their beauty decided to share them with the public. David Tarrant, from UBC Botanical Garden, guided one tree tour and Bill Browne, retired Arborist for the City of Vancouver led another. We had no idea how many people might attend but a couple of hundred tree lovers showed up. We had to borrow a bullhorn from the RCMP.

Soon we realized that these trees were more than just landscaping for Riverview Hospital. They were a provincial treasure of interest and value to botanists and arborists nationally and internationally. We also realized that it would be a disaster if they were destroyed. Already, in the 1980s, some 57 hectares (143 acres) of the site had been sold to developers. As this seemed likely to recur we formed the Riverview Horticultural Centre Society (RHCS) dedicated to preserve and protect the land and trees of the Riverview Hospital site (the Lands) as a community-oriented, financially viable centre for horticultural, educational and therapeutic activities. At present the Lands consist of 99 hectares (244 acres) of parkland, meadow and woodland, with streams, paths and gardens. It is a wildlife habitat and part of the diminishing corridor of green spaces between Burrard Inlet and the Fraser River. Once home to 5000 patients and now housing fewer than 700 (less than 200 today) it has several large empty buildings of heritage and architectural interest. The mature trees reflect almost a century of gentle nurturing and preservation. Dedicated head gardeners knew the treasure they were fostering and served it well, each doing their part to create and maintain this treasure for the future.

Over 1800 significant trees at Riverview have been identified and tagged. According to the International Society of Arborists' standards, ten years ago the value of these trees as individual specimens was over \$50 million. But as a collection they are worth far more. They were planted, using Kew Gardens in England as a model, in complementary groupings. Many are now over a century old and over a metre in diameter. This is a Canadian Heligan.

John McGannon, President of the Society of Municipal Arborists wrote: *"Examples of trees such as on this ground are priceless in terms of their aesthetic, educational and scientific value. This site will be world renowned if it becomes a preserve or education center."*

The Riverview Lands could be world renowned. Already, without professional promotion or publicity, they are attracting attention across North America and in Asia. They are a place of intrinsic aesthetic value, a place of healing, part of our heritage and a resource for study and learning. If we must consider the bottom



John Davidson

line, as an arboretum or botanical garden they could bring in a fine income annually in perpetuity. How do we set a price on a priceless asset? To value the Lands by the acre for housing development would be like valuing the Mona Lisa for the canvas, frame and paint used in it. But as John Davidson himself said, "We need men who can see and act straight, whose eyes are not fixed on TODAY, but who are looking forward to the FUTURE welfare of the Province."

The trees alone have given British Columbia a first class arboretum with trees of unique and pristine growth. They also form a gene pool that is the envy of arborists elsewhere on the continent. Some varieties are a challenge to taxonomists and a number of trees have not yet been conclusively identified. Common themes of newer botanical gardens and arboreta are natural areas for native flora and wildlife. Riverview Lands has these elements, with an old orchard, a long strip of native trees known as the "backyard" and streams. While powerful and persuasive arguments can be made for saving the Lands for their ecological, botanical and heritage values, equally strong arguments can be made for maintaining the vision of John Davidson by understanding and valuing their healing power. His vision could not have been realized without the labour of patients who lived at the hospital. They cleared the land, blasted stumps, built rock walls by hand, levelled the terraces and helped erect the buildings. They lived, worked and died at Essondale and many are buried in its cemetery. But they have left us this national treasure; an oasis for plants, wildlife and people.

Article originally printed in 2004,  
some dates or numbers may not be accurate.

**Valerie Adolph is a BC writer whose recent book, *Tales of the Trees*, examines the history of the trees found at Riverview.**

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## 2011 Tree Walk Schedule



March 20	Sunday 1 pm	First walk of the 2011 season
April 17	Sunday 1 pm	Magnolia walk
May 1	Sunday 1 pm	BMN Nat. Heritage Child/Youth walk*
May 8	Sunday 1 pm	Public Tree Tour - Mother's day
June 5	Sunday 1 pm	Public Tree Tour
June 26	Sunday 1 pm	Linden walk 1
July 7	Thursday 7:30 pm	Linden walk 2
July 17	Sunday 1 pm	Public Tree Tour
August 14	Sunday 1 pm	Public Tree Tour
August 21	Sunday 1 pm	BMN Natural Heritage walk*
Sept. 17	Saturday 11-4	TREEFEST 2011-18th Annual
October 2	Sunday 1 pm	Public Tree Tour - Last of the season

All walks start at the HEY building at 1 pm unless stated otherwise.

## LEAVES Newsletter

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Editorial email:  
newsletter@rhcs.org

## New Premier

Norma Gillespie

When our Premier was sworn in last month I saw and heard her on my computer. Her speech covered a fair amount of ground and my ears perked up when I heard Ms Clark say that there would be a focus on core priorities such as Mental Health and Addictions. We are going to have to let the government know that we have room here for more than the forty odd that are presently receiving help.



Anyone suffering in this way belongs in a sanctuary not on the street or worse still in jail.

## RHCS

Riverview Horticultural  
Centre Society

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We're on the Web!  
visit us:

**www.rhcs.org**

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Pass on to a friend to read



## AGM Announcement!

**EVERYONE is WELCOME**

Please come join us for Our

**Annual General Meeting**

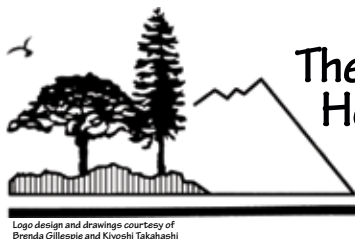
**Thursday June 2, 2011 at 7:30 pm**

**Henry Esson Young Building, Riverview Hospital**

call for more info: 604-290-9910

If you want to know more about what is happening with the Society,  
and at Riverview this is a chance to hear the latest news we have.





# The Riverview Horticultural Centre Society

RENEW or JOIN NOW!! 2011

RHCS invites you to join us in supporting our efforts to keep the site of British Columbia's first botanical garden, the Riverview Hospital Lands intact.

*Our Letter writing campaign continues,  
YOU still have Time to WRITE !!*

Learn more visit our website [www.rhcs.org](http://www.rhcs.org)

## PAY or DONATE ONLINE!

You can use a credit card to renew your membership online, [www.rhcs.org/membership.html](http://www.rhcs.org/membership.html)

In this time of uncertainty we really need your continued support more than ever before.

*We Value your Support & Appreciate all the help you can give.*

## The Heritage Trees & Buildings on the Riverview Lands

The Heritage Trees at Riverview Hospital form an irreplaceable asset for the people of BC, complementing the Metro Vancouver Park at Colony Farm, as a regional green space for Greater Vancouver.

Preservation of the site will enhance the quality of life in the Tri-City areas, & beyond.

Join us for one of our guided walking tours. Experience the legacy of BC's first Botanical Garden; a treasure trove of trees from the temperate world, some planted a century ago, allowed to grow to their full potential.

Our walks begin at the front door of the Henry Esson Young Building. Follow Holly Drive, turn uphill onto Oak Crescent then right onto Kalmia.

**We go rain or shine.**

## 2011 Walking Tour Schedule:

March 20, April 17, May 8, June 5, July 17, August 14 & October 2 at 1 pm

Linden Walks Sunday June 26 at 1 pm & Thursday July 7 at 7:30 pm

Burke Mountain Naturalists offer Natural Heritage walks at 1pm: May 1-[Children/Youth] & August 21

**Treefest 2011 takes place on SATURDAY, September 17, 11am-4pm:**

Arborist-led walks, displays, art and music. This free Event is based in & around the Henry Esson Young Building.

The Riverview Horticultural Centre Society, P.O. Box 64616, RPO Como Lake, Coquitlam, BC, V3J 7V7  
604-290-9910 [trees@rhcs.org](mailto:trees@rhcs.org) [www.rhcs.org](http://www.rhcs.org)

## MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION - FORM

RHCS invites you to join us in supporting our efforts to keep the site of BC's first botanical garden, the Riverview Hospital Lands, intact.

Membership Classification: NEW ☐ or RENEWAL ☐

Please make cheques payable to;  
Riverview Horticultural Centre Society

Student: \$5 ☐

Senior: \$5 ☐

Adult: \$10 ☐

Family: \$15 ☐

Corporate: \$25 ☐

Yearly membership is due on April 1st

- RHCS is a registered charitable organization

- Tax Receipts issued for donations

AND you are invited to make a \$   
DONATION to support the Society \$   
Total amount enclosed \$

Last Name(s):

First Name(s):

Address:

City:

Province:

Postal Code:

Phone #:

Email for 'Newsletters' & notices:

Please Mail to: The Riverview Horticultural Centre Society

P.O. Box 64616, RPO Como Lake, Coquitlam, BC, V3J 7V7

604-290-9910

[trees@rhcs.org](mailto:trees@rhcs.org)

(personal information will NOT be  
shared with other organizations)

[www.rhcs.org](http://www.rhcs.org)

## CALL FOR FURTHER ACTION ON THE HISTORIC SITE APPLICATION

Thank you to all our members who responded to our appeal last Fall by sending a personal letter to Premier Campbell. Although we have not yet succeeded in our ultimate goal of gaining support for the Historic Site application, our campaign definitely got the attention of some decision makers. Christy Clark, BC's new premier, formerly represented the riding of Port Moody. Ms. Clark is familiar with the Riverview Lands and is currently setting directions for her government. Please urge her to support the application at this critical time.

### A REVIEW OF THE SITUATION:

The City of Coquitlam has applied to the Federal Government (HSMBC) to have Coquitlam's Riverview Hospital Lands recognized as a National Historic Site. However, the process is stalled because it lacks the approval of the landowners - namely the BC Provincial Government. Please add your personal comments to the letter below and send it to:

**Premier Christy Clark,  
PO Box 9041, STN PROV GOVT, Victoria, BC, V8W 9E1  
Email: premier@gov.bc.ca**

A personal letter, a copy to your MLA, or a letter to the press would make your voice even louder. For more information or an e-mail version of this appeal, go to [www.rhcs.org](http://www.rhcs.org) or call 604-290-9910

..... ✂ .....  
Date:

Dear Premier Clark,

Congratulations on your election as BC Liberal party leader and Premier of BC. In this role and at this time, you have an opportunity to make a simple decision that will cost nothing and may result in your leaving a gift of major significance to the people of B.C.

I urge you to support the application now before the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada (HSMBC) to have Coquitlam's Riverview Hospital Lands recognized as a National Historic Site. The approval process has been put on hold because the HSMBC has been unable to get support for the application from your government, who represent the landowners.

The property has immense historic value but its heritage features are under-used and deteriorating. The provincial hospital located there will be closed within two years. A decision has to be made. As a National Historic Site, Riverview could still serve the needs of the mentally ill as a research, treatment or education facility. The designation would not rule out revenue generating activities and there would likely be federal funds available for maintenance costs. Most importantly, it would ensure that the property remains in public ownership and accessible to all the people of Canada.

On their behalf I implore you to do the right thing and direct your staff to cooperate immediately with the federal board's request to endorse the application.

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Full Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_ Address: \_\_\_\_\_



# THIS LAND IS YOUR LAND - IT SHOULD BE A NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

**Act now to save Coquitlam's Riverview Hospital Lands!**

The legacy of Western Canada's first botanical garden - an arboretum featuring over 1800 mature significant trees from the temperate world.



Five large brick-faced reinforced concrete buildings in a campus-like setting - architecturally designed and rated excellent heritage value.



Wood-frame Tudor cottages with solid hardwood floors and trim representing staff residences in the village of Essondale.





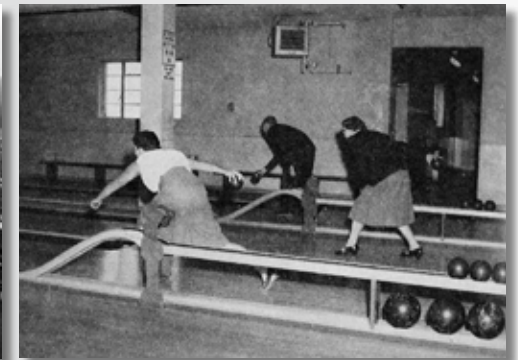
# Are you aware of the historical significance of Coquitlam's Riverview Hospital Lands?



A century ago, eminent British Columbians such as Provincial Secretary Henry Esson Young, Professor John Davidson ("Botany John"), and Dr. Arthur Crease together realized a vision of a community where the mentally ill could live purposeful lives in their own sanctuary.



A vital part of the therapy included horticultural and food production at adjacent Colony Farm. Patients were also encouraged to work in cottage industries such as upholstery, bakery, and carpentry for the self-sufficient village of Essondale whose population reached 5,500 in 1956.



[trees@rhcs.org](mailto:trees@rhcs.org)



The Riverview  
Horticultural Centre Society

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