



The Oldest Douglas Fir in Canada

Part II

The 1000 Year Old Mothers

The following article by Bruce Devitt was written for the Forest History Association of BC's newsletter and continues the story of an earlier Facebook posting regarding the BCFDC's tree cookie and its origins.

Neil Malbon, Collections Curator

Gerry E Wellburn, 1900-1992

January 31, 2021

Distinguished BC Philatelist and Lumberman

Master Collector and Storyteller

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. One album the “Panama Railway Connection” was recently offered for sale December 12, 2020.

By far his largest collection and story 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 lake side trestle and loops around 100 acres; an old working sawmill; camp buildings; Ranger Station; post office and trappers cabin; dioramas and other memorabilia. Gerry told me he wanted this place to tell the complete story of man and the forest through logging and forestry on the BC West Coast. The BC Forest Discovery Centre has now been in operation 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 Glenora 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 on the Gorge. Early in 1960 Gerry needed some trees planted and 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 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 and the property on Somenos Lake was purchased with industry donations and community support. Jim Macfarlane, Forest Engineer, MacMillan Bloedel, Shawnigan Division was the engineer 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 being a good example; Gerry had saved an area-containing 1000-year plus Douglas-firs on Waterloo Mountain behind Glenora 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 week-end in the Spring of 1967, just after snow melt, and dug up some Douglas-fir seedlings that had grown along the road side 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”. 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 Victoria Canadian Forestry Research Centre. 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 showing the annual growth rings which can be counted to determine age. 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 old 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, led by Gerry through the MacMillan Bloedel Shawnigan Division woodlands dated October 04, 1957. This was followed by a picture showing the placement of a plaque on the Waterloo Mountain tree commemorating its age and the tour. There also was a map showing the tree location (1 of 3). 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 William QC, a local Lawyer and museum supporter, and I 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 museum located south of the big log building past the big “General Grant offspring” Sequoia in the crescent near the railway track. And 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 who to contact to help him when he needed it.

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

Thank you and credit goes to Neil Malbon, Collections Coordinator, BC Forest Discovery Centre for providing me copies of the items from their collection.

Bruce Devitt, RPF (Ret.), and President BC Forest Museum Society 1982-84

One of Canada's most highly integrated organisations in the forest products field, MacMillan & Bloedel Limited was formed in 1951 by the merger of two well established Canadian companies, Bloedel Stewart & Welsh, which began as logging operators in 1911 and the H. R. MacMillan Export Company, which in 1919 became the first direct merchant exporters of B. C. 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.



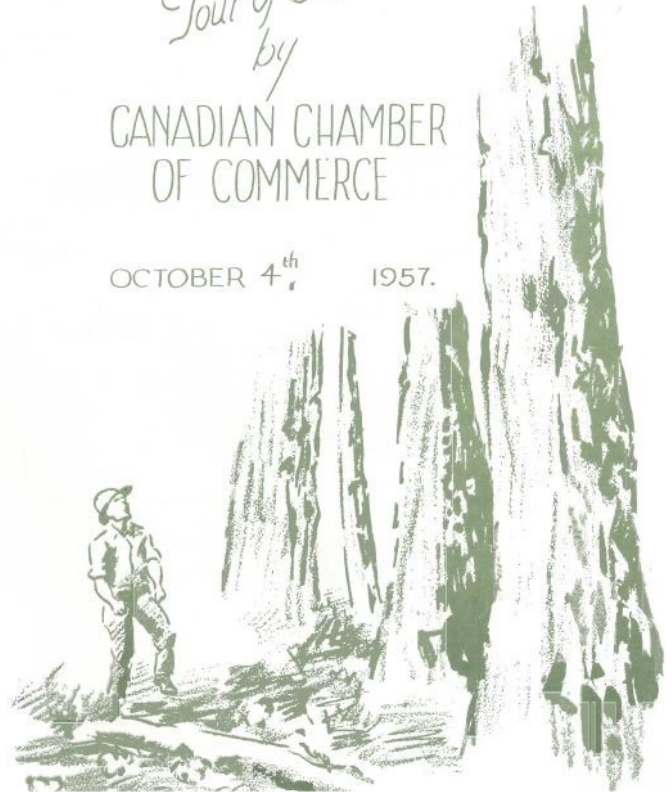
MacMillan & Bloedel Ltd.

SHAWNIGAN LOGGING DIVISION

*Tour of Forests
by*

CANADIAN CHAMBER
OF COMMERCE

OCTOBER 4th, 1957.



Shawnigan Division forms part of the MacMillan & Bloedel Tree Farm on the east coast of Vancouver Island. This Division started logging in 1890 with three yoke 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 sides 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
SHAWNIGAN 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 - Shawnigan Logging Division
Rest stop and coffee 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 tree by high rigger
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 mi.)
 - 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 barbecued salmon
- LUNCH MENU
Barbecued 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)