

HISTORY OF VANDUSEN BOTANICAL GARDEN

A Factsheet for Guides

1885

- The site of today's VanDusen Botanical Garden was a small part of an extensive 6,000 acre land grant from the Province of BC to the CPR in 1886 to extend the railway from Port Moody to Vancouver. The original, vast Dominion of Canada Government Grant had been given in 1885 to the Canadian Pacific Railroad as an incentive to build their rail line to the coast, but it went only as far as Port Moody.
- After logging, between 1904 and 1927, a small part of the BC Land Grant, south of 16th Avenue, was developed as Shaughnessy Heights, an exclusive residential area. To attract buyers into the area, the CPR constructed a golf course south of 33rd Avenue.

1911

- One hundred and nine acres of Shaughnessy Heights land were leased for a private golf course. Shaughnessy Heights Golf and Country Club opened November 2, 1912. Parts of three fairways of the golf course are now VanDusen's "Great Lawn".
- The Corporation of Point Grey owned 5.5 acres near the Clubhouse for the Point Grey Reservoir site – the reservoir was built in 1911-1912.

1957

- The CPR gave the golf club notice that their lease would not extend beyond 1960 as CPR planned to subdivide the golf course. Quiet Oak Street that cut the golf course in two had become a busy bus route. Golfers could no longer stroll across easily to finish their game. The club arranged to move.

1960 – 1965

- Last game played at Shaughnessy Golf Club early November 1960.
- "Save Shaughnessy Golf Course" petitions began. Some citizens wanted to develop all 109 acres for parkland. The mayor preferred subdividing to bring in taxes. Three levels of government and two referendums later nothing had been solved. Finally it was decided to purchase 55.5 acres for parkland.

1966 - 1967

- Eighty-nine people formed the Vancouver Botanical Garden Association (VBGA) and began sending out circulars to prominent citizens and horticultural societies to solicit funds. 1966 membership was 89; 1984 membership between 7,000 and 8,000.
- It was discussed whether the 55.5 acres should become not just a park but a botanical garden. Independent feasibility studies and site surveys conducted by representatives of Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh and Royal Botanic Garden, Hamilton. Later, Sir George Taylor from Kew's Royal Botanic Garden was brought in to give an opinion on the land's suitability. He immediately saw the potential.

1970

- The land was purchased from Marathon Realty (CPR) for a botanical garden. The City gave the development and management responsibility to the Board of Parks and Recreation.

1971

- Mr W. J. VanDusen, who had anonymously funded one-third of the cost through the Vancouver Foundation, agreed to let his name be known and used for the official title of the new garden – the *VanDusen Botanical Display Gardens*.
- Landscape development began under the direction of Park Board Superintendent, S. Lefeaux . Design and construction largely the work of Deputy Superintendent and VBGA member, William (Bill) Livingstone, who was entrusted with developing the neglected site. He set to work enhancing the natural contours of the land, moving earth and getting fill to create agreeable variations in height and to take advantage of sun, shadow and prevailing currents of air. He created three small lakes. His stonework of basalt, sandstone, granite and B.C. jade can be seen throughout the garden.

1972

- Roy Forster, an applicant with an impressive background in botany and horticulture, was chosen as the first curator of the new garden. He immediately began planning and planting. Roy was to become a recipient of The Order of Canada for his work in the VanDusen. His advice and expertise have been sought long after his retirement in 1996.
- The Rhododendron Garden was planted.
- July 15, the first edition of the Bulletin was sent out.
- Open House! October 1972 saw over a thousand people visit the site to listen to the Kitsilano Boys' Band, look at already planted areas, and see sketches and plans for the Garden's future.

1973 – 1974

- Roy Forster went ahead with his theme to make the Garden a place that united beauty and learning for those who enjoyed simply looking at plants and those who wanted to learn more about them.
- In April 1974, twenty five volunteers registered for Roy's first course for garden guides. They trained from a tin shack.
- Funds for waterways, a rock garden and tree planting were running out. Delays had escalated costs for the Floral Hall and Administration Building. The main building was still a trailer. Then thanks to the Civic and Federal Governments and several generous families, work continued
- The Heather Garden and the Taxodian grove were planted. The Floral Hall and Pavilion begun.
- First 'Christmas in the Garden' held (in 1983 became Festival of Lights).

1975

- A symposium of twelve stone sculptors came to the garden to begin carving huge blocks of donated marble and travertine that had been ships' ballast. The sculptors managed to finish their work by opening day and the Canadian Armed Forces supplied huge cranes to move the eleven massive sculptures from the southwest corner work area into their permanent positions.
- The Swedish Folk Society donated the Swedish Fountain formerly installed in the corner of the Garden at 37th and Oak and currently in storage. The Vancouver Sun donated the Scottish shelter to the Garden.
- A library committee was formed and began requesting donations of books, money or both. With the work of two group members, Phyllis Plenderleith and Isabel Hester, a new library with 500 books was open to the public for three hours, three days a week. The library grew, and by 1980 a part-time librarian was needed.
- The Stanley Smith Rock Garden built.

1975 cont.d.

- August 30, the Floral Hall opened and on November 1 the first show in the Floral Hall was that of the Chrysanthemum Society.
- Bill Livingstone officially retired but stayed as a consultant till 1985.

August 30 - Grand Opening Day!

- May Brown, Park Board Chair, hosted opening day ceremonies. To mark the occasion Premier Dave Barrett, Mayor Art Philips and W.J. VanDusen planted a tree - a *Catalpa bignonioides* 'Aurea'. The festivities were enjoyed by many visitors to the Garden.

1976

- MacMillan Bloedel Place (*A Walk in the Forest*) opened.
- First educational coordinator was appointed to design and manage lectures and workshops.
- First electric cart was donated for visitor tours.

1977 – 1978

- VanDusen Garden took shares in plant hunting trips to Turkey and high altitudes of Arizona. Roy Forster brought new ideas from his trip to Sichuan and Yunnan, China, and continued to develop the rhododendron and azalea collections.
- W.J. VanDusen, whose donation had made the Garden possible, died in his ninetieth year in December 1978.
- In 1978, the Perennial Garden was started and then reconstructed in 1983. In April, the Stanley Smith Rock Garden dedicated by Sir George Taylor, Director of Kew.
- The first Plant Sale was held in April 1978 and raised \$23,000 net.

1979

- September 9, Children's Garden was dedicated, with 'story-book topiary figures'. It was built for the Year of the Child.
- Work began on the Sino-Himalayan Garden. Soil from the building of Shaughnessy Place used.

1980

- Period of intense building in the Sino-Himalayan area. A floating bridge installed over Cypress Pond.

1981 - 1982

- The maze and the waterfall built. The maze opened in 1982.
- Guides begin collecting seeds.

1984 - 1985

- A liaison was formed between the Park Board and the VBGA allowing the VBGA to develop some projects, such as the Alma VanDusen Garden and contribute to maintenance costs.
- School programs were expanded and more paths, bridges and byways were added. The buildings had a library, gift shop and cafeteria.
- Adopt-a-tree program began.

1986

- First year of All-British Field Meet held, featuring vintage cars.
- MacMillan Bloedel Place (*A Walk in the Forest*) closed after 10 years. The building was to become the Education Centre.
- Start of work on transforming South Acre to area of Native trees and shrubs.
- Design of Canadian Heritage Garden approved.
- Alma VanDusen Garden completed and opened by HRH Princess Margaret.
- Second 'Ksan totem pole erected, completing traditional two-pole entry of First Nations people. In 2011, the totem poles were moved to Forest Lake during construction.
- Korean Pavilion donated by Korean government to VBGA at the close of EXPO '86.

1987

- Formal dedication of Korean Pavilion.
- Phase I of Canadian Heritage Garden completed, funded by Plant Sale proceeds.
- Facility Excellence Award received from B.C. Recreation and Parks Association.

1988

- Gold Leaf Award from International Society of Arboriculture for outstanding landscape beautification activities.
- Phase II begun on Canadian Heritage Garden.
- VanDusen Garden recognized as official Holly Arboretum by Holly Society of America.
- Work begun on long-term restoration of ponds and waterways.

1989

- Canadian Heritage Garden architectural components completed and planting begun. Phases I & II of Heritage Garden dedicated and opened.

1990

- Construction of Canadian Shield Rock Garden and Maple Tree grove in Canadian Heritage Garden.
- Throughout Garden hundreds of feet of granite edging and detail installed as part of program to upgrade structure of Garden.
- Major new electrical service installed to enhance "Festival of Lights" annual exhibit.

1991

- Extension of Taxodian swamp area.
- Work begun on Fern Dell part of Sino-Himalayan Garden.
- Medicinal Plant Collection added to Canadian Heritage Garden, and dedicated April 21.
- Collection of wild-collected sugar Maples also added to Canadian Heritage Garden.

1992

- Strategic Planning initiated by Parks Board and VBGA.
- Trail opened through Holly Arboretum collection of English, Highclere and American Hollies.

1993

- Final Report of Strategic Plan completed. Parks Board and VBGA negotiated recommendations and implementation. Also started Fundraising Feasibility Study and User Needs Survey for fund-raising campaign.
- Work completed on Salter Fern Dell and Dong Rhododendron Collection. Fern Dell opened in September.
- Education Program extended.
- Restoration of Livingstone Lake.

1994

- Joint Operating Agreement signed between Parks Board and VGBA.
- First VanDusen Garden Show held.
- Canadian Heritage Garden reconstructed with more natural landscape.

1995

- Name changed from Vancouver Botanical Garden Association to VanDusen Botanical Garden Association.
- New Perennial Border planted below Rose Garden.
- White Garden planted below the Pavilion terrace.
- Planning started for next phase of Canadian Heritage Garden and Gazebo on Heron Lake.
- Cypress Pond restored.
- Cultivars in Rose Garden being replaced by shrub roses, David Austen roses and other recommended varieties.

1996

- Additional paths built to provide greater access for visitors in Sino-Himalayan area and Meadow Garden. Re-construction of the Canadian Heritage Garden completed.
- Addition of new signage and interpretative panels.
- Retirement of Roy Forster, Curator of VanDusen Botanical Garden who had served in that position since 1972.

1997

- Bill Manning, previously manager of horticulture at the Parks Board, appointed Garden Manager, an interim position. He replaced Ron Caswell, Garden Manager who for the past 8 months had replaced Roy Forster, former Curator.
- James Warkentin appointed as Garden Foreman.
- Fund Raising Committee began, chaired by Past President Mary Butterfield.
- Greenhouse constructed for propagation and over-wintering.
- Additional interpretive signage installed.

1998

- In September the appointment of the new Garden Director, Margaret Johnston, formerly Superintendent of Parks Maintenance, Delta.
- Refurbishing of the Meditation Garden began aided by a grant from the Garden Club of Vancouver

1999

- In July, VBG & UBC Botanical Gardens were joint hosts of American Association of Botanical Gardens and Arboreta (AABGA) with 700 international delegates.
- The Cedar Series Lectures were established to take advantage of excellent local speakers.
- Art in the Garden – sculpture in August and art show with 15 artists present in September.
- October saw the first Scarecrow Festival.
- In December, Symphony of Lights became dancing lights synchronized to music.

2000 - 25th Anniversary Year

- Appointment of new Garden Director Jill Cherry from Toronto in June.
- Seven week city workers strike in the fall.
- Gardeners replaced horticulturalist Carolyn Jones for Thursday Garden Walks in August and September; Carolyn continued walks on the first Thursday of other months.
- VBGA presents a Strategic Plan for the future.

2001

- New Vision Statement for the Garden developed.

2002

- 1800 active volunteers in the Garden including 136 guides, and plant sale workers, Master Gardeners and others.

2003

- Integrated Pest Management was more finely tuned since its introduction in 1996. Minimum chemical controls in use in the Garden.
- Perennial Garden renovated: 18 inches of topsoil replaced; redesigned and replanted.

2004

- The *Planting the Seed* Capital Project was launched with Nancy Dickson as Chair of Campaign Committee and Mary Butterfield as Campaign Director.

2005

- VanDusen celebrated its 30th anniversary throughout August. Anniversary Awards were presented to 13 volunteers who had made outstanding contributions.
- Phyllis Bentall Garden & Pool was completed as Phase I of the Capital Project.
- In July, the Korean Pavilion underwent a restoration courtesy of the Korean business community with assistance from the Government of Korea. A team of three artisans, specialists in the ancient technique of dan cheong, were sent from Korea to undertake the project. The team was led by Hye In, a Buddhist monk and a National Living Treasure in Korea.
- The first phase of the water conservation improvements was begun in the Garden. The project would be phased over several years and make use of the reservoir. It was to be funded by the Vancouver Park Board.
- In the fall, a complete cleaning and restoration of 11 sculptures in the Garden took place.

2006

- Jill Cherry left VanDusen in April after 5 years as Garden Director to accept a position of director of gardens with the Royal Horticultural Society in the UK.
- Members were invited to receive the Bulletin electronically instead of through the mail.
- Chris Woods joined VanDusen as Garden Director in September.
- A major snowstorm in November resulted in more than \$156,000 damage to trees and shrubs and it was estimated that it would take more than three growing seasons to repair all the damage.

2007

- Busby, Perkins + Will commissioned to create plans for a unique & green facility which would provide greater capacity to deliver programs, particularly education programs, increase visitors to the Garden and raise the profile of the Garden.
- Civic workers including the Park Board unionized employees at VanDusen on strike from mid-July to mid-October with only the Garden Director & Business Operations Manager to manage the Garden.
- Chris Woods resigned effective November 30th

2008

- The Plant Sale celebrated its 30th anniversary.
- In June, Harry Jongerden became the new Garden Director.
- Ivy Busters were formed at VanDusen.

2009

- Mary Stewart, a long time supporter of a botanical garden 10 years before it became a reality, died. She served as President of the Association and as a Board member for most of three decades.
- *Zimsculpt* with its curator and two sculptors arrived with many Zimbabwean sculptures in the Garden. They stayed from late August until October and made a lasting impression. This was the first of three annual visits.
- In November, HRH The Duchess of Cornwall visited the Garden and planted a Garry Oak.

2010

- Site preparation for a new building began and a Sod Turning Ceremony held in May.
- The Park Board, responding to public pressure, recommended making Bloedel Conservatory a part of VanDusen Botanical Garden.

2011

- VanDusen/VBGA adopted a new logo, Mission and Vision Statements.
- Bill Reid's *Black Eagle Canoe* moved to VanDusen.
- The new Visitor Centre surrounded by a native plants landscape officially opened in October.

2012

- While staff and volunteers adjusted to the new Visitor Centre, there was immense interest in the new building by visitors and they came in record numbers to explore it and the Garden.
- *Earth Art 2012* provided an additional attraction for visitors during summer and fall.

2012 cont'd.

- The Bloedel Conservatory came under the management of VanDusen Botanical Garden.
- VanDusen's library moved to the Visitor Centre and became *Yosef Wosk Library & Resource Centre*.

2013

- Bloedel officially became part of VBGA.
- Shawn Mitchell was appointed Association Director for VBGA.
- Harry Jongerden resigned in June to take a position with the Toronto Botanical Garden.
- Howard Normann appointed interim Garden Director.
- *Touch Wood* sculpture exhibition interested and sometimes amused visitors during the summer and fall.

References

Major Sources (in descending order of importance)

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Vancouver City Archives: various documents and maps

Drafted 2013 by History Project Group

HISTORY OF VBGA – Appendix I

PRESIDENTS*

1997 – 1999	Beverley Dunn
1999 – 2001	Dick Stace-Smith
2001 – 2002	Dick Mackenzie
2002 – 2004	Nancy Dickson
2004 – 2006	Margie Knox
2006 – 2008	Rowland McLeod
2008 – 2010	Henry Hawthorn
2010 – 2011	Jim Brookes
2011 – 2013	Brian Clark
2013 –	Christine McCaffrey

VANDUSEN GUIDE CHAIRS*

1996 – 2000	Guide Executive shared responsibilities
2000 – 2002	Audrey Dewan
2002 – 2004	Honorine Loader
2004 – 2006	Beatrice Carlani
2006 – 2008	Claire Kermacks
2008 – 2010	Patti Lazzerini
2010 - 2012	Sheila Hildred
2012 -	Sue Abzinger

*Continuation of Appendix D of Betty Stubbs' book *From Golf Course to Garden*