

Vancouver Street Trees

A Public Affair

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By the late nineteenth century, Europeans had settled much of the North American continent. On the West Coast, however, Vancouver was just coming into existence: the City was officially incorporated in 1886. With the early settlers and immigrants came new American – and to some extent European – ideals of landscaped architecture and urban planning. Using an urban-historical approach, which focuses on specific influential decisions made by individuals or groups with regard to urban development,¹ this essay analyzes how, and which, individuals and groups contributed to expanding the legislation and practice of planting street trees, and relates this practice to a broader cultural, professional, social, and economic context. More specifically, it argues that the dominant white English-speaking population of Vancouver played a crucial role in the development of Vancouver's street tree programme from 1896 to 1925. Beginning with an overview of the origins of street trees and of the emergence of the parks and boulevard movement and the City Beautiful movement, this paper assesses their impacts on Canada's urban planning and explains why Vancouver presented such a great opportunity. Then, it describes the local individuals, groups, and associations that were influential to the development of Vancouver's street tree programme, and how they contributed to shaping legislation and practices. Finally, it argues that the Park Board's practice – or necessity – of depending on residents' activism and private investments favoured the greening of the wealthier western districts of Vancouver.

¹ Gilbert A. Stelter and Alan F.J. Artibise, eds., "IV: The Physical Environment," in *The Canadian City: Essays in Urban History* (Toronto: MacMillan Company of Canada, 1979), 160.

² Ira Bruce Nadel, Cornelia Hahn Oberlander, and Lesley R. Bohm, *Trees in the City* (Toronto: Pergamon Press, 1977), 14.

³ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴ For the purpose of this essay, boulevard will refer to the portion of land located between a

The origin of the practice of planting urban trees can be traced back to eighteenth-century Europe. As explained by Ira Bruce Nadel, Cornelia Hahn Oberlander, and Lesley R. Bohm, “only in the 18th century was there a new concern with connecting the dwelling to nature, which developed almost simultaneously in France and England.”² In England, open spaces encircled by apartments and houses were reconstituted as “squares,” redesigned with grass, flowers, and trees and enclosed by fences, to which only a few people had access. In spite of these changes, Nadel, Oberlander, and Bohm argue that “[p]lanning had not yet conceived the role of trees on a busy avenue.”³ In fact, Paris was the first city to carefully plan the transplantation of trees on streets during the mid-nineteenth century. From 1853 to 1868, the French Emperor Napoleon III and his engineer Baron Georges Haussmann pioneered the practice of tree-lined boulevards.⁴ Nadel, Oberlander, and Bohm, as well as Gene W. Grey and Frederick J. Deneke, argue that this innovative beautifying strategy hid political and military agendas, as wide and long avenues ensured more efficient military defence and police interventions, and that the elimination of shabby alleyways led to the first slum-clearance programme.⁵ Unlike the English square, the French boulevard was freely accessible, and integrated dwelling, commerce, and nature at last.

Urban trees started appearing in North America during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, as early settlers brought and planted seeds of species from their homeland. The Lombard poplar, the Norway maple, and the English elm were among the most popular trees planted. American Andrew Jackson Downing was the first advocate for

² Ira Bruce Nadel, Cornelia Hahn Oberlander, and Lesley R. Bohm, *Trees in the City* (Toronto: Pergamon Press, 1977), 14.

³ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴ For the purpose of this essay, boulevard will refer to the portion of land located between a city street and a private property, and often landscaped with trees, shrubs, and flowers, as specified in the first Boulevard By-Law (1896). City of Vancouver Archives, By-law No. 246: a By-Law relating to Boulevards and Shade Trees 1896, Public Records #36, 29-A-4 file 46. The City of Vancouver Archives is subsequently abbreviated as CVA.

⁵ Nadel, Oberlander, & Bohm, 16; Gene W. Grey and Frederick J. Deneke, *Urban Forestry*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: John Wiley & Sons, 1986), 3.

the use of indigenous trees such as maples, oaks, and elms.⁶ Downing's park designs and horticulture books were very influential to the establishment of cultivated landscapes in the mid-nineteenth century. His contemporary and friend Frederick Law Olmsted, known for his conception of Central Park in New York, took this concept further, promoting city park development and tree-lined boulevards, believing that the relaxing effects of trees could relieve city-induced stress.⁷ From Montreal, Quebec to Berkeley, California, Olmsted designed several famous parks and campuses.⁸ By the 1870s, a parks and boulevard movement was well underway in the United States and Canada, where various cities solicited such planning with the hope of enhancing their residents' wellbeing and beautifying their respective cities.⁹

The parks and boulevard movement was progressively swallowed up by the broader City Beautiful movement, which emerged in the United States during the 1890s and drew its inspiration from European – especially Parisian – baroque planning.¹⁰ In general, plans derived from this movement focused on the beautification of streets, civic centres, and parks and boulevards.¹¹ The City Beautiful movement took off following the Chicago World fair of 1893-94, where the concepts of landscape design and city planning merged. According to Chicago architects Daniel H. Burnham and Edward H. Bennett, two enthusiast advocates of the City Beautiful movement, the consequent civic beauty would convey proper ethical and moral values to its residents. Indeed, they wrote in the Chicago Plan of 1907: “natural scenery furnishes the contrasting element to the artificiality of the city . . . He who habitually

⁶ Grey & Deneke, 4.

⁷ Charles N. Glaab and A. Theodore Brown, “Chapter 12: The Growth of a Planning Tradition,” *A History of Urban America*, 2nd ed. (New York: MacMillan Publishing, 1976), 234-236.

⁸ For more details on landscape design and the park movement, see George F. Chadwick, *The Park and the Town: Public Landscape in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (London: Architectural P., 1966).

⁹ Glaab & Brown, 70-71.

¹⁰ Margaret Anne Meek, “History of the City Beautiful Movement in Canada 1890-1930” (master's thesis, University of British Columbia, 1979), 14-15.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

comes in close contact with nature develops saner methods of thought than can be the case when one is habitually shut up within the wall of a city.”¹²

These ideas on urban beautification and boulevards quickly disseminated northward to Canada. Early in the twentieth century, major Canadian professional journals published articles preaching the City Beautiful principles of “coherence, visual variety, and civic grandeur”¹³ and parks commissions assumed leadership in beautifying such cities as Toronto, Montreal, Calgary, and Regina.¹⁴ In 1904, Percy Nobbs, an architecture professor at McGill University, insisted that “every street in the city should be made as beautiful as it can be.”¹⁵ Around the same time, the University of Toronto’s department of forestry prevailed over North America in forestry education and urban forestry, owing in part to B. E. Fernow’s 1911 book *The Care of Trees in Lawn, Street and Park*.¹⁶ Margaret Anne Meek reports that following the economic depression of 1913, grandiose and expensive plans were put aside and cities favoured “tree-planting and smaller scale beautification.”¹⁷ Nonetheless, street landscaping became a professional enterprise entrenched within broader city planning frames and municipal bureaucracies during the early twentieth century in Canada.

On the West Coast, Vancouver was growing. Its late development, in comparison to the eastern cities, presented a great opportunity for urban planners. From 1891 to 1921, Vancouver’s population increased approximately from 13,709 to 163,220.¹⁸ The migration patterns of the time fashioned a predominantly English-speaking population of which 85

¹² Daniel H. Burnham and Edward H. Bennett, quoted in Glaab & Brown, “Chapter 12: The Growth of a Planning Tradition,” 241.

¹³ Walter Van Nus, “The Fate of City Beautiful Thought in Canada, 1893-1930,” in *The Canadian City: Essays in Urban History*, ed. Gilbert A. Stelter and Alan F.J. Artibise (Toronto: MacMillan Company of Canada, 1979), 166.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 162-171.

¹⁵ Percy Nobbs, quoted from the Ontario Association of Architects’ *Proceedings*, 1904, 95, in Van Nus, “The Fate of City, 162.

¹⁶ Grey & Deneke, 5.

¹⁷ Meek, 95.

¹⁸ Table 1 in Norbert MacDonald, “‘C.P.R. Town’: The City-Building Process in Vancouver, 1860-1914,” in *Shaping the Urban Landscape*, ed. G. A. Stelter and A. F. J. Artibise (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1982), 398.

percent originated from Britain, the United States, or elsewhere in Canada.¹⁹ Historian Norbert MacDonald argues that these British immigrants “had a profound effect on all aspects of Vancouver’s life [, as demonstrated by] the abundance of Tudor and stucco houses, the popularity of flower gardens . . . the miles of public beaches, the number of public tennis courts, [and] the layout of parks and playgrounds.”²⁰ In comparison to Seattle, Washington, which welcomed a more diverse immigrant mix, especially Scandinavians, during the early twentieth century, Vancouver acquired a more British character, and as such, a greater interest in nature.²¹ Increased mobility and enhanced communication contributed to the dissemination of the values and principles of the parks and boulevards and the City Beautiful movements, and professional debates about urban planning. During the late nineteenth century, the vast undeveloped areas of Vancouver, in contrast to the overcrowded eastern cities, offered a fresh slate for planners and engineers to create an exemplary civic beauty. Most sizeable American and Canadian cities had been founded, and their urban network completed, by 1890.²²

Several local individuals and groups were influential in the development of Vancouver’s street tree programme. The Vancouver Board of Park Commissioners was established in 1888 as an appointed body, only two years after the City of Vancouver’s incorporation. It became an elected body of three commissioners in 1890, and was expanded to five commissioners in 1904.²³ According to historian Robert A. J. McDonald, during the early decades the park board consisted mostly of city entrepreneurs, businessmen, and middle-class professionals.²⁴ Robert G. Tatlow, an Irish immigrant who made his fortune in

¹⁹ MacDonald, “C.P.R. Town,” 399.

²⁰ Norbert MacDonald, “Population Growth and Change in Seattle and Vancouver, 1880-1960,” *The Pacific Historical Review* 39, no.3 (1970): 312.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 312-21.

²² *Ibid.*, 300.

²³ Vancouver Park Board, “Vancouver Park Board Commissioners,” <http://vancouver.ca/parks/board/commissioners.htm> (accessed October 30, 2008).

²⁴ Robert A. J. McDonald, “‘Holy Retreat’ or ‘Practical Breathing Spot’?: Class Perceptions of Vancouver’s Stanley Park, 1910--1913” in *Readings in Canada History: Post-Confederation*,

real estate and married the daughter of famous Canadian Pacific Railway (C.P.R.) chief surveyor Henry John Cambie, sat on the board from 1888 until his accidental death in 1905.²⁵ Also involved were George Eldon (superintendent 1896-1909), Andrew E. Lees (commissioner 1902-1917), Charles E. Tisdall (commissioner 1904-9 and 1926-34; mayor 1922-3), Jonathan Rogers (commissioner 1910s-1930s), and W.S. Rawlings (superintendent 1913-1936).²⁶ This board increasingly assumed the care of parks and street trees until the City Council finally granted it full jurisdiction over tree planting and maintenance in 1917.²⁷ In 1912, inspired residents formed a local City Beautiful Association, which later became the Vancouver Planning and Beautifying Association, to promote civic grandeur and planning. Both the Mawson Plan of 1912 to redesign Georgia Street and Stanley Park and the Bartholomew Plan of 1929, which aimed in part to transform Cambie Street into a ceremonial corridor, were in harmony with the City Beautiful principles, but were never fully implemented.²⁸ The Natural History Section of the British Columbia Mountaineering Club (B.C.M.C.) and the University Women's Club also played a crucial role in advancing the street trees legislation in 1916-17 through their collaborative efforts under the leadership of newly-immigrated Scottish botany Professor John Davidson and the Arbor Day Association.²⁹

Other local groups, in addition to the City Council, Park Board, and residents-led associations, played significant roles in modeling Vancouver's streetscape. The attitude of the engineering profession was especially influential within "Greater Vancouver." Reflecting on

7th ed., ed. R. Douglas Francis and Donald B. Smith (Toronto: Thomson Nelson, 2006), 303.

²⁵ Tom Snyders and Jennifer O'Rourke, *Namely Vancouver: A Hidden Story of Vancouver Place Names* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2000), 259.

²⁶ CVA, Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation fonds, 1888--2001, Public Records, in City of Vancouver Archives, <http://vancouver.ca/ctyclerk/archives/index.htm> (accessed October 30, 2008); Vancouver Park Board, "Parks and Gardens," <http://vancouver.ca/parks/parks/Stanley/nature.htm> (accessed October 30, 2008).

²⁷ Gregory Paris and Hugh Monroe, "Boulevard Tree Operations of Vancouver, B.C.," *Journal of Arboriculture* 15, no. 3 (1989): 68.

²⁸ For more details about these plans, see Lance Berelowitz, *Dream City, Vancouver and the Global Imagination* (Vancouver, Douglas & McIntyre Ltd, 2005).

²⁹ Jim Peacock, *The Vancouver Natural History Society, 1918--1993* (Vancouver: Vancouver Natural History Society, 1993), 7-11.

tree-planting on city streets, Fred L. MacPherson, a municipal engineer for Burnaby B.C., wrote in *The Canadian Engineer* journal in 1913:

Although a well-designed and well-constructed street primarily serves traffic and building conditions, beauty and harmony are necessary to give the street character and tone. Such an atmosphere is created with impressive shade trees and well kept boulevards.³⁰

He listed several economic, physical, and other benefits of tree planting and boulevarding. By his account they: increased property values, indicated a city's character and well-being, caught the attention of visitors and investors, cooled the air and provided shade during summer, masked noise and dust, and created a soothing effect on residents. Even more significant were the cumulative social benefits argued by MacPherson:

. . . shade trees add to the beauty, health, comfort and charm particularly of residential districts and lend an air of dignity and repose to the thoroughfare therein. Socially, tree-planting and boulevarding foster civic welfare and further "community efficiency."³¹

MacPherson also discouraged any boulevarding action until permanent grading and street classification had been established to avoid unnecessary tree removals or mutilations consequent to expanding infrastructure and advised a distance of 30 to 40 feet between trees.³² These standard recommendations surfaced in Vancouver's street tree policies and practices.

How did these movements and local individuals and groups impact the street tree programme of Vancouver? The City of Vancouver passed its first By-Law relating to

³⁰ Fred L. MacPherson, "Tree-Planting on City Streets," *The Canadian Engineer* 25 (1913): 857.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 858.

³² *Ibid.*, 857-9.

Boulevards and Shade Trees (No. 246) in 1896, as it was “deemed expedient to the interests of the City to encourage the making and keeping of boulevards and the planting and care of shade trees in the sides of streets.”³³ In addition to defining a boulevard and its adequate use, it prohibited the planting of “silver poplar, balm of gilead, cotton trees or willows,” regulated the planting of trees “no less than 20 feet apart” under the direction of the City Engineer, and established a penalty “not exceeding the sum of fifty dollars”³⁴ for any breached provisions. Additionally, to encourage the planting of street trees by the residents, section 6 of the By-Law declared that:

There shall be paid out of the municipal funds of the City a bonus or premium of fifty (50) cents for each and every Ash, Basswood, Beach, Birch, Cedar, Chestnut, Oak, Walnut, Butternut, Elm, Hickery [sic], Maple, Whitewood tree, and all other shade trees approved of by the Council which shall have been planted . . .³⁵

The City of Vancouver was possibly influenced by the City of Ottawa, which had passed a similar By-Law in 1869 that awarded twenty-five cents for every tree planted by the property owners.³⁶ Section 6 of the Boulevard and Shade Tree Vancouver By-Law was repealed in 1899, without any written explanation.³⁷ Nevertheless, merely a decade after its incorporation, the City of Vancouver was already endorsing City Beautiful movements and the greening of parks and boulevards in its city regulations.

Predictably, funding and maintaining the boulevards quickly became problematic. In 1906, the *Vancouver Daily Province* reported on a debate between members of the City

³³ CVA, By-law No. 246: a By-Law relating to Boulevards and Shade Trees 1896.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Joanna Dean, “‘Said Tree Is a Veritable Nuisance’: Ottawa’s Street Trees 1869-1939,” *Urban History Review* 24, no. 1 (2005), in LexisNexis Academic (accessed September 19, 2008), 86.

³⁷ CVA, By-law No. 343: a By-Law to amend By-Law No. 246 1899, Public Records #36, 29-A-5 file 52.

Council and the Garden City Association about the cost of maintaining boulevards and the city's right – or not – to charge the cost against the adjacent property owners.³⁸ Discussions also arose, in 1910, over boulevarding responsibilities; it was finally decided that the Board of Works would assume the construction and the Park Board would be responsible for maintenance.³⁹ In 1912, the City Council increased the penalty fines to a maximum of one hundred dollars.⁴⁰ The City of Vancouver would not tolerate any careless action with regard to its street trees!

The planting of trees, in spite of the earlier withdrawal of the 50 cents incentive, was progressing well owing to the keenness of the Vancouver residents. Filing an application form from the Board of Park Commissioners, ensuring the transportation of the trees from the Stanley Park Nursery, located at the Pender Street Entrance, to their home, and respecting a newly-determined distance of thirty feet between the trees, effectively allowed the residents to continue the landscaping of their respective boulevards.⁴¹ The trees supplied during the 1900s and 1910s consisted mainly of large deciduous trees, such as the mountain ash, chestnut, maple, elm, and sycamore.⁴²

The funding issue was finally addressed in 1913 by amending the City charter – previously the Vancouver Incorporation Act of 1900 – to help financially support the planting and maintenance of street trees. Section 78a authorized the City to levy a tax that would charge the adjacent property owners with:

. . . the payment of any and all sums necessary to meet the cost and expenses of the constructing, maintaining, sodding, planting, caring for and keeping in good order, repair and condition [by the Park Board] such boulevards or grass

³⁸ *The Vancouver Daily Province*, "Frontage Tax for Boulevarding," June 28, 1906, 4.

³⁹ *The Vancouver Daily Province*, "Boulevard on Residential Streets," April 28, 1910, 7.

⁴⁰ CVA, By-law No. 940: Boulevard By-Law No. 940 1912, Public Records #36, 29-C-3 file 11.

⁴¹ CVA, Correspondence – tree planting on boulevards, 1912- 1917, Public Records Series #81, 48-C-6 file 5.

⁴² *Ibid.*

plots in front of such land, (but not to any greater extent than ten cents a year for each front foot of such land) . . .⁴³

This amendment also legally designated the Park Board as the sole agency responsible for managing boulevards, which amounted to twenty miles.⁴⁴

Over the next few years, hundreds of requests and complaints about street trees were mailed to the Park Board, especially regarding lack of pruning. For example, the British Columbia Electric Railway Company Ltd. reported trees in contact with its wires, while the Northern Securities Ltd., on behalf of the Bute Street Hospital, criticized the trees for shutting out the light. Overall, however, most complaints originated from the residents with regards to the trees on their front boulevard, which were apparently in need of a severe trim.⁴⁵ Urban nature needed to be tidy for the residents and different organizations if it was to remain soothing, enjoyable, and safe.

In an attempt to further define its role and regulations, the Vancouver Park Board initiated communication in 1916 with the park superintendents of Seattle, Washington and Calgary, Alberta. The latter replied that boulevards were under the direct care of the City Council and that no frontage tax existed.⁴⁶ In Seattle, there was no policy regulating the planting or maintenance of street trees on boulevards; a property owner was free to use this strip of land “as he may see fit, provided he does not obstruct the street or walk.”⁴⁷ Thus, it appeared that Vancouver was well ahead of its neighbouring constituents on the West Coast with respect to policies and administration of street trees.

Meanwhile, the Vancouver Natural History Section of the B.C.M.C. and the University Women’s Club joined efforts to found the Arbor Day Association. The latter

⁴³ “An Act to Amend the Vancouver Incorporation Act, 1900,” in *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ A. S. Wooten to F. G. Macpherson, 5 November 1913, CVA, Correspondence – boulevarding and tree planting, 1913-17, Public Records Series #81, 48-C-6 file 6.

⁴⁵ CVA, Correspondence – boulevarding and tree planting, 1913-17.

⁴⁶ W. R. Reader to W. S. Rawlings, 20 December 1916, CVA, Correspondence – tree planting on boulevards, 1912-1917.

⁴⁷ Roland W. Cotterill to W. S. Rawlings, 23 December 1916, CVA, Correspondence – tree planting on boulevards, 1912-1917.

advocated for a transfer of jurisdiction from the Engineer's department to the Park Board, a stricter boulevard legislation regarding planting and removals, and a civic Arbor Day.⁴⁸ As a result of pressing demands from the Arbor Day Association, which had the support of the Park Board, the School Board, the B.C. Teachers' Association, and the City Beautiful Association, the City of Vancouver appointed the president of the Arbor Day Association, University of British Columbia (UBC) Professor John Davidson, and W.S. Rawlings, Park Board superintendent, to draft regulations to "secure uniformity, protection, and preservation of our work for the benefit of the future generations."⁴⁹ As for an Arbor Day, the association believed it would "encourage [residents and organizations, such as schools,] to beautify their surroundings by planting trees on the boulevards in front of their homes."⁵⁰ The Natural History Section of the B.C.M.C. and the Arbor Day Association merged in 1918 to become the Vancouver Natural History Society. According to its president Professor Davidson, the Society's mandate was to introduce its "members to healthful physical exercise in 'God's great out of doors', to mental activity in the study of His works, and to spiritual uplift in reading the lessons He has written in the great book of life – Nature."⁵¹ Thus, it was a citizens' association, with a marked interest in nature and sustainability, that gave the key momentum to further boulevard legislation.

In 1917, the Park Board was given official jurisdiction over the boulevards and parks by the City Council. The elaborate By-Law No. 1293 clarified boulevard property and management:

All trees, saplings, or shrubs planted on any boulevard of the city shall be deemed to be the property of the City; and the control of such trees, saplings,

⁴⁸ John Davidson, "Vancouver Natural History Society's President Address," 6 October 1921, CVA, Public Addresses, 1916-19, Private Records Add. Mss 505, 565-F-3, file 3, John Davidson fonds, 6.

⁴⁹ Ibid.; Information on the delegates to the Arbor Day meeting from Peacock, 19.

⁵⁰ Davidson, "Vancouver Natural History Society's President Address," 4.

⁵¹ Ibid., 1.

or shrubs are here-by declared to be under the care or control of the Board of Park Commissioners.⁵²

Written permits to plant trees were mandatory, to ensure respect for the optimal conditions predetermined by the board. These conditions included, among many others, that trees be no less than thirty feet from one another, and three feet from the sidewalks. The board also became responsible for any required pruning, trimming, removal, or transplant, unless authorization was otherwise given.⁵³ Vancouver had thus decided that regulating street trees and boulevards was a necessity to ensure a standardized and unified streetscape, in line with the essential concept of “beauty and harmony” previously articulated by MacPherson. At the same time, the City also passed the Civic Arbor Day By-Law (No. 1290) for a day to be held annually during early spring to officially launch and celebrate the “tree-planting season.”⁵⁴

The City of Vancouver’s late development gave its planners the advantage of learning from older cities’ mistakes. In Ottawa, for example, where most street trees had been privately planted since 1869, “results were often haphazard [:] Trees were planted too close to one another, and symmetry was often lacking,” explains historian Joanna Dean.⁵⁵ As Ottawa’s street trees grew bigger and started competing with the emerging infrastructure – sidewalks, new road surfaces and paving, curbs, drains, overhead wires – a new Street Tree Planting By-Law was finally adopted in 1909.⁵⁶ Over the next decades, thousands of trees had to be removed to comply with the modernizing urban society’s needs. By proactively regulating street trees, Vancouver hoped to minimize the destruction or removal of street trees.

The Vancouver Natural History Society’s membership grew steadily and so did its passion for trees and boulevards. In his presidential address of 1921, Professor Davidson proudly asserted that the Society had slightly more than two hundred members and “had

⁵² Ibid., 9.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ By-Law No. 1290, quoted in Ibid., 3.

⁵⁵ Dean, 87.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 88, 90.

become one of the strongest and most active Natural History Societies in Canada . . . the strongest west of Ottawa.”⁵⁷ He also urged its members to arrange meetings in schools and church-halls from various districts to promote urban trees: “Yo do something! it will be good for *you*, it will be good for our *society*, it will be good for *Vancouver*?” (sic).⁵⁸ Other active members were Dr. Leonard Sylvanus Klinck, president of UBC; Charles F. Connor, a botany teacher at King Edward High School and Methodist minister; Katerine McQueen, an English teacher at this same high school; and A.H. Bain, a chartered accountant.⁵⁹ The Society fervently argued for the dogwood flower to become Vancouver’s civic emblem.⁶⁰ This interest in a “native” flower echoed Andrew Jackson’s mid-nineteenth-century concept centered on indigenous trees. The dogwood flower was chosen as a provincial symbol in 1959. As for Vancouver, it finally opted for the rose in 1967.⁶¹

In the years following the transfer of jurisdiction to the Park Board, managing and caring for boulevards proved difficult. Since the 1913 frontage tax of a maximum of ten cents hardly covered maintenance fees, the Park Board had to rely on annual special grants from the City, starting with \$228.29 in 1916, to “enable work of an urgent nature” to be completed.⁶² As a result, the board concentrated its “constructing” efforts on the main thoroughfares, such as Georgia Street, and relied upon property owners to deal with less urgent matters, such as pruning, on their respective boulevards. The Park Board had to decline countless “construction” or maintenance requests from residents, “owing to lack of funds; the City Council not having appropriated any sum for [such] work.”⁶³ Helplessly, the

⁵⁷ CVA, Public Addresses, 1916-19, John Davidson fonds, 14.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 24. Underlining in original.

⁵⁹ Peacock, 26-28.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 22-23.

⁶¹ Government of British Columbia, “Official Symbols of British Columbia,” <http://www.protocol.gov.bc.ca/protocol/prgs/symbols/symbols.htm> (accessed October 30, 2008); City of Vancouver, City Clerk’s Department, “Symbols of the City,” 2007, <http://vancouver.ca/ctclerk/symbolsofthecity/index.htm> (accessed October 25, 2008).

⁶² W. S. Rawlings to the Board of Park Commissioners, “Re Boulevards,” 28 January 1920, CVA, Tree pruning on boulevards and street ends, Public Records Series #81, 49-A-2 file 1.

⁶³ W. S. Rawlings to M. L. Copley, 2 March 1920, CVA, Tree pruning on boulevards and street ends, Public Records Series #81, 49-A-2 file 2.

board granted the residents permits to take on these endeavours at their own costs. In 1921, the City Charter was further amended. Subsection 163 now stipulated that a frontage tax not exceeding 25 cents could be imposed to maintain boulevards. However, there were still no provisions made for “construction” costs.⁶⁴ Yet again, the Park Board was to depend on special grants from the council for any new local improvements to the boulevards. Such budget restrictions for boulevards were not uncommon throughout Canada during and following World War I; for example, Winnipeg did not carry out any new construction from 1916 to 1921.⁶⁵

During those challenging years, Vancouver residents and organizations took action and acquired permits to assume the planting of new boulevard trees. As revealed by a 1916 petition from five residents of Stephens Street in Kitsilano, “[they] would be glad to plant such trees [them]selves, and to pay for the cost of cartage.”⁶⁶ To its relief, over the next four years, the Park Board gave away more than two thousand trees from its Stanley Park nursery, which had by then grown to a critical size.⁶⁷ Thus, the initiatives of residents, schools, and other organizations significantly contributed to the development of boulevards and densification of street trees in Vancouver. In fact, the nursery ran out of trees in the spring of 1921, at which time boulevarding slowed down until new trees were secured in the fall of 1922.⁶⁸

Given that homeowners had to bear the costs associated with planting street trees between 1910 and 1920, it is not surprising that most applications originated from the

⁶⁴ City Solicitor to W.S. Rawlings, 19 October 1922, CVA, Tree pruning on boulevards and street ends, Public Records Series #81, 49-A-2 file 2.

⁶⁵ G. Champion to W. S. Rawlings, 30 January 1922, CVA, Tree pruning on boulevards and street ends, Public Records Series #81, 49-A-2 file 2.

⁶⁶ Residents of Stephens Street to the Park Board Commissioners, 11 March 1916, CVA, Correspondence – tree planting on boulevards, 1912-1917, Public Records Series #81, 48-C-6 file 5.

⁶⁷ W. S. Rawlings to the Board of Park Commissioners, “Re Boulevards,” 28 January 1920, CVA, Tree pruning on boulevards and street ends, Public Records Series #81, 49-A-2 file 1.

⁶⁸ W. S. Rawlings to the residents, in CVA, Tree planting, Public Records Series #81, 54-E-7, file 10.

wealthier west side of Vancouver.⁶⁹ A close examination of the correspondence of the Park Board from 1912 to 1917 reveals that the vast majority of the applications came from the West End and Kitsilano.⁷⁰ These neighbourhoods also happened to be settled mostly by middle class families. As historian Jean Barman argues, “by the 1920s Vancouver was divided between east and west largely by socio-economic orientation.”⁷¹ Barman also advances that race and ethnicity contributed to reinforce this east-west division. As the West End and Kitsilano populations originated predominantly from the United States, Britain, and elsewhere in Canada, these districts displayed some of the lowest percentages of immigrants from continental Europe and Asia.⁷² Thus, the Park Board’s practice – or necessity – of depending upon residents’ activism or private investments favoured tree planting in the wealthier western districts, whose interests, resources, and cultural upbringing effectively reflected the values and ideals of movements such as the parks and boulevard, or City Beautiful.

This essay demonstrates that the dominant white English-speaking population of Vancouver played a crucial role in the development of Vancouver’s street tree programme. Influenced by the English squares of the eighteenth century and the elaborate French boulevards of the nineteenth century, American landscapers, architects and urban planners of the 1870s conceived the parks and boulevard movement. Within two decades, this movement was integrated to the much larger City Beautiful movement, which spread across North America. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Canadian

⁶⁹ Jean Barman, “Neighbourhood and Community in Interwar Vancouver: Residential Differentiation and Civic Voting Behaviour,” *BC Studies* 69/70 (1986): 97-141.

⁷⁰ CVA, Correspondence – tree planting on boulevards, 1912--1917.

⁷¹ Jean Barman, “‘Knowledge is Essential for Universal Progress but Fatal to Class Privilege’: Working People and the Schools in Vancouver During the 1920s,” *Labour/Le Travail* 22 (1988): 14. For more details, see Jean Barman, “Neighbourhood and Community in Interwar Vancouver.”

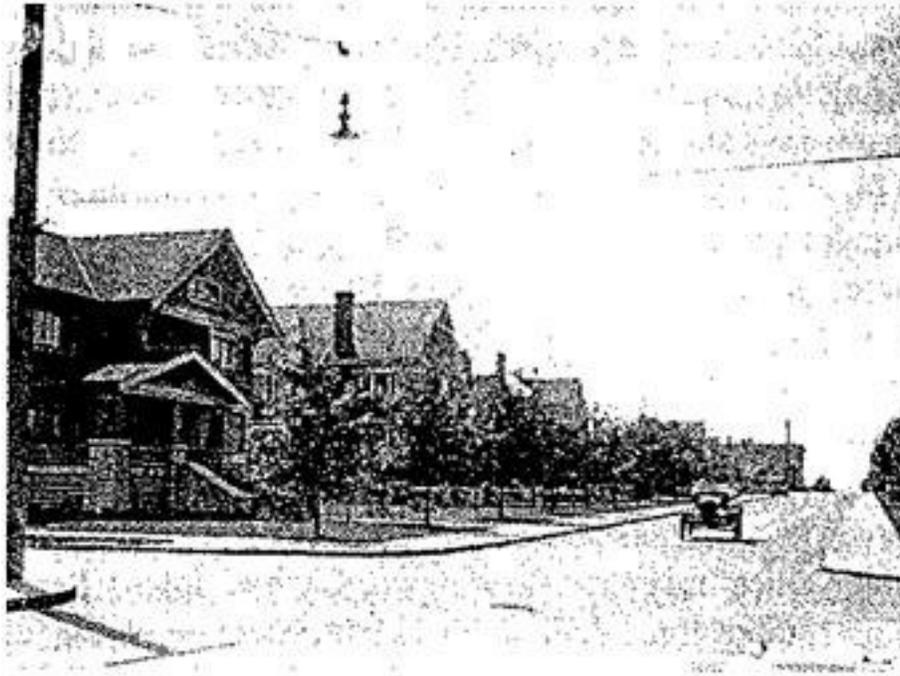
⁷² Table 3: Birthplace of Vancouver Residents, by Percentage, Sex and Geographical Area, 1931, in Barman, “Neighbourhood and Community in Interwar Vancouver,” 111. Since immigration significantly slowed down after 1914, one could advocate that these 1931 data are somewhat reflective of the geo-ethnic reality of the 1910s.

professionals and cities adopted the City Beautiful movement's values and principles of landscaped architecture and civic beauty, which encompassed the beautifying of boulevards with street trees. Vancouver offered a fresh slate for its early settlers and new immigrants – predominantly from Britain, the United States, and elsewhere in Canada – to impose a rigorous street tree programme and legislation. Many contributed to such endeavours: the City Council, Park Board, and professional and private organizations. Even more significant was the role that residents played through associations or basic activism (such as planting!) in beautifying their boulevards and ensuring a sound sustainable legislation. The neighbourhoods that benefitted the most from the residents' and organizations' "green" investments were located on the west side of Vancouver, which was also home to the middle and upper classes. The initial efforts made by the dominant white English-speaking population, from 1896 to 1925, especially on the wealthier west side of Vancouver, can still be felt today, thanks to the actions of passionate residents who have kept the initial enthusiasm alive.



East Georgia Street, ca. 1920. City of Vancouver Archives, CVA 1376-241.

Photo has been cropped.



West 12th Avenue at Spruce Street, ca. 1920. John Davidson photo, City of Vancouver Archives, CVA 660-2. Photo has been cropped.

Note the differences between the west and east side boulevards, circa 1920. The photograph of West 12th Avenue depicts rows of trees along the boulevard. In contrast, there are no trees on the boulevard along East Georgia Street (formerly Harris Street); the two trees in front of the one house (identified as the Marsland family house at 856 East Georgia Street) were planted on private property. Photos used by permission of the City of Vancouver Archives.

****Media Editor's Note:** Any errors of information omission that remain result from the original publication and not this transcription.