

Frank Ebenezer Buck 1875-1970: His Legacy to Vancouver: Town & Park Planning, Boulevard Trees, and Gardens.

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Dedication of the Frank Buck memorial garden fronting the library 1946 Frank & wife Kathleen at UBC as Dean of Agriculture and Chancellor present at the awards

In 1949 Frank Ebenezer Buck retired from the UBC Department of Horticulture where he been Professor of Ornamental Horticulture in the Faculty of Agriculture. since 1920 He was also Campus Landscape architect a title and position that went with his faculty appointment. For almost 30 years he had taught ornamental horticulture and overseen the landscape development of the UBC Point Grey campus in accordance with the 1914 plan that had been the winning campus design by the Vancouver architectural firm of Sharp and Thompson. Later becoming Sharp, Thompson, Berwick and Pratt, they too, had continued on as unpaid advisors with the unspoken agreement they would get the design commissions for the new campus buildings as the campus developed.

While there was little campus building development during the first spurt of growth in the 1920s there was almost nothing in the way of building during the depression years of the 1930s. Frank Buck as campus Landscape Architect was able to landscape around most of the buildings and line the roads, boulevards (malls) and pedestrian walks with trees and plantings. An example of his landscape handiwork is University Boulevard, the divided carriage way with landscaped median from Alma Road all the way past the golf course and Endowment Lands winding gently past the university village into the campus.. It had pedestrian walks on both sides lined with Silver Maples, Acer saccharinum, and the grassed centre median planted at regular intervals with islands of shrubs such as Peegee Hydrangeas, Hydrangea paniculata grandiflora, and rugosa shrub roses, Pink and mauve Catawbiense and Caucasicum hybrid Rhododendrons with groups of flowering Hawthorne trees between.

I went to see Frank Buck in the late spring of 1946. It was just before much of his landscape work of twenty years on the campus was to be overcome by the post war building and campus development boom that occurred in the 1950s. The visit to consult the professor was suggested to me by one of the officers handling the discharge of returning veterans from BC had just come back from overseas. We were billeted in District Depot 11 Army Camp at Heather and 41st Avenue between Cambie and Oak streets, later used to house veterans and their families attending. It was, the Lieutenant explained, to seek his advice on using my higher education entitlement credits – month of university

for each month that I had served in the forces – to undertake the study of landscape Architecture; an idea I had picked up from my seeing Cornwall, Somerset and Devon during my visits there during the war.

I arrived on campus in the afternoon of a day in early June and met him at one of the Boston Ivy covered stucco buildings. It reminded me then of the ivy covered buildings I had seen in England although I learned later these were temporary buildings. Professor Buck suggested that since there was no University in Canada with a course or courses in Landscape Architecture, that if I could swing it, I should try and gain admittance to a University in the USA. I was most heartened, I knew that if a course was not given anywhere in Canada, Veteran's Affairs would have to allow me to attend a university outside of Canada, providing of course I could gain admission to a university where Landscape Architecture was a course of studies. My meeting with him that day showed me the way to a lifetime career, a partner of fifty plus years; both of which I am still passionately fond.

Frank Ebenezer Buck, was born in 1875 in Colchester, England, where he received his early schooling and training in journalism and printing. He emigrated to Canada in 1902, worked as an Associate Editor for a newspaper in Ontario and also undertook landscaping work. He entered Macdonald Agricultural College in Quebec, graduating in 1911 with a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture. Shortly after that he attended Cornell University at Ithaca, in upper New York State where he earned a Diploma in Horticulture. He had, he told me later, studied under Liberty Hyde Bailey, who was then an up and coming professor of horticulture at Cornell.

Frank Buck returned to Ottawa from Ithaca and beginning in 1912 secured a position as Assistant Dominion Horticulturist in charge of "landscape architecture and floriculture work" at the Dominion Department of Agriculture. J. H. Grisdale was the new Director replacing William Saunders, the founder in 1886, and first Director of the Canada wide systems of Dominion Experimental Farms and Stations. In 1912 there were only four Experimental Farms: Nippan, Nova Scotia; Brandon, Manitoba; Indian Head, Saskatchewan; and Agassiz, in British Columbia's lower Fraser River Valley; with eight stations: Charletown, Prince Edward Island, Kentville Nova Scotia; Ste Anne de la Pocatière, and Cap Rouge in Quebec; Rosthern and Scott in Saskatchewan; with two stations in Alberta, Lethbridge and Lacombe. Frank Buck was stationed at the Ottawa headquarters at the Dominion Experimental Farm in Canada's capital. It is not known but highly unlikely he ever visited any of the prairie the farms or stations during his short tenure with the Dominion Department of Agriculture.

Frank, being a former editor, got right to work and in 1912 he produced a four page booklet which was revised in 1916, titled Beautiful Homes and How the Farmer may Make Them. It was specifically directed to European, particularly United Kingdom, immigrants and settlers taking up Railway and Dominion land in the three prairie provinces and who had little or no farming experience in the harsh climate of the open windswept and treeless prairies.

The plan on the front of the booklet pictured at scale "A Well Arranged Farm Home" shows a 400 x 500 foot area (roughly 5 acres), divided up into the various farm activities. In the centre is the 1 acre area with tool, stock and storage sheds, and the main barn building all grouped around a square labeled the 'Barn Yard'. The mandatory north and eastside shelterbelts are shown at two perimeters that would indicate a northwest or southwest quarter of a surveyed 640 acre, mile by mile square area of prairie. A main north-south road borders the west side, while the farm entry road off it in the centre of the 5 acres goes straight into the barnyard. On the south side of this driveway is the 'Farm Home', standing slightly to the northeast of centre, and set in a little under an acre of lawn. There are small areas of shrubs and trees shown scattered about the lawn.

The main garden feature mentioned in the text is a 10 ft wide x 150 ft long flower border on the north side of a hedge along the south perimeter of the lawn. The hedge continues west to protect the vegetable garden between house and barnyard. There is an orchard of about an acre shown on the north side of the driveway across from the house. This basic farm crop would have to await the results of several decades of breeding for prairie hardy apple varieties. Few if any horticulturists at the time, including Frank Buck knew that the

current apple varieties, the mainstay of the settled farming areas of Eastern USA, or Atlantic and Central Canada farms and orchards could not survive the cold of a prairie winter. While apple varieties had been grown successfully in New England, since the late 18th century, in Upper Canada's Niagara peninsula and the Annapolis Valley in Nova Scotia and beginning in the early and mid 19th in BC's Kootenay lake area, Columbia River and on Saanich Peninsula and the Gulf Islands of the Pacific Northwest; none of the varieties grown here could survive the prairie winter temperatures.

Frank Buck's plan had the mandatory orchard and poultry houses at the top bordering the east side of the barnyard along with the bee hives. Both home grounds and orchard are shown with about 150 ft of frontage on each side of the farm entry road, along the main north-south public road. The ornamental garden shown around the farm home has a very simple and straight line layout. The objective is to create a garden in fact but also one of memory. Buck's opening paragraph begins:

A nice lawn and a few flowers around your farm home will make the old place a loveable spot rooted deeply in the affection of your children. They will think of it with delight in after years even though they be scattered over the face of the earth. Don't think Mr. Farmer, that flowers and nature's beautiful things like green sward and trees are luxuries for people who have more leisure than you have. Flowers, trees, shrubs and green grass are things of beauty that will repay you for any trifling initial cost in manifold ways.

Buck continues with a paragraph with some value added specifics:

Use them and in one or at most three years your home will look worth much more in actual cash value. Your attachment to the place and your pride in it will be greatly increased. The mental effect on members of your household will be distinct. You may gain a hobby which you may have to thank for inducing you to quit regular work earlier occasionally in order to indulge in a bit of joyous work which will give rich rewards.

... Mr Farmer you need a little reminder that your home can be made to look even more attractive than your cousin's Mr Townsman, can, if you will give this question of "more beautiful Farm homes" a little of your careful attention, and the few hints given in this circular are such a reminder.

The simple message of the simple plan by the assistant horticulturist was that the ornamental garden on the farm helps to maintain family values, increase monetary value, create recreational values and bring pride with beauty to the farmstead. It was a tall order!

Frank Buck's pamphlet next poses a series of simple questions in order to help the farmer create a farm ornamental garden that could be planned over a few winter evenings, changes to the farmstead that would save him time and steps, and would please his wife. Several questions concerning basic utility and beauty were directly addressed to the farmer.

And have you nice shade trees near the house and buildings under which the men can rest at noon hour and your family and friends enjoy at other time? Have you a nice lawn?. What about flower seeds? . . . What about Trees and Shrubs?

In these questions Buck set out the essential elements that constitute the English plant garden: trees for shade, grass in the form of a lawn, shrubs (both foliage and flowering) and flowers (both annuals and perennials) but he falls a bit short when it comes to the specific design and placement of the elements, relying perhaps on the overall plan to show what he has in mind. He writes that the lawn should be in the front between house and road, "locate hedges trees and shrubs in the right place when planting as moving them after a few years is not to be successful." This is more horticultural than design but short on the specifics of what varieties of trees and shrubs to plant. . . "Aim for combining convenience and beauty and . . . a good arrangement seldom costs more than a poor one," he concluded. These two edicts assumed the farmer and or his wife have some horticultural knowledge and understanding of the artistic taste of the day and can judge between a good and poor arrangement.

In 1915, not to overlook the town lot garden, Frank Buck, wrote a four page pamphlet *Planning the Home Lot*. The example a sketch plan layout is for an east-west oriented 87 x 122 ft “Town lot of Medium Size.” Again, as with the Prairie farmyard layout garden, Buck gives the elements of the ornamental garden.

The first consideration in most cases is a good lawn. . . It should not be cut into by walks, . . and flowers are more easily tended and produce more far better effects when placed in borders at its boundaries, rather than in prominent beds in central places where they rob the lawn of much of its charm. A lawn broken up by a flower beds generally looks smaller than it actually is. . . The second consideration is that of permanent features on the lawn, such as shrubs, trees. Flowering shrubs cannot be too highly recommended. . . They are most effectively placed when planted in groups of three or four, close to the house. . . In such positions they help to make the house and grounds harmonious whole and a pleasing picture. Other good positions for shrubs are by boundary fences and in the corners of the lot.

While still in Ottawa, Frank Buck combined his horticultural writing and landscape design talents with R. B. Whyte and agricultural department colleague Dr W. T. Macoun, Dominion Horticulturist to produce in 1916 a larger booklet for the Ottawa Horticultural Society titled: *Ottawa City of Gardens*. It contained a plea for urban beautification with garden layout plans for gardens in Ottawa. These were for a the range of different house and lot sizes, home owners income levels with plans for special gardening and horticultural interests. For each garden pictured there were detailed plant lists, of annuals, perennials, shrubs and tree varieties to accompany each of the garden layouts, with suggested arrangement of shrubs and placement of trees. Since the extensive 26 acre arboretum of trees shrubs and herbaceous plant material at the DEF ‘Farm’ in Ottawa had been planted in 1889, with a wide range of ornamental horticultural plant varieties there had been over two and a half decades of Ottawa winters to test them for winter hardiness. The survivors could now be performance rated and safely listed for landscaping of Ottawa gardens.

Dr. Leonard Klinck who had been Dean of Agriculture since 1914, and a summer-squatter on the logged over campus site, became UBC President in 1918 after the death of UBC’s first President, Dr Frank Westbrook. In 1916 Dean Klinck appointed Dr. Clement to head up the Department of Horticulture. Klinck and Clement had been classmates at Macdonald College and close friends of another graduate of the College, Frank Ebenezer Buck. After the War the ‘new boys’, (later to become the ‘old boys network’) came into play in their search for someone to tackle the daunting task of landscaping the new campus, “a logged-off area replete with stumps, boulders and blasted craters.” Already an Assistant Horticulturist in Landscape architecture and a specialist in Ornamental Horticulture with the Dominion Experimental Farm Service, Frank Buck was the man selected for the job. He was appointed Assistant Professor of Ornamental Horticulture and arrived at the University of British Columbia’s new Point Grey campus in 1920.

In 1920 the first building on the new campus, the Science Building was in the construction process, a concrete shell in a field of stumps. It was completed with landscaping by the official opening of the Point Grey campus in 1925. The four storey building clad in Haddington Island grey granite, later became the main library for the University, and was the only campus building to be faced with this local granite quarried from an island in Johnstone Straits. This light grey extremely hard, black flecked stone had been selected by the architects, Sharp and Thompson and warmly approved in a 1913 report by the three member oversight committee of two Professors of Engineering, Laird of Pennsylvania and Darley of McGill University with Thomas Mawson, the English Landscape Architect and Town Planning Consultant as the third member. Mawson was so taken with the granite, he suggested a cheap method for getting the stone to the campus. The stone could be quarried and shipped to a jetty at the base of Point Grey loaded onto rail wagons like those used in mines and pulled by cable up the 300 ft high bluffs to the Campus building sites via temporary rails laid to each site. Prewar this would have been cheap and feasible, but after the Great War the Province had trouble affording to clad even the one building, and with the onset of the Great Depression it became unthinkable to even consider using such an expensive material to face a building.

In 1912 the logged over lands of the Burrard peninsula between the railway line bordering the CPR lands on the east and the University Endowment Lands including the campus land at Point Grey, although adjoining was not yet a part of the City of Vancouver, but a separate District municipality called Point Grey. It, with the Municipality of

South Vancouver, encompassing the southwest part of the peninsula west of Boundary Road from the Quarry on Little Mountain south to the North Arm of the Fraser River, were both amalgamated with Vancouver in 1929. The municipality of Burnaby took up the rest of the land of the Burrard Peninsula stretching from Boundary Road east to the boundaries of Port Moody, Sapperton and the City of New Westminster. Burnaby didn't amalgamate with Vancouver; it became a separate city six decades later.

In 1920 when Frank Buck came to take up his horticultural teaching and to take on overseeing the landscaping for the new Point Grey campus, Point Grey Municipality was also experiencing the renewed growth that had been stopped during the war years. New streets and houses began to appear in Kerrisdale, McKenzie Heights, Dunbar and the District called Point Grey. These scattered municipal districts and subdivisions with fanciful old country real estate names had been created in the prewar period 1900 - 1914 to lure the influx of UK immigrants to settle in Vancouver's suburbs. Point Grey, the area from 16th Avenue between Alma and Blanca Streets south to Jericho Beach was one of them. It was where Frank Buck and his family found a place to live. Point Grey was the closest residential area to the university, it abutted the undeveloped University Endowment Lands between it and to the Point Grey campus out at the end of the Burrard peninsula.

The Point Grey Municipal Hall had been built in 1912. It was located in Kerrisdale on the west side of the CPR tracks and north down the railway line a block from the CPR nursery and greenhouses on the east side of the line. The nursery had provided landscape materials for the gardens of the posh prewar posh houses built in the Company's adjoining Shaughnessy Heights, but mainly it was to grow and supply the trees for the beautification of streets, medians and boulevards in the subdivision. Like Osler Street with a wide centre grassed park like median which ran through the East side of the subdivision, or the grade separated carriage ways with narrow sloping treed median on parts of Angus Drive on the west, both radiating like arms from the treed park oval centerpiece roundabout called the Crescent.

The range of greenhouses on the hill overlooking the nursery field supplied flowers for the downtown CPR hotel on Granville, the dining cars of the transcontinental trains departing Vancouver every day for Toronto and Montreal. and the Empress ships departing monthly for Asia Pacific ports such as Yokohama and Shanghai. The nursery site called the CPR Gardens was sold to the Vancouver School Board in the mid twenties for the Point Grey Secondary School, designed in the Gothic Revival Collegiate style by architects Townley and Matheson, and opened in 1929. Today a row of very large trees, several Ailanthus, Northern Red Oak, and London Planes border the school site along East Boulevard. Their age and magnificent size indicate they are left overs from when the site was the CPR nursery.

The elected councillors and appointed officials in Point Grey were imbued with promoting growth and development of the municipality but also eager also to have some guidance and control over future development to ensure the exclusiveness of the municipality as a place of residence for white, middle class professional and semi professional families preferably from the British Isles. No one came out and said it but it was an undercurrent of feeling among the current residents who had bought in Point Grey. In 1925, the provincial legislature over in Victoria passed the Town Planning Act which gave Cities and Municipal Councils the authority to prepare an official Town Plan, set up advisory town planning commissions to guide and to consider matters dealing with control of the physical development of a municipality.

Two years previously, proactive gung ho Point Grey bent on being progressive had passed a local bylaw that said much the same thing. By using provisions in the Municipal Act and preempting the provincial Planning Act that came two years later Point Grey became the first municipality in the Dominion to have a Town Planning commission. The fact that Landscape Architect Frank Buck was Chairman and Architect, George Thornton Sharp a member of this Point Grey Advisory Town Planning Commission, and both served in those capacities continuously from 1923 until amalgamation with the city in 1929, would strongly suggest that both were more than ordinary concerned residents, but were known, respected and knowledgeable professionals, serving unpaid and concerned with the orderly development of their municipality.

For Frank Buck it would be more than orderly development that he was concerned about. It would be local improvements, beautification of streets with boulevard trees, front yard lawn planting, and sidewalks. Something he knew all about. A big part of his legacy is the street tree plantings he initiated in the 1920s in what was Point Grey Municipality: the avenue of American elms (his favourite tree) down 22nd Avenue from Dunbar Street and many other avenues of elms and maples still scattered throughout the Dunbar, Point Grey and Arbutus districts. The elms luckily escaped the devastation caused by Dutch elm disease that eliminated grand and stately avenues of them from towns and cities in Eastern Canada and United States.

His legacy lives in the Northern Red Oaks along 8th Avenue at the edge of Point Grey Park and in the park viewpoint at Discovery is still the best overlook view across English Bay to the downtown and Stanley Park, along with the urban evolved hybrids, the venerable London Planes lining the diversion of 8th Avenue into 9th before Alma. Then there is the grand avenue of Liriodendrons west from Alma along 12th creating a 'mile' of gold with their striking yellow fall colour and then the trees changes midway to Catalpas, creating an avenue of summer orchid blossoms that continues east on up the hill as 10th Avenue and end at Kitsilano High School, showing clearly that these trees were planted prior the Kitsilano Diversion merging Point Gey's 10th into Vancouver's 12th at McDonald. The street linkage occurred well after amalgamation.

Perhaps Frank Buck's greatest legacy to Vancouver had its beginning in 1923 when he was appointed chairman of the very first Advisory Town Planning Commission in Canada, by Point Grey Reeve G. A. Walkem. One of Frank Buck's and the TP C's first concerns was the development, landscaping and beautification of public parks and recreation places in the municipality. To this end they sought the ideas and expertise of consultants, not from the Old Country as had been the practice before the Great War but from our neighbours to the South. Buck had probably read or heard about the City Beautiful movement that originated in Chicago. It was a good place to start so he and the Commissioners invited the Chicago multi-disciplinary firm of Town Planners, Transportation Engineers and Landscape Architects, Harland Bartholomew and Associates come and present their ideas on Park development to the Commission.

Harland Bartholomew arrived in Vancouver by train from Chicago via Winnipeg and appeared on Friday July 27th 1923, before the Point Grey Town Planning Commission and members of Council meeting at the Point Grey Municipal Hall Council Chambers in Kerrisdale. He spoke on the "Five Principal kinds of recreational facilities (that) should be provided in a district Like Point Grey." outlining the five facilities in order of size. First were Children's Playgrounds, to be located on elementary school grounds then came Playfields for older Children, located within a one mile radius of each other. The third kind of recreational facilities were Neighbourhood Parks at a mile apart and designed for "Passive recreation with grass, trees, flowers and water (where possible) The recording secretary added an NB: "Unfortunately Mr Bartholomew was not shown the Maple Grove Park." At the time, the only water Maple Grove sported was a very large shallow rock lined wading pool.

The fourth Principal recreational facility Mr Bartholomew spoke to were: Large Natural Parks of 50 acres or more retaining natural features with informal landscape design, while the fifth recreational facility combined two elements Boulevards, here referring to traditional tree lined streets, with a new concept that recognized the potential in the then dawning age of the automobile This new idea Bartholomew called Pleasure Driveways and commented that these landscaped median divided streets "connecting the large parks are in themselves a great recreational advantage to the city." In 1928 when Harland Bartholomew was commissioned by Vancouver to prepare plans to amalgamate Point Grey with the city, he enlarged and extended the concept of Pleasure Driveways he had outlined in his presentation to the Point Grey Planning commission and Council Members five years earlier, by incorporated these Parkways as part of the park and street system for Vancouver.

In 1928, the year before the demise of Point Grey as a separate municipality with amalgamation Frank Buck who was about to lose his chairmanship of the commission, summed up the role Point Grey had taken in the town planning movement for the City of Greater Vancouver. Although he wrote " it can be inadequately performed in the few pages assigned for that purpose," he gave a good accounting of the contributions the Commission had made in planning

the orderly development of the municipality and street beautification as well as indicating what was in hand but not completed. As an example; under the heading of "Recreation" he wrote :

"The recommendations of the Commission relating to Parks and Recreation were presented to the Council (Point Grey) in November 1928, and while as yet they have not been adopted in their entirety, a number of the recommendations have been acted upon."

Frank Buck lost the appointment with the dissolution of Point Grey as a municipal entity but was appointed in 1929 to the newly constituted Advisory Town Planning Commission for the City of Vancouver that now included Point Grey. He served until 1951 with two, one year terms as Chairman in 1939 and 1941.

His Legacy of volunteer service over some 30 years set a standard and an obligation by the British Columbia Landscape Architects, he was the Societies first Honourary Member, to offer themselves for volunteer professional service.. The BCSLA Code of Professional practice following this Frank Buck tradition now obligates member Landscape Architects to serving on today's equivalent of Advisory Town Planning Commissions, the Advisory Design Panels now in many of B C's cities and districts.. In particular the urban and suburban communities in the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island. However ,Frank Buck's greatest legacy remains The parkland landscape of lawn and trees particularly flowering trees that weave a broad ribbon of green landscape through our city. King Edward, Cambie Heritage Boulevard and the 100 Maples on Boundary Road.

Although Frank Buck wouldn't qualify in today's world to use the term Landscape Architect after his name, he was one, combining garden design and plant arrangement with his teaching at UBC of courses in ornamental horticulture. With his Ottawa experience and his knowlege of plants he was called upon many times by UBC Faculty colleagues to provide advice and planning of their home gardens Two examples were UBC President Klinck s garden on Marine Drive in West Vancouver and the estate garden for Dean of Agriculture Dr and Mrs Blyth Eagles at Deer Lake in Burnaby. The Eagles garden which includes a large rockery and several pools designed by Buck has been declared a Heritage Garden by the City of Burnaby and is now being restored with the help of the BC land Conservancy. Frank Buck's landscape legacy lives on in Burnaby even though it never amalgamated with Vancouver but did became a city in it's own right.

In the June 1939 issue of the local magazine, The Garden Beautiful, (it ceased publication in 1946), Professor Frank Ebenezer Buck wrote an article titled "Potentialities of Our Coast Cities." in which he stated:

Today the House alone no longer constitutes a Home, a House must have a Garden . . . I attempt a brief discussion on the opportunities offered by British Columbia cities on the Pacific Coast for building the ideal home of all types. . . The director of Kew Gardens said of Vancouver that this city had a climate which favoured, . . . the successful growth of Nature's beautiful garden flowers. . . And is it not true that the two chief cities of this province are especially favoured in this respect? Our Gardening friends may be found in their gardens for nine, sometimes ten months of the year. Where else in Canada is this possible?

On the UBC campus in front of the of the Main Library is a pool and fountain made with blocks of the same granite that was used to face the building. At the base of the fountain there is a plaque with the inscription:

**AS A TRIBUTE TO THE WORK OF
FRANK E. BUCK BSA
UNIVERSITY LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT
1920 - 1949
ERECTED BY THE AGRICULTURAL
UNDERGRADUATE SOCIETY -1949**