

2011 Work Season Comes To A Close

It has been another wonderful year of restoration of the Park. Our faithful band of volunteers has, once again, done themselves and you, proud.

We had a rocky start with five weeks cancelled because of wet weather which, of course, made the weeds very happy. Our first efforts were the annual major weeding, removal of noxious growth and general clean up after the winter.

Those who visited the Park later in the season will have noticed the edging of the Island Beds and North Border. A difficult and tedious chore but we all agreed that it was a major improvement in the general look of the Park.

Our biggest effort this year was the spreading of 90 yards of bark mulch. The first application with front end loaders and our largest number of volunteers ever – 24. We invited family members, neighbours, strangers met in the Park and we even had two vacationing couples from Ontario and Australia join in the fun.

For next 40 yards, we had two front end loaders, an orange transporter and our own tractor with only 8 workers and that completed the job for this season. On both occasions, we had the much appreciated District machinery and workers along with the Centre's front end loader and operator. Without either of those, we could not have accomplished the job. It was like traffic on the 401 in Toronto as machines whipped around the Park followed by shovels and rakes in the hands of our volunteers.

With the addition of the second water outlet last year, we were able to give the newer specimens and rarer shrubs a weekly drench and the benefits are obvious in their better condition.

THE TEAM EFFORT



l to r: John Dawson, Verna Warren, Penny Boone, Joan MacDonald, Alan Warren, Stu MacDonald, Gerry Warren, Brian Rowe, John Ashton, Bob Parr, Lee Pears. In front of Bob Parr: Jesse and Erin. Missing: Barry Hall, and new volunteer, Bill Perry

More work was done in the southeast corner of the Park in and around the Picnic Shelter area. The Ligustrum hedge has had a trimming for the first time in eight years along with removal of 'junk' growth in the Cedar grove. The work was abruptly halted because of a massive wasp nest but the District will complete the job this winter.

We have added new specimens to the Park including an amazing Monkey Puzzle Tree (*Araucaria araucana*), Oriental Spruce (*Picea orientalis Aurea*), Serbian Spruce (*Picea omorika*), Spruce Bush's Lace (*Picea glauca*), Silk Tassel shrub (*Garrya elliptica*), Magnolia D.D. Blanchard, Wollemi Pine (*Wollemia Nobilis*), *Pittosporum Garnettii*, *Fothergilla gardenia*, Climbing hydrangea, (*Hydrangea anomala subsp. petiolaris*) and ferns, polygonums and winter heather. Some of the new material was donated by our supporters.

Plans are already underway for the 2012 work season and with the team, we can expect another successful year. New volunteers for our Wednesday work days are more than welcome.

We, once again, must acknowledge Cliff Halliday and his team from the District and David Lye and his team from the Centre of Plant Health. We could not have accomplished our work without them. Thank you all.

We Are 100 Years Young !

As we approach our 100 years of the Park, we are planning celebrations to mark the occasion.

The Farm and Park were an integral part of the social and work history of the Peninsula. We would like those with memories, stories or comments on their connection to the Farm and Park to share them with us. Whether it is a work experience, Sunday school picnic memory, a wedding or any occasion that was memorable to you, we would like to hear about it. If you have photographs you would like to share, please contact us.

We welcome any input on just how we should celebrate the anniversary and, of course, more than welcome any one who would like to become part of the planning group.



Photo credit: Sidney Archives

John Marshal's (3rd from the right) daughter married Sam Arrowsmith, Dominion Experimental Farm foreman and their daughter Verna is one of our Wednesday Work Party volunteers. One hundred years, one family involved in the Park. Quite a record.

Paeonias

The Peony flower has a long and somewhat violent history. Battles were fought, won and lost and the beautiful peony played a part. The only country, Paeonia, to be named after the flower located in present day Northern Greece was overrun in the fifth century, B.C.E, by the Persians and all that survives is the peony plant.

The plant became a lasting Chinese symbol of prosperity. The peony tree was Empress Wu's, Tang dynasty of the 7th century, favourite flower and its popularity rose to ridiculous heights and became so valuable, a cluster of red blooms would pay the taxes on ten houses. A later Emperor, Ming Huang, 8th century, appreciated the beauty of peonies so much that a civil war broke out to stop his excessive spending on the plant. He first had to execute his favourite concubine because it was she that he was hoping to please by stuffing the palace garden with precious peonies before the revolt was ended.

The spectacular beauty of the peony flower is undeniable but what of the plant's healing powers? Bearing the same name as Paion, a Greek physician who used a concoction made from parts of the peony to staunch wounds and the plant was once thought to cure a host of ills.

It is thought the Romans distributed the European peony as their empire spread west and north from the plant's native home in southern and eastern Europe. In the Iliad, Homer mentions Paion, a physician to the gods, who was given a peony by Apollo's mother. There is little evidence of the efficacy of any part of the peony as a coagulant. Nevertheless the Greek myth established a solid reputation for the peony as a miraculous cure-all that endured for more than a thousand years.

As late as 1810, the root was prescribed to treat insomnia and epilepsy. A tradition developed of hanging beads made from peony root around the necks of young babies to relieve teething problems, preventing fevers, convulsions, ruptures coughing, rickets and distemper. However, the use of any peony plant as a medicine must take care as parts of the plant can be highly toxic.



In October, 1913, the Dominion Experimental Farm ordered the entire range (50) of peony plants from the Paeonia Moutan collection catalogue, two of each variety, from Yokohama Nursery in Yokohama, Japan. The nursery was a consortium of Japanese nursery owners who dominated the lucrative market of flower export at the height of the western vogue for Japanese gardens. The total cost of the collection was \$29.50, a goodly sum in 1913. Unfortunately, even though Peony plants can live a 100 years, none are to be found in the Park or Centre of Plant Health.

As a side note, the catalogue of the Paeonia Mountain Collection is now selling for \$5,500.

Plant collector, Reginald Farrer, described discovering a wild plant in bloom on a hillside in Kansu province: *“Through the foaming shallows of the cove I plunged and soon was holding my breath with growing excitement as I neared my goal....I was setting my eyes on Peonia Moutan...the single enormous blossom, waved and crimped into the boles grace of line of absolute pure white with featherings of deepest maroon radiating at the base of the petals from the bosse of gold fluff at the flower heart....the breath of them went out upon the twilight as sweet as any rose.”*

This issue is much better in colour: www.dominionbrookpark.ca/newsletter33.pdf

Featured Plant

Araucaria araucana

Monkey Puzzle Tree, Chilean Pine

A genus of about 18 species of evergreen conifers from South America to Australia and the Pacific Islands. It is related to the Wollemi Pine. It was first introduced by Archibald Menzies in 1795. Araucana is a hardier species and can be successfully grown in Zone 7-9.

A medium to large sized tree unique in appearance – you love'm or hate'm – with long spidery branches and densely overlapping, rigid, spine-tipped dark green leaves. It is Chile's most important coniferous timber tree.

Our new, good sized specimen is located at the bottom of the Park and can first be seen when walking across the stone bridge looking east. There had been one in Bed 5 (near the present location) grown from seed in 1968 and transplanted to the Park in April, 1971. It was removed in the late 1990s.



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For more information on Dominion Brook Park, please visit <http://www.dominionbrookpark.ca/>
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