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429: Research in Historical Geography

Professor Brownstein

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to delve into the histories of five of the early contributors to The UBC Herbarium. This research will fill some of the gaps the UBC Herbarium currently has in its history, and allow for a deeper understanding of the people who contributed to the Herbarium's collections. The primary argument my paper focuses on is the reason these five contributors partook in the collecting of botanical samples, and what drove them along in their studies. My research methods consisted mostly of analyzing primary and secondary sources, either written by the collectors themselves, or by people who were interested in their work. For supplementary information, secondary sources focused on the subjects of botany, natural history, and the history of British Columbia were also analyzed. These methods opened up the histories of most of the collectors for scrutiny. It was found that the five contributors collected for the joy of being in nature, and to preserve knowledge of nature for future generations.

Introduction

Throughout history, plants and botany have held a special meaning for certain people. Explorers, both amateurs and professional, would go out, seeking new and unusual plants to document and preserve. Many of the first descriptions of Canadian plants came from when they were collected and exported back to Europe to be added to the collections of the wealthy and elite. Much later in Canada's lifespan, around the beginning of the 19th century, people who had settled down within its borders began accumulating plants, either for their own collections, or to be sent to professionals for identification. These people generally already held interest in botany, and it was their type of meticulous behavior that led to the creation and success of some of the first herbariums in Canada, including the UBC Herbarium. However, despite all this diligent behavior, by the end of the 19th century, Canadian botany was still mainly composed of plant lists and inventories, published as books or papers.



Figure 1: John Davidson in kilt, circa 1911. Photo by John Davison. City of Vancouver Archives, CVA 660-641.

Luckily, there were some notable exceptions of people whose diligent work allowed the interest in botany to keep flourishing in British Columbia. John Davidson was one of these people. Davison established the UBC Herbarium in 1912 on West Pender Street, and relocated to the UBC campus in 1916. At the beginning, the herbarium mainly consisted of Davidson's own collection of vascular plants, but donations from amateur collectors quickly expanded the scope of the project. Some

of the most notable early contributors were Albert James Hill, Joseph Kaye Henry, Eli Wilson, Dr. Charles Frederick Newcombe, and William A. Newcombe.

Eli Wilson

Eli Wilson was the Principle of a school in Armstrong, BC, where he lived. For thirteen years, from 1903 to 1913, Wilson dedicated much of his spare time to collecting and preserving native flora from around the Armstrong area. Although he had no formal training in botany, he was in regular correspondence with John Davidson, and even gave Davidson a tour of Armstrong when he came out to survey the area, showing Davidson ‘a number of the most interesting botanical districts in the vicinity; amongst the plants found were *Disporum trackycarpum*, *Monarda fistulosa*, *Lupinus argenteus*, *Sambucus glauca*, *Berberis aquifolium*, a few *Loniceras*, *Clematis*, etc’.¹ In December of 1913, Wilson presented his whole collection of over 1000 plants to the UBC Herbarium, which Davidson admired, describing it as ‘very representative of the Interior, and contain[ing] many interesting and rare plants’.²

It is unfortunate that more information about Eli Wilson is not readably available. The Armstrong Archives may have more information about him, but their distance from Vancouver made it a difficult source to access. If one does wish to inquire further into the life of Wilson, there are volunteers at the archives who can complete research for an nominal fee.

¹ John Davidson (1914). *First Annual Report of the Botanical Office of the Province of British Columbia*, William H. Cullin, Victoria.

² John Davidson (1914). *First Annual Report of the Botanical Office of the Province of British Columbia*, William H. Cullin, Victoria.

Albert James Hill

Albert James Hill was another important amateur contributor to the UBC Herbarium. He was born April 7th 1836 at Sydney, Cape Breton, in Nova Scotia to parents John Lewis and Margaret (Whyte) Hill.³ His early education took place at home under his parents care, and soon afterward he entered the shipbuilding industry with his brother, Arthur Edmund Hill, where he spent several years and was involved in the launch of two schooners. On July 19, 1866, he married Agnes Lawrence with whom he had two daughters and two sons: Elizabeth, Grace Irene, Egerton Boyd Lawrence, and Frederic Tremaine. In August of 1866 he left shipbuilding, and entered the Horton Collegiate Academy where he received his M.A. After graduating, he spent two years teaching at the Academy, before moving on to work as a Civil Engineer at the European and North American Railroad (E&NAR). Apparently this was a position he found a great deal of satisfaction in, as he worked there for the next sixteen years.⁴

Hill's work at E&NAR initially involved assisting in deciding where various railways could be located in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, but then evolved to include surveying, construction, exploration, and expansion of railways throughout all of Canada, until he finally settled in New Westminster, B.C. Done with working for E&NAR railway life, but not ready to retire, he started his own firm with a partner, named Hill and Kirk Engineers. They operated out of Guichon Block on Columbia Street in New Westminster. The work still included his specific skillsets, and there is

³ Ancestry.ca: Albert James Hill.

⁴ George Gordon (1914). *British Columbia. From the Earliest Times to the Present*, The S.J. Clark Publishing, Vancouver. p. 37.

documentation saying his company did the surveying for the proposed Canadian Pacific Railway terminal in Port Moody.⁵

Hill had quite an impact on New Westminster. He had built a luxurious house, known as 'Idlewild' when he settled there in 1891 at the cost of \$4000. His brother, Arthur, built the 'Dunwood' house at the cost of \$2400 on the same city block, but facing a different street, so that the two could combine their properties and share a back yard, giving them a sense of privacy even when in the city.⁶ The house was known for its lavishness: the fireplaces were supplied by Campbell and Anderson, and the mantles made of curly maple by the Wintemute Brothers. Unfortunately, both houses were demolished in 1974, to the shock of nearby residents. In fact, the backlash was so bad, that out of this event, the New Westminster Heritage Preservation Society was formed.⁷ They are a charity that work to support the conservation of heritage homes, buildings and structures and are still active today.

⁵ Gavin Hainsworth & Katherine Freund-Hainsworth (2005). *A New Westminster Album: Glimpses of the City As It Was*, Dundurn Press, Toronto. p. 43.

⁶ Gavin Hainsworth & Katherine Freund-Hainsworth (2005). *A New Westminster Album: Glimpses of the City As It Was*, Dundurn Press, Toronto. p. 43.

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Figure 2: Lounge and Dining room of Idlewild, circa 1910. Photo by Lelsie Hill. New Westminster Heritage House Photo Tour.

On October 6th, 1906, Hill narrowly escaped death when he was almost struck by an express train at Mission Junction. Apparently quite hard of hearing at this late point in his life, he had not heard the train come barreling down the tracks, and jumped off when it was only five feet away. Amazingly he was able to walk away from the incident with only a few cracked ribs.⁸ After this event Hill retired, still in New Westminster, where he remained until he died on May 23rd, 1919 at the age of 83 after living a full life.

⁸ Gavin Hainsworth & Katherine Freund-Hainsworth (2005). *A New Westminster Album: Glimpses of the City As It Was*, Dundurn Press, Toronto. p. 43.

Hill's life can be commemorated for his work as a railway engineer, but also for his active membership in various societies, including the Historical Society of Nova Scotia, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the National Geographic Society, the Sullivant Moss Society, and as a correspondent to the Ottawa Field Naturalists Club.⁹ One can see what a deep love and appreciation for plants Hill had through the titles of the associations he was a part of, and the contributions he made to the UBC Herbarium of over 2500 plants from 1884 to 1912, spanning from Nova Scotia to British Columbia, and down into the United States. Hill's work as a railway engineer put him in the unique position where he had ample opportunity to collect plants all over Canada, as can be seen in a showcase of his collection, and is truly a testament to the impact an amateur can make to the field of botany.

Dr. Charles Frederick Newcombe

One of the most famous contributor the UBC Herbarium has in their database is probably Dr. Charles Frederick Newcombe. Born in 1851 in Newcastle upon Tyne, in England, Dr. Newcombe's influence spread so far over his lifetime that he even had a plant named after him – *Sinosenecio newcombei* – named by Dr. C.V. Piper, one of the founders of the University of Washington Herbarium, and a man Dr. Newcombe frequently corresponded with. It was named after him to commemorate his work, as he was always deeply interested in the native plants of British Columbia, and especially on Vancouver Island, where he resided later in life.

⁹ George Gordon (1914). *British Columbia. From the Earliest Times to the Present*, The S.J. Clark Publishing, Vancouver. p. 38.



Figure 3: *Sinosenecio newcombei*, circa 2011. Photo by Hans Roemer. E-Flora BC: Electronic Atalas of the Flora of British Columbia. Photo ID #26182.

Dr. Newcombe's parents were William Lister Newcombe (1817-1908) and Eliza Jane (Rymer) (1816-1888). They were both from Yorkshire, England. He was the eighth of fourteen children. He received his M.B. from the University of Aberdeen in 1873 and his M.D. is 1878. He married Arian Arnold (1857-1891) in 1879 and had six children with her: May, Nelly, Percy, William, Arthur and Duncan.¹⁰

¹⁰ Ancestry.ca: Dr. Charles Frederick Newcombe.

After graduation Dr. Newcombe briefly worked as an assistant medical officer at Rainhill, an asylum near Liverpool. However, it is said that his wife found living near an asylum unsettling, and they left Rainhill to open a general practice in Windmere, located in the Lake District of North West England. He stayed here for several years, and during this time, took a three-month trip to Canada and the United States, traveling as far as California. He left for a second trip in 1883, this time heading to the north coast of San Francisco. He enjoyed his time so much that he decided to set up a general practice in Hood River, Oregon. By 1884 he went back to England to collect his wife and children, and they moved to Hood River, where they remained for five years. Here is when his family began to dedicate time to collecting – both botanical specimens and First Nation arrowheads. After the five years, Dr. Newcombe picked up his family once more and moved to Victoria, British Columbia, abandoning an apparently successful practice for no discernible reason in 1889. Two years after settling in Victoria, his wife Marion gave birth to their sixth child, and died a week later, in February 1891. Newly widowed and with a newborn, Newcombe brought his children back to England and left the three oldest there, and after a year of getting them settled in with relatives, brought the three youngest back to Victoria with him.¹¹

¹¹ Peter Corley-Smith (1989). *White Bears and Other Curiosities: The First 100 Years of the Royal British Columbia Museum*, RBCM special publication, Victoria. p. 52.

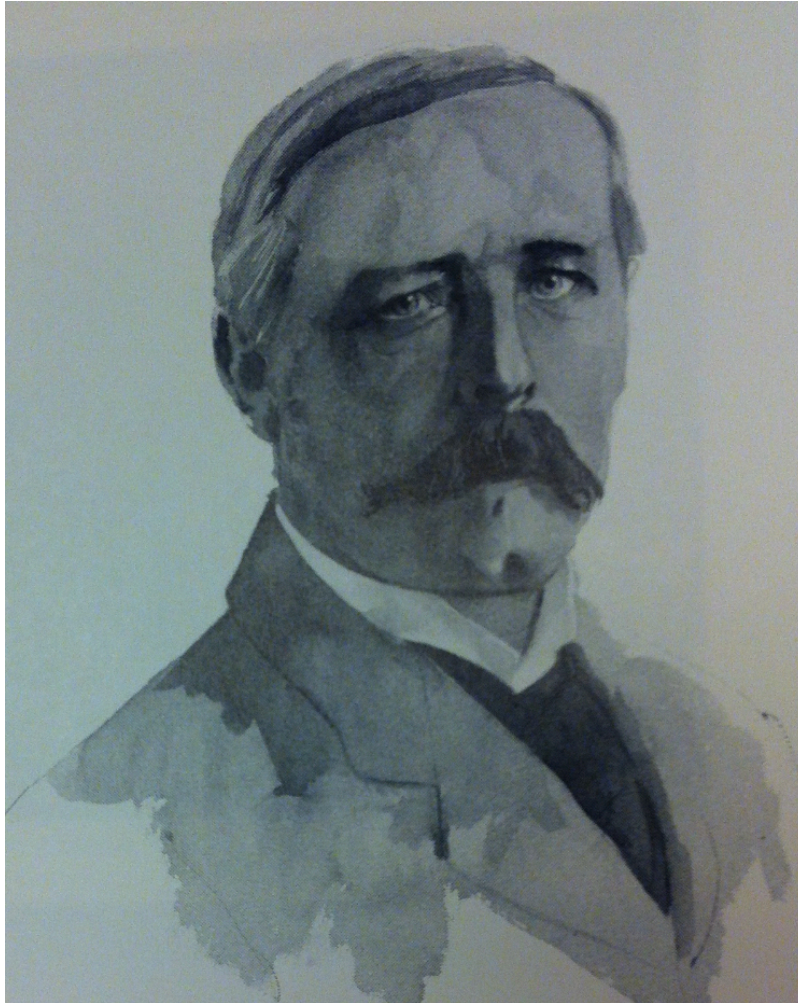


Figure 4: Dr. Charles Frederick Newcombe. Photo via Peter Corley-Smith. *White Bears and Other Curiosities: The First 100 Years of the Royal British Columbia Museum*.

Back in Victoria, Dr. Newcombe once again put his efforts into establishing a general practice, but it did not prosper. Independently wealthy through investments in railways, he became increasingly involved in geology and natural history, and decided to officially cease to practice medicine in 1894 to focus entirely on this new project.¹² After about a year, he was commissioned to collect for the Canadian Geological Survey, the Museum of Chicago, and the American Museum of Natural

¹² Kevin Neary (2005). *Newcombe, Charles Frederick* in Dictionary of Canadian Biography, vol. 15, University of Toronto.

History. By the end of the early 1890s, he had established an international reputation as a naturalist and as an anthropologist. He was appointed Secretary at the first meeting of the Natural History Society of British Columbia on March 26, 1890. He was so popular that he was even offered a job by the Provincial Secretary as the Curator of the Provincial Museum, for the handsome sum of \$50 per month. However, he did not accept the role. Perhaps he enjoyed venturing out to collect specimens too much – he had even designed his own boat for his expeditions.¹³ Sadly this also proved to be his downfall. Dr. Newcombe died October 19, 1924 in Victoria of pneumonia after a sailing trip.¹⁴

Dr. Newcombe led a lucky life. His considerable investments in British railways allowed him to follow his passion for natural history, and become a key contributor to the UBC Herbarium, both with plant specimens that he donated, but also in the less tangible form of the ideas he exchanged with John Davidson. To this day he is known for both his botanical and anthropogenic work.

William Arnold Newcombe

William Arnold Newcombe, named for his grandfather, was born on April 29th, 1884 in Hoch River, Oregon, USA. His parents were Dr. Charles Frederick Newcombe (1851-1924) and Arian Arnold (1857-1891). While he was born in Hoch River, he spent most of his life in Victoria, growing up at 138 Dallas Road. He was as drafted into the First World War in 1918 when he was 33.¹⁵

¹³ Peter Corley-Smith (1989). *White Bears and Other Curiosities: The First 100 Years of the Royal British Columbia Museum*, RBCM special publication, Victoria. p. 53.

¹⁴ Kevin Neary (2005). *Newcombe, Charles Frederick* in Dictionary of Canadian Biography, vol. 15, University of Toronto.

¹⁵ Ancestry.ca: William Arnold Newcombe.



Figure 5: William Arnold Newcombe. Photo via Peter Corley-Smith. *White Bears and Other Curiosities: The First 100 Years of the Royal British Columbia Museum*.

Like Albert Hill, William Newcombe grew up with a sporadic education. At an early age, he began to accompany his father on his sailing expeditions to Haida Gwaii, and then later began to assist with the collections that took place. Despite his lack of formal education, he gained a respected reputation for his knowledge, assisted by his competence when he acted as his father's secretary and began taking over Dr. Newcombe's correspondences with scientific contacts.¹⁶ In June of 1928, he

¹⁶ Peter Corley-Smith (1989). *White Bears and Other Curiosities: The First 100 Years of the Royal British Columbia Museum*, RBCM special publication, Victoria. p. 60.

was appointed as an assistant biologist at the Provincial Museum in Victoria. However, 'Billy' Newcombe's career would not prove to be as illustrious as his fathers. The Provincial Museum Director, a man named Francis Kermode, hired Billy Newcombe. He worked for the Provincial Museum for four years, 'toiling relentlessly to restore order from something approaching chaos'.¹⁷ However, friction arose between Kermode and Newcombe after only a few years. What apparently started as a misunderstandings over whom correspondences should contact within the museum escalated into a full feud: Kermode 'always jealous of his prerogatives as director, became increasingly resentful'¹⁸ as scientific correspondents began addressing letters to Billy Newcombe rather than him. In 1932, Kermode decreed that 'all correspondences to the Museum must be addressed to the Director, to pass on to his staff only if he decided to; and all outgoing correspondence from the Museum must leave under his signature, no matter who wrote it'.¹⁹ He applied the same rule to scientific publications that were being published from the museum at the time – no matter who they had been written by, Kermode's name had to be on them. It was this second half of Kermode's declaration that caused the kettle to boil over. Newcombe 'appears to have resisted, if not outright ignored this dictum'.²⁰ He

¹⁷ Peter Corley-Smith (1989). *White Bears and Other Curiosities: The First 100 Years of the Royal British Columbia Museum*, RBCM special publication, Victoria. p. 61.

¹⁸ Peter Corley-Smith (1989). *White Bears and Other Curiosities: The First 100 Years of the Royal British Columbia Museum*, RBCM special publication, Victoria. p. 62.

¹⁹ Peter Corley-Smith (1989). *White Bears and Other Curiosities: The First 100 Years of the Royal British Columbia Museum*, RBCM special publication, Victoria. p. 62.

²⁰ Peter Corley-Smith (1989). *White Bears and Other Curiosities: The First 100 Years of the Royal British Columbia Museum*, RBCM special publication, Victoria. p. 63.

also 'may have at one point told Kermode that 'he was batty and off [his] head'.²¹ Retaliating, Kermode began to keep mail from Newcombe, and reportedly Newcombe became very difficult to work with. The local government, hearing of these difficulties, felt bound to support authority, despite Newcombe's popularity. The decision was made to claim Newcombe's position was cut due to a lack of funding. Later this was found to be a complete fabrication. A letter has since come to light which states 'the reason he was discharged was because he would not conform to the rules and regulations of the Department'.²² Various friends and distinguished people sent in letters protesting the decision to relieve Newcombe of his position, but to no effect. Billy Newcombe, 'embittered by the experience, became a virtual recluse for the rest of his life, living as a near neighbour to Emily Carr in James Bay. He used to do odd jobs for her ... In return, she gave him paintings – paintings that were found after his death [in 1960]²³ piled up in a considerable heap on the floor of his own house'.²⁴

Although Billy didn't have the same success his father did, he was still an important contributor to the UBC Herbarium. His donations span from fungi to lichen, but the majority of them are in the vascular plant section, with many hundreds of specimens coming in from all over Canada. He spent most of his life working to

²¹ Peter Corley-Smith (1989). *White Bears and Other Curiosities: The First 100 Years of the Royal British Columbia Museum*, RBCM special publication, Victoria. p. 63.

²² Peter Corley-Smith (1989). *White Bears and Other Curiosities: The First 100 Years of the Royal British Columbia Museum*, RBCM special publication, Victoria. p. 63.

²³ Ancestry.ca: William Arnold Newcombe.

²⁴ Peter Corley-Smith (1989). *White Bears and Other Curiosities: The First 100 Years of the Royal British Columbia Museum*, RBCM special publication, Victoria. p. 64.

better the public's understanding of natural history and botany, and his contributions should not be forgotten.

Joseph Kaye Henry

Joseph Kaye Henry was born in 1866 and died March 7, 1930. He was an English Professor at the McGill College of British Columbia. He stayed at the campus when the university became independent and changed to the University of British Columbia in 1915. He married Mary Eliza McDougall on July 27, 1899.²⁵ It is known that he worked with the Botanical Staff of the Geological Survey in Ottawa for a short period, and that for his whole life he held a passion for 'varied and attractive wild flowers'.²⁶ This passion cumulated in his book: 'Flora of Southern British Columbia and Vancouver Island' which was published in 1915. Henry wrote the book to fill a gap in BC botany. He wrote 'to determine plants of British Columbia is at present a task of considerable difficulty. No general herbarium has been established, and descriptions of plants are scattered through many books and scientific publications. To make these descriptions available to the amateur, rather than to attempt an authoritative survey of our Flora, the materials for which, indeed have not yet been assembled in British Columbia, [was] the general aim of this book'.²⁷ Valuable correspondences of Henry's included Eli Wilson, Dr. Charles Frederick Newcombe, and Albert James Hill.

²⁵ Ancestry.ca: Joseph Kaye Henry

²⁶ Davidson (1914). *First Annual Report of the Botanical Office of the Province of British Columbia*, William H. Cullin, Victoria.

²⁷ Joseph Kaye Henry (1915). *Flora of Southern British Columbia and Vancouver Island: With many references to Alaska and northern species*, W.J. Gage & Co. Limited, Toronto.



Figure 6: J. Kaye Henry. Unknown photographer. UBC Historical Photograph Collection. Access Identifier: UBC 1.1/951.

The majority of Henry's collection is located at the UBC Herbarium, mostly in the vascular plants section. His collection spans most of British Columbia, and occasionally voyages into Alberta as well. He is an excellent example of a person who has specialized in one area of work but does not let that slow them down or prevent them from picking up a new interest. Henry was truly an amateur – his book has been edited by multiple sources and expanded on since its original publishing date – but he loved plants and wanted to share that love with other people.

These five men came from all around the world, but held a mutual interest in botany, collection, and taxonomy. They lived in an exciting age where one could make their name in the botanical world by describing a new species, and they were

all trying to do that. They existed in a network of relationships where they could send specimens to each other trying to assist each other in identifying new plants. They would also send their specimens to John Davidson at the UBC Herbarium, assisting in the creation of one of the largest Herbaria in Canada, and in the process, creating the legacies they were looking for.

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