Sub Quercu Felicitas: Place, Knowledge, and Victoria's Garry Oaks, 1843-2008

by

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Abstract

The Garry oak (*Quercus garryana*) is a species of oak tree native to North America's Pacific coast. Its range in Canada is limited to the east coast of Vancouver Island, the southern Gulf Islands, and two isolated groves in the Fraser River valley. It is most widespread and conspicuous in Greater Victoria, the urban area centred around the city of Victoria, British Columbia. Garry oaks themselves and areas of relatively undisturbed land containing Garry oaks are threatened in Victoria by a number of factors including land development, the tree's unpopularity as an ornamental species, and fire suppression. The Garry oak's predicament provides rationale for the central goal of this thesis, which is to explore how people have known these trees in the 165 years since Fort Victoria was established. Using a range of print sources, I identify five prominent areas of knowledge about the tree, or Garry oak cultures. These are: Garry oaks as significant of Britishness, Garry oaks as known through science, Garry oaks as significant individual trees, Garry oaks as remnants of pre-colonial landscapes, and Garry oaks as advocated for by conservationists. From these, I draw three key themes. First, many people have found Victoria's Garry oaks valuable or important and expressed that sense of value in a variety of ways. Second, people have used Garry oaks in narratives of national identity, though in divergent ways: for some Garry oaks have been symbolic of Britain and Victoria's supposed connection with the mother country, and for others Garry oaks are to be regarded only as a native species. Third, scientific language and concepts have been used to understand Garry oaks with increasing popularity over the past few decades, especially as public awareness grows of the oaks' ecological crisis. Following recent work in cultural geography, I contend that people negotiate connections to place through trees

such as Garry oaks. Though these findings must be understood to be preliminary, they can help to explain the plight of the Garry oak by casting light on ambiguities and dissonances in the ways that Victoria's diverse citizenry relates to the places they inhabit.

Acknowledgements

My first and most profound thanks must go to my supervisor, Dr. Laura Cameron, who has been tirelessly encouraging over the long months that this project has been with me. Laura's curiosity, creativity, and enthusiasm leavened some of the heaviest, thickest bits of the last year's work. She has been dedicated, encouraging, and hospitable, and for all of that I am grateful.

While studying at Queen's I was fortunate to learn from scholars who challenged me to read closely, think broadly, and write clearly. I thank Drs. Mark Rosenberg, George Lovell, Mick Smith, and Brian Osborne (in order of appearance during my 2006-2007 school year!) for eight truly enjoyable months. And I was fortunate to learn *with* an interesting, intelligent, and companionable group of fellow graduate students – thanks to all of them as well, especially those who made sure that I never got any work done in my office.

After finishing my classes in April 2007, I disregarded Dr. Rosenberg's advice and headed home to Gibsons, British Columbia to write this thesis. In hindsight, it would probably have been much easier to stay around at Queen's and remain in contact with colleagues and faculty. But we geographers know what gravity home place can exert. There were long days – weeks – months where it rained a lot and I didn't get much written. But even on the most leaden days in January, a true friend (and fellow Garry oak enthusiast) supported and encouraged me to keep going. A deep and heartfelt thanks to Sheena Careless, my wife, best friend, and fellow traveller.

I am also deeply grateful to my parents, Jim and Penny Cavers, for their love and support over the past two years. No, it's been more than that – more like twenty-five years. They have been encouraging, patient, generous, and – I really appreciate this – interested in the work that I do. It was Mum and Dad that first taught me about Garry oaks, by the way. Who knows what I'd have written this thesis about had it not been for those summertime bike trips to Galiano and Mayne and Salt Spring Islands!

Thanking people is fine, but I figure that thanks are also due to the *places* where I got the best thinking done, and those where I gathered strength with which to tackle the work I had to do. This is geography, after all. So, in no particular order, I thank the Grad Club, City Park, the top two floors of the Douglas Library, Wolfe Island, Frontenac Provincial Park, Fernwood and Oaklands and some bits of Oak Bay, Armour's Beach, the lower slopes of Mt. Elphinstone, salmonberry bushes everywhere, and the outside deck of the *Queen of Surrey*. Where would I be without them?

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Central questions

This thesis is about trees, people, and a place that they share. The place is Victoria, British Columbia, the largest city on Vancouver Island and capital of the province of British Columbia.[1] The people are those who have lived and visited there in the years since the city began to form with the founding of Fort Victoria by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1843. The trees, which will often take centre stage in the pages to come, are Garry oaks, known to science as *Quercus garryana* (see figure 1).

Garry oaks are broadleaf deciduous trees indigenous to Canada and the United States. While their American range extends from northern California to Puget Sound and the San Juan Islands, their Canadian range is extremely limited. Garry oaks grow on the east coast of southern Vancouver Island from Victoria to Comox, on the Gulf Islands as far as Savary Island, and in two disconnected patches at Sumas Mountain and Yale in the Fraser Valley. While they are fairly uncommon in most of their Canadian range, Garry oaks are relatively easy to find in Victoria – in the most southerly parts of the city they are quite common. The trees can be found in various types of urban space, including parkland, private lots, and the campuses of Victoria's three major post-secondary institutions.

The trees are surprisingly diverse in their physical forms. Some Garry oaks, especially those growing in rocky locations with poor soil, grow low to the ground with thin, crooked limbs, and resemble shrubs rather than trees. Garry oaks fortunate enough

[1] In keeping with common usage, I use the name "Victoria" to apply to the area described by the name "Greater Victoria." This area extends from the City of Victoria northward to the end of the Saanich Peninsula and westward to the District of Sooke.

to grow on deep soil, on the other hand, often develop straight trunks and broad, even crowns of foliage. Mature trees in these habitats often grow to around twenty-five metres in height. Several physical features are held in common by most Garry oaks, whether stout or shrubby. The trees have leathery, deeply lobed leaves, dark green above and rough brown below, that usually appear late in spring. They bear large, pointed acorns held in scaly cups in late summer, and as the acorns fall from the tree through the early autumn, the leaves turn brownish and gradually fall away, some remaining into winter. Garry oaks have whitish-grey bark marked by regular fissures, and the trees' limbs are usually quite crooked.[2]

What I intend to do in this thesis is investigate how people in Victoria have known Garry oaks since the city's colonial history began. In other words, I am looking for how Garry oaks have been represented, used, perceived, and imagined in the years following the establishment of Fort Victoria in 1843. In doing so I will show that people in Victoria, in myriad ways, have negotiated connections to place through their various engagements with the oaks. I will also pay attention to the paths and networks by which this knowledge has circulated. The end result, as I see it, is the beginning of an historical geography of the Garry oak and its intersections with humans in Victoria.[3] The end result is only the *beginning* of such an historical geography because many avenues for research that would add to such a work lie outside the scope of a Master's thesis. In the work that follows I identify five major areas of knowledge and practice related to Garry oaks in

[2] Jim Pojar and Andy MacKinnon, eds., *Revised Plants of Coastal British Columbia* (Vancouver, BC: Lone Pine Publishing, 1994).
[3] As opposed to an historical geography of the Garry oak *itself*, such as that found in Ted Lea, "Historical Garry Oak Ecosystems of Vancouver Island, British Columbia, pre-European Contact to the Present," *Davidsonia* 17 (2006): 34-50.

Victoria – I will refer to these as "Garry oak cultures"[4] – and conduct extensive research, mostly, though not exclusively, through print sources. The object, for me, is to explore the histories of prevailing Garry oak discourses in Victoria.

It should be noted that thesis is the first work to explore the Garry oak's relationships with human culture in Victoria in depth. Garry oaks have been studied extensively in the sciences, but neither human geographers nor other social scientists have conducted detailed study of Victoria's oak trees. One might respond that this is because the topic is an obscure one. If it seems that way, it is worth noting that the oaks are by no means obscure in social life in Victoria. I hope that the thesis that follows will provide ample evidence for this point. For the time being perhaps it will be sufficient to mention that Garry oaks have lent their name to a municipality, the District of Oak Bay, as well as two suburban neighbourhoods – Oaklands in the City of Victoria and Royal Oak in the District of Saanich. It should also be noted that the District of Oak Bay's motto, *sub quercu felicitas*, means "under the oak, good fortune." Garry oaks grow throughout the region, and people notice them – this in itself is some rationale for my undertaking this project.

Current events involving Garry oaks offer further justification for this choice of research question. Recent years have seen Garry oaks receiving unprecedented amounts of public attention in Victoria. As I will show in greater detail later on, academics and activist groups alike have, over the last two decades, warned that Garry oaks and several species of plants and animals associated with the oaks are threatened by a combination of factors, the most critical among them being urban development. Not only are individual

[4] And I do so with a nod to Owain Jones and Paul Cloke, *Tree Cultures: The Place of Trees and Trees in their Place* (London, UK: Berg, 2002), in which their term "arbori-culture" performed a similar role.

Garry oak trees said to be threatened – the trees are often cut down but seldom planted[5] – but "Garry oak ecosystems," dynamic biotic systems found in areas featuring Garry oaks and other indigenous vegetation that have been left relatively undeveloped since colonization, are found in less than five per cent of the area they are supposed to have covered in Victoria prior to European settlement (see figure 2).[6]

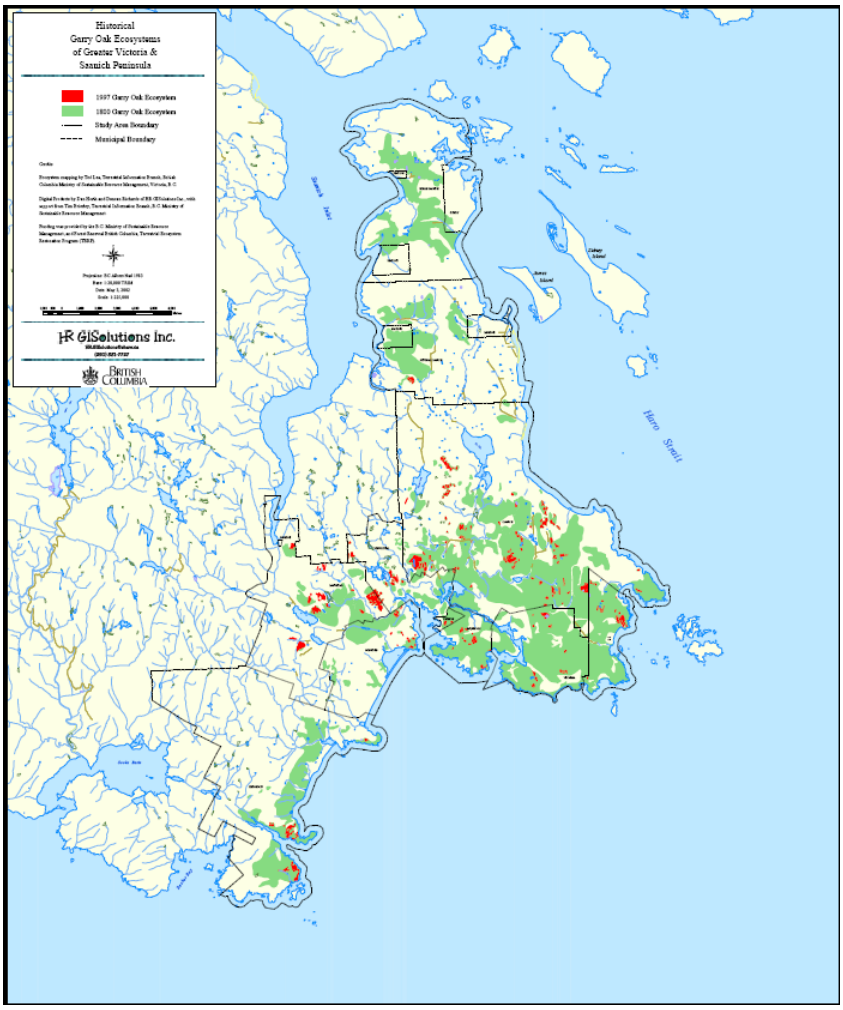

Figure 2: Historical Garry oak ecosystems in Victoria. Areas shaded green contained Garry oak ecosystems in 1800; areas shaded red contained Garry oak ecosystems in 1997. Source: Lea, "Historical Garry Oak Ecosystems," 36. Image used with author's permission.

The usual explanation for the state of the Garry oak in Victoria is that urban development has caused the trees to be felled; that the suppression of forest fires, anthropogenic and non-anthropogenic, has allowed coniferous trees to grow up and shade out oaks; and that landowners and municipal

[5] Richard Watts, "Developers, Pests Laying Siege to Our Unique Garry Oaks." *Victoria Times-Colonist*, April 22, 1992, p. B1.
[6] Lea, "Historical Garry Oak Ecosystems."

governments prefer to plant faster-growing trees whose roots do not pose a threat to underground infrastructure and whose limbs can be trusted to remain attached to the trunk. I contend that these answers are incomplete. Each begs its own question: why have people cleared land, suppressed fire, and planted mountain ash and ornamental larch when such activities are known to be detrimental to the persistence of Garry oaks? If I cannot offer a complete answer myself, bound as I am by the scope of a Master's thesis, I will at least attempt to show how my discussion of Garry oak knowledges can be brought to bear on the plight of the Garry oak in Victoria. I believe that this secondary project provides context and a critical focus to the central question that I stated above. I pursue it here to suggest to the reader that, at least in this particular set of relationships between humans and non-humans, knowledge can have tangible – and sometimes drastic – effects.

The central question of this thesis concerns people in Victoria at least as much as it does Garry oaks, and since I have devoted some space to explaining the latter term, I ought now to explain the former. Assembling all of Victoria's citizenry under the name "Victorians"[7] masks a remarkable, and problematic, diversity of culture and ethnicity. Victoria is an urban area of 311,902 people, of which 57,590 were born outside Canada, 27,185 belong to a visible minority, and 8,700 are Aboriginal.[8] Victorians are not a homogeneous group. Therefore, asking how people in Victoria have known Garry oaks brings with it an associated set of questions: *what* people? Are these knowledges shared?

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[7] Some city names lend themselves readily to the creation of nouns describing the city's residents – Dublin to Dubliners, London to Londoners, even Calgary to Calgarians. Victoria, unhappily, does not, only giving us the ambiguous "Victorians." The reader is advised that, in those instances where I use this term, I use it to signify residents of Victoria rather than the late nineteenth century British. If it is confusing, it at least saves on verbiage.

[8] Statistics Canada, "2001 Community Profiles," web page, 2007, available from http://www12.statcan.ca/english/profil01/CP01/Details/Page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=CMA&Code1=935__&Geo2=PR&Code2=59&Data=Count&SearchText=victoria&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=59&B1=All&Custom=, last accessed September 1, 2008.

How does the power held by Victorian's English-speaking Euro-Canadian majority enable the dominance of certain knowledges?

A particularly important factor that I will bear in mind throughout is that modern Victoria owes its existence to the operation of colonialism. The British Crown, in 1849, granted Vancouver Island to the Hudson's Bay Company on the condition that the Company would arrange to have the island settled as a British colony. The place that would become Victoria, though, was already home to several groups of Aboriginal people who spoke Coast Salish languages and lived in a way decidedly foreign to the British. Over the first few years of the Colony's existence, Governor James Douglas purchased the land on which Victoria now lies from resident First Nations in a series of financial transactions. Though the purchases were held by the colonial authorities to be sufficient grounds upon which to occupy formerly Aboriginal land, there is doubt as to whether Aboriginal signatories to the treaties understood whether they were, in signing, ceding ownership over their land to the Crown.[9]

Aboriginal people were dispossessed of their land in Victoria, given small reserves upon which to live, and through decades of systemic racism, pushed to the margins of Victoria society. Yet Aboriginal people remain in Victoria. Within Victoria live the people of the Tseycum, Pauquachin, Tsawout, Tsartlip, Songhees, Esquimalt, T'Sou-ke, and Scia'new First Nations.[10] The last four named are members of the Te'mexw Treaty Association, currently negotiating an agreement in principle with the

[9] Cole Harris, *Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance, and Reserves in British Columbia* (Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 2002).
[10] Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation. "Region 1," web page, n.d., available from http://www.gov.bc.ca/arr/firstnation/maps/map_1.htm, last accessed 10 September 2008.

Government of British Columbia.[11] The continuing presence of Aboriginal people, and the ambiguity of Aboriginal ownership of the lands that Victoria occupies, reminds us that there is no one way of life, no simple relationship of identity between people and land in Victoria. This has major implications, as I will later show, for the ways in which people in Victoria, at least settler people, express and experience belonging to the land they occupy.

I make these disclaimers in order to make clear that Garry oak knowledges are not the same for everyone in Victoria. More often than not I will be commenting on knowledges circulated and held in place through the uneven workings of social power. But, as I will explore later, there might be something hopeful in this. By identifying hegemonic discourses and ways of knowing Garry oaks, I reveal the constructedness and contingency of these discourses – not, to be sure, simply to undermine them. Rather, I wish to leave their assumptions open to questioning, and in doing so, encourage the reader to consider how the way in which a group of people knows a certain native tree can affect their common world in very tangible ways.

Organization

I have divided this thesis into nine chapters. The first of these is the introduction, which is now nearly at its end. Chapter 2 is a literature review. In it I begin by examining relevant work on trees in order to express a strategy for my own intellectual engagement with the Garry oak. I then review literature that will help in interpreting some two of the thesis's main themes, namely the relationship of scientific knowledge to the experience

[11] Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation, "Te'mexw Treaty Association – Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation," web page, n.d., available from http://www.gov.bc.ca/arr/firstnation/temexw/default.html, last accessed 10 September 2008.

of place and the relationships between nature, identity, and colonialism. In Chapter 3 I discuss the sources and methods I have used in this thesis before concluding with a discussion on some possible directions for future research. Chapters 4 through 8 constitute the main body of this thesis, and are built upon extensive empirical research. In these chapters I describe how Victorians have known Garry oaks variously as nostalgic reminders of Britain, organisms knowable through scientific study, significant individual trees, inhabitants of a pre-colonial Victoria, and one species among many under threat from human environmental wrongdoing. In Chapter 9 I summarize and discuss my findings, referring to the sub-question of how they might help us understand the current state of the Garry oak in Victoria.

Chapter 2: Literature review

Introduction

As I have stated above, this thesis aims to answer the question of how people in Victoria have known Garry oaks in the years since the city originated. The purpose of this chapter is to explore some key themes that will be found throughout this project with reference to literature from geography and its related disciplines.

I have devoted the first section of this literature review to a brief discussion of how social scientists have written about trees in several recent works. In this section I will explore how these authors have understood trees – albeit often in divergent ways – to be significant in social and cultural life, rather than simply as scenery or mute nature. The second section situates the way in which I will investigate Garry oak cultures in Victoria through comparison to the tree literature previously reviewed. I then refer to this literature to propose a major justification for *why* geographers ought to consider trees, namely, that people use trees, in various ways, to negotiate their own connections to place.

Place is a difficult concept with an extensive bibliography, so I have attempted here to concentrate my literature review on two major aspects of it that resonate well with major themes in my work on the Garry oak. The third section of the literature review addresses the relation between two of science's hallmarks – classification and objectification – and the creation of place. Science infiltrates a major part of the Garry oak knowledge I will present later, and is thus worthy of detailed consideration here. The

fourth, and final, section of this literature review examines the relationship between three ideas of great relevance to the Garry oak in Victoria – nature, identity, and colonialism.

Trees in social science research

It is not that trees have somehow slipped authors' attention, as books about trees are abundant.[12] In the social sciences, however, including geography, trees have seldom been a primary research topic. It is somewhat surprising that this should be so, however, for trees are deeply involved in human worlds, as scenery, symbolic resources, natural resources, landmarks, and places of memory. The few works that do address trees substantially, though, are of great assistance in forming a theoretical and methodological orientation to the questions I ask in this thesis. The works I will outline first in this literature review are ones that take what I consider to be a traditional approach to the study of trees. The perspective common to these studies is an anthropocentric – and I do not use the term pejoratively – view of the significance of trees.

The second group contains the studies that investigate trees as non-humans or representatives of "nature," and studies their integration with humans and other non-humans in emplaced networks. These studies have been undertaken almost entirely by geographers and draw upon recent criticisms of the common-sense dichotomy of nature and culture. Methodologically and theoretically they are certainly non-traditional, and I will use them to open a discussion in the next section on social constructionist viewpoints towards nature.

[12] Good popular works I have encountered are David Suzuki and Wayne Grady, *Tree: A Life Story* (Vancouver, BC: Greystone Books, 2007), William Bryant Logan, *Oak: The Frame of Civilization* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2005), and Thomas Pakenham, *Meetings With Remarkable Trees* (New York: Random House, 1998).

A less-than-obvious distinction must be made here or it will seem that I have neglected a major section of the literature. Many works in social science investigate *forests*, which would seem to simply be areas in which there are many trees. But I am not much interested in forests here. Garry oaks, even when they live well away from roads and suburbs, grow in well-spaced stands with no canopy to speak of, surrounded by grasses and small herbaceous plants. The landscape is much more often described as a "meadow" or "savanna" rather than a forest. In the years since Victoria was colonized, Garry oaks have been treated less as *forest trees*, especially in the North American sense, than as urban or park trees, and the idea of wilderness has only been applied sporadically and loosely to them. Therefore my literature review is intentionally framed as being about trees in social science research rather than forests in social science research.

Two works that represent some of the most traditional, though differing, approaches to trees are Henry Lawrence's *City Trees: A Historical Geography from the Renaissance through the Nineteenth Century* and Laura Rival's edited collection *The Social Life of Trees: Anthropological Perspectives on Tree Symbolism*. Lawrence's work investigates the process by which trees went from being excluded from urban environments to becoming a crucial part of Western urban landscape architecture. The author explores the purposes, symbolic and otherwise, for which trees were used in cities, the types of trees that were deployed, and the public's changing perception of those uses over the centuries named. The research is grounded in several Western cities, and makes extensive use of archival sources.[13] Rival's book takes on a much different, though similarly traditional question, examining the use of trees as symbols in a range of mostly

[13] Henry W. Lawrence, *City Trees: A Historical Geography from the Renaissance through the Nineteenth Century* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2006).

non-Western cultures.[14] Though these two works differ in nothing less fundamental than having come from vastly different disciplines, they share the assumption that the significance of a tree comes from human intervention in it – whether the intervention is physical (planting trees in urban settings) or intellectual (using trees imaginatively).

Two recent books, which though quite interdisciplinary could broadly be regarded as environmental history or historical geography, investigate particular types of trees in a way more in line with my own Garry oak research. Michael Cohen's *A Garden of Bristlecones: Tales of Change in the Great Basin* studies the bristlecone pine and the stories told about it – scientific and otherwise – in order to document human response to environmental change.[15] Kit Anderson's *Nature, Culture, & Big Old Trees: Live Oaks and Ceibas in the Landscapes of Louisiana and Guatemala* asks two central questions: "How did these two trees come to be so important in their respective landscapes? How have people affected the trees and how, in turn, have the trees affected their human companions?"[16] The books are well considered together as they share an interest in how humans have circulated stories about trees over time. Where the two books diverge is in their treatment of scientific narratives on the trees. Cohen's book interweaves bristlecone pine stories from academic speculation on the considerable age of the trees to discussions of tropes used in talking about the trees. No narrative is privileged or treated as fundamental. In Anderson's book, however, the text is divided between "Notes from the Field," "Natural History," and "Cultural History." The information given in the natural

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[14] Laura M. Rival, ed., *The Social Life of Trees: Anthropological Perspectives on Tree Symbolism* (Oxford, UK: Berg, 1998).
[15] Michael P. Cohen, *A Garden of Bristlecones: Tales of Change in the Great Basin* (Reno, NV: University of Nevada Press, 1998).
[16] Kit Anderson, *Nature, Culture, and Big Old Trees: Live Oaks and Ceibas in the Landscapes of Louisiana and Guatemala* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2004), 3.

history section is, by contrast to that in the other two sections – the former ethnographic and the latter historical – treated as if it were outside of the human, rather, as if it were simply *about the tree itself*.

Cohen's and Anderson's works show a nuanced understanding of how trees are used by humans to tell stories and embody values; nevertheless, for each author the trees' meanings come from the human beings who come in contact with the trees one way or another. However, another group of scholars has attempted to move beyond this by finding ways to discuss the *agency* of the trees involved. Their work, produced over the past ten years, is closely related to recent arguments on the constructedness of nature. I will briefly introduce these arguments before returning to the subject of trees.

The discussion in the social sciences on the social construction of nature has grown from an intermittent conversation in the late 1980s to a vibrant discourse and important body of theory nowadays. There are many theoretical currents that run through the work, though Marxism and poststructuralism have been perhaps the strongest influences.[17]

A common denominator of this work is the assertion that nature does not simply *exist* as a category distinct from culture or society. Most scholars would instead argue that it is *produced* or *constructed* through the workings of culture. An early appearance of this argument was Margaret FitzSimmon's 1989 piece "The Matter of Nature," published in *Antipode*, in which the author argues that the modern concept of nature is rooted in the development of an urban intellectual tradition that viewed nature as external and primordial. "*Nature as we know it*," argues FitzSimmons, "was invented in the

[17] Bruce Braun and Noel Castree, eds., *Remaking Reality: Nature at the Millenium* (London, UK: Routledge, 1998).

differentiation of mental and manual labor, and in the abstraction of contemporary culture and consciousness from the necessary productive social work of material life."[18] This is a Marxist permutation of the argument, locating the creation of nature in the workings of capitalism. However, the argument has been given different emphases by some who locate the construction of nature in the power-driven development of linguistic categories related to it. Bruce Braun investigates the "nature" of the temperate rainforest of British Columbia, to which categories such as "pristine" and "untouched" are conventionally applied, and finds alive and well the workings of a colonial system of thought that erased the presence of Aboriginal people on British Columbia's Pacific coast by constructing the area as an uninhabited wilderness. [19]

Many scholars investigating the social construction of nature have emphasized that a retheorization of nature must go further than an anthropocentric account of its construction. The term "hybrid" or "hybridity" has been closely associated with this intellectual movement. Sarah Whatmore uses the term "hybrid" to draw attention to the indivisibility of nature and society – all things, all places, and all beings known to humanity are *hybrids*, composed of intermingled elements of the human and the natural, which are themselves hybrid categories whose purity is impossible to uphold.[20]

Whatmore's work also drew upon Actor-Network Theory (ANT), one theoretical approach to this problem that works to reascribe agency in social/natural hybrids to actors typically considered not to exercise agency. ANT works by identifying networks of entities involved in a given situation and, instead of describing simply how human actors

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[18] Margaret FitzSimmons, "The Matter of Nature," *Antipode* 21 (1989): 108.
[19] Bruce Braun, "Buried Epistemologies: The Politics of Nature in (Post)Colonial British Columbia," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 87 (1997): 3-31.
[20] Sarah Whatmore, *Hybrid Geographies: Natures Cultures Spaces* (London, UK: Sage, 2002).

use and modify the non-humans in the situation, it seeks to understand how agency is shared between the human and non-humans in the system. The approach allows for rather unconventional analyses of ecological encounters, whether the coming-together of humans and plants in Australian[21] or British suburban gardens,[22] or the operation of charisma in animal species of interest to British conservationists,[23] to name a few among many. The unconventionality is perhaps most noticeable in the attention given in studies of this kind to the materiality of the lived world and its non-human components, and to the insufficiency of the conventional separation put between thinking subject and acted-upon object.

Moving with these theoretical currents, several geographers have worked on "more-than human geographies" that attempt to come to terms with the lifeworlds of various non-humans. Animals have received a significant amount of attention from geographers interested in problematizing the presumed boundaries between nature and society;[24] plants, on the other hand, have seen considerably less, and the work of Paul Cloke and Owain Jones on trees makes up a considerable portion of it. Jones and Cloke's "arbori-culture"[25] project, which spans a book and several journal articles, attempts to describe "how the nonhuman agencies of trees contribute to the (re)production of nature

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[21] Emma R. Power, "Human-Nature Relations in Suburban Gardens," *Australian Geographer* 36 (2005): 39-53.
[22] Russell Hitchings, "People, Plants, and Performance: On Actor Network Theory and the Material Pleasures of the Private Garden," *Social & Cultural Geography* 4 (2003): 99-113.
[23] Jamie Lorimer, "Nonhuman Charisma," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 25 (2007): 911-932.
[24] Sarah Whatmore and Lorraine Thorne, "Wild(er)ness: Reconfiguring the Geographies of Wildlife," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* n.s. 23 (1998): 435-454, Sarah Whatmore and Lorraine Thorne, "Elephants on the Move: Spatial Formations of Wildlife Exchange," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 18 (2000): 185-203, Jennifer Wolch and Jodie Emel, eds., *Animal Geographies: Place, Politics and Identity in the Nature-Culture Borderlands* (London, UK: Verso, 1998).
[25] Jones and Cloke, *Tree Cultures*, 19.

society relations and place milieu in different rural and urban settings."[26] In order to do this, the authors draw upon an eclectic set of methodologies to carry out research in four specific places in which trees figure significantly: an orchard, a cemetery, a square and a trail.[27]

A theme in these authors' arbori-culture work is that ANT is only useful to a point in explaining interminglings of humans and non-humans such as the tree-places Jones and Cloke investigate. ANT reminds that agency is shared between humans and non-humans, and this is helpful in preventing anthropocentric readings of nature in which non-humans are simply raw material for one purpose or another. However, Jones and Cloke argue that ANT can only, at best, provide a detailed listing of the combinations of actors in a network, and that it fails to account for the rich and unique lived qualities of place. To fill this void, Jones and Cloke turn to a "dwelling perspective," a concept of Heideggerian origin reworked recently by Tim Ingold, who describes it as "a perspective that treats the immersion of the organism-person in an environment or lifeworld as an inescapable condition of existence."[28] Contrasting the dwelling perspective with ANT, Jones and Cloke explain that "ideas of dwelling can be positioned usefully between the topologies of networks and the topographies of place."[29] Accordingly, the place studies in the arbori-culture work are richly detailed and attentive to the ways in which trees both

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[26] Paul Cloke and Owain Jones, "Dwelling, Place, and Landscape: An Orchard in Somerset," *Environment and Planning A* 33 (2001): 649.
[27] Cloke and Jones, "Dwelling, Place, and Landscape," Paul Cloke and Owain Jones, "Grounding Ethical Mindfulness for/in Nature: Trees in their Places," *Ethics, Place and Environment* 6 (2003): 195-213, Paul Cloke and Owain Jones, "Turning in the Graveyard: Trees and the Hybrid Geographies of Dwelling, Monitoring and Resistance in a Bristol Cemetery," *Cultural Geographies* 11 (2004): 313-341, Jones and Cloke, *Tree Cultures*.
[28] Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling, and Skill* (London, UK: Routledge, 2000), 152.
[29] Cloke and Jones, "Dwelling, Place, and Landscape," 652.

co-create and are embedded in places that would otherwise be considered part of the human world. I will discuss the idea of dwelling in greater detail below.

Two other studies have followed in the path cleared by Jones and Cloke's prolific arbori-culture work. In a 2004 paper, Andrew Garner looks at "trees *and* metaphors of identity" (emphasis mine) at Hatfield Forest, a managed woodland in Essex.[30] The wording of the title reveals Garner's interest in exploring how the trees of Hatfield Forest actively create meaning as well as receive it; one has the feeling that a more traditional study would have taken on trees *as* metaphors of identity. Garner's research explores how social roles and senses of identity are created between woodland managers, who actively intervene in the growth of the forest, and the trees themselves. Another study, this one by Paul Cloke and Eric Pawson, investigates symbolic trees located in a few sites in Christchurch, New Zealand. Again, instead of reading the trees simply as blank documents onto which meaning can be inscribed, the authors pay attention to how the memorial trees, through their growth and transformation over time, form changing treescapes whose meaning extends well beyond their original symbolic purpose. The trees here, as elsewhere in this literature, are co-constitutive of place.[31]

How and why should a geographer write about trees?

Though trees – as opposed to forests – have perhaps been underrepresented in the social science literature, the works discussed above demonstrate that there are a great many ways to write about them. Jones and Cloke's arbori-culture work distrusts

[30] Andrew Garner, "Trees and Metaphors of Identity in an English Forest," *Journal of Material Culture* 9 (2004): 87-100.
[31] Paul Cloke and Eric Pawson, "Memorial Trees and Treescape Memories," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 26 (2008): 107-122.

commonsense interpretations of trees, looking instead for ways to demonstrate their agency and dwelling in the places they inhabit. Lawrence's work on city trees is primarily concerned with the historical geography of trees as a feature of urban landscape architecture, and does not attempt to theorize on the agency of trees in shaping urban spaces. Cohen's work on the bristlecone pine takes an identifiable tree species and asks how it has been known and what stories have been told about it on the understanding that people's stories about trees reflect their broader attitudes about land.

Ultimately the approach chosen must answer to the question that is asked. What I hope to discover in this work is how people have known the Garry oaks of Victoria over time. The reason I ask this question is to be able to critically comment on the plight of the Garry oak. I believe that, taking leads from a collection of the studies discussed above, an appropriate theoretical orientation can be fashioned to address this question.

The central question that I ask is first of all a question about human knowledge. Though the Garry oak is the subject of this knowledge, it is the circulation of these stories through human networks in which I am interested. Therefore I find the approach Cohen adopts to be particularly useful. Cohen examines bristlecone pine stories as a record of human response to environmental change, and organizes his work as a collection of these stories in which no one story is given priority. This approach resembles the one taken by Anderson except that it is more effective in treating scientific narrative as constructed, rather than somehow apart from the human realm. I will use a similar method, identifying five interrelated ways Garry oaks are discussed – as reminders of British landscapes, as the classified and scientifically knowable species *Quercus garryana*, as individual trees,

as reminders of Aboriginal peoples' stewardship of the land, and as an environmentalist icon – and investigating each in turn.[32]

It is the arbori-culture work of Jones and Cloke and subsequent authors, though, that, to my mind, most effectively argues for *why* social scientists – and geographers in particular – ought to study trees. Throughout this extensive literature, the authors use trees as tools with which to think about how places are constituted through the interactions of humans and non-humans. Though the goals and nuances will be different in my own work, I, too, wish to use trees, Garry oaks in particular, to help discuss place.

A part of why trees can help to facilitate discussion on place is that they are at least somewhat steady co-inhabitants of our world – trees draw our attention while more or less staying put. But emphasizing the rootedness of trees offers the intellectual temptation to use the idea of the rooted tree as a metaphor for human place-dwelling. As Brian Osborne argues, this metaphor is grossly insufficient to describe how people are in place in 21st-century Canada, where "an essentially fixed metanarrative of a heroic survival in the face of adversity" has been rendered incoherent by an increasingly pluralistic, transnational cultural reality.[33] The pitfall to be avoided here, perhaps, would be to use Garry oaks to *define* a place, a fixed region in which people can somehow live properly or improperly. After all, Garry oaks' own mobility – they are said not to have

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[32] "This doesn't add up!" exclaims the reader. "You tell us here that you'll treat scientific narrative as a construct, but on the very first page you told us, quite uncritically, that you're studying *Quercus garryana*!" The criticism is fair: my use of scientific names throughout this thesis could imply acceptance of the Linnean system I question below. In fact, I use these names because doing so facilitates clear communication – scientific names are much more consistent than are common names. An Oregonian reader might not know what Garry oak is until hearing the binomial *Quercus garryana*, as the same species tends to be called "Oregon white oak" south of British Columbia.

[33] Brian S. Osborne, "From Native Pines to Diasporic Geese: Placing Culture, Setting our Sites, Locating Identity in a Transnational Canada," *Canadian Journal of Communication* 31 (2006): 147-175. Osborne offers "diasporic geese" as an alternative metaphor that does justice to the openness of place in modern Canada.

arrived on Vancouver Island until 8000 years before the present[34] – would make such an approach invalid.

What I would like to do, in part, is use trees as landmarks, around which we can pay attention to the flows of knowledge that integrate people with places. If we conceive of place as a multiscalar, uneven, and fluid phenomenon played out through diverse social relations, the relatively rooted Garry oaks can help us to mark the very transience of that place-formation. From a vantage point near the Garry oaks, then, we should be able to see that

> the identities of place are always unfixed, contested and multiple. And the particularity of any place is, in these terms, constructed not by placing boundaries around it and defining its identity through counterposition to the other which lies beyond, but precisely (in part) through the specificity of the mix of links and interconnections *to* that "beyond." Places viewed this way are open and porous.[35]

Put another way, Garry oaks are not the *end* of place here but its beginning.

This view of place is all very well until one recalls that trees are something rather more than just landmarks – they are non-human beings, and, as the arbori-culturists would remind us, they exert agency, and, though slow-moving, they do not remain static. Though I have already stated that I am more interested in human interpretations of Garry oaks than in speculating about the trees' own contributions to life in Victoria, I do wish to remain attentive to the fact that, in knowing Garry oaks, people in Victoria are engaging with and interpreting non-human beings, and that this constitutes an experience of place unaccounted for by Massey's conception of place/space as a product of social relations. I would like to use – cautiously – Edward Casey's idea of "thickening" as a way in which

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[34] Marilyn A. Fuchs, *Towards a Recovery Strategy for Garry Oak and Associated Ecosystems in Canada: Ecological Assessment and Literature Review* (Victoria, BC: Environment Canada, 2001), Technical Report GBEI/EC-00-030.
[35] Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 7.

to imagine emplaced relations between humans and nature. Casey uses the term to describe the mutually edifying mixing of nature and culture that occurs in places as various as Thoreau's cabin at Walden Pond and a small farm run by Wendell Berry. "Thickening," he writes, "occurs when each party to the interaction [i.e. nature and culture] gains in concert with the other."[36] By contrast, "thinning" occurs as one of those parties exercises dominion over the other – Casey's example is a highway turnpike constructed without regard for its surroundings, which "fails to thicken into a genuine work."[37]

Certainly it is difficult to think of what a "genuine work" – or genuine place – might be, and to define a place as such almost certainly ascribes to it an authenticity that is both dubious and problematic. I do not think it is necessary to take the idea of thickening this far, however. What is useful here is the notion that, in the places they inhabit, humans and non-humans can intermingle in ways that provide for a (somehow) deeper, richer experience of place. I believe that this idea resonates well with this thesis's subject, which is a tree that is very rarely found far from humans or at least evidence of the presence of humans.

I will explore some of these ideas further in the next two sections of this literature review. In the first of these, I will explore some connections between scientific knowledge of nature and the experiences of place it allows, with reference to literature from science studies and environmental studies. In the second of these I will examine the relations between nature, identity, and colonialism, using recent literature in cultural geography. I will return to each of these themes in Chapter 9.

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[36] Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), 253.
[37] Ibid., 254.

Scientific knowledge and place

There are many ways of talking about trees. Western culture, though, is inclined to give science the last word. Anyone can read significance into their arborescent neighbours and, with the right tools, transform their wooden bodies at will. To speak properly about what a tree *is*, though, is usually left for the scientists and those who have been trained to use their language and modes of thought.[38] This thesis is a geography of environmental knowledges, and, over the 165 years of concern to us here, science has underscored those knowledges fundamentally. As I have stated already, I will be using the tree-knowledge explored below to help think about place. For this reason it will be worthwhile here to discuss how understandings of place can be affected by the creation of scientific knowledge.

As I am at risk of over-generalizing here, it should be stated that science is certainly not one universal, generic process but an incredibly diverse range of activities. I am particularly interested here in two functions associated with science: the creation of supposedly universal knowledge and the division of subject and object. Each of these bears with it a variety of implications for place. I will discuss each of these functions in turn, beginning with the former.

Much of science's great success comes from the fact that it seems to appear from nowhere and speak of things that are universally true. As Steven Shapin writes, "truth is – and, arguably – always has been – the 'view from nowhere' and the claim that knowledge is geographically located is a way of saying that the knowledge in question is not

[38] And if one should doubt this, they might try writing a historical geography thesis on a tree. Then, when they bring the topic up over dinner, they should pay close attention to the confused looks on the faces of their acquaintances and note the inevitable question: "So that's *biology*, right?"

authentically true at all."[39] Or, as David Livingstone puts it, "it was the end for cold fusion when people decided it only happened in Salt Lake City."[40] Science presents itself as omniscient and disembodied, and its seeming lack of local preoccupations lends it credibility as an impartial arbiter of truth.

Even if science is not often credited with coming *from* places, it is well known for speaking about them. The rise of science in 19th century Europe gave people the ability to know faraway places at a level of detail previously unimaginable. Mapping allowed those who stayed at home to know the shapes of foreign coastlines; floras and botanical gardens gave them the ability to know what plants might be found in far-flung lands. Simon Naylor writes of the "cartographies of science," the imagined geographies that science creates. Writing specifically about von Humboldt's invention of isolines as a way of representing spatial variation, Naylor suggests that science promoted a vision of the world as ordered and knowable – people were able to believe that isolines existed *out there* and that scientists could discern them.[41] As the world came to be thought of as ordered and homogeneous, Europeans developed what Mary Louise Pratt calls a "planetary consciousness."[42] Those who understood the right classificatory systems could possess knowledge of the world at a distance.

Bruno Latour asks *how* it was that scientists were able "to act at a distance on unfamiliar events, places, and people," and concludes that they did it by bringing those

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[39] Steven Shapin, "Placing the View from Nowhere: Historical and Sociological Problems in the Location of Science," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, n.s., 23 (1998): 5-12.
[40] David N. Livingstone, *Putting Science in its Place: Geographies of Scientific Knowledge* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 2.
[41] Simon Naylor, "Introduction: Historical Geographies of Science – Places, Contexts, Cartographies," *British Journal for the History of Science* 38 (2005): 1-12.
[42] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 28.

"events, places, and people" home.[43] Obviously some things could not be brought home, such as coastlines, sea floors, indigenous rituals, and three-hundred-foot trees. Latour argues that science was successful because it was able to select *traces* of these things to collect. What was to be taken depended on its mobility, stability, and ability to be combined with other traces. These "immutable and combinable mobiles" could be brought together in what Latour calls "centres of calculation" – the homeland – and placed into some sort of order. Explorer's maps, for example, were useful representations of faraway places, but owing to the dislocation of the cartographer, the maps could be idiosyncratic and incompatible with other maps. As technology improved and chronometers were developed to determine longitude, mariners were better able to locate themselves when in distant seas. As all chronometers worked alike, maps produced this way could be compared to other maps in the safety of the homeland to create a continually more accurate representation, and thus could enable travellers to reach the place more safely and confidently than was otherwise possible. Such a process facilitated imperial control, for one thing, but also changed the way in which people imagined the world. Naylor describes it thus: "when knowledge of the wide world can be reduced to the scale of a table-top and when mechanically produced and virtually identical copies can be placed on table-tops everywhere, then all (potentially and in principle) know the same world in the same ways."[44]

The great power of science was that it could make sense of places that would otherwise be irretrievably foreign. Idiosyncracies turned into patterns, giving the impression of an overarching, incontrovertible knowledge system:

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[43] Bruno Latour, *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers through Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 223.
[44] Naylor, "Historical Geographies of Science," 7.

> One by one the planet's life forms were to be drawn out of the tangled threads of their life surroundings and rewoven into European-based patterns of global unity and order. The (lettered, male, European) eye that held the system could familiarize ("naturalize") new sites/sights immediately upon contact, by incorporating them into the language of the system. The differences of distance factored themselves out of the picture: with respect to mimosas, Greece could be the same as Venezuela, West Africa, or Japan; the label "granitic peaks" could apply identically to Eastern Europe, the Andes, or the American West.[45]

In the work that follows, there will be many opportunities to observe the intersections of science with Garry oak trees, as the local, emplaced trees were fit into a translocal order – Linnean nomenclature – with the help of immutable and combinable mobiles such as leaves and acorns.

The other function of science that I would like to address here is its insistence upon a division between subject and object. The text I find most helpful in exploring – and contesting – this dichotomy is Neil Evernden's *The Natural Alien*. The book's argument, I find, has much to offer to the work undertaken here. For this reason, I will discuss it in some detail, before proceeding from there to some further arguments from scholars who have problematized the subject-object dualism.

Evernden's argument declares itself to be "an examination of the failure of the environmental movement to achieve its goals,"[46] a failure Evernden acknowledges not to be immediately apparent or intuitive given the growing visibility of the movement.[47] The problem it faces, he argues, is that the objectives of environmentalists cannot be faithfully expressed using the type of discourse mainstream society considers to be valid. An environmentalist, according to Evernden, is "one who experiences a sense of value in

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[45] Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 31.
[46] Neil Evernden, *The Natural Alien: Humankind and Environment*, 2d ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 3.
[47] The same movement is even more popular in 2008 than it was when Evernden published the second edition of *The Natural Alien* in 1993; nevertheless, I believe that his arguments remain pertinent.

nature and is moved to assert the reality of his experience to others."[48] But to faithfully assert the reality of the experience is to risk ridicule and uncomprehension, as such an experience cannot be represented objectively, and takes place in the widely distrusted subjective realm. So, not wishing to appear overemotional or irrational, the environmentalist searches for quantifiable values that can stand in for their experience and persuade the public that it is reasonable to preserve one aspect of nature or another. A beautiful place, for example, might be represented as a "viewscape" worth a certain amount of revenue to the tourism industry. But Evernden here points out what he calls "the fatal flaw" of this sort of advocacy – once a higher use can be proposed for the viewcape – say, mining – the environmentalist's tactic has failed.

The problem, then, is that environmentalists perceive and advocate for a world unacknowledged by the rest of society, who demand to be shown, objectively, what that world is good for. And as it turns out, the problem goes all the way down. Environmentalists encounter it as a major challenge, but it is a problem of perception that affects all in Western society. Evernden finds one major part of the problem to be the belief that objectivity is the only valid way of perceiving the world. This belief discounts the validity of perceptions other than those derived from the senses, especially vision, which Evernden identifies as the most trusted of the senses. This is the result of its inherent distancing effect – vision presumably presents us with a world undistorted by the subjective as no other sense can. Or, as Evernden explains it:

> Vision permits us the luxurious delusion of being neutral observers with the ability to manipulate a distant environment. The gain is objectivity, but the loss is any notion of interrelation between the elements of the visual field. We see only what is, not how it came to be.[49]

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[48] Evernden, *The Natural Alien*, 4.
[49] Ibid., 84.

Another manifestation of the problem is the belief that one's self is somehow bounded by the edge of one's body – that there is a fixed boundary between subject and object. Both of these beliefs belong to the "official version"[50] of how the world is, argues Evernden, and alienate us from nature. If we hold to them, we are only able to relate to it as an external object comprised of neutral matter, valuable only in its possible use by humans.

Science upholds this official version of the world – at least as it is generally understood and practiced in relation to a native tree in Victoria. But many authors have argued that this is an impoverished conception of the way the world is, and that it is especially weak in describing how humans are in the world. Evernden's work and the works I discuss below draw upon phenomenology, a philosophical school peopled by the likes of Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty. It insists that humans inhabit *worlds* laden with meaning, as opposed to *environments* filled with neutral objects. Whereas the official version that Evernden identifies treats the meaning of environments as something gained through sensory perception, phenomenology holds that humans perceive the meaning of the places they inhabit instantly, prior to any intellectual assessment.[51] In referring to work by phenomenologists here I am not expressing unconditional support for their methods, or even their results. I will devote the fourth section of this literature review to dimensions of place that phenomenology has, arguably, not taken into account sufficiently. Yet the work I discuss here serves as a valuable critique of scientific ideology, and has much to offer to a discussion of place.

I alluded to the concept of dwelling above – and its phenomenological origin – above. Heidegger, the originator of the concept, referred to it as "the basic character of

[50] Ibid., 103.
[51] Evernden, *The Natural Alien*.

Being"[52] in an enigmatic, yet for subsequent phenomenologists, germinal essay entitled "Building Dwelling Thinking." Between Heidegger's own use of the term and later uses of it in the social sciences, dwelling appears as humans' default mode of existence, characterized by immediate, meaning-laden contact with their world. John Gray, for instance, finds dwelling enacted by shepherds in the Scottish borders, who physically engage with their land and sheep on long sojourns and, through this performance, make place.[53] Ingold finds dwelling to be that which unites the human and non-human subject – both exist in lifeworlds that are inherently meaningful to them. Though humans use their senses and their intellects to build knowledge about the world, they are only able to do this because they first dwell.[54] Cloke and Jones find dwelling to be the most appropriate way to conceive of the manifold interrelationships of humans and trees in a Somerset orchard – the selves of trees and people are interlinked through living and working amongst one another.[55]

But if dwelling binds humans together with their worlds, humans unbind themselves by objectifying those same worlds and therefore denying their power, as Evernden's argument suggests. And this is where a critical discussion of dwelling and place becomes rather difficult to sustain without veering too enthusiastically towards misleading notions of past authenticity and organic place. Cloke and Jones exercise caution in looking for the authenticity of dwelling in their orchard, for example, because the line between authentic dwelling and nostalgic reconstruction of a vanished pre-

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[52] Martin Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking," in David Farrell Krell, ed., *Basic Writings* (London, UK: Routledge, 1978), 362.
[53] John Gray, "Open Spaces and Dwelling Places: Being at Home on Hill Farms in the Scottish Borders," *American Ethnologist* 26 (1999): 440-460.
[54] Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*.
[55] Cloke and Jones, "Dwelling, Place, and Landscape."

industrial orchard-life can be difficult to locate. The authors find the use of modern technologies of harvesting and pest control to form part of the network of dwelling in the orchard, in contrast to the commonsense view that such things are part of the undesirable modernization of a traditional activity.[56] Rather than looking for dwelling in an imagined (and sanitized) past, it may be found in

> The ongoing rich mixture of nature, technology, and humans [that] retains a form of oneness which is bound together in some form of cohesion, which perhaps can be seen as "authentic," but only in a dynamic, time-embedded sense, rather than in comparison with any fixed time-point referencing.[57]

Authentic dwelling, then, is not to be found in the present's resemblance to a charming past; rather, it takes place in the complex, empathetic, sensuous connections between subject and world.

Various commentators suggest (intentionally or not) things to look for in the search for dwelling.[58] I wrote above of Casey's idea of "thickening," the mutually constructive interplay between humans and nature, wherein the wild is not dominated or erased (as in the highway turnpike) but cultivated (as in Thoreau's cabin). Another work that comes to mind – though it may seem unlikely – is William Cronon's classic essay "The Trouble with Wilderness." The wilderness Cronon critiques might possibly serve as a counterpart to Casey's turnpike – whereas the turnpike is a monumental glorification of culture at the expense of nature (which is nevertheless still enlisted in the turnpike's construction), the national park is a monumental glorification of nature at the expense of culture (which is unavoidably exercised in the intellectual purification of the wilderness contained within the park boundaries). Though Cronon does not make any claim to be

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[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid., 658.
[58] Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), 253.

interested in dwelling *per se*, his statement that "the dream of an unworked natural landscape is very much the fantasy of people who have never themselves had to work the land to make a living"[59] is reminiscent of Evernden's criticism of the official version of reality – nature is something to be objectified, delineated, and forever kept external. Though writing from quite different disciplines, both authors argue that the relationship between humans and nature must be fundamentally rethought to acknowledge the mutual constitution of both.[60]

Over the past several pages I have discussed two major ways in which scientific knowledges can affect human experiences of place, namely, that science's supposed creation of universal knowledge erases the potential particularity and variability of the local, and that its enforcement of the subject-object dualism discourages an empathetic way of being in the world. Scientific knowledge, though, is not the only cultural factor that might affect Victorians' experience of place as negotiated through Garry oaks. In the next section I will explore how nature is involved in ideas of identity, especially in a colonial context.

Nature, identity, and colonialism

Simon Schama writes that "landscape is the work of the mind," meaning that when people view or represent landscape they do so under the influence of deep, scarcely perceptible and almost intractable cultural narratives.[61] This has much in common with the arguments on the social construction of nature that I discussed above. The common

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[59] William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," *Environmental History* 1 (1996): 16.
[60] Ibid., Evernden, *The Natural Alien*.
[61] Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 7.

thread is that human interactions with nature are not somehow *natural* – they are written through with stories, they are constructed, and they are learned. As Schama shows abundantly in his *Landscape and Memory*, Western cultural groups have inscribed narratives of identity into the landscapes they inhabit. I would like to use this final section of the literature review to explore this idea, especially as it relates to nature and identity in settler societies created through colonialism.

Non-humans of all sorts have been used in many quite familiar ways as symbols of national or ethnic identity. British oak, for example, has long been used as a symbol of Britishness.[62] Anderson, whose work I discussed above, shows ceibas and live oaks to perform a similar role in their native Guatemala and Louisiana.[63] Symbolic animals roll off the tongue with the familiarity of cliché – New Zealand kiwis, Russian bears. Beyond individual species, landscapes have been used as symbols of identity, such as Germany's deciduous forests, or, closer to home, the windy northern scenes painted by the Group of Seven in the early twentieth century. The relationships between these symbolic non-humans and identity are never straightforward, and they are sometimes deeply problematic. Osborne, for instance, finds the Group of Seven's austere landscapes unequal to the task of representing the range of Canadianness, though the Group's images persist as Canadian icons.[64] Schama, tracing the lineage of German forest imagery, shows how arboreal myths of German ethnic origin were used by the Nazi regime to support a

[62] Esmond Harris, Jeanette Harris, and N. D. G. James, *Oak: A British History* (Bollington, UK: Windgather Press, 2003).
[63] Anderson, *Nature, Culture, and Big Old Trees*.
[64] Osborne, "From Native Pines to Diasporic Geese."

discourse of ethnic purity in the mid-twentieth century.[65] Nevertheless, the narratives of identity that human groups have inscribed in landscapes and natures prove tenacious.

Storied natures develop in places over time. Yet they are occasionally displaced and disrupted. Over the course of the settlement of North America by European colonists such disruptions occurred again and again as Aboriginal place-narratives were silenced or and replaced by ones related to European ones. An obvious result of colonialism was the erasure – or at least the subjugation – of Aboriginal nature-cultures across the continent, and indeed across many continents. Another result, particularly relevant to the study of dominant Garry oak discourse in Victoria, was that settler narratives of nature and identity were left fractured and deeply ambiguous. The landscapes and natures used to reinforce identities among settler peoples belonged, often, to a mother country far away.

Isis Brook, in an excellent essay on gardeners and their practices concerning native species, has argued that displaced people – settler inhabitants in colonial societies, for instance – often cultivate non-native species that remind them of an imagined home.[66] Considering Victoria's reputation as both a city of gardens and a particularly English place, Brook's observation seems to ring true. Leslie Head and Pat Muir document what seems to be an opposite reaction among suburban gardeners in Australia – many choose to plant native species and explain their decision to do so as being motivated by love of Australia.[67] This preference for native species on the part of settler peoples brings to mind Franklin Ginn's cautions about "eco-nationalism." Ginn, exploring the politics of nature in modern New Zealand, argues that the current national enthusiasm for native

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[65] Schama, *Landscape and Memory*.
[66] Isis Brook, "Making Here Like There: Place Attachment, Displacement and the Urge to Garden," *Ethics, Place and Environment* 6 (2003): 227-234.
[67] Lesley Head and Pat Muir, "Nativeness, Invasiveness and Nation in Australian Plants," *The Geographical Review* 94 (2004): 199-217.

species (and corresponding backlash against introduced ones) sanitizes the country's colonial past by trumpeting a reconciliation with indigenous nature, while relations between indigenous and non-indigenous humans are as unequal as ever.[68] The irony of settler peoples vilifying introduced species is not lost on Brook, who imagines a dialogue between ecologist and gardener: "The ecologist or environmentalist says 'you shouldn't [cultivate non-indigenous species].' The gardener's response could be: who are you to say what is natural? What about plants introduced by other animals? Who is to say how long something has to be around to be naturalized? I am an alien as well – are you suggesting that I shouldn't be here?"[69]

Braun's *The Intemperate Rainforest* suggests another way in which narratives of nature are ambiguous and problematic in settler societies. Braun writes on how British Columbia's temperate rainforest has been discursively constructed as a wilderness, a space of pure nature outside history and culture. Such a construction has legitimized the "management" of the rainforest by scientists – and forestry corporations – who are privileged to speak on behalf of nature. It has simultaneously dispossessed Aboriginal people of their traditional territory by holding that modern, historical Aboriginal people are no longer able to exist in a supposed primeval balance with nature in the rainforest. The idea of the rainforest as a culture-free wilderness is a remnant of the colonial imagination, which held North America (and more continents besides) to be empty space.[70]

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[68] Franklin Ginn, "Extension, Subversion, Containment: Eco-Nationalism and (Post)Colonial Nature in Aotearoa New Zealand," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, n.s., 33 (2008): 335-353.
[69] Brook, "Making Here Like There," 229.
[70] Braun, *The Intemperate Rainforest*, Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness."

Victoria is a city that owes its very existence to colonialism. Most residents of the city are descended from cultural groups other than the Coast Salish people who inhabited the area before Hudson's Bay Company ships began to arrive in the mid-nineteenth century. It will be important to keep in mind, therefore, that much Garry oak knowledge in Victoria is descended from environmental knowledges that originated elsewhere and that have been held in place by colonial power structures. Victoria's residents, whose families have come from all over the world, negotiate identity and connection to their places through a difficult and tangled collection of nature-knowledges.

We will see below in some detail how complex human interactions with Garry oaks are in Victoria. They are the product of an incredible dissonance of knowledges, cultures, identities, and narratives. The legacy of colonialism and the strength of scientific discourse render certain oak-knowledges prominent, yet the diversity of social life in Victoria makes it impossible to isolate an overarching significance of the tree to Victorians. Perhaps this is what makes the problem so tantalizing.

Chapter 3: Sources and methods

On choosing the right questions

This thesis began as rather a different project than the one I present here. There were similarities – I wanted to study human relationships with Garry oaks in a way that might shed light on underlying relationships between humans and non-humans in Victoria. I began by asking different questions, though. Originally, I intended to carry out something along the lines of an oral history project with people involved in Garry oak ecosystem conservation in Victoria. Armed with a tape recorder and a long list of personal questions, I set out to discover how conservationists reconciled their experiences of value in nature with the necessity of appearing credible and objective. I had hardly begun when more fundamental questions appeared, ones which, if they were left unanswered, would have left the project standing on a very weak foundation indeed.

What made me question the approach I had begun to take was the fact that many of the questions I asked of my informants (e.g. "Why is Garry oak important in Victoria? Why are you trying to protect it?) received answers that showed remarkable consistency. Garry oak was important because it was a native species. Garry oak needed protection because it and ecologically related species were threatened by development and other factors. Garry oak was aesthetically beautiful.[71] Though the people I interviewed had all had their own experiences with Garry oaks, their answers showed much less diversity than I had expected. I soon came to suspect that the language of these answers drew on

[71] The interviews I conducted before rethinking the purpose of my project were Hal Gibbard and Martin Anderson, Directors, GOMPS, interview by author, 27 June 2007, audio recording in author's possession, and Carolyn MacDonald, Chair, GORP, interview by author, 13 September 2007, audio recording in author's possession.

long histories of Garry oak-talk in Victoria. There were discourses, I decided, that influenced – or governed, perhaps – the ways in which people talked about Garry oaks. The present incarnation of this project emerged from that realization. Rather than asking how a group of people with a professed interest in Garry oaks negotiated and expressed that interest, I opted instead to ask a question I believe to be more fundamental: on what kind of knowledge is that interest, and indeed all types of interest in Garry oak in Victoria, founded? The project gained an historical dimension – it would attempt to look backward to trace the histories of our understandings of the oaks that appear in everyday Victoria life. I decided to be, like tree scholars Cloke and Pawson, "concerned less with the particularity of memory than with the significance of collective memory in the performance of place."[72]

Looking backward, though, can be done in many ways. In tracing knowledge through the Garry oak cultures I identify in this thesis, I have worked with some of Foucault's words on genealogy in mind. Remembering that "truth is undoubtedly the sort of error that cannot be refuted because it was hardened into an unalterable form in the long baking process of history,"[73] I have looked for the histories of what pass as unquestionable truths nowadays by remaining receptive to the interconnections of stories. The starting-point from which I have examined sources that refer to Garry oaks is a conviction that their views and truth-claims derive from other views and truth-claims, and

[72] Cloke and Pawson, "Memorial Trees and Treescape Memories," 109.
[73] Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in F. Bouchard, ed., *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 144.

that the genealogist must pay close attention to their contingency and historicity, refusing to accept them as self-evident.[74]

Today's Garry oak presents itself in culture the way it does not as the culmination of a linear history but as a hybrid of knowledges, and knowledges that sometimes are sharply at odds with one another. As I stated before, I have identified five Garry oak cultures to explore in this thesis. These are (in order of appearance here, not relative importance or chronology) Britishness and Old World oak tradition, science and *Quercus garryana*, significant and storied Garry oaks, Garry oaks and remembered/imagined Aboriginal landscapes, and Garry oak ecosystem conservation. Each Garry oak culture is an area of knowledge and practice held in place by common assumptions and language, and though these areas intergrade and hybridize, they demonstrate enough internal consistency to be presented here separately.

Locating appropriate material

Deciding what sources to use in this thesis has been, as it was with simply choosing the right questions, a challenge. The challenge in selecting sources has come – and I must be thankful for this, to be sure – from the enormous range of potentially useful materials.

I opted, after early investigations in library and archive, to concentrate on textual sources for the history of Garry oak knowledges in Victoria. Though I did not use these to the exclusion of all others, as I will explain below, I used them primarily. Doing so allowed me to apply a relatively consistent methodological approach throughout my

[74] I have been influenced in this approach by Bruce Braun, *The Intemperate Rainforest: Nature, Culture, and Power on Canada's West Coast* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

research; furthermore, the textual sources I used provided me with an abundance of material from which to work.

The textual sources themselves were fairly diverse, as might be expected from the range of Garry oak cultures I named above. I have drawn from 19th century floras and botanical journals to piece together the anonymous western oak's metamorphosis into *Quercus garryana*. 19th century travel literature, especially the sort found in publications enticing the hopeless and worn out to start life anew in the colonies, helped especially in tracing the transplantation of language that had grown up around the British oak to the new Western one. Anthropological and ethnobotanical publications from throughout the 20th and 21st centuries have provided examples of how the connection between First Nations and oaks has been understood; scholarly publications in ecology and conservation biology have shown the changing, modern face of *Quercus garryana*. Natural history society magazines, brochures, and websites suggested how conservation groups have drawn attention to the Garry oak's plight and argued for its protection.

The most valuable single source has been the trio of daily newspapers published in Victoria since the study period began. These are the *Victoria Daily Colonist* (hereafter "the *Colonist*"), founded in 1858, the *Victoria Daily Times* (hereafter "the *Times*"), founded in 1884, and the *Victoria Times-Colonist* (hereafter "the *Times-Colonist*"), which was formed by the 1980 merger of its namesakes. A major part of the oaks' textual record is found in the Victoria newspapers. Perhaps this is what an obscure yet locally common tree like the Garry oak can expect – frequent mention in a medium printed in Victoria for consumption by those inside Victoria. Oaks appear in the paper for many different reasons. There are news stories documenting controversies over oaks slated for felling by

municipal government, and there are passionate letters to the editor in defense of the same oaks. There are essays arguing for preservation of native trees and decrying "topiarism." There are informational pieces published in the Saturday pull-out section explaining what Garry oaks are and telling stories about them. There are news pieces near the end of the 20th century telling of the beginnings of a Garry oak ecosystem conservation movement. The newspapers have provided an excellent source of information, and I have used them extensively in my research.

Archival sources on Garry oak were difficult to locate, and, as a result, I have used them minimally in this work. The difficulty I had in locating them, indeed, sheds some light on a key limitation inherent in my choice of sources, so I will elaborate.

In attempting to access archival records that might contain information on Garry oak cultures in Victoria, I, like many researchers who are making a first approach to a given subject, used the search tool on the website of the British Columbia Archives (http://www.bcarchives.gov.bc.ca). This tool searches the descriptions of materials in the archives for keywords or phrases entered, such as "oak" or "Garry oak." Materials contained in the archives, however, are often extremely extensive. The descriptions given for them cannot always provide a complete summary of the information contained within. So unless Garry oaks were a major subject in a document – and they very rarely were – the search tool would pass the document over. This is not to say that the only way to find Garry oak material in the archives is to enter "Garry oak" into the search tool – I was able to locate some information by cross-referencing or simply having an idea of where I ought to look, as in the case of the Admiralty records. Nonetheless, I am left not knowing

whether I have exhausted the British Columbia Archives' Garry oak-related holdings. I suspect I have not.

The difficulty I have just named applies similarly to the newspapers and books I used in my research. I found books – or failed to find them – using libraries' search pages in a way similar to the way I described in the case of searching for archival records. Newspaper articles presented a somewhat different challenge. To locate newspaper articles, I used the British Columbia Archives and Records Service Newspaper Index (for the years 1858-1900), the British Columbia Provincial Library Newspaper Index (for the years 1900-1970), and the British Columbia Legislative Library Newspaper Index (for the years 1970 to the present). In addition to these indexes, I used the Canadian Newsstand online database available through ProQuest, which provided me with full-text access to newspapers published after 1993. The last named was likely the most effective of these tools, as it searched newspaper articles in their entirety for keywords given. The others, though undoubtedly useful, were likely less effective. Each of them indexes British Columbia newspapers by subject – finding articles about Garry oaks, then, involves finding headings such as "Oak" or "Trees (Victoria)" or "Trees (Oak Bay)" in the index and working through the list of newspaper articles it provides for each. What I found with the assistance of these indexes was of great value for my project, but I continue to wonder how much Garry oak content has been published in Victoria newspapers over the past century and a half and been missed by the people who compile newspaper indexes. Considering that the newspaper indexes did not list any articles on Garry oaks or trees in Victoria before 1898, I am particularly skeptical.

The most significant limitation inherent at least to archival, library, and newspaper sources, is that they are by no means natural accumulations of worthy material but constructed collections. Power runs through these institutions, whether it be the power of a newspaper's editor to reject a story or of a librarian to decide to purchase a book. These sources give us access to Garry oak cultures, but it should not be seen as an unlimited access. We see a partial view here of the social life of the Garry oak in Victoria. But my goal, as I have said before, is to shed some light on some of Victoria's prevailing Garry oak discourses, and certainly I have looked in places where prevailing discourses can be found. In other words, I acknowledge and accept the limitations of my sources. Despite their limitations, they have provided amply for a satisfying discussion.

I stated above that I did not use textual sources exclusively. I conducted a small number of in-depth interviews with individuals whom I suspected of being able to add to my research in a way that textual sources would not. Often this was because few or no textual sources existed in a given area. For instance, I interviewed Paul Gartside, a boatbuilder trained in traditional methods of wooden boat construction who often uses Garry oak as a building material. There is very little literature available on traditional wooden boatbuilding in British Columbia, so speaking with Gartside on his use of Garry oak was enlightening. In other cases oral interviews ended up providing me with a chance to contextualize information I had seen in print, as when I discussed Garry oak conservation with several people involved in various conservation organizations. Nonetheless, I used oral interviews only as an adjunct – and a minor one – to my research with textual sources. They are potentially an extremely useful source of information, but to use them as a major source brings with it a set of attendant challenges, not least of

which is the basic question of how one is to interpret information delivered though conversation, a much different – and, for interpretation, perhaps more challenging – medium than print.

On the other hand, oral interviews offer the potential to approach the central question of this thesis – and other related ones – in a way that many textual sources do not. I will conclude this chapter by reflecting upon the potential for future research into Victoria's Garry oak cultures that other sources might offer.

Possibilities for future research

I have stated already that this thesis is the first investigation of its kind – it is the first work to consider the interconnections between Garry oak and human culture in Victoria. For that reason I have concentrated my inquiry on some discourses and narratives that appear to be dominant – or at least pervasive – in that city's Garry oak cultures, and carried out research through reference to a number of textual sources. Garry oak knowledge and practice are expressed through media beyond the printed word, however, and in the course of conducting research for this project, I was able to identify several sources that might enable future investigators to explore Victoria's Garry oak cultures in ways that I have not been able to do here.

Historical and cultural geographers have, in recent years, made extensive use of photographs as primary sources.[75] In searching the British Columbia Archives for information relevant to the Garry oak I discovered a large number of images, most of which were photographs, depicting Garry oaks. The images range from pictures of large

[75] For instance, see Joan M. Schwartz and James R. Ryan, *Picturing Place: Photography and the Geographical Imagination* (London, UK: I. B. Tauris, 2003).

oaks dwarfing Victorian colonists on farm properties now vanished under the pavement to pictures where oaks serve as background or framing to stately houses and church picnics. In addition to the photographs in the archives, the visual life of the Garry oak in Victoria includes having been painted extensively. Using images as primary sources might help to fill out discussion on the Garry oak's use as symbol. If, as Schama argues, "landscape is the work of the mind," and "its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock," these visual representations of landscape will be helpful in exploring ways that people have known Garry oaks in Victoria.[76]

Interviews and oral history present other opportunities. I began this chapter with a brief description of what this project might have been, and I believe that original project remains a potentially very productive one. Conducting oral interviews with Garry oak ecosystem conservationists offers a researcher the potential to go beyond the potentially more discursively regulated written expressions of value that these individuals have produced and ask conservationists what Garry oak means to them. Oral methodology, in this case, might prove more sensitive to potential dissonances between individual experiences of value in Garry oaks and the public statements made by their groups. Such a study could help shed light on the current plight of the Garry oak in Victoria.

A very important question for future researchers to consider is how Aboriginal people in Victoria have known Garry oaks in the years since colonial settlement began. I found remarkably little on this question through my research, leading me to speculate that the absence of textual sources that might help answer it might reflect the power structures that regulate the availability of such sources. That is, newspapers and magazines, books

[76] Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, 7.

and journals have been available for Anglo-Canadian Victorians to write in far more than they have been available for First Nations Victorians.

Yet the question is remarkably important, as post-1843 settlers in Victoria inhabit a landscape that First Nations peoples lived in for countless years. Colonial settlement worked to alienate Aboriginal people from their land and replace the Aboriginal knowledge and narrative in the landscape with European knowledge and narrative. Leaving Aboriginal voices out of work such as this runs the risk of tacitly accepting colonialism's work as complete and inevitable. I contend instead that inhabitants of postcolonial[77] Victoria might do well to listen for how their Aboriginal neighbours know the land – not in search of the timeless wisdom of Romantic cliché, but in respect of voices long disempowered by colonialism's legacy. How this last project might be done is hard to speculate, but I suspect oral methodology might prove useful here as well.

This project is and must be a beginning, rather than something complete in itself. But exploring how the inhabitants of a place of such turbulent identities know the land in which they dwell is a worthy project, I believe, and must start somewhere. And with that, I will begin, in the next chapter, to explore the social life of Victoria's Garry oaks.

[77] This should be taken as describing the "aftermath and not the transcendence of colonialism." Braun, *The Intemperate Rainforest*, 22.

Chapter 4: Garry oak and Britishness

Oak and Britain

There is no tree so uniquely identified with Britain and Britishness as the oak. British oak[78] (*Quercus robur*) is an eminently cultural tree: its wood, bark, and leaves have been used for a multitude of purposes over millennia, its image has long served as a nationalist symbol in Britain, and the tree has played a role in Christian and pre-Christian religiosities there. British oak is a fascinatingly storied tree, one whose hybridity soundly dismisses any notion of a clean divide between nature and culture.

Oak is known to have been used in Britain for thousands of years. Oak forests were areas of intense economic activity, as the trees could be used for a great variety of purposes. Acorns provided food for swine, which in turn provided food for humans. Oak bark, which contains a high concentration of tannins, was stripped from the trees to tan leather. Galls on oak leaves caused by parasitic insects could be used to make ink. The timber itself, if it was not burnt for charcoal, was used for building and the construction of watercraft. It was often harvested by coppicing – a method in which a tree is cut near the ground and allowed to regrow, thus ensuring a sustained supply of timber.[79]

The oak wood was a place of myth in Britain. As Schama shows, a tradition developed from the medieval period onward that envisioned the greenwood as a place of liberty from despotism, as exemplified by the Robin Hood story. Oak woods in England were often interpreted as a symbol of a past, authentic culture.[80] Oak trees themselves were associated with various deities throughout the history of pre-Christian Britain, and

[78] Also called "English oak." I use "British oak" throughout this thesis.
[79] Harris, Harris, and James, *Oak: A British History*.
[80] Schama, *Landscape and Memory*.

the woodlands were held as sacred by Druids, who harvested the mistletoe that grew on the oaks. Some such elements of pre-Christian religiosity, such as the Celtic image of the Green Man, a face clothed in oak foliage, persisted in British art and architecture long after Britain had been Christianized.[81]

In relatively recent British history, oak played a major role in the expansion of Britain abroad as the timber from which the Royal Navy's ships were built. Open-grown oak timber was extremely valuable for this purpose, as the natural curves of its branches could be used to form the curved structural members of ships. The increasing rarity of such timber only increased its value through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The connection between oak and naval timber secured the oak's place as a patriotic symbol, such as the "heart of oak" lauded in a ubiquitous eighteenth century naval march.[82]

Ideas about oaks imported from Britain play a major role in the histories of Victoria's Garry oaks. Whereas much of the region's vegetation was unfamiliar to early European explorers,[83] the Garry oak attracted attention thanks to its strong resemblance to British oak, and early writers were able to use language typically applied to British oak to describe Garry oak. I suggest that early European visitors were able to see Garry oak more clearly than other features of the local environment because of their possessing language for British oak. Mugerauer argues that "language and environment *always already* are given together," that is, that the environment one perceives immediately is

[81] Harris, Harris, and James, *Oak: A British History*.
[82] Ibid.
[83] This applies especially to the coniferous rainforests of the Pacific Northwest. For more on this see Maria Tippett and Douglas Cole, *From Desolation to Splendour: Changing Perceptions of the British Columbia Landscape* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Company, 1977).

disclosed only so far as one's language allows.[84] He demonstrates this with the example of American travelers on the Oregon Trail, who, arriving in the arid and unexplored Midwest, described it with an array of European architectural and Biblical terms for want of a language that could more sensitively respond to the environment they had entered. I do not wish to raise the question of whether an *accurate* language is possible. For now, it suffices to show that European explorers and settlers used language associated with British oak to describe Garry oaks because that language was the only one they had brought with them to the New World. This section will outline some ways in which the association between British oak and Garry oak played out. I will first discuss how Victoria's oak landscapes were interpreted in ways similar to interpretations of oak-dominated English rural landscapes. I will then turn to the practices of shipbuilding and boatbuilding, for which British oak was a preferred material in the Old World, and for which Garry oak was not, though some early commentators thought it might be suitable. In the next section I will examine the long-standing and possibly widely-held belief that Garry oaks were actually British oaks imported from Europe. I will conclude this chapter by reflecting on the continuing importance of Garry oak's association with Britishness in Victoria.

Garry oak and "parkland"

Victoria's landscape is distinctive – whereas much of the surrounding coast is dominated by dark green coniferous trees with few openings in the canopy, Victoria possesses a savannah-like landscape of grasses, rocks, and deciduous trees. Oaks are an

[84] Robert Mugerauer,. "Language and the Emergence of Environment," in David Seamon and Robert Mugerauer, eds., *Dwelling, Place, and Environment* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1985).

integral part of this distinctive appearance, as their range is so restricted. Victoria's landscape strongly appealed to many early colonists, as, unlike much of the Pacific Northwest, it satisfied prevailing British aesthetic taste.[85]

European explorers reached the Strait of Juan de Fuca around the same time that new styles of landscape gardening were emerging at home. In sharp contrast with the Baroque rural gardens of the prior century, with their symmetries and angles, a naturalistic style of landscape had begun to find favour in aristocratic rural estates. This style favoured meadows and groves, smooth curves over hard angles, and above all rejected the formalism of the Baroque in favour of a pastoral irregularity that simulated Nature through great artifice.[86] It is almost certainly the contemporary popularity of this style that caused Sir James Douglas, the Hudson's Bay Company official who became Governor of Vancouver Island and British Columbia, to remark, famously, on his first impressions of Fort Victoria's future site: "it appears to be a perfect 'Eden,' in the midst of the dreary wilderness of the Northwest coast, and so different is its general aspect, from the wooded rugged regions around, that one might be pardoned for supposing it had dropped from the clouds into its present location."[87]

Victoria's oak meadows, to many of their 19th century viewers, resembled an English country estate. Out of this similarity came the enduring term "parkland" to describe the oak landscapes. An early visitor to Victoria put it directly, suggesting that Victoria contained a mix of English and Scottish scenery. The Scottish parts were the

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[85] The supposed resemblance between pre-contact Victoria and British landscape ideals has been written about here and there. The most thorough investigation of this fortuitous concordance, though, can be found in an unpublished conference paper that explores the dissonance between the landscape's perceived meaning and its function as an Aboriginal agroecosystem. John Lutz, "Preparing Eden: Aboriginal Land Use and European Settlement," paper presented at the 1995 meeting of the Canadian Historical Association, Montreal, QC.
[86] J. Douglas Porteous, *Environmental Aesthetics: Ideas, Politics and Planning* (London: Routledge, 1996).
[87] Tippett and Cole, *From Desolation to Splendour*, 29.

ones covered in coniferous trees. "Then," he wrote, "you come to the oak region; and here you have clumps, open glades, rows, single trees of umbrageous form, presenting an exact copy of English park scenery."[88] This comparison to areas that were intensively landscaped for visual effect seems to have been quite intentional in most cases. C. C. Pemberton, an amateur botanist whose work will be discussed below, published an article in the *Victoria Daily Colonist* in 1922 advocating preservation of Victoria's "pioneering landmarks," or historic trees. Pemberton quotes an 1862 essay by Charles Forbes on Victoria's landscape:

> Before the observer stretches an undulating, park-like country, backed by wooded hills of moderate height...From Fisguard light...past Victoria Harbor, Beacon Hill, and, sweeping on by Cadborough Bay, this same character of country obtains, its sloping pastures, studded with oak and maple giving, from their general appearance, the idea of a country long occupied by civilized man and covered by flocks and herds.[89]

In a similar vein, Pemberton quotes a report written by James Douglas to the Hudson's Bay Company, in which the future governor reports finding, amidst the oak and pine groves, "several acres of clover growing with a luxuriance and compactness more resembling the close sward of a well-managed lea than the produce of an uncultivated waste."[90] Another description of this sort can be found in naturalist Berthold Seeman's description of Victoria in his *Narrative of the Voyage of H.M.S. Herald*:

> In walking from Ogden Point round to Fort Victoria, a distance of little more than a mile, we thought we had never seen a more beautiful country; it quite exceeded our expectation; and yet Vancouver's descriptions made us look for something beyond common scenery. It is a natural park; noble oaks and ferns are seen in the greatest luxuriance, thickets of the hazel and the willow, shrubberies of the poplar

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[88] Anonymous correspondent, quoted in William Carew Hazlitt, *British Columbia and Vancouver Island; Comprising a Historical Sketch of the British Settlements in the North-West Coast of America* (London: G. Routledge & Co., 1858), 217.
[89] Charles Forbes, *Vancouver Island, Its Resources and Capabilities as a Colony* ([Victoria, BC?]: The Colonial Government, 1862); quoted in C. C. Pemberton, "Victoria Should Conserve Her Pioneering Landmarks, *Victoria Daily Colonist*, June 4, 1922, p. 13.
[90] James Douglas, quoted in Pemberton, "Victoria Should Conserve Her Pioneering Landmarks," 13.

> and the alder, are dotted about. One could hardly believe this was not the work of art...[91]

Lutz, who has written about the British fondness for Victoria's pre-contact landscape, offers us a summary when he writes: "Never mind that the oak, invariably mentioned in these descriptions, was not the same genus [*sic*] that grew on the British Isles, but was rather a twisted, gnarled, and often stunted variety. They were Oaks, by God, and the noble oak was the emblem of British strength, and permanence!"[92]

The oak landscapes were often interpreted, like the country estates, by the aesthetic standards passed down by the Romantics. The pastoral beauty that so many celebrated in the meadows of Victoria contrasted starkly with the sublimity of the sharp peaks and tenebrous forests elsewhere on the coast.[93] Yet there were darker elements in the oak woods that gave them a picturesque character that persists in conventional ways of talking about Garry oak woods. Old oak trees can become gnarled and irregular, and in 1909, an Alderman Turner took issue publicly with a Garry oak on the property of Joseph Hunter, calling it a "disreputable looking stump." Hunter replied, in a letter to the editor of the *Victoria Daily Times*, "might he not reflect, in his softer mood, that it has withstood for ages the shock and fury of Heaven's thunder and tempest, and often, mayhap, sheltered under its kindly spreading arms and listened to the soft nothings of

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[91] Berthold Seeman, *Narrative of the Voyage of H.M.S. Herald During the Years 1845-1851*, vol. 1 (London, UK: Reeve and Co., 1853), 102.
[92] Lutz, "Preparing Eden."
[93]Early nineteenth century physician William Fraser Tolmie writes of an afternoon's idyll in northwestern Washington: "Had a solitary walk in the prairie in the afternoon before dinner, came to a beautiful lake, nearly circular & about ¼ mile round...on the sloping grassy banks forming the basin, the oak & a small glossy fresh leaved Pine, something like the Larch vied with each other in number & size, but the former demanded the palm of beauty – Lay musing for nearly an hour on its bank, soothed by the melodious harmony of the grove & feeling the holy influence of the sabbath stealing over me in this beautiful sequestered spot." Oak took part here not only in a beautiful landscape, but a spiritual one. William Fraser Tolmie, *Physician and Fur Trader: The Journals of William Fraser Tolmie* (Vancouver: Mitchell Press Limited, 1963), 197.

Indian brave and maiden, centuries before the white man had here a habitation or a name?"[94] Nearly half a century later, the picturesque remained a valid way of viewing oak trees. A letter to the editor in 1953 defended some Beacon Hill Park oaks slated for destruction, arguing that "the twists and weatherbeaten appearance of aged oaks adds to their charm."[95] A 1959 piece that mused about the possibility of Garry oaks going extinct described the Garry oak as "this rugged tree with its twisting limbs, a thing of massive and rugged beauty."[96] A piece in the *Victoria Daily Colonist*'s magazine section puts this same point very colourfully: "Winter brings a touch of the grotesque to the Victoria landscape with the gnarled and naked skeletons of the Garry oak trees. Their trunks stand black against the low overcast, their splayed and twisted arms making impossible patterns, they might well be the sort of spook that frightened Ichabod Crane on his ghost-ridden journeys about the distant Catskills."[97] This last example might invoke New York instead of Britain; nonetheless, the quotation reveals a Romantic way of seeing Garry oak landscapes.

Especially in the early years of settlement in Victoria, Garry oak took part in a landscape that many people compared, implicitly or explicitly, to the English countryside. The language through which people interpreted and accessed Garry oak's landscapes was directly related to the pastoral language with which people interpreted English country estates and parks. This is an important aspect of the Britishness of the Garry oak.

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[94] Joseph Hunter, "From the Sentimental to the Practical," *Victoria Daily Times*, May 10, 1909, p. 4.
[95] Denis H. Besley, "Weathered Oaks," *Victoria Daily Times*, November 17, 1953, p. 4.
[96] F. K., "Extinction Threatening Garry Oaks?" *Victoria Daily Colonist*, May 24, 1959, mag. sect., p. 11.
[97] Edna W. Slater, "Coast's Garry Oaks: Mighty But Rare," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, April 17, 1955, mag. sect., p. 3. Even in the 21st century, the Garry oak still seems to belong to the picturesque. In informal conversations, I have asked several people to describe Garry oaks in their own words. Nearly all began by calling them "gnarled" or "ancient."

Interestingly, pastoral landscape aesthetics seem to have regained some currency within the recent Garry oak ecosystem conservation movement, a movement that I will cover in greater detail in Chapter 8. The website of the Garry Oak Ecosystem Recovery Team (GOERT) characterizes early settlers' impressions of Garry oak ecosystems by quoting James Douglas's famous comparison between Victoria's landscape and Eden. It goes on to lament that "over time, much of the meadows and woodlands were converted to farmland and pasture, displacing the native flora and fauna."[98] A newspaper article published in 1999 by organizers of a conference on Garry oak ecosystems was titled "Slim Chance Remains for 'A Perfect Eden.'" In a similar vein to the website just quoted, the authors contrast early perceptions of aesthetic beauty with later despoilment:

> Capt. George Vancouver, when he sailed near Victoria in 1792, described the Garry oak parkland as enchantingly beautiful. James Douglas, founder of Fort Victoria, called the parkland a perfect Eden. However, early settlers cleared the woods and brush, established farms and orchards, drained the wetlands, and set their horses and livestock to graze on the luxuriant meadows. The original parkland areas were soon plowed and invaded by roads and houses. And we continue to convert the remaining meagre patches to streets, buildings, extensive parking lots and lawns as our population grows.[99]

These sources suggest that pastoral beauty retains some persuasive power in twenty-first century Victoria.

Heart of oak? Garry oak in shipbuilding

David Douglas, adding *Quercus garryana* to his list of the American oaks, wrote that "for various domestic purposes the wood of the tree will be of great advantage, more

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[98] GOERT, "About Garry oak ecosystems: Why are they important?" web page, 2007, available from http://www.goert.ca/about_GOE_importance.php, last accessed 17 September 2008.
[99] Nancy J. Turner, Richard Hebda, and Brenda Beckwith, "Slim Chance Remains for 'A Perfect Eden,'" *Victoria Times-Colonist*, May 28, 1999, p. A15.

especially in shipbuilding."[100] "It has been submitted to the usual tests," Douglas wrote, "and has been found in every point equal in strength and capable of receiving a polish in the same degree as *Q. Robur* of English botany, to which in appearance and in the quality of the wood it is so nearly akin."[101] This manuscript, though written shortly after Douglas's return from the Pacific Northwest in 1827, was not published until 1914. Douglas's mentor, William Jackson Hooker, published *Quercus garryana* instead, and, with a nod to his protégé, deemed "the wood good, and well adapted for ship-building."[102] Hooker's *Flora Boreali-Americana* was published in 1840, only eight years before the Royal Navy's Pacific Station arrived in Esquimalt, a short distance west of Victoria's main harbour. Judging only from these records, one might suppose that the Royal Navy's well-known timber shortages were soon to be alleviated by the bounty of readily available oak timber at their new home. Other sources reinforce this – surveyor and early settler Walter Colquhoun Grant's 1858 *Description of Vancouver's Island* contains a suggestion that the Island's oak might be useful for shipbuilding.[103]

But Admiralty records from the Pacific Station are strangely silent on the subject of oak, with only a few mentions of the wood in half a century's correspondence and records. A rigorous search of the Admiralty records available at the BC Archives, which consist mostly of correspondence between Esquimalt and the Admiralty's headquarters at Whitehall between 1848 and 1898, turned up only one document that suggests that oak had come to the attention of the Navy. The document is a report written at Portsmouth

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[100] David Douglas, *Journal Kept by David Douglas During his Travels in North America, 1823-1827* (London, UK: W. Wesley & Son, 1914; reprint, New York: Antiquarian Press, 1959), 49 (page citations are to the reprint edition).
[101] Ibid.
[102] William Jackson Hooker, *Flora Boreali-Americana; Or, the Botany of the Northern Parts of British North America*, vol. 2 (London, UK: Henry G. Bohn, 1840), 159.
[103] Walter Colquhoun Grant, "Description of Vancouver Island," *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society* 27 (1857): 268-320, quoted in Hazlitt, *British Columbia and Vancouver Island*, 185.

Yard, dated 27 December, 1847. Its author had received a cargo of softwood spars and oak timber from Vancouver Island aboard the ship *Palinurus*, and had gone about testing its strength. Upon first inspection, he writes: "With respect to the two pieces of Oak, we are of opinion from its texture and color, that its quality is good, but...experience must decide on its durability." Accordingly, the author describes an experiment to be performed which will determine the strength of the oak timbers. A table of figures, indicating the final weights borne by the pieces of oak before they broke, precedes the remarks: "Now, as English Oak of similar dimensions would bear 853 lbs., we conclude that in comparison as to strength with English Oak, the specimens sent us from Vancouver's Island, are very inferior."[104] The report was sent by the Storekeeper General (presumably of Portsmouth Yard) to Rear Admiral G.F. Seymour, commander-in-chief of the Royal Navy's Pacific Station in January of the next year.[105]

Considering that the Pacific Station existed at Esquimalt at the same time that the Royal Navy was experiencing significant trouble in satisfying their demand for timber, it seems reasonable to conclude that if the Navy's shipwrights had found Garry oak satisfactory as a shipbuilding timber, there would be a more obvious trail of documents to show for it. A workable oak tree was an exceedingly precious thing to the Royal Navy in the mid-19th century; true British oak (*Quercus robur*), prized for its durability and its ability to grow strong, curved limbs that could be worked into the curved structural members of a wooden ship, had been overharvested for centuries and was extremely

[104] Anonymous, Report on Vancouver Island timber to Admiralty, Portsmouth Yard, 27 December 1847, Admiralty Fonds, British Columbia Archives.
[105] James Meet, 1848. Letter from James Meet (for the Storekeeper General) to Rear Admiral Sir G.F. Seymour, Admiralty, 10 January 1848, Admiralty Fonds, British Columbia Archives.

scarce.[106] Yet, judging by the comparative silence of the records, Garry oak was of little value to shipbuilders.

Information from wooden boat-builders now working in Victoria and elsewhere on the British Columbia coast further suggests that Garry oak would not likely have ever been suitable as a shipbuilding timber. The wood is extremely likely to deform and fracture ("check") while seasoning, making its use in large vessels nearly impossible.[107] This information strongly suggests, I believe, that Garry oak was very likely not used in wooden shipbuilding, in the sense of large-scale construction, in Victoria.

Yet some other modern sources offer inexplicable contradictions. Donald Culross Peattie states in *A Natural History of Western Trees* that Oregon White Oak – a name by which Garry oak is sometimes known in the United States – "has long been known as a wonderful fuel and shipbuilding material."[108] Miller and Lamb's *Oaks of North America* contains a similar statement.[109] In a different vein, a poem entitled "The Garry Oak," engraved on a stone in Beacon Hill Park, merrily recalls that "From hearts of oak great ships were built/They sailed the seven seas," failing to mention that it was the Garry oak's English cousins, and not the Garry oak itself, from whom the hearts of oak were generally taken. Another source appears in an interview found in the British Columbia Archives. The conversation is between forestry historian C. D. Orchard and Vancouver Island lumberman Charles Hugh Grant in 1961. Orchard asks Grant:

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[106] Robert Greenhalgh Albion, *Forests and Sea Power: The Timber Problem of the Royal Navy, 1652-1862* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1965).
[107] Paul Gartside, boatbuilder, interview by author, 19 February 2008, audio recording in author's possession, Patrick Sharman, Chief Shipwright, SALTS, personal communication, 7 January 2008, notes in author's possession.
[108] Donald Culross Peattie, *A Natural History of Western Trees* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1950), 426.
[109] Howard A. Miller and Samuel H. Lamb, *Oaks of North America* (Happy Camp, CA: Naturegraph Publishers, 1985).

> Down around Victoria we have a lot of oak and the scientists now call it Garryana – Garry Oak, and there's a peculiar fact that there's oak around Victoria with the Naval base at Esquimalt. You'll find a little bit of oak up here around Comox and Courtenay, a Naval base. You don't find any in between. Now, I have heard it said that maybe that oak occurs in those two places because in the old days the Navy and explorers were required to plant oak when they were on their tours in various parts of the world as a source of oak to the Royal Navy. Did you ever hear any such?[110]

These seeming inaccuracies illustrate that, though of little value for the purpose, Garry oak still enjoyed some association with the craft of shipbuilding from the time of Douglas's first written observations on the tree to well into the 20th century.

The primary reason for this, and almost certainly the reason why Douglas first speculated on the Garry oak's suitability for shipbuilding, was that oak was so securely linked to shipbuilding in the British popular imagination. It had been used in the construction of watercraft since the second millennium BCE, and as the Royal Navy grew to defend Britain's imperial hegemony from the 16th century onward, its use became not only widespread but increasingly embedded in British culture. Through ubiquitous symbols such as the "heart of oak," literally the tough heartwood of the oak tree used for building naval ships, but also the presumed solidity and strength of the British character, oak came to equal sea power, which came to equal Britishness.[111]

When Douglas first encountered Garry oak, then, there is good reason to suppose that his assessment of its value for shipbuilding was inspired more by its resemblance to British oak, and therefore by the British naval tradition of oak veneration, rather than by a disciplined evaluation of its physical properties. It is likely enough that this is what inspired unknown persons at Esquimalt to ship oak timbers to Portsmouth Yard in 1847,

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[110] Charles Hugh Grant, Interview by C. D. Orchard, 17 February 1961, interview 36, transcript, C. D. Orchard Collection, British Columbia Archives, Victoria, BC. In a footnote, Orchard adds: "This is a most unlikely story."

[111] Harris, Harris, and James, *Oak: A British History*.

unless, of course, they had simply read Hooker and got the idea from him. Later botanical authors, on the other hand, who reproduced the myth that great sailing ships might be wrought from Garry oak, are quite likely to have got the idea from Hooker, as well as, perhaps, a confirmatory glance at the tree itself.

The great sailing ships of the 19th century naval imagination were never constructed of Garry oak, at least so far as written records and memory can demonstrate. Settlers in the Pacific Northwest did use oak in the construction of watercraft, however, and they did so in a way that diverged noticeably from the established practices of European boatbuilding. Written information on the history of wooden boat building in the Pacific Northwest is extremely scarce; what is known about the way people once built boats here has largely been gleaned through oral history and detailed study of still-existing boats. Since much of this knowledge its held by current boatbuilders, I conducted research in this area by seeking out some of these craftspeople. I had brief (but useful) communications with Patrick Sharman, Chief Shipwright at SALTS (Sail and Life Training Society), a Victoria organization that builds and maintains wooden tall ships and boats, and Larry Westlake, a wooden boatbuilder and amateur historian based on the Sunshine Coast. I conducted an extensive, face-to-face interview with Paul Gartside, a boatbuilder based in Sidney, visiting his shop and touring a finished wooden sailboat at a local marina.

The three boatbuilders I consulted were unanimous in stating that Garry oak is a difficult wood to work with. As mentioned above, it is prone to checking as it dries, making it very difficult to use large pieces of Garry oak as British oak was traditionally used in shipbuilding. Westlake and Gartside also stated that Garry oak is not particularly

resistant to rot, though British oak is known for its rot resistance. All three, though, agreed that Garry oak timbers could be used well in framing small wooden vessels if bent using steam. Gartside indicated that Garry oak was, in his opinion, the best wood available for this application.

It became clear through discussion with these boatbuilders that, until vessels made from metal and composites became readily available in the mid-20th century, a distinct style of wooden boatbuilding developed in the Pacific Northwest. This style, which differed markedly from European norms of wooden boatbuilding, reflected the general scarcity of workable hardwoods in the Pacific Northwest as well as the overwhelming abundance of softwoods. Gartside said that whereas the frames of European boats were often made from grown oak timber – curved ribs cut from the natural curve of large oak branches and trunks – typical Pacific Northwest boats featured lighter frames made from steam-bent oak timber, and the strength of the hull would come from heavy, longitudinal pieces made from straight-grained softwood. Gartside, who was brought up working in his family's boatyard in England, emphasized the distinctiveness of this local style of boatbuilding from common British practice.

Nevertheless, some practices that originated in European boatyards with British oak took root in the Northwest. One was the practice of using naturally curved pieces of oak timber – these are generally referred to as "crooks" – to serve as curved structural members. Gartside regularly uses Garry oak crooks in his wooden boats, and Westlake, who has devoted years to the study of the early 20th century Strait of Georgia rowboat fishery, has seen several oar-powered fishboats with Garry oak crooks.

Wooden boatbuilding is a very small industry in the 21st century, and the boatbuilders themselves are few. Gartside himself makes many more boats using laminated wood construction – a modern method quite similar in principle and practise to building with composite materials – than he does with traditional methods. Sharman's employer, the Sail and Life Training Society, is a specialty organization that builds sailing ships to be used for youth programs. They are fully conscious of the anachronism of their mission, stating "our programs teach traditions that are too valuable to be forgotten" on their website.[112] When I suggested to Gartside that wooden boatbuilding sounded more like a hobby than an industry, he replied, "yeah, [it's] a craft. That's where it exists. And that's where those skills will survive, if they're going to survive at all. They won't survive in the commercial world – they'll survive in the craft world."[113]

Garry oak as British oak

I came upon a surprising piece of Garry oak knowledge early in the course of my research, in an article published in the *Colonist*'s magazine section in 1955. The article, entitled "Coast's Garry Oaks: Mighty but Rare," was a general piece on the Garry oak, intended for a non-specialist audience. The author discusses the range of the Garry oak, its characteristics, makes some statements on its uses, and then writes: "A rumour persists that these trees are English Oaks planted by Sir Francis Drake during some idle moments of his busy visit to the coast; another, that they were planted and named by homesick

[112] S.A.L.T.S., "About S.A.L.T.S.," web site, 2006, available from http://www.salts.ca/090_SALTS_about.htm., last accessed 7 January 2008.
[113] Gartside, interview by author, Sharman, personal communication, Larry Westlake, boatbuilder, e-mail to author, 9 January 2008, document in author's possession.

immigrants from Glengarry."[114] The author dismisses the "rumour," but nevertheless, the point remains that there were once enough people who believed Garry oaks to be British oaks by another name that the belief caught the ear of a newspaper journalist.

This is surprising indeed, as Garry oak is well known to be a native species – in fact, Garry oak is widely valued precisely because it is native.[115] Intrigued, I began to wonder whether Garry oaks were known to be native at all in the early years of the city. Whatever the answer, the fact that the Garry oak was once considered to be a British import attests to the strong association between these trees and British identity in Victoria.

However, it soon became clear that at least some considerable portion of the general public knew Garry oak as an indigenous tree from very early in the city's history. For one thing, traveling botanists and naturalists had consistently identified Victoria's oaks as species other than British oak as early as the 1860s.[116] However, evidence that amateur naturalists and the general public knew Garry oak to be native was less abundant. The first unequivocal evidence of this that I was able to find of this fact appeared in the *Colonist* in 1922, when a tree felled by city workers in Victoria was identified as a Garry oak, "the only oak indigenous to British Columbia."[117] Oaks were often felled in Victoria, though, and several earlier (and later) newspaper articles on the subject neglect to identify the species of tree felled beyond the generic name of "oak." The name "Garry oak" appeared sporadically until roughly the middle of the 20th century, after which point it was unusual to refer to oak trees in Victoria without specifically

[114] Slater, "Coast's Garry Oaks: Mighty But Rare."
[115] For more on this see Chapter 8.
[116] See Chapter 5.
[117] "Collinson Oak Tree Falls to City Axe," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, May 27, 1922, p. 3.

naming the species. Indirect evidence that Garry oak was considered a native species was easier to find. Several newspaper articles refer to the presumed great age of oak trees in Victoria. One, in 1908, writes of an oak threatened with removal as a "veteran...which stood there almost as [it] did yesterday when Cook was circling the world and Vancouver gave his name to this island."[118] A correspondent writing about the same tree wrote that it "[had] probably been there since the time of William the Conqueror."[119] Similar estimations of the ages of large oak trees appear throughout the first half of the century. Presumably those who made such estimations would have believed without hesitation that the oaks were native, since no European explorers were planting oaks in the Pacific Northwest at the time of William the Conquerer.

The question remained: how widespread was this rumour? My argument at the end of the previous paragraph echoes the argument made in a story in the *Times* from 1941 entitled "Not Drake Oaks in City Parks." This article is the earliest evidence I have found for the existence of the belief that Garry oaks were British oaks. The article documents its disproval:

> Suggested historical connections between Sir Francis Drake's trip up the Pacific Coast and Victoria's aged oaks, were shaken by material evidence presented by H. W. Warren, city parks superintendent, today. The connection was suggested by J. B. Munro, Deputy Minister of Agriculture. He advanced the possibility that Drake might have reached this territory and scattered some acorns. Today Mr. Warren placed Drake's visit to the Pacific coast at 1569. Last week one of the Beacon Hill Park oaks which had developed dry rot was cut down. By counting the rings, city officials fixed its age at 420 years, about 50 years before the Drake excursion.[120]

A year later, another article appeared, written by Victoria Natural History Society president Robert Connell. It was another general-interest piece about Garry oaks, in

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[118] "Giant Trees are Destroyed," *Victoria Daily Times*, April 13, 1908, p. 3.
[119] F. B. Pemberton, "Wanton Destruction," *Victoria Daily Times*, April 14, 1908, p. 4.
[120] "Not Drake Oaks in City Parks," *Victoria Daily Times*, January 30, 1941, p. 15.

which Connell writes that "there is a popular myth that the Garry oak is the English oak brought to this coast by Sir Francis Drake."[121] Connell appealed to botanical common sense, pointing out that "it is entirely different from the English oak as a comparison of the two shows," not to mention that "it would be nothing short of a miracle" if Drake's plantings had spread so widely in such a relatively short period.[122] A few years later, Connell found himself misquoted, and set the record straight:

> I was rather surprised the other day to find myself quoted as supporting the fantastic legend that our familiar Garry oak is an introduced species, and of European origin. In one form the introduction is credited to Sir Francis Drake! A comparison of the leaves, bark, and acorns of our oak with those of the English or any other oak ought to convince anyone of the specific difference between it and ours.[123]

Later references to the "fantastic legend" are rare. Besides the *Colonist* piece from 1955, I have found mention of it in two places. One, a 1972 book on the geography of Vancouver Island, mentions that "legend has it that the Garry oak, which is also found in Oregon and Washington, was brought by early Spanish explorers," in a slight mutation of the story as related above.[124] The most recent mention of it that I found was in a deleted blog entry turned up by a Google search. I contacted the blog's author, a woman living in the Comox Valley, who provided me with the original text of the entry, which confirmed that she had been told as a child that Garry oaks had been planted by English settlers to provide wood for their ships, and that the acidic soils of Vancouver Island had caused the sturdy, straight oaks to become warped and twisted.[125]

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[121] Robert Connell, "Our Native Oak and its Ancestry," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, Dec. 20, 1942, mag. sect., p. 3.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Robert Connell, "Nature Talks," *Victoria Daily Times*, August 26, 1946, p. 11.
[124] S. W. Jackman, *Vancouver Island* (Newton Abbot, UK: David & Charles Publishers Ltd., 1972), 19.
[125] "kimber the wolfgrrrl," email to author, 9 January 2008, document in author's possession.

When looked at together, it seems that the now-discredited rumour as to Garry oak's origin flourished sometime during the mid-20th century. However, I did not locate any primary sources attesting to its existence, and it remains up for speculation how widely and for what period of time the rumour circulated. I had given up the search when, in describing my thesis research to an acquaintance, the acquaintance asked me to confirm his belief that Garry oaks were an introduced species. Only a few days later, I was discussing my thesis with another acquaintance, who asked: "Garry oaks – they were planted, weren't they?"

Surely this story must be a rare one nowadays, for, as I will show later, Garry oaks are often celebrated precisely because they are a native species. But oral stories are difficult to trace – perhaps the rumour still circulates, and perhaps it circulated for decades in advance of the few mentions it received in the middle of the 20th century in the newspapers. Whatever the case, its existence points to the important way that the Garry oak has been interpreted in association with Britishness over the years.

Coda: Victoria and Britishness, 2008

I have identified three ways in which Garry oaks in Victoria were compared, implicitly or explicitly, to British oaks: through their placement in a landscape that resembled an English landscape ideal, through a rumoured association with the craft of shipbuilding, and through actual confusion with British oaks. But the Britishness of the Garry oak does not stop there. It remains tangible throughout the oak's history in Victoria, which is understandable when one considers how laden the oak is with

associations of the Old Country, and how encouraging an atmosphere Victoria is to any such association.

Victoria is reputed to be "More English than the English,"[126] though Victorians' enthusiasms seem to extend to the rest of the British Isles as well. A visitor to the city is reminded time and time again of this as she negotiates a downtown in which British sweets, Scottish tartans, Irish linens, and teas from the world over are hawked from every storefront as horse-drawn carriages slowly convey those eager to part with their money and to enjoy a few minutes of extreme conspicuousness. The visitor who is confident enough of his good manners can pay (generously) for a sitting of afternoon tea in which there will be scones with jam and clotted cream to nibble at while he consumes cup after tiny cup of tea and milk. The affluent visitor might play a round at the Victoria Golf Club, passing behind the "tweed curtain" into the upscale suburb of Oak Bay. What is interesting is that this marketing theme, which is truly bizarre to behold if one has just come across the water from the iconoclastic bustle of Vancouver, has a long history in Victoria, with its origins in the 19th century when, to American visitors from San Francisco and Seattle, Victoria's colonial roots were strikingly visible and the new city resembled "a bit of old England."[127]

This must be kept in mind when looking at the later history of the Garry oak. Sure enough, the language commonly used to describe oak landscapes has changed; as I will explain later, scientific vocabulary now tends to dominate discourse on "Garry oak ecosystems." Yet a flavour of Britishness remains. Advocacy for these oak ecosystems

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[126] For instance, see Terry Reksten, *More English Than the English: A Very Social History of Victoria* (Victoria, BC: Orca Book, 1986).
[127] Kenneth Lines, "A Bit of Old England: The Selling of Tourist Victoria" (M.A. thesis, University of Victoria, 1972).

still involves appeals to aesthetics, often in terms that echo the aesthetic principles of the early settlers.[128] Then there is the very fact that "Garry oak ecosystems" are named as such despite the oaks being merely one actor in a complex system, in which, as I will discuss later, other plants might have had more importance for local First Nations. Perhaps the neutral language of science obscures a lasting preoccupation, inherited from Europe, with the oak. And though print sources are dominated by the language of the Garry oak ecosystem, it is impossible to tell (but tempting to speculate) for how many people the phrase "heart of oak" appears unbidden when faced with a tall, stout, open-grown Garry oak.

[128]GOERT, "About Garry oak ecosystems: Why are they important?".

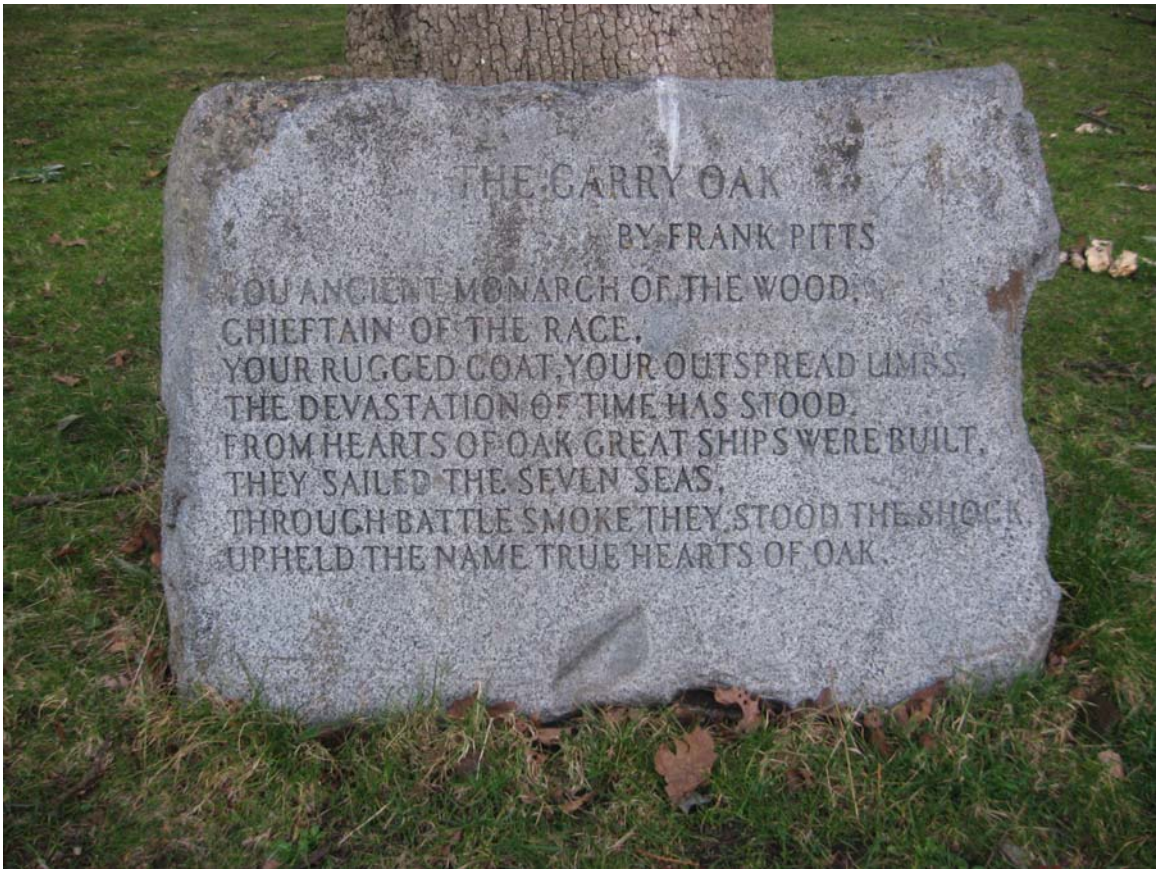

Figure 3: Poem engraved on stone, Garry oak in background, Beacon Hill Park, Victoria. Photograph by author.

Chapter 5: Science and *Quercus garryana*

Placing Quercus garryana

As the "planetary consciousness" written of by Pratt developed through the eighteenth century, scientists developed systems to assemble and categorize the "immutable and combinable mobiles"[129] they obtained. For botanists there has been no classificatory system as important as the one Carl von Linné – Linnaeus – invented in the mid-eighteenth century. His classificatory system, based specifically on reproductive morphology, was designed to be comprehensive. All of the world's plants reproduced, and therefore all could be classified and given both a generic and specific name. In addition, the system was exceptionally easy to use, greatly helping its popularity.

Linnean names can seem consubstantial with the plants they identify, for years of conventional use have naturalized the connection between plant and name. But Linnean names are not, of course, inevitable – they are a *particular* way of identifying plants, and like all systems, the Linnean system is rooted in culture and history. Linnaeus's Sweden had no empire, but Linnaeus hoped to fulfill the function of an empire domestically by importing commercially valuable plants from around the world and acclimatizing them to the Scandinavian climate. The need for an easily applied and universal system of classification was economic before it was epistemological.[130]

It is easy to overlook the fact now, but that Linnaeus's system was a *partial* view of the natural world was perfectly clear in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. During its early years many criticized it, simply, for prioritizing the wrong information. Some

[129] Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 28, Latour, *Science in Action*, 223.
[130] Patricia Fara, *Sex, Botany, and Empire: The Story of Carl Linnaeus and Joseph Banks* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

felt that its focus on plant sexuality threatened the decency of botanizing ladies;[131] others took issue with the reductionism inherent to classifying plants on the simple basis of morphology. Lafuente and Valverde document criticisms of the Linnean system from eighteenth century New Spain, where Creole agriculturalists rejected the notion that a European system could account for the diversity of New World verdure. They also criticized the system for failing to account for plant characteristics such as utility and habitat. The Linnean system, argue these authors, "deanthropologized" and "deterritorialized" botany. Science ignored the relation between plants and place, and "territory became a sort of carpet for plants to lie on."[132]

Those properties of the Linnean system that the Creole agriculturalists criticized were exactly those that ensured the system's popularity in imperial Britain. Unlike Linnaeus's Sweden, within which botanists soon discovered that tropical plants simply would not bear Scandinavian weather, Britain was extremely successful at relocating the world's vegetation. Britain succeeded because it possessed a massive empire spanning a range of climates, and could use subject populations for cheap agricultural labour. Britain was able to create a botanical network by locating plants with potential economic value in the colonies, experimenting on them at home, and relocating them to places where they could be cultivated.[133] To scientists in an Empire that could redistribute the world's flora at will, Linnean botany seemed to give access to the "true connections"[134] between plants: if a plant can be taken from its native habitat and made to grow in Kew Gardens

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[131] Ibid.
[132] Antonio Lafuente and Nuria Valverde, "Linnean Botany and Spanish Imperial Biopolitics," in Londa Schiebinger and Claudia Swan, eds., *Colonial Botany: Science, Commerce, and Politics in the Early Modern World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 139.
[133] Richard Drayton, *Nature's Government: Science, Imperial Britain, and the "Improvement" of the World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000).
[134] Lucille H. Brockway, *Science and Colonial Expansion: The Role of the British Royal Botanical Gardens* (New York: Academic Press, Inc., 1979), 6.

and elsewhere, its definitive relationships are no longer necessarily those between it and the plants it shares places with, or the plants with which it shares a common use, but with other plants of its physical type. Floras evolved through the period to reflect this new ordering of the plant world, grouping and listing plants in the method prescribed by the Linnean system. The plant world, through the intervention of this classificatory method, could be reduced to information.

If we read the basic information available about *Quercus garryana* we notice that the tree's full name is "*Quercus garryana* Douglas ex Hook."[135] The two names that follow the standard binomial indicate the "authorship" of the species. In this case, the name of the tree and its first description were given by David Douglas, a collector for the Horticultural Society, sent to the Columbia River in 1824 to collect useful and ornamental plants. As Douglas did not live to see his species published, William Jackson Hooker included it in his 1841 *Flora Boreali-Americana*.[136]

How, then, are we to read this? It would be most conventional to take the position that, for all intents and purposes, *Quercus garryana* began to exist as a knowable plant in 1841, no matter whether it had been subject to speculation beforehand. Douglas and Hooker, as co-authors, deserve credit for finding a new species and describing it accurately, so that it might be placed alongside other members of the genus *Quercus* in subsequent publications, and then, perhaps, with such trees in a botanical garden. Reading *Quercus garryana* this way treats the authors – Douglas and Hooker – as scientific automatons, processing the relevant information and making logical

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[135] Species 2000 and the Integrated Taxonomic Information System, "Catalogue of Life: 2008 Annual Checklist: Quercus garryana Douglas ex Hook.," web page, available from http://www.catalogueoflife.org/show_species_details.php?record_id=4844188, last accessed 18 September 2008. "Hook." stands for "Hooker."
[136] Hooker, *Flora Boreali-Americana*, 159.

connections, but only so far as the system allowed. Given the foregoing, though, it should be no surprise that I do not wish to accept a disembodied account of science's workings. Rather, I wish to historicize the creation of *Quercus garryana*. There are three important outcomes of viewing this process as contingent. First, we can put more weight on earlier encounters with the Garry oak. Other botanists and observers saw the tree before Douglas named it, and if we treat their descriptions not as inevitable misidentifications but as other interpretations of the tree, we are better able to ask what a tree might be if not a member of a genus and species. Second, we gain the opportunity of treating Douglas as an actor, rather than an automaton. If we observe how Douglas *performed* Linnean botany, we can understand how this way of knowing influenced his interpretation of place. Finally, treating *Quercus garryana*'s creation as a contingent process opens up the tree itself to questioning. If Douglas and Hooker authored a species, what *is* that species? What are the results of textualizing a tree?

The plants of the Pacific Northwest had been known for millennia to the Aboriginal inhabitants of the region, but only became the object of European attention in the late eighteenth century. The first sustained descriptions of Northwestern flora came from the late eighteenth century expeditions of Cook, Malaspina, and Vancouver, the latter two employing botanists to describe, name, and collect specimens of new species. Botanists like Luis Née (of the Malaspina expedition) and Archibald Menzies (of the Vancouver expedition) encountered a world where nearly every plant was unknown to science, yet many were familiar nonetheless. Their experience was likely similar to the one the later botanist Thomas Nuttall describes here:

> Towards the shores of the Pacific, and on the banks of the Oregon, we again meet with the agreeable features of the forest...Transported in idea to the borders of the

> Hudson or the Delaware, we recline beneath the shade of venerable Oaks and spreading Maples; we see, as it were, fringing on the streams, the familiar Cotton-wood and spreading Willows. On the higher plains and ascending the hills and mountains to their summits, we see a dark forest of lofty pines; we hear the light breeze sigh and murmur through their branches as it did to the poets of old. But the botanist, in all this array, fails to recognize one solitary acquaintance of his former scenes…[137]

Those botanists could not summon a pre-existing binomial to attach to plants found ashore in the new land, but recognized familiar shapes – the sharply pointed maple leaf, the deeply lobed oak leaf.

As I mentioned earlier, Mugerauer suggests that "language and environment *always already* are given together,"[138] or, in other words, that the environment emerges for the observer to the extent that the observer's language and interpretive categories permit. For Menzies, sailing to the convergence of the Strait of Juan de Fuca and Puget Sound, this seems to have been the case. Encountering islands covered in Garry oaks, he is quick to compare the landscape to English parkland, heaping praise on its beauty.[139] Menzies, as a botanist from the British Isles, knew instinctively that the characteristic leaf, stout trunk and sprawling branches meant *oak*. But though Menzies indicated in his journal that what he saw was *Quercus*, he did not give the tree a specific name. For the time being, the tree lived in botanical limbo – it existed in the physical world and at least one botanist had seen it for himself, but it had not yet been fully categorized with a description or specific name. Looking back to Latour, we might say that the tree is still "stronger" than the visiting scientist;[140] its essence has yet to be textualized for the

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[137] Thomas Nuttall, *The North American Sylva; A Description of the Forest Trees not Described in the Work of F. Andrew Michaux* (Philadephia: J. Dobson, 1842), vi.
[138] Mugerauer, "Language and the Emergence of Environment," 58.
[139] Archibald Menzies, *Menzies' Journal of Vancouver's Voyage*, ed. C.F. Newcombe (Victoria: William H. Cullen, 1923).
[140] Latour, *Science In Action*, 220

benefit of other scientists abroad. Even at this time, though, the Garry oak was an *oak*, the word and concept derived from the Old World, its identity shared with an array of Old World trees, its meaning necessarily tied up in countless Old World interpretations.

The Garry oak's anonymity, after Menzies first spotted the tree, was short-lived. But it was not Menzies who gave the tree a specific name, it was Née, who, as it happens, likely did not actually see a Garry oak on his travels. Née published two *Quercus* species after his travels with Malaspina, and indicated that one of them, *Quercus agrifolia*, grew around Monterey and Nootka Sound. The specimens, he claimed, had come from those two locations,[141] which were the only points in the Northwest at which the expedition had gone ashore.[142] There are, however, no oaks in Nootka Sound; the rainswept forests of the Sound are completely inhospitable to the warmth- and dryness-loving Garry oak. Nonetheless, since botanical eyewitnesses were few and far between in the early 19th century Pacific Northwest, subsequent floras reproduced the erroneous claim that there was a *Quercus agrifolia* near Nootka Sound. When Frederick Pursh published his *Flora Americae Septentrionalis*, he simply described *Quercus agrifolia* as living "on the north-west coast, about Nootka Sound,"[143] and does not mention Monterey, where the California live oak – the tree that now carries that scientific name – actually does live. It is possible that Pursh, who had consulted Menzies extensively prior to the publication of *Flora Americae Septentrionalis*, had reproduced Née's error on the knowledge that

[141] Charles Konig and John Sims, *Annals of Botany*, vol. 2 (London: R. Taylor and Co., 1806), 106. This is an English translation of the original entry, which appeared in a Spanish botanical journal in 1801.
[142] Alessandro Malaspina, *The Malaspina Expedition, 1789-1794: The Journal of the Voyage by Alejandro Malaspina* (London, UK: Hakluyt Society, 2001).
[143] Frederick Pursh, *Flora Americae Septentrionalis; Or, A Systematic Arrangement and Description of the Plants of North America*, vol. 2 (London, UK: James Black and Son, 1814), 627.

Menzies had seen an oak of some sort quite close to Nootka Sound.[144] If this was the case, Pursh unwittingly grouped the Garry oak under the same name as the quite different live oak, an evergreen species with stiff, prickly leaves.

What is significant about Pursh's misidentification of the Garry oak is that when David Douglas reached the Pacific Northwest in 1825, he expressed some puzzlement over the oak he found growing in abundance along the shores of the Columbia: it "may prove *Q. agrifolia*,"[145] he wrote, but certainly the tree did not match the description given in *Flora Americae Septentrionalis*. For a while, then, the confusion over *Quercus agrifolia* seems to have influenced how at least one explorer directly interpreted the Garry oak. But Garry oak's life as *Quercus agrifolia* did not last for long – soon after returning from his travels in the Northwest Douglas added *Quercus garryana* to a list he had made some years before of American oaks, explaining the name thus: "I have great pleasure in dedicating this species to N. Garry, Esq., Deputy Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company, as a sincere though simple token of regard."[146] The Hudson's Bay Company had assisted Douglas greatly in his travels, supplying him with shelter, food, and transportation during the two years Douglas spent roaming the area. The warmth with which Douglas "dedicates [the] species," and the simple fact that the species is named not for a more outwardly neutral morphological trait but a snippet of biography, invite us to look at Douglas's travels and botanizing from a personal angle. Indeed Douglas was a

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[144] Though Nootka and Puget Sounds may seem vastly different and distant from one another to the modern reader, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Nootka Sound was the most familiar place name from the Northwest coast, and thus it may have seemed a reasonable generalization to Pursh to describe Menzies' oak as growing near that place.
[145] Douglas, *Journal Kept by David Douglas During his Travels in North America*, 112. Subsequently he noted the species simply as *Quercus*.
[146] Ibid., 49.

fascinating character whose writings reveal much about how 19th century botanists performed Linnean botany.

Considering Douglas's employment, it comes as no surprise that his attention was absorbed primarily in identifying plant species and classifying them if they were new to science. But it is the zeal and completeness with which Douglas applied this scientific gaze that is remarkable. He botanizes from the first moment ashore: "On stepping on the shore *Gaultheria Shallon* was the first plant I took in my hands. So pleased was I that I could scarcely see anything but it. Mr. Menzies correctly observes that it grows under thick pine-forests in great luxuriance..."[147] What appears to be immediately relevant to Douglas about the salal, besides its appeal as an ornamental plant, is that it resembles the *Gaultheria shallon* in the literature. Encountering plants not in the literature, he names them eagerly, for if he is to collect them, he must be able to speak about them. Douglas, in short, did not tolerate an unknown landscape. He endeavoured to open it up to science, to put words to it, and to put plants into the system he knew from home.

Douglas had no doubt that the systems with which he was acquainted would apply to the Pacific Northwest as fully as they did to Britain. Though working locally, he saw his work as contributing to a global knowledge, rather than a place-bound one. It certainly did not strike him that what is now known as traditional ecological knowledge was anything other than a parochial pseudo-science, as one incident in Douglas's journal demonstrates well. Coming across a tobacco garden where the plants were growing in a pile of ashes, he helps himself to a specimen, having hoped to find *Nicotiana* in the Northwest. However, the Aboriginal owner of the garden intercepts him quickly, demanding an explanation for the theft. Douglas immediately offers the upset gardener a

[147] Ibid, 102.

gift: "...by presenting him with two finger-lengths of tobacco from Europe his wrath was appeased and we became good friends." Then, to Douglas's surprise, the Aboriginal gardener proves that he knows something: "He told me that wood ashes make it grow very large...thus we see that even the savages on the Columbia know the good effects produced on vegetation by the use of carbon."[148] To Douglas, that the gardener knew to plant in wood ashes indicates that the local population possessed a very small amount of scientific knowledge, for in Douglas's view the tobacco garden was primarily a local example of a universal principle.

Because he understood the relevant classificatory systems, and knew what to look for, Douglas was able to make the Pacific Northwest intelligible. Plants found there, whether or not botanists had found them before, were members of species, and the Linnean system could accommodate an unlimited number of species. The laws of the natural world operated the same way on the Columbia as they did on the Thames. Even when allowing himself an aesthetic moment or two, Douglas invokes Romantic convention and remains within a European interpretive framework. Of encountering the Grand Rapids on the Columbia River, he writes:

> The scenery at this season is...grand beyond description; the high mountains in the neighbourhood, which are for the most part covered in pines of several species, some of which grow to an enormous size, are all loaded with snow; the rainbow from the vapour of the agitated water, which rushes with furious rapidity over shattered rocks and through deep caverns producing an agreeable although at the same time a somewhat melancholy echo through the thick wooded valley; the reflections from the snow on the mountains, together with the vivid green of the gigantic pines, form a contrast of rural grandeur that can scarcely be surpassed.[149]

[148] Ibid., 141.
[149] Ibid., 158.

Literary merit aside, this is the language of the picturesque. Simply put, Douglas's Pacific Northwest could not surprise on its own terms; scientists like Douglas had already domesticated it.

Douglas collected physical traces of vegetation, including seeds for cultivating desirable plants in the botanical gardens of Britain. By naming and defining species collected Douglas gave future botanists an interpretive key to the Northwest. As these records are partial renderings created with certain assumptions, and as *Quercus garryana* is one of these textual entities, it is worth exploring what the textualized plant looks like.

To collect knowledge valid anywhere, Douglas limited himself to the "immutable and combinable mobiles" of botany. His work was to collect and create pieces of information that could be assembled into a coherent work – the flora – and would be supported by the incontrovertible physical evidence of the specimen. Of course, Douglas did more than this. Over his travels he made extensive observations and reflected at length on certain species, noting where they grew, what they might be used for, and so on. This was conventional with all botanists and collectors. However, this sort of information was implicitly of less importance than the essentials – the name and "character," the importance of both indicated by the fact that they are written in Latin rather than the botanist's own tongue. The character contained precise morphological information about the plant, exactly the sort of information the botanist needed in order to classify it. A typical flora began with a name and character, and then, sometimes but not always, contained additional notes on the plant. The format of the entry reminded the reader that one type of information was necessary and the rest contingent; names and

characters were subject to scientific scrutiny and the rest could be only as valid as learned speculation.

So in Douglas's list of American oaks, he followed this convention exactly. In the final entry, that of *Quercus garryana*, he follows the name immediately by the Latin character.[150] Then, having fixed the essence of the tree, the tone changes as he reflects at length on the new species. Particularly, it is a "handsome straight tree of considerable dimensions" that will be of "great advantage" for "various domestic purposes...especially in shipbuilding." Indeed it has "a decided superiority over every other native [oak] of that country [America]." He notes that it inhabits alluvial deposits on the Columbia river, growing plentifully "on the north banks of that stream sixty miles from the ocean, and from that circumstance named by Capt. Vancouver *'Oak Point'* 1792."

Douglas's reflections on the Garry oak are lengthy and interesting, but it is clear that they are meant to serve a different purpose than the name and character. Put simply, Douglas is writing about what the oak *might do* – the character and name stand as what the oak *is*. As printed information about the Garry oak circulated, this pattern remained. William Jackson Hooker published the first record of the Garry oak in his *Flora Boreali-Americana*, based mostly on Douglas's specimens and observations, as well as specimens sent home by Douglas contemporaries William Fraser Tolmie and Meredith Gairdner, and the specimens of Archibald Menzies. The character is different than Douglas's, reflecting the greater diversity of specimens Hooker had access to, but carries with it the same air of universality. After Douglas and Hooker transformed the unknown western oak into the known and named species *Quercus garryana*, other botanists made their own

[150] "Foliis petiolatis deciduis oblongis superne latioribus subtus pubescentibus, sinubis acutioribus, angulis obtusis, calycibus fructus sessilibus subtus planis," ibid., 48.

notes about it and entered it into new floras. In Nuttall's *North American Sylva*, the first book to incorporate all known North American trees, *Quercus garryana* (the "Western Oak") is the first species listed. Preceding three pages of effusive description, including accounts of its picturesque qualities and remarkable utility, is the scientific name and character. Nuttall's character is again different in wording from both Douglas's and Hooker's, though he did not botanize far from areas Douglas had already covered.

Quercus garryana *comes to Victoria*

Quercus garryana was originally known from the area between the Columbia River and Puget Sound. David Douglas's type for the species had come from that area, and the three other collectors Hooker acknowledges in the entry for *Q. garryana* in *Flora Boreali-Americana* – Archibald Menzies, Meredith Gairdner, and William Fraser Tolmie – collected in the area as well. Early botanical authors such as Hooker and Thomas Nuttall described the species' range in vague terms, however. Nuttall encountered the tree "at the confluence of the Columbia and the Wahlamet"[151] but could only guess that the species' northern range would extend "probably as far as Nootka Sound,"[152] no doubt influenced by Pursh's erroneous description of the habitat of *Q. agrifolia*.[153] These open-ended geographical descriptions made it reasonable, but by no means inevitable for early naturalists on Vancouver Island to identify the native oaks as *Q. garryana*.

John Keast Lord's *The Naturalist in Vancouver Island and British Columbia* might be the first printed source declaring the Vancouver Island oaks to be *Q. garryana*. Lord's mention of the species is given in passing, and is not highly complimentary: "On

[151] Nuttall, *The North American Sylva*, 2. The "Wahlamet" is the Willamette River.
[152] Ibid., 3.
[153] "On the north-west coast, about Nootka Sound." Pursh, *Flora America Septentrionalis*, 627.

the open lands, misnamed prairies, the scrub-oak (Quercus Garryana) grows so gnarled and contorted that stock, branch, twig, and even the very leaves look as if they suffered from perpetual cramp."[154] Lord was Naturalist to the Boundary Commission that travelled in British Columbia in 1858, and the above title was published in 1866. It is difficult to know, without consulting Lord's journals,[155] whether he identified the tree while on Vancouver Island or on the later date at home in Britain. The next mention of *Q. garryana* on Vancouver Island came in 1871, when a botanical collector turned explorer named Robert Brown published his own conclusions on the Vancouver Island oaks in a British scientific journal. He found *Q. garryana* growing around Victoria, indeed, but decided that it was not the only oak native to the region. The other, which he only located growing in one place, he named *Q. jacobi*, after Sir James Douglas, Governor of British Columbia. The tree which served as Brown's type for *Q. jacobi* grew, of all places, on the Governor's lawn.

Sir James Douglas apparently took an interest in Victoria's oaks. Brown writes that the governor "had for many years noticed these trees growing alongside of *Q. Garryana*, and was quite convinced of the specific difference of [*Q. jacobi*]."[156] Brown notes differences he observed in the leaves and form of the tree, and notes having been informed of differences in the acorns and flowering period.[157] There were others besides Douglas who felt that Victoria had two species of oak rather than just one: a paper read before the Royal Geographical Society around 1857 by an early Victoria settler names

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[154] John Keast Lord, *The Naturalist in Vancouver Island and British Columbia* (London: Richard Bentley, 1866), 39.
[155] Which I have not found in print.
[156] Robert Brown, "Species of Oaks from North-West America," *Annals and Magazine of Natural History* s. 4, n. 7 (1871), 255.
[157] Ibid.

the oaks *Quercus suber clavigata*[158] and "another [unidentified] species, somewhat darker in the bark and harder in the quality of the wood."[159] William Carew Hazlitt suggests that Warre and Vavasour found Vancouver Island to possess both red and white oaks.[160] It seems reasonable to suggest that this viewpoint – the "splitter" mindset of biological cliché – might have been prevalent in the early years of the Vancouver Island colony.

The lumpers would ultimately prevail, but come to different conclusions. Edward Lee Greene, who drew popular attention to Brown's *Q. jacobi* in his *Illustrations of the West American Oaks*, traveled to Vancouver Island shortly after the publication of that volume and visited the original *Q. jacobi* on the Governor's lawn, and remarked upon his return: "By reference to Mr. Brown's notes, reprinted by me, it will be seen that he credits both this and its ally, *Q. Garryana*, to the locality; in which opinion it is plain to me that he is in error. The two more than middle-sized trees on Sir James' lawn, one of which he calls *Q. Garryana*, the other *Q. Jacobi*, though differing in habit as he describes them, one being earlier, the other later in its flowering, are assuredly one species, and that *Q. Jacobi*."[161] And further: "Although I noticed many of these oaks in the neighborhood of Victoria, I saw nothing which I should call *Q. Garryana*."[162] George Mercer Dawson of the Geological Survey of Canada came to an entirely different conclusion, making no mention of *Q. jacobi* in his "Note on the Distribution of Some of the More Important

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[158] *Quercus suber* is the cork oak of the Iberian Peninsula.
[159] Grant, "Description of Vancouver Island," 185.
[160] Hazlitt, *British Columbia and Vancouver Island*.
[161] Edward Lee Greene, *Pittonia, A Series of Botanical Papers*, vol. 2 (San Francisco, CA: Doxey & Co., 1890), 111.
[162] Ibid.

Trees of British Columbia," but devoting an entry to *Q. garryana*.[163] John Macoun's *Catalogue of Canadian Plants* similarly omits *Q. jacobi* in favour of *Q. garryana*, based on specimens received from Dawson.[164] It is possible, however, that Dawson and Macoun had not heard of *Q. jacobi* – though Brown published the species in 1871, Greene writes that the journal in which the species appeared was difficult to find, and Greene's reprint of the original did not appear until 1889.[165]

From the 1870s until a decade or so into the 20th century, there was little consensus on the identity of Victoria's oaks. Alexander Caulfield Anderson indicates in his *Notes on North-Western America* that *Q. garryana* appeared prominently in Victoria, but also mentions having read of Brown's new species.[166] The *Year Book of British Columbia*, in a section on native trees, gives *Q. garryana* as the scientific name of the "Pacific White Oak" in 1903 but names the same oak *Q. jacobi* in 1911.[167] *Q. garryana* eventually emerged as the favoured name overall, though, after it appeared in comprehensive texts such as Sudworth's *Forest Trees of the Pacific Slope*, Henry's *Flora of Southern British Columbia and Vancouver Island*, Morton's *Native Trees of Canada*, and a *Preliminary Catalogue of the Flora of Vancouver and Queen Charlotte Islands* prepared by the Provincial Museum of Natural History.[168] Though *Q. jacobi* persisted

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[163] George Mercer Dawson, "Note on the Distribution of Some of the More Important Trees of British Columbia," *The Canadian Naturalist* 4 (1880), 10.
[164] John Macoun, *Catalogue of Canadian Plants: Part I – Polypetalae* (Montreal: Dawson Brothers, 1883), 440.
[165] Greene, *Illustrations of the West American Oaks*, 75.
[166] Alexander Caulfield Anderson, *Notes on North-Western America* (Montreal: Mitchell & Wilson, 1876), 14.
[167] R. E. Gosnell, *The Year Book of British Columbia* (Victoria, BC: Government of British Columbia, 1903), 240, R. E. Gosnell, *The Year Book of British Columbia* (Victoria, BC: Government of British Columbia, 1911), 259.
[168] George B. Sudworth, *Forest Trees of the Pacific Slope* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1908; reprint, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1967) (page citations are to the reprint edition), Joseph Kaye Henry, *Flora of Southern British Columbia and Vancouver Island* (Toronto: W.J. Gage & Co., 1915), B. R. Morton, *Native Trees of Canada* (Ottawa: Department of the Interior, 1917), Provincial Museum of

from place to place, scientific papers devoted to British Columbia's oaks uniformly accepted *Q. garryana* as its true name. The oak Brown had dedicated to Sir James Douglas has since all but disappeared, now appearing only in lists of accepted synonyms for *Q. garryana*.[169]

Amateur science and growing awareness

Knowledge about *Quercus garryana* circulated between professional botanists and collectors, but did not stop there. Information gleaned originally from the pages of Hooker and Macoun went out into the field with enthusiastic amateurs, many of whom lived in Victoria and encountered Garry oaks daily, unlike most of the botanists named above. These amateurs then recirculated knowledge from the field and the flora in popular media such as newspapers and field guides. It is important to examine their contributions to the scientific conversation on Garry oak. For one thing, their contributions often came from the borderlands of science – unconstrained by professional training, amateur natural historians often interspersed their empirical observation with commentary not normally found in scientific literature. This might have been troubling to the contemporary botanist, but to the historical geographer exploring past perceptions of a tree, it is welcome indeed. An equally compelling reason to examine these sources is that it was amateurs, not professional botanists, who first called for the protection of the Garry oak.

Natural History, *A Preliminary Catalogue of the Flora of Vancouver and Queen Charlotte Islands* (Victoria, BC: William H. Cullen, 1921).

[169] Species 2000 and the Integrated Taxonomic Information System, "Catalogue of Life: 2007 Annual Checklist: Quercus garryana var. garryana," web page, 2007, available from http://www.catalogueoflife.org/annual-checklist/show_species_details.php?record_id=4083489, last accessed 18 September 2008.

By far the most influential of these early natural historians was C. C. (Chartres Cecil) Pemberton. Pemberton (1864-1943) worked in law and real estate, but gave himself to natural history in his spare time. David Brownstein, who has written on the contribution of amateur natural history to forest conservation in British Columbia, points out that Pemberton was unconventional for an amateur – instead of concentrating his efforts on taxonomy and the identification of local plants, he instead took an active interest in tree physiology. Pemberton's work, as Brownstein puts it, "sought to understand the biographies of individual trees."[170]

The trees Pemberton seems to have been most curious about were the trees that behaved in unexpected ways. Pemberton began botanizing seriously around 1913 when he encountered conifer stumps in the Victoria area that had developed calluses of bark over their cut surfaces. Later, he turned his attention to a peculiarity of the Garry oak's growth, which so intrigued Pemberton that he devoted three articles to the topic in the Saturday edition of the *Victoria Daily Colonist* in addition to two papers in the *Canadian Field-Naturalist*.

Pemberton described the question thus in the first of his *Colonist* articles:

> Our grand old oaks exhibit a characteristic which has proved a puzzle to all visiting botanists who have sojourned in our city. The gigantic limbs often twist, turn, writhe and wriggle and finally make a dive at some part of the ground or rock close at hand and then fly off at a tangent. At other times the wood of the stems and branches makes a pancake-like spread over the rock, which it touches, and this spread may be downward, upward, or sideways and the wood becomes firmly attached to the rock.[171]

Pemberton was adamant that this peculiarity warranted close attention:

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[170] David Brownstein, "Sunday Walks and Seed Traps: The Many Natural Histories of British Columbia Forest Conservation, 1890-1925" (Ph.D. diss., University of British Columbia, 2006), 151.
[171] C. C. Pemberton, "Garry Oaks Exhibit Puzzle to Botanists," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, August 20, 1924, p. 7.

> Some people think an occurrence of this sort is just a freak of nature, and pass it off with the remark: 'oh, it just happened.' Others believe that the phenomenon indicates some principle in vegetable vitality and that the subject should be looked into and studied and the trees themselves taken care of and preserved. There are even those who think that if Victoria were a place like New Zealand or any other part of the world where citizens valued the natural features then these curiosities would be made much of as attractions to tourists.[172]

Later in the article Pemberton quotes at length from a letter from a Professor Thomson at the University of Toronto, whose opinion on the Garry oaks apparently had been solicited by the Victoria Chamber of Commerce. Professor Thomson was of the opinion that "[the trees] are certainly very unusual and well worthy of preservation as a feature of scientific interest," and that "besides being of scientific interest the specimens could be made a popular attractive feature."[173] Pemberton's article concludes with the speculation that, since no explanation of the strange growth was available in the contemporary literature, "Victoria may...possess, in her oaks, an exemplification of a new principle in plant biology."[174]

Pemberton authored two similar pieces in the *Colonist* some sixteen years later in 1940.[175] Then, as in 1924, the question of the oak's "tropic movements" had not been answered. The two articles addressed different types of movement – the first dealt with the oak limbs' radial movements over rock, and the second discussed instances of "apical elongation" where the branches appeared to grow in inexplicable directions. Pemberton gave no explanation for either phenomenon – he simply mused about the limbs finding "points of stimulation" in the rocks beneath. He did, however, end the first article with a quiet warning: "I note that with building up of the district north of Hillside Avenue, etc.,

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[172] Ibid.
[173] Ibid.
[174] Ibid.
[175] C. C. Pemberton, "Tropisms of the Garry Oak," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, June 30, 1940, mag. sect., p. 5, C. C. Pemberton, "Tropisms of the Garry Oak," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, August 18, 1940, mag. sect., p. 3.

many fine and interesting phases and examples of these tropic reactions of the Garry oaks are being destroyed."[176] In other words, lost Garry oaks could be science's lost opportunities.

Pemberton's advocacy for the Garry oak went deeper than an interest in its tropic movements. Pemberton seems to have been an early defender of native species, simply for the reason that they were native. Brownstein writes that Pemberton, in 1913, commissioned photographers to capture images of Garry oak parkland slated for clearing, so as to create a record of a landscape type threatened by settler farming and development.[177] In the 1920s Pemberton petitioned Victoria's city council several times to take better care of the city's oaks, protesting vociferously when council ordered trees down.[178] Yet he was pragmatic, and sought to take advantage of even such a misfortune as a Garry oak being felled. After a large oak was felled because a motorist had collided with it at night, Pemberton wrote, "As such extravagant statements have been made by visitors in reference to reason for these unique oaks being found here have been published in outside papers, it is well to try and obtain a record of some of the ages of big trees when cut down."[179] The words "extravagant statements" refer to the persistent rumour that Victoria's oaks were not of a native species, but, in fact, were British oaks brought by early explorers. Pemberton notes that the oak that had recently been felled was over 300 years old, and therefore not possibly introduced.

Pemberton addressed a long article in the *Colonist* on June 4, 1922 to Victoria's city council. Entitled "Victoria Should Conserve Her Pioneering Landmarks," the article is

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[176] Pemberton, "Tropisms of the Garry Oak," August 18,1940, p. 3.
[177] Brownstein, "Sunday Walks and Seed Traps," 146.
[178] "Stop Cutting Oaks in View of Protest," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, January 12, 1921, p. 7, "Collinson Oak Tree Falls to City Axe."
[179] "Warns City About Removing Oak Trees," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, February 11, 1921, p. 5.

a passionate defense of native vegetation in the face of the prevailing climate of "topiarism:"

> In artificial topiarism, commonplace grass lawns and boulevards, etc., Victoria can probably be easily outdistanced by centres possessing more money. But in the natural features, rockland types, and in the specimens of native trees we have something unique and which cannot be obtained elsewhere. We all have the experience of hearing visitors remark on the fine specimens of native flowers, etc., growing wild everywhere, but which are deemed rarities elsewhere. In the past our efforts seem to have aimed at the destruction of the only things we excel in and the substitution at enormous cost of features to be found everywhere. It is undoubtedly a fact that for really fine open grown specimens of many of our conifers we must travel to Europe. On the other hand we still have some fine specimens of *native oaks*, maples, arbutus, etc. These are in danger of extermination through ignorance or because they do not conform to conventional ideas or because they have through neglect and lack of intelligent management become decadent. It is to be hoped, however, that the aldermen will awake to the realization of the value of the wonderful natural parkland with which this locality was originally endowed by nature and instead of wasting money on excessive pruning of the exotic trees of the boulevards that they will devote some of the funds to the conservation under direction of trained men of the remnant of the superb pioneer trees which were so great a wonder to the first arrivals on the Coast.[180] (emphasis mine)

Pemberton, in his celebration of native vegetation over imported landscape ideals, foreshadows the nativist sentiment found in much modern Garry oak ecosystem conservation discourse.

Pemberton was joined in his interest in natural history by J. R. (James Robert) Anderson (1841-1930). Anderson, for some time Deputy Minister of Agriculture, devoted much of his spare time to collecting information on British Columbia's flora.[181] He was more reserved than Pemberton on the issue of felling oaks in Victoria, though he did weigh in once when Pemberton suggested that Council inspect some possibly dangerous Garry oaks in Beacon Hill Park: "During my long experience I cannot recall a

[180] C. C. Pemberton, "Victoria Should Conserve Her Pioneering Landmarks," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, June 4, 1922, p. 13.
[181] Brownstein, "Sunday Walks and Seed Traps."

single instance of any accident of any consequence resulting from the breaking down of oak trees, either in Victoria or elsewhere where they occur in Vancouver Island...We have had enough of vandalism in the name of improvement. It was a sad sight to see the fine oaks which were destroyed recently, trees good probably for another century. Let well alone is a good motto."[182]

More importantly Anderson disseminated information on trees that was intended for audiences not already proficient in botany. A 1906 paper in the *Canadian Forestry Journal* on "The Deciduous Woods of British Columbia" described a host of these non-commercial species, including *Quercus garryana*, to an audience of foresters.[183] Brownstein notes that the appearance of such a paper indicates the relative lack of botanical knowledge among the foresters of that time.[184] Anderson's one book, *Trees and Shrubs: Food, Medicinal, and Poisonous Plants of British Columbia*, published in 1925, addressed itself to a generalist readership. It differs from a conventional flora in the absence of detailed technical descriptions and an emphasis on information related to plant uses, by both European settlers and Aboriginal peoples. On Garry oak Anderson writes: "Considerable discussion and diversity of opinion has been expressed regarding this Oak, as to whether our variety is not distinct from that of Oregon and Washington, and whether or not we have more than one variety. I am of opinion that any peculiarities are due to local conditions, and that we have only one...for a work of this character, it will suffice to adopt the opinion given."[185]

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[182] J. R. Anderson, "Oak Trees," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, June 21, 1923, p.4.
[183] J. R. Anderson, "The Deciduous Woods of British Columbia," *Canadian Forestry Journal*, II (1906): 114-120.
[184] Brownstein, "Sunday Walks and Seed Traps," 60.
[185] J. R. Anderson, *Trees and Shrubs: Food, Medicinal, and Poisonous Plants of British Columbia* (Victoria, BC: Charles F. Banfield, 1925), 112.

Several popular articles written in the magazine section of the *Colonist* in the mid-20th century described Garry oaks for a popular audience, straddling science and oak lore. A 1932 piece by Julian A. Dimock moves from a physical description of the tree and quotations from Douglas's journal to musings on oaks and Englishness: "It is interesting to note that [introduced English] skylarks sing above the trees in the Uplands district of Victoria."[186] An article written in 1940 by Robert Connell explains the formation of "oak apples," galls created by parasitic wasps, and goes on to reminisce on a British tradition of wearing the galls on one's shirt as a button.[187] Connell writes again in 1942 of "Our Native Oak and its Ancestry," connecting *Q. garryana* botanically with *Q. robur* and other oak species as well as drawing a cultural connection between Victoria's oaks, houses built of English oak, and Druids.[188] H. B. Binny derides the Garry oak in 1948, writing that "it possesses the rather meagre distinction of being the second largest variety on the Pacific Coast of America," though "it certainly has a rare roster of distinguished relations," meaning the hundreds of other, presumably more interesting, oak species found worldwide. Edna Slater, in a 1955 piece, begins with a conventional description of *Q. garryana* and then describes a nostalgic sensory experience: "Few people cure their own hams and bacons now, and when they do they are more likely to use a patent cure and an outsize hypodermic syringe. A whiff of fragrant smoke from an oak fire will bring a nostalgic memory to the mind of many a city worker whose family roots go back to some old-time Saanich farm."[189] Recurring in several of these articles is the assertion that

[186] Julian A. Dimock, "British Columbia's Oaks," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, November 6, 1932, mag. sect., p. 5.
[187] Robert Connell, "Gleanings in Sunny September," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, September 29, 1940, mag. sect., p. 4.
[188] Robert Connell, "Our Native Oak and its Ancestry."
[189] Edna W. Slater, "Coast's Garry Oaks: Mighty but Rare."

Garry oak is a native species, contrary to prevailing rumours that I have already discussed.

Conservation biology and the rise of the Garry oak ecosystem

Victoria's Garry oaks received a steady but minimal amount of scientific attention through most of the 20th century. As described above, they were first noticed by botanists, whose main objective was to describe and classify the species; afterwards *Quercus garryana* caught the eye of local natural historians in Victoria. Occasional articles circulated on the oak's natural history, and a few times, amateur natural historians intervened in political processes affecting the fate of the oaks. Professional biologists of one sort or another added to the literature on Victoria's Garry oaks every now and then in the years before 1980, treating a variety of topics, including the distribution of the species,[190] past species distribution, [191] and biogeoclimatic ecosystem classification.[192]

Nonetheless, scientific literature relevant to Garry oaks in Victoria is fairly sparse until the last two decades of the 20th century. At that point, a confluence of factors – the rise of environmental consciousness in society and the emergence of conservation biology as an academic discipline vital among them – brought a new object to light, one whose precarious existence attracted both scholarly and lay attention as well as funding.

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[190] R. Glendinning, "The Garry Oak in British Columbia," *Canadian Field Naturalist* 58 (1944): 61-65. This piece addressed certain claims made in Sudworth, *Forest Trees of the Pacific Slope* – that Garry oak grew in the Fraser Valley, at Quatsino Sound, and had once grown near Vancouver. Glendinning finds evidence of the former, but casts doubt on the existence of oaks at Quatsino Sound, and shows that Sudworth had mixed up Vancouver, British Columbia, where no Garry oak grows, with Vancouver, Washington, in the midst of the oak lands of the Columbia River.

[191] D. L. Zirul, "Pollen Analysis of a Bog in the Garry Oak Zone of Southern Vancouver Island, B.C. (B.S. diss., University of Victoria, 1967).

[192] V. J. Krajina, "Biogeoclimatic Zones and Classification of British Columbia," *Ecology of Western North America* 1 (1965): 1-17, Karel Klinka, F. C. Nuszdorfer, and L. Skoda, *Biogeoclimatic Units of Central and Southern Vancouver Island* (Victoria, BC: Ministry of Forests, 1979).

The object was something called a "Garry oak ecosystem," and it is in the context of this new object that Garry oaks have been perhaps most often discussed in the past few decades.

The arrival of the Garry oak ecosystem can be seen clearly in two conference papers delivered by biologist Jim Pojar in 1980. These two papers, "Threatened Forest Ecosystems of British Columbia" and "Threatened Habitats of Rare Vascular Plants in British Columbia," use the system of biogeoclimatic classifications developed for British Columbia by Krajina in 1965 and applied to central and southern Vancouver Island by Klinka, Skoda, and Nuszdorfer in 1979 to identify the ecosystems and habitats in question.[193] In the former, Pojar begins his list of threatened ecosystems with "Garry oak savanna and woodland," which he equates approximately with the dry subzone of Krajina and Klinka *et al.*'s Coastal Douglas Fir zone.[194] Similarly, the list of threatened habitats in the second paper begins with "Southeastern Vancouver Island – Gulf Islands," which Pojar identifies with the same biogeoclimatic zone.

Pojar's papers reveal a coming together of ideas that would have a major impact on the relationship between humans and oaks in Victoria. The germinal work of Krajina, which was refined and localized by Klinka, Skoda, and Nuszdorfer, delineated zones characterized by similarity in biological, geological, and climatic factors. These zones named and made visible regions of British Columbia entirely on the basis of non-human

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[193] Jim Pojar, "Threatened Forest Ecosystems of British Columbia," in Richard Stace-Smith, Lois Johns, and Paul Joslin, eds., *Threatened and Endangered Species and Habitats in British Columbia and the Yukon: Proceedings* (Victoria, BC: Ministry of Environment, 1980), Jim Pojar, "Threatened Habitats of Rare Vascular Plants in British Columbia," in Richard Stace-Smith, Lois Johns, and Paul Joslin, eds., *Threatened and Endangered Species and Habitats in British Columbia and the Yukon: Proceedings* (Victoria, BC: Ministry of Environment, 1980), Krajina, "Biogeoclimatic Zones and Classification of British Columbia," Klinka, Nuszdorfer, and Skoda, *Biogeoclimatic Units of Central and Southern Vancouver Island*.

[194] In the schema developed by Klinka, Nuszdorfer, and Skoda, this zone is known as "CDFa."

characteristics. Pojar, taking a region thus identified, intervened by showing the region to be ecologically stressed. The Garry oak ecosystem, then, originated by geographical definition combined with scientific pronouncement of its endangerment. The results were massive. In the years that followed, Garry oaks – albeit now in the guise of the Garry oak ecosystem – found themselves written about and discussed with increasing frequency.

Several studies appeared in the 1980s that indicate the growing popularity and credibility of the Garry oak ecosystem as an identifiable, and relevant, object of study. These included an inventory of insects associated with Garry oak conducted by the Canadian Forestry Service,[195] a Master's thesis on bryophytes and lichens in Garry oak ecosystems,[196] and a status report on Macoun's meadowfoam (*Limnanthes macounii*), a small plant associated with Garry oak ecosystems, produced by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC).[197] The appearance of this type of work reflects the contemporary emergence of conservation biology, a "mission-driven discipline" that synthesized traditional and applied approaches to biology in response to ecological crisis.[198] What was untraditional about conservation biology was how well it lent itself to involvement by those situated outside universities. Though the journal articles and the research itself were still the work of academics, the discipline allowed for a kind of symbiosis with non-academic activists.

Early evidence of this symbiosis is the 1993 Garry Oak Meadow Colloquium organized jointly by the University of Victoria's biology department and the Garry Oak

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[195] D. Evans, *Annotated Checklist of Insects Associated with Garry Oak in British Columbia* (Victoria, BC: Pacific Forest Research Centre, Canadian Forestry Service, 1985), BC-X-262.
[196] M. W. Ryan, "Distribution of Bryophytes and Lichens on Garry Oak" (M.Sc. thesis, University of Victoria, 1985).
[197] A. Ceska and O. Ceska, *Status Report on the Macoun's Meadowfoam,* Limnanthes macounii (Ottawa: Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada, 1988).
[198] Curt Meine, Michael Soulé, and Reed F. Noss, "'A Mission-Driven Discipline': The Growth of Conservation Biology," *Conservation Biology* 20 (2006): 631-651.

Meadow Preservation Society (GOMPS), a group that will be discussed later. The 1993 Colloquium, which has become a near-yearly event in recent years, was the first academic gathering to feature original research on Garry oak ecosystems. The proceedings remain widely cited.[199] GOMPS co-hosted a second Garry oak meadow symposium in 1999, the first to be specifically international in scope.[200]

Further colloquia took place in 2003, 2005, 2006 and 2007. The main organizer of these later events was the Garry Oak Ecosystem Recovery Team (GOERT), a large umbrella group formed in 1999 as "a comprehensive partnership of experts affiliated with all levels of government, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, First Nations, volunteers and consultants."[201] GOERT is the largest and most active group currently involved in the conservation of Garry Oak ecosystems, and, as the statement above suggests, it shows considerable hybridity in intention and makeup. As its sponsorship of the research colloquia shows, the group encourages and facilitates research into Garry oak ecosystems. Of six main activities listed on the group's website, three relate to research and information-gathering. The group is: "Mapping and classifying plant communities," "assessing the population of species at risk, writing status reports, recovery strategies and recovery action plans for them," and "guiding research to further our understanding of Garry oak and associated ecosystems."[202] Beyond research, though, GOERT engages in the political by "raising the protection level of priority sites through covenants, stewardship, and acquisition," and "engaging others through

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[199] Richard J. Hebda and Fran Aitkens, *Garry Oak Meadow Colloquium Proceedings*) Victoria, BC: Garry Oak Meadow Preservation Society, 1993).
[200] Patty Pitts, "Gnarly Oak is Focus of Conference and Festival," *The Ring*, March 19, 1999.
[201] GOERT, "Who We Are," web page, 2007, available from http://www.goert.ca/about_who_we_are.php, last accessed 6 August 2008.
[202] GOERT, "What We Do," web page, 2007, available from http://www.goert.ca/about_what_we_do.php, last accessed 6 August 2008.

outreach."[203] Furthermore, they engage in the practical by "restoring Garry oak habitat through invasive species removal and propagation of native plants."[204]

Notwithstanding the group's obvious hybridity, it would be fair to describe GOERT's work as science-based. The language of the group's main objectives, contained in their "Recovery Strategy for Garry Oak and Associated Ecosystems and their Associated Species at Risk," makes this clear. For example, the first of two long-term goals of the organization is "to establish a network of Garry oak and associated ecosystem sites and landscape linkages that is representative of the full range of ecosystem variation across the geographic range in Canada, sustains all the critical processes over the long term, and supports the full range of native biota over the long term." The second reads: "To improve and secure the status of all species at risk from Garry oak and associated ecosystems, except those that are globally extinct, so that they no longer have at-risk status."[205] Though GOERT reaches beyond the academy by advocating for ecosystem protection and taking an active role in restoration, the organizing principles of the organization derive from science.

Very little in the literature on Garry oak ecosystems explicitly states what role humans might play in them. A page on GOERT's website explains that "a Garry oak ecosystem is one with naturally occurring Garry oak trees (*Quercus garryana*) and some semblance of the ecological processes and communities that prevailed before European settlement," suggesting that humans might belong in the ecosystem.[206] Another page,

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[203] GOERT, "What We Do."
[204] GOERT, "What We Do."
[205] GOERT, "Recovery Strategy for Garry Oak and Associated Ecosystems and Associated Species at Risk in Canada, 2001-2006," unpublished draft report, 2002, available from http://www.goert.ca/documents/RSDr_Feb02.pdf, last accessed 7 August 2008, 20.
[206] GOERT, "About Garry oak ecosystems: What are Garry oak and related ecosystems?" web page, 2007, available from http://www.goert.ca/about_GOE_what.php, last accessed 17 September 2008.

entitled “About Garry oak ecosystems: Why are they important?” explains the ecosystems’ cultural significance – that First Nations tended them, that European colonists found them picturesque – before describing their biological significance.[207] Yet, as I will report in detail later, the Garry oak ecosystem conservation movement has worked to create parks and preserves around the ecosystems in which humans are encouraged to be visitors – and perhaps students – primarily. Though this has undoubtedly been necessary to prevent many of these areas from being paved, I believe it has implications for the long-term success of the movement.

The rise of the Garry oak ecosystem has had major implications for the politics of conservation in Victoria. In chapter 8 I will examine the rise of a citizen-driven activism in Victoria that has dedicated itself to defending these ecosystems, and contrast this new activism with the piecemeal efforts in the past to preserve Garry oaks themselves.

[207] GOERT, “Why are they important?”

Chapter 6: Garry oaks as significant trees

"No tree with a story worth preserving"

An abundant literature attests to the fact that trees play a complex role in human cultures. Tree symbolisms exist at the levels of the species and the individual, and are invoked for a stunning variety of purposes. In the case of oak trees, several authors have documented species-level symbolisms. Well known are the connections between British oak (*Quercus robur, Q. petraea*) and the British nation.[208] Across the Atlantic, live oak (*Q. virginiana*) plays a complicated role in ethnic politics and the public memory of the antebellum South.[209] Individual trees, though, are just as capable of attracting meaning. Individual trees become significant for any number of reasons – they can become commemorative of historical events, as in the case of the mythical oak in which Charles II evaded his captors, they can stand for a culture, as does Louisiana's Evangeline Oak for the expelled Acadians,[210] or memorialize individual people.

An enormous number of oaks in Britain have been identified as having taken on stories, symbolisms, and often names.[211] Though this has occurred to some extent with Victoria's Garry oaks, it has been on a much smaller scale than with Britain's oaks. A 1953 letter in the *Colonist*, protesting the threatened destruction of twelve oaks in Beacon Hill Park, went so far as to lament: "it is a pity that Beacon Hill Park has no tree with a story worth preserving, like the tree in which Bonny Prince Charles hid..."[212] In fact, whether or not the stories were worth preserving, a few stories had attached themselves to

[208] These are given a comprehensive treatment in Harris, Harris, and James, *Oak: A British History*.
[209] Anderson, *Nature, Culture, and Big Old Trees*.
[210] Ibid.
[211] Harris, Harris, and James, *Oak: A British History*, Pakenham, *Meetings with Remarkable Trees*.
[212] Besley, "Weathered Oaks."

Beacon Hill oaks by 1953, as well as to oaks throughout the city. Certainly there are more storied oaks nowadays, even if their numbers are still few.

Named and dedicated oaks in Victoria

There are a few oaks in Victoria that are dedicated to or otherwise commemorate individual people. One is the Sloan Tree, located on Beach Drive near the Victoria Golf Club. This massive, reclining oak was dedicated posthumously to Gordon McGregor Sloan, who had been the province's Chief Justice, Forestry Commissioner, and a government advisor. The *Times* reported in 1959 that "Lands and Forests Minister Ray Williston spoke in tribute to the late Mr. Sloan and said that quiet symbolism 'for the things we honor and cherish' is more fitting with the British and Commonwealth tradition than flag-waving and noisy propaganda which are sometimes followed."[213] Today a plaque identifies the Sloan Tree.

Garry oaks make up a large part of the Mayor's Grove in Beacon Hill Park. The grove is made up of trees that have been planted by local and visiting dignitaries, and the earliest plantings date back to 1927. On a walk through Mayor's Grove I located several Garry oaks amongst the other tree species, which include British and eastern red oaks, maples, hawthorns, lindens, and, amongst the deciduous trees, a few Douglas firs. A signboard linked the numbered Garry oaks with their planters. Of the twenty-seven numbered trees, at least five are Garry oaks. These trees were planted by Hon. Randolph Bruce, Lieutenant Governor, in 1927; Mayor J. Z. Parks of Armstrong, in 1927; King Prajadhipok of Siam, in 1931; Sir Percy Vincent, Lord Mayor of London, in 1936; Lord Tweedsmuir, Lieutenant Governor, in 1936; and the Victoria Women's Institute, on the

[213] "'Fitting Symbol' to Gordon Sloan," *Victoria Daily Times*, April 6, 1959, p. 30.

occasion of the 1937 royal visit. However, not one of these Garry oaks, commemorative though they might be, is identified by so much as a plaque on the ground, and their stories seem limited to the bare fact that they have been planted by one important personage or another.

Several municipalities in Greater Victoria[214] have tabled tree preservation bylaws within the last decade. The bylaws adopted in most of these municipalities contain lists of individual trees designated as "significant," and several Garry oaks are listed as such in Saanich, North Saanich, and Oak Bay.[215] The definition of a significant tree is consistently vague across these municipalities. In Oak Bay, it means "a tree...designated because of its historical, cultural or landmark value to the community, its exceptional botanical significance, or its value as wildlife habitat, as determined by Council."[216] In Saanich and North Saanich, they are designated as significant "because of their importance to the community, including importance for heritage or landmark value or as wildlife habitat."[217] The level of protection afforded does differ between municipalties, however: Saanich and North Saanich have explicitly outlawed the cutting of significant trees, whereas Oak Bay requires that applications for permits to cut significant trees be approved by Council rather than the parks department.

Nevertheless, information on the significant Garry oaks, such as an explanation of their significance, of these municipalities is hard to come by.

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[214] These are the City of Victoria, the Township of Esquimalt, the District of Oak Bay, the District of Saanich, the District of Central Saanich, the District of North Saanich, the Town of Sidney, the District of Highlands, and the Town of View Royal.

[215] The Esquimalt bylaw has two Garry oaks in its list of significant trees, but Town Hall staff informed me that these trees were actually English oaks that had been misidentified. The Corporation of the Township of Esquimalt, Bylaw No. 2664, *A bylaw to provide for the protection of trees*.

[216] The Corporation of the District of Oak Bay, Bylaw No. 4326, *A bylaw to regulate the cutting of trees*, 3.

[217] The Corporation of the District of Saanich, Bylaw No. 7632, *To regulate and prohibit the cutting of trees*, 6, District of North Saanich, Bylaw No. 935, *A by-law to provide for the protection and preservation of trees*, 3.

Civic conflict and individual oaks

The individuality of Garry oaks comes to the forefront, it would seem, when their lives are threatened by cutting for one civic purpose or another. Victoria newspapers have served as a forum for public indignation over tree cutting for over a hundred years. The earliest such stories, as far as I have been able to find, appear in the *Colonist* in 1898, when F. B. Pemberton wrote the editor to complain of the felling of "a beautiful young oak on Belcher avenue above Cook street."[218] Another correspondent writes that "I, in company with a gentleman who is versed in the tree culture, examined the trunk of this particular tree this morning. My friend gave it as his opinion that the tree was about 40 years of age," and laments that "in other cities a tree 40 years old, and in healthy condition such as this was, would be looked on as something to be guarded and treasured."[219] The fallen tree, whose demise was ordered to allow an electrical line to be put in, became a lightning rod for condemnations of the city's "municipal vandalism." As such, though, its individuality soon got lost in the tempest and the issue became shade trees rather than the felled Belcher Avenue oak. An editorial engages in histrionics:

> In other cities there is a heavy penalty upon those persons who cut down shade trees growing on the streets. Here it is a civic virtue to cut them down. It appears that the city administration is hostile to shade trees, flowering broom, rose bushes and everything else which makes the town beautiful. The civic idea of beauty is a dreary street without a bit of foliage, flanked by sidewalks three feet wide and out of repair, with a general assortment of stones of various sizes, old newspapers, empty oil cans, pieces of rotten wood taken out when sidewalks are repaired, and, in winter, mud puddles of various dimensions ornamenting the roadway.[220]

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[218] F. B. Pemberton, "Destruction of Our Shade Trees," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, August 24, 1898, p. 6.
[219] G. H. Barnard, "Municipal Vandalism," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, August 26, 1898, p. 8.
[220] "Legalized Vandalism," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, August 24, 1898, p. 4.

Meanwhile, another correspondent appeals to aesthetic taste: "What would the apostle of the beautiful, John Ruskin, say that after having preached his doctrines for over half a century there are still those who would destroy a luxuriant oak tree for the sake of a hideous post?"[221]

Trees became individuals for a short time when they were felled, but as the letter-writer observed, few trees had a story to tell. Perhaps because nothing else could be said for the trees, awe over the trees' supposed or real age and longevity became a recurring theme in the elegies published in the newspapers. When, in April 1908, civic workmen cut down several Garry oaks on Rockland Avenue, a *Times* journalist wrote: "To-day a venerable giant, hundreds of years of age, has been ruthlessly sacrificed in order that the symmetry of a concrete gutter may be maintained and that the strip of green down the west side of Rockland avenue may be unbroken."[222] F. B. Pemberton wrote that "the largest of these trees...has probably been there since the time of William the Conqueror."[223] When a large oak tree on Collinson Avenue was felled in May 1922, it was described as a "noble patriarch," and eulogized grandly: "The lofty and spreading native oak tree, which has stood on the corner of Cook and Collinson Streets since there were streets in that district, and probably stood there for at least 300 years before the streets were made, has been cut down by order of the City Council."[224] Three days later an editorial quoted F. B. Pemberton as speculating that the tree had been "six or seven hundred years old."[225]

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[221] F. B. Kitto, "Vandalism," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, August 28, 1898, p. 7.
[222] "Giant Trees are Destroyed."
[223] Pemberton, "Wanton Destruction."
[224] "Collinson Oak Tree Falls to City Axe."
[225] "Oak Tree Protest," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, May 30, 1922, p. 17.

Conversely, individual oak trees sometimes appeared in antagonistic roles. In July 1937 the *Times* reported that "The large old oak tree which stands on the north side of Burdett Avenue, between Vancouver and Quadra Streets, near the Bishop's Close, is doomed. The city engineer and the parks superintendent visited the tree and found it to be hollow, with branches continually falling on the sidewalk." The engineer described the dying tree as a "menace."[226] Nevertheless, when the tree came down, there was a lament, tempered somewhat by knowledge of the tree's hazardous condition:

> Six hundred years ago, when Edward III sat on England's Throne, and a century before North America had been heard of – a tiny oak started its life on Vancouver Island, although the island had no name then. Last week that tree was taken down from the back garden of 1132 McClure Street, and experts who were called in to see it, said it dated back to at least 1337 A.D. The rings gave them proof of that fact. The old oak was rotting and had become a danger.[227]

Some Garry oaks were a nuisance as well as a menace. An oak on Heron Street came to public attention when a resident petitioned city council to cut it down for the reason that its leaves were too messy. The Colonist introduced the oak thus: "It's no model of decorum, but a very twiggy Garry oak whose idea of a swinging time is to gyrate with the wind and flick its mini-leaves over all and sundry."[228] Furthermore, the oak offended some motorists by protruding slightly into the roadway. After a week or so of controversy, the oak was deemed not to be a hazard.

Public outcry has been a common occurrence when oak trees are felled. Sometimes particularly colourful protests drew extra attention to the tree in question. These are worthy of attention here in that they seem to indicate the existence of strong attachment between people and individual trees. In April 1908, a Garry oak near the ones

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[226] "Ancient Oak Ordered Down," *Victoria Daily Times*, July 2, 1937, p. 11.
[227] "Ancient Oak Taken Down," *Victoria Daily Times*, November 12, 1937, p. 15.
[228] "Danger, Debris, or 'Magnificent,'" *Victoria Daily Colonist*, June 7, 1967, p. 6.

felled on Rockland Avenue had a notice posted on it that read: "NOTICE – This tree belongs to and adds value to the adjoining property. The owner will protect it with firearms, if necessary."[229] The notice was immediately removed by a police constable, but the *Colonist* appeared to take the side of the owner, Fred M. Jones. In the next week the newspaper published two lengthy interviews with Jones, who, despite seeming to threaten tree-cutters with murder, appeared otherwise respectable. The *Colonist* reported:

> He thought it was a shame that trees, whose sturdy trunks and gnarling branches bespoke age scarcely estimable, should be cut off promiscuously. He knew of instances where this had been done without serving any good purpose. Such was the case in reference to that over which he was having trouble. 'Why,' he said, 'the other day I was talking to an alderman who informed me that trees were the curse of British Columbia.'

After a lengthy legal action initiated by Jones, the city announced the following April that it would not cut down the contested oak.[230]

City newspapers were somewhat less sympathetic to another flamboyant oak defender. In August 1951 the *Colonist* reported that "City Council will receive a lesson on nature tonight. Robert Jackson, Moss Street, is scheduled to carry his fight to save a tree's life before the council."[231] Apparently the "lesson on nature" had been prompted by a Garry oak on Gonzales Road being blown over – Jackson, however, believed the city council had chopped the tree down. Jackson's appearance in the council chambers entertained the *Times*, which reported that

> the outspoken taxpayer had his say at the meeting. He flayed [city engineer] Mr. Jones for saying the tree 'leaned at a drunken angle,' and said that the engineer 'had no appreciation for curves – only straight lines.' Mr. Jackson, attired in his work clothes, tried to elaborate beyond the submitted brief, pleading 'just give me one more minute,' but he was ruled out of order by Acting Mayor Frank Mulliner

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[229] "Will Protect Tree by Using Firearms," *Victoria Daily Times*, April 16, 1908, p. 1.
[230] "Oak Untouched on Rockland Avenue," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, April 24, 1909, p. 3.
[231] "Champion of Imperiled Gonzales Oak to Carry Issue to Council Chamber," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, August 14, 1951, p. 5.

> and had to leave the inner circle of the chamber. 'What a council...but I'll get you somehow – I'm a taxpayer – you're my servants,' he said as he walked out , puffing furiously on a cigarette.[232]

A couple of days later Jackson had a polemical letter published in the *Colonist*, in which he railed: "The Parks Superintendent is a great friend of mine, but I would kill friend or foe to save a tree."[233]

Another protest caught the *Times*' attention in 1974. This time a small group of children erected signs around Garry oaks in a vacant lot on Kings Avenue that was slated for development. The newspaper's tone was avuncular: "The tree-defenders are neighborhood youngsters to whom the oaks have become leafy brothers-and-sisters. The trees all have names. There's Donna, of which Carolyn Mitchell, 10, of 255 Roseberry says: 'She's too young to die. She's only five years old.'"[234]

"Edwood"

Public accounts that shed light on the meanings of individual trees are, ultimately, few and far between. Aside from the written record of Victoria's few commemorative and "significant" Garry oaks, and the handful of newspaper stories on ill-fated street trees, not much suggests that individual Garry oaks in Victoria have developed the sort of personality that, for example, Britain's oaks have.

However, an interview I conducted in February 2008 reminds that human relationships with trees are incredibly varied, and that people can see the same trees in different ways from each other. In this thesis I have made a point of concentrating on the

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[232] "Garry Oak; Tree Lover Both Downed," *Victoria Daily Times*, August 15, 1951, p. 21.
[233] Robert Jackson, "Oak Tree on Gonzales Road," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, August 17, 1951, p. 4.
[234] Pat Dufour, "Tyke Picket Firm as Oak," *Victoria Daily Times*, September 13, 1974, p. 19.

exploration of mainstream Garry oak discourse in Victoria. I relate this experience here, however, in order to suggest that much work remains to be done in exploring the bonds that exist between people and oaks.

I contacted Kathy Peddlesden, a Victoria musician, after finding a reference to her on Ross Crockford's *Unknown Victoria* blog. She told me about her ongoing relationship with "Edwood," a massive oak on Falkland Avenue in Oak Bay.[235] Edwood – whose name was apparently coined by the tree's closest neighbour – is very much an individual being to Peddlesden, and one of considerable strength. She remarked that "[Edwood's is] the biggest aura I've ever seen," explaining that the hydro pole across the street from the tree appears to be leaning away in reaction. She described her visits to Edwood as a spiritual practice:

> And I go there and I – when I need to be grounded, and when I need strength, and when I need to feel resiliency, sometimes when I don't need anything from the tree and I'm feeling really powerful and I go there and I bring my energy through me and right into the tree, right into the ground, into the root system. So we have this sort of sharing process that goes on. Sometimes I'll hear the tree call and I'll have to go to it, and I will go and give it energy, whether that's a reality – I mean, there's no measurable way to know what's going on there, but I find more often than not I'm going to the tree for grounding and just – it just brings me right into the now, and takes me out of, you know, fears of future, or living in the past, feeling sorrow, I'm just right there, right now, with this incredible being.[236]

Peddlesden's testimony to her relationship with Edwood suggests that individual interpretations of particular Garry oak trees might be far more wide-ranging than the written record reveals. Further research on this subject could prove to be useful in understanding how people in Victoria relate to trees.

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[235] This tree is designated as significant under Oak Bay's tree protection bylaw, likely because it is recorded as being the biggest Garry oak by circumference in British Columbia. District of Oak Bay, *A bylaw to regulate the cutting of trees*.

[236] Kathy Peddlesden, interview by author, 19 February 2008, audio recording in author's possession.

Chapter 7: Garry oak and imagined Coast Salish landscapes

A conspicuous absence: Garry oaks and First Nations people

Unless one accepts the rumour that it is a European import, Garry oak is widely known as a native tree. Implicit in this is the fact that Garry oak shared space with native peoples in the years before European colonists arrived in Victoria. In this section I ask two questions. First, how has Garry oak – native vegetation – been associated with Aboriginal peoples in the years since colonial settlement began in Victoria? Second, how has knowledge of First Nations peoples' use of Garry oaks affected interpretations of the tree in the years since Fort Victoria was founded?

The short answer to both of these questions is that, at least in the written record, Aboriginal peoples have seldom been associated with Garry oaks in modern Victoria. In the places where Garry oaks have been discussed and interpreted, the fact that the trees shared space with First Nations before the arrival of European colonists is either left unstated or actively omitted. One of these places, as I have shown above, is the newspaper. In a previous section I suggested that commenting on the perceived age of Garry oak trees was a popular way of telling stories about individual trees. It was quite common for Victoria's oak trees to be associated with great age and longevity. Common sense tells us that if a tree is admitted to have been alive before 1843, it must have inhabited a landscape shared with First Nations peoples. Nonetheless, even in cases where explicit mention is made of a tree's age, the tree's implied placement in a Coast Salish landscape goes unremarked. In fact, the age of Garry oaks seems to have often been reckoned against events in European history.

When large Garry oaks were felled on Rockland Avenue in 1908 to make way for civic improvements, a journalist described the trees as "veterans which stood there almost as they did yesterday when Cook was circling the world and Vancouver gave his name to this island."[237] A letter to the editor the next day deplored the cutting of the trees, which the writer felt had "probably been there since the time of William the Conqueror."[238] In 1937, when a large oak in a McClure Street back garden was determined to be unsafe, a eulogy appeared in the *Times* that read: "Six hundred years ago, when Edward III sat on England's Throne, and a century before North America had been heard of – a tiny oak started its life on Vancouver Island, although the island had no name then."[239] And later, in 1977, a Garry oak was associated with colonial history. The tree, which stood behind an apartment building on Fairfield Avenue, had once shaded the farmhouse of Judge Matthew Begbie, and was showing signs of decay. It recovered after being seen to by a tree surgeon.[240] Other articles that speculate on the ages of individual Garry oaks simply do not attempt to attach the trees to events in history. Most significantly, of the several general interest pieces on Garry oaks published in the *Colonist*'s magazine section throughout the 20th century, none mention the tree's connection to Aboriginal peoples, choosing instead to discuss the tree in terms of European oak lore.

One lone letter to the editor, published in 1909 in response to a threat to a Garry oak tree, breaks this pattern. The correspondent asks of the civic politician who suggested that the tree should fall: "might he not reflect, in his softer mood, that it has withstood for ages the shock and fury of Heaven's thunder and tempest, and often, mayhap, sheltered

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[237] "Giant Trees are Destroyed."
[238] Pemberton, "Wanton Destruction."
[239] "Ancient Oak Taken Down."
[240] "Tree Future in Doubt as Heart of Oak Fails." *Victoria Daily Colonist*, September 30, 1977, p. 13, "Sequel Dept.," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, December 18, 1977, p. 31.

under its kindly spreading arms and listened to the soft nothings of Indian brave and maiden, centuries before the white man had here a habitation or a name?"[241] For this correspondent, Garry oak and the noble savage went hand in hand.

Another place where one might expect to find Garry oaks associated with Aboriginal people is the anthropological literature on the Coast Salish people of southern Vancouver Island. But even this literature has little to say about the use and significance of Garry oaks to First Nations people. Though the consumption of acorns by Aboriginal peoples in other parts of the Pacific Northwest was fairly well-known early in the area's colonial history,[242] it was less certain until recently whether Vancouver Island Coast Salish used the acorns. The earliest claim I have found that the Coast Salish ate Garry oak acorns is in an educational publication of the British Columbia Provincial Museum from 1965, which claims that acorns were leached of their tannins and made into acorn bread.[243] By contrast, ten years later than this Suttles found "no indication that the acorns were used" by the same First Nations.[244]

Nevertheless, Turner and Bell, in their widely-cited 1971 paper "The Ethnobotany of the Coast Salish Indians of Vancouver Island," state that acorns were eaten on Vancouver Island, and that their preparation could have involved many techniques including boiling, steaming, and roasting to remove tannins and make the acorns

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[241] Hunter, "From the Sentimental to the Practical."

[242] Painter-explorer Paul Kane described the processing of what he called "Chinook olives," or cured Garry oak acorns, among the Cowlitz of western Washington state. He claimed that the acorns were buried shallowly and urinated on for several months before being excavated and eaten as a delicacy. To my knowledge, this has not been corroborated by subsequent research. Paul Kane, *Wanderings of an Artist Among the Indians of North America: From Canada to Vancouver's Island and Oregon Through the Hudson's Bay Company's Territory and Back Again* (London, UK: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans and Roberts, 1859), 187.

[243] Department of Education, Province of British Columbia, *Coast Salish*, Our Native Peoples (Victoria, BC: A. Sutton, 1965).

[244] Wayne P. Suttles, *The Economic Life of the Coast Salish of Haro and Rosario Straits* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1974).

palatable. The authors claim, however, that acorns constituted a lesser part of the diet on Vancouver Island than they did in Washington and Oregon.[245] Turner, eight years later, authored a handbook entitled *Plants in British Columbia Indian Technology*, in which she states that "the Cowlitz of Western Washington used Garry oak wood to make combs and digging sticks, and burned it as fuel."[246] The same words reappear in a 1998 update of the handbook.[247] No mention is made in either of the wood being used for construction among British Columbia First Nations.

Little appears to have been written about how Garry oak was used by Aboriginal people around Victoria; furthermore, I have found nothing that comments on any other significance Aboriginal people may have found in the tree. This could mean either that Garry oaks were not significant to Aboriginal people there beyond their role as a minor food source, that what significance once existed has been forgotten, or that researchers have not attempted to find out. I do not know which of these, if any, is the case.

Camas

There, it would seem, is where the Garry oak's associations with the Coast Salish of Vancouver Island cease. Though it was undoubtedly present in the traditional territories of the peoples who inhabited the region, little is known about how those peoples thought about or used the tree, and as a result, the tree itself has rarely been directly connected with First Nations peoples. However, in recent years, a frequent

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[245] Nancy Chapman Turner and Marcus A.M. Bell, "The Ethnobotany of the Coast Salish Indians of Vancouver Island," *Economic Botany* 25 (1971): 63-104.
[246] Nancy J. Turner, *Plants in British Columbia Indian Technology* (Victoria, BC: British Columbia Provincial Museum, 1979), 275.
[247] Nancy J. Turner, *Plant Technology of First Peoples in British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998), 214.

neighbour of Garry oak, camas (*Camassia quamash, C. leichtlinii*) has attracted attention from scholars, conservationists, and Aboriginal peoples because of its traditional relationship with local First Nations. Its proximity to Garry oak, and especially the fact that it is a conspicuous inhabitant of the landscapes known as Garry oak ecosystems, has implications for the Garry oak itself.

Camas, a member of the lily family, produces an edible, starchy bulb that was prized as food by a large number of First Nations. Its consumption is well-documented – for instance, David Douglas, who visited the Pacific Northwest in the early 19th century, remarked on the method by which it was cooked and complained of the violent flatulence which it produced in him.[248] Beckwith reports that several of Victoria's early colonists commented on the presence of camas in Victoria, whether to scorn it as a weed or note the fondness of local Aboriginal peoples for its edible roots. Either way, as Beckwith describes, the same colonists' work in converting former camas-harvesting grounds to farmland effectively ended the traditional camas harvest.[249]

The Coast Salish peoples of Vancouver Island intentionally set fires to improve conditions for growing camas – this is widely accepted and has been known since the early years of Pacific Northwest colonization.[250] Some recent work in the field of ethnoecology has pointed out two major implications of this knowledge, hitherto unnoticed or ignored. First, if Aboriginal peoples set fires to increase the yields of their camas-gathering grounds, they cannot be considered "hunter-gatherers," an epithet that

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[248] Douglas, *Journal Kept by David Douglas*.
[249] Brenda Beckwith, "'The Queen Root of this Clime': Ethnoecological Investigations of Blue Camas (*Camassia leichtlinii* (Baker) Wats., *C. quamash* (Pursh) Greene; Liliaceae) and Its Landscapes on Southern Vancouver Island, British Columbia" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Victoria, 2004).
[250] Nancy J. Turner, "Time to Burn: Traditional Use of Fire to Enhance Resource Production by Aboriginal Peoples in British Columbia," in Robert Boyd, ed., *Indians, Fire, and the Land in the Pacific Northwest* (Corvallis, OR: Oregon State University Press, 1999).

has long been attached to the Coast Salish.[251] As the allegation that British Columbia's Aboriginal people did not cultivate land played a role in removing them from the same land, this is a potent – and troubling – realization.[252]

The second implication, which is of much greater significance to this project, is that if anthropogenic fire was used to keep areas clear and open, then the Garry oak landscapes of Greater Victoria and elsewhere are partly of anthropogenic origin. If this is accepted, as the work of Beckwith and others would justify, then it makes the statements of several of Victoria's early explorers and colonists on the area's supposedly natural park-like landscape sound particularly misguided. This conflict has already been highlighted by Boyd, who illustrates it with Vancouver's remarks on the natural "well-stocked park" of "spacious meadows" and "clumps of trees" that he found on Whidbey Island, in the San Juan archipelago.[253] Many commentators on the landscape of early Victoria express surprise that the oak grassland had not been created through human labour; they would have been even more surprised if they had realized that, in fact, it *had*.[254]

Accepting that Aboriginal peoples cultivated the land to improve camas harvests, and that in doing so, they fundamentally shaped the Garry oak landscape of early Victoria, has contemporary implications as well. Most troublingly, it complicates

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[251] Douglas Deur, "Rethinking Precolonial Plant Cultivation on the Northwest Coast of America," *The Professional Geographer* 54 (2002): 140-157.
[252] Ibid.
[253] George Vancouver, *A Voyage of Discovery to the North Pacific Ocean and Round the World, 1791-1795*, vol. 2, ed. W. Kaye Lamb (London, UK: Hakluyt Society, 1984), 568, quoted in Boyd, *Indians, Fire, and the Land*, 1. This is also acknowledged in Lutz, "Preparing Eden."
[254] Recall, for instance, Douglas's remarks on finding "several acres of clover growing with a luxuriance and compactness more resembling the close sward of a well-managed lea than the produce of an uncultivated waste," and Forbes' remark that the Victoria landscape gave " the idea of a country long occupied by civilized man and covered by flocks and herds." Both authors quoted in Pemberton, "Victoria Should Conserve Her Pioneering Landmarks," 13.

attempts to protect Garry oak ecosystems by suggesting that the ecosystem is not a "natural" one, and that efforts to restore it to a supposed pre-human state might be misguided. Mainstream conservation efforts, especially federally-funded GOERT, acknowledge the role that First Nations played in shaping Garry oak ecosystems, and consider fire suppression to have been a cause of the ecosystems' disappearance.[255] Accordingly, in GOERT's 2002 Recovery Strategy document, the organization signals intentions to "establish a research and management program to address fire and stand dynamics in Garry oak and associated ecosystems," a project which would include "produc[ing] and distribut[ing] extension materials about traditional use of fire, effects of fire exclusion, and restoration options."[256] GOERT also states that "ecological management of Garry oak and associated ecosystems by local First Peoples played a key role in shaping and sustaining the ecosystems over historical time. Changes in land management regimes subsequent to European settlement have resulted in significant changes to ecosystem composition, structure, and function."[257] They express an intention to "support First Nations Traditional Ecological Knowledge research and management programs" by "establish[ing] links with First Nations," "distribut[ing] information about Garry oak and associated ecosystems and the species at risk in them," "develop[ing] restoration and management strategies that recognize traditional uses of Garry oak ecosystems," "publiciz[ing] the importance of Garry oak and associated ecosystems for the culture and economy of local First Nations and as a land base for camas harvests and

[255] GOERT, "Garry Oak Ecosystems Recovery Team: A Lifeline for our Rarest Species," brochure, 2004, available from http://www.goert.ca/documents/GOERTbroch_Jan6-2004.pdf, last accessed 22 May 2008.
[256] GOERT, "Recovery Strategy for Garry Oak," 15, 16.
[257] GOERT, "Recovery Strategy for Garry Oak," 40.

other traditional uses," and "develop[ing] strategies to ensure that the health of those consuming harvested resources is not compromised by site contamination."[258]

Nevertheless, from examining GOERT's "2001-2006 Report Card Summary" document, and the three "Annual Highlights" documents (2004-2005, 2005-2006, 2006-2007), available on their website, it appears that little progress has been made in most of the objectives pertaining to the restoration of traditional ecological management using fire or the restoration of traditional harvesting.[259] Aboriginal people receive passing mention on the final page of the proposed 2007-2008 Work Plan of the Garry Oak Ecosystems Recovery Team, under the heading "Outreach and Education." The organization intends to, "where possible, continue to work with First Nations to provide information on how to restore their lands."[260] GOERT is highly active in several other areas, but it appears that in work with First Nations the organization, for whatever reason, has made little headway.

Near the beginning of the research for this project, a colleague suggested that I contact Cheryl Bryce to talk about traditional land management in First Nations traditional territory. Bryce, who is Lands Manager for the Songhees First Nation, has received a fair amount of media and scholarly attention for her work in restoring

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[258] GOERT, "Recovery Strategy for Garry Oak," 41.
[259] GOERT, "2001-2006 Report Card Summary," unpublished report, 2006, available from http://www.goert.ca/documents/GOERT2001-06ReportCardSummary.pdf, last accessed 26 May 2008, GOERT, "Annual Highlights 2004-2005," unpublished report, 2005, available from http://www.goert.ca/documents/GOERT_AH_04-05.pdf, last accessed 26 May 2008, GOERT, "Annual Highlights 2005-2006," unpublished report, 2006, available from http://www.goert.ca/documents/GOERT_AH_05-06.pdf, last accessed 26 May 2008, GOERT, "Annual Highlights 2006-2007," unpublished report, 2007, available from http://www.goert.ca/documents/GOERT_AH_06-07.pdf, last accessed 26 May 2008.
[260] GOERT, "Proposed GOERT Work Plan 2007-2008," unpublished report, 2007, available from http://www.goert.ca/documents/GOERTWorkPlan_April07.pdf, last accessed 22 May 2008, 6.

traditional harvesting by First Nations to the Garry oak landscapes of Victoria.[261] I conducted an interview with Bryce and spoke with her about her work, and her hopes for the restoration of the area's camas landscapes.[262]

Bryce spoke to me of her hopes for restoring the camas harvest in Beacon Hill Park. Over the years that traditional harvesting has been forbidden there, blue camas (*C. quamash, C. leichtlinii*) has been joined by death-camas (*Zigadenus venenosus*), a related plant of fearsome toxicity that was traditionally removed from areas where camas was harvested. Bryce hopes to begin having the area weeded of death-camas by First Nations peoples as well as parks employees. Burning is more difficult to reinstate, of course, as prescribed fires are a tough sell to nearby residents and city officials; nevertheless, Bryce hopes to be able to reinstate fire in Beacon Hill Park as a management tool. Bryce voiced frustration with mainstream Garry oak ecosystem conservation efforts for their reluctance to use fire, as there apparently are concerns that burning might facilitate the spread of invasive species. Bryce spoke of having used fire successfully on Chatham and Discovery Islands, reserve islands situated a few kilometres off Oak Bay in Haro Strait – she told me that a first prescribed burn on Discovery Island caused a particularly lush flowering of camas the following summer.

Very little land within the Songhees First Nation's traditional territory remains viable for camas cultivation, but Bryce suggested that individual landowners had a role to play by cultivating traditional foods in their private lands. She suggested that this could

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[261] For instance, Kathryn Carlson, "Protecting our Natives," online article, 2006, available from http://www.canadiangeographic.ca/Magazine/SO06/indepth/nature.asp, last accessed May 26, 2008, Eric Higgs, *Nature by Design: People, Natural Process, and Ecological Restoration* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003).

[262] I hesitated before doing so, as the university ethics board that reviewed and approved this project was told that I would not be conducting research in Aboriginal communities. With that in mind, I did not ask Ms. Bryce to speak on behalf of her First Nation; rather, I asked her questions that she could answer in her professional capacity as Lands Manager. I recognize that this distinction might not be particularly clear-cut.

be a fair response to concerns over food security, an issue that Bryce says links Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.[263]

Bryce did not have much to say about Garry oak, except that it was an integral part of the ecosystem. Perhaps this raises a valuable point – the term "Garry oak ecosystem" makes sense if Garry oak is held to be most valuable component of the ecosystem. Viewing these landscapes as grounds for camas harvesting, for instance, transforms the meaning of the landscape substantially and places Garry oak somewhat in the background. Therefore contemporary Aboriginal attempts to restore the camas harvest might possibly be seen as a unique interpretation of what is conventionally considered an oak landscape. Certainly this, and other aspects of contemporary Aboriginal relationships with land in Victoria, are worth further investigation.

[263] Cheryl Bryce, Lands Manager, Songhees First Nation, interview by author, 13 May 2008, audio recording in author's possession.

Figure 4: Camas in bloom at Uplands Park, Oak Bay. Photograph by author.

Chapter 8: Garry oaks, Garry oak ecosystems, and conservationism

Garry oak conservation as a recent phenomenon

This chapter examines what is perhaps the Garry oak's most familiar role in modern Victoria. Garry oaks, in 21st century Victoria, are well known for the fact that they are dwindling in number. They are also well known in association with the plants and animals which are considered to have been ecologically associated with them in the years before Victoria was colonized. They have given their name to a generous handful of advocacy groups and conservation projects in the Victoria area.[264] If the Garry oak was a noble patriarch with a slight savour of old England in 1908, in 2008 it is endangered.

In the pages that follow I will examine some key themes and events in the history of the Garry oak ecosystem conservation movement. It will be seen that this movement, and the resultant identity it has given the Garry oak, is a young one, only as old as the idea of the Garry oak ecosystem. Nonetheless, it has been extraordinarily successful in that it has achieved a very high profile, reinventing the Garry oak in the image of embattled Nature.

What can perhaps be called conservationism appears early in the history of the Garry oak, but its objectives and philosophy range from localized protest over the cutting of individual trees to something resembling landscape-scale conservation of native species. Examples of the former can be seen in the above chapter on significant trees and do not need to be revisited. As for the latter, only a few examples attest to the existence

[264] It is the "GO" in GOMPS, GORP, and GOERT, for instance.

of conservationist sentiment toward Garry oaks in Victoria before the 1980s. One, already quoted, is C. C. Pemberton's 1922 article, "Victoria Should Conserve her Pioneering Landmarks," published in the *Colonist*. Pemberton's article addresses itself to a city council and public with a preference for imported vegetation on city streets, and lamented that "our efforts seem to have aimed at the destruction of the only things we excel in and the substitution at enormous cost of features to be found everywhere."[265] Though Pemberton's appeal to a sort of botanical local pride was eloquent, similar appeals were uncommon. In fact, the next published statement of interest here appeared in 1959 in the *Colonist*, written by an "F. K." The piece, titled "Extinction Threatening Garry Oaks?" sounded alarm bells:

> Victoria's own oak tree, the Garry Oak (quercus garryanna) [*sic*] is the only one native to B.C. This particular tree grows nowhere else in the world, except in a small clump at Yale and a few on Sumas Mountain. It is supposed that they were carried there by pigeons which feed on the acorns or by a past generation of Indians who used the acorns for food. *The lower part of Vancouver Island is the Garry Oak's real habitat and Victoria its home.* This tree is on its way out unless something is done about it. Where houses or buildings are being put up they are cut down and bulldozed out. Beacon Hill Park is perhaps the only place that the tree is safe, and there some of the older trees are rapidly coming to their end.[266] (emphasis mine)

What is interesting in this quotation is the explicit connection the author draws between the Garry oak and Victoria. The oak is not simply found in Victoria, it belongs in Victoria and is "Victoria's own oak tree." The final sentences of the article illustrate the value that the author ascribes to the tree: "It is well-known that the people of Victoria are tree conscious and would hate to see Victoria's own tree vanish. But a caution to those who are not aware that the Garry Oak is a real rarity, and must be preserved, is in order."[267] In

[265] Pemberton, "Victoria Should Conserve Her Pioneering Landmarks."
[266] F. K., "Extinction Threatening Garry Oaks?"
[267] Ibid.

contrast with the ecological arguments for Garry oak conservation that would come later, this argument seems to afford relative significance to the fact that Victorians are "tree conscious."

At least two groups took on landscape-scale conservation of Garry oaks before the 1980s. Both the *Times* and the *Colonist* reported in 1964 that a Major Cuthbert Holmes, chairman of the Oak Bay Ratepayers Association, had begun a campaign to save Garry oaks from destruction. The *Colonist*'s article quoted the Major as saying "I saw a beautiful, glorious oak cut down – slaughtered, butchered – today in Victoria," and vowing to push for their preservation.[268] Nothing more appeared on Major Holmes' efforts in either newspaper's pages. Three years later the *Colonist* reported on a plan by Victoria Natural History Society president G. A. Poynter to create a nursery for Garry oak seedlings and to plant them throughout Victoria. Poynter predicted that the Garry oak would last "20 or 30 years" if the rate of cutting did not slow, and speculated that "this would certainly be detrimental to the aesthetic values of the community."[269] Unfortunately, this plan also did not amount to very much – Poynter, contacted by telephone, stated that he had personally planted several dozen Garry oak seedlings, but that the nursery had never come to be.[270]

Compared to the high-profile and relatively successful conservation campaigns that have arisen in the last few decades, these few statements and efforts show little unity of purpose or philosophy. The common denominator appears to be a belief that the presence of Garry oak contributes to human life in Victoria, either through its beauty, or

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[268] "Save-Oaks Campaign Launched in Oak Bay," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, December 29, 1964, p. 2.
[269] "Oak Savers Plant Idea." *Victoria Daily Colonist*, October 14, 1966, p. 21.
[270] G. Allen Poynter, former Victoria Natural History Society president, personal communcation, February 2008, notes in author's possession.

because it somehow belongs to the place. Nonetheless, there was no movement to speak of until quite recently.

Garry oak ecosystems and citizen activism

As I reported in chapter 5, the idea of the Garry oak ecosystem as a distinct and endangered natural object appeared in the early 1980s in conservation biology. I suggested that the arrival of the Garry oak ecosystem caused a surge of academic activity that hybridized with citizen activism in an unprecedented way, blending research, politics and practice. I want to turn my attention now to that activism. The first group to use the concept of the Garry oak ecosystem was GOMPS, which formed in Victoria in 1992.

GOMPS began as a group of citizen activists concerned about the rapid disappearance of natural Garry oak ecosystems in Victoria. As Joyce Lee, a founding member of the group, explained it, GOMPS was pragmatic in their approach to advocacy for the oak meadows. The group used the term "Garry oak meadow" as opposed to "Garry oak ecosystem" because it would be more tangible to members of the public,[271] and early newspaper coverage suggests that GOMPS might have framed their objective simply as an effort to protect the trees themselves. A *Times-Colonist* article from April 1992 introduces the group soon after its founding, describing its challenge as "the plight of Western Canada's only native oak tree."[272] Other early newspaper coverage of the group focused on their efforts to collect Garry oak acorns and plant the trees around

[271] Joyce Lee, founding member of GOMPS, interview by author, 12 May 2008, transcript in author's possession.
[272] Watts, "Developers, Pests Laying Siege to Our Unique Garry Oaks."

Victoria,[273] and a newspaper bio of one of GOMPS's early members, Willie MacGillivray, dwelt on MacGillivray's "passion to protect Garry oaks."[274] A 1993 article interviewing founding member Joyce Lee lamented that "there are only two years left to save the Garry oak as a significant B.C. tree."[275] GOMPS also held a "Garry Oak Month" in February 1994, and the *Times-Colonist* reported that the group had "set out on a campaign to return the Garry oak to its rightful place as the dominant tree of southern Vancouver Island."[276]

Meanwhile, GOMPS described their mission somewhat differently in the *Victoria Naturalist*, the journal of the Victoria Natural History Society. An article by Joyce Lee began with the words "Garry oaks (*Quercus carnyana* [*sic*]), with their associated flowers, ferns, grasses, shrubs, lichens and mosses, are fast moving towards extinction. In fact, this ecosystem is the most threatened in Canada."[277] Shortly afterwards, another article by Joyce Lee in the same publication explained the goals of the new society. The first item on the list reads "preserving to the greatest extent possible the remaining Garry Oak stands and ecosystems."[278] The difference between GOMPS's self-explanations to the newspaper and the *Naturalist* are subtle but telling: to the former GOMPS stood for the oaks, and to the latter it stood for the ecosystem.

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[273] Richard Watts, "Ottawa Won't OK Acorn Project," *Victoria Times-Colonist*, September 19, 1992, p. A1, "Acorn Effort Rapidly Taking Root," *Victoria Times-Colonist*, September 26, 1992, p. B10, Patrick Murphy and Peter Salmon, "Seedlings First Step in Fight for Oaks," *Victoria Times-Colonist*, September 23, 1993.
[274] Nancy Brown, "Broad Regard for Nature Grew into a Passion to Protect Garry Oaks," *Victoria Times-Colonist*, October 19, 1992, p. A3.
[275] Patrick Murphy, "Activist: Only Two Years Left to Save Garry Oak," *Victoria Times-Colonist*, October 8, 1993.
[276] Patrick Murphy, "Garry Oak Campaign Kicks Off This Month," *Victoria Times-Colonist*, February 10, 1994.
[277] Joyce Lee, "Garry Oak Meadows," *Victoria Naturalist* 49 (1992), 17.
[278] Joyce Lee, "The Garry Oak Meadow Preservation Society," *Victoria Naturalist* 49 (1993), 7.

Nevertheless, the Garry oak ecosystem, and its close intellectual relative, the Garry oak meadow, found its way into public consciousness, and its popularity seems to have come largely from its perceived indigeneity as opposed to the introduced vegetation that inhabits large areas of Victoria. One of the first suggestions of the Garry oak ecosystem in the *Times-Colonist* is in an article describing a Victoria elementary school's efforts to re-introduce native species to an area already home to eight Garry oaks. The school planned to plant "specialty seeds such as camas, starflowers, Easter lilies and chocolate lilies," fence the area off, and leave it unmowed. Interestingly, the article reports that

> The idea was suggested by Victoria Stevens, a biologist and a parent at the school. "A Garry oak meadow is what was under the Garry oaks when the Europeans arrived. There are little remnants now in places like Beacon Hill Park which are either not mowed until the area has stopped blooming or which have just escaped development," she said.[279]

The idea of a native ecosystem that accompanied Garry oaks appeared haltingly for a few years thereafter in the *Times-Colonist*'s pages. An article reporting on the revitalization of the Oak Bay Native Plant Garden quoted horticulturalist Ron Carter as saying that the site, which featured trees including Garry oaks, and several species of native shrubs and wildflowers, is "'like a sample of everything that would be considered indigenous to Victoria.'"[280] A 1995 article described a Victoria couple's answer to mandatory water restrictions – their Blenkinsop Road property featured twenty-three Garry oaks and native understory plants such as "white fawn lilies, chocolate lilies, blue camas and shooting

[279] Judith Lavoie, "Sundance Students Leave Legacy of Garry Oak," *Victoria Times-Colonist*, April 22, 1994.
[280] Carla Wilson, "Experts Prepare to Tackle Wilds of Oak Bay Native Plant Garden," *Victoria Times-Colonist*, May 4, 1994.

stars," which are indigenous and therefore adapted to the dry conditions common in Victoria.[281]

Perhaps the strongest indications that the Garry oak ecosystem had penetrated public awareness are in spontaneous defenses of these areas by non-specialists. One such instance is found in a 1996 news article entitled "Youth Invade Highway Work Site." The article reported that "youthful environmentalists invaded an Island Highway work site just outside Victoria Wednesday, in a race to save plants in a patch of Garry oak meadow." Despite official consternation caused by the youths' failure to obtain permission to rescue the plants, "the team...removed purple camus [*sic*], white fawn lily, Oregon grape and other plants common to a Garry oak ecosystem."[282] In 1997, the newspaper reported that "members of the Garry Oak Meadow Preservation Society and other environmentalists" were objecting to the proposed development of a Costco store and housing in Langford at a site containing "some rare remnants of Garry oak meadow."[283] Despite the admonition by Langford mayor Stew Young that "'if we say we don't want trees cut down, we don't get any jobs and we'll have a community where we're all stuck on welfare,'"[284] activists intervened bodily at the proposed Costco site by chaining themselves to logging equipment when logging began in 1998. The paper reported that "Police...used bolt cutters to free the protesters who say endangered species including a Garry oak meadow are being razed to make way for the superstore at the corner of Millstream and the Trans-Canada Highway."[285]

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[281] Carla Wilson, "Natural Approach Saves Water," *Victoria Times-Colonist*, July 22, 1995.
[282] "Youth Invade Highway Work Site," *Victoria Times-Colonist*, May 9, 1996.
[283] Lavoie, Judy, "Mayor Backs Costco Store Plans Despite Worry About Meadow," *Victoria Times-Colonist*, August 7, 1997.
[284] Ibid.
[285] Bill Cleverley, "Activists Battle with Costco," *Victoria Times-Colonist*, May 20, 1998.

The idea of the Garry oak ecosystem began to have a noticeable impact in Victoria in the 1990s with the creation of new parks, additions to existing ones and alterations to developments to allow areas to remain undeveloped. One such area was at Christmas Hill in Saanich, which in 1995 was privately owned but largely undeveloped. In response to development plans by the landowner, the District of Saanich's planning department created an "area action plan" that addressed public concerns by designating areas to be acquired by the municipality and retained as park. The *Times-Colonist* reported that the proposed plan would include "the establishment of protection for significant Garry oak areas to retain the oaks and their associated ecosystems."[286] Ten years later the District of Saanich enlarged their parkland on Christmas Hill by purchasing a .73 hectare property for $1,035,000. The property, containing "numerous wildflowers and native plants and a sizeable number of Garry oaks," was chosen because it was "'considered essential to the integrity of the endangered Garry oak habitat represented on Christmas Hill,'" according to Saanich mayor Frank Leonard.[287] Christmas Hill is now part of the Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary, a suburban park owned by the District of Saanich and run by a nonprofit society.[288]

Another area at which the presence of an identifiable Garry oak ecosystem had tangible consequences was the property known as the Matson Land in Esquimalt. The land, a 2.5 hectare waterfront parcel owned by the Salvation Army, was slated to have a housing development built on it. The proposal did not sit well with some – one *Times-Colonist* correspondent wrote that "it is left to us the people to see to it that the

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[286] Jeff Bell, "Changes in Wind for Christmas Hill," *Victoria Times-Colonist*, March 1, 1995.
[287] Norman Gidney, "Saanich Enlarges Nature Park," *Victoria Times-Colonist*, September 23, 2005.
[288] Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary, "About Swan Lake," web page, n.d., available from http://www.swanlake.bc.ca/aboutus.htm, last accessed 7 August 2008.

biodiversity and the existing wildlife will be protected from a developer who wants to blast the rock for underground garages and build a six-storey highrise onto it."[289] As a result of public pressure, the developer ended up handing a large portion of the site to the Habitat Acquisition Trust (HAT), a Victoria-based conservation organization, in 2005.[290] HAT now administers the area as the Matson Conservation Area, and the organization states on its web site that it "contains Victoria harbour's last patch of rare and endangered Garry oak ecosystems."[291]

Beyond these fairly well-known and high-profile areas, the presence of Garry oak ecosystems was a factor in the creation of parkland at many other sites around Victoria.[292] As Garry oak ecosystems became increasingly familiar to an environmentally conscious public, those ecosystems that remained undeveloped were swiftly added to existing parks or put under some kind of protection if they were not built on by developers.

Garry oak ecosystems entered the public consciousness of Victoria as a long-overlooked, fragile, but indigenous and inherently virtuous landscape. At the same time, invasive species similarly came to Victoria's attention, though in a different light. One such species, Scotch broom (*Cytisus scoparius*) swiftly became seen as a major enemy of the Garry oak ecosystem. Not only did broom threaten understory plants such as camas

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[289] Carla Olmr, "A Question of Custody," *Victoria Times-Colonist*, February 13, 2000, p. B15.
[290] Jeff Bell, "Land Conservationists Wearing Party HAT," *Victoria Times-Colonist*, July 21, 2005, p. B1.
[291] Habitat Acquisition Trust, "Matson Conservation Area, Esquimalt," web page, 2008, available from http://www.hat.bc.ca/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=23&Itemid=25, last accessed 7 August 2008.
[292] Jeff Bell, "Covenant Protects Garry Oak Habitat," *Victoria Times-Colonist*, January 31, 1996, Bill Cleverley, "CRD Fund Pays Off With New Parkland," *Victoria Times-Colonist*, September 15, 2000, p. F4, Malcolm Curtis, "Mill Hill Park Adds Wildlands," *Victoria Times-Colonist*, October 11, 2001, p. B1, "Home Site to Become A Tiny Park," *Victoria Times-Colonist*, May 29, 2003, p. C2, Norman Gidney, "Covenant Builds Protection for Central Saanich Eco-Site," *Victoria Times-Colonist*, October 14, 2004, p. B2, Malcolm Curtis, "Garry Oaks Preserve to Officially Become City Parkland," *Victoria Times-Colonist*, March 11, 2005, p. B1.

and choke out Garry oak seedlings, Scotch broom came to represent a now-distasteful botanical colonialism. Proponents of the Garry oak ecosystem supported what was indigenous to it, and removed what they could of the rest. In fact, invasive species removal became an extremely popular way to interact with Garry oak ecosystems.

A 1995 *Times-Colonist* article entitled "Broom-Pull Party Aims to Restore Garry oak Glades" began with the ominous words: "Don't be deceived by the pretty yellow flowers, prolific Scotch broom is smothering native plants and shrubs."[293] The article explains that a volunteer work party made up of members of GOMPS and the Sierra Club was attempting to eradicate broom in Mount Tolmie Park. Two months later the newspaper reported that the Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary had begun using helicopters to remove large quantities of broom cut from Christmas Hill, aided by $700 in support from GOMPS.[294]

The growing movement to eradicate broom was not without its critics. A 1996 *Times-Colonist* correspondent voiced his concerns, noting that broom was more attractive than some plants it allegedly threatened:

> I cannot feel...that the broom is being eradicated on the grounds that something bad and unattractive is crowding out something good and attractive, and I can only conclude that the broom eradication program is "justified" on the grounds that the "imported" broom is crowding out "native species." This in turn implies a simple discrimination on the grounds of national origin, which is hardly a sentiment one would wish to encourage.[295]

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[293] Judith Lavoie, "Broom-Pull Party Aims to Restore Garry Oak Glades," *Victoria Times-Colonist*, January 6, 1995.
[294] "It's Up, Up, and Away for Sweep of Hay-Fever Nightmare on Hill," *Victoria Times-Colonist*, March 11, 1995.
[295] Michael Hamilton, "Killing Broom Discrimination," *Victoria Times-Colonist*, November 18, 1996.

The correspondent's plea for tolerance received a strongly-worded rebuttal nearly a year later. In response to the statement that Scotch broom "gives us a very welcome first splash of yellow color in spring,"[296] this author retorted:

> From my personal perspective, "first splash of yellow" broom represents the curse of sentimental nationalism and western ethnocentrism, since the color and fragrance of native shrubs such as Indian plum and red-flowering currant actually precede those of broom by as much as four months. While arbitrary cultural-esthetics may be at home in the garden, in natural parks they must yield to those of nature.[297]

Nature, it seemed, had no place for Scotch broom, perhaps aesthetically pleasing but far from indigenous.

A 2006 piece celebrated the volunteers in the invasive-species eradication effort, casting them as righteous opponents of an "alien invasion": "Plant invaders have overwhelmed vast areas of parkland in Greater Victoria. But hundreds of community volunteers – armed with clippers, work gloves, muscle power and perseverance – are fighting back."[298] The author of the piece benevolently forgave past wrongdoers: "How times change. Not long ago, the same foreign plants were beloved. Residents transported them here because blackberries taste good, ivy and holly are decorative and hearty and broom and gorse have beautiful yellow flowers. Early settlers didn't know that good plants in the Old Country could become bad plants elsewhere."[299]

Another piece lauded the "Boss of the Broom Bash," Girl Guide leader Margaret Lidkea, who, at the time of writing, was recovering from the "mustering of the troops for Victoria's annual standoff against the botanical terrorist movement – Scotch Broom."[300]

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[296] Ibid.
[297] Eric Redekop, "Why Native Plants Deserve Protection," *Victoria Times-Colonist*, September 13, 1997.
[298] Janis Ringuette, "Alien Invasion," *Victoria Times-Colonist*, January 8, 2006, p. D8.
[299] Ibid.
[300] Jim Gibson, "Margaret Lidkea: Boss of the Broom Bash," *Victoria Times-Colonist*, November 4, 2001.

Lidkea's Girl Guides had recently achieved local fame by removing fantastic quantities of broom from a meadow near Cattle Point in Oak Bay.

Righteous volunteers may have provided the muscle to send broom on its way, but specialist bodies such as GOERT came to exercise intellectual control over the work to a large extent by creating restoration goals and coordinating volunteer labour. GOERT's website lists several dozen sites at which restoration work is proceeding, and describes the work that has been done or is ongoing. At many sites, management plans have been created to specify the type of restoration needed. For example, at the Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary, "long-term control of broom, blackberry, ivy and daphne has been ongoing...A comprehensive habitat management plan is in progress." Other sites, though perhaps restored more informally, are still contained in GOERT's listing of restoration projects - at the Kings Road Native Plant Garden, "Garry oak habitat was restored over a period of four years by volunteers meeting once a week." Projects overseen by GOERT range from large areas – the group is involved in several projects at Beacon Hill Park – to small ones, such as the "triangular patch beside [the Royal Oak middle] school parking lot."[301]

GOERT's website also features a "Quick Guide to Restoration" as well as "The Garry Oak Gardener's Handbook," suggesting that the group's reach theoretically extends beyond listed restoration sites into private yards throughout the city. In "The Garry Oak Gardener's Handbook," the authors explain that they intend "to help people living in Garry oak areas learn how to select and grow native plants for their gardens."[302]

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[301] GOERT, "At Home and In Your Community: Restoration Projects & Places to Visit," web page, 2007, available from http://www.goert.ca/at_home_places_to_visit.php, last accessed 8 August 2008.
[302] GOERT, "At Home and In Your Community," web page, 2007, available from http://www.goert.ca/at_home_introduction.php, last accessed 8 August 2008, GOERT, "The Garry Oak

The handbook explains how to create a "Garry oak garden" on private land by reintroducing native plants. The authors are pragmatic, though, and reassure the reader that

> you don't need to remove all your favourite plants – if you can't do without lilacs or snowdrops, then by all means keep them. Even replacing a small patch of lawn with a few native shrubs or perennials can provide sources of food for birds and butterflies as well as colour for your yard, and will help in the conservation of nearby endangered Garry oak ecosystems.[303]

The threat of climate change, interestingly, appears on GOERT's web site as a potential opportunity for Garry oak ecosystems to expand in territory. Given the seeming bleakness of the present for Garry oak ecosystems, it comes off as somewhat surprising when one reads that

> in the future, Garry oak and associated ecosystems may play an increasingly important role in Canada with the current trend towards global climate change. Species in these ecosystems are well adapted to a warm climate with an extended summer drought. Douglas-fir forest in coastal British Columbia may be replaced by Garry oak and related ecosystems within the next half century if current global climate change continues. We must ensure that these species persist within the landscape so they can occupy new habitat as it becomes available.[304]

Climate change, otherwise deeply worrying, may at least provide hope for Garry oak ecosystems.

Though Garry oak ecosystems received great amounts of attention from the environmentally conscious in Victoria since the early 1990s, the trees themselves also saw their share of concern and political action. As I related in Chapter 6, most municipalities in Greater Victoria have tabled tree preservation bylaws. These bylaws, it would seem, came about as a result of public pressure, much of which came from

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Gardener's Handbook," book, 2007, available from http://www.goert.ca/documents/GOERT_Gardeners_Handbook.pdf, last accessed 17 September 2008, 1.
[303] GOERT, "The Garry Oak Gardener's Handbook," 1.
[304] GOERT, "Why are they important?"

GOMPS and other groups. A GOMPS member wrote to the *Times-Colonist* in 1997 and lamented the City of Victoria's lack of a tree protection bylaw, and asked the reader "would a treeless Victoria have as much appeal?"[305] The same writer wrote again in 1999, and noted while the City of Victoria continued to put off passing a tree protection bylaw, a neighbour had cut down two large Garry oaks adjacent to her property, and noted a dark irony in the conjunction of that fact and her own activity with GOMPS.[306]

Other correspondents to the *Times-Colonist* called for Garry oaks to be planted in Victoria instead of foreign species more conventional to city streets. One letter, written after a drought harmed city trees, stated that "we note that no Garry oaks, Victoria's distinctive local tree adapted to such droughts, were lost. That may be due to the fact that city tree planters have chosen trees for show, rather than for survival."[307] The same author wrote again in 2006, the centennial year of Saanich and Oak Bay, and suggested that "residents [of those municipalities] could avoid an "oakless" future by planting Garry oaks this fall, leaving a growing legacy for their grandchildren."[308]

An article submitted by organizers of the 1999 Garry Oak Meadow Symposium draws attention to the continuing appeal of the Garry oak itself, despite its being merely one member of a complex ecosystem, in its opening paragraph: "The majestic Garry oak, which lends its name to many Island places (Oak Bay, Royal Oak), is more than just another tree. Its gnarled limbs, broad canopy, and the meadows and rocky hilltops where it grows combine into as distinctive a landscape and habitat as any major ecosystem in

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[305] Katie Stewart, "Protect the Trees – There Are a Few Left," *Victoria Times-Colonist*, January 25, 1997.
[306] Katie Stewart, "Tree Bylaw Tardiness an Oak Tragedy," *Victoria Times-Colonist*, August 15, 1999.
[307] Michael D. Meagher, "Garry Oaks Ideal for Our Climate," *Victoria Times-Colonist*, December 3, 2002, p. A11.
[308] Michael D. Meagher, "Save Our Garry Oaks," *Victoria Times-Colonist*, February 24, 2006, p. A19.

Canada."[309] Camas and chocolate lilies might be as worthwhile to protect as Garry oaks, but the oaks remained the recognizable face of the less-tangible ecosystem.

As a final note it should be mentioned that as Garry oak ecosystem conservation picked up energy, it was not without its opponents, even if they were few in number. A letter to the editor in 2004 confessed:

> I appreciate all nature has to offer and the safeguards we should have in place for its care. However I have to admit I dislike intensely the fact that Garry oaks are lauded above all other trees in Victoria. Here is an oak which is a delight for squirrels, birds, insects and moss but its only saving grace for poor mortals is some shade.

The author went on to complain that Garry oak leaves could not be composted and expressed frustration about "that black/brown dust that comes off the tree and covers everything."[310] Another reason for which to dislike Garry oaks was the oaks' perceived propensity to drop limbs dangerously. A 2004 letter suggests that Garry oaks "have a grudge against the world" as evidenced by limbs having fallen off oaks on the Cedar Hill Golf Course.[311] A very brief 1998 letter states, with laconic sharpness, "I wonder how many Garry oaks were responsible for destruction to property and power outages in the last storm."[312] Most colourfully, in a 2008 column in which the author aired a series of grievances with the state of the world, this indictment of the Garry oak appeared:

> Second, can we all now admit that we hate that protected weed called the Garry oak? These dreadful trees grow like Scotch broom and yet are protected like the failing marmot, as if we will never see their like again. If you wish to make a hard-hearted municipal administrator cry as he would not over orphans and widows, just mention a destitute Garry oak that perhaps has not had its spring-fed drink lately and he is off in his subsidized car to the rescue. The leaves of this plague do not break down and have the consistency of leather gloves and so lie

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[309] Turner, Hebda, and Beckwith, "Slim Chance Remains for 'A Perfect Eden.'"
[310] Derek Rennie, "Garry Oaks are For the Birds," *Victoria Times-Colonist*, March 12, 2004, p. A13.
[311] Derek Rennie, "Stressed-Out Garrys Take Their Revenge," *Victoria Times-Colonist*, September 12, 2004.
[312] D. W. Gustafson, "Power Oakage," *Victoria Times-Colonist*, December 6, 1998.

> around our yards for generations. Just the other day our beetle-browed Romanian gardener found an older leaf than most that had written upon it, "Leave the women alone," signed Captain Cook.[313]

Even if all Victorians did not become defenders of the Garry oak ecosystem after it appeared in the 1980s, a great many did. The idea of the ecosystem brought Garry oaks to public attention in a way not seen before in Victoria, and made the oaks, as well as the many other species considered part of the Garry oak ecosystem, the focus of environmental activism. Garry oaks, as I stated in the introduction to this chapter, are now very strongly linked in the popular imagination to environmental crisis and the precarious existence of native species. As such, they are venerated and treated with great reserve, their care entrusted to specialists.

[313] Maj. (Ret'd) Nigel Smythe-Brown, "Of Floating Feet, Garry Oaks, and Other Plagues," *Victoria Times-Colonist*, July 6, 2008, p. C5.

Chapter 9: Summary and discussion

A partial summary

In the previous five chapters I worked from a variety of primary sources in order to answer the question of how people in Victoria have known Garry oaks over the past 165 years. I stated at the outset that the answer to that question would necessarily be incomplete, as this project is the first to approach this subject. I have decided, therefore, to frame this final chapter as a summary and discussion rather than a conclusion. In it I will present a partial summary of my results, identifying three themes I believe to be significant and worth further contemplation. I will then frame a discussion of these results around a question I asked in this thesis's introductory chapter: how can knowing about how people have known Garry oaks help to explain why the oaks are threatened in Victoria? The initial task in this chapter, though, is the summary.

The first theme, of great importance to this thesis, is that many people in Victoria have found Garry oaks to be important and to have value, and that this has been the case since the city's origin. At first hearing, this might sound like a great platitude – people have found Garry oaks important – so, certainly, have they found Douglas firs and black raspberries and the Empress Hotel important! But I believe, nonetheless, that it is a key point, for reasons I will explain momentarily. Before I do that, though, a review of some evidence for this first theme might be in order.

First, people in Victoria have used Garry oaks in naming places. Within Greater Victoria there is a District of Oak Bay, a Saanich neighbourhood called Royal Oak, and a Victoria neighbourhood called Oaklands. Common sense suggests that these places

would have been named differently had oaks not caught the attention and the imagination of the namers.

Similarly, but more subtly, there is the fact that Garry oaks have given their name to that celebrated rarity, the Garry oak ecosystem. This is something that seems at first to be inevitable – of course it is a Garry oak ecosystem, it is an ecosystem with *Garry oaks* in it! – until one considers that ecology may draw our attention to the interconnections between species, rather than towards the importance of one particular species over another.[314] Garry oaks grow in Garry oak ecosystems, but so does camas – why, then, do we not celebrate and defend Victoria's camas ecosystems? Work addressing the ethnoecology of the Coast Salish peoples who inhabited southern Vancouver Island before it was colonized suggests that camas was considerably more economically important than Garry oak. Nevertheless, we know the complex ecosystem by the large trees that inhabit it, not the showy camas plants that paint it brilliant purple in springtime. This suggests, once again, that Garry oaks have drawn the attention of enough people in Victoria to make the term "Garry oak ecosystem" legible.

The most powerful demonstration of this theme, though, is in the fact that many Victorians have defended Garry oaks, politically and bodily, when Garry oaks faced one threat or another. This has taken place on both a local scale, as when individual trees are threatened with cutting, and a much broader scale, as when Garry oak ecosystems are threatened with extinction. Not only have people in Victoria honoured Garry oaks by

[314] I was reminded of this point when interviewing Carolyn MacDonald, Chair of GORP. I asked Ms. MacDonald what she thought the "role and value" of a Garry oak in a Garry oak ecosystem was. She responded: "Well, I've never really thought about it that way…I've never really pulled a Garry oak out and thought about it individually." I suspect that, in her understanding of ecological science, my question was invalid. Carolyn MacDonald, Chair, GORP, interview by author, 13 September 2007, audio recording in author's possession.

naming their neighbourhoods after them, many have intervened to protect the oaks from destruction.

There are two reasons why I consider this theme worth mentioning first. One reason is that it validates and encourages research – the research already done, and any that should follow – into Victoria's Garry oak cultures, because it reassures us that those cultures are there. The second reason is that it seems to set up a paradox. Many people seem to value Garry oak, and that value, in some ways, is acknowledged in mainstream discourse. Yet Garry oaks continue to be cut down and young oaks are hard to find. This raises the question: why has this experience of value, that many people in Victoria appear to recognize, not resulted in a bright future for the tree?

The second theme is that narratives of identity have been written into Victoria's Garry oaks in vastly divergent ways. On one hand, the oaks inherited much of their significance from British oaks thousands of miles away. This pertained especially during the early years of colonialism, when explicit comparisons between Victoria's landscape and picturesque English scenery were common, and Garry oaks were an important perceived similarity. Furthermore, Garry oaks were commonly believed to actually be British oaks, imported by some explorer, through the early 20th century, and this belief might persist to some extent even nowadays. Garry oaks have also proved to be somewhat popular as memorial trees, a function British oaks carry out in extraordinary numbers in Britain. Finally, evidence for the continuing Britishness of the Garry oak might also come from the fact that, as I stated above, it has been noticed and appreciated and considered important by those who live in Victoria. Garry oak ecosystems, say,

might well bear that name because they were named in a settler culture that inherited a veneration for oaks over other plants. So might Oak Bay.

But, on the other hand, Garry oaks have been celebrated as *native* trees for many years. This can be seen as early as 1922, when C. C. Pemberton published the polemic "Victoria Should Conserve Her Pioneering Landmarks," in which he blasted Victoria's city council for neglecting to protect "native oaks, maples, arbutus, etc."[315] Enthusiasm for oak as a native species (and a corresponding backlash against introduced ones) has run to a much higher pitch in the last decade, with work parties assembling in great numbers to remove Scotch broom and other unwanted plants from parks and other natural areas. Though some have protested that Scotch broom is beautiful and worthy of protection, the popularity of broom-pulling seems to attest to the existence in Victoria of what Ginn calls eco-nationalism.[316]

The third theme to which I want to draw attention is that scientific discourse appears to have become a much more popular way of discussing Garry oaks in the last few decades than it had been before. That being said, science has offered a language with which to speak about Garry oaks for as long as Victoria has been around. Victoria's oak trees have been identifiable as *Quercus garryana* since the species was published in 1840. Science, though, did not always have much to say about the oaks beyond the empirical descriptions that appeared in floras. Victoria's Garry oaks appeared only sporadically in other scientific literature for most of the 20th century. The oaks did enjoy a brief prominence in the work of C. C. Pemberton, who strove to understand the peculiarities he found in the growth patterns of individual trees throughout Victoria. This

[315] Pemberton, "Victoria Should Conserve Her Pioneering Landmarks."
[316] Ginn, "Extension, Subversion, Containment."

work is perhaps most interesting in that Pemberton's scientific interest in the oaks seems to have been strongly related to a sense of civic pride – Garry oaks enriched Victoria by being objects of scientific curiosity. This blend of scientific sensibility and civic pride seems to have been echoed by "F. K.," who warned *Colonist* readers in 1959 that "Victoria's own oak tree" was on its way to extinction.[317] Nonetheless, Garry oaks attracted little sustained scientific attention until the last two decades of the twentieth century, when the concept of the Garry oak ecosystem gained currency amongst scientists and the public.

The conjunction of growing public concern over the imperiled state of the biosphere with the sudden availability of the Garry oak ecosystem concept enabled a citizen activism to emerge in the 1990s. The rhetoric of this movement drew explicitly on ecological concepts to achieve its goals. It framed Garry oak ecosystem conservation as a matter of maintaining ecological integrity and allowing endangered species to continue to exist, rather than, say, a matter of preserving a beautiful landscape or maintaining a culturally significant one, though these arguments were used as supports to the ecological argument. Garry oak ecosystem conservation, I suggest, framed landscapes with Garry oaks in them as small urban wildernesses, areas belonging to nature, which science had the capacity to properly explain.

The plight of the Garry oak

Garry oaks, as stated before, are in considerable trouble in Victoria. The trees are abundant throughout the area, but young Garry oaks are uncommon. The existing population of Garry oak trees is being replaced insufficiently to ensure the future

[317] F. K., "Extinction Threatening Garry Oaks?"

abundance of the trees. Furthermore, the oak meadow landscape – or, in a different interpretation, the Garry oak ecosystem – once common in the Victoria area is rapidly disappearing.

Asking why this is the case produces familiar answers. GOERT's website lists three "main threats to Garry oak ecosystems" – these are land development, fire suppression, and the introduction of invasive species.[318] A 1993 brochure from the British Columbia government on Garry oak ecosystems lists the same three threats.[319] A 1959 *Colonist* article entitled "Extinction Threatening Garry Oaks?" blamed land development for the decline in Garry oaks.[320] C. C. Pemberton's 1922 article "Victoria Should Conserve Her Pioneering Landmarks" blamed the city council's preference for "artificial topiarism, commonplace grass lawns and boulevards, etc."[321] These are credible explanations, I believe – or, rather, I have no reason to dispute the claim that Garry oaks have been knocked down in great numbers to make way for housing. I believe that a critical question remains, though: given that many people in Victoria find Garry oaks to be valuable in one way or another, why do the factors that threaten the trees persist?

Considering how people in Victoria have known Garry oaks may help us in the search for an answer. Based on the foregoing summary I would like to propose some ways in which people's experiences of value in Victoria's Garry oaks may be seen to be problematic or insufficient to ensure the oaks' persistence. In earlier chapters of this

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[318] GOERT, "About Garry Oak Ecosystems: Why Are They Disappearing?" web site, 2007, available from http://www.goert.ca/about_GOE_threats.php, last accessed August 13, 2008.
[319] Wayne Erickson, *Garry Oak Ecosystems*, Ecosystems in British Columbia at Risk (Victoria, BC: Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks, 1993).
[320] F. K., "Extinction Threatening Garry Oaks?"
[321] Pemberton, "Victoria Should Preserve Her Pioneering Landmarks."

thesis, I suggested that studying how people have known a native tree can help us to understand how the same people negotiate connections and a sense of belonging to place. I contend, now, that these problem areas might work against such connections by making it difficult for people in Victoria to sustain an empathetic, emplaced relationship with the Garry oak.

Evernden has argued that environmentalism routinely fails to achieve its goals because it cannot credibly argue on behalf of the immaterial. That is, the environmentalist according to Evernden is "one who experiences a sense of value in nature and is moved to assert the reality of his experience to others."[322] The problem stems from the fact that the others to whom the environmentalist asserts the reality of her experience do not accept the experience as real because it cannot be objectively verified. The environmentalist's experience is understood to be subjective and therefore less real than one that can be empirically measured.

The Garry oak, as I argue above, has had value for many people in Victoria. However, it has mostly had *immaterial* value for them. Though Garry oak wood can be used in boatbuilding, few people practice this craft, and the wood is very difficult to acquire. Garry oak acorns can be eaten, but they are unpalatable and their preparation is time-consuming. If Garry oaks were a desirable source of food or building material, it is quite possible that very different relationships between them and people might exist. Demonstrating the value of Garry oak trees, at least, would likely be an easier task. As it stands, those who have tried to protect the Garry oak from destruction have had to confront the fact that mainstream society in Victoria seems to consider the economic gain

[322] Evernden, *The Natural Alien*, 4.

from a housing development to be more real than the value of a stand of Garry oaks. The hypothetical former can be quantified; the latter, often, cannot.

Conservation biology, however, *has* been able to objectively demonstrate that Garry oaks are valuable. It has done this by drawing attention to an identifiable object known as the Garry oak ecosystem and showing it to have considerable value for the endangered species that depend upon it. Almost as an aside, Garry oak ecosystem conservationists have suggested that Garry oak ecosystems are beautiful and culturally significant – but the main argument for preserving them rests on an ecological foundation that gives an ambiguous value, at best, to the role of humans in the ecosystem. And, to judge from tangible results such as the fact that new parks have been created, restoration projects begun, and that the Garry oak ecosystem is widely recognized by the public in Victoria, the argument has proven very successful. Whereas efforts to protect individual Garry oaks were inconsistent and piecemeal, efforts to preserve sections of the Garry oak ecosystem containing Garry oak trees have made concrete gains.

But are bounded, preserved Garry oak ecosystems a sign of the success of environmentalism here? With Evernden's arguments in mind, I suggest that these are only a partial victory. Garry oak ecosystems have been preserved because they are ecologically important – that is, they have demonstrable value that can be compared favourably against the potential value of a competing land use. The cultural importance of the Garry oak ecosystem has been used only as a side benefit to the real (ecological) gains of ecosystem conservation. There are two significant problems with this situation. The first is that, as Evernden suggests, conservation gains made this way can only survive as long as it can be shown that the value of environmental conservation is greater than the

value of a competing use – say, of a new parking lot. The second, and more crucial problem, I believe, is that to designate and delineate Garry oak ecosystems is to write humans out of the picture. Pure Garry oak ecosystems, as commonly understood, are not held to have room for modern, technological humans. The places where Garry oak ecosystems can be found must be managed by specialists and held apart from the masses, who must enter only as visitors.

This is not at all to suggest that it is a bad idea to preserve areas where Garry oaks and other rare species grow. I would venture to say, rather, that it is an extremely good thing and that it ought to continue as long as these areas are threatened with destruction. The problem that remains is the idea that the resulting areas are there exclusively for the good of the non-humans contained within, and that the role of humans in these areas is to visit, perhaps to learn, and certainly to leave. This is all very well except that it reinforces the idea that nature is a collection of objects external to humanity, and that the worlds of Garry oaks and humans are to be kept fundamentally apart.

Then again, it should be noted that not all aspects of Garry oak ecosystem conservation involve discouraging human involvement in the ecosystems. Notably, GOERT's "The Garry Oak Gardener's Handbook" suggests ways that gardeners can cultivate Garry oaks and native species in their own yards. Broom pulling, as well, seems to have provided a way for people to legitimately enter and interact with Garry oak ecosystems. Future researchers might do well to explore cultures of native species gardening and invasive species management in Victoria – perhaps this is where something like Casey's "thickening" might be found. I am inclined to doubt, however,

that they counterbalance the separationist tendencies of mainstream Garry oak ecosystem discourse.

Another type of value that people have identified in the Garry oak is its involvement in discourses of identity. Many people have compared Garry oaks, implicitly or explicitly, to British oaks. Narratives of various sorts of Britishness, whether the aesthetic of the English country landscape or the mythic qualities of the "heart of oak," have been inscribed in Garry oaks since Victoria was first settled by colonists. It is quite possible that this has enabled many people to experience a sense of belonging to Victoria through the familiarity of the Garry oak. But at the same time, Garry oaks are a native species. They are – at least biologically speaking – fundamentally distinct from *Quercus robur* of Europe. This colours these narratives of Britishness with a deep ambiguity.

Correspondingly, Garry oak is celebrated for its nativeness, especially within the culture of the Garry oak ecosystem. Garry oak, as a native species, stands in opposition to exotic invaders such as the widely despised Scotch broom. But taking this position can lead to the difficult realization that, by the same logic, most of Victoria's citizens are *also* invasive. This seems to have been dealt with by framing the problem ecologically and creating Garry oak preserves where human interference is discouraged. As I have already suggested, though, such action fails to deal with a deeper, implied question: how can humans, settler and Aboriginal, co-exist with Garry oaks in Victoria?

Another dimension of nativist Garry oak discourse that is potentially troubling is that, as Ginn argues, fervent enthusiasm for native species – what Ginn calls eco-nationalism – can draw attention away from the lasting human inequalities brought on by colonialism. Eco-nationalism, his argument suggests, sanitizes and obscures the legacy of

colonialism that must be critically – and carefully – dealt with before any reconciliation between settler and Aboriginal groups can occur.

Garry oak cultures in Victoria are informed by an array of divergent narratives that can contradict each other as well as themselves. The knowledges that emplace humans amongst the Garry oaks are complex and shared unevenly. This ought to come as no surprise, given that "the identities of place are always unfixed, contested and multiple."[323] Yet there are problems. The plight of the Garry oak continues; the deep thickening of nature and society, human and non-human, to which Casey points remains obscure, at least in this analysis of mainstream Garry oak discourses. The problem may well be that those discourses do not do enough to help people understand the potential depth of their relationship to the Garry oaks.

It is well beyond the scope of my project to concoct a remedial narrative. How people in Victoria, in all their diversity, could overcome the limitations of scientific knowing and the seldom acknowledged but continuing presence of colonialism to relate more successfully with nature is a worthy question, but much too vast to answer here. What I choose to do instead, by way of conclusion, is quote a passage from Cronon's "The Trouble with Wilderness" that speaks of reconciliation to a tree through recognition of its otherness. It does not tell us how the Garry oak might be rescued from its predicament, but it gives an idea of why, perhaps, it ought to be:

> The tree in the garden is in reality no less other, no less worthy of our wonder and respect, than the tree in an ancient forest that has never known an ax or a saw – even though the tree in the forest reflects a more intricate web of ecological relationships. The tree in the garden could easily have sprung from the same seed as the tree in the forest, and we can claim only its location and perhaps its form as our own. Both trees stand apart from us; both share our common world.[324]

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[323] Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, 7.
[324] Cronon, "The Trouble With Wilderness," 24.

Humans and Garry oaks share a common world in Victoria, and people there have the opportunity to recognize this and be richer for it.

Figure 5: A Garry oak on Beach Avenue, Oak Bay. Photograph by author.

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