Chapter Thirteen: Treasure Island and Tree Conservation

Whole Island a Mine of Wealth

In order to exploit and promote Vancouver Island, the Board of Trade set up a special Development Committee and Will was invited to speak at their first meeting because, *The Colonist* tells us, he ***"probably knows more about the Island than any man living."*** According to Will, Vancouver Island,

> ***was so rich in resources as to warrant the most serious combined effort on the part of both the Dominion and Provincial government, to open up to the prospector, the settler and the capitalist the untold wealth in natural resources lying within its borders.*** [i]

He anticipated a boom in the timber industry, once America had lifted its duty on timber, and with regard to minerals, having spent years studying and prospecting the Island, he had ***"no hesitation in saying that it would well repay government effort to take up seriously the question of arriving at some comprehensive knowledge of actualities in the matter."*** In other words, a geological survey and map. He added, however, it was ***"the most difficult country in the world to explore."*** Albeit a preliminary to the general Board of Trade committee meeting, the chair thanked Will and assured him his recommendations would receive every consideration.

Vancouver Island Development League

In fact, Will's recommendations were agreed by the Board of Trade who also decided to form an Island Association ***"representing all the business communities throughout the Island."*** Public meetings appointed delegates who met in

Victoria and the Vancouver Island Development League was launched with Will giving the first address.

A year later, in 1910, the League published *Vancouver Island, British Columbia, Canada, The Treasure Island*, with the clear purpose of promotion. Its introduction tells us Vancouver Island is ranked foremost amongst the frontiers of Great Britain, being the richest part of the North American Continent with both the variety and extent of its natural resources. Each chapter describes the various districts and their resources with photographs. It seems likely Will would have played a major role in its compilation and possibly wrote some of the chapters.[ii]

Part of frontispiece for Vancouver Island, British Columbia, Canada, The Treasure Island, public domain

Will was elected first vice-president of the Victoria branch of the League in 1911 (and again the following year). The League's achievements were celebrated at their annual meeting in March 1911, attended by Premier McBride. Their promotion campaign was clearly working as secretary, Mr. E. McGaffey, reported,

> ***The personal interviews at his office had continued to increase both in numbers and importance, and it was a significant fact that of the inquiries 97% were from British people. No part of the world appealed so much to the Anglo-Saxon as Canada and of Canada no part as much as this province and this island especially. The inquiries came from all parts of the globe wherever the Englishman had wandered by land and sea, at the rate of twenty-four per day … the effects of advertising was cumulative and would be felt for years to come.***[iii]

Natural History Society

The Natural History Society of British Columbia was established in Victoria in 1890. Will joined the Society on his return to Victoria and the meeting in January 1891 was held at his house where he showed off his vast collection of rocks, minerals and fossils and gave a practical talk on the geological structure of Vancouver Island; he explained,

> ***how the exact composition of any rock can be obtained by taking a small portion and grinding it upon a revolving flat surface until it becomes transparent. This is mounted on glass, when it can be minutely analyzed under a powerful microscope.***

The president, Dr. Newcombe, gave Will ***"a hearty vote of thanks for his valuable address, and the hospitality extended to the society."***[iv]

Will was elected president of the Society in 1912 and, along with other members, campaigned for the establishment of a permanent building where the Society could meet which would also form the basis of a museum – he was even willing to donate his geological collection; sadly this never materialised.

In April 1914 the proposed speaker for the Society was unable to attend, so Will stood in and gave a paper, "Nootka Unchanged From Early Days." This was to be the last paper Will presented at the Society before his untimely death the following month.

He talked about features of the west coast of Vancouver Island, describing the scrub covered country to the north of Quatsino Sound and traced the coast line down by Clayoquot, Nootka and Ucluelet to Barclay Sound, describing vividly the growth of sallal, no doubt retelling the story of how he had to roll on top of it to get to Lost Shoe Creek.[v] He said the West coast ***"had been submerged by the sea to a depth of 600 feet, which accounted for the great depth of its various sounds ranging from 100 fathoms up to 150 in Nootka harbour."*** He praised the settlers from the area, saying that whilst the ***"west coast soil was of a sandy nature, the climatic conditions enabled excellent crops to be grown equal to those from the loam of the other side of the Island."***

Speaking about the cedar tree and how it was seen at its best on limestone at Clayoquot, Will said,

> ***…specimens might be seen 2,000 years old, 50 feet in circumference and running up 200' without a branch. One tree he had in mind should furnish 100,000 shingles and be worth $200. The cedar would grow well on bare limestone rock without any soil at all.***

Will suggested the area around Clayoquot Sound and Nootka, remained ***"practically as the Spaniards and Captain Cook found it centuries ago, precipitous hillsides run down sheer into the water, with few landing places and the trees leaning out over the water."***[vi]

It is clear Will loved the West coast of Vancouver Island where he had once lived, owned a saw mill, held large tracts of timber land and, ultimately, where he died.

Seismology

Will Sutton was interested in most branches of natural science including seismology which is not surprising given his background in geology. He was introduced to the latest equipment for measuring earthquakes at a meeting of the Natural History Society in April 1908 by Mr. F. Napier Denison,[vii] a friend and collaborator who would be one of the pallbearers at Will's funeral.

Will's membership of the Natural History Society, Vancouver Island Development League and the Board of Trade often put him in a position where he could promote ideas, as we have already found with regard to provincial parks, timber conservation and transport systems. His interest in seismology was no different. At a meeting of the Board of Trade in October 1912, Will brought up the question of a seismological station or observatory at Victoria. He pointed out,

> ***it had been demonstrated time and again that Victoria was peculiarly well situated for the recording of earthquakes and tremors. He did not ask the government representative to promise them a first class observatory but he thought that in view of the extremely valuable***

information that could be obtained here at a nominal expense it was but right that something should be done to encourage the work. What was wanted was more and better accommodation for the officer in charge of the work and more suitable locations for the instruments.[viii]

Will had already brought the issue to the attention of the dominion government at a meeting of the Canadian Mining Institute the month before:

Vancouver Island is in the seismic zone of the Pacific Coast, and it is well known that earth movements have been frequent here in recent geologic times. Hence the opportunities were particularly favourable for the conduct of investigations of this character. We have extensive coal mines on the island, and it certainly appears that there is a sympathetic relationship between earth strains and the outbursts of large volumes of gas. For this reason I consider it highly important that the Government should establish a well-equipped seismological station on this coast.

In 1916 a new Meteorological Station was built at Gonzales Heights, Victoria and the seismograph was moved to a pier in the basement of the Dominion Astrophysical Observatory.[ix] Will's friend, F. Napier Denison played a large part in designing the new station and became its Director.

Provincial Park

Moves were afoot in the early 20th century to establish a provincial park on Vancouver Island. Will was interviewed by *The Colonist* in April 1910 when he said,

Cameron Lake, in his opinion, was the country best adapted for reservation as a park. Of course, there were

others more or less suitable, but none that would be immediately accessible.

Members of the Natural History Society sent a resolution to the Vancouver Island Development League (remember, Will was a member of both), saying they were concerned about the rapid loss of their ***"noble forest probably unequalled in magnificence and extent"*** as a result of the ***"insatiable lumberman."*** They asked the League for help in lobbying the government to acquire land for a forest reservation and game sanctuary at Cameron Lake. The area had a ***"magnificent primeval forest"*** and access by wagon and the new railroad.

However, the Victoria Lumbering and Manufacturing Company owned or leased much of the land around Cameron Lake and government decided it would cost too much to acquire. For many years the public lobbied the provincial government to acquire Cathedral Grove. Public pressure eventually won as in 1944 forester H.R. MacMillan, who had acquired the land, was forced to donate 136 hectares in recognition of the unique stand of trees; it became the MacMillan Provincial Park three years later.[x] Cathedral Grove is one of the best accessible stands of giant Douglas fir trees on the Island. It is ironic that MacMillan wanted to cut the trees and yet history credits him with generously donating the area.[xi]

Strathcona Park

The provincial government looked further north for a park. Although Will agreed an area of ten or twenty miles around Central Lake and running to Buttle Lake was acceptable the main problem was that much of the timber in that area had been staked (why Will did not point this out as a problem with Cameron Lake is a mystery unless it was because of his

connection with E & N Railway who owned part of the area near Buttle Lake).

Utilising his membership of the various organisations, knowledge of Vancouver Island and, no doubt, as an employee of E & N, Will wrote to the Premier suggesting that the province buy the northern end of Buttle Lake from E & N as it had little commercial use to the company, it being rugged and mountainous. The area was described in the local paper:

> ***Buttles lake is rated the largest fresh water body within Vancouver island, and is especially distinguished for the magnificence and the variety of its scenic delights, mountains – perpetually snow-crowned – rising from its dense blue waters to a height of from seven to eight thousand feet, while charming waterfalls, majestic glaciers and fairy-like islands afford alluring contrasts.***

Photograph from Will's album if can get funding for it.[xii]

The Strathcona Park Act was passed on 1st March 1911.[xiii] Strathcona Park was the first and largest provincial park in British Columbia. It is a rugged mountain wilderness of more than 250,000 hectares. To this day it attracts mountain climbers, canoeists, kayakers and hikers, with a large network of trails.

Forest Conservation

Will Sutton's concern for the forests of Vancouver Island extended beyond his promotion of provincial parks: he was one of the first to recommend tree conservation. Will had vast knowledge about the types of trees, where they grew and the lumbering business; after all, he had been involved in the industry since he was eighteen.[xiv] It was because of his

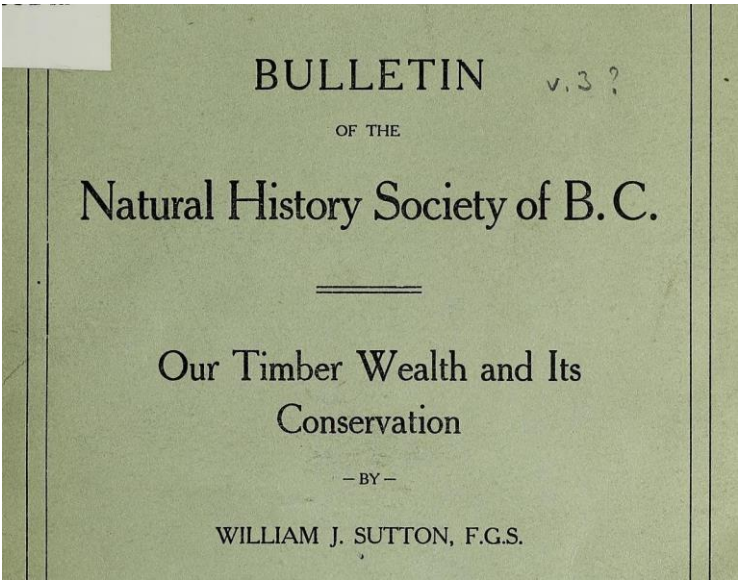
knowledge, and his growing influence, that Will was invited to give evidence to several commissions set up by the provincial government to investigate timber lands.

Assessment Act Commission, 1905

Will was called as a witness by the commission enquiring into tax assessment on 'wild lands' and timber in 1905. He clearly had strong views on the subject. He argued that lands were not properly assessed as there were different types of wild land but all were assessed the same. There was first and second class land with regard to timber, agriculture, mineral and coal. Most were charged at $2-$5 an acre whereas the first class land should be charged at a much higher rate. All were subject to a taxation of 5%. This caused hardship in many cases as the holder of second class land had to pay the same as those who held first class land. He thought the Government should sell lands freely at $5 an acre but that this should be subjected to tax dependent on the quality of the land. It looks like Will's suggestion was accepted because as a result of the hearing the commissioner's recommended coal and timber lands be classed separately to wild land, the rate of taxation being significantly higher on the former and reduced to 3% on the latter.[xv]

Our Timber Wealth and its Conservation

Will married his scientific brain with his experience and knowledge of trees in British Columbia, which resulted in the booklet, *Our Timber Wealth and its Conservation*, the purpose of which was ***"to present a general survey of the forest trees of the Province of British Columbia and call attention to the vital questions of conservation and reforestation."***


BULLETIN v.3 ?

OF THE

Natural History Society of B.C.

Our Timber Wealth and Its Conservation

— BY —

WILLIAM J. SUTTON, F.G.S.

The booklet was presented to the Natural History Society in January 1910. Interest was so extensive the meeting had to be held in the large lecture theatre at the Carnegie Library, which was nearly full. Will would use magic lantern slides to illustrate his talks and it seems likely he would have used them to project images of the different trees he described. An overview of the talk was printed in *The Colonist* the following day and the Society published his paper in full. One thousand copies were made, Will paying half of the cost.[xvi] The booklet was sent to the Smithsonian in Washington by the Legislative Assembly library (and, no doubt, to other academic institutions).

Will starts off by listing the principle forest trees of commercial value, of which there are eighteen species. He then goes on to describe each species, with the Douglas Fir

being most prominent. This is what he says about the Western Red Cedar (Thuja plicata):

This is the large cedar of the coast region, reaching a maximum of about 20 feet in diameter. I have measured several around 50 feet in circumference four feet from the ground, although, of course, these are exceptionally large, and are invariably heart-rotten and hoary with age.

The best timber runs about four to six feet in diameter, and about 120 feet in height.

This cedar, like the Douglas fir, is specially indigenous to the north-west portion of North America, and reaches its maximum size and best development in the extra humid regions of the Pacific slope.

It will stand an immense amount of atmospheric moisture, but does not favour very soggy ground for its roots. It thrives best where limestone is the underlying country rock. I have seen immense trees growing on bare limestone with the roots ramifying the fissures.

The wood is of great commercial value, on account of its lightness and durability under all sorts of exposure.

It is not uncommon to find a tree five feet in diameter growing over a fallen cedar which is still only sap-rotten, although lying on the ground for two or three centuries.

The Red cedar is an extremely long-lived tree. Trees three feet in diameter are about 200 years old, and the largest trees take about 1,000 years to reach maturity, and may remain standing in a state of decadence for several hundred years more. Woodman, spare that tree!

The Red cedar grows all over the Pacific coast region of British Columbia. It is to be found scattered amongst the Douglas fir forest, seeking out the wetter spots. It also covers those areas of the country too wet for the Douglas fir. It is the dominant tree on the west and northern coast of Vancouver Island – I may specially mention, Barkley, Clayoquot and Quatsino Sounds.

It extends over the islands and northwest coast of the mainland to the northern boundary of British Columbia.

It is the prevailing tree on the Queen Charlotte Islands.

A large quantity of fine cedar at one time grew on the shores of Burrard's Inlet and Howe Sound, but is now almost depleted.

Narrow belts of Red cedar occur along river valleys in the interior of British Columbia, such as on the Columbia, Kootenay and North Thompson rivers, but it only reaches a moderate size and is inclined to be hollow-butted and knotty.

Red cedar has a strong tendency to become scrubby where the conditions are not favorable. The old trees make the best merchantable lumber. It is a prolific seeder, and takes root readily on moist ground; but not so well over ground covered by forest fires.

After describing the different trees Will identifies his concerns about forestry. He argues that timber resources in British Columbia are comparatively limited: Vancouver Island is ***"well-clothed"*** but the rest of the Province is not. When issues such as fire destruction, scrubby timber and inaccessible timber are taken into consideration the timber

resources are comparatively limited. Consumption of timber was growing significantly, more had been consumed in the past 50 years than all preceding centuries and was still growing:

> ***It is now a well known fact that the world's supply of timber is becoming far too inadequate to meet the present day demands upon it, and that a timber famine is near at hand.***
>
> ***British Columbia has a very valuable inheritance in her forest wealth, and it behoves us to take more thought for the morrow, and exercise more care and foresight in the management of her timber domain than has been in evidence in the past.***

Will then looks at Provincial legislation on timber and concludes: "***The method may simply be described in a word, 'frenzied finance,' or discounting our timber assets at the speculator's bank, by a small payment down with future delivery. In the end, the poor consumer must pay the piper."***

He is strongly opposed to the use of fire to clear land as, he argued, it ruins and destroys the soil as well as timber. He argued for forest reserves to be set up as happens elsewhere in the world with a programme of reforestation being pursued to cultivate the best forest trees.

Will recommended the Province set up a bureau of forestry to ***"supervise all matters relating to our forests,"*** for scientific management and reforestation of good timber and listed 19 areas for research.[xvii] He concludes,

> ***… the public mind [should] be educated to realize that the forest is not a thing to be wantonly destroyed, but that it is***

one of nature's best gifts to mankind. What would this world be like if it were destitute of tree life?

Fulton Royal Commission on Timber and Forestry

In May 1910 Will represented the Natural History Society at the Fulton Royal Commission on Timber and Forestry at which he presented *Our Timber and its Conservation*. J.R. Anderson, Deputy Minister of Agriculture, protested that Will's report was ***"an individual expression."*** He disagreed with Will's assessment of reforestation issues and argued that his experience ***"during the last 50 years in the forests of Oregon, Washington and British Columbia convinced him that the proper regulation of logging operations and the subjugation of fines entirely met the question."***

According to David Brownstein, who examines the issue in his doctorate,[xviii] Anderson's observations were out of date. Brownstein further points out Will was the only person at the hearing who appreciated the extent of the problems facing forests in British Columbia. Other witnesses talked about tenure and fire protection but Will was the only one to talk about regeneration. As in his booklet, Will challenged the view that British Columbia had vast quantities of timber and suggested resources were limited; he repeated his call for stronger controls over logging, the creation of forest preserves and a programme of reforestation introduced. He outlined the soil and climatic conditions needed for good growth and described the geographic range of the trees, identifying their most common companions. Brownstein says, ***"Perhaps more important though, was his inclusion of life-history sketches which comprised information on speed of growth, maximum size, life expectancies, and common stand density."*** Brownstein says several of Will's proposals were taken up by the Provincial Government but, added, ***"without the detailed rationale."***[xix]

The Colonist tells us at the same hearing Will strongly protested against lifting the embargo on the export of rough cedar to America. In Will's opinion, the exhaustion of their own cedar supply meant the cedar mills of Washington would turn to British Columbia and to lift the embargo would put back the initiative of British Columbia manufacture.

He stressed the forestry resources of British Columbia were in a transition stage and each year timber was retained added to its value; it was ***"daily becoming a more valuable resource as the general timber famine throughout the United States made itself felt."***[xx]

The Fulton Commission made 21 proposals which were incorporated in the first Forest Act. As a result of the Act the new Forest Branch was set up and, in 1912, H.R. MacMillan was appointed the first chief forester. The B.C. Forest Service was severely affected by World War One with staff enlisting and funding being diverted to the war effort, consequently research by the Branch was delayed until 1921. Many years passed before any progress was made on the 19 research areas Will recommended back in 1910.

Forestry and Conservation Convention, Vancouver, 1914
The last time Will spoke about forest conservation was at the Forestry and Conservation Convention in Vancouver in January 1914. He said:

> ***I am a lumberman by inheritance, rather than by choice or profession. My father was a lumberman and I inherited his interest. I am interested very much in the lumber business. I think that one subject has not been touched on in this connection, and that is the question of holding rights of timber in this country.***

The timber man in British Columbia does not own the timber. He has only got a rental of it. This is a serious feature in connection with conservation. I know in regard to my own interests, I hold the fee simple — a Crown grant. That is my very own. But any other timber that I have I consider that I have simply rented, the same as a man rents a house. I wish you outsiders to understand our situation — that the government owns the timber of British Columbia. In the fire question they have a greater interest than the man who rents the timber. If the fire destroys that timber he is only out his rent.

Our situation in British Columbia is entirely different than Washington or Oregon, and therefore our methods and system must be different and will ultimately have to be different. It ought to be brought strongly to the attention of the government that they ought to put the timber man of this province in a little better shape in regard to a future supply of timber.

A lumberman always figures on the increment of the growth of his timber to get his profits — he hardly ever expects to make anything out of his mill. I hope those in authority will try and do their best to strengthen the stability of tenure in regard to timber. The chief commissioner of lands here has the power to tell a lumberman to cut his lumber off at any time.[xxi]

*** * * ***

In 2012 the British Columbia Forest Service celebrated its centenary. It is now incorporated within the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations with responsibility for 59 million hectares of Crown land. This covers two-thirds of B.C. It is responsible for timber, range

and recreation resources and co-operates with other agencies in the management of water, fish, wildlife, tourism, heritage, energy and minerals,[xxii] all areas of interest to Will Sutton. It is worth pondering what might have happened had Will lived longer and decided on a career in forestry and been appointed first chief forester instead of H.R. MacMillan.

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[i] The Colonist, 25th December 1908.

[ii] An excerpt describing Ucluelet can be found in Chapter Nine; Will probably wrote this chapter; he may also have provided some of the photographs. An earlier booklet, *Victoria, Past and Present: something about the advantages which the city offers, viewed from business, residential and tourist standpoints,* published in 1901 by the Board of Trade includes one of Will's photographs.

[iii] In 1914 the League came under the Industrial and Publicity Commissioner and became known as the Vancouver Island Development Association, Will being involved in its re-organisation. It later took on the title Victoria and Island Publicity Bureau.

[iv] The Colonist, 31st January 1901.

[v] See Chapter Eleven.

[vi] The Colonist 22 April 1914.

[vii] The Colonist 28th April 1908.

[viii] The Colonist, 2nd October 1912.

[ix] The Journal of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada, Vol XLIX, No 4, July-August 1955, Whole Number 415, p. 141.

[x] http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/bcparks/explore/parkpgs/macmillan/

[xi] http://vancouverislandbigtrees.blogspot.co.uk/2013/01/timber-baron-wanted-to-cut-cathedral.html

[xii] There are five photographs in Will's album associated with Mount Washington which Will probably used in this campaign.

[xiii] Creating a "Natural Asset": British Columbia's First Park, Strathcona, 1905-16, Paula Young.

[xiv] With the sawmill at Cowichan, setting up the Sutton Lumber Trading Company with his father and brother in 1893. He was still managing the Ucluelet Mercantile Sawmill in 1911 and owned 300 shares in the company when he died.

[xv] Will further objected to pre-emptors being permitted to go onto timber land and destroy timber by setting fire to it in order to do the improvements required by the Act and concluded by saying he knew of timbermen who creamed off the best timber and left good merchantable timber which was then vulnerable to fire. Will also objected to the recent law allowing anyone to lease land at 25 cents an acre for 21 years, saying it was an unfavourable bargain in comparison with the $5.00 per acre previously obtained for lands. He advocated that Government survey the land as this was an obstacle in the way of purchasers because it added to their expense and Government could do it much cheaper. Whilst this would initially cost Government, the outlay would be returned by selling the land once it had been surveyed. Will was to reiterate many of his previous arguments when he was called to give evidence at the Assessment and Taxation Commission in 1911.

[xvi] https://ia801501.us.archive.org/13/items/bulletin31910natu/bulletin31910natu_bw.pdf

[xvii] The soil-requiring qualities of the different tree species? What trees improve soil conditions? What trees require rich soil? Their relative moisture needs? Their temperature requirements? The effect of altitude on different trees? The shade enduring qualities of trees? The quality and properties of the different woods? The rapidity of growth? The height and size at maturity? What trees are exclusive? What trees may be grouped together? What trees require nursing? Topographical conditions affecting tree growth? The relative value for commercial purposes? The general care of forests? The collection and care of seeds? The establishment and care of nurseries? The pathology of trees?

[xviii] Sunday Walks and Seed Traps: The Many Natural Histories of British Columbia Forest Conservation, 1890-1925, David Brownstein, A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The University of British Columbia, 2006.

[xixxix] ibid p.234.

[xx] The Colonist, 1st June 1910

[xxi] *Western Lumberman*, 1914, Report on Convention of Western Forestry and Conservation Association held in Vancouver, p. 36.

[xxii] *The Forestry Chronicle*, Celebrating 100 years of Forest Management in British Columbia, Laura Pickering, Vol 88 (2) March/April 2012, p. 106-107.