

## PLANT HUNTER AND PACIFIC NORTHWEST EXPLORER DAVID DOUGLAS' NAME LIVES ON WITH THE GIANT DOUGLAS-FIR. BY PETER STEKEL

MOST CONTEMPORARIES believed that David Douglas was humorless, cantankerous, impolite and stubborn. Yet Douglas accomplished more during 10 years of exploration and botanical collection than any other plant hunter has accomplished since the peripatetic employee of the Horticulture Society of London visited North America during the 1820s and '30s.

David Douglas was born in 1799 in Scone, Scotland, where his parents imposed a repressive life of rigorous discipline. The boy grew up sullen, withdrawn and non-social, and was truculent and truant at school. When he was 7, David was apprenticed to the gardener of the Earl of Mansfield, in Scone; his parents wanted him out of the house.

The object of gardening in those days was not to mow the lawn and clip the hedges. Wealthy landowners employed gardeners to maintain the large estates that became the models for Central Park in New York and Golden Gate Park in San Francisco. Young Douglas flourished while learning how to grow rare tropical plants in the damp Scottish climate, cultivating wild plants from the Highlands, and reading anything available on the subject of botany.

When he was 17, Douglas ended his apprenticeship and found a position at Valleyfield, near Dunfermline. Two years later he succeeded in securing a position at the Botanical Garden at Glasgow. In 1823, he caught the eye of botanist Professor William Hooker, who recommended him to Joseph Sabine, secretary of the newly formed Horticultural Society of London.

For his first assignment, a "shakedown cruise" of sorts, Douglas was sent to eastern North America to study and bring back samples of fruit trees. He traveled overland from Philadelphia to New York, journeyed up the Hudson River, crossed to Lake Erie via the Erie Canal and sailed to Detroit. Along the way, Douglas botanized, returning to London with dried, pressed specimens and an accurate record of his expedition.

The Horticultural Society had been created by influential Londoners to expand the limits of scientific knowledge as well as turn a profit in garden plants. The assort-



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ment of marketable fruit tree varieties collected by Douglas satisfied the board of directors, and the collection of new North American plants delighted the botanists.

Secretary Sabine then assigned Douglas to collect plants for the society in the Pacific Northwest. His main concern would not be documenting the flora, but introducing profitable new species to England. The landed gentry demanded ever more exotic plants to grow in their greenhouses and on their estates; fortunes could be made by the successful introduction and propagation of new plants.

Douglas set out in the summer of 1824 aboard the Hudson's Bay Company ship *William and Ann*. The ship's doctor, John Scouler, and Douglas became fast friends. They spent the voyage collecting specimens at every port of call and discussing natural history. Modern accounts suggest this played more to Scouler's talents. When a sailor was injured, the doctor botched the surgery and left the poor fellow in worse shape than when he had begun.

In April 1825, the ship crossed the treacherous Columbia River bar and sailed upriver some 100 miles to the Hudson's Bay Company post at Fort Vancouver. Douglas got right to work. His early journal entries are rapturous in depicting the still undefiled forests of Oregon Territory. His first view of the shrub salal, of which he had read in Archibald Menzies' journal from British Captain George Vancouver's 1792 Pacific Coast exploration, led Douglas to effuse, "So pleased was I that I could scarcely see anything but it."

Douglas traveled extensively throughout the Columbia Basin. He moved about the country by canoe and horse, but mostly on foot, sometimes covering 50 miles in a day. His indefatigable energy constantly amazed the French Canadian *engagés* who accompanied him. He unsuccessful-

**TOP:** Scotsman David Douglas wandered the American Northwest in the 1820s and '30s hunting plants. **MIDDLE:** When he encountered the evergreen shrub salal, Douglas wrote: "So pleased was I that I could scarcely see anything but it." **BOTTOM:** The mighty Douglas-fir, named after the busy plant hunter.





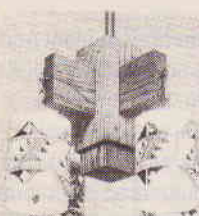
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continuing Sioux wars and the whites' fear of the powerful Sioux Nation. Charger, however, was thoroughly convinced that it was his destiny to help people and pursue peace. During the next year, the Fool Soldiers heard about a group of starving Sioux. They bought food and clothing and delivered them to the group. Conditions at the camp were so poor that the Fool Soldiers stayed all winter to take care of the other Indians before helping them back to Fort Pierre during warmer weather.

In 1867, Kills Game and Comes Back was murdered by a Santee who still held a grudge over the 1862 rescue. There was a custom among the Sioux that, when a close friend died, the other committed suicide to join him in the afterlife. Charger, though, knew he had much to do yet in his life on earth. He soon traveled to Washington, D.C., to discuss reservations and their boundaries.

In 1872, the Fool Soldiers began building the first Indian community in the West to have log cabins with chimneys. They started farming, growing corn and other vegetables. Charger was instrumental in setting up the Cheyenne River Reservation, where members of his family still live. In later years, he called himself Martin Charger, became a Christian and promoted peace between Indians and whites. He died August 16, 1900, after a short illness.

A granite monument was erected at the rescue site near the mouth of the Grand River in 1909. It states, "Shetak (sic) Captives Rescued Here November 1862 by Fool Soldiers Band." However, the monument has since been moved to Riverside Park, two miles west of Mobridge, S.D., and about 1½ miles from the rescue site. Today the rescue site is covered by the Oahe Dam Reservoir. In 1929, the government erected a monument honoring famous chiefs of the Cheyenne River Reservation. The names of Martin Charger and two sons, Samuel and Harry, are engraved on it.

Major Pattee wanted the Fool Soldiers to be recognized for their rescue. He reported to the government: "I had been informed that the United States Congress had appropriated \$2,400 to pay those Indians for their trouble and was greatly pleased that the government had recognized the obligation." But according to the Fool Soldiers, including Judge No Heart, who claimed to be the last survivor at age 66 in 1912, they never received a penny. ww

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