

## Early Nurseries by Deborah Stewart

### SHANNON GREENHOUSES

*As Remembered by Lyle Shannon*

'Dogwood Springs' was a narrow strip of 10 acres located at 130 St. and 16 Ave. extending to 18 Ave. – an adjoining parcel of land was bought in the '70s which allowed the operation to enlarge to 20 acres. The property became known as 'Shannon's Greenhouses' in the '60s.

Mr. Shannon was known to routinely buy ten-acre parcels of land and over the years the cedar from his properties were cut into posts and used to build 'shelters' which were used on occasion (polyethylene was thrown over to protect the vulnerable crops during a hard frost).

In the late '40s Lyle's dad, Arthur started growing chrysanthemums outdoors for fall use, with a small area of greenhouse space nearby for spring bedding plants. 'Shannon's Nursery' supplied cut flowers to a wholesaler in downtown Vancouver and bedding plants to Shaw's Feed & Seed, on Pacific near '5 Corners' on hilltop White Rock.

There was an early frost in Oct. '56 which decimated the chrysanthemum stock. At that time, Mr. Arthur Shannon decided he needed to expand the operation to encompass more greenhouses or get out of the market. Coincidentally, Keefer Wholesale Florist from Vancouver approached him and asked him to grow roses for their business.

The nursery's original greenhouse boilers were stoked with coal and wood to keep the greenhouses warm. In 1956, Arthur Shannon built an additional 10,000 square feet of new greenhouses so he could grow roses year-round. In 1957, planting within the greenhouses began and with natural gas being promoted as the cheapest and cleanest heating fuel, it was used to heat the grow operation. By 1958, the greenhouses had tripled in size!

Arthur's wife, Violet and their five children Verna, Maureen, Greta, Norman and Lyle all worked at the nursery in some capacity as they grew up.

High intensity lights were first used in 1974 and they caused quite a stir in the area since the luminous sky led neighbours to fret and call the fire department since it appeared there was a blazing fire nearby!

### OCEAN PARK NURSERY

*As Remembered by Paul Johnson*

In the mid 1930s, Jack Manten started up 'Manten's Nursery' on Stevenson Road (now called 128 St.); Jack and his family lived on the property. His business specialized in Magnolias and a broadleaf Evergreen called Daphne – matter of fact, there was a Daphne named after him – called 'Daphne Mantensianna'!

Many nurseries were 'plant ranches' back then since shrubs and trees were harvested in the late fall and over-wintered in cold storage rooms (with the walls insulated with sawdust) so the plants stayed dormant; in the spring the plants were sent 'bareroot' to the prairies.

In the early years of Ocean Park, many of our area's residents were employed with the nearby nurseries. In '47, Ernie Schuster hand-dug a huge pond in the northeast corner of the property (50 by 50 by 5 feet) – working full-time for 'C. D. Morris Nursery' and weekends for 'Mantens Nursery'. Ernie now owns the biggest wholesale nursery in the Seattle area – 'Vibert Nursery' in Redmond.

In the early '50s, Jack Manten passed away and Val Johnson bought the stripped-down seven acres from Jack's wife. Val was one of the original Parks Commissioners in our area.

The annual Kiwanis Club's salmon barbecue held in the late '50s and early '60s on the nursery's grounds was popular with 'the locals'. In the '50s and '60s while Val oversaw his wholesale nursery, his wife Magda ran her own garden centre, 'The Cottage Garden' in Burnaby.

Val Johnson ran the nursery as a wholesale business until 1964 when Norm Smith who was known for 'running a tight ship' became a partner. Subsequently, Val ran the landscaping/wholesale aspect and

Norm ran the garden centre. Norm built most of the newer outbuildings on the property and the wooden greenhouses. 'Ocean Park Nursery' became the biggest supplier of native B.C. Dogwoods in the Pacific Northwest; shipping as far away as West Germany. The medians on the long stretch of Highway 1 from Port Mann Bridge to Abbotsford are lined with their Dogwoods!

As adolescents, Paul and his brother Tim used to camp in the back field area of the nursery. In high school, Paul used to 'chum around' with Norm's son, Stan.

In 1974, Paul and his wife Suzanne bought out Norm's partnership; Paul and his wife moved their family of three kids into a house on the property for the first three years.

In '87 the two brothers sold 3.5 acres of the seven acres off the back of the property to developers and it became part of a subdivision.

Presently, Tim continues working in Vancouver while Paul is retiring Oct 3, 2000. After Paul's retirement, the locally-owned 'Garden Works' chain will lease the 'Ocean Park Nursery'.

### HEATHCLIFF GREENHOUSES

*As Remembered by Gerry and Laura Hennig*

Heathcliff Nursery started as a hobby for R. L. Cliff in 1940 since he had a passion for growing flowers. His nursery supplied Peace Arch Park and wholesaler David L. Jones with Easter Lilies, exotic Orchids, Chrysanthemums, and Poinsettias; the nursery was well-known for its tomatoes, too.

The nursery was approx. 83 acres of bushland at 124 St. and 20 Ave. with five greenhouses on site (two more were added later). There are obvious advantages to growing 'crops' in greenhouses; a grower has control over extreme temperature changes, humidity, etc. Mr. Cliff's original mansion was built in 1947 on 124 St., south of 20 Ave.

Heathcliff Nursery was the most modern complex in the area boasting in the early '50s the only stretch of paved road (this was to keep the greenhouse glass from getting too dusty). An artesian well was used on the property until the GVRD supplied water to our area.

Boilers were fired by coal which allowed the hot water heating system to operate – this was considered 'state of the art' back then. There was little waste – the coal residue was routinely raked out and the 'clinkers' were thrown onto the nearby gravel roads to fill potholes and reduce road dust.

Before Workers' Compensation Board came into being, a granular black powder called 'cyanide' was thrown down on the ground as the employee backed out of the greenhouse. This 'fumigating procedure' was routinely used to control pests whenever deemed necessary by Mr. Albert Hopper; he was the boss and chief grower and supervised five-to-six full-time staff – Carl Hennig, Bob Mylroie, Tom Charles, Horace Lee and Mrs. Russell come to mind. Gerry's father Carl moved to our area in July 1948 and shortly afterward, Gerry and his mother Mary followed. Gerry started working after school in '48 at the age of twelve.

The nursery functioned until the late '80s and was torn down in the '90s to make room for a subdivision.



## Ocean Park Nurseries

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