

What's In a Name?

By John Neorr, Native Plant Steward

You probably have seen those funky names botanists use to identify plants. These are called *botanical names*. Besides serving to impress your friends and relatives, botanical names serve to uniquely identify plants. For example, a tree can have several *common names* but only one botanical name. Thus Alaska cedar, yellow cedar, Alaska cypress, Nootka cypress, yellow cypress, canoe cedar, and Sitka cypress are all the same tree - *Chamaecyparis nootkatensis*. But I digress – to me, one of the interesting things about several species native to the Pacific Northwest is that their botanical names end in *menziesii*, *lewisii*, or *douglasii*. These names pay tribute to three early visitors to the Pacific Northwest – Archibald Menzies, Meriwether Lewis, and David Douglas. In the period between 1788 and 1827, these three men were among the first white men to systematically collect plant specimens and document their features and their uses by Native Americans. Part of their legacy is recorded in the names of our native plants – many of which are found in the Lake Wilderness Arboretum.



Archibald Menzies

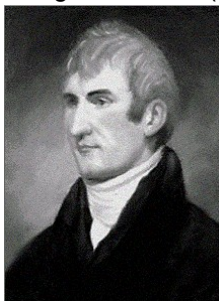
Archibald Menzies was born in Scotland 1754 and as a young man worked with his relative tending the gardens at Castle Menzies. After studying both botany and medicine at Edinburgh, he joined the Navy and was stationed in Nova Scotia. In 1788 he visited the west side of Vancouver Island where he had his first exposure to Pacific Northwest plants. His notes and collections from this 3 year journey earned him an appointment by the British Government as a naturalist on Captain George Vancouver's ship, Discovery. He soon was appointed ship surgeon as well when the original ship surgeon became ill and had to return home.

During his 1791 trip to the Pacific Northwest with Captain Vancouver, Menzies collected and documented over 200 plants. They included red cedar, Oregon grape, pacific madrone, and Pacific dogwood. One of our most common trees in the Arboretum is named after him – the Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*).



Pseudotsuga menziesii

More than likely the most familiar name of our trio is Meriwether Lewis. Although many of us recognize Lewis, (along with his co-leader William Clark) as an explorer, fewer of us recognize



Meriwether Lewis

Lewis as the team's designated naturalist. Among the Corps of Discovery's charter was to record, "The soil and face of the country, its growth and vegetable productions, especially those not of the United States;". As the group's naturalist Lewis carefully recorded detailed descriptions of the plants unfamiliar to science. He also noted where they were found, and how they were used by Native Americans. Today, at the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences, 226 sheets of his specimens are still on display in amazingly good condition. In hand drawn pictures and carefully recorded notes in his own hand, the specimens display

Lewis's sharp eye for detail. Washington natives documented by Lewis include red flowering current, thimble berry, salmon berry, and mock orange (*Philadelphus lewisii*). Although Lewis did much of the collecting, 5 others in the Corps of Discovery also recorded some specimens. The expedition's botanical work was honored in 2008 at the Corcoran College of Art in Washington D.C. The show contained 60 works of art based on the Lewis and Clark specimen collection. The collection itself still serves as a valuable resource



Philadelphus lewisii

as a historical record of flora in the early 1800's. The collection has recently been used to study the effect of CO₂ gas emissions over the past 200 years.

There are probably more plants named after David Douglas than for any other person in the



David Douglas

history of scientific nomenclatures. Like Menzies, Douglas was born in Scotland. Initially informally trained he subsequently attended college at University of Glasgow where his mentor recommended him to the London Royal Horticultural Society. In 1823 the RHS sent him to America to gather and return new specimens to England. Douglas first visited Philadelphia where he reviewed the specimens gathered by Lewis and the Corps of Discovery. Back in England in 1824, Douglas was once again tapped to explore America's flora – this time in the Pacific Northwest. Before leaving England, he had an opportunity to chat with Archibald Menzies over tea. The two could not imagine at that time that their common discovery, the Douglas-fir (*Psuedotsuga menziesii*)

would later honor them both. In 1825, using Fort Vancouver on the Columbia River as his base, he began an extraordinary two-year exploration of Washington and Oregon. In 1825, traveling 2000 miles in Western Washington, he amassed collected nearly 500 plant specimens. In 1826, trekking as far as Kettle Falls, he collected 16 different species of sagebrush alone.



Crataegus douglasii

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Including salal, red flowering current, and Oregon grape; and black hawthorn (*Crataegus douglasii*), Douglas introduced different species of plants to England. His efforts helped transform English gardens as well as the English lumber industry where he introduced the Douglas-fir. After two subsequent trips to America in 1830 and 1832-33, he died under suspicious circumstances in Hawaii in 1834. Douglas's legacy includes Douglas-firs still growing in England from the seeds he brought back from our state.

Menzies, Lewis, and Douglas - three adventurers who helped introduce the Pacific Northwest to the rest of the world. The next time you are walking through the arboretum, look for some of the plants that greeted Menzies, Lewis, and Douglas 200 years ago. With a little luck, you can impress your friends and complete strangers by pointing out the *Psuedotsuga menziesii*, *Philadelphus lewisii*, and *Crataegus douglasii*.