



Garden Ramblings

I have tried to ignore the signs of Christmas as I haven't finished the Spring work yet. Still, there are two more interesting plant hunters that you might come across while looking for your Christmas Tree. (You won't actually see them but trees they discovered.) The first is David Douglas - hence the bit of Douglas Fir above.

He worked first in the Botanical Gardens in Glasgow and then joined the Horticultural Society of London which now is famous for putting on the Chelsea Flower Show. He had really wanted to explore China but plant hunters as well as others from the west were not welcomed there. Instead he went to New York and travelled around that area looking at landscaped gardens of the wealthy. No great excitement there ! In fact he sent back several new varieties of apples and 21 varieties of peaches.

He did travel up to Hudson Bay and collected very many perennial plants including golden rod, asters and michaelmas daisies My hero just for those. He only had three minor mishaps when he fell off a horse, fell out of a canoe and when he took off his coat and his guide stole it. He had to walk back five miles on his own having lost his notes and money. The Horticultural society were delighted with his finds. Although these plants would be easy to grow and would appeal to the owners of grand estates more people wanted specimen trees for their parkland. Even so peaches would be good. I gave up on my peach tree which produced just one peach and suffered dreadfully from peach leaf curl. It was replaced by a good fruiting fig but the memory of that peach still lingers.

The next journey was to the pacific coast of North America as the Horticultural Society were convinced they would make a profit in three years after Douglas returned with seeds and especially trees. In fact, to keep the possibility of profits high the members of the expedition was encouraged to "live off the land". It was on this voyage he discovered the tree named after him, The first he saw was washed up on the sea shore and although a bit was missing he reckoned it to be 190 feet high. neither he nor I do metric. No great catastrophes that time, but while in Hawaii later, with his eyesight beginning to fail he fell into a pit used to trap to catch cattle. It was there he died at just 34 years old but his contribution to the plants brought to this country was enormous as he introduced 200 new species.

