

APPLICATION FOR
THE POST OF PROFESSOR OF BOTANY
IN
POINT GREY UNIVERSITY.

BY

JOHN DAVIDSON.

(late of University of Aberdeen, Scotland,)

Fellow of the Linnean Society of London, (Eng.)

Fellow of the Botanical Society of Edinburgh, (Scot.)

Member of the Torrey Botanical Club, (Columbia University,
New York.)

Member of the B. C. Academy of Science, McGill University
College, Vancouver,
(etc. etc.)

Botanist to the Government of the Province of British Columbia.



THE GOVERNMENT OF
THE PROVINCE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA.

APPLICATION FOR THE BOTANICAL POST AT POINT GREY UNIVERSITY.

BY

J.DAVIDSON, F.L.S., F.B.S.E.

At the request of the Honourable Dr.H.E.Young, Provincial Secretary and Minister of Education, I humbly submit my qualifications for consideration in connection with the appointment of a Professor of Botany for Point Grey University.

I should state at the outset, that I possess no University Degrees, and because of this, I feel myself considerably handicapped, knowing that nowadays these are taken so much into account in making appointments.

Knowing too, that many young men attend Universities for the sole purpose of obtaining degrees, as a means towards an end, rather than for the knowledge and training to fit them to do future useful work, I felt that my training and experience might be of greater value here, especially in the pioneer work associated with the commencement of a new Department in a new University, there being so many sides of work to attend to:- The construction and equipment of the class-museum and laboratories, the supplies of apparatus for physiological experiments and micro-technique, models and diagrams etc. to illustrate lectures, and the direction of work in the Botanic Garden to supplement the class work.

In support of my ability for this work, I beg to submit copies of the testimonials I obtained on leaving Aberdeen University for British Columbia so that the qualifications I possess may be based on the testimony of others, rather than on anything I may say.

I think however, I should give information on such points as are not covered by the testimonials, and which I consider should be made known. This I believe, can be best accomplished in a brief sketch of my career.



THE GOVERNMENT OF
THE PROVINCE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA.

SKETCH OF MY CAREER.

I am thirty five years of age, married; my wife and two children are here in Kerrisdale where we have settled.

It will be seen by Professor Trail's testimonial that I began my botanical career early.

Having had botany lessons at school under Dr. John Roy, a well known Alga-ologist, my interest was aroused, and I was glad to have the opportunity of beginning at the University in the humble capacity of boy-attendant.

In those days it was possible to rise from the "rank and file" to the higher positions on the University staff, and at my appointment I was informed by the Professor that I could raise myself to his level. No doubt this acted as an incentive to do my best.

My parents were not in a position at that time to put me through the University, and there were no assisted courses then as there are now. So I took every opportunity of acquiring knowledge after my appointment in the Botanical Dept.

I attended day and evening classes at Gordon's College, Central and Albyn Place High Schools, and other schools for special classes. This included English, French, German, Mathematics, Botany, Physiology, Photography, Drawing, Modelling, and several technical subjects, to enable me to use my hands when necessary, in making pieces of apparatus for experimental or demonstrative purposes.

In 1893 when I was appointed, there was practically no Botany Dept. but a large suite of rooms was supplied in the University extensions of 1895. I was put in charge of the new Department, being then the youngest attendant in the University.

I took every opportunity of increasing my knowledge of Botany and allied subjects and of acquiring a knowledge of laboratory and museum methods, so that gradually much of the work, previously done by the Professor and Assistant-Professor, was left to me.

During three years of the time that Dr. A. T. Gage (now Supt. of the Royal Botanic Garden, Calcutta) was assistant Professor, I acted as



demonstrator in the Practical Botany classes for Medical, Agricultural, Arts, and 1st, B.Sc. students; besides assisting Dr. Gage in Museum and laboratory research work.

On Dr. Gage's appointment to the Indian Medical service, about 1897 I was given full charge of the Museum; Professor Trail allowing me a free hand to improve or extend its usefulness.

Since then, my own research work in museum technique resulted in a new process of treating fluid preparations whereby the green colour of plants is retained and the percentage of successfully treated specimens was raised from under 20% to over 95%.

The only specimens so prepared are those (about 1400) in Aberdeen University, 19 in Kew Museum (being presented after exhibition at several Scientific Societies in London), and those I have partially prepared for Point Grey University.

My success in this work encouraged me to specialize in Museum technique preparing specimens or models where I considered it necessary in order to assist in teaching the students.

During the class sessions most of my time was occupied in assisting one class or preparing for another. At times directing the laboratory work of the Final B.Sc. students, or selecting specimens and setting up experiments to illustrate the Professor's lectures to both Elementary and Advanced classes.

I thus obtained a theoretical and thoroughly practical knowledge of the various branches of botanical departmental work, including field-work, it being our custom to take the classes out to selected districts, and apply what was taught in the lecture-room, to what was seen in the field.

In 1908 through the promotion of Mr. R. M. Clark B.Sc. to the Lectureship on Nature Study and School Gardening, the post of Assistant-Professor became vacant. I was informed by the Professor that my knowledge and experience qualified me for the post, but that since my appointment it had gradually become the "unwritten law" in Aberdeen for candidates to have a Degree in the



THE GOVERNMENT OF
THE PROVINCE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA.

subject they were to teach, and this constituted a technical barrier to my promotion.

Naturally, I was much disappointed in this, knowing that this "law" did not prevail in all British Universities; but having spent so much of my life in the University, and having done so much for my Department, I resolved to remove, if possible, the barrier which hindered my promotion, and proceeded on a course of studies with the ultimate purpose of obtaining the Degree of B.Sc.

Having been married 5 years, and having a home to provide for, I found it necessary to carry on my studies in the evenings, after my day's work at the University.

For the first year all seemed to be going well, although I felt at times run-down. Then in the winter of 1909, pneumonia gave me a "close call", from which I was recovering, when in the spring of 1910 I had a severe attack of influenza; this left me very susceptible to colds. Prof. Trail kindly gave me an extended vacation in order to recuperate on the highland moors, but owing to the unpropitious weather conditions, I did not benefit so much as had been expected; and on my return, my medical adviser recommended my going to Australia, or some such country with a more equable climate than the North of Scotland.

On hearing of the proposed University in Point Grey, and believing that my services might be acceptable there, I ascertained that the climate was suitable, consequently I reluctantly decided to sever my connection with Aberdeen University and sailed for B.C. early in April 1911.

Before leaving, I received numerous testimonials from well-wishers, in addition to three presentations, (1) A writing case and purse of sovereigns "From the present and past students of the Botany Dept." (2) A purse of sovereigns from "The staff, lecturers, and assistant-professors of the University" and (3) A purse of sovereigns from the "Aberdeen Natural History and Scientific Society".



THE GOVERNMENT OF
THE PROVINCE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA.

Outside my University duties I taught Private Classes in Elementary and Advanced Botany. These were conducted at home, and during the period of about 14 years, I prepared upwards of 200 students for Arts, Medical, Agricultural, 1st. and Final B.Sc. Botany exams; having usually 7 or 8 students each session, and 2 sessions each year. At the close of each session I examined my pupils on a rather higher standard than that usually set by the University.

In addition to this, I found time to help the good work of the Aberdeen Natural History and Scientific Society, and derived much pleasure in seeing this society come to be the most active one in the City. I was appointed Assistant-Secretary when quite a young lad, and after two years, was elected Hon. Secretary, which office I held for eleven years, giving it up to pursue my studies for B.Sc. I was Vice-President at the time of my departure for B.C.

For many years my services have been requisitioned for public lectures on popular natural history subjects, and I have always been ready and willing to do what I could to encourage and help others who desire to do a little nature study.

Though most of my lectures were of a Botanical nature, Photography, electricity and Entomology came in for a share of my attention, and on many occasions I found a knowledge of these subjects to be of considerable value in my botanical work.

MY WORK IN BRITISH COLUMBIA.

On arriving in B.C. I made inquiries as to how much Botany was included in the University curriculum here, and was surprised to learn there was no Botanical Dept. I had the privilege of an interview with the Honourable Dr. H. E. Young, Minister of Education, and as a result was given the honour of laying the foundation for a botanical survey of the Province, the formation of a herbarium for the Botanical Department of the University, and the collection of specimens for class and museum purposes.

Since my appointment I have made a collection of several thousand plants which will form the nucleus of a complete herbarium to illustrate the native Flora of the Province. There is also a collection of seeds, and much



material which can be used for teaching or museum purposes. I have organized a considerable number of volunteer collectors in various parts of the Province, and by giving them assistance when desired, we obtain many additions to our herbarium.

I have in course of preparation a card-index of all plants hitherto recorded for this Province, and am gradually gathering together the literature dealing in any way with B.C. Botany.

I have had distribution-maps and record-sheets prepared, in order to ultimately ascertain the range and distribution of each species in the Province. I have superintended the commencement of a collection of growing plants for the Botanic Garden at Point Grey, and though only begun this spring, many specimens are becoming well established.

Outside my Botanical Office duties, I have taken an interest in various educational subjects which I consider deserve to be encouraged.

I am keenly interested in seeing a greater measure of nature study done in schools and in the introduction of school-gardening as part of the school curriculum, and have been making observations to see how this may be best accomplished.

I have encouraged the formation of a Natural Science section to the B.C. Mountaineering Club, and for the past two winters gave courses of lectures to an average of 10-12 students per night.

The first winter the subject of the course was "A general survey of the Vegetable Kingdom, from the beginning to modern times."

Last winter the subject of the series of about 12 lectures was "The life and work of our common plants".

On Feb. 17th. I gave a public lecture in Lester Hall on "Mountaineering as an Educational Stimulus". On April 19th, I gave a paper to the B.C. Academy of Science entitled "Botanical Opportunities in British Columbia."

On July 18th. I lectured to the B.C. Entomological Society at Vernon on "Entomology from the standpoint of a Botanist".

I am the author of an illustrated article appearing in "British Columbia its History, People, Commerce, and Resources" (By Sells, London) Under the title "The Botanical aspect of British Columbia".



(7).

Also an article appearing in "The Northern Cordilleran" under the title "Botanical work for Mountaineers".

It may be mentioned that the lectures and articles were given free, with the hope of indirectly helping the work I have the honour of doing for the Government.

My 18 years experience and training under one of the most eminent Professors of Systematic Botany in Great Britain, fitted me to take full advantage of the opportunities afforded during my two years work in the Province. The experience I have gained here, is very real to me. I have been free to find out those fields of work which are practically untouched, and much time may be saved in directing the efforts of research students along particular lines, thereby preventing repetition.

In addition to pure Botany as a subject in the Arts, Science and Medical curricula, I am fully alive to the importance of the various sides of applied Botany, and its relation to Forestry, Agriculture, Nature-Study etc., and I should consider it a privilege to be able to cooperate with those engaged in these departments of Economic Botany.

In the event of my receiving the honour of the appointment, I shall conscientiously do my best, and bring all my abilities, knowledge and experience to bear in my efforts to build up the Botanical Department, so that a solid foundation may be found by those who come after me.

Respectfully submitted.

John Davidson