Menzies' journal of Vancouver's voyage, April to October, 1792

Forsyth J
ARCHIVES OF BRITISH COLUMBIA.

MEMOIR NO. V.

MENZIES' JOURNAL OF VANCOUVER'S VOYAGE

APRIL TO OCTOBER, 1792.

Edited, with Botanical and Ethnological Notes, by C. F. NEWCOMBE, M.D.,
and a Biographical Note by J. FORSYTH.

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Tha'm freasdal a fa'har nan treum.

Coat of Arms of Menzies of Culdares, Meggernie, and Glenlyon and Stix, 1672. From a drawing by Sir David Menzies.
Provincial Library,  
Victoria, B.C., 1922.

The Hon. J. D. MacLean, M.D., C.M.,  
Provincial Secretary and Minister of Education,  
Parliament Buildings, Victoria, B.C.

SIR,—I have the honour to transmit herewith the fifth memoir of the Provincial Archives Department, entitled "Menzies' Journal of Vancouver's Voyage," April to October, 1792, edited, with notes, by Dr. C. F. Newcombe, a leading authority on the early exploration of the North-west Coast, and whose knowledge of the botany and ethnology of the district has been of greatest service in the preparation of this work.

The original MS. journal of Archibald Menzies is in the possession of the British Museum, but a certified copy is in our British Columbia Archives Department, which was acquired a few years ago. As the whole journal is a voluminous document, it was deemed advisable for the present to publish only that portion which related to Vancouver Island and Puget Sound.

In Memoir No. I., "The First Circumnavigation of Vancouver Island," Dr. Newcombe vindicated the contention of Captain Vancouver that his ships were the first to complete the navigation of the inner channels which separate the island from the mainland of British Columbia, and this contention is borne out in Menzies' journal.

It is several years since the last Archives Memoir was issued, but with the great appreciation which is being accorded by students of British Columbia history it is hoped that we may be able to continue those publications more regularly.

With your approval, the next bulletin will deal with early mining days on Fraser River and the Cariboo District, which should appeal to every one in the Province. His Honour Judge F. W. Howay, who has made a special study of this period in our history, and who is at the same time a recognized authority on the early history of the Pacific Coast, has very kindly consented to edit the memoir.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient servant,

JOHN FORSYTH,  
Librarian and Archivist.
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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE.

ARCHIBALD MENZIES, Scottish botanist, explorer, and traveller, was born at Stix or Styx, an old branch house of the Menzies of Culdares about 4 miles west from Aberfeldy, Perthshire, Scotland, and was educated at Weem Parish School. According to the Weem Kirk register, he was baptised on March 15th, 1754.

It is remarkable that nearly all the Menzies in the vicinity of Castle Menzies were either gardeners or botanists; an old record of proceedings shows that no fewer than seven of this name were employed at the same time at the Castle gardens.

Sir David Menzies, of Plean Castle, to whom the writer of these notes is indebted for much information, in speaking of Castle Menzies, which was founded in 1057, says: “When Sir William Wallace took shelter in the ancient portion of Castle Menzies, it had a castellated parapet running round its wall-head and flanking turrets, from which it could be defended by hurling missiles, arrows, etc. The first floor is supported on arches of stone, proof against any fire, as are also the walls, which are 7 feet thick in places; in them are secret rooms, one of which is the charter-room, where many of the deeds were preserved from destruction in the fire of 1592. These MSS. date back before the time of Wallace, as this part was built when the Barony of Menzies was founded by King Malcolm Canmore in 1057. It remained so till 1571, when the Armorial shield was inserted over the ancient doorway commemorating the marriage of the Chief to Barbara Stewart. This date, 1571, has nothing to do with the building of the Castle, etc. 1577 over the dormer windows is the date when the Castle was altered to its present condition.”

It was in the gardens of this ancestral home that Archibald Menzies, the subject of this memoir, received his first lessons in botany, and where it was his privilege later to add many new varieties of trees which he had discovered during his travels. Many of these may be seen on the wooded sides of Weem Rock at the back of the Castle. On leaving home, Menzies journeyed to Edinburgh and as a botanical student entered the Royal Botanic Garden, where it may be mentioned his elder brother William was already employed. Menzies was also at this time studying for the medical profession, and attended the Edinburgh University Botanic classes under Dr. John Hope, who is described as a genial and painstaking teacher and who took a deep interest in Menzies’ education.

In 1778 Menzies made a botanical tour through the Highlands and Hebrides and later became assistant to a surgeon at Carnarvon.
He subsequently entered the Royal Navy as assistant surgeon on board the “Nonsuch,” under Captain Truscott, and took part in Rodney’s victory over the Comte de Grasse on April 12th, 1782. After peace was declared he served on the Halifax Station. In a letter of introduction to Sir Joseph Banks dated August 22nd, 1786, Dr. Hope says: “Mr. Archibald Menzies was early acquainted with the culture of plants and acquired the principles of botany by attending my lectures. He was particularly acquainted with the Scotch plants, of the rarest of which he made a collection for Doctors Fothergill and Pitcairn. He has been several years on the Halifax Station in His Majesty’s service as a surgeon, where he has paid unremitting attention to his favourite study of botany, and through the indulgence of the Commander-in-Chief had good opportunities afforded him.”

Menzies’ first correspondence with Banks was while he was on board the “Assistance” at Halifax, N.S., from which place he sent botanical news and an assortment of seeds for the collection at Kew Gardens. Upon the arrival of the “Assistance” at Chatham, England, in August, 1786, Menzies sent up to London a small box of Acadian plants, together with a note to Sir Joseph, in which he promises to visit him in a few days, but says: “Meanwhile I am informed there is a ship, a private adventurer, now fitting out at Deptford to go round the world. Should I be so happy as to be appointed surgeon of her, it will at least gratify one of my greatest worldly ambitions, and afford one of the best opportunities of collecting seeds and other objects of natural history for you and the rest of my friends!” A few days later Menzies announces that he was happily appointed surgeon to an expedition round the world: “... Two vessels are going in company, a ship, the ‘Prince of Wales’ (commanded by Captain Colnett), and a sloop, the ‘Princess Royal.’ The proposed route is round South America and by the Japanese Islands to China, and then round the Cape of Good Hope homeward. Their chief object is the fur trade. But it is not allowed for the ship’s company to trade for barter for any curiosities.” He expresses the hope, however, that they would not be debarred from picking up curiosities if they came in their way, and asks Sir Joseph to intervene with Mr. Etches, who was the merchant and ship-owner. As a result of Sir Joseph’s influence Mr. Etches agreed to dispense with the restrictions in the case of Menzies, of whose conduct and manners he highly approved.

The voyage of the “Prince of Wales” round Cape Horn to the North Pacific Ocean occupied nearly three years. Menzies had sent home a consignment of plants and he had brought back the ship’s company in perfect health, only one man having died. In a letter dated
Mrs. Menzles, the wife of Archibald Menzies. From a miniature in the possession of C. D. Geddes, Esq., Edinburgh.