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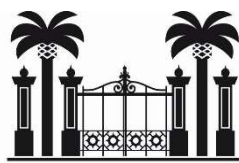
**Williamstown Botanic Gardens
Oral History Transcript**

Loris Ellen Wood

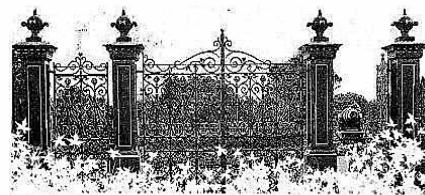
5th August 2014



Hobsons Bay
CITY COUNCIL



**WILLIAMSTOWN
BOTANIC GARDENS**



**Friends of Williamstown
Botanic Gardens Inc.**

This is an interview with Loris Wood on behalf of the Friends of Williamstown Botanic Gardens. It is one of a planned series to document personal memories and experiences of the Gardens.

Loris's family home was across the road from the Gardens in 122 Osborne Street and she recalls memories of the Gardens and playing sport on Fearon Reserve from an early age.

The date of the interview is 5th August 2014 and the interviewer is Lindy Wallace.

LEW My name is Loris Ellen Wood. I was Loris Ellen Donnelly. I was born in Williamstown Hospital. My parents lived in 122 Osborne Street, directly across the road from the Botanic Gardens and the Fearon Reserve. We lived there all our lives. We've only just sold the house. My parents were Thomas Stuart Donnelly and Margaret Catherine Donnelly. I had two other sisters and a brother. Like I said, we lived there all our lives and that area was our extended backyard. I was born on 10th January 1948.

I think my earliest memories are of the early fifties. Mum and Dad had bought a beautiful old Edwardian house that was so solid and double fronted and a big block of land. Then we had the Fearon Reserve right out the front, we looked out across the reserve down the bay. The Gardens were just to the left of us so we were in and out of there all the time. I suppose I was in there from 1948 onwards in my pram. Mum was a country girl who loved being outdoors so we were out and about all the time. My father was a steam engine driver with the railways. He ended up being the Commissioner of Victoria. He often drove trains down to Williamstown Pier.

Our life was very much a fairy tale because of the situation where we lived. Mum would always take us over the Gardens. The Gardens were then really really beautiful. There was not a blade of grass out of place. They had many men working there under the control of Mr Anderson, he was the head gardener. He lived in the gardener's cottage with his wife - I only ever knew her as Mrs Anderson - she was a lovely lady. She cooked a lot. She had a son and a couple of daughters. They were grown up. I don't think they'd been there forever because the grown-up girls didn't know Williamstown people. They had a granddaughter and she would come and visit them quite regularly and her name was Cheryl Anderson, so it was the son's daughter. I think her Dad was a policeman. But she would come regularly, and we got along really well. Mum got along with people, so Mrs Anderson was always chatting to Mum and Dad so was Mr Anderson.

We often played in the gardener's cottage backyard, which was something special. It was beautifully laid out courtyard, like a big fernery with all the tall ferns and aspidistras of the Victorian era. To the right of the back door was a huge – oh six feet diameter cast iron triple fountain – in the backyard. There was not a fountain in the Gardens, there was in the Gardener's cottage backyard. It was spectacular and in summer-time Mr Anderson would often put it on and it would trickle. It was six-foot-high, and it would just tumble down its first bowl, second bowl, into the big pond at the bottom. It had lilies in it. It was in this shaded private garden of the Gardens. Nobody else would probably tell you about that, it was fabulous. It was just beautiful. The old cottage was an old Edwardian/Victorian cottage like most Williamstown houses, situated the same as the replacement one is, facing the Osborne Street gate and the backyard was further down towards the Fearon with a side gate

out to Osborne Street. We played and saw a lot of Cheryl Anderson right through until teenage. I think Mr Anderson finished about then, he retired. So we didn't see Cheryl after that. All our junior years, yes, that was part of school holidays 'is Cheryl coming?' We'd be over there or she'd be over at our house.

The Gardens itself, well right from the word go Mum, like I said was a country girl – she took us – like I said I had an elder sister, eighteen months older, her name was Cheryl, close to Cheryl

LW How do you spell your sister's name?

LEW C h e r y l but she pronounces it Jeryl

Mum would always walk us, even in foul weather, she would walk us down all over Williamstown peninsular, down Nelson Place, down the Back Beach, that was a favourite of hers, the Back Beach. We saw ships that ran aground, we'd go down and watch the cannon fire, the army training fire out into the bay. She would walk the beach. All summer she would take us over to the beach. So we were out and about and were very very familiar with Williamstown even before we went to school. That included always coming back through the Gardens.

7:48 My father, was a very open man, he loved people. If he was in the front doing our gardening, he'd be talking to everybody under the sun. After the war he played cricket on the Fearon Reserve with the Returned Services, RSL team. With his cricket being just out the front, we'd be watching from the front verandah. They didn't have any water or electricity or gas connected to the old pavilion on the Fearon Reserve.

(Conversation was paused because sound interference from Loris's bird and the local rubbish collection)

Well after the war the returned services men were a fairly tight group and the RSL was quite strong. They had a cricket team that played on the Fearon and trained on the Fearon. It was just beautiful – you see paintings in the galleries of cricket matches – well that's what we looked at all the time. It was beautiful. There were other clubs there as well so there was always two cricket matches on the Fearon, one further down towards the beach and one up on Osborne Street side. The RSL played on the Osborne Street side. It was just beautiful with all that gorgeous bat and ball sound, better than ABC radio (laughs). Sometimes the balls would be hit across the road. I don't recall any broken windows. They did try baseball there for a few years and there were broken windows with baseball – but that's off the point. With the cricket matches they were all fastidiously in their creams and very proud of their team and their game and the rules were strict, the umpires were fully dressed. It was like the best you'd ever seen. Just a beautiful picture to look at. Come teatime at the cricket match – because the pavilion, which has now been replaced with cream brick monstrosity. It was an old weatherboard long, four separate club rooms so four teams could occupy. Then out the front there the seats under the verandah and it sloped down. But it had no electricity gas or water. So come afternoon tea time for the cricketers Mum would actually boil this great big – I think it was called a cauldron – it was a least a foot deep and eighteen oval round shape. The supporters and spectators would come over just before cricket afternoon tea and pick it up from Mum's place with these big holders that they could carry the heat – it was a dangerous thing to do because it was boiling water – she had a lid on it. They'd take it over and then the wives would put on this afternoon tea, which was all homemade cakes and the tea – they

didn't drink coffee in those days, it was just tea. It was very very nice. There'd be fresh scones and lovely cakes, mainly all desert things. They'd have a lovely afternoon tea and after that they'd get back for their game and back would come the cauldron to 122 Osborne Street for the next game. It was just part of life - that was Saturdays. The Fearon at the time was never used for Sunday sport, it was only for Saturday. Sunday was a religious day the rules were kept. It's the same as the area being so close to the beach. It had signs up all over the place, you weren't allowed to walk the streets in your swimwear. You had to cover up.

12:31 Back to the Gardens – we used to just play there all the time. In the arboretum out the back, that was wonderful. That was a real magical playground in all the pine needles. They had the band rotunda out the back in that arboretum. Regularly there'd be a Sunday afternoon concert, gorgeous old bands – all sorts of bands. There'd also be sometimes pipe bands and highland dancing on this band stand, which was just like rocky build up with a garden around it and then a big tabletop, mesa top where the band would set up their chairs – it was beautiful.

Every Christmas, because we were so familiar and friendly with the Andersons, I don't think people should know this because it could create future problems, we would get a branch of the trees down in the arboretum as our Christmas tree. About two weeks before Christmas Dad would say 'come on we'll go see Mr Anderson'. We'd go over and we'd all walk around the arboretum and choose the very best branch for our Christmas tree. Nobody else in Williamstown got them, except maybe the Andersons. Probably the staff got it too.

13:52 The Gardens were themselves were like I said pristine. They didn't have a blade of grass out of place. You weren't allowed to walk on the verges. You were allowed to enter the interior lawns to the garden sections, like what they call rooms these days. You were allowed to go in the proper entry way to those but all the edges along the pathways you weren't allowed to put your foot on. They had all these beautiful signs - Do not walk on the edges – do not step on the edges. The Gardens never had a weed in them. I think part of their schedule was on Thursdays and Fridays they would rake all the gravel, it would be just like a Japanese garden, the gravel would be all perfect. The seasonal planting was just superb, the annuals, they were grown from seed of course in those days – they were just spectacular. The bulbs – there's still a trace of everything there, the peonies and the dahlia bulbs are still all there. At this time of year the daffodils and jonquils would all come up – there was lily of the valley, there was all sorts of bulbs – it was a treasure. The workforce there was full on.

15:40 I'm just trying to picture as a child – you'd stand in the lane walkway and you'd probably see ten, twenty men just in your peripheral vision – there was a big workforce. They all arrived by – they'd either walk there or they pedalled their bikes – there were not many cars in those days – there was not much traffic on the roads. There was the bus that came down Osborne Street - that was probably the most regular thing that drove down Osborne Street. Today it's a giant car park, every house has got two or three cars parked on the verges. Over at the Gardens it gets choked up and in summertime it's just a giant car park. But in those days there were no cars – it was just space. The verges were green – it was lovely.

That was mainly my fifties [1950s]. We had lots of picnic there. At least twice in the school holidays, the mid-year ones, we'd have a picnic down there and all our friends would be invited. Mum would make the sandwiches – it would only be plain – vegemite piece of bread - sometimes we'd get the hundreds and thousands – life in those days was fairly simple – we'd get the homemade jam.

I remember Mrs Anderson, she was a good cook, she'd always contribute if Cheryl was down - the treats - there were lemon tarts, lemon meringue pies and scones and jam and cream. We'd stay in the Gardens all day and play.

17:36 I can remember in - I was about eight or so - it was an anniversary of some kind for the poet/author Adam Lindsay Gordon and they had this little ceremony - there must have been quite a few admirers of his work had gotten together - one of those literary societies - they did a formal dedication on this anniversary - I guess it might have been his hundredth or something like that - I'm not particularly aware of how old he was. They planted a gum tree. As you come from the Osborne Street entrance, down the main path there's the pond on the right and the next on the right is a lawn space - right in the middle of that lawn is a gum tree - that's the Adam Lindsay Gordon Gum Tree. I think I was about eight because it's very etched in my memory and every time I look at that tree I say yes it's still growing.

We'd go over there, even just after school, or any time we'd go over there because they had the old bronze cannons, the big beautiful old cannons were there, the ones that are now parked on the foreshore. There were one, two three, I think there were four originally - one either side of Mr Clark's statue facing Osborne Street and then opposite them on the other side facing Mr Clark's statue were the other two. They got moved, all of them. We would clamber all over those and I was agile enough I remember, I used to be able to crawl out on the barrel and get my feet around into the actual - inside the barrel and slide into it and just stick my head out - what you do as children. Yeh - they were big things for a little kid. The wheels of them - I don't think I was as high as the wheels - but we would clamber up and be so familiar with them.

19:58 There was always the lovely old water fountain that always seemed clean and I always drank from it - right beside the pond. The pond that now been refurbished, they did a good job but we missed it for a long time. It hasn't got the fish and the frogs like it used to have - had frogs everywhere in the Gardens, they were fantastic. I know that people are putting goldfish in but the birds around here - you can often see a stork feeding on the goldfish. That's an ever-going problem isn't it - you have to restock it all the time but there used to be plenty of goldfish. We'd always take the old dry bread over and feed them and hundreds would come around. The pond was well stocked. It survived by itself but now the birds - why that happens - I mean there that many birds then - why it happens now I don't know.

The pond on the right hand side from the main walkway used to have an elevated walk around that all covered in bougainvillea which to a child is dangerous because it's so spiky and scratched - so we didn't ever climb that. It was built up a fence that was six-foot-high - at one stage it went over as an archway and you walked through. When it was in flower it was superb. I don't think they've replaced that - no they haven't.

21: 38 Further over on the right of the pond - there was the gardener's cottage, the pond and to the right of that over on the work area side - the workmen's yard, which was only half of what it is now - there were two bird cages which were just beautiful. They were always chock a block full. They had parrots and pigeons and doves - doves that cooed beautifully. There were couple of blue tongue lizards on the ground in agi pipes they lived in. At various times there'd be other little things - a sick possum would be put in there - you'd see all sorts of things. It was constantly moving but there were the staid lorikeets and things. They'd even get canaries and budgerigars and finches - there was a whole variety, a big variety. The main cage, the biggest cage which was probably half the size of this room, then there was a smaller cage, a

quarter the size. It was always there – there were steps for kids – it didn't matter how high you were you could step up to your height and see in. They didn't seem to have any trouble with vermin or anything – the animals and birds were quite protected. I guess with that sort of workforce they were cared for very well. A branch from the arboretum trees would come in every now and then and change the outlook of how they flew around – they nested and they hatched – it was as good as any zoo.

There weren't any other features in the Garden that attracted kids. There was good seating, the beautiful old Victorian seats. There were often fetes there and the bandstand was active down in the arboretum.

LW Loris, who held the fetes there?

LEW The churches would hold them – sometimes the council had community ones – hospital fetes – they were all local.

LW Were they in the main part of the Garden?

24:33

LEW No, I always remember them down on the back left hand side of Clark's statue, in that corner. Occasionally some smaller music groups would play up on the lawn sections but that was only rare, most of it went on on the bandstand down the back.

Not in my younger childhood but later on I've seen maypole dancing there and Irish jigs and music like that – that's been nice. Through the generations, each ten years, you'd see it change. In the fifties we had this huge influx in immigration and they started to populate the west and we had our train line so on Saturdays and Sundays Williamstown Beach Station, which is two blocks away – the trains coming into Williamstown in the morning would be absolutely chock a block full with families coming down the line to have a day at Williamstown. They'd come to the Gardens, the Fearon, the beach or the foreshore. It would be a huge influx of people to Williamstown – they'd come down Garden Street and just spread out through the Gardens with their picnic rugs in those days – things were simple, you didn't have chairs and tables. They'd stay all day. It was just magical. That was all through summer, every Saturday and Sunday, every train would be packed. It was a sight to see. Now I speak to people and they say that they immigrated and say 'oh yes we used to come to Williamstown' and they recall it as when they first came to Australia.

It's still used in that way as everybody sees – in summertime its chock a block and families have their reunions and of course it's wedding heaven.

27:03 Now sometimes you can count up to ten or twenty weddings a weekend happening in the arboretum or the Gardens. There weren't so many in our younger days – weddings were always in the churches. I was married in St Andrews Church in Cecil Street and we had our wedding photos taken in the Gardens. We had our own photographer in Williamstown, I've lost his name, I can't remember. He came and did my photos. I had some hugging some of the tree bases which would be eight foot diameter – the old pine trees. Most of those have gone now. Arborists are super protective, they're like you know – don't let kid have any germs – well let's not have any old trees so all the old ones have been taken down but they truly were magnificent. On one side I was the bride hugging the tree and the other side was my husband hugging the tree and we weren't even touching – the trees were that big. They

were lovely. It'll be another hundred years before those trees are grown to those sizes if they're ever allowed to.

The east west walkway beside Clark's statue, well the whole of Clark's statue was surrounded by peppercorn trees which were just delightful – the same as most of our railway lines had peppercorn trees down them and they were beautiful trees. There's still a few remaining which is good.

My younger sister, she got married twenty years ago, she got married with the preacher standing on the Clark statue base steps and she was facing it. Her ceremony was there and we had the signing of the papers and things on the right hand side under the peppercorn trees. So each of my siblings has got their own memories I suppose. But it was beautiful – my younger sister who got married twenty years ago she has always been into fairy like things and old english history and her husband wore a nice almost Edwardian suit, beautiful one and Merryn had a gorgeous dress that was embroidered by my older sister. It was almost like a Queen Anne – beautiful brocaded – it was lovely. She walked from Mum's house across the road, down the main pathway – it was very nice and all the guests were standing around. That was a lovely wedding. Then they had their reception at the old lifesaving club up at the end of the beach – it was all very homey. But that's what Williamstown was.

30:55 We were very very lucky, we had this community that would have been the City of Melbourne had we had fresh water but it's that old, it's the oldest part of Melbourne. It grew up and it made its own community and therefore the Gardens were established in the 1850s – and the Fearon. You know it was all laid out and ear marked like an English property. We had our own hospital. We had the whole communal backup – many English churches – a lot of the designs were shipped out. One church was even shipped out brick by brick I think. Some of the churches are beautiful – all bluestone. I went to a beautiful bluestone school. Not many people in Williamstown or Australia can say they lived in this old-world English community. But we did and we were isolated because we were a peninsular. The Gardens were part of it- they were part of our community, our structure. We had every support, everybody was involved; everybody knew everybody – like a country town.

I remember when we were little children there were a few kids along the street that were our friends and we'd run from house to house and in late winter early spring the magpies would swoop us. It became a real problem and of course Dad would always tell Mr Anderson. Eventually, I think I was probably only six or five, they called in the sharp shooters. So every late winter early spring we weren't allowed to go outside for a week or so while the sharp shooters would be killing the magpies. They'd shoot all the magpies so the community was safe (laughs). Thanks goodness they don't do that now I like magpies.

There was a beautiful old tree over on the eastern side – it was a cork tree. It's not there now – in the last ten years it seems to have gone.

33:44 There were the three draught horses – a male, female adult draught horses - I can't remember their names but I used to know them - then their son. They kept the grass down on the Fearon Reserve. That made it playable by all these sports groups. There's always been lacrosse there and there was footy on the Osborne Street side always. We didn't need television in those days. You'd just stand on the front verandah and something was happening.

Across the road from the Fearon, which is sort of an extension in my mind of the Gardens, you go across to the old Hatt Reserve – another cricket game - and beside that was the Anglers club which was just a group of old men with their putt putt boats. They'd made a rock groin so that they had a protective area to bring their boats in and a hoist and everything. Beside that there was about another fifty meters across – there was another shed/structure and a pier into the bay which was where the picnic shelter is now – it was just on the foreshore there – and a family there – and a man who fished, I suppose you would call him a professional fisherman now – he fished and he repaired boats – he and his family lived there. It was Mr and Mrs Marks.

35:26 Their boys, their eldest sons went on to have a business in Williamstown. Everybody would recall the Marks Electrical. Their fourth child, Allison, was my age so we were good mates. As a seven or eight or nine year old my mum allowed me to have sleep overs – the whole family lived in the boatshed. They just had bare boards with water lapping underneath. They had a simple structure for – they did have water – I don't recall they had a toilet – they must have – no I don't think they did. It was a very simple life but to me it was better than girls own stories. At high tides they'd be flooded out. They all slept on camp stretchers. Mrs Marks – I think she had at least – three four five six or seven children – and they'd all been born in the boatshed. I remember at one stage Mum helping her out delivering the baby. They had no money but in those days none of us had any money but they particularly didn't have any money. But Mrs Marks was a very intelligent woman – and my Mum was too – and she made do, those kids were the healthiest looking kids in town. They had rosy cheeks, they were not skinny – they had plenty of fish of course. They had a menagerie like you wouldn't believe. The kids had probably fifty pets of all sorts – in cages – it was wonderland to me – and I was allowed to sleep over – on a stretcher like everybody else. Who can remember doing that – it was just brilliant. Mr Marks looked just like the old man of the sea – he had white hair and a white beard – beautiful, beautiful.

37:50 I learnt to swim off that pier. You'd watch everybody swimming away and in the end you'd just say 'oh blow this I'm going to do that too' and you'd jump in well over your head – next minute I could swim. We kids would all look after each other. If someone silly jumped in that didn't know what to do – didn't know how to dog paddle – somebody else would save them. My girlfriend who lived up the street, Yvonne, she and I were close mates and we used to have - between the anglers club and Marks's boatshed – we used to have our own water gardens. We'd go out there and we'd sit a half a day looking after our area – we called it our area. We'd sit out in the middle of the water and let the tide come up and go down. It was full of beautiful coloured seed weeds as good as the Barrier Reef. We had our own crabs that we'd named and they'd be there all the time. There was crustaceans – that was our sea gardens and we'd sit there days on end – in the water on our rock – just looking after it. This was what you did. There were so many things to do in Williamstown – it was lovely – and that was my backyard.

39:23 The Gardens were always very formal, we didn't muck around in them. You were on your best behaviour. It was like – the signs said that you didn't walk on the verges – well you didn't misbehave there either. It was a revered place. But it was beautiful and seasons would show spectacularly. Never bleak and horrible in winter, there was always something going on, autumn and spring. Once autumn had finished its nicest show, there wasn't a leaf left on the lawn – the men would rake everything up and like I said everything would be pristine – not a pebble out of place – not a blade of grass – not a weed - never a weed. It was fantastic.

There were strange things in the Gardens – there were opium poppies that I’ve learned since – because sometimes they still come up (laughs) the seeds are embedded in the soil. The formality of it was just glorious and I was lucky enough to live with it.

There’s not really much more I can tell you.

LW Loris, do you remember Mr Anderson locking the gates?

LEW Oh yes, yes, at sunset. It varied through the year because it happened at sunset and the sign says ‘these gates will be locked at sunset’ and that’s when they were locked. I knew that it happened, I didn’t see it very often because it was usually my bed time but yes it happened. The workmen would be there early in the morning so I’d never see them opening it up but yes they definitely locked them up and there were signs – there were signs everywhere beautifully hand scripted signs. But the sign used to say ‘these gates will locked at sunset’.

LW You said that you didn’t often see Mr Anderson, do you remember seeing him walking around

LEW I’d see him supervising and you’d always say hello Mr Anderson. Yes, I can envision him locking in summer time because as I got older we weren’t quite so early to bed. We might be out on our bikes on the street and I’d see him locking it up and know I’d have to go home then because it was getting dark. But sunset was – there was always a twilight in summer so we were out and about and I can clearly see him locking them up.

LW Do you remember hearing the bell that he used to ring?

LEW Yes, yes – warning people that he was locking up – yes – he’d wander around – probably had a routine. I think he finished nearest to my house in Osborne Street because that was nearest to his house. He’d go down to the back – there wasn’t a gate onto the Fearon – the arboretum was the other entrance – you had to go right round to the back of Mr Clark’s statue – he’d probably start there and ring the bell – yeh. It was very nice. I had forgotten about that.

LW Loris, you mentioned the horses before, do you remember seeing the horses working in the Gardens?

LEW No, no, the horses were there just to keep the grass down. I never saw them saddled or bridled or – no I never saw them pulling any equipment – they were there purely to keep the grass down. I never saw them pull a dray or anything like that. They had drays in my early years. We used to have the man come around with his covered dray with the vegetables in it and the baker would come around with a horse and van and the milkman had a dray and the bottle-o came on Saturdays with a dray but I never saw those three horses working – they were there to mow the grass.

I have this vague thought of the older ones pulling a log one time just in the working area but I can’t be sure of that. Have you met anybody that heard of them using them?

LW We have a couple of photos

LEW Of them being used?

LW Yes

LEW You sure they were those ones? The bottle-o man had a draught horse, the milkman had a draught horse

LW There's a photo of a horse pulling the mower in the Gardens

LEW Oh yes I remember that, that's really early. In my lifetime they'd stopped doing that.

LW You mentioned the cannons, do you remember seeing the cannons being removed from the Gardens?

LEW No – I didn't see them the day – the first cannons went – the ones that faced south, they went first and they just sort of disappeared – and you sort of went 'where did they go?' – and Mum would tell us what had happened to them. The first ones went- I think they went to Geelong or somewhere like that – they went out of Williamstown. There were some down at the Back Beach as well and they were shipped out of town and the last two are the ones that are now on Nelson Place. One still had a shell in it and I couldn't climb down the barrel of that but the other one, it didn't have a shell in it and I used to climb down the barrel of that. I thought I was very brave going inside there, I mean there were spiders and twigs and totally enclosed.

There's nothing more I can really recall. I just lived - that was my area – I lived in that area all the time – I grew up on the beach in summer and went there in winter as well. You know – you have your space – that was my space. We've only just sold Mum's house last year. What a wrench that was to all of us. But none of us could afford to buy each other out. There's a doctor and his young family, little boys, have bought it and they're redoing it – major renovations but the front part of the house has to comply with the heritage but the back – they'll be spending over the million dollar mark which we would never have found. But it was a great house, great area, fabulous people. I had a story book childhood.

LW That's a really lovely note to finish on Loris. On behalf of the Friends of Williamstown Botanic Gardens thank you so much, it's been such a privilege listening to you

LEW You're quite welcome, it's nice to remember it all.

After completing the interview Loris wanted to mention her sporting experiences and the Melbourne Olympic Games in 1956. It is on the recording but not transcribed as the intention of the interview was to record recollections of the Botanic Gardens.