

STATUES IN AND AROUND THE BALLARAT BOTANICAL GARDENS

J A Chisholm - 1983

On Queen Victoria's birthday, 24 May 1884, the first 12 statues, the gift of Mr Thomas Stoddart, were unveiled in the Botanic Gardens.

It is interesting to reflect that the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery was founded at the same period and therefore was influenced by this gesture to omit from its design, a special area for statues.

Those initial 12 statues, 'scattered' throughout the gardens proper, were all executed by Italian Sculptors. Subsequently, some of the finest pieces have been done by Australians either in Australia, or overseas. Some of the best examples would be those in the Statuary Pavilion executed by Charles Francis Summers. Nearby, 'Wallace' was done by Percival Ball.

The 12 statues donated by Mr Stoddart, were selected by him whilst on a trip through Italy. Carved from CARRARA Marble - it is interesting to know that the quarries are still in operation. Carrara, city of 70,000 persons, is on the coast of Italy, approximately west from Florence and 50km from Pisa. Quarried for nearly 2,000 years, there are still nearly 275 quarries, exporting 50% of the marble to Arab countries for use in buildings. The city still fosters art, with its annual sculpture contest held in the city square where young artists have 14 days in which to shape their entry.

Those 12 statues were the beginning of Ballarat being known as the City of Statues.

The unveiling was done with due ceremony, following a procession of boats from View Point at 2.00pm. The steamer carrying the Councillors and guests was accompanied by yachts, rowing eights and row boats on the trip to the gardens jetty, from where the party moved to the official dais. All the statues were covered, with draperies and as Mercury was officially unveiled, a signal gun was fired, and, as the paper of the day reported, "the draperies shrouding the other statues from the public gaze were simultaneously taken from each of the other figures and the militia band played the National Anthem and three ringing cheers were given for the Queen." (her birthday) Mr Stoddart was present on the stand with the Mayor.

In addition to the 12 statues of Carrara Marble, Mr Stoddart also presented to the City, the pedestals of Sicilian Marble which have for their base Victorian Granite.

STODDART STATUES:

- SPRING (by BERTOZZI) is depicted as a maiden crowned with a wreath of flowers and carrying a basket of blossoms.
- SUMMER (by BERTOZZI) is depicted as a woman bearing a sheaf of corn, with a scythe in her hand depicting that it is the harvest season.
- AUTUMN (by BERTOZZI) a manly young fellow holding a bunch of grapes emblematic of the season, clad in a robe red with the juice of the vintage; the dog at his feet denotes that it is also the season of the chase. This statue was damaged in transit and repaired on arrival.
- WINTER (by BERTOZZI) as the oldest season is depicted as an old man drawing in his cloak to keep out the cold.
- HERCULES (by BERTOZZI) the acme of personal strength, a heathen deity, his club was presented to him by mighty Vulcan, the Roman Fire God.
- MERCURY (by BERTOZZI) in mythology was the messenger of the Gods, the winged caduceus indicating speed. He was the Patron of travellers, of thieves, pickpockets and dishonest persons. He also presided over orators and merchants.
- BACCHANTE (by GIOVANNI UDNY) a mythological Priestess to Bacchus, usually carried in her hands a dart entwined in ivy leaves. The Priestesses were reputed to be wild women who went into the hills, clothed themselves in animal skins, tore animals apart with their teeth and indulged in orgies.
- FLORA FARNESE (by GIOVANNI UDNY), sometimes known as the Flora of the Farnese. The Farnese being a noble Italian family, part of their art collection including a Flora, the Roman Goddess of Spring. I presume that this statue is after the one from that collection.
- FLORA (by G MARCHETTI), as a symbol of beauty in nature, is portrayed as a maiden in the act of watering the flowers at her feet.
- LEDA (by B RAGGI), wife of TYNDARUS, King of Sparta, whom Jupiter wooed in the form of a swan. His wife was JUNO, whose daughter was HEBE.
- HEBE (by B RAGGI), being fair and beautiful, was made the Goddess of Youth, and cup bearer to all the Gods. On day she was unlucky enough to spill JOVE's cup and lost her position. Ultimately she married HERCULES.
- POMONA (by B RAGGI), the old Roman Goddess of tree fruits.

When the statues were presented, the donor added some instructions for periodically cleaning them with rain water, soda and a soft brush. This was carried out for a long time, but later forgotten. As a result, Winter out in the open looks quite clean, especially after the rain, whilst some of the others, look as though they have a case of small pox.