

Wellingtonia

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FRIENDS NEWSLETTER SPRING 2010



PRESIDENT'S REPORT – JOAN GARNER

I do hope that you have all been able to keep warm and well through this old fashioned Ballarat winter. Our reputation for being the coldest place in Victoria is alive and well. The bright side of course is the wonderful rainfall and the fact that we can face spring and summer knowing that our trees have been well soaked and our gardens will benefit greatly.

I find it quite amazing the number of people that visit our Gardens on the coldest of days. The trees are so beautiful without their leaves and there is a true feeling of peace to be had in the winter months. Watching the lake fill up has also been a great and welcome pastime.

The Staff have been very busy preparing the spring plantings and the display in the Conservatory is certainly up to the standard for which our staff are known.,

It has been a quiet time for the Friends since our last newsletter but work has continued for all our special groups. We are quite busy between now and the end of the year as you will find in our "Coming Events" section in this newsletter.

The committee has set the re-furbishing of the McDonald gates as our next project. This will give a great lift to the Southern end of the Gardens; the estimated cost is around \$15,000. Our application for a Federal grant to purchase our own Power Point equipment was granted. This is very exciting as it will be used by the history group, the guides, the Education group and, of course, visiting speakers. This is the second grant we have received this year, the first being for the restoration of the Thomas Stoddart grave from the Ballarat Foundation.

Our August General meeting was very well attended and Guest Speaker Lynsey Poore, gave us a glimpse of the beautiful; and historic Gardens of Paris.

I look forward to seeing you at our various spring functions.

Joan Garner – President FBBG

GEORGE LONGLEY – the work of the gardener in the 1870s by Zelda Martin



The Ballarat Historical Society collection, held in the Gold Museum's archives, contains Minutes and Report books relating to the Ballarat Botanical Gardens, although unfortunately a complete sequence of either is not available.

The *Botanic Gardens Report Book 1870–87* contains reports, on a fortnightly or monthly basis, from George Longley (Gardener, but later appointed Curator) to the Mayor and Members of the Municipal Council. Due to repetitiveness, spelling, and lack of punctuation and capitalisation, this book is not easy to read. Notwithstanding, it allows us to form an interesting cameo of the role of the Gardener at the Ballarat Botanic Gardens in the early 1870s.

In addition, the book provides detailed information about many aspects of the history of the Gardens. Most members are aware that Baron Von Mueller, Curator of the Melbourne Botanical Gardens and Mr Bunce, Curator of the Geelong Botanical Gardens, offered assistance in planning out the gardens, and in providing many seeds and plants. Perhaps not so well known was the assistance of Mr Moore, Curator of the Sydney Botanical Gardens, in supplying plants and bags of seeds to Ballarat. George Longley obtained Council permission to travel to Sydney, returning with 150 choice plants, 250 Seedling Oaks, a packet of seeds and 60 lbs of English acorns – the latter were particularly successful, and a further three bushels were requested in February, 1872.

Scattered throughout George Longley's reports are quite useful statistical details, such that in 1864, eight acres of the Gardens were under cultivation but by

1871 this had grown to 30 acres with some 1200/1300 forest trees planted. Longley also provides his estimates of attendances at fetes, picnics and special days such as Boxing Day. Thus he reports that 15,000 to 20,000 people attended a fete on 14 November 1871, indicating the great popularity of the Gardens. On 6/12/1870, George Longley states that the Gardens employed a regular staff of 5 men and two boys. He also regularly lists the numbers of prisoners employed (average about 12) and the work they were doing. This usually involved heavy tasks requiring little or no skills. Two aspects of the Gardener's life should be emphasised. First, much of the work George and his men were required to do was very mundane, and secondly, even in the early 1870s, George Longley had only limited control over his own work. The following extract from his report illustrates its boring and repetitive nature.

The chief work done for this last fortnight in the garden hoeing and clearing plants watering borders and raking walks carting dung from the park mowing croquet grounds collecting seeds put in various cuttings. (14/3/1870)

Despite his wide gardening knowledge, George Longley had to abide by Council decisions. For example, he reported that *"I beg to inform you that I have had instructions from the City Clerk to cart all the manure from the cattle yards to the Gardens"* (17/7/1871). Also in July, 1871, George pointed out to Council that about three years previously he had suggested that six blocks in Sturt Street should be planted with Oriental Planes and Pinus Insignis, and this was eventually carried out. On 31 July 1871, he wrote in his report to Council that *"not 12 months have elapsed until the Council received a letter begging to have them removed and Blue Gums put in their place."* (31/7/1871) He then pointed out very strongly the reasons why he considered Blue Gums inappropriate for city streets – all to no avail.

In 1872, George Longley prepared an inventory of tools. It was interesting to note that this inventory, containing about 70 different types of tools, was divided into *Gardening Tools*, *Blacksmith's Tools*, *Stable Tools* and *Tools Broken and Worn Out* (the latter includes *"I dray very little good"*) 14/11/1871. The list of *'Broken and Worn Out'* tools was certainly an innovative way of informing the Council about the tool needs of the gardens. It should be remembered that Longley did have problems obtaining essential needs, for example, in October, 1872 he reminded Council of

the piece of netting 6ft by 3ft he required for "ketching gold fish".

It is apparent that, in addition to gardening, all the tasks relating to animals such as horses and ponies were carried out in-house – by just the 5 men and 2 boys. There were many occasions when his men were required to do other work, for example, one man spent six days repairing the swings while others had to paint the fruit carts, and do other repair work around the Gardens. We also read at various times of George and/or his men building fences, a potting shed and even a kitchen.

We also learn that organisations such as the churches, Water Commission, Pleasant Street School, Mechanics Bazaar, Benevolent Asylum, and even Ercildoune received large numbers of free trees and shrubs from the Gardens. George provides lists of these 'disbursements' – some months up to about 2000/2500 plants. He wrote in his report that if this continued, he would need to appropriate £15 – £20 for seeds each year. (21/6/1870) The task would also have tied up his workers for many hours each month.

Finally, there was a quirky little report about the horse. *"I made known to the council in the month of March of the horse dying belonging to the Gardens and have not had a substitute for it, the one which I have now is only a pony which cost about £3.10,- and it is not able to do that work: it will require a good rough horse: for roads are bad and the dung is heavy"* (17/7/1871)

All quotations are from various dates in the *Botanic Gardens Report Book 1870–8*; spelling and punctuation have not been changed.

I would like to acknowledge the kind permission of Roger Trudgeon, President of Ballarat Historical Society Inc. and Manager/Curator of the Gold Museum, for allowing me to use the Report books to write this article.

Zelda Martin

George Longley (1822-1899) served as Head Gardener/Curator for forty years from the 8th of December 1858 until shortly before his death on the 14th of October 1899. Not only did he lay out and develop the Ballarat Botanical Gardens according to the prize-winning design, much as we see them today, he also was responsible for the improvements to the lake foreshore within the boundaries of the gardens. By his 'indefatigable exertions' he transformed the bush wilderness into an 'earthly paradise'. His legacy to us is certainly a cause for celebration. Do come along to the Friends headquarters in the George Longley Building, just north of the Robert Clark Centre on Thursday 14th October at 4.00pm and find out more about the life and achievements of this remarkable man.