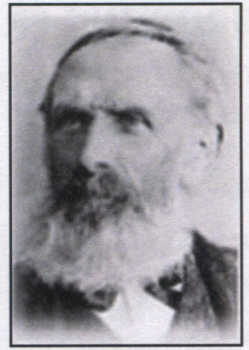


## GEORGE LONGLEY'S ACHIEVEMENTS REVISITED: REMEMBERING OUR GARDENS' FOUNDER



Many Friends will know the name **George Longley**, the first Curator of the Ballarat Botanic Gardens appointed in 1858. Tom Toop, Curator for fifty-five years wrote that Longley "*did pioneer work in the truest sense, as his was the hand that put the first spade into the ground and created from its virgin state the present beautiful landscape.*" Besides Longley's leadership in the development of the Botanic Gardens and nurseries, his many responsibilities included, the training of staff, the Sturt Street garden beds, street trees, the Viewpoint garden beds, care of the white swans, the Acclimatization Society, the Fish Hatchery, Menagerie and Deer Park as well as the maintenance of the Borough Meteorological records, all for a salary of three pounds a week. All of these tasks were performed without electricity, mechanical devices or mains water.

Originally, Longley had trained as a gardener at Lowther Castle, in England. He married Helen Tickle in 1853, arrived in Port Phillip and became a miner at the Black Hill diggings the following year. The hard physical labour associated with being a miner may well have been valuable preparation for the energy and self-discipline needed in his later career as a multi-skilled Curator.

Meanwhile, for the first 18 months, Longley and his family lived in a tent on site. One can only imagine the hardships endured by Helen Longley in Ballarat's cold.

After Longley was appointed as Gardener in Ballarat, one of the fundamentals of family life was attendance at the Jubilee Methodist Church overlooking Yuille's Swamp. Longley acted as Sunday School Superintendent and bell ringer there, which honed his skills as a leader and teacher. And, as a devout, sober and upright Methodist, he also ensured that the seats on the Garden swings were removed on Sundays!

His correspondence with the Ballarat Council and the Botanical Gardens Committee of Management revealed an abrupt, plain-speaking, practical man. In 1869, the Council ordered that the prison labourers who had worked in every corner of the Gardens were not to work within 50 yards from any tree or street. As no prisoners had escaped or gone missing, Longley wrote that he thought the order was "a most ridiculous idea" and there would be no other place than the Swamp for them.

At another stage, the Council replaced the Council carthorse with a pony. Longley was quick to point out that dung was heavy.

There was the expectation that Longley would provide reports on all that happened in the Gardens, even less important events. Various, he was to ensure boat holders did not allow passengers after sunset and report on the theft of the white swans' eggs.

Over the years of his service, at times, Longley had a difficult and tense relationship with those at the Town Hall. As Longley became older and not as strong, the Council sought his retirement and proposed to halve his salary and reduce his supervision and work to half. There was, understandably, a public outcry.

As a leader in his church and community, he was a foundation member of the Ballarat Horticultural Society; a frequent exhibitor in plant shows and he displayed the first pineapple grown in Ballarat. Under his stewardship, festoons would be supplied for a Mayoral Ball and 500 garlands of cut flowers were regularly prepared for the cemetery. Longley's purview as Curator extended into myriad aspects of Ballarat life.

What contributed significantly to Longley's work as a renowned Curator were his other talents as a teacher, lecturer and mentor. While Longley could be a dour and taciturn man in his dealings with the City authorities, he instinctively knew the value of education and generously passed on his skills and knowledge to those who were to succeed him.

Between 1880-1888, Longley began providing outdoor lectures for the Botany students at the School of Mines and Industries in Ballarat. Furthermore, Longley had his apprentices at the Gardens undertake a six-year programme and then two years as improvers with no guarantee of further employment. Longley was a hard man. And yet, as with most exceptional teachers, he inspired some of his apprentices, notably, John Lingham and John Williams. By 1890, these two men succeeded Longley as Curators. They continued and developed Longley's work with great success. BBG became a standard for other public gardens. Another of Longley's apprentices, Hugh Linaker went on to design the State Institutional Gardens of Lakeside, Mayday Hills, Larundel and Parkville with the Melbourne Domain being his last work.

Throughout the long years of service as pioneer Curator of the BBS, Longley acquired a world of experience and influenced other important gardeners. Longley had contacts far and wide, in Victoria, Australia and overseas. If he was not meeting or corresponding with other Curators such as von Mueller in the Melbourne Botanical Gardens, he was busy procuring seeds from San Francisco and plants, birds and animals from other parts of the world. With an encyclopaedic knowledge of gardens, he was not only an authority in the world of gardens he had become a great communicator.

After Longley's death, Ballarat Council grudgingly permitted his second wife to remain in the Curator's cottage for a short time. No recognition was given for the essential support she gave her husband in his work. George Longley came to be remembered by a street named after him and the George Longley Building. And yet to this day, there is no actual memorial in the BBG celebrating his outstanding achievements! (*Why not? Ed.*)

George Longley is an iconic figure in Ballarat's history who must not be forgotten in the 21st century when we stroll through our beautiful Botanical Gardens.

**Stephanie de Boer, History Group**

*If the label says a favourite of birds it means avoid planting near cars and clothes lines.*