

Zoo Timeline – a preliminary draft

Please feel free to add, subtract or alter anything

1857 The Ballarat City Council applied to the government to reserve the land where the old police paddock was for public gardens. George Longley was appointed as gardener and spent the next forty years supervising the establishment of the foundations of the Ballarat Botanical gardens.

1857 -1870 This was a period of colonisation in Victoria where Europeans began to settle into unfamiliar environments. Acclimatisation societies were formed in order to establish familiar and exotic plants and animals into new environments for economic, game or recreational values or from nostalgia, to make the land feel more like 'home'.

English songbirds were released and white swans introduced to the lake. This was not just a one way process as black swans were sent to the UK. Some introductions were considered misguided and the emphasis shifted to zoological display of exotic birds and animals

1873 The Ballarat Fish Acclimatisation Society met for the first time and discussed the possibility of introducing sporting fish such as trout into the waters of the region. The Ballarat Trout Hatchery still exists at the Botanic Gardens, the volunteers raising hundreds of thousands of trout each year.

1873 – 1910 Due to the public interest in establishing a zoo at the Botanic Gardens, George Longley set aside an area of the gardens to become an animal enclosure. It was located in the north-west corner of the gardens and comprised an area of more than a hectare. As finance allowed, building work started on the erection of cages and an aviary over this period.

Many birds and animals were offered to the gardens including two six-foot Johnstone fresh water crocodiles from Cairns, deer, monkeys, and numerous native animals and birds.

1912 A former Ballarat citizen, Henry Ben Jahn died in his native Germany. In his will, much to everyone's astonishment, he left his entire estate of about 11,000 pounds to the Ballarat City Council for the purpose of establishing a 'menagerie' in the Botanic Gardens. The Mayor's annual report of this year stated that the bequest would enable the Council to establish a collection of animals 'attractive and instructive to residents and visitors of all ages'. Under the terms of the bequest (The council was permitted to invest under the trust act, up to 3/5 of the value) 3,600 pounds would be available for the purchase of animals and the erection of accommodation for them. There will still be 7,300 pounds to be invested with a view to the expenditure of the interest upon it for maintenance and upkeep. The zoo would be charging entrance fees to offset expenditure. It was from here that the establishment of the Zoo really took off

1914 At the invitation of the Mayor, Mr Dudley Le Souef, director of the Melbourne Zoological Gardens, gave advice on and suggestions for the establishment of a zoological collection in Ballarat. He stated that with the means at its disposal, The Council could establish a good collection of herbivorous and native animals; but that it would not be desirable to introduce carnivores. The Council's suggestion that an Australian collection should be formed met with Mr Le Souef's approval.

The Engineer was instructed draw up a plan of the layout so that work could proceed on accommodation, Caretaker's quarters, paths, fencing and planting (with native trees as far as possible).

1917 With all the preliminary work completed and the animals in their new quarters, the Zoo was formally declared open to the public by the Hon, The Chief Secretary, Mr Donald McLeod, on 4th April 1917.

Mr J. Waight was appointed as the curator. He reported that 'A residence for the curator has been erected on a prominent position, to a style in keeping with its surroundings. Both outside and inside the outer fence there are areas devoted to distinctively Australian Flora.' And 'Since the opening day and more especially during the warm days the Zoo has been well patronised by the public and general expressions of approval have been given. The general design and artistic arrangement of paths, beds, etc. have been much admired.'

The fauna on exhibition at the time of opening was:-Kangaroo, Wallaby (Victorian and Tasmanian), Paddy Melon, Monkey, Wombat, Ringtail Opossum, Tasmanian Black Opossum, Native Cat, Guinea Pigs, Tortoise, Emu, Cassowary, Eagle, Swamp Hawk, Blue Crane, Silver-necked Crane, White and Coloured Pea Fowl, Guinea Fowl, Pheasant, , Pacific and Silver Gulls, Bronzewing Pigeons, Common Pigeons, several varieties of Parrots, Mountain, Black and Wood Ducks, Cockatoo, Laughing Jackass, Spurwing Plover, Stone Plover, Bald Coot, Black Magpie, Owl, Dove, Californian Quail, Linnet and Java Sparrows.

1918 Work of planting, maintaining and extending the pens proceeded regularly and feeding tending and housing of animals was receiving due care and attention.

Donkeys were purchased and donkey cart rides were introduced and proved to be very popular. Bears were delivered in good shape and many other animals were offered as gifts and for sale.

Williamson's Circus offered for sale Tigers, Black Panther, Leopard, Orang outangs, Monkeys, Elephants from Singapore. This offer does not seem to have been accepted

The matter of registering the Ballarat Zoo as a quarantine station was investigated and advice received that that the keeping of wild or undomesticated animals derived from overseas where such animals are kept under perpetual quarantine would not be permitted. There was an annual bond required for keeping animals acquired from sources within Australia. Commonwealth Quarantine Acts(1908/24) 'B' Class Zoological Gardens.

1920s In this decade the popularity of the Zoo increased well with gate takings in 1924 of 425 pounds comprised of 15,687 adults @ 6d each and 7857 children @ 1d.

In 1929 the gate was 517 pounds 18843 adults and 11,067 children.

Animals were still being added by purchase, donation and natural increase and enclosures built
In 1928 Born at the Zoo; Japanese Deer, Bennet Wallabies, Black Wallaby. Hatched: White Peafowls, Canada Geese, Canaries, Finches, Weavers.

Donated: Black Ducks, Stumptail Lizards, Tiger Snakes, Carpet Snakes, Red Kangaroos, coloured Rabbits, Rhesus Monkey, Major Mitchell Cockatoos.

Purchased: Camel, 19 small Rhesus Monkeys, Yellow and Green Shell Parrots, Cockatoos, 2 Cassowaries, Barred Doves, 2 Great Grey Kangaroos.

1930s The early part of this decade saw Zoo attendances more than halved due to terrible weather in 1931 and the early years of the depression. However the feeding and care of the animals and their surroundings were reported to be very good. Numbers improved greatly towards the end of the decade despite the outbreak of polio and the war. A chute, see saw and a mini merry go round were installed. American Grey Squirrels were introduced in 1937 and they thrived for some years.

Report in 1934 of the death of 2 White Swans in Fairyland probably killed by dogs or gander.

1940s and 50s Due to war restrictions visitors were not up to the usual strength. The matter of limiting the Zoo's opening hours was discussed.

In 1951 the Council leased the Zoo to Mr G Langley however the lease was eventually terminated as the terms of the lease were not met.

There were many letters to council about the poor physical state of the zoo, animals not being cared for correctly, too many domestic animals, many animals aged and in poor condition trees in need of work and excluding sunlight, empty pens, rats, too many dogs etc. The number and variety of exhibits seek to have decreased considerably

The 1950s saw a number of letters to council re the return of white swans to the lake. Despite a number of suggestions made it was not possible to purchase any in Australia and the cost of freighting the birds from London by air was not affordable.

In 1959 the Zoological Board of Victoria forwarded a cheque for 180 pounds being the assessment of the value of the stock taken over from the Ballarat Zoological Gardens.

Now all that remains is the Zoo Drive leading to a few concrete animal shelters in one corner of the North Gardens .

Pictures on the Computer at GLB

(FBBG-2011 copy)

108 Ballarat Zoological Garden in NW corner

109 Entrance to the Zoo 1917-1959

110 Henry Ben Jahn proposed inscription on memorial tablet

111 The Ballarat Zoological Gardens

112 The Aviary at the Zoo

113 The Courier 3/12/2000

114 Remnants of 200 structures concrete shelters devised by Le Soeuf

146 Crocodiles at Ballarat Zoo

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