

# Ballarat Botanical Gardens

1920 - 1950

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(ELIZABETH  
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The period from 1920 onwards was a vastly different era from the 1990's we know. The population varied from below 30,000 to some 35,000 people. Transport to and from the Ballarat Gardens was mostly bicycles, many horse-drawn vehicles, local electric trams and steam trains, much slower than today. Progress to motor transport was slow and gradual in the 1920's, but inevitably faster from the 1930's.

Leisure and pleasure activities were simple, but the Botanical Gardens attracted hundreds, even thousands of visitors from near and far. Excursion trains from Melbourne brought in vast numbers at week-ends, loud in their praise of the colorful displays. Children played happily on a huge naval cannon and on the many see-saws, swings, turntables and maypole rings on the lake foreshore, while in the early 1920's Almeida's rotunda penny slot machines played pianola rolls and <sup>PROVIDED OTHER</sup> amusements for young people.

Lake Wendouree was ever popular for quiet relaxation <sup>AND FUN</sup> with hired rowing boats, paddle steamers, motor boat rides and graceful yachts sailing across the water.

Sunday school children would arrive in their hundreds by tram and horse-drawn or motor furniture vans for their annual picnics; Boiling water from a wood-fired outdoor copper was available at 2 pence (2<sup>d</sup>) for 2 quarts (2<sup>qt</sup>) for picnic teas and ice cream cones @ 1 penny and 3 pence were sold at the kiosk.

The Gardens were under the supervision of Thomas B. Toop (always known as Tom) since 1914, well trained in horticulture and the son and grandson of English gardeners, while in 1924 Tom Beaumont joined the gardens staff as an apprentice under Tom Toop. These two men showed great skill in their Conservatory displays in the 1906 "Keel" Glass House and the two small glass houses at the south end.

High standards were attained with the beautiful and popular tuberosus begonias and other seasonal varieties of potted plants.

The gardens did show improved changes over the years; removal of a huge spreading cypress <sup>tree</sup> from the main lawn gave a better view across the flower beds which were altered and increased to achieve seasonal displays of exceptional color and beauty. The early free plantings showed tremendous growth in size and many new commemorative and memorial trees were added.

Some Notable changes that occurred were —

In 1921 the Hon. J. Y. McDonald M.L.A. provided the Pergola and arch of creepers forming the south entrance also the McDonald Bandstand where the City or Returned Soldiers' Memorial Bands played regularly to the crowds on Sunday afternoons.

The Adam Lindsay Gordon Cottage was moved from the rear of Craig's Hotel in 1934 and renovated with all memorabilia displayed for tourists.

The low expanded metal fence around the gardens was removed in 1938, and two new brick toilet blocks erected in that year when sewerage arrived.

The Prime Ministers' Avenue commenced in March 1940 with the erection of the first 12 busts.

Tom Toop retired in December 1943 when aged 77 years having been at the Gardens since 1890. He lived on at the first curator's residence adjacent to the fernery until his death aged 91 years. His ashes were scattered on a garden bed in front of the residence which became known as the "Tom Toop Corner".

Tom Beaumont became Superintendent in 1947 and was later awarded an M.B.E. for the world-wide fame and expertise he achieved in the growing of Tuberosus Begonias.

ROY. D. MOSMAN

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