

September 30, 2020

The Friends
of the Public Gardens



Newsletter

PO Box 36013 • 5665 Spring Garden Road • Halifax, NS • B3J 3S9 www.halifaxpublicgardens.ca

What makes our Garden a Victorian garden?

In 1984, the Halifax Public Gardens was celebrated as a rare surviving example of a Victorian public garden in Canada. It was deemed that the 'sense of space' that the Public Gardens created, was of special value to Canadians, earning it the designation of National Historic Site. But what exactly are the features that make a Victorian garden unique from other public gardens?

During Victorian times the idea that gardens were a work of art, rather than a work of nature became popular. Following this philosophy, known now as Gardenesque landscaping design, Victorian gardens tended to be self-contained, independent of their surroundings.

Our Public Gardens is gradually separated from the urban landscape by wide tree-lined sidewalks outside the Gardens. That separation is further reinforced within the Gardens where avenues of mature trees, many lindens and elms, run parallel to the perimeter fence. This was one of the first design features that Richard Power implemented after he became the first superintendent of our Public Gardens in 1872.



Ornamental pear trees (*Pyrus calleryana*) line the boulevard outside the perimeter fence on South Park Street



The deciduous Laburnum Tree sometimes called Golden Chain or Golden Rain.

By the time the Halifax Public Gardens was being developed, another guiding principle for Victorian gardens was to plant trees, shrubs and flowers so they could be showcased as individual specimens. This led plants to be spaced out amidst immaculately groomed lawns, pathways and flowerbeds, such as we see today in our Public Gardens.

(continued on page 2)

Victorian garden, Continued from page 1

A wide variety of plant specimens were valued, and exotic specimens were particularly sought after. Over 140 species of trees are represented in the 675 trees currently growing in our Public Gardens, a legacy of this planting approach.

Colour, particularly primary colours, and texture were emphasized in the Victorian gardens. The Victorian practice of bedding out involves the temporary planting of fast growing annuals, biennials and perennials, particularly those with variegated leaves, to create colourful displays from spring through to fall.



August display of Fan Palms and Begonias

In Victorian times, the then brand-new technology of greenhouses was key to achieving continuously attractive flowerbed displays. Our greenhouses play a similarly vital role today.

Our greenhouses also provide a winter refuge for our exotics and semi-tropical species, such as cacti, agave, palms and hibiscus that like to spend winter indoors! These exotic species, as well as roses, geraniums, fuchsias, dahlias, rhododendrons, gladioli, and begonias were popular plants in Victorian gardens and hold a similar prominence in our current gardens.

Superintendent Richard Power also introduced a Victorian style of gardening called carpet bedding to the Halifax Public Gardens. Very popular during Victorian times, these intricately patterned 3-dimensional displays require constant attention if they are to maintain their beautiful designs through the season. (continued on page 3)



Highly designed carpet beds were also a major feature of Victoria gardens and the tradition continues to present times

Obligations of a National Historic Site

A Commemorative Integrity Statement outlines the Halifax Public Gardens features that make it a nationally significant site, guiding its development and maintenance as a National Historic Site. The components that have been recognized as essential to maintaining our Gardens as an example of a Victorian Garden are:

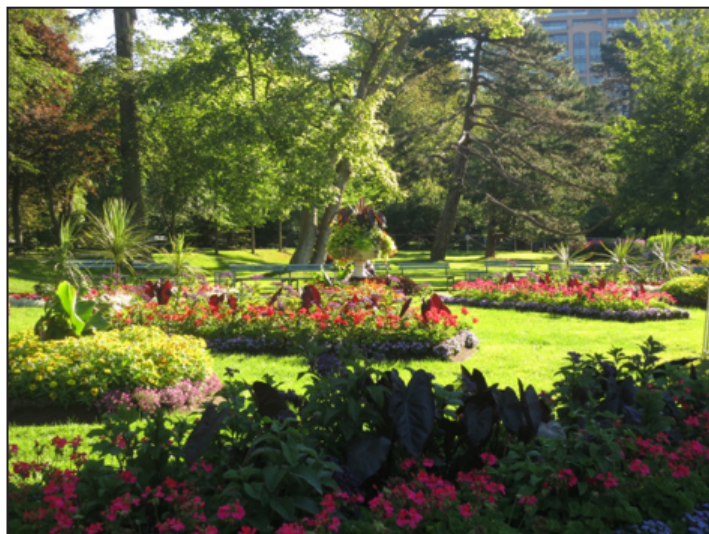
- Maintain the integrity and quality of the original planting material (eg. Weeping elms)
- Follow planting traditions and Victorian taste in plant material
- Maintain the lawns, pathways, buildings, man-made ornaments and plant displays to the meticulous standards of Victorian gardens
- Protect the Gardens from surrounding development which could alter the delicate natural balance sustained in the Gardens

Victorian garden, Continued from page 2

Gardenesque principles also dictate the placement of plants in a Victorian garden. At a landscape scale, Victorian gardens have a subtle axial symmetry containing discrete areas.

The Grand Allee pathway serves to define the appropriate halves of our Gardens. Superimposed over the symmetry are the gently curving, meandering pathways that provide optimum views of the plants and the garden features.

At a more detailed scale, the plants are grouped together following the design principles. For example, the Victoria Jubilee Bandstand, marking the center of the Public Gardens, showcases 32 formal 'floating beds' of brilliant colours. The geometric shapes of the beds highlight another distinctive feature of Victorian gardens.

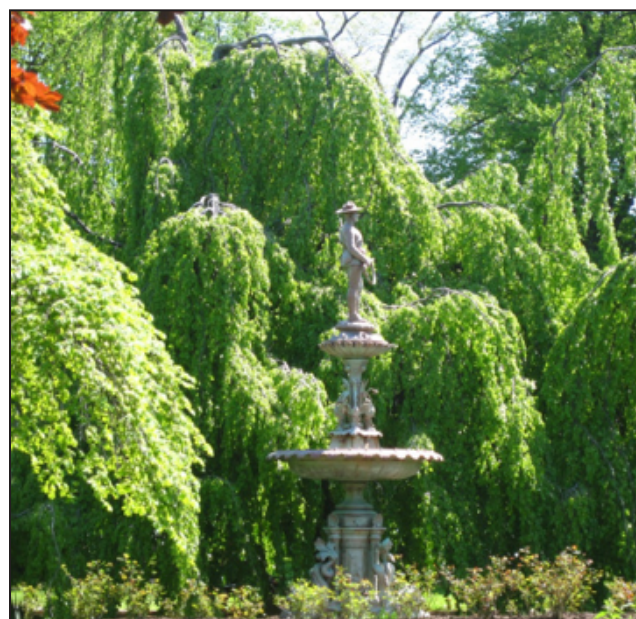


Some of the 32 'floating' beds around the Bandstand.



Scroll beds near the Victoria Jubilee Fountain. On the left, *Cercidiphyllum japonicum* (Katsura Tree) in its Fall glory.

The area around Victoria Jubilee Fountain highlights the Victorian preference for rococo curves as seen in the serpentine and scroll flowerbeds.



Fagus sylvatica "Pendula" (weeping European Birch) cascades behind the Soldier's Memorial Fountain

The Soldier's Memorial Fountain (also known as the South African Memorial or the Boer War Fountain) anchors the section featuring weeping trees including Elms, Camperdown Elms, Birch, European Ash and Beech species.

(continued on page 4)

The final component of a Victorian garden is the man-made embellishments. Elaborately designed built structures such as the Bandstand, and Horticultural Hall, are characteristic of a typical Victorian garden. Decorative ironwork, such as that found in our fountains, main entrance gates and fences was a popular feature of Victorian gardens. Classically inspired ornaments, such as the statues, urns and features on our fountains, help to create a serene and, to some, whimsical atmosphere.

As was the custom in Victorian times, many of these features were placed in our Gardens in honour of either a milestone in Queen Victoria's reign, a contemporary military event, or a local notable individual.



Decorative ironwork gates at the main entrance.



The Golden Elm (*Ulmus glabra* var. *lutescens*) glowing by the Victoria Jubilee Fountain featuring Egeria and cherubs

In normal years, our volunteers lead free, hour long, weekly tours of the Public Gardens during the summer season. By request, these tours can be offered in several different languages. Our knowledgeable volunteers have many more details to share about the Victorian features of our Gardens, and we highly recommend joining a tour to learn more.

Photos Courtesy of Susan Feader, Serena Graham-Dwyer, Susan Kerslake and Martin Wigginton

Volunteer Opportunity Looking for an opportunity to practice those organizational skills you worked hard to develop? We are looking for a responsible, intelligent person (we know there are lots of you out there) to work behind the scenes keeping our membership files organized and our membership informed.

You need to have a computer, and access to the Internet. We will train you on how to use a simple membership programme. Here is a list of things you will be asked to handle:

1. Keep track of membership database. Although much of our annual dues system is automated, you will, at times, need to enter new members and contact people with lapsed memberships
2. Keep membership home page and automated letters up to date
3. Attend TFPG events to answer questions about membership and take new applications
4. During summer season prepare and send out (using the membership programme) a weekly sheet summarizing 'What's happening in the Gardens' for the upcoming week and once a month, send out a newsletter (prepared by others).
5. Send out condolence cards to families of people that have requested donations to TFPG at the time of death

If you are interesting in helping, please send an email to infohalifaxpublicgardens@gmail.com!

NEWS



Our Pose as Diana contest and our LIVE Diana performances have, sadly, come to an end! However you can see wonderful photos on our website halifaxpublicgardens.ca under Events. Our contest winners have special prominence under the Pose as Diana Contest but check out Gallery and Live Statues to see all the fun.

Congratulations and many thanks to our Events Chairperson Milena Khazanavicius, and her dedicated volunteers for making this all happen!

Also much appreciation goes to the Spring Garden Area Business Association for helping sponsor these activities.

Watch for the installation of the restored Diana statue in October



Live Statue



SUMMER INTERN PROJECTS

Lauren Siteman has produced a searchable database summarizing details about the Memorials, past and current, that have graced the Halifax Public Gardens. This database will be available on our website.

CAMP HILL CEMETERY BURIALS

Michael Nearing compiled an extensive record of stories about people buried in Camp Hill Cemetery. He also created a self-guided tour brochure, complete with original drawings, which will be available next season.

Thanks to Harry Popowich, Judith Cabrita and Janet Brush for supervising, and to all the volunteers that donated their time to these projects.



Uncommon Grounds has closed for the season