

Tour of the Public Gardens

- article by Janet Dalton

- photos by Louise Grinstead

Date: Sunday July 13, 2025

Time: 1:30 pm to 2:45pm

Weather: Sunny and warm

Number of participants: 11 (4 members from HFN)

Leader: **Susanne Wise** (from Friends of the Public Garden)

The tour began at the back of the canteen and we travelled around the garden in a large circle ending at the tree planted by King George 6th in 1939. There were many facts that I was not familiar with and I will mention them in this report.

Trees: First tree we stopped at was a **Black Ash** which is becoming rare due to it likes to grow in damp soil near a bog and as the Japanese Ash has been introduced to North America and it carries a disease that kills the Black Ash. The native people used the Black Ash to make baskets, snowshoes and the ribs of their canoes.

The **Linden** tree was popular with the Victorian people of London England because the bark fell off in strips and this was ideal as everything in London England was covered with coal dust as a result of the burning of coal for heat in the 1900's.

The **Ginkgo** Tree is the oldest tree on earth and grew before the dinosaurs. It is not pollinated by insects and is dependent on a female ginkgo tree to produce the nut, but this tree, (the female Ginkgo) has a very strong smell (it stinks!!) and is never planted --only the male species is used and it is difficult to tell the difference until the trees are mature.

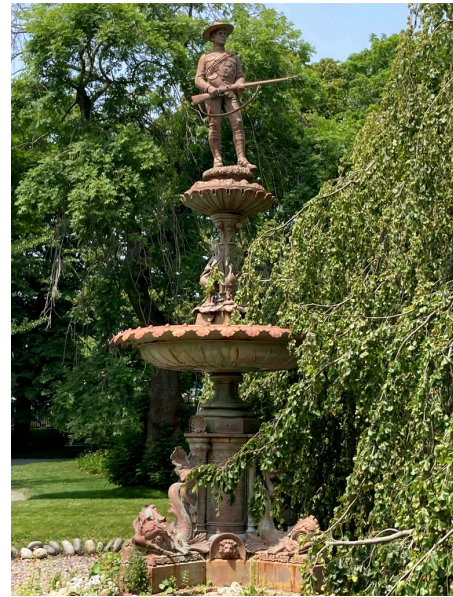
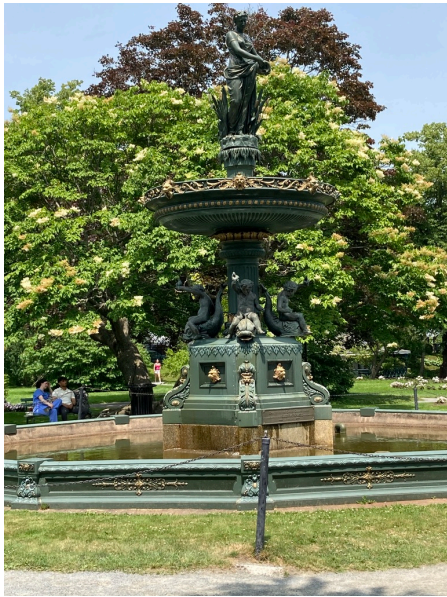
The Victorians seemed to like sadness of death and long periods of mourning death and so the weeping trees were very popular. There are several types of weeping trees in the Public Gardens, but the most amazing is the **Camperdown Elm**. This tree was developed in the forest outside of Camperdown Estate in Dundee Scotland in 1835. It is a mutton/ grafting between a 4 ft. base of an Elm tree and the many graftings of branches of the wych elm. The grafted branches do not know which way is "up". This is a tree of creation and is not passed on by seed.



Camperdown Elm - *Ulmus glabra*

The **pathways** in the Gardens were designed so two Victorian lades with their hooped skirts could walk side by side on the pathways.

The two **fountains** (the Jubilee Fountain and the Boer War Memorial Fountain) do not



work because the water to them has broken down and a more modern system needs to be developed in the Public Gardens.

We walked passed the green "**Family Area**" and our leader mentioned that during the 19th century this area was a small zoo with monkeys and peacocks. The leader mention that she has a friend who said that when she was a little girl she was bitten by one of the peacocks.

The Superintendent of the Gardens was **Richard Power** (hired in 1872), who got his training at Lismore Castle in Northern Ireland. He worked for the Crystal Palace and came to New York City and worked with Frederick Law Olmsted in Central Park before coming to Halifax. Thanks mostly to this man, the gardens have survived all these years and were decreed a National Historic Site in 1984.

This tour is well worth while and there are many more facts of interest about the Gardens but I have mentioned only the ones that were new information to me.

What a jewel this Public Garden is!!!



HALIFAX PUBLIC GARDENS LES JARDINS PUBLICS DE HALIFAX

Opened to the public in 1875, these grounds united the 1837 Horticultural Society gardens with an adjacent civic garden created in 1867. The original design of landscape gardener Richard Power is largely intact, partly due to his family's long superintendence. Bedding patterns, exotic foliage, favourite Victorian flowers, subtropical species and tree specimens continue the planting traditions of the era. The serpentine paths, geometric beds, commemorative statuary and bandstand are also typical features of this, one of the rare surviving Victorian gardens in Canada.

Ouverts au public en 1875, ces jardins regroupaient les jardins aménagés par la *Horticultural Society* en 1837 et le jardin municipal adjacent créé en 1867. Le plan conçu en 1870 par Richard Power, jardinier paysagiste, est presque intact, du fait que sa famille en a longtemps assuré la surintendance. Repiquages, plantes exotiques et subtropicales, arbres divers et fleurs chères aux Victoriens perpétuent le mode de culture de l'époque; sentiers sinueux, parterres géométriques, statues et kiosques, telle est l'illustration de la rare survivance d'un jardin victorien.

Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada.
Commission des lieux et monuments historiques du Canada.

Government of Canada · Gouvernement du Canada