

STROLL in the cathedral-like Wellingtonia Avenue of giant sequoiadendrons, first planted in 1863, to see the Stoddart statues of these goddesses in their own circular beds bordered by box hedges: Hebe in roses, Leda in euphorbias and Flora Farnese in salvias.

HEBE - Greek goddess of eternal youth, shown in an elegant flowing gown, bearing a cup and a pitcher to serve ambrosia and nectar to the gods on Mount Olympus.



LEDA - wife of a Greek king. Those who delve into classical lore will find that the story of Leda is just one of many rollicking good yarns of intrigue, infidelity, violence and worse. Let's be polite and just say that Zeus loved Leda and came to her in the form of a swan.

FLORA FARNESE - this statue is another portrayal of the Roman flower goddess Flora, named after one from the noble Farnese family, shown here wearing a ruched blouse with short puffed sleeves under a fitted bodice. The skirt features exaggerated gathering at the hip with graceful folds to a flattering below the knee hemline, trimmed with a double row of pintucking. She is placing a flower in her hair from a basket of blooms on a pedestal.



THOMAS STODDART 1828-1905

IN 1884 Thomas Stoddart presented 12 white marble statues to adorn the public gardens of Ballarat. That collection is now 126 years old, still intact, and very much valued. For the past 8 years the statues have been kept safely indoors to protect them from vandalism and weathering. Following restoration work and increased security measures, the statues have returned to their original pedestals of Sicilian marble with Grampians granite bases, situated along the paths among the trees and garden beds. The first 8 statues were reinstated on the 4th March 2010 and 5 days later 3 more were moved outdoors and finally the collection was complete when Hercules joined them after a minor repair.



THE statues are of the finest marble quarried at Carrara, a coastal town at the foot of the marble mountains of the Apuan Alps in NW Tuscany. A 2000-year tradition which began in Roman times was climaxed during the Renaissance when many of the world's most famous sculptures were created. The silky texture of Carrara marble allows the artist to fashion exquisite detail with a lustrous finish.

WHILE visiting a sculptors' studio in Italy, Thomas Stoddart saw classical statues being made for the gardens in Genoa. He thought, "Why should not the gardens at Ballarat be similarly adorned?" On impulse, as goldmen of the day did, he ordered a dozen on the spot. The sculptures are three-quarter human size and depict deities from the realms of Greek and Roman mythology. It was the intention of the donor that the statues would cultivate a love for the beautiful in the hearts of the young people of the district.

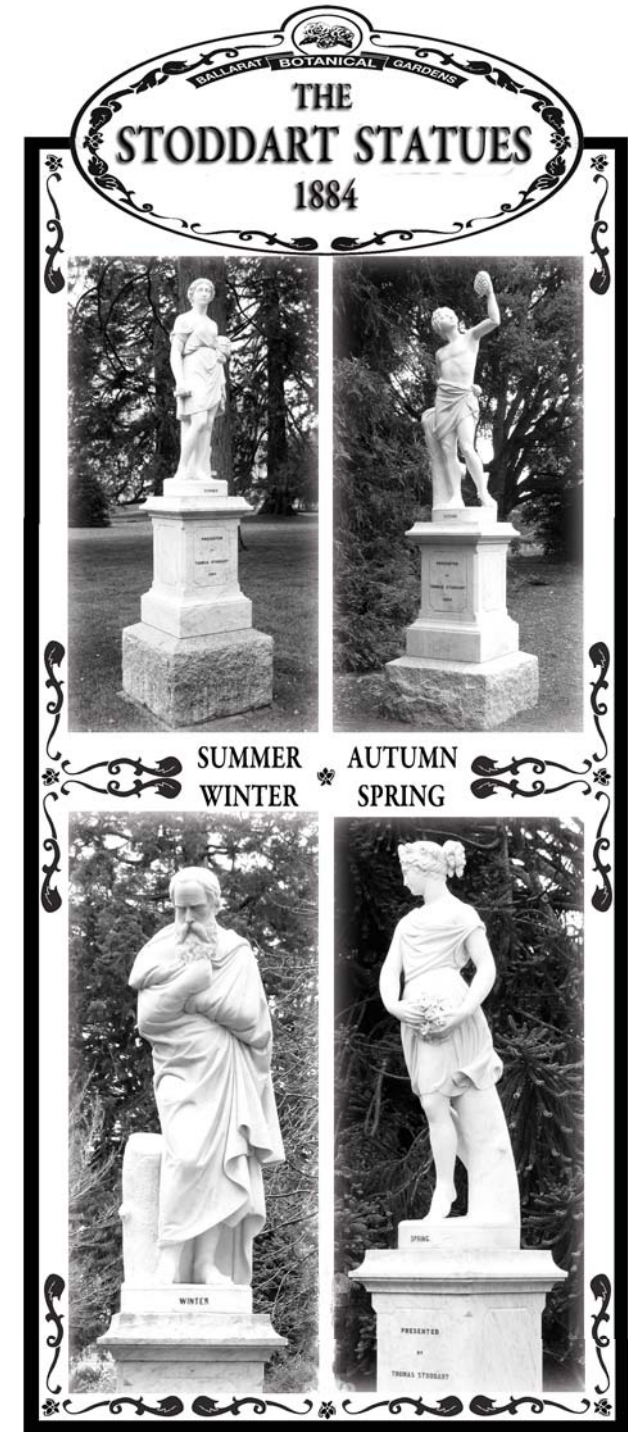
VISITORS to the gardens were inspired to increase their knowledge and enjoyment of the classics in literature as well as in art. This was regarded as the hallmark of a cultured society whose refined tastes had developed in the Colonies to no greater degree than in the City of Ballarat. Historian W. B. Withers remarked that, "None of the public grounds of even the metropolitan cities of Australia are graced with marble statues in such profusion as are the Botanical Gardens of Ballarat."



For guided tours please contact Friends of the Ballarat Botanical Gardens
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POMONA - Roman goddess of gardens and orchards as well as all fruit trees. Her name, Pomona, from her woodland race, In garden culture none could her excel, Or form the pliant soul of plants so well, Or to the fruit more generous favors lend, Or teach the trees with nobler loads to bend.

BACCHANTE - with a backdrop of Swamp Cypress, priestess of Bacchus, ever fair, ever young, bejewelled and playing on a tambourine. The festivals of the Roman Bacchante were joyful, unruly dance parties. Think wild women in the woods, debauchery and revelry.



FLORA - is considered by many to be the masterpiece of the twelve because of the fine detail which creates such a pretty picture in stone. This portrayal of the Roman goddess of flowers shows her watering a pot of luscious blooms with a basket of flowers on her arm. Her position is a highly visible one between the Statuary Pavilion and the fernery pond.



The Stoddart Statue Collection represents four studios of Italian artists: Angelo Bertozzi fashioned the seasons, Mercury and Hercules; B. Raggi created Hebe, Leda and Pomona; and G Marchetti made Flora. Giovanni (John) Udny (1850-1927), the sculptor of Bacchante and Flora Farnese, was a descendant of a Scottish-born British Vice-Consul of Italy and he learned his genius with marble from an Italian uncle who was a marble merchant. (Stoddart was born in Scotland.)

MERCURY - a youthful god in a winged helmet, messenger of the gods and the centrepiece for the ceremony on the 24th of March 1884, the 65th birthday of Queen Victoria. The newspapers reported that there was some confusion about the proclamation of this holiday due to the lamented death of King Leopold. "As it is, the action of the City Council has deprived the citizens generally of participating in the celebration at the Botanical Gardens to-day, as many of them had to take their holiday yesterday." Even so, some 1000 spectators saw the main party arrive at the Lawn landing after a processional flotilla of steamers, yachts (including the 4 ton *Pinafore* owned by Stoddart) and rowing boats, slowly paraded around the southern shore of Lake Wendouree to the Gardens.



Disembarked dignitaries crossed the road to a covered statue in a circular enclosure. Foot constables dealt with an orderly crowd and the newly-formed 100-strong Militia brass band marched in to soul-inspiring strains for the presentation ceremony. The drapery was tenderly removed with a pole, disclosing the near-nude figure of Mercury to the enraptured gaze of the spectators. As the god of merchants and commerce, orators and travellers, as well as thieves and pickpockets, this one would attract many admirers.

Mr Stoddart, in presenting his gift to the City Council, said, "I hope that the people of Ballarat will receive this gift with as much pleasure as it has afforded me in making the presentation." A diminutive cannon was then fired as a signal to unveil the statues situated in various parts of the Botanical Gardens. The Militia band chimed in with the National Anthem, and three rousing cheers were given in honour of Her Majesty the Queen. Mayor J. Hickman and the Hon. Major W. C. Smith MLA responded with words of praise for the donor and the last speaker, Cr F. M. Claxton, called for three cheers for Mr Stoddart and the spectators made the heavens ring with applause. The assemblage then scattered to view the remainder of the statues, which were intently studied, and called forth pleased comment. It was agreed that the best judgement had been shown in the selection of sites.

That night Mr Stoddart was the toast of the town at a grand dinner at Craig's Royal Hotel. His splendid gift was the first which inspired other wealthy men to generously support the movement to make Ballarat the "City of Statues."

EXPERIENCE the glory of all four seasons in nature and in art in Ballarat's gardenesque style, cool climate garden. Pass the glass prism that is the Conservatory and the mature Turkey Oak into the Prime Ministers Avenue and beyond into the Chestnut Avenue to see the sculptures shown on the front cover.

SUMMER - denotes harvest time with a sheaf of grain and a scythe (broken). The lyricist sings of summer pleasures:
The town's pale denizens come forth to breathe
The free fresh air, and lave their fevered brows;
And beauty loves young flowers to wreath
Beneath some stately forest's antique brows.
Oh, art hath naught like this, the very air
Breatheth of beauty, banishing despair.

AUTUMN - a bare chested youth who yields the juice of the luxuriant grape to spread good cheer and gladden hearts.

WINTER - located near the sensory garden fountain, an elderly gentleman with shrivelled limbs and white hoary locks, stooping, with his robe tightly drawn against the chill.

SPRING - beside a Bunya Bunya pine, this young woman has a fresh look, crowned with a floral wreath and carrying a posy. Her flattering one-shoulder toga dress is a style of Greco-Roman inspired goddess gowns which fashion designers periodically revive. In ancient times the welcome return of spring was celebrated with lengthy pagan festivals. Christians followed suit.



HERCULES - hero of great strength and courage in his awesome "twelve labours", raising his mighty club and wearing a lion skin as a trophy. Be sure to look behind for the lion's head and tail and, *abem*, the not unattractive buttocks of this mortal/god of long ago who rescued hapless maidens in distress.

