

Victorian Heritage Database Report
COLAC BOTANIC GARDENS



Location:
1-5 FYANS STREET COLAC, COLAC OTWAY SHIRE

Heritage Status / Level of Significance:
Registered

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number: H2259

Listing Authority: VHR

Heritage Overlay Number: HO113

Statement of Significance:

What is significant?

The Colac Botanic Gardens occupy an elevated site of approximately 16 hectares north-east of the town centre bounded by the southern shores of Lake Colac, Gellibrand Street, Fyans Street and Barongarook Creek.

The main entrance to the Colac Botanic Garden is through the south-west entrance Bilson gates (1962) on the corner of Fyans Street and Gellibrand Street where a carriage drive, lined with predominantly *Quercus robur* (English Oak) and few *Quercus cerris* (Turkey Oak), forms a row around the perimeter of the Gardens and is open to vehicle access. The area enclosed by the drive has a network of winding paths and is mainly open lawn with specimen trees, shrubberies, some bedding plants together with a palm bed, rose garden, rose arbour, pond and fountain, and cannon (acquired 1904) near the south eastern gate. The curator's cottage (c.1924, now a café) is located at the western end of the gardens with playground equipment, picnic facilities and car parking at the eastern end. A caravan park occupies the north-east corner along Barongarook Creek adjacent to the lake shore.

A steep escarpment planted with *Pinus radiata* (Monterey Pines) and specimen trees runs between the botanic gardens and the flat area around the shore of Lake Colac which contains remnant terracing, an old brick toilet block with castellated roof (c1930s), a walking track, a fire brigade asphalt training track and shed, rotunda (1999), car parks, a rowing club, angling club, public toilets, boat ramp (1968) and jetty (1971). The escarpment provides separation between the two areas and provides extensive views from the Botanic Gardens over Lake Colac.

The site was temporarily reserved in 1865 for botanical and recreational purposes after a request from local residents. Little progress was made until 1868 when Daniel Bunce, Director of the Geelong Botanic Gardens, was approached to lay out a plan for the garden. Implementation of the plan was slow with the construction of a carriageway and planting of trees the only known details.

Between c1875 -80, curators Reeves and McDonald made changes to the carriageway and introduced garden beds, curved paths, lawns and shady arbours. In the 1890s structures added to the gardens included a pavilion overlooking the lake a conservatory in the south-eastern corner and a permanent rowing clubhouse on the edge of the lake joining the existing structures of piers, baths and a boat shed. Most of these structures have been removed.

In 1910 William Guilfoyle, Director of the Melbourne Botanic Gardens, prepared a plan and a 'Report on the remodelling and development of the Colac Botanic Gardens', which are extant, suggesting some improvements and remodelling to take advantage of the slope and vistas across over the lake which he considered had been ignored. This included simplifying the existing path system within the circular drive, and removal of borders and crowded areas in favour of larger trees and clumps of shrubs and a palm and cordyline bed all of which were implemented. Curators Archibald Campbell (1911-40) and Dugald Leitch (1940-55) were responsible for implementation of part of the Guilfoyle plan and maintaining the maturing Gardens but, with Guilfoyle's death in 1912, any further influence ended. The last resident curator Donald Greenwood (1955-65) was responsible for the addition of many native plants and in more recent times the gardens have more simplified planting and a park-like character.

The Colac Botanic Gardens contains many rare plant species only found in historic gardens and several significant and uncommon trees including four *Cupressus forbesii* (Tecate Cypress), a very large *Sophora japonica* (Pagoda Tree), a *Pittosporum tenuifolium* 'Eila Keightley' (Kohuhu), a large *Araucaria bidwillii* (Bunya Bunya Pine) and an outstanding *Ulmus x hollandica* 'Vegeta' (Huntington Elm). In March 1996, James Guilfoyle, grandson of William Guilfoyle, planted an *Arbutus canariensis* (Canary Island Strawberry Tree). In 2004 the Australian Plant Society planted an Otway Flora Bed on the eastern side of the Gardens.

This site is on the land of the traditional owners.

How is it significant?

Colac Botanic Gardens are of historical, aesthetic, and scientific (botanical) significance to the State of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

Colac Botanic Gardens are of historical significance as an important example of a regional botanical garden, established in the nineteenth century in response to the increased wealth of Victoria with the discovery of gold and the desire to provide a place for recreation and education in keeping with European trends.

The Colac Botanic Gardens are of historical importance through the association with Daniel Bunce and William Guilfoyle, two pioneers of botanic gardens and garden design in Victoria

The Colac Botanic Gardens are of aesthetic significance due to their park - like character and elevated location immediately above the southern shore of Lake Colac, providing vistas across the lake. The gardens are of aesthetic significance for the sub-tropical plant groups supported by Guilfoyle together with his gardenesque style. They are of aesthetic significance for the contrasting form and variety of trees and plants which includes conifers, evergreen and deciduous plantings, together with the leaf shapes, colours and flowers, also contribute to the Garden's aesthetic quality and appeal

The Colac Botanic Gardens are of scientific (botanical) significance for a number of rare plants and trees including four *Cupressus forbesii* (Tecate Cypress), the only known examples in Victoria, a large *Sophora japonica* (Pagoda Tree), *Pittosporum tenuifolium* 'Eila Keightley' (Kohuhu), and large *Araucaria bidwillii* (Bunya Bunya Pine) and an outstanding *Ulmus x hollandica* 'Vegeta' (Huntington Elm). .

Heritage Study / Consultant	
Construction Date Range	1868 -
Architect / Designer	
Municipality	COLAC OTWAY SHIRE
Other names	
Hermes number	147162
Property number	

This place/object may also be State heritage listed. Check the Victorian Heritage Database. For further details, contact the local Council or go to Planning Schemes Online