

The Halifax Public Gardens

The gentle Victorian-era garden in the middle of the city

By Diane Marchese, Guelph Wellington Master Gardener, 2016

The chance to go to Halifax, Nova Scotia, presented itself to my husband and me in July 2015, so we happily pulled out the maps, updated the GPS, and took a road trip out east. It didn't take long to fall in love with Halifax, with its beautiful coastline, delicious food, and interesting people and history.

After a morning in the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia to see the Maud Lewis exhibition, I decided to take a walk toward the "hill," where I encountered at the corner of South Park and Sackville Streets the beautiful black iron gates that open to the Halifax Public Gardens. The gates led me into this oasis in the heart of the city, where I lost track of time and forgot about the cars and buses humming around this 16-acre patch of land. The weather was exceptional that week, and the dogwoods (*Cornus florida*, *Cornus kousa*) were outstanding and abundant. I walked by mock orange (*Philadelphus coronarius*), katsura trees (*Cercidiphyllum japonica*), and *Ginkgo bilobas*.

As I meandered through the park, I felt the history and pride of this garden. Master horticulturalist Richard Power created this Victorian garden concept by merging two city gardens. Power introduced fountains, statues, the gates, winding public paths, seating areas, and garden beds. More elements were brought in over time, such as the bandstand, stone bridges, balusters, concrete urns, ponds, and waterfowl.

I learned of the gruesome history associated with a large pond: Griffin pond bears the name of a publicly hanged man, who was wrongfully convicted of murder: Frederick Griffin. The majestic

fountain that commemorates Queen Victoria's 1897 Diamond Jubilee was in full splendour surrounded by a canopy of old maples, with hawthorns and golden chain trees. The sound of water was relaxing, pleasantly adding to my contemplation of the extent of the shrubs and trees, such as the European linden (*Tilia europaea*), which seemed to outline the park.

As I walked along the pathways I reviewed dahlia beds, rose beds, perennial beds with poppies in full bloom, tropical beds, and themed beds. I loved the neo-classical statues of Ceres, the goddess of fertility, and Flora, the goddess of flowers, each surrounded with annuals. The serpentine beds were filled with annuals and succulents in beautiful arrangements. Japanese maples (*Acer palmatum*) were poised along many paths taking you along to more ponds and fountains. There is a model of the *Titanic* floating in a quiet pond, and the Soldier's Memorial Fountain surrounded by a group of Weeping European birch (*Fagus sylvatica 'pendula'*) seems to be paying tribute to the past.

At Horticultural Hall I stopped in for coffee and to speak to a representative of the Friends of the Halifax Public Gardens, whose fundraising efforts continue to care for this beautiful garden. My afternoon at the Halifax Public Gardens was so overwhelming that I returned later in the week for another walkabout. I hope to return here many times in the future.

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