

THE GARDENS OF THE YORK RESIDENCY MUSEUM

We began to revitalize our garden areas in 2007. The lawn and Iceberg roses were then well established and continue to give a formal attractive look to the frontage. Our new rose garden at the front entrance replaces a large tree lost in the storm of January 2011. The roses were planted thanks to a generous donation from a Museum supporter, Megan Wellstead.

Our aim in the waterwise garden beds is to have local Noongar bush foods growing amongst the native shrubs and trees but they have been difficult to source as yet.

Many trees and plants in the “Early Settlers Kitchen Garden” were written about by Mrs. Janet Millet in her book “An Australian Parsonage”¹. She and her husband, Edward, who served as an Anglican Chaplain came to York in December 1863 and stayed until 1869. She was a great observer and recorder of everyday life.

On landing in Fremantle she saw fig trees and geraniums growing and whilst wandering Perth, noticed orange, lemon, apricot and peach trees and banana palms, also cape lilac, oleanders, pines and a fine croquet lawn of Indian couch grass. The trade to China in Sandalwood for incense was in progress and folk were using Xanthorrhoea [grass tree] rushes as fire lighters and for thatching roofs – all this only 30 years after settlement.

In her York garden Mrs. Millet grew pomegranates and fig trees. The grapes from her vines not only made wine but were also dried as sultanas and currants. Bamboo was used for stakes and fencing and the local boys used it as fishing poles. Cabbages were planted but early potatoes were frost nipped. She also made mention of mulberry and olive trees and noted that grafted peach trees lost their leaves in autumn while peach trees grown from seed did not.

The early settlers brought many seeds and cuttings from the “old country”. These cuttings were often kept alive by placing them into a cut at the top of a potato. They also collected other plants at the Cape of Good Hope on the voyage to Australia. These included wild spinach/double gee which many were reluctant to gather because of the prickles. Bulbs were also popular particularly Ixias.

Some of the women Janet met were very resourceful and could make a very passable imitation apple pie from the large pig melons she said. The surrounding bush did not go unnoticed either. Red and blue Lobelia (probably Lechenaultia) was admired as were wattle blossoms. Quandongs or wild cherry were known and its seed and the seed from the Sandalwood were strung together to make a pretty row of beads. [We have a sandalwood bead necklace in the Museum collection]. Pink and yellow everlasting daisies delighted in spring and some housewives picked bunches of the pink everlasting daisies to decorate their homes placing them in the gap between the top of the walls and the roof. At the base of the Zamia Palm is a fine elastic substance resembling wool and this was used for bedding. The local Ballardong people showed

¹ Mrs. Edward (Janet) Millet, *An Australian Parsonage, or, The Settler and the savage in Western Australia*. First printed London 1882 and reprinted by the University of Western Australia Press 1980.

her ways of finding food in the bush. The scarlet seeds pods of the Zamia, which were poisonous could, however, be eaten after burial for 2 weeks and she supposed one could get very hungry while waiting! Also Acacia seeds after pounding made an edible flour.

More information on local bush foods can be read in a file of Noongar Cultural Heritage information kindly provided by the late Saul Yarran, a Ballardong Noongar Elder, in the Museum resource area. Our leaflet accompanying the Ballardong Noongar Six Seasons Garden Walk provides an introduction to traditional uses of native plants. This leaflet and creation of the Garden Walk were funded through grant-aid by Wheatbelt NRM [Natural Resource Management] and many interesting publications relating to Noongar cultural heritage can be viewed on their website: <http://www.wheatbeltnrm.org.au/reports-publications/sustainable-communities/>

Continuing to collect further knowledge of early gardening in WA and reading John Viska's book, "A Guide to Conserving and Interpreting Gardens of WA", (not at all a dry read), we have added to the Settler's Kitchen Garden four roses, all known to have been grown in the late 1800's. (John Viska's book is available in the Museum for perusal and for purchase if you want to find out more).

The other plants are modern cultivars indicative only of what could have been grown here. Fruits include quince, apricot, pomegranate, olive, mulberry, fig and we have some of the strong perennial herbs such as lavender, yarrow, rue, wormwood, mint and sage.

Yes we do have a watering system unlike the women pioneers who through long hot summers had to carry buckets of water from the near by Avon River to keep the fruit trees alive and perhaps it was a disgruntled lady gardener who penned this:

"To stay in thee O land of mutton
I would not give a single button
But bid thee now a long farewell
Thou scorching sunburnt land of hell"

Anonymous poem, C19th.

These notes were prepared by Betty Kane, Museum Volunteer, May 2009.

