

The Information contained in this section is extracted from the *Rockhampton Botanic Gardens – Botanical Collection Management Strategy*.

## The Six Curators

JAMES SCOTT EDGAR (1822 – 1902) served as curator from 1873 – 1902

- The instructions given to Edgar were that his primary role was to develop the Gardens as a facility for experimentation in “economic botany” (the practice of trial-growing plants that had commercial and agricultural potential to test their suitability to the local climate).
- As a secondary role, accommodate the passive recreational needs of the people of Rockhampton and the surrounding district
- The first section of the Gardens developed by Edgar was an area of 10 acres along the Murray Lagoon foreshore. Today, this is still known as the *Lower Gardens*.
- Perhaps the greatest influence of Edgar’s curatorship was the laying out of the Gardens themselves into upper, lower and outer garden areas. This was achieved through the use of several iconic plantings that still remain today, including:
  - Bunya Pine Avenue
  - The North-South Axis (also known as the Palm Avenue)
  - The Tamarind Tree Line
  - The Banyan Figs
- During the 1880’s, Edgar introduced the first animal exhibit to the botanic gardens. Known as “The Finch Aviary”, this simple rotunda structure in the Lower Gardens housed Edgar’s personal collection of colourful finches

RICHARD JACOB SIMMONS (1862 – 1940) served as curator from 1902 to 1931

- Following Edgar’s death in June 1902, Simmons was subsequently appointed to replace him as curator of the Botanic Gardens
- By 1918 the nursery area extended to eight (8) acres, fully enclosed by a white picket fence
- During his time as curator, Simmons undertook a number of initiatives to enhance the public appeal of the Gardens as a passive recreational venue with the construction of a timber kiosk in 1911 (opened January 1912)
- In 1915 Athelstane Bowls Club was officially opened and in 1927 the leasing of land to Rockhampton Croquet Club, Rockhampton Tennis Club and Girls Sports Association lead to the increased sporting opportunities within the Gardens
- On 16 November 1924 the Central Queensland War Memorial (Cenotaph) at Rockhampton Botanic Gardens was unveiled.
- In 1925 he moved the animal section of the Gardens to the present site of the Zoo. The animal section at that time consisted of monkeys, cassowary, possums, guinea pigs, guinea fowl and pea fowl

HENRY GEORGE SIMMONS (1890 – 1974) served as curator from 1932 to 1957

- Son of Richard Jacob Simmons, Henry was appointed as curator on his father’s resignation in 1932

- Australia was still reeling from the effects of the Great Depression and there were no finances available to support any new expansion or direction of the Gardens. Hence the public popularity of the Gardens as a recreational destination continued to fall in favour of the coastal seaside beaches
- George Simmons was a fancier of Australian native plants and in 1933 he planted a small section of Australian native trees in the Lower Gardens the main feature being an avenue of She Oaks (*Casuarina spp*)
- By 1937, plant sales from the Gardens nursery had all but diminished and the Council of the day made the decision to cease the sale of plants to the public and relocate the fernery and glasshouse to the Upper Gardens. The project was largely financed by a bequest made in the estate of Hugo Edward Lassen (1862 – 1938). The newly-constructed fernery was batten-style in the shape of a Celtic cross lying on a north-south aspect.
- During World War 2 a 10 acre section of the Gardens towards the southern end of Murray Lagoon was allocated to the growing of vegetables in order to meet local food shortages and to assist in feeding the 70,000 American troops stationed in and around Rockhampton at the time. American troops occupied the area of the Gardens lying between Penlington Street and the Croquet Club as well as large areas of the neighbouring Rockhampton Golf Club

KENNETH CLIVE BAKER served as curator from 1957 to 1972

- In June 1957 Kenneth Clive Baker was appointed as Curator of the Botanic Gardens and was given one (1) week to present a report as to why the gardens should be retained on their existing site and not relocated to Victoria Park. A preference that can be traced back to the curatorship of James Scott Edgar who had been instructed to make improvements to the park to render it suitable for a botanic gardens site
- The relocation did not proceed nor was additional funding provided to the Rockhampton Botanic Gardens. Operating on a maintenance budget only Baker restructured his team of 35 workers
- In 1959 the first major planting under Baker's curatorship occurred when 2,000 *Pinus radiata* donated by the Forestry Department at Byfield were planted in the old WW2 vegetable farm area beyond the present children's playground. The objective was to turn this area into a forest plantation. Survival rates were not good but remnants of this planting still exist in the area as a colony
- In 1972 work commenced planting the new Arid Garden at the rear of the Cenotaph. This was to be a collection of dry climate plants endemic to the world's desert regions, particularly the arid zones of Central America

JAMES REYNOLDS served as curator from 1973 to 1974

- Reynolds was appointed in January 1973 and served for 18 months before resigning in June 1974. He died suddenly a short time after.
- During his time as Curator of the Rockhampton Botanic Gardens, Reynolds produced and distributed an Index Seminum for the Gardens and conducted field trials with a variety of Eucalypt species and turf grasses

TOM WYATT served as curator from 1974 to 1998 and 2001 to 2009

- Having been appointed as Curator in August 1974, in 1976 Australia and Japan signed the Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation and Wyatt designed an Australian garden to be built at Rockhampton's nominated sister city in Japan, Ibusuki. Meanwhile leading Japanese landscape designer, the late Kenzo Ogata commenced construction of the Japanese Gardens at the Rockhampton Botanic Gardens with the official opening occurring in 1982.
- In the late 1976 Wyatt took measures to ensure that Garden's palm collection which was then the largest in the southern hemisphere was nurtured and had greater diversity
- In 1976 Wyatt began to research and plant a tropical fruit arboretum near *The Pinetum* beyond the children's playground. Planting of the arboretum was completed in 1978
- Again in 1976, Wyatt entered into seed exchange programs with botanic gardens in Zimbabwe and Mexico. During the late 1980's Trees grown from the seed exchange program were planted in the Cenotaph far lawn area.
- Tom Wyatt was the last-serving incumbent of the position of Curator of Rockhampton Botanic Gardens.