

# Canary Island Date Palms (*Phoenix canariensis*) in Australia: Introduction and Early Dispersal

DIRK H.R. SPENNEMANN  
*Institute for Land, Water and  
Society,  
Charles Sturt University,  
PO Box 789,  
Albury NSW 2640  
Australia  
dspennemann@csu.edu.au*

During the past 150 years, the Canary Island Date Palm (*Phoenix canariensis*) has found widespread use as an ornamental in public and private spaces across the globe. This paper traces the historic trajectory of the introduction and early dispersal of the palm into Australia, from its beginning as a prized ornamental plant in private and public greenhouses to the planting in botanic gardens and public parks. When the public embraced the plant as a highly decorative exotic ornamental, it found widespread use as a street tree, which after World War I became often associated with Australian War Memorials. The palm became well established in private gardens of the interwar period.

During the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, the Canary Date Palm (*Phoenix canariensis*) has seen widespread use in horticultural settings, first in Central and Mediterranean Europe and

then in many parts of the USA, South America and Australia. The ease with which even established *P. canariensis* can be transplanted for immediate effect aided its acceptance as an ornamental plant.

*Phoenix canariensis* is a dioecious plant that is solely propagated by seed (Barrow 1998). The seed germinates after 85–100 days, and the plant has two pinnate leaves at about one year of age. It reaches reproductive maturity and first flowers after six or seven years. It seeds freely annually producing between 100 and 300 dates of limited flesh content. In its natural setting, the palm will grow to about 18–20 m in height, with a crown diameter of 10–12 m, made up of in excess of 200 arching, pinnate fronds. Unless affected by disease or pests, the plant can live for 200–300 years (Beech 2017). Fully mature palms weigh up to 10 tons in mass.

The plant is endemic to the Canary Islands, where it has been recorded on most islands (Lipnitz & Kretschmar 1994, Sosa et al. 2016). It was quickly and widely dispersed in the second half of the nineteenth century as a horticultural feature plant and street tree. Today it is distributed globally in warm temperate climates. Given its hardiness, *P. canariensis* can thrive on many soils and under many climatic conditions (as long as temperatures do not fall below -10°C). It is now considered naturalized in peninsular Spain, Portugal, Italy, Bermuda and parts of the United States, New Zealand (Beech 2017) and most of Australia (Spennemann & Pike in prep.). In Australia it is increasingly considered an invasive weed, as it is readily dispersed by a number of avian and other vertebrate vectors (Spennemann subm., Spennemann & Pike in prep.), as well as through water movement.

Compared with research into the dissemination of the true Mediterranean date palm (*Phoenix dactylifera*) (e.g. Johnson et al. 2013, Rivera et al. 2013), little work has been carried out on *P. canariensis*. The only surveys of historic sources are a paper by Zona (2008), which focused on Europe and the United States with a brief section on Australia, and Tournay's (2009) study of France. For the Australian setting, Zona's work was by necessity limited, as it was carried out from overseas and relied on secondary literature as well as personal communications. A systematic compilation of all plants listed in nursery catalogues in Victoria 1855–1889 includes only a single entry for *P. canariensis* (Brookes & Burley 2009, p. 133).

While these gaps in the history of palms in Australia are in part due to a lack of interest in the topic, they are primarily an artifact of the availability of data, as relevant primary sources were either absent or lost. Many local

government/council files that may have addressed the rationale for planting such palms during the nineteenth century have long been destroyed or lost. Private archives of horticultural enthusiasts, if they ever existed, are virtually unknown. While there are small collections of nursery catalogues, they are incomplete, dispersed and often not readily accessible. Nineteenth and early twentieth century newspapers, the other primary source of information, were dispersed and, by and large, not indexed. The development of a digital archive of Australian newspapers (National Library of Australia 2018) has fundamentally changed this.

This paper originated from an exploration of the potential use of DNA to track some historic plantings of the 1920s and 1930s back to the original seed trees. It was surmised that the majority of seedlings used in public plantings in southeastern Australia would have been furnished by the botanic gardens of Melbourne and Sydney. To understand the patterns of dispersal and the usefulness of this hypothesis, background research into the history of *Phoenix canariensis* in Australia was required.

This paper will review the historic evidence for the introduction and dispersal of Canary Island Date Palms (*Phoenix canariensis*) on the Australian continent. It will draw, to the extent possible, on primary sources, in particular a systematic review of the reporting of *P. canariensis* in Australian newspapers during the colonial (1850–1900) and early Federation (1901–1915) and Inter-War period (1915–1939). The methodology is discussed elsewhere (Spennemann 2018a).

### Introduction of *Phoenix canariensis* to Australia

The first properly documented presence of *P. canariensis* in Australia dates to 1877 when the Royal Society of Tasmania acquired an unspecified number of *P. tenuis* for its gardens in Hobart (Abbott 1878, p. 30). Given the name, we can safely assume that the plant was supplied by Verschaffelt's successor company Jean Jules Linden (André 1873, Ducos 1875, Linden 1873). We can surmise that the plants in Hobart were grown in heated greenhouses. Nothing is known as to whether, or how long, these plants survived. Today the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens possesses two *P. canariensis* which are deemed to date back to the late nineteenth century (Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens 2018).



1. *Phoenix canariensis* (center, back) in the greenhouse of the Adelaide Botanic Gardens in 1881.

We can infer an earlier introduction to Melbourne, possibly about 1872 or 1873. Sometime in the 1880s a Mr. W.R. Virgoe in Brighton (Victoria), described as an “ardent lover and indefatigable collector of plants” (Anon. 1874), had planted out two well-established, potted specimens of *P. canariensis* in his garden once they had become “too large to be accommodated in the glasshouses” (Anon. 1897c). Virgoe’s garden formed the private extension of what was to become the Old Chatsworth Nursery. In 1897 the two plants were described as being “at least 25 years old,” which suggests they were initially grown in the early 1870s.

Frederick Turner (1919) claimed in a piece contributed to the *Sydney Morning Herald* in September 1919, that Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker, then director of Kew Gardens, sent seeds of *P. canariensis* to Charles Moore, Director of the Botanic Gardens, Sydney. Turner asserted that “in due course they were sown, and seedlings raised from then. The most vigorous seedling was planted in the present group of palms in the Garden Palace Grounds at the time when I had charge of

those gardens. That was the first specimen of *Phoenix canariensis* planted in Australia.” Turner (1919) also asserted in the newspaper piece that he “recently published a very brief account of it in a scientific journal in London, and that information has since been verified by the authorities at Kew.” At the time of writing this article has not been located.

Turner was recruited from Queensland and became foreman of the Garden Palace Grounds in 1880, a position that he held until 1881 when he became the superintendent of Hyde, Phillip and Cook Parks, Sydney (Anon. 1889). The first *P. canariensis* in the Garden Palace Grounds date to that period. This is broadly confirmed by a news item of 1916, that noted that “[i]n the Garden Palace grounds, Sydney, is a fine specimen of this palm. It is 36 ft high, has a trunk diameter of 3 ft at 3 ft from the ground, and the spread of the fronds is 30 ft. It is upwards of 30 years of age” (Anon. 1916).

Unlike the *Phoenix canariensis* which had arrived in Hobart in 1877 as potted specimens supplied by a nursery, the *P. canariensis* at Sydney were grown from seed supplied by another botanic garden.



2. *Phoenix canariensis* planted in ca. 1906 in the Botanic Gardens, Albury, NSW.

In addition to these two confirmed occurrences, there is anecdotal evidence for an early introduction to Queensland, now a 20 m tall *P. canariensis* in the gardens of the former Archerfield Homestead (Forest Lake near Brisbane). The palm, which is listed on the significant tree register of the National Trust of Australia, was reputedly planted ca. 1876

(National Trust 2014a). As this claim cannot be independently verified at the time of writing, this record needs to be taken *cum grano salis*.

In the mid-1880s, the Melbourne nursery Law, Somner and Co (1886) sold potted, one- or two-year old specimens which would have been grown from imported seed.

### The Pot and Greenhouse Period

In Europe and the Americas, the primary use of *P. canariensis* was initially that of an indoor plant, as many nursery catalogue illustrations suggest (Spennemann 2018b). Not surprisingly, the early references to the Canary Island Date Palm in the Australian press highlight the use of the plant as an indoor ornamental. For example, in June 1891 the Melbourne-based weekly, *The Australasian*, reported on a survey originally carried out by the *Revue d'Horticulture Belge* and extracted from a report in the *Gardener's Chronicle*, that *P. canariensis* was the tenth most popular indoor plant in Europe (Anon. 1891c). The item was reprinted in the *Sydney Mail* (Anon. 1891a). By that time the palm had long been established as a feature plant in fashionable Victorian house interiors and in greenhouses, both private and public as in the case of the Geelong Botanic Gardens (Viator 1891).

The Australian press continually advocated *P. canariensis* as suitable as a pot plant for windows and verandahs (Anon. 1901, 1902, 1913c, 1913e), to be used "for the decoration of halls, balconies, &c." (Anon. 1909c) and for ferneries, including those with southern aspects (Anon. 1910d).

We know from ancillary evidence, that in Australia *P. canariensis* were widely grown as pot plants in the mid-1880s. For example, in 1899 a then approximately 14-year old *P. canariensis* was planted out in the Williamstown (Victoria) gardens (Anon. 1910e), which suggests that the plant was grown since ca. 1886.

### Production in Nurseries

As noted earlier, during the mid-1880s, the Law, Somner and Co (1886) nursery, based in Richmond, Victoria, sold potted specimens of *P. canariensis* that by necessity would have been grown from imported seed. It can be surmised that the plants would have been at least one to two years old at the time of offering. We can further assume that the initial production would have been in greenhouses. By the mid-1890s, however, the palm had proved sufficiently hardy to thrive in the Melbourne climate. Consequently, Melbourne nurseries grew *P. canariensis* in the open, both for direct sale and as future seed sources, such as a large specimen in the Richmond nursery in 1894 (Anon. 1894). The Balaclava Nursery, for example, had large numbers of *P. canariensis* growing in open ground near their residence in 1895 (as *Phoenix tenuis*, Anon. 1895).

3. A mature *Phoenix canariensis* being transported on the outskirts of Adelaide, SA, ca. 1914. (Image courtesy State Library of South Australia PRG-280-1-12-251).





4. *Phoenix canariensis* in the Botanic Gardens, Melbourne, Victoria, ca. 1905.

As noted above, sometime in the 1880s W.R. Virgoe of Brighton had planted out two well-established, potted specimens of *P. canariensis* in his garden. By 1897 the two plants, a male and a female, had grown to 12 ft. high with a crown exceeding 20 ft. in diameter. The plants were manually pollinated by cutting off “the flower of the male plant and shake the pollen over the flower of the female” (Anon. 1897c). By 1897 the nursery “had thousands of the young palms in various stages of growth” (Anon. 1897c). These two mature specimens were transplanted in 1903 to the Melbourne Botanic Gardens (see below). At the time, they weighed eight tons each and were claimed to be about 30 years old (Anon. 1903b).

The demand for palms as an easy-to-maintain yet exotic decoration for living rooms and verandahs was quite substantial. Regular reports on the Melbourne nurseries during the closing years of the nineteenth century indicate that the Union Nursery in Brighton annually sold 10,000–12,000 palms of various varieties (Anon. 1896), while in 1898 the total Melbourne demand was estimated at about 30,000 palms annually, primarily *Howea belmoreana* and *H. forsteriana*, *Trachycarpus fortunei*, *Chamaerops humilis*, *Ptychosperma elegans*, *Latania loddigesii*, *Rhopalostylis baueri* and *Phoenix canariensis* (Anon. 1898). Ten years later the boom still showed no signs of abating: “[w]ith the exception perhaps of ferns there are

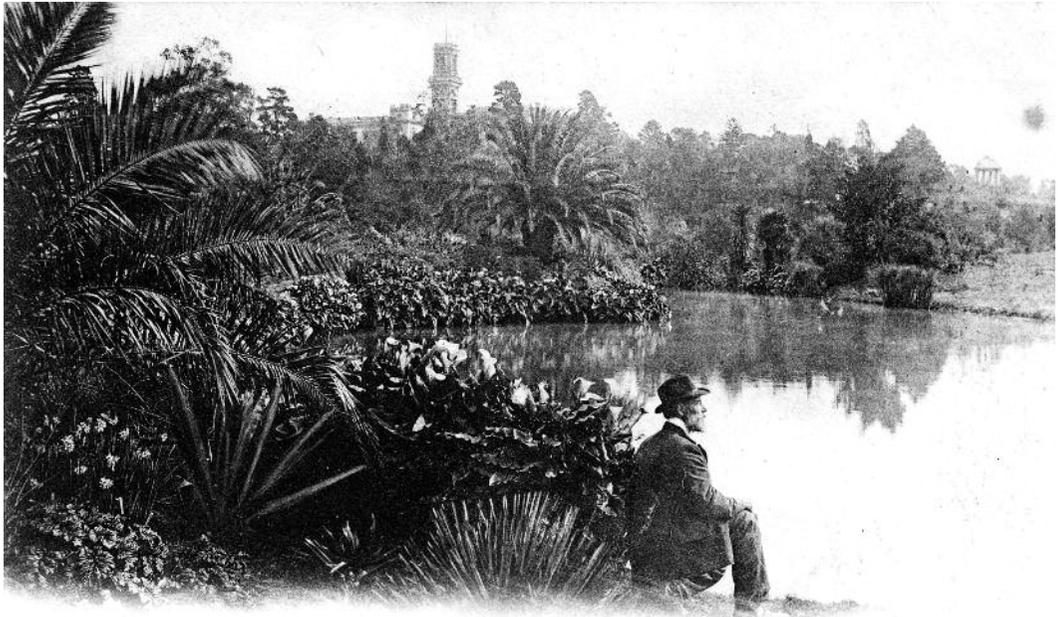
more palms sold in Melbourne than any other class of pot plants” (Anon. 1908a).

The nurseries accommodated this. In 1903 the Cremorne Nursery Company, Richmond, had “a large stock, plants of all sizes, of this very hardy and valuable palm” (Anon. 1903c). At Richard Cheeseman’s nursery on Hawthorn Road, Brighton,

“*Phoenix canariensis* are raised in the open, as it is found by experience that hardier and better specimens can be produced in this way. No better example of the hardy character of the latter palms can be shown than the results attained at the Brighton Nurseries, where practical evidence is to be seen of their usefulness as garden ornaments.” (Anon. 1904a).

The production of *P. canariensis* and other palms occurred on a large scale. In 1907, for example, the Union Nursery in Brighton operated a palm shed with 100,000 plants (Anon. 1907). Three years later, at Richard Cheeseman’s nursery in Brighton “[t]here [was] one large shed full of palms of various sizes, and when we are told there are quite a quarter of a million of plants in it, the statement cannot be contradicted... only popular and serviceable kinds are propagated....” (Anon. 1910g).

By 1910, however, some nurseries seem to have had an oversupply of large palms and were



*Botanical Gardens, Melbourne.*

5. *Phoenix canariensis* at the lake in the Botanic Gardens, Melbourne, Victoria, ca. 1909.

forced to destroy the excess. It seems the foliage of “a batch of large plants, too big for transplanting, was being fed to the home cow, and the animal seemed to relish the dainty and uncommon diet” (Anon. 1910g).

While Melbourne’s nurseries seemed to have been able to rely solely on word of mouth and the annual accounts in the newspapers, a Sydney nursery advertised the sale of *Phoenix canariensis* as “palms for lawns” in 1905 both in Sydney (Searl’s 1905a) and Brisbane (Searl’s 1905b), asking prospective buyers to request a catalogue.

Horticultural production from locally produced seed, however, remained relatively small, despite *P. canariensis* being on record in Victoria from at least 1897 for having produced ripe and viable fruit (Anon. 1897c, 1900a), and even though palm fronds of *P. canariensis* with fruit were shown at the Mentone Flower Show of 1905 (Anon. 1905b). It appears that the only local commercial seed production had been at Virgoe’s Chartsworth nursery, which ceased once the plants were transferred to Melbourne’s Botanic Gardens – where Guilfoyle continued to harvest and propagate.

By 1908, the majority of Melbourne nursery specimens were apparently still grown from seed imported from the Canary Islands, with “only a small proportion from locally grown specimens” (Anon. 1908a).

This situation eventually changed as more and more mature *P. canariensis* came into production. Thus by 1911, Richard Cheeseman’s Brighton Nursery had “a pair of fine specimens of this species growing alongside each other and fortunately they are of both sexes, so that the female plant is producing an abundance of fruit from which thousands of seedlings are raised” (Anon. 1911b). Formal horticultural processes were followed at Cheeseman’s nursery in Brighton to ensure success: “A fine specimen of the female plant of *Phoenix canariensis* is in flower, and the pollen from a male plant has been scattered over the female blossoms, so that fertile fruits are assured” (Anon. 1913b).

Local seed production meant that the prices for *P. canariensis* could drop and the market could expand as Australian nurseries could now readily service any growth in demand. Thus *P. canariensis* moved from a special to a mainstream exotic also servicing the demands of the lower economic segment of society. And demand was to rise, not just as an indoor plant, but as a hardy feature plant in public and private gardens.

#### Feature Trees in Botanical and Public Gardens

While Australian nurseries and enthusiastic amateurs may have acquired *P. canariensis* directly from Belgian suppliers almost as soon

as they became available, it fell to the botanical gardens in the metropolitan and regional cities, as well as the public gardens of smaller towns, to familiarize the public with its characteristics and appearance. The role of botanic gardens as trend setters for urban gardens and public plantings must not be underestimated as they provided the public with a first-hand experience of the habit of plants they had read about in horticultural magazines and in the horticultural sections of weekly newspapers such as the *Australasian* (Melbourne, Vic) the *Australian Town and Country Journal* (Sydney, NSW), the *Queenslander* (Brisbane, Qld) or the *South Australian Chronicle* (Adelaide, SA).

*Phoenix canariensis* was grown both in the greenhouses and conservatories (Fig. 1) of botanic gardens and, where the climate allowed, also in the open (Figs. 2, 4–6). Extensive experiences with outdoor growing had been made, of course, in the Mediterranean with plantings in Vicomte Vigier's garden in Nice (André 1888), which suggested that Sydney and Brisbane should be two of the prime locations in Australia. Indeed, a *P. canariensis* was planted in Sydney's Domain as early as 1880, but it does not seem to have captured the public's imagination. One wonders to what extent the destruction of the Garden Palace in September 1882 and the subsequent temporary abandonment of the place played a role (Fitzgerald 1989). The palm would have been out of sight and mind for a period, and only re-entered public consciousness once the area had been redeveloped as Sydney's Botanic Gardens. In November 1903 J.H. Maiden noted that the Sydney Botanic Gardens sported a 'magnificent *Phoenix canariensis* [with] a circumference of

foliage of about 90ft' (Anon. 1903f). This seems to refer to the palm that had been planted by Turner in 1880.

As experiences with outdoor growing in Australian settings increased, the geographic range of out-door planted specimens expanded. One of the earliest documented plantings of a *P. canariensis* in Victoria occurred in 1890 in Malvern when a specimen of *P. canariensis* "was knocked out of a 4 inch pot" by William Pockett (Anon. 1897b), the then curator of the Malvern Shire Gardens. The performance of that plant was watched with interest, and it was reported that by 1897 the palm had attained a height of 14 feet (Anon. 1897b), while by 1909 it had reached 20 feet (Anon. 1909f). That fact that it could withstand low level frost in 1900 (Anon. 1900b) was of great interest as it proved that *P. canariensis* could be planted successfully in moderate Australian climates (see also Anon. 1897a, Neete 1906).

By early 1891 several specimens (labelled *Phoenix tenuis*) were growing in the Parliament House Gardens in Melbourne (Anon. 1891b, 1892). Other public gardens soon followed. As noted earlier, in 1899 the curator of the Williamstown (Victoria) gardens, Samuel Thake, planted out a then approximately 14-year old *P. canariensis* (Anon. 1910e).

In the Melbourne setting, *P. canariensis* were absent from the Botanic Gardens in 1883 (Guilfoyle 1883, p. 120). When Guilfoyle remodelled the gardens, he embraced the palms. As one writer put it in 1903,

"The great success achieved with palms is one of the features of the garden. They grow so slowly that a long lime must pass before any effect could have been secured but Mr. Guilfoyle's plan was to obtain by gift, exchange, or purchase well-grown palms and transplant them." (Anon. 1903b).

Guilfoyle put this into effect in late 1899 or early 1900 when he acquired two mature trees:

"Amongst the many improvements recently made in these gardens by Mr. Guilfoyle...are a pair of magnificent Canary Islands palms, which were obtained from the Old Chatsworth Nursery, at Brighton; these specimens weighed 7 and 8 tons each respectively, and are probably upwards of 30 years old...There are several fine specimens of this noble palm in the vicinity of the

6. *Phoenix canariensis* in the Botanic Gardens, Melbourne, Victoria, July 1911.





7. *Phoenix canariensis* as a feature street planting in the 1930s. Western end of Dean Street, Albury, NSW.

metropolis, the finest being in Mr. John Grice's garden at Toorak, but splendid plants are in the University gardens and elsewhere. Ere long this palm should be quite common, as it is seeding freely, and many thousands of young plants may be found in some of the nurseries" (Anon. 1900a).

The two palms, nicknamed "Adam and Eve" once they had been transplanted from Mr. Virgoe's garden at Brighton (Anon. 1903b), produced viable seed for propagation in and distribution by the Royal Botanic Garden in Melbourne.

At the turn of the twentieth century, palm seeds and palm seedlings were still gifts of value. For example, before the Australian opera star Nellie Melba returned to England from her Australian and New Zealand tour, she planted on 13 April 1903 a golden poplar on the central lawn of the Melbourne Botanic Gardens (Anon. 1903e). The following day, Guilfoyle sent her two packets of Australian and New Zealand seeds, as well as "two Canary Island date palms (one for you, the other for Miss Clarke) and I feel sure they will thrive splendidly on your cabins during the voyage home if you will give them light and moisture. As for the salt air, my experience has been,

this palm does not mind it a bit, in fact likes it" (Guilfoyle 1903). While Guilfoyle may have procured the specimens from commercial suppliers, it is more probable that they came from the Melbourne Botanic Garden's own nursery at that time. *Phoenix canariensis* palms were then also used as memorial trees in the Melbourne gardens (see below).

The transplanting of *P. canariensis* is a comparatively easy affair as the palms tend to withstand a change of conditions fairly well (Fig. 3). As a reporter noted in 1900, when discussing the newly planted palms in the Melbourne Botanic Gardens,

"These giants were moved with the greatest safety, and are an illustration of what can be accomplished in the removal of big specimens when undertaken by experienced men." (Anon. 1900a).

*Phoenix canariensis* were planted in the Fitzroy Gardens (Melbourne) on 10 July 1906 (Anon. 1906a). Intriguingly, they were found vandalized in mid-September 1910 (Anon. 1910f), after someone had snapped the leaves in half. By and large, however, the public certainly "took to" the exotic trees. Thus, when two palms had to be removed from the domain in Sydney in March 1911, members of



8. A row of *Washingtonia robusta* as street trees and a single *Phoenix canariensis* in the grounds of Rio Vista, Mildura in ca. 1909.

the public objected, forcing the Domain Overseer (1911) to respond publicly, asserting that not only had twelve new palms been planted that month, but that between 1908 and 1911 a total of 35 *P. canariensis* had been planted in the Domain.

Why did the palms become so popular? Clearly their hardiness was one reason, and their exotic nature another. However, that does not fully explain the palm craze that swept Australian towns at the end of the nineteenth century and the subsequent period before World War I. Lilleyman (2007) posited that it was influenced by the travelers who had come through the Suez Canal with a subsequent stopover in Colombo (Sri Lanka) who could not help but being exposed the picturesque nature of palms planted in the open, whereas previously the palms had been confined to Victorian greenhouses.

### Taking to the Streets

Given the public interest in exotic trees, it is not surprising that *P. canariensis* soon made an appearance as street trees. The ornate nature of the tree, combined with the dense and (eventually) lofty canopy made the “graceful palm” eminently suited as a tree that would give a street or avenue a tropic flair, creating “picturesque and efficiently shaded boulevards” (Anon. 1917b). The reports on

street tree plantings at the French Riviera had extolled that “*Phoenix canariensis* is one of the most commonly planted, and succeeds well. This and *Washingtonia filifera* are frequently planted in avenues, and then have a fine bold appearance” (Anon. 1904b). Underlined by reports from the USA which claimed that the Canary Island palm was “much esteemed for street planting” (Anon. 1905a), such sentiment influenced Australian urban planners. The directors of the various metropolitan botanic gardens, Guilfoyle (Melbourne), Schomburgh (Adelaide), as well as the government botanists such as Joseph H. Maiden (New South Wales), shaped much of the debate as they provided “expert” advice.

Plantings commenced in Sydney’s Centennial Park in 1906, and dramatically expanded in 1909 when a total of 308 palms had been “planted on either side of one of the principal drives” (Anon. 1909d) of Gregory, Driver, and Macarthur Avenues, which form the approaches to the Sydney Cricket and Show Grounds, (Anon. 1910c). By 1918 there were “three miles of palms already planted...mostly the Canary Islands palm” (Anon. 1918b). In 1910 Maiden planted a row of *P. canariensis* along Macquarie Street, on the western boundary of the old Palace Garden Grounds and future Botanic Gardens (Anon. 1910b), adding to a number of single trees and smaller



9. The avenue at Yanco, NSW, ca 1914. (Image courtesy State Library of South Australia, PRG-280-1-14-317).

palm groups that had already been planted in 1909 (Morris 2002, Ruting 2015).

It was Maiden's stated aim for "Sydney to present a more semi-tropical aspect" and "the planting of palms will help this" (Maiden 1910).

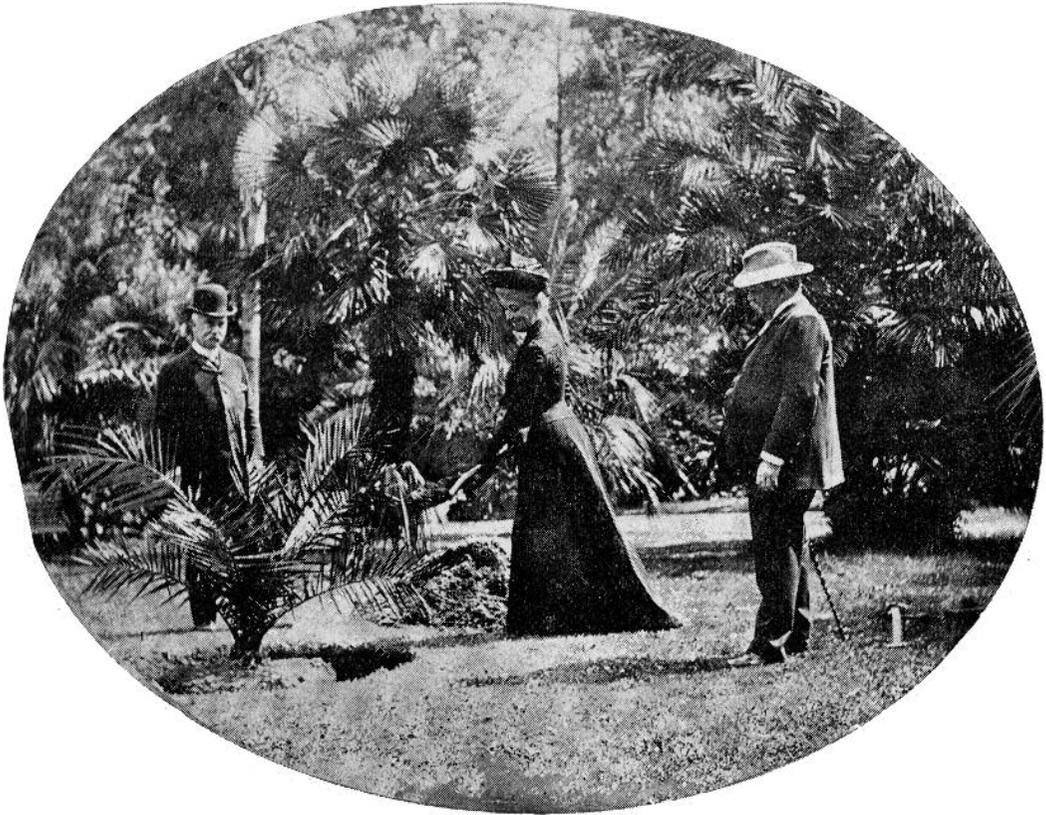
The various municipalities making up Sydney embraced *P. canariensis* to such a degree as a street tree and park tree (such as Daceyville, Anon. 1917b), that Melbourne's *Australasian* noted with some envy that "the city of Sydney will deserve the fancy name already given it, viz., the city of palms" (Anon. 1918b). *Phoenix canariensis* was also embraced by regional and rural communities in NSW and Victoria (Fig. 7).

In Mildura, a regional town in northern Victoria (Fig. 8), the decision was made to plant *P. canariensis* as street trees in 1906 (Anon. 1906b) and again in 1912 (Anon. 1913d, Heritage Council Victoria 1999b). The Canary Island date palm was widely recommended as ornamental street trees in drier areas, such as the goldfields and other towns of Western Australia (Chapman 1906 Anon. 1909b). Often specimens were supplied by the botanic gardens, such as in 1922 when Maiden recommended *P. canariensis* for planting in Parkes (New South Wales) (Anon. 1922a) and the Sydney Botanic Garden supplied the plants (Anon. 1922b).

Palms were also trialed on a larger scale in the newly developed irrigation areas (Anon. 1908b) and soon became integral to urban planning in the new towns (Fig. 9):

"The main avenue from Yanco station to the new township, a distance of between three and four miles, will consist of two roadways, with a row of palms in the centre and sugar-gums on each of the outer sides...the palms, consisting of *Washingtonia*, *Phoenix canariensis*, and *Cocos plumosa* (*Syagrus romanzoffiana*), ... are being raised from seed in the nursery established by the Government at Yanco" (Anon. 1912b).

The preference of many councils to plant exotics and in particular *P. canariensis* was driven by the hardiness of the plants once established, but it was not without its critics. Some argued that Australian towns should eschew the use of exotics and ought to plant natives (Anon. 1926), while others brought up more practical concerns about the use of *P. canariensis*, such as monotony and dense interlocking canopies blocking future views and vistas (Turner 1919). Such voices, however, were few and far between. Some councils engaged in large-scale planting of avenues. In 1928, for example, almost 70 trees were planted along Robe Terrace at Walkerville, South Australia (National Trust, 2014c). In 1929



10. Lady Clarke planting a Canary Island Date Palm on 28 September 1903 (Anonymous 1903a).

an even more grandiose avenue of 143 *P. canariensis* was planted along the median strip of Mt Alexander Road, Essendon (Victoria) (Heritage Council Victoria 1999a). The appeal of palm-lined streets endured. In 1936, for example, the City of Port Adelaide planted 66 palms as part of a depression-era work scheme (McDougall & Vines 2014, p. 19, National Trust 2014b).

### Memorial Trees

Since palms could be readily (trans-)planted as feature trees in lawns, they were well suited as trees to be planted to mark specific occasions. The first such event occurred in September 1903 when Lady Clarke, the wife of the Governor of Victoria, planted a *P. canariensis* in the Melbourne Botanic Gardens (Fig. 10) (Anon. 1903a, 1903d). Further specimens soon followed. In November 1909 the Victoria League Memorial Tree planted in the Melbourne Botanic Gardens (Anon. 1909a, 1909e). Lord Kitchener, “hero of the Boer War,” likewise planted a Canary Island Date Palm on 12 February 1910 (Anon. 1910a, 1910h), adding to the memorial palm collection.

### Memorial Trees to WWI

The Australian military campaigns during World War I in the Near East, from the troops preparing in Egypt to the landings at Gallipoli and the operations in the Palestine (Beersheba), exposed a broad range of citizens directly and indirectly (via newspaper reporting) to the nature of palms in the open. In particular, they created an emotional connection to a plant associated with the battle against the Turks. Just as the seeds of the Lone Pine at Gallipoli (a specimen of *Pinus brutia*) became known to signify that campaign, *P. canariensis* became the symbols of the Palestinian operations (ignoring the fact that the palms in the Palestine were of course the “real” date palms, *P. dactylifera*). Because of its ease of propagation, as well as its hardiness as a plant in diverse environments, *P. canariensis* was far more commonly planted as a commemorative tree than *Pinus brutia* (ALA, 2017).

As early as October 1917, even before the Battle of Beersheba, the City of Melbourne decided to plant a *P. canariensis* to line the projected ANZAC Parade. It noted that,

"[s]urmounting the raised centre way will be rows of Canary Islands date palms. Lest it be thought that in the continuation of palms— reminders of the deserts of the Orient, where Australia's troops clashed with the Sultan's— there should be monotony. It is pointed out by the director that no two of these trees, produced from seed, are exactly alike." (Anon. 1917a).

Similar memorial avenues were planned for (but not implemented) in May 1918 for Perth (Western Australia) (Lilleyman 2007). They were established, however, *inter alia* in Williamstown (Victoria) (Birdwood Avenue, Anon. 1918a) and West Merbein (Anon. 1919). At the latter location 240 palms were to be planted, each with plaques bearing the names of fallen soldiers of the area (Anon. 1919). *P. canariensis*, planted singly or in pairs, decorate War Memorials in a number of places.

#### Feature Trees in early Private Gardens

Almost simultaneously with the planting of *P. canariensis* in the botanic gardens, we find references to planting in private outdoor spaces. The palm was lauded as an exotic and highly ornamental plant that could readily be raised from seed and as the Australian press noted, once planted out proved a fast grower (Anon. 1899) that had shown itself to be quite hardy (Anon. 1897b, 1909d) and could even resist light frosts (Anon. 1900b). Yet the palm did not thrive in areas with too much frost, as "even in the sheltered Botanic Gardens of Hobart such a beautiful palm as the *Phoenix canariensis* had severely suffered from frost" (Anon. 1913a). *Phoenix canariensis* was advocated as a feature tree in the center of a lawn (Allaway 1914, Caldwell 1895), as it gave the garden a tropical flair (Viburnum 1915).

#### Feature Trees in Private Gardens of the Interwar Period

The architecture of the inter-war period in Australia shifted away from Victorian British architecture and became heavily influenced by Californian designs, such as Californian Bungalows or Spanish Mission-style houses. Not only the architectural designs were imported, but also ideas of landscaping, of which palms formed an integral part (Fig.11).

Consequently, *P. canariensis* was advertised by a range of nurseries for example in Sydney (Symonds 1928, p. 76), throughout Queensland (Langbecker 1928, 1929, 1930, 1931a, 1931b, 1932, 1938a, 1938b) as well as

Hobart (Davis 1938) and Launceston (Walker & Sons 1938).

#### Conclusions

Publicly planted palm trees were visual manifestations of exotic, and often romanticized, environments. The second half of the nineteenth century saw the final expansion of colonial empires. In Australian context, the South Pacific with its palm-fringed exotic islands created a public allure. Accounts of South Seas island trade, as well as Australia's own colonial aspirations in New Guinea, were prominent in the Australian press. While coconut palms (*Cocos nucifera*), the icon of the tropical Pacific did not thrive in temperate Australia, another pinnate-fronded palm did – *Phoenix canariensis*.

Initially confined to greenhouses as a tangible connection of the reach of governments (and powerful merchants) to their overseas possession and trading contacts, palms later became more commonplace, allowing the general public to partake in that dream (Manthorne 1984, Rodrigues 2017).

The lushness of its ample pinnate fronds and the decorative, evenly patterned trunk made *P. canariensis* the quintessential visual manifestation of an exotic palm. The species was eminently suited for public display, as its general hardiness, once the plant was established, allowed it to persist even in areas beyond its potential natural spread.

The early introduction of *P. canariensis* to Australia was a mixture of organized acquisitions by botanical gardens and acclimatization societies as well as an uncontrolled import by enthusiasts. The difficulties with the importation of live plants must not be underestimated, as during the 1870s a ship's voyage from Europe to the major ports of Melbourne and Sydney took three months. While plant importers had gained much experience by the 1870s, and mortalities were low, the system was far from perfect. It was much easier to ship seeds, but for the Belgian and German horticultural firms that meant forgoing a sizeable profit. Thus is not surprising that the early introductions were potted plants. Concomitantly, the significance of the supply of *P. canariensis* by Hooker to Moore must not be underestimated.

Once local seed production had commenced, both at Melbourne's and Sydney's nurseries as well as the respective botanic gardens, the propagation and planting of palms accelerated.

Eventually, *P. canariensis* became a prominent street tree.

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