

ST. LUKE'S SEQUOIA GIGANTEA from J. E. (Liesel) Jakeman, nee Layritz



St. Luke's Sequoia Gigantea

On March 8, 1860, an advertisement appeared in Victoria's newspaper the British Colonist stating Edward Green, office of Samuel Price & Co., at the corner of Wharf and Johnson Streets, had for sale a small quantity of valuable seeds of the Sequoia Gigantea trees, California. A few early residents planted some of these seeds and the trees are easily identified today.

People are often confused and think Sequoia Gigantea are California Redwoods or Sequoia Sempervirens, whose distinguishing feature is their red, fibrous bark. Sequoia Gigantea are found in the Sierra Nevada mountains of California and then in only a few isolated groups. The deep reddish bark of these giants grows one to two feet thick. They attain a height of 300 to 400 feet and a few specimens have a diameter of 40 to 40 feet. Their outstanding feature is their natural pyramidal shape. They can weigh over one thousand tons, are pest free and live for thousands of years.

Richard Layritz, my great uncle started his well known nursery here in 1889 by planting a dozen Sequoia Gigantea seeds he had carried around in his pocket for some time.

Quite a number of these seeds matured into young seedlings and by further proper propagation he produced most of the older Sequoia Gigantea trees in and around the well known gardens in Victoria today, and also on the original, old nursery property at 4262 and 4268 Wilkinson Rd. On a clear day from the top of Mt. Tolmie some of these trees are visible.

A significant giant Sequoia stands in the St. Luke's church parking lot on Cedar Hill Cross Rd. This one, over a hundred years old, was planted by a former rector of St. Luke's from 1901 to 1908, Rev. Robert Connell. The tree was a gift from his close friend, Richard Layritz. Reverend Connell was a great lover of nature, often visiting parishioners on horseback or by carriage, most often miles distant to study plants while appreciating the rural countryside. After preaching an early morning service at St. Luke's Church, he would ride to St. Michael's Church, in Royal Oak, for an eleven o'clock service. This was often followed by lunch at Layritz House. Over a loaf of bread, cheese and a bowl of fresh, seasonal fruits, the two men would spend happy hours discussing a mutual subject, horticulture.



Layritz residence, Wilkinson Road

Today, Reverend Connell lies buried in St. Luke's churchyard near his favourite Sequoia tree while Richard Layritz's final resting place is beneath another gigantic Sequoia tree grown from an original seed planted by his own hand, in 1889, beside Wilkinson Rd. When you are out and about look for these trees, a beautiful legacy left to us by an earlier generation.