



One of the damaged trees, planted October 9th, 1898, by The Children of Morris Street School.
PHOTO: Jessica Spurrell

Vandalism in Our City Oasis

by **JESSICA SPURRELL** /// EAC Volunteer

A child & their guardian admiring the sunset;
a damaged tree is depicted with its bandage.

PHOTO: Jessica Spurrell

Halifax's first city-owned public garden was officially opened in 1867, and after many additions, is now known as our city oasis, the Halifax Public Gardens. With parts of the garden first established in 1832, it became an ever-growing symbol of our community's history, and our resilience towards a better future.¹ The Gardens were not always a free, openly shared, communal space, however. Initially, they were restricted to upper classes, with memberships that were affordable to few. But despite its origins as an elite, colonial space, the Gardens have since been reclaimed by the public and now serve as an important green space where Haligonians can connect with nature right in the middle of the city.

In July 2022, 32 trees in the Gardens were damaged by vandals using a hatchet. Of these trees, four have since been removed due to irreparable damage.² Deeply stripping a tree's bark deteriorates the tree's ability to transport nutrients, effectively killing it. The cultural significance of the Gardens greatly surpasses any monetary value we assign to them. As some of the trees date back 50-200 years, they are essentially irreplaceable. The vandalism was not simply an act against the Gardens, but an act against our community and its morale.

Cities often fail to make space for nature within their boundaries, and we are fortunate to have such a flourishing city here in Halifax.

All aspects of nature left in this increasingly developed region should be conserved to the best of our abilities. Seeing ecosystems at work, from watching bustling birds, to smiling at scavenging squirrels while walking the city streets is such an enchanting feeling that is often taken for granted. When our environment - our home - is injured, it scars the hearts of its residents too.

Society has inevitably evolved since the establishment of the Public Gardens; it has long been understood that gardens and green spaces are beneficial to us. Nature provides a healing atmosphere for our busy brains smothered by modern existence. It acts as a blissful haven amidst concrete and cranes. Research shows that green spaces greatly improve our cognitive health and mental well-being.³ As a result, the destruction of such ecosystems can have equally detrimental effects.

Sure, some may say they are "just some trees." However, some of these trees have been here for centuries. Their roots have grown with this city since they were little saplings.

It may appear as a simple tree to some, but to others it is a core memory in the foundation of their upbringing. The cultural values that we have grown to associate with the Gardens - accessible green spaces and well-being within a city network - extend, like the trees, beyond the surface. Beneath the soil where a tree stands, a complex root system enriches all life above.

Jessica (she/her) is a Newfie & Labradorian with a passion for the past and alliteration; Jess is a third-year anthropology student at Saint Mary's University.

1. "History of the Gardens — Friends of the Public Gardens." n.d. Halifax Public Gardens. Accessed January 13, 2023. <https://www.halifaxpublicgardens.ca/history-of-the-gardens>
2. Cooke, Alex. 2022. "\$50,000 reward for tips leading to arrest in Halifax Public Gardens tree vandalism | Global News." <https://globalnews.ca/news/9114410/halifax-public-gardens-vandalism-reward/>
3. Weir, Kirsten. 2020. "Nurtured by nature." American Psychological Association. <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2020/04/nurtured-nature>