

Samuels Rose Garden, Broadgreen, Stoke

There's a story behind every name. This one could be called 'Pie cart helps deliver roses', but in a roundabout way.

Stephen James (Jim) Samuels was a man of many talents, including writing poetry during the long night hours of running Nelson's pie cart for 25 years. During quiet times he would sit on a box in the cart's doorway and jot down his notebook creations. Several of Jim's works were published under the nom-de-plume of 'Stephen James'. Perhaps he thought identity might lose him custom at the cart.

The subjects of his varied verse ranged from musings on life's random pathways to cycling, a royal visit, the merchant navy and the natural world. One of his longest and most heartfelt poems, *The Happy Nurseryman*, is near the end of this article. One of Jim's dreams was to be commercial rose grower and he realised this dream, with his wife Rima, by working long and hard at the pie cart.

The rose garden at Broadgreen House is called the Samuels Rose Garden. For those who wish to know why, here is the story.

Jim Samuels was born in 1909 at Lowlands, north of the Rakaia River, Canterbury. His working life started as an apprentice nurseryman at Clark's Nursery in Ashburton. Perhaps it was here his enthusiasm for roses was first ignited.

By the time he finished his tenure in 1934, few jobs were available due to the economic Depression. So this keen, rose-loving sportsman loaded his possessions – not much more than a tent, bedroll and billy – onto his racing bike and travelled to Nelson to look for horticulture work. All he could secure was seasonal work, so between the fruit, hop and tobacco harvests he took on anything going, such as taxi driving and delivering newspapers.

Life was not always kind. One time he had his tent – his home – deliberately set on fire. His belongings were destroyed. Having time for contemplation during several hospital admissions for pneumonia, he figured that 'everyone, even the poor, needed to eat'. In 1935, with the support of his father and the help of other family members, he set up Nelson's long-running pie cart, a business that successfully supported his own family for many years.

Image (below) caption: Jim Samuels serving in the original wooden pie cart, Nelson, 1930s. Jim's daughter Elizabeth Sunckell has written a story about the Samuels' pie carts.

CREDIT: RITA & BILL LOWES

*Prow reference



Jim married Rima Holyoake in May 1937 and they had seven children, six of whom survived into adulthood. While raising their family the couple ran Nelson's pie cart. Rima's job was to prepare the food every morning, including baking the famous 'best in town' pies.

Medical grounds denied Jim a place serving in WW2, much to his disappointment, but he did serve the war years as a volunteer ambulance driver and a National Services Reservist. In a story told by family members, it was during these petrol-rationing years that 'Jim-the-innovator' converted the pie cart's towing vehicle, a Model T Ford van, to run on gas. He built a plywood box lined with a heavily greased calico bag to sit atop the van. He filled the bag with gas from the works at The Port. John Gray, a family neighbour, would point to Madagascar on the world map and say, "That's your father's madder gas car".

Despite the inventions, which included a machine for judging wood chopping events, rose growing remained in Jim's sights. By the 1950s the family home garden, in Nelson city's Shakespeare Walk, was full of them.

In the mid 1950s Jim and Rima decided to test the market for commercial rose growing, and leased a small block of land at Stoke. When it became apparent they could make a living from the work they most enjoyed, a larger piece of land was purchased in 1957, in Beatsons Road. Life became very busy as the couple juggled two businesses. The pie cart was needed to support the establishment of the nursery.

Image (below) caption: Jim and Rima Samuels working at their Beatsons Road nursery, Wakatu, 1962. Jim was a keen sportsman, winning trophies in his younger days for swimming and cycling. Up until the 1950s he entered races and a common training ride would be up to Whangamoia Saddle and back. As his poem suggests, he and Rima were always up for the hard physical work of running a nursery.

Credit RITA & BILL LOWES



Image (below) caption: Gathering blooms for Rita Samuels' marriage to Bill Lowes April 1962. Note the Beatsons Road sawmill and joinery factory in the background.
Credit RITA & BILL LOWES



By the 1960s the Samuels nursery was well established and the couple recognised as leading New Zealand rose growers. Their blooms were successfully exhibited at rose shows, including across the Tasman where several first prizes were awarded at the Sydney Royal Easter Show. Jim served time as president of the Nelson District Rose Society, was a member of the New Zealand National Rose Society and wrote articles for the Rose Annual and NZ Gardener. Both Jim and Rima were accredited National Rose Show judges.

Image (below) caption: Samuels Nursery blooms won prizes at national and international competitions.
Credit BRIAN SAMUELS



Such was the international success of their blooms that one headline following the Sydney Royal Easter Show in 1963 read – ‘NZ Axemen Bring Home a Flower Prize’. Jim had attended the show when travelling as manager of the NZ Axemen’s Team. The axemen lost the competition that year and were so unimpressed with the newspaper report that the team and Jim parted company.

The Samuels Nursery developed four new roses. One, *Rima*, was featured on the Nursery Catalogue of 1964. It was the first New Zealand rose to receive a British Trial Ground Certificate, which established it as a new variety. *Rima* won prizes at national rose shows in Christchurch and Wellington. Other roses were *Huria Matenga* (1968), developed from a sport Jim found at the Queen’s Gardens in Nelson; *City of Nelson* (1970), developed from a Semina bush growing at Broadgreen; and a climbing version of *Condessa de Mayalde*.

Jim named his 1964 rose after his wife Rima. Rima did not want a rose named after her, but Jim got his way with his ‘creative rationale’:
“The stem of the sport has produced five lateral buds, rima being the number five in Maori; when I remove the first letter from the first word of the parent rose – *Prima Ballerina* – I get *Rima*; anyone suggesting remotely that it is named after my wife would clearly be lacking the contributing facts. Coincidental, my lass.”

Image (below) caption: The Samuels Nursery sale catalogue for 1964 contained 186 roses, including Rima, the new rose variety Jim developed.
Credit BRIAN SAMUELS



When the Samuels' pie cart business was sold in 1960, the long held dream of full time, commercial rose growing was realized. Sadly, it was short lived. In the mid 1960s the nursery land at the lower end of Beatsons Road was required for a future motorway. This dashed the couple's future plan to subdivide the land for housing. With the Council unable to confirm a time frame for land acquisition, and the nursery operating on a 3-4 year plan for rose growing, Jim and Rima decided to take early retirement. They sold the land to the Council in 1967.

However, in a twist of good fortune for the people of Nelson, it was in 1965 that the Nelson City Council purchased the Langbein orchard historic house and surrounding land, with a view to developing a garden. Jim Samuels, who believed that Nelson grew the best roses in the world, was one of many citizens who encouraged the Council to purchase the Stoke property and to establish a formal rose garden.

With the situation on their hands of a closing down nursery, the couple offered to donate the rootstock and the budwood needed for a new garden. The Samuels' were happy to share their extensive rose collection with the City rather than send it elsewhere. The superintendent of the Parks and Reserve Department Mr Leigh, whose staff became responsible for creating the garden, were grateful for the offer.

With their enthusiasm for rose work and support for what was to become Broadgreen, Jim and Rima worked for several years at the Nelson City Council nursery, helping staff grow rootstock from the strong briar roses at their nursery. They grafted 250 varieties of budwood onto the rootstock to prepare 2056 rose bushes. Not only were they prepared to donate backbreaking work, but Jim also served on the Rose Sunday publicity committee, to help make Nelson's first 'Rose Sunday' a success.

Broadgreen and its new rose garden opened on the 17 November 1968. The Photo News reported:

'It was a case of "roses, roses, all the way," for the huge crowd which flocked to Broadgreen for Nelson's first Rose Sunday in 1968 – the official opening of Broadgreen.'

Broadgreen is a monument to the city councillors who foresaw its potential, to Mr and Mrs Samuels who donated the roses and to the council staff who have transformed the area into the magnificent park it is today.'

In recognition of their work in donating and preparing rose bushes for the new gardens, Jim and Rima were presented with a silver salver from the people of Nelson.

Image (below) caption: The silver salver that was presented to Jim and Rima Samuels on the very first Rose Sunday is today displayed in the dining room of Broadgreen House.

Credit NELSON PHOTO NEWS ISSUE 98 DEC 1968 P26 BARRY SIMPSON COLLECTION 35MM 1376_FR8



Image (below) caption: The newly formed Rose Garden at Broadgreen in 1968. An 'old garden rose section' was added in 1984. In 1999 the garden was redeveloped with new brick support structures and a change in pathways. The rose beds today are largely untouched from the original layout.

Credit NELSON PHOTO NEWS ISSUE 98 DEC 1968 P24-25 BARRY SIMPSON COLLECTION 120 3627_FR2



On December 5 1976, seven years after Broadgreen opened, the rose garden was officially named the Samuels Rose Garden. Jim had passed away in 1971 and Rima in July 1976. Family members and a large crowd of Nelsonians attended the naming ceremony.

Rose Sunday has become an annual November tradition, with a name change to Broadgreen Rose Day and more recently, Among the Roses. For many years it featured a Rose Queen competition, other years pruning demonstrations, Devonshire teas, craft stalls and various fund raisers. Whatever the events of the day, the centre of attention is always the roses – in full fragrance, colour and bloom.

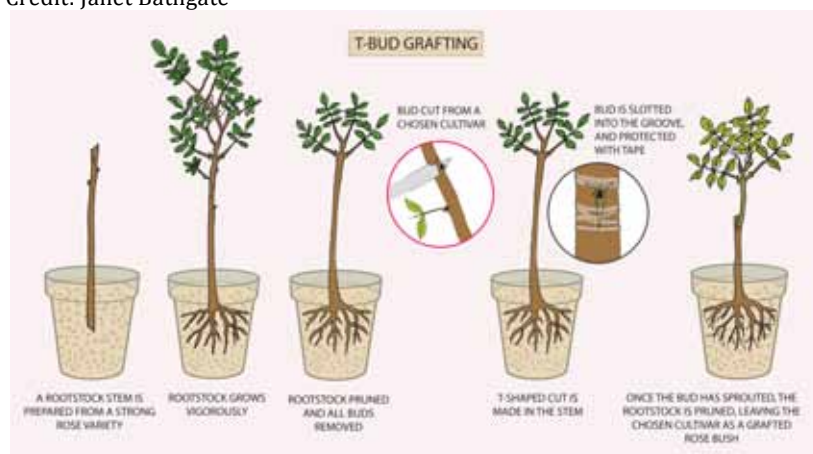
The Art of Rose Growing

Jim and Rima Samuels were novelty rose importers. The family would pore over the beautifully illustrated catalogues that arrived annually from the recognized European and U.S.A. breeders. Family members recall needing the help of foreign language dictionaries to decipher them, having much fun around the table at home.

Jim chose the new releases, which he imported as budwood. Then the repetitive and hard work started. Lateral buds were grafted onto prepared rootstock that had been grown from strong briar roses. A newly grafted bush was kept in quarantine for two years. As it grew, buds were taken and the process repeated over and over so that a good variety of the imported rose would be available for sale in the third season.

New varieties would be sold as new releases the first year they were ready, then again the next year. By the following year every other nursery had them and the price went down, so generally they were then removed from the local Samuels Nursery catalogue.

Credit: Janet Bathgate



Developing a new rose variety is possibly the dream of every rose grower, but Jim and Rima were not rose breeders. However, opportunities are for the taking and when Jim noticed a 'sport' or mutated stem growing from the rose *Prima Ballerina*, with an unusual, pale coloured bloom, he acted. The stem of the unusual bloom yielded five buds. Following grafting, these all grew robust bushes in the second season. Blooms from two of the bushes were identical to *Prima Ballerina*, but three bushes bloomed with perfectly shaped, richly fragrant flowers in a new colour. Jim decided to call it *Rima*.

Rima was exhibited in 1961 in Christchurch and Wellington and won awards. It was then entered into the Trial Grounds of the National Rose Society in England and received a Trial Ground Certificate, the first New Zealand-raised rose to obtain this award.

Jim went on to develop three other new rose varieties. *Huria Matenga* (1968), a rich apricot gold hybrid tea rose, was propagated from a sport found in the Queen's Gardens, Nelson. *City of Nelson* (1970) was developed from a Semina bush growing at Broadgreen. Both *Rima* and *City of Nelson* can be found today growing at the Samuels Rose Garden.

The Happy Nurseryman, a poem by Jim Samuels.

*I am a happy nurseryman, with such a healthy tan,
From working in all weathers, since my trade I first began.
All nature is an open book, I study as I look,
Around the plot that holds my lot, forever in a nook.*

*The ways of birds and earth worms, the texts of soil and sand,
Of beetles, blights and bees in flight, these things I understand.
And names of plants that stretch the length, of ones extended arms,
And noxious pests, voracious guests that cause me untold harm.*

*Early and late I propagate, with scion, cutting, bud;
When season's right one daren't waste light, so even work in mud.
For seasons go in cycles, so mustn't lose a day,
The penalty, sterility, is one I'll dearly pay.*

*I am a busy nurseryman, in early spring all day,
When mating stock and scion, lock them in ball of clay.
By tongue and whip they're made to grip, with raffia wedded tight,
The damp clay set to stay the wet, to shut out air and light.*

*A shield-shaped bud, without the wood, fits in a T-shaped slit,
Is bound by hand with rubber band, to form an airtight fit.
When sap is flowing freely, and the stock is full in leaf,
It's time for budding, the way I've outlined, here in brief.*

*The cuttings I have shaped, from ripe wood or tender shoot,
Wise heeled down tight, next rammed with might, awaited then to root.*

*By thousands they have struck away, to fill rows by the score,
Most plants that grow upon this earth, will reproduce galore.*

*I am a humble nurseryman, with Nature hand in hand,
To clothe the globe with flowing robe, I work my piece of land.
As nature will not wait, until a sluggard feels like work,
I've proved the need to work with speed, so duty never shirk.*

*By filling ground and tilling round, from New Year's Day to Eve,
And sowing seeds and hoeing weeds, I hope one day to leave,
This monument to my content, in work that did not irk,
Where I a happy nurseryman, was happy in my work.*

Samuels Rose Garden Today

Currently there are about 300 named varieties of rose and around 3000 plants at the Samuels Rose Garden. Over the years the Nelson District Rose Society, Tasman Bay Roses and generous individuals have contributed new cultivars. Nelmac staff, on behalf of the Nelson City Council, work to replace declining roses each year.

Roses are not long living plants. The crown increases in size, the rootstock becomes weak, and the plant rarely lives for more than twenty years. Roses of the 1960s, when the Samuels Rose Garden was created, were bred primarily for colour, fragrance, symmetry and size of bloom. Exhibiting blooms was important. The overall health and vigour of the plant was not a priority and rose bushes required frequent spraying against insect attack.

With today's environmental awareness, and the fact that [most insecticides and fungicides are banned for public use](#) in Europe – which is the centre of rose breeding – health and strength in addition to gorgeous blooms and fragrance has become a top priority.

Of all 250 varieties originally planted at Broadgreen, just two cultivars remain – Jim Samuels' own roses *Rima* and *City of Nelson*. Every year in February gardening staff assess the bushes to identify sick and diseased specimens and replace those of the poorest quality. However, where a strong cultivar still exists, the same rose will be planted. Some of the early roses were strong cultivars.

To identify today's Samuels Rose garden cultivars, there are nameplates in the beds. Also, an annually-updated map and catalogue is available at Broadgreen House.

Other work in the gardens since 1968 has been the addition of 'an old garden rose section' in 1984, and in 1999 the garden was redeveloped with new brick support structures and a change in pathway layout. The rose beds are largely untouched from the original layout.

When Did Cultivated Roses First Arrive In New Zealand?

As Jim Samuels selected the rose cultivars he wished to replicate in his Nelson nursery, he knew the imported budwood would arrive on a relatively short flight from Europe in good condition. The first cultivated roses to reach New Zealand arrived during the sailing ship era. How did they survive months at sea? Some, such as the Sweet Briar, arrived as seed; some survived as potted plants while others as cuttings packed in moss and sealed in long, metal surveyor's tubes. Only the tough would survive a long sea journey. This could explain the presence of old roses still growing at cemeteries and around long gone homes.

It is believed that Samuel Marsden's missionaries introduced the first roses to New Zealand. They were China roses, namely *R. Chinensis semperflorens*, *R. Poxburghii* and *Blush China*, planted at Pompellier House, Bay of Islands in 1810. Many of New Zealand's earliest Roman Catholic missionaries were French and would have been the vehicles for many popular roses of the day.

R. Chinensis can be seen growing today on the side of Broadgreen House.

For further information visit nelson.govt.nz to find The Rose Walk. It contains a map and stories about roses.

Information for rose enthusiasts can be found at:

heritageroses.org.nz/gardens and nzroses.org.nz

Information for this article was obtained from recollections and archives of the Samuels family; Nelson City Council archives; Nelson Provincial Museum; and Nelmac staff.