

EUREKA STOCKADE MEMORIAL PARK.

Committee Centenary

In February 2012 the Eureka Stockade Memorial Park Committee completes 100 years of outstanding community service.

On 7 February 1912 forty-seven people (34 men, 13 ladies) attended a meeting in the Ballarat East Town Hall convened by Cr Frank Penhalluriack who was very concerned about the unkempt state of the Eureka Stockade Reserve. It had been in very good condition in December 1904 when 1500 people attended a Service for the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Eureka Stockade Attack, but very little had been done to the Reserve since then.

Right from the first year the Stockade Reserve Committee was characterised by the willingness of members to work, and the arrangement of sub-committees – Finance, Grounds, Sports, Ladies – encouraged participation and efficiency; they were really committed to having a worthy Park in the East.

In 1913 a statement of 'Objects' was adopted : (a) To create a national spirit and patriotism by enlisting the sympathy of the Government and Citizens of the Commonwealth (b) The Annual Celebration of the fight for liberty which took place at Eureka on 3 December 1854 (c) The beautification and maintenance of the Eureka Stockade Reserve (d) The raising of funds for the carrying out of the above objects.

Many working bees and numerous fund-raising activities have resulted in great improvement in the grounds and amenities of the Reserve. Annual Stockade commemoration Services were held from 1912 at the Reserve on the Sunday nearest to 3 December. They were in the format of a traditional 'Pleasant Sunday Afternoon' with an address and musical entertainment.

The Eureka Stockade Reserve Committee went through several name changes which reflect Council and community attitudes to the Committee's role at the time :

1913 Eureka Stockade Committee Ballarat 1917 Eureka Stockade Progress Association
1922 Eureka Stockade Improvement and Progress Association 1972 Eureka Stockade Memorial Park Committee (to match the change of name Eureka Stockade Reserve to Eureka Stockade Memorial Park).

Fund-raising has been a major challenge for the Park Committee over the century. Sources of funds have included the annual Carnivals, membership subscriptions, community donations, produce stalls, the Park Kiosk, proceeds from Swimming Pools, special efforts including raffles and competitions, social activities, Eureka Hall hirings, and Eureka Caravan Park proceeds. It is estimated that during the hundred years to 2011 the Park Committee has raised about \$6 million (2011 equivalent dollars) for improvement and maintenance of the Eureka Stockade Memorial Park. This amount does not include the costs of fund raising activities nor Council and Government grants.

The Eureka Caravan Park was set up in 1950 when land at the north-east of the Reserve became available due to the closure of the railway branch to the Eureka Tiles factory. As well as meeting a need in Ballarat tourism the Caravan Park was seen as a potential source of the significant funds that would be required for future developments at the Stockade Reserve.

In the 1960s visitors to Ballarat were often expressing disappointment about the lack of readily available information about the 1854 Eureka Stockade Battle. The City Council, Rotary Clubs and Apex Clubs took a strong interest in this shortfall. The Park Committee responded keenly with much voluntary assistance and cooperation, a model of

the Stockade with information panels was erected near the south-west corner of the Park close to the Eureka Street fence; this was an Apex Clubs combined project.

The Rotary Clubs also combined to sponsor the construction of a Diorama depicting the 1854 attack on the Eureka Stockade; with a colorful scene, bright lighting, and an audio tape triggered by a slotted coin; it was a very popular attraction for visitors. The Park Committee and the Caravan Park Manager also produced a variety of informative literature about the Stockade and Ballarat for visitors to the Caravan Park.

The biggest challenge for the Park Committee in the 1970s was the raising of \$80,000 necessary as its share of the cost of the 50 metre concrete Swimming Pool and the Learner's Pool; this new Pool complex replaced the former Lake Elsworth recreational pool. That Lake with its island and bridge access had been a popular swimming and games spot in the East for some forty years; it had previously been a much used fishing venue. The East community was very generous with financial support for the much desired water sports facility; the City Council provided the engineering expertise and the other share of the total cost.

During the 1990s Park Committee representatives participated in advisory sub-committees for two very significant developments at the Stockade Park. The City Council employed a Consulting service to advise on all aspects of the Park including landscaping, tree health, layout and relevance of all features and amenities. The resulting changes to the Park were a splendid upgrade.

In 1992 the State Government responded generously to Ballarat Council requests for major funding of a \$3.1 million Eureka Centre. This Centre would provide educational and interpretive experiences about the Stockade story for visitors. Opened in

1994 the Eureka Centre was a prominent and impressive feature of Ballarat, with it's towering model of the Eureka flag overhead; the Park Committee contributed \$120,000 towards the Eureka Centre costs.

Since 1912 about 420 people have been members of the Reserve/Park Committees. The average attendance at the monthly Committee meetings has been about 22 members (14 men, 8 ladies).

The following members served multiple terms as President of the Reserve/Park Committee : A J Pittard (2 years), W Carey (3), W Jones (2), A McGregor (2), W A Shaw (4), J H Stanley (2), A Barnett (9), L O'Brien (5), B Parsons (2), W G Fleet (2), A N Mills (3), J Lamb (2), G McKenzie (3), G A Lee (2), F E Kennon (2), W R Ham (2), R Chittock (2), G A Drake (6), M G Taite (2), F Williams (15). A further 29 members each served one term as President.

Life Memberships have been awarded to the following members in recognition of outstanding service : W R Elsworth, R Britnell, C C Phillips, W Carey, Mrs H McKay, V C Jones, Mr and Mrs J Parsons (Snr), A Jones, Mr and Mrs W A Shaw, Mr and Mrs E Parsons, Mrs A De Graaf, H McKay, Mr and Mrs A Barnett, G A Drake, F E Kennon, Mr and Mrs G McKenzie, Mr and Mrs M G Taite.

The Park Committee has suffered some big disappointments over the years including : the demolition of the Begonia House and the Gardens along the south side of the Park, the loss of a Council employed resident Caretaker and the residence from the Park, the disbanding of the Ladies sub-committee in 1985, the lack of museum type facilities in the 1994 Eureka Centre, and the startling Council decision in November 2011, one week before the planned seasonal opening of the Swimming Pool Complex, to

appoint a different Operator after 39 years of very good service by the McKenzie family in cooperation with the Park Committee.

But big hearts with strength of mind and purpose have prevailed, and much praise is due to those who have worked, donated, solved problems, organised events, and liaised with other community agencies during the Committee Century.

The Park Committee understands the contribution to public awareness of the Eureka Stockade story made by Sovereign Hill, the Eureka Stockade Memorial Association, the Art Gallery, and other groups which have developed alternative ways to celebrate 3 December 1854. The specified 'Objects' are being achieved !!

A clear confirmation that the first of the 'Objects' was being achieved came in 2010 with the announcement that the Australian Government would support the \$11.2 million extension of the Eureka Centre. Initial excitement is now muted by concern that the new Centre might be a weak imitation of the Canberra Museum of Australian Democracy. It appears that the 'Expert Panel' appointed by the Ballarat City Council to communicate with the design contractors and with Council is not much involved. The Park Committee is hoping that Council will ensure that there is appropriate Ballarat input to the design and content of the new Eureka Centre.

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A 'mangled' version appeared ^(late) in February 2012.*

*K. Clements.
December 2011.*