

VICTORIA PARK.

Weston Bates in his book Lucky City notes that before 1890 this was a windswept place with ugly Mullock Heaps left behind by the rich Hand in Hand park mine / Park GM Co. 1868 - 1874

It appears from George Longley's letters to the Council that it was also the site for the City night Soil which was left to mature over 12 months before being transported to the Botanical Gardens. Probably, well prior to 1890 the Council were already considering change to the area as George Longley was asked to report on the scarcity of Night Soil on site in 1894 saying "there is about 80 loads of last years prepared and the season up to the present time about 50. Now, should the Council think of discontinuing this place as a depot for the night soil I would suggest that the manure on hand be kept for there is the present new shelter houses which will take about 30 loads and the trenching on the Western Border for line fence will take some 50 loads so that there would not leave much on hand."

Victoria Park was developed with its own Curator and Curator's Cottage.

On the 20th August 1884 he wrote to the Parks and Gardens Committee :- "Seeing that the Council is about to negotiate with Mr Hunter to take the Night Soil to form a deposit outside, now, if I may be allowed to express my opinion, the Council has a park of some 320 acres and from time to time there has been a tolerable sum spent on it and nothing to the purpose after all. What I would suggest at present is the following. The Entrance at a main avenue leading from Sturt St extending 350 yards with a curve road 33 feet wide. Plenty of quartz close at hand, then commence a trench on each side and deposit the soil 33 feet wide which would be making a border for two lines of gums, pines and when complete with one row of shrubs this would be preparing the ground to grow anything and by this time next year you could plant 1,000 trees which in a very short time give shelter to one of the bleakest coldest places in the neighbourhood. The expense could not be much now and it would be reclaiming one of the most prominent places in the City but now as a barren waste. Hoping that the Council will consider this before they allow the manure to go from there."

George accompanied his letter with a sketch stating "This sketch is something after the form of the ground."

(The Report of the Local Board of Health for the year ending 31st. December 1886 includes :- "Botanical Gardens 202 acres. Site of manure Depot - Botanical Gardens..") It seems that a different arrangement had occurred ? where was the new site within the Gardens.)

The Council must have taken some note of Longley's suggestion as on 24th May 1890 Mayor Little invited the citizens of Ballarat to come to the park to plant trees. Each one was given a plan on which he was to find his (? her as well) name on it with a number alongside. He then went around the Park until he found his number with a hole dug and a tree beside it. At 11 o'clock a trumpet sounded and

everybody got busy planting a tree. In 10 minutes 3,000 trees were planted. The bleak treeless plain was transformed as if by magic into beautiful Park. Trees were planted in the laid out Avenues - Oak, Elm, Poplar, Cedar and Plane trees.

The Mullock Heap was named Mt Hollich Smith after the Commander of the Colonial Defence Force that had an encampment in the Park in 1895. (When I came to Ballarat in 1959 it was noted on a map of the City as a look out so I drove into the Park to find it but failed to do so. I now realise that it was disguised by Pine trees. Recently I did find it but it has been used by local children as a slide and it was too difficult to climb without boots and a stick!)

During World War 1 a plantation of Pine trees was planted (I think on Russel St)

On 30th June 1916 40 Wattle trees were planted in the Park by 80 boys from the Urquart St. School supervised by Mr Williams following a submission to the Council by the Ballarat Progress Association concerning the planting of Acacias in various parks of the City. Preciously Toop and Williams had suggested 12 clumps of 3 to 5 trees, each clump to consist of one variety be planted on the East and West side of the Plane Drive and noted that this would be in keeping with the clumps planted in 1886 in Elm Drive .

During the 2nd World War it was home to 8,000 American Servicemen and there was a Military Hospital

Over the years a whole variety of activities have occurred, - Cycle and Motor cycle racing cricket. dog obedience classes ,a velodrome (now defunct) a BMX track, cricket pitches and a World Scout Jambouree in the 1980s. (and probably many more)

Today the Sturt St. Entrance provides a convenient stopping place for travellers, particularly those with caravans, whilst its perimeter provides a 5 kilometer jogging track. There are two ornamental ponds., whilst the south side provides an ample area for the Pony Club.

Unfortunately, although the area would be viewed with envious eyes by many other cities, it has a dubious reputation being unlit at night and to some extent off the beaten track. The roads are not well maintained and the whole area presents as something of a "Hoch Potch " It remains in many ways a poor relation of the Botanical Gardens. As such one feels that it has been placed in the "too hard" basket by successive Councils.