

19. CHILDREN'S PLAYGROUND – RADLEY STREET

Officer responsible Parks and Waterways Manager	Author Warwick Scadden, Parks & Waterways Area Advocate, DDI 941 6614
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The purpose of this report is to:

1. Advise the Board of the outcome of research and discussions with the McCombs family concerning renaming the children's playground in Radley Street as "Andrew Johnson's Playground". There has been some confusion over whether the playground was previously named McCombs Memorial Playground. The research carried out, and the discussions with the McCombs family, indicate that this naming did in fact take place.
2. Seek the Board's approval to:
 - (a) rename the Radley Playground as "McCombs Memorial Children's Playground; and
 - (b) install an information board in the playground depicting aspects of Andrew Johnson's Troutdale Farm or "Johnson's Fishponds" in consultation with the local community.

Refer also to clause 26.1.

BACKGROUND

Board members will recall the report which was considered at the Board meeting on 6 September 2002.

At that meeting the Board resolved:

1. That its decision of 4 June 1997 be rescinded.
2. That the Parks and Waterways Area Advocate discuss the renaming of the playground with the McCombs family.
3. That the playground be renamed "Andrew Johnson's Playground".
4. That an information board be erected in the playground incorporating details of Andrew Johnson's work and former features of the site.

DISCUSSIONS WITH THE MCCOMBS FAMILY

Since 17 March 2003, discussions have been held with two principal members of the McCombs family: Lady Christina McCombs of Christchurch and Mr Peter McCombs of Wellington.

The family's view is expressed in the following excerpt from a letter addressed to the Mayor from Peter McCombs:

"...it is the family's view that having been established with the support of the Council as a permanent reminder through the efforts and voluntary donations of many who knew first hand the contributions made by James and Elizabeth McCombs, it is our view Council should ensure that the association of the park and the playground with recognition of their work should continue....."

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH CARRIED OUT

Historical research has been carried out to try and ascertain whether the playground was named McCombs Memorial Children's Playground. The results of this research are detailed below, showing that the playground was known as McCombs Memorial Children's Playground.

Report of the Playground's Official Opening

A report of the playground's official opening as recorded in the *Press* on 30 November 1953 is attached in Appendix I. That report states that:

The ground with its equipment would be a memorial to the fine services of Mr J. McCombs and Mrs Elizabeth McCombs to the district....

National Archives

A search has been made of records held at Archives New Zealand. Three significant references were found relating to the reserve in Radley Street confirming the naming of the playground as McCombs Memorial Children's Playground. These references are outlined below.

1. Report to the Council's Abattoir and Reserves Committee on 8 June 1953

Memorial Children's Playground – Radley Street

The following letter has been received from the Hon Secretary of the McCombs Memorial Trust committee:

"My committee has been holding a sum of money to provide a suitable memorial in the district to the late Mr J McCombs and to his wife the late Mrs O B McCombs. Our attention has been called to the fact that there is a children's playground in Radley Street without equipment.

I have been directed to ask you if it would be possible for the Council to erect a set of seesaws and swings and a merry-go-round on this site if my committee contributes £200 towards the cost?

In accordance with the object for which the money was raised, it would be necessary to have some suitable plaque created recording the fact that the money was subscribed for a memorial. In view of the interest that the late Mr and Mrs McCombs had in the welfare of children, we feel that it would be a most suitable memorial.

The Direct of Reserves submits the following:

It has always been the practice of the Christchurch City Council to subsidise by 10/- in the £ any amount collected for the erection of children's playground equipment. With the 10/- subsidy on £200 there should be sufficient to erect a site of three seesaws, sets of three swings and a merry-go-round. The City Council will attend to the erection of the equipment and will be responsible for its maintenance for all time. In respect of the suggested plaque, as far as the Reserves Department is concerned there would be no objection".

It was resolved to recommend approval.

2. Report of the Abattoir and Reserves Committee to the Council meeting of 22 June 1953

Memorial Children's Playground – Radley Street

The McCombs Memorial Trust Committee advises that it is holding a sum of money to provide a suitable memorial in the district of the late Mr and Mrs McCombs and offers to contribute £200 towards the cost of playground equipment for the Radley Street playground, a suitable plaque to be erected rewarding the fact that the money was subscribed for a memorial.

It is the Council's policy to subsidise moneys donated for playground equipment to the extent of ten shillings in the pound.

The Committee recommend that the offer be accepted with appreciation.

3. A further reference to the playground in the report to the Abattoir and Reserves Committee on 12 October 1953 records:

Deputation – McCombs Memorial Children's Playground

Mr G J Bruce will attend the meeting at 5pm today to discuss with the committee the proposed children's playground in Radley Street, Woolston.

MR ANDREW JOHNSON

In 1875 Andrew Johnson established Troutdale Farm on a block of land bounded by Clarendon Terrace and Sheldon, Radley and Marshall Streets, measuring approximately 1.7 hectares. The area included what is now Radley Playground. For nearly 60 years, until 1933, the grounds of Mr Johnson's property were a meeting place to enjoy picnics and entertainment. The property became known as "Johnson's Fishponds", due to the extensive aquarium and ponds together with the large number and variety of fish. In the latter years, the property was noted for its outdoor skating rink and various other outdoor entertainments.

Andrew Johnson was an inaugural member of the Acclimatisation Society, being appointed curator in 1864 to the newly established society, which was based in that time in Hagley Park.

In 1925, Charles Morris, who had been Johnson's caretaker, purchased the property and shortly after disposed of several lots for residential purposes, with one lot of approximately 800m² being transferred to the Council for recreation purposes.

DISCUSSION

From the records it is clear that the children's playground in Radley Street was officially opened in November 1953 as the "McCombs Memorial Children's Playground". It is evident, however, that the name dropped out of use in later years and was replaced with "Radley Playground", in line with the common practice of naming local reserves after the street in which they are situated.

It would appear also that the commemorative plaque referred to in the report of 8 June 1953 was either not installed or removed at a later time.

The significance of Andrew Johnson's 'Troutdale' is also worthy of recognition as part of the local heritage.

Staff

- Recommendation:**
1. That the Board's decision of 6 September 2002 to rename the area as "Andrew Johnson's Playground" be rescinded.
 2. That the Radley Playground be renamed "McCombs Memorial Children's Playground".
 3. That an information board be installed in the playground depicting aspects of Andrew Johnson's Troutdale Farm or "Johnson's Fishponds" in consultation with the local community.
 4. That the local community be advised of the proposed name change.

Chairperson's

Recommendation: For discussion.