

Mount Pleasant Reserve

Once a Public Gardens

Just a few years after the little residential community began to form, it was proposed to reserve this sloping piece of land as a public gardens. The gold rush had now reached Mount Pleasant and the area was being stripped of trees. Residents at Mount Pleasant believed they should not be compelled to go as far as the new Botanical Gardens to enjoy a park. In 1863 it was temporarily reserved but was threatened by mining claims and a government plan to subdivide it. Also a house had to be removed from it. In response to further local agitation, it was permanently gazetted as a Public Gardens on 18 July 1871. By 1875 it was fenced and planted out on the advice of Dr von Mueller of the Melbourne Botanical Gardens.

Half a century later the conifers were mature but the gardens were looking worn, having suffered vandalism and neglect. As a government make-work project during the Depression of the 1930s it was decided to repurpose the old gardens. Unemployed workers on the dole ('sussos') were directed to form the present sports oval by digging out the side of the hill. Two workers were crushed in a landslide, one fatally.

A sports ground

Baseball was the first game to be played on the new oval. In 1934 the ground was allocated to the Mount Pleasant Baseball Team. The Ballarat Baseball Association had been formed in 1930 and Mount Pleasant—known as the Mounties— soon fielded several grades. For a long time baseball was played as a winter game, attracting cricketers in the off-season. The diamond was originally at the northern end of the oval and was later shifted to the southern end with a high cyclone-wire fence. The Saturday ritual of liming the lines and laying out the bags was a magnet for local boys. The Mounties colours were light blue on dark blue.

A cricket pitch— asphalt requiring an overlay of coir matting for games— was laid down in 1935 when the reserve became home to the Mount Pleasant Cricket Club. The oval was also used for State School and church competitions. Informally, the reserve has long been a popular escape for children, teenagers and dogs. The only drawback is the chance of being swooped by magpies.