

A Short Account of the Formation of Port Macquarie Croquet Club.

The recorded history of the club-in-embryo begins on the 19th September, 1951 when a public meeting was convened in the Municipal Council Chambers with Alderman L. Crisp presiding. At this meeting, a group of interested Port Macquarie citizens resolved to form a croquet club and to petition the council for the construction of a green at the eastern end of West Port Park. An organizing committee was elected and empowered to open a trust account with four initial donations totalling five pounds two shillings.

Three months later, on 4th December, 1951, the inaugural meeting of the club was held in the local offices of the Bank of New South Wales where Mr Simpson was the manager. After a motion to form a croquet club (moved by Mrs McHattan seconded by Miss Flynn) was passed unanimously, Mrs G.M. Pountney was elected as the first President and a further four office bearers and four committee members were then ensconced. The annual subscription for members was set at two guineas, to be paid in advance. The minutes of this first meeting also record that the council provided an estimate of cost of constructing the lawn (which was five hundred and forty pounds) and it was agreed to embark immediately on raising funds to meet this cost. House parties were suggested as an initial means of fund raising. Mrs Simpson was thanked for allowing practice at the Bank on Wednesday afternoons where 3d was charged for afternoon tea and use of the facilities, and Mrs Crisp (snr) was thanked for providing instruction on how to play the game of croquet.

Mrs Lena Campbell hits the first ball on 27th October, 1953

Momentum gathered quickly in 1952. At the second meeting, held on the 21st January, the name "West Port Croquet Club" was agreed and the club colours were nominated as royal blue and red. The rules of the existing Taree Croquet Club were adopted as the provisional club rules with the power to alter these at general meeting adopted.

Significantly, two club members Mrs I. Brownlow and Mrs L. Campbell provided loans of two hundred pounds and three hundred pounds respectively to allow the construction of facilities to get underway. These two personal loans were probably critical to the early viability of the venture.

On 13th February, 1952, club representatives met with the council's Parks and Gardens Committee and the minutes of the subsequent committee meeting, (held on 22nd February), reported that "agreements were arranged".

By June of that year a formal quote from McCudden & Freeman for preliminary civil works was in hand (the cost was three hundred and eighty four pounds) and this was duly accepted on the proviso that the council guarantee to continue with their part of the contract. Work got underway shortly after this with the council apparently acting as prime contractor and project manager. Perhaps not surprisingly, the project was soon over budget and many letters were exchanged between the club and the council regarding additional funds for completion of the work.

The first Annual General Meeting was held on 6th December 1952 where Mrs McHattan ("Mac") succeeded Mrs Pountney as President.

With work on the lawn progressing slowly attention turned to other facilities, the first of which was a clubhouse. On 21st March 1953 a sketch plan for a 30 x 15 ft clubhouse was tabled and on 25th April a contract to build this was let to Mr Irvine. The cost of the clubhouse was significantly reduced by benevolent



donations of materials from local timber mills. One of these was the Heron's Creek Timber Mill but the names of the others are unfortunately not identified in the minutes.

Amazingly, the clubhouse was finished by July and it hosted its first meeting of the club on 1st August, 1953.

With the first lawn and the clubhouse completed, the club hosted its **official opening on 27th October, 1953** with one hundred and sixty people attending including visitors from neighbouring Taree and Wauchope clubs. The mayor, Mr Brownlow, cut the ribbon and turned the key in the clubhouse door and Mrs L.Campbell was given the honour of playing the first ball (see photograph).

The following month, Mrs Campbell who played a key role in the club's formation and who had been secretary for the first two years, was elected as the first "Lawn Captain". She continued as Secretary for another four years and then filled the Presidency for nine years from 1957/8 to 1965/6. She also became the first Life Member of the Club. Her name is perpetuated on the trophy for the winner of the club's annual handicap singles competition, played in alternating divisions, which was donated in her memory by her family,.



28 of the 32 founding members of the club photographed at the Opening on 27th October 1953.

*Back: Mrs I.E.Blair, Mrs Blake, Miss McClintock, Mrs D.Smith, Mrs Beesley, Mrs Mcmillan, Mrs Schrader, Mrs R.Cattell, Mrs Debreny, Mrs Rosendahl, Mrs C.Lewis, Mrs Garnside, Miss B.Nichols, Mrs Johnston.
Front: Mrs Roberts, Mrs W.Cantell, Mrs Redford, Mrs Robson, Mrs L.Campbell, Mrs McHattan, Mrs Simpson, Mrs Brownlow, Mrs McCrae, Mrs Pountney, Mrs Lunnon, Mrs Cadell, Mrs Estens and Mrs Crisp Snr. (Patron, seated).
Absent: Mrs M.Buckmaster, Mrs A.McRae, Mrs J.Mitchell, Mrs D.Elliott.*

The First Tournament - July 1956

After the official opening of the club's first lawn in October 1953, the committee had a long running battle with the council in an attempt to have the second lawn completed as agreed. This saga dragged on for over two years with considerable correspondence and many meetings between the club's executive and various representatives of council (and council staff) throughout 1954, 1955 and into 1956. Finally, some impetus

was given to completing the task by July 1956 because of an upcoming important event.

At its meeting of 13th April, 1956, the club endorsed a motion from Mrs Doris Woods to hold a croquet tournament during the week of the Port Macquarie's "*Carnival of the Pines*" and this was used to instil some urgency into completion of the civil works on the second lawn. As late as 18th June, a Special Meeting was held with council to discuss having the ground filled, levelled and top dressed before the middle of July. The minutes of that meeting even record that Mr Hinton "...offered to use the flame thrower to get rid of the grass" so that earthmoving could begin.

As we now know, the 1956 tournament went ahead and was by all accounts very successful. It is noteworthy that golf croquet and croquet games were also played. Unfortunately, the club's archives have no copy of the program for this inaugural event, but the minutes of the July meeting record that six players from Cheltenham, two from Killara and eight from Wauchope had submitted entries. A subsequent note records that a further two visitors from Victoria and New Zealand were also participants. The August 2nd edition of the "Port News" column covered the event.

Interestingly, the Cheltenham ladies who attended provided two trophies to the club in appreciation the hospitality received.

Each year since 1956, without fail, the Club has run its July/August Carnival with growing popularity. The Silver Jubilee Tournament in 1980 for instance had seventy two entrants with twenty interstate clubs represented from Queensland, ACT, Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia. Such large numbers could of course only be accommodated by a knock-out competition format over ten days and also by the use of other courts at Wauchope and at the Presbyterian Church in Port Macquarie. When this format was abandoned in favour of a one-week, round-robin event in 1993, the numbers have been restricted to around forty.



Mrs Eileen de la Rue, Vice President in 1956, played a major role in running the first tournament. She was appointed manager of the 2nd tournament the following year and continued in this role and the Vice Presidency for many years. She was also Treasurer 1963, and President 1967-68, 1979-80 and 1984. In addition she was Club Champion 1958-66, 1968, 1971, 1973 and 1978.

The article, contributed by Mrs McHattan, which appeared in the Port News, August 2nd 1956.