

Vignettes of McLean Park's history

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Michael Fowler (mfhistory@gmail.com)

1. Historical development pre-McLean Park

In 1851 government land agent, Donald McLean made his way into Hawke's Bay on instructions from Governor George Grey to purchase the Ahuriri block from Ngati Kahungunu.

The deed for purchase of the 265,000 acres of the Ahuriri Block was signed in November 1851 for the purchase price of £1,500.

This land included the site of McLean Park, which was then part of a large area of swamp and water.

A syndicate, initially of William Langland and Charles Kennedy, negotiated with the harbour board in 1900 to reclaim 1,780 acres (720ha) in the Te Whare o Maraenui block, which was said to be "unhealthy and unsightly."

George Latham and George Nelson replaced Langland to join Kennedy in the reclamation syndicate operating under the name of C D Kennedy and Company.

The reclamation was completed by 1908 and included the ten acres (4ha) where McLean Park would be developed.

This area, which would be known as Napier South would be a separate local authority to Napier from 1908. They became part of the Napier Borough Council in 1915 as the costs of infrastructural drainage works were beyond the Napier South Board.

2. Donald McLean

Donald McLean (1820-1877), later Sir Donald Mclean upon his 1874 knighthood, came to New Zealand in 1840, where he settled in Auckland and worked cutting timber and then on a schooner. It was here while trading, that he gained a good knowledge of Maori ways and customs.

His first involvement with the New Zealand government was in 1844, when he was appointed to the Protectorate of Aborigines in Taranaki.

Upon the election of Governor George Grey in 1846, McLean was retained as police inspector in Taranaki due to his success with being able to "arrange matters" between Maori, and between Maori and settlers.

Governor Grey had bigger plans for Donald McLean when in 1848 made him responsible for land purchases. He was active in Hawke's Bay during 1851 purchasing the Ahuriri block of 265,000 acres (107,241ha), Waipukurau 279,000 acres (112,907ha) and Mohaka 86,000 acres (34,802ha).

During this period Maori were eager to sell land to Europeans to encourage trade between them.

Some 50 years later these deals would be subject to land claims, which continued throughout the 21st Century.

In 1853, Donald McLean became chief land purchaser under Governor Grey.

When land became more difficult to purchase in the late 1850s, McLean's methods of making separate payments to some Maori leaders to persuade others to sell, led to problems of unrest.

He also used his own staff to purchase land for himself in Hawke's Bay, where he bought a large sheep run in Maraekakaho.

Further promotion occurred in 1856, when he was made native secretary and chief land commissioner.

Donald McLean was elected superintendent of Hawke's Bay in 1863 and made a general government agent when the East Coast war began later that year.

An 1873 commission cleared his purchase of his Maraekakaho property, although many Maori held a different view.

He was elected MHR or member of parliament for Hawke's Bay in 1866, until he resigned in December 1876.

Sir Donald McLean passed away aged 56, in January 1877.

3. McLean Park beginnings

After Sir Donald McLean has passed away in January 1877, a group of his fellow European settlers met at Otane to discuss a memorial to him.

A subscription fund was proposed to create a lasting monument to Sir Donald in a "conspicuous place in Napier". Those present pledged £501 and 13 shillings (2018: \$74,500) when the subscription list was opened. The fund was administered by trustees.

A statute was initially favoured as a memorial, of which there was considerable difference of opinion. The Sir Donald McLean Park Trustees asked Sir Donald's only son, R D D (Douglas) McLean, some years later what he thought. His reply was that a "statute would not altogether be desirable."

Douglas thought that Napier was in need of a recreation ground, and that "would have pleased his father better."

He recommended a 10-acre (4 hectares) site to the trustees' developed by George Nelson, George Latham and Charles Kennedy as part of the Te Whare o Maraenui block or Napier South reclamation. According to Douglas: "The trustees were treated in their usual liberal way" by Messrs Kennedy and Nelson, and in 1909 the trustees secured the site.

Charges were not allowed to be made at grounds classified as open reserves, which meant no entrance fees to watch sports and other events. This complicated a transfer of the land from the trustees to the Napier Borough Council, who wanted to receive revenue from the ground to develop it. However, in 1911, solicitor and trustee P S McLean, began to draft a bill for parliament to achieve a transfer to the council and avoid McLean Park being classified as an open reserve.

P S McLean's bill was successful and passed in 1911 as the Sir Donald McLean Memorial Park Act, and later in 1912, McLean Park was passed legally to Napier Borough Council's control.

The Hawke's Bay Highland Society gave £1,000 towards the development of McLean Park which would be used for drainage, ground levelling and a grandstand.

Two fields were created on the park.

About a third of the ground at this time was covered in a swamp.

4. First uses of McLean Park

Hockey was played at McLean Park during 1910, when the Sir Donald McLean Park trustees gave the ground free of charge to the Hawke's Bay Hockey Association, provided they gave a quarter of the net gate takings to the Trust.

Northern Union Football (rugby league) and soccer, who until Napier Borough Council control around May 1912, leased the ground from the trustees.

Rugby Union at that time was played at Nelson Park.

A practice match was held by the Kia Ora Northern Union Football Club in March 1912.

Soccer was played at the park in April 1912, when a Palmerston team, Kia Toa, defeated Old Boys by 3 to 2.

Agreement was made in May 1912 between with the trustees of McLean Park for Northern Union (rugby league) and Hawke's Bay Football Association (soccer) for games to take place at the ground.

An interprovincial match of Rugby League took place between Canterbury and Hawke's Bay in September 1912, where the ground was described as being "rough." The game itself was described as "comparatively uninteresting" and having "moderate attendance."

McLean Park's first caretaker was appointed in November 1912, who would also look after Nelson Park and the Recreation Ground.

The Napier Borough Council's horses were grazed on McLean Park.

The Hawke's Bay Cricket Association came to agreement in November 1912 for rental of McLean Park from the Napier Borough Council.

Reclamation of the swamp area and top dressing was applied during 1916.

5. Cairn and Memorial Gates

Sir Donald McLean was born in Kilmaluag, Tyree, Scotland. And as such, he was a highlander. A cairn is a group of stones placed on top of each other to form a mound as a memorial.

The cairn in memory of Sir Donald McLean was 20 feet (6m) by 12 feet (3.6m) and consists of blocks of limestone weighing about 270 tons (245,000 kgs).

It was a reproduction of a cairn which stood at Culloden, Scotland.

Half way up the cairn is a granite slab with an inscription:

The Honourable Sir Donald McLean, K. C. M. G.
Born Kilmaluag, Tyree, Scotland, 25th October, 1920.
Died Napier, New Zealand, 5th January, 1877.

The cairn was unveiled by Sir Donald's friend, the Hon J D Ormond, on May 14, 1913.

At the unveiling it was discussed that the trustees of the Sir Donald McLean Memorial Fund had decided not only upon the Park to be used for the benefit of the residents of Napier, but also as a site for the erection of a cairn in his memory.

A number of men, including Messrs Tait, P S Mclean, A McLean, and C D Kennedy decided at the time of the purchase of McLean Park that a memorial to Sir Donald should be created as well, hence the cairn.

Memorial Gates.

A committee was formed to create memorial gates at the entrance of McLean Park in memory of athletes that had fallen during World War I.

Fundraising took place to pay for the gates.

General Sir Andrew Russell unveiled the gates in December 1934.

The inscription on the gates reads:

In memory of all those Hawke's Bay athletes who fell in the Great War 1914-1918 Their last great game of all.

McLean Park Memorial Gates Opened 13th December 1934.

Architect Louis Hay designed the gates of two timber ticket boxes set in a panelled brick wall, which were situated near the pump house.

6. Maori Pioneer Battalion rugby match

In May 1919, there was a match between the Maori Pioneer Battalion rugby team and Hawke's Bay representatives.

It was the first match the returned soldier team had played since the return from the battle fields of World War One. Their battalion was the only one to return to New Zealand as a complete unit.

The Napier City Band escorted them from the changing sheds to the field facing the stand, where they were given a civic reception.

The Pioneer Battalion won 8 to 3.

7. Ranfurly Shield eras 1922s and 1967s

Although the early winter sporting use of McLean Park was for hockey, rugby league and soccer, that was about to change.

Competition between the codes of rugby league (Northern Union) and rugby union was fierce. Napier MP and mayor J V Brown was disqualified from ever attending a rugby union match after he presented a shield for competition in the Northern Union League. The Wellington rugby union centre laughed at this and rescinded the motion.

Rugby Union began to use McLean Park around 1917 and requested temporary changing rooms, which was allowed.

Norman A McKenzie (1888-1960) OBE, was a player, coach, administrator and sole selector for 30 years for Hawke's Bay rugby. He had even acted as a security guard at McLean Park. In addition, Norman was New Zealand representative on the International Rugby Board (IRB).

His 1922-26 Magpie's team would achieve a long winning streak of the Ranfurly Shield with 24 successful defences. The team was made up of All Blacks - the three Brownlie brothers, Laurie, Cyril

and Maurice and George Nepia. (As discussed, there might be scope to have a profile on George Nepia and Kelvin Tremain as two outstanding Hawke's Bay players).

Beginning in 1966, another dream run of Hawke's Bay Ranfurly shield rugby began and they completed 21 successful defences between 1966 and 1969.

8. New Zealand's first outdoor talkie movie theatre

All Napier's movie theatres were wrecked after the 1931 Hawke's Bay earthquake.

By necessity of being no place to show moving pictures, McLean Park became the first outdoor "talkie" movie theatre in New Zealand from February to May 1931.

The Western Electric Company loaned and installed at their own cost the sound component equipment, and Harry Thompson, the owner of the Gaiety Theatre in Dickens Street, Napier gave the projectors and electrical generators.

Films were supplied by the Associated Film Exchanges.

Freeman Steel operated the projector.

Admission was initially free, with a collection was taken up each night to pay for the costs of erecting the screen, and wages of the projectionists. Admittance was later charged at 6 pence for adults and 3 pence for children, and after these expenses, all profits were given to Relief Fund Committee.

9. History of the McLean Park grandstands

The first grandstand at McLean Park was uncovered, seating 1,000 people and was completed in 1912.

In 1921, a small stand was built on the south eastern side of the park, which apparently was so low you could step off it onto the ground.

It would be named the McKenzie Stand after Norman McKenzie, Hawke's Bay rugby player, coach, selector and administrator. This stand had to be rebuilt twice after fires in the 1940s and 1950s.

The 1912-stand was replaced in 1926 by a covered stand that could seat 1,800 people. Imported Oregon timber was used in the construction due to its weight-strength ratio being higher than New Zealand native timbers. It was a controversial choice.

McLean Park would be the first rugby ground in New Zealand to have two covered stands on both sides of a ground.

When the 1926 stand was used for the first time in 1927, Hawke's Bay lost the Ranfurly Shield to Wairarapa.

This stand would be named after Sir Lew Harris, a patron of Hawke's Bay rugby and keen supporter of sport in Napier.

As a centennial project to celebrate Hawke's Bay becoming a province in 1858, was the creation of the Centennial Hall and 1200-seat stand as part of the complex which opened in 1959.

In 2005, the Centennial Stand required major work due to the alterations in the Centennial Hall underneath the stand.

It was renamed the Rodney Green Stand in 2007 after the Napier businessman gave a significant donation to the building's upgrade.

In January 1984, the Harris Stand was badly damaged by fire and the council decided to rebuild, rather than repair it.

The new 4,000-seat Harris Stand was opened in 1986, which also contained the Park's first hospitality boxes.

Napier Chartered Accountant and Share broker, Douglas Chapman, bequeathed a large number of shares, once converted to cash to provide new seating at McLean Park.

The Chapman Pavilion opened in 1993. The lounge in the pavilion was named the Pettigrew Lounge in 2006 after the Pettigrew family's support to the redevelopment of McLean Park.

In 2008, the McKenzie stand was demolished and replaced in 2009 by the Graeme Lowe stand which was named after the businessman who donated \$1 million towards the cost.

The Graeme Lowe Stand has 4720 covered seats and hospitality boxes.

10. Napier's 1924 and 1974 Jubilee celebrations

1924

Napier's 50th anniversary of becoming a municipality in 1874 was celebrated with a number of events, including an event at McLean Park in November 1924.

On Saturday, November 29, Napier Boys' High had a sports meeting, with the Citizens' Band and the Pipe Band in attendance. Highland Dancing was exhibited and a Quoit competition – which is throwing rings over a metal pin or spike.

At night there were cycling races, boxing, and wrestling.

The grand finale was to the jubilee events at McLean Park was: "The greatest display of fireworks ever seen in the Dominion." The hour-long display started at 8.30pm.

1974

One hundred years of Napier municipal government was celebrated during from February to May 1974, and like 1924, events were held at McLean Park.

The opening day was of the Centennial celebrations was on Saturday, February 9, with a centennial parade of floats making its way to McLean Park.

Mayor Peter Tait hosted Governor-General, Sir Denis Blundell, at the opening.

One of the highlights was the arrival of the centennial procession at 2pm, which circled the McLean Park.

On Sunday, a Centennial Thanksgiving Service was held by the combined Churches of Napier in the Harris Stand.

A century of songs was presented in March 1974 by 2,000 primary and intermediate school pupils, with a crowd of 8,000 in attendance.

A small orchestra on the back of two trucks provided the musical accompaniment.

Highlights were a London double-decker bus used to accompany a song called *Lambeth Walk* and two children riding a tandem bicycle to the song *Bicycle made for two*.

The grand finale was the singing of the Commonwealth Games song, *Join Together*.

11. Centennial Hall

As a project to celebrate Hawke's Bay's Centennial in 1958, the Napier City Council decided upon a grandstand at McLean Park with a sports stadium, to be named Centennial Hall underneath. The cost of the Centennial Hall and Stand was £66,000.

Public fundraising for the project was £28,797, and government centennial subsidy of £20,197 was also contributed. The balance was financed by the council over some years.

The building was completed in September 1959.

In October 1959, a Centennial Industries Exhibition was held in the Centennial Hall.

A redevelopment of the Centennial Hall began in 2003.

Major alterations were made to the building in 2003 and 2004 and reopened in 2005.

It was renamed the Rodney Green Centennial Event Centre in 2007 after a significant donation from the Napier businessman.

12. Royalty visits hosted at McLean Park

1934 Duke of Gloucester. The third son of George V and Queen Mary, (Queen Elizabeth II's uncle and Grandparents) visited Napier on a royal tour in December 1934.

His reception at McLean Park was in front of 4,000 school children and 6,000 adults.

The Duke walked around the entire ground to "resounding cheers, flying headgear and fluttering-flags."

He expressed admiration for the courage shown by the people of Napier and pleasure at the complete restoration and beautification of the town after the 1931 Hawke's Bay earthquake.

1954 Queen Elizabeth II

The official reception at McLean Park was attended by around 10,000 people, although the Park could hold 40,000. Many had decided to line the streets instead of going to the Park to get a closer look.

Instructions were issued to those who were going to the reception or lining the streets: "loose clothing should be worn, no tight collars or belts and no tight shoes, even if the sizeable shoes are less elegant". Backs of necks should be covered, "preferably with a hat if the sun is shining" and glucose barley sugars were suggested for sustenance. If you have a "swimming feeling put your head between your knees for a few seconds."

The Queen and Prince Phillip saw a sheep shearing demonstration at McLean Park from Godfrey and Ivan Bowen.

1963 Queen Elizabeth II

The reception at McLean Park was filled with thousands of children and "massed banks of colour, with women in their gayest dresses."

The Queen gave the H.B. Regiment its third set of Regimental and Queen's Colours, but this was the first time they were presented from the Queen herself.

1958 Queen Mother

The mother of Queen Elizabeth II visited Napier in February 1958 and had her main reception at McLean Park.

Six thousand school children first assembled in Nelson Park and got into their school groupings before moving to McLean Park.

The school children were all seated in front of the grandstand and could see the civic leaders filling up the dais.

When the Queen mother landed at the airport at 11.40am. word was received at McLean Park and excitement amongst the children began to run high.

The whole ground went silent as the pilot police vehicle led the Royal car decorated with the Queen Mother's colours, which was followed by another police car. At this point cheers roared at the sight of the Queen Mother.

The Queen Mother, after speeches from dignitaries, saw a wood chopping exhibition for ten minutes and listened to the Port Ahuriri Pipe Band. She spoke herself before doing a circuit of McLean Park waving to the children, who all cheered at the sight of her.

13. Athletics

An early use of McLean Park was for athletics, with the Hawke's Bay

The Presbyterian Bible Class conference used McLean Park for Athletics in 1917.

During 1918 the first use of McLean Park for Athletic Sports by high schools occurred, with Napier Technical School, Napier Boys' and Girls' High Schools holding a sports day there.

"The Napier Boys' High School is holding its annual athletic meeting on McLean Park, Napier, next Saturday. As the boys have decided to give the profits to the new building fund, they have prepared an excellent programme including outside events for footballers, amateur sprinters, and primary school pupils. There will be a band in attendance, and with the forward state of preparations there is certain to be provided a splendid programme of events which promise to be keenly contested. This is a good opportunity of seeing the athletic capabilities of the school and of assisting in a small way in the big building scheme about to be launched. Visitors are advised to be early to secure good seats."

As part of celebrations such as the 1924 Jubilee celebrations, athletic competitions featured.

In 1925 at McLean Park, C Matthews broke the New Zealand record for two miles in 9 minutes 18 seconds.

In 1936, E J Winter from New South Wales broke the New Zealand record for pole vault.

The Hawke's Bay Provincial Championships were held at McLean Park in 1937. Cycling as well as track and field events were held.

New Zealand sporting greats Sir Peter Snell and Sir Murray Halburg have competed at McLean Park.

14. Chatham Cup Final

Napier City Rovers defeated Christchurch Rangers 6 -0 in 1993 in the Chatham Cup final at McLean Park.

15. Cricket.

The first international cricket test at the Park was in 1979 versus Pakistan.

McLean Park became the 50th test venue in the world.

The first One day international (ODI) was played in 1983 versus Sri Lanka

16. Rugby Test

McLean Park became the first ground outside of a metropolitan centre to host a rugby test when the All Blacks played Manu Samoa in 1996 in a night game.

17. Floodlights

The Napier Amateur Athletic and Cycling Club were anxious for McLean park to “floodlighted in an up-to-date manner” in 1932.

Napier Battery and Electric Co were involved in the scheme, which involved putting up four poles 45 feet (14m) in height with each to carry two 1500-watt floodlight projectors. One pole would be erected at the corner of each stand. The cost was £285.

As a result of the scheme, the Napier Battery and Electric Co said all the material used would be British and “the desired area will be bright and evenly distributed.” They also stated that this “modern scheme will be superior to anything to anything yet installed in New Zealand and Australia.”

The floodlights were installed in 1933 after arriving on the SS Rangitata at Napier Port in January.

The floodlights needed replacing in the 1950s.

In 1964, an agreement was attempted to be made between The Hawke’s Bay Rugby Football Union and the Napier Athletic and Cycling Club to replace them as they were biggest night time users of the ground. No agreement could be made.

The Athletics Club then worked with the Napier City Council to replace the floodlights and a special track meet was held in March 1965 to celebrate the new flood lights. (The programme for this is at National Library and can secure this if required).

Following the innovation of floodlights at a New Zealand sports ground some 60 years ago, in order to host New Zealand’s first one day cricket day/night international under floodlights in February 1996 against Zimbabwe, McLean Park’s Floodlights had an upgrade of its four lighting towers in 1994.

This day/night match was followed later in 1996 by an All Black test later year versus Manu Samoa under lights as well as the All Black trials.

The next time the floodlights were replaced was in 2007, in order to meet night time television broadcast requirements.

In 2016, the lighting at McLean Park was discussed in terms of its suitability for cricket's new pink ball.

18. Top Town mid-1970s. Have a photo but requires more research.

19. World Cup events at McLean Park

Rugby World Cup pool events in 1987 and 2011.

In 1992 and 2015 Cricket World Cup pool matches.

The FIFA under 17 World Cup Pool in 1999

20. 1931 Earthquake

The 7.8 magnitude Hawke's Bay earthquake occurred on the morning of February 3, 1931.

In addition to the around 160 people killed in Napier, hundreds were in need of immediate medical attention.

McLean Park's grandstand was turned into a temporary hospital.

Many doctors and nurses treated several hundred serious cases and it was said that McLean Park resembled a huge operating theatre, with many operations being performed in the open with anaesthetics.

Around 200 patients from the damaged Napier Hospital were also transferred to McLean Park.

At night the only light McLean Park had was supplied by a few candles and three acetylene bicycle lamps.

A birth of a baby girl occurred on the afternoon of the earthquake in a tent at the park.

Tents to house some of the earthquake refugees were erected at McLean Park.

The 67-metre-deep wells at McLean Park for water supply were damaged during the earthquake. They were shattered at 4.5 metres deep and became like geysers, and a good proportion of the Park was flooded, with its grass subsequently rotting.

Restoration of the ground commenced with depression labour lifting the salvageable turf and filling in fissures. The grounds surface was then levelled and re-sown in time for a rugby match at King's Birthday in June 1931, where Hawke's Bay defeated Wairarapa by 27 to 13 in front of a crowd of 5,000.

The salvageable turf was used to form the Marine Parade putting greens.

The water pumping station at the Park was repaired and the spoil was used to make some banks at the east end of the ground.

Amongst those giving support for the restoration of McLean Park after the earthquake was the New Zealand Rugby Union, who gave £250.

The Napier Civic Thanksgiving Service was held at McLean Park on February 3, 1932 to commemorate the first anniversary of the 1931 Hawke's Bay earthquake.

21. Battery Camp WWII

During the Second World War, the New Zealand Army decided to occupy McLean Park from 1942 to 1944. At this point the grounds were in apparently the best condition they had been in its history.

To form roads on the Park, they dumped shingle at apparently three times the required thickness.

Buildings, including a cookhouse, laundry, recreation room, latrines and gymnasium were erected complete with concrete foundations and trenches dug throughout the park.

New Zealand Amateur Athletic Championships could not be held at McLean Park for the duration of the war and no other suitable ground was available in Napier.

The damage the army caused according to Superintendent of Parks and Reserves, Charles Corner, was on a par with the 1931 earthquake.

During the army's occupation of McLean Park, a fire damaged the McKenzie grandstand, which had to be partly rebuilt.

Napier Borough Council began negotiations with the army to restore the damage in July 1944.

Some of the army buildings were accepted by the council as part compensation.

The shingle roads had to be restored to grass in many areas all over the Park.

Barbed wire at the entrance to the Park was removed.

22. Mardi Gras

Nelson Park had been the location of Napier's Mardi Gras, first held in 1913. The Mardi Gras was a carnival held by a service club called the Thirty Thousand Club. However, in 1915, Nelson Park was "impossible to use" because "If they took horses on it the place would be a cloud of dust." McLean Park, the Mardi Gras Committee thought, would be a better option.

The concern The Thirty Thousand Club had for using McLean Park was the distance being further from town than Nelson Park.

A description of what the McLean Park was like in 1915 was given as an 8-foot (2.4 metres) iron fence enclosed the ground. On top of the fence was a barbed wired entanglement.

As McLean Park had 10 acres (4 hectares) The Thirty Thousand Club was happy with the area, being "easily large enough".

At that time there was an acre of flax on the grounds, and Maori were interested in making a pah as part of the Mardi Gras events.

Funds from the Mardi Gras would be donated to the Wounded Soldiers' Fund.

Innovative events at McLean Park to take place over two days and nights in December 1915 during the Mardi Gras were a quick-step contest for brass bands, a Japanese umbrella parade, and a Pierrot and comedy competition. Highland and graceful dancing also featured,

The grand procession of floats would start in town and make its way to McLean Park

A grand masquerade ball was held on McLean Park, and an Oriental lantern parade.

Maori took part and had a Maori Queen competition. They made a pah and "entered heart and soul into the heart of the Mardi Gras."

“Before the close of the old year pleasure seekers congregated on the Marine Parade for the lantern parade to McLean Park, where the Mardi Gras of 1915 was to be brought to a close. The lantern procession started off at 9.30 headed by the Napier City Band, which played selections en-route. With the lovely clear evening the various lights of the lanterns, and the fancy and grotesque costumes, the Marine Parade bore a very happy and picturesque view. On arrival at the park the band struck up a waltz, and soon the green in the enclosure was crowded with couples. This was kept going until a few minutes before midnight, when, with whistles blowing and squeakers squeaking, the band struck up ' Old Lang Syne.' Hands were joined, and to this old favourite tune the old year passed out and the new in.”

23. Hawke’s Bay Highland Society

The Hawke’s Bay Highland Society held Caledonian games at McLean Park, and in 1911 donated £1,000 towards its improvements. Sir Donald McLean’s son, Douglas, was Chieftain of the Society.

In 1912, the Society announced that “It is to be hoped that the corporation will take steps to have McLean Park put in order without delay, failing which it will be necessary to hold our annual sports in the country.” In September 1912, Napier had no sports grounds fit to be used.

The first Caledonian Sports held by the Hawke’s Bay Highland Society at McLean Park occurred in 1920. Highland Pipers started a procession in town to McLean Park to begin the sports events.

The sports day featured tug-o-war, putting the shot, throwing the hammer, bagpipe music, Highland fling, pipe music marches, throwing the caber, running, wrestling, Irish jig, high jump and sword dance.

The Hawke’s Bay Highland Society was apparently promised a few days free every year in perpetuity for use of McLean Park. Evidence of this, however, could not be conclusively found to make this legally binding when a review was done in 1991 of the claim.

24. 1921 Springboks tour

The 1921 Springboks tour of New Zealand was their first rugby union tour to New Zealand.

McLean Park hosted two matches for the Springbok’s, with the first against a Hawke’s Bay-Poverty Bay team on 3 September 1921. The second, and what would be controversial was against a New Zealand Maori team on September 7.

The Springbok’s defeated Hawke’s Bay-Poverty Bay 14 to 8. Legendary Hawke’s Bay player. Maurice Brownlie (1897-1957) played in the team as captain. Next year he would become an All Black and play 61 matches from 1922-1930.

A close match followed against the New Zealand Maori team on 7 September, with the tourists winning 9 to 8.

A South African Journalist was outraged at McLean Park when he saw white spectators supporting the New Zealand Maori team.

He telegraphed back to his homeland: “Spectacle thousands of Europeans frantically cheering on band of coloured men to defeat members of own race was too much for the springboks, who frankly disgusted.”

The Springbok’s manager did not deny his players had been upset by remarks from the crowd but had “the greatest admiration for the Natives as a race.”

This episode took New Zealand by surprise, and most in this country were appalled and leapt to the defence of Maori as a race. It was the beginning of nearly 70 years of debate surrounding colour-based selected teams.

Sixty years later in 1981 the Springboks would once again play New Zealand Maori at McLean Park on 25 August 1981. This time it was a different scene with hundreds protesting outside the ground against the South African apartheid regime. The result of the game was a 12 all draw.

25. Military Pageant December 6, 1980

Six months planning was involved in organising a spectacular military pageant by the army at McLean Park on December 6, 1980.

Thirteen thousand people watched the pageant, in which hundreds took part in the displays or musical performances.

The evening's 2 ½ hour performance began with massed pipe and brass bands against a setting of a makeshift "massive castle wall." Their musical items ranged from tunes from the Wombles, Jesus Christ Superstar and Scotland the Brave.

Following this, the Royal New Zealand Artillery assembled and fired 105mm howitzers.

The Royal New Zealand Corps of Transport did stunts involving Land Rovers, including a dangerous near miss or "suicide stunt."

Others to take part were the Royal Engineers, New Zealand Police - with dog handling, eighteen marching teams and the Napier fire and ambulance service's demonstration of handling an accident and rescue situation.

One of the most popular items was the New Zealand Army Band.

A mock battle was presented with machine gun and mortar fire, and tanks. Charges were placed throughout the ground and denoted in time with cannon and mortar fire.

Tchaikovsky's 1812 overture was performed by the massed brass bands, which was accompanied by fire from the Royal New Zealand Artillery, fireworks and tubular bells.

The finale involved the whole evening's cast with a musical presentation for the retreat ceremony of lowering the New Zealand Ensign from the flag pole.

26. Boxing

An outdoor boxing match was held at McLean Park in December 1931, when Australian boxer Archie Hughes fought Johnnie Leckie.

A crowd of 1,500 watched the bout which was held at night.

The fight was won by Archie Hughes.