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# The H V McKay Memorial Gardens

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## Location

Anderson Road, SUNSHINE VIC 3020 - Property No G13035

## Municipality

BRIMBANK CITY

## Level of significance

State

## Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H1953

## Heritage Listing

National Trust

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - April 24, 2007

The H V McKay Memorial Gardens (formerly Sunshine Gardens), developed by H V McKay in conjunction with his Sunshine Harvester Works in 1909, maintained as a privately funded garden until 1953, taken over by the City of Sunshine and renamed, is of State significance:

- as an early and intact example of a privately funded garden attached to an industrial site catering primarily for recreational needs of workers, their families and local residents;
- as an integral part of an industrial complex of national importance in the history of Australian manufacturing; the importance of the gardens now heightened by the demolition of most of the factory buildings. This category of significance is best exemplified by their location close to the factory site, the extant railway footbridge (which provided a link between garden and factory) and the relative intactness of plantings and layout from 1909-53 (ie the period of private ownership);
- for its link with H V McKay, pioneer industrialist and developer of much of the infrastructure of the suburb of Sunshine as part of his 'garden suburb' vision;
- for its retention of elements from the period 1909-53; major attributes include exotic trees (especially Oaks), retention of some early path layout, the conservatory and some detailed landscaping;

- is of regional significance for its aesthetic qualities, largely as an 'oasis' in the heart of a densely developed industrial and residential area; this is enhanced by strong boundary plantings;

- is of local significance as the setting for the McKay Memorial Presbyterian Church, excised from the garden by McKay shortly before his death.

## ANALYSIS

This site was developed in 1909 with excisions for the Presbyterian Church (1926), bowling club (by 1953 and probably much earlier) and manse (1962). The church and bowling club were linked to H V McKay through his donation of the land on which they are sited. The garden was primarily intended for use by McKay's factory workers and was maintained as a private garden for the period 1909-53 (although also open to the public during this period) then controlled by the City of Sunshine as a public park from 1953 to the present.

Tree plantings are the major feature remaining from the early period of development as well as the conservatory and some sections of early path layout (notably along the railway and southern boundaries). An early tree relating to the original garden layout is now located within the grounds of the manse. The internal path system was largely removed and grassed over in the 1970s; an oblique aerial photograph c.1956 (held on the National Trust file) shows what is presumably the original layout. The caretaker's residence has been demolished within the last ten years and the works area extensively reorganised. An early tennis court has also been removed and the area given over to garden.

The railway bridge (date unknown) is crucial to an understanding of the usage of this site and its integral link with the factory. The factory was demolished in late 1991/early 1992 and this now makes the McKay Memorial Gardens a particularly important reminder of this former industry and its major influence on the local community. No other examples of industrial gardens of such an early date are known in Victoria. More recent examples include gardens for workers at the Footscray Ammunition Factory, Gordon Street, Footscray (mid-late 1920s) and Fletcher Jones Gardens, Warrnambool (1940s-1950s). Sunshine was a planned suburb following precedents of British garden suburbs such as Bourneville and Port Sunlight, so provision of a garden for workers and residents is not surprising in the international context, but unusually early for Australia. It is even rarer for the garden to survive with such high integrity.

Due to lack of public gardens in Sunshine and western Melbourne generally, the Sunshine Gardens (as they were known until 1953) achieved a high profile. This was enhanced by their reputation for horticultural excellence formerly exemplified by annual floral displays (especially of Chrysanthemums). The conservatory, although not of great individual significance, is a reminder of the horticultural traditions of this garden.

Classified: 10/06/1992

See also: B5780 (H V McKay/Massey-Ferguson (Aust) Ltd) & B5905 (H V McKay Memorial Presbyterian Church)

## REFERENCES

(1) Sunshine Cavalcade, souvenir booklet commemorating the proclamation of the City of Sunshine, 1951, p.10; Dorothy McNeill and the McKay family, The McKay's of Drummartin & Sunshine, publication details not known.

(2) Sunshine Advocate, 11 May 1934, p.1; Sunshine Cavalcade, souvenir booklet commemorating the proclamation of the City of Sunshine, 1951, p.11.)

(3) Land and Transport, December 1917, p.13, photograph of bandstand on p.13.

(4) Sunshine Advocate, 11 May 1934, p.1; Sunshine Cavalcade, souvenir booklet commemorating the proclamation of the City of Sunshine, 1951.

(5) Dorothy McNeill and the McKay family, The McKay's of Drummartin & Sunshine, publication details not known.

(6) Sunshine Advocate, 11 May 1934, p.1.

(7) *ibid.*, loc.cit.

(8) *ibid.*, loc.cit.

(9) *Sunshine Advocate*, 17 April 1936, p.7.

(10) *Sunshine Advocate*, 29 April 1938.

(11) Tony Menhennitt, 'The Sunshine Gardens: H V McKay Memorial Gardens', typescript, 1991; and pers.comm., 24 April 1992.

(12) J H Jackson, 'The Garden of the Sunshine Harvester Works', colour film, n.d., video copy in possession of City of Sunshine.

(13) *Sunshine Advocate*, 7 August 1953; H V McKay Massey Harris Pty Ltd to Town Clerk, City of Sunshine, 30 September 1953; Title to the McKay Memorial Gardens did not pass to the Council until August 1958.

(14) A E Dedrick, Hon. Secretary, Hugh V McKay Memorial Fund to Mayor and Councillors, City of Sunshine, 21 August 1953; C N McKay to Town Clerk, City of Sunshine, 24 September 1953.

(15) *Sunshine Advocate*, 16 and 27 October 1953.

(16) Correspondence held by City of Sunshine.

(17) Tony Menhennitt, 'The Sunshine Gardens: H V McKay Memorial Gardens', typescript, 1991; City of Sunshine press release, 17 March 1976.

Hermes Number 70199

Property Number

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## Physical Description 1

### DESCRIPTION

The H V McKay Memorial Gardens is situated on a flat triangular site bounded by the Melbourne to Bendigo railway, Anderson Road and the K G Chaplin Reserve. Several excisions from the triangular site have been made since its original development, most notably for the McKay Memorial Presbyterian Church, bowling club and manse, all along Anderson Road. The main entry for workers from the adjacent Sunshine Harvester Factory was via a railway footbridge at the eastern tip of the garden. An early footbridge still exists here and leads to a long path parallel to the railway. The bed between this path and the railway reserve is planted as a dense shrubbery with remains of an early *Pittosporum* hedge interspersed with *Tecoma*, *Plumbago*, *Kurrajongs*, *Prunus* and conifers. Along the southern boundary of the garden is a drive and parallel path leading to Anderson Road. Recent re-organisation of works buildings in the McKay Gardens has seen the demolition of the original curator's residence and siting of a new works office in the south-east corner of the garden. The southern border contains several early trees, most notably *Ulmus procera*, *Platanus x acerifolia* (X2) and a large *Cupressus sempervirens* close to Anderson Road. A tennis court is located on church land east of the church building and between this court and the gardens' conservatory is a large *Acer negundo* (formerly on the edge of another tennis court - now removed) surrounded by a recently developed shrubbery. The conservatory is a low timber structure with a heavy masonry base. It is now used for storage of potted plants and propagation rather than horticultural displays. The main areas of McKay Gardens are composed of lawn with specimen trees and shrub beds (often bordering pathways). North of the conservatory are fine specimens of *Populus x canadensis* 'Serotina Aurea' and *Quercus robur*. Around the manse are several large specimens of *Populus alba* and *Quercus robur* (X2) with another large *Quercus robur* in the manse grounds. At the northern tip of McKay Gardens are recently developed rose beds and the northern entrance has early basalt gate posts (relocated from another site) and metal gates. The McKay Memorial Gates which formerly stood opposite this entrance (on the west of Anderson Road) are now held in storage by the City of Sunshine.

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*For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>*