

**NOSTALGIC CORNER****HOW STUART PARK WAS SECURED FOR THE PEOPLE**

Reprinted from November 1981 Bulletin and  
"Illawarra Mercury," 13 January, 1904

Mr Henry Rauch, proprietor and editor of the "Shoalhaven Telegraph," for many years connected with the "Illawarra Mercury," and who was intimately associated with Mr Archibald Campbell, the late proprietor, forwards the following particulars of how Stuart Park came to be secured for the people of Wollongong as a popular resort — the facts never having been made public during Mr Campbell's lifetime, owing to that gentleman's innate modesty:-

Few people in Wollongong and Illawarra are aware of the true history of Stuart Park. It was due to the late Mr Archibald Campbell, more than to any other man, that that charmingly-situated, and admirable pleasure resort was secured to the people. I well remember the circumstances under which it was secured, and now that the public-spirited man who played the leading part in making it available for the people has been laid aside by the hand of Death. It will not be out of place to give the facts. When the agitation was first started to secure a recreation ground there, Wollongong boasted a Progress Association, of which Mr Campbell was president. He was the originator of the proposal, as he was of many other public matters that were carried to a successful issue by that body. His idea was to secure the whole area lying between the Mount Pleasant tramway and Fairy Creek, but other members of the Progress Committee thought there was no chance of getting so large a tract. Mr F A Franklin was one of these, and he made a survey of a portion abutting the sea shore, and taking in only about half the area suggested by Mr Campbell. The survey was laid before a meeting of the Progress committee, but after the meeting it disappeared. As a matter of fact it was pigeon-holed by Mr Campbell, who was afraid that it would spoil the committee's chance of getting the whole block. At his own expense he had a survey made by Mr J G Biggar of the full area and this he brought under the notice of the late Sir Alexander Stuart, who represented Illawarra, and who was also Premier of the colony at that time. Sir Alexander, no doubt desirous of serving so strong a supporter

as Mr Campbell, and anxious to do what he could for his Wollongong constituents, eventually asked that gentleman to ascertain at what price the land could be purchased. Mr Campbell interviewed the owner (Mr James Anderson), and after some negotiations a price was agreed upon. But Mr Campbell did not stay his hand at that. Considering that the price at which the land was offered was a reasonable one, he took a very bold step, and one that very few persons would have ventured upon. He paid his own cheque for a substantial sum as a deposit to bind the bargain, and communicated with Sir Alexander Stuart to the effect that, acting on behalf of the Government, he had purchased the land shown in the survey. This bold step forced the situation. It compelled Sir Alexander Stuart, in a measure, to complete the purchase; otherwise he would have placed his most loyal supporter, to whom he was greatly indebted for his seat as a Member for Illawarra, in a tight place. Had the Government not completed the purchase, Mr Campbell would have had to do so himself, or have forfeited his deposit. It was not altogether convenient for the Government to purchase the site - and it is doubtful whether that would have been done at the time but for Mr Campbell's bold stroke - but the upshot of it all was that the Premier put the matter through, and in due course the large area now forming Stuart Park was vested in trustees as a public recreation ground. It was named Stuart Park, in honour of the then Premier and Parliamentary representative of the district; but seeing the important part Mr Campbell played in securing it, would it not be a graceful act on the part of the trustees to perpetuate that gentleman's name by associating it in some way with the Park or some portion of it, thus keeping green the memory of the chief actor in having it placed at the disposal of the people?