

Heritage Citation

Ficus Elastica

Key details

Addresses	At 5 Riverview Terrace, Hamilton, Queensland 4007
Type of place	Tree/s
Period	Postwar 1945-1960
Lot plan	L1_RP129584
Key dates	Local Heritage Place Since — 30 November 2012 Date of Citation — June 2010
Criterion for listing	(A) Historical; (E) Aesthetic

The large specimen of rubber tree (*Ficus Elastica*) was planted as a means of beautifying the small triangular parcel of land that the Brisbane City Council acquired in 1945. Situated beside the tramway and electricity Substation No. 12 that was built in 1947, the fig tree contributes to the streetscape at the entrance to two of Brisbane's most prestigious suburbs, Ascot and Hamilton. Planted in a period of civic beautification through an extensive tree planting and park improvement program under the leadership of Harry Oakman, Parks Superintendent of Brisbane City Council, the mature rubber tree reflects this era in Brisbane's history.

History

The value of the Hamilton district had been recognised from the earliest settlement of Brisbane. And by the late 1840s wealthy free settlers were attracted to the Hamilton area by the elevated hilly country which offered river views and sea breezes. However, rough and swampy roads deterred settlement generally and residential development in the area was slow. By the 1860s the Hamilton area had become renowned for the establishment of several grand residences, for example *Toorak*, a stone residence on the top of the hill on Annie Street built for businessman James Robert Dickson in 1865 and *Eldernell*, another grand stone residence built in 1869 for William Hemmant atop of another of Hamilton's hills.

The Queensland Turf Club was granted a portion of land by the Queensland Government at Eagle Farm in 1863 for the purpose of establishing a racecourse. In 1865 the first race meeting was held. Coinciding with the development of the racecourse was the establishment of the Hamilton Hotel, giving the suburb its name. The area around the racecourse (in the suburbs now known as Hamilton, Ascot and Hendra) in this period, were predominately farming communities. By the 1860s the population of the district warranted the establishment of a school; the first in the area being the Eagle Farm School, opened in 1864 (renamed the Hendra School in 1908). Several churches were built in the area in this period, the earliest of which was a Wesleyan Methodist Church in 1869.

As a result of the popularity of the racecourse it was deemed necessary to improve the transport service to the area. Although a horse-drawn tram service had previously run along the Eagle Farm Road to Breakfast Creek and into the city, it was in 1899 that an electric tram service was introduced, the line extending all the way up Racecourse Road from Eagle Farm Road. This improvement not only encouraged greater numbers to the race venue but also heralded a wave of residential development. In 1891 the population of Hamilton alone was 2,660 and by 1911 this had doubled to 4,905. With the increase of residents in the area came improved services and facilities, for example the establishment of Hamilton State School in 1907, the first Anglican Church in 1895, a reservoir on Bartley's Hill in 1907, and an increase in retail and commercial facilities both along Lancaster Road adjacent to the Railway Station and along Racecourse Road.

The interwar period saw major residential development in the racecourse suburbs. In Hamilton the population in 1911 was 4,905, by 1921 this had risen to 8873. As a reflection of this, new schools were established, for example the Ascot State School in 1920, as well as increased commercial activity in areas such as Racecourse Road and included businesses such as Ascot Garage, Arcadia Picture Theatre and the Hamilton post-office and store. In 1923 the Queensland Amateur Turf Club, now known as the Brisbane Turf Club, acquired a site to the east of Eagle Farm Racecourse for the purpose of establishing a second racecourse in the area. By 1933 Doomben Racecourse had opened.

The Second World War saw an influx of activity in the racecourse suburbs. The Eagle Farm and Doomben Racecourses were requisitioned by the Commonwealth Government in December 1941. Known as 'Camp Ascot' both of the sites were used by the American forces as military camps. As the Second World War drew to a close the U.S troops moved out of Brisbane and the everyday activities in the Hamilton and Hendra area that had been interrupted by the war resumed.

In June 1947 the Brisbane City Council, utilising the State *Transport Facilities Act 1946*, resumed a number of private bus services in an attempt to co-ordinate bus routes. The previous war years had proven the most profitable for the Council transport system. In 1947-48 the Brisbane City Council placed orders for thirty electric trolley bus chassis. As these were to arrive during the 1949-50 period it was necessary to have in place larger substations which would cope with the increased electricity demands of the trolley buses. This expansion included the purchase of both diesel and electric powered buses.

Substation No.12 was erected in 1947 as part of this post-war expansion of Brisbane City transport infrastructure. The structure was designed by Frank Costello who served as City Architect 1941-1952 and City Planner 1946-1952 Costello's contribution to Municipal architecture was impressive. He is credited with providing an 'architectural legacy to the city of Brisbane (which) was the architectural style new to Brisbane City Council.' His work is reputed to be heavily influenced by the work of Netherlander Willem Dudok.

With the post-war population increase and a decided increase in housing and industry through the Hamilton and Eagle Farm areas it became necessary for the installation of extra utilities to help service the area. Substation

No.12 was one of only two substations built to combine the functions of electricity substation and tramway substation. The Hamilton Substation was the first of this type of station to be built in Brisbane, the other (Substation No. 42) on Waterworks Road at Ashgrove, was built in 1948. This dual usage within one station is rare. It was deemed an efficient use of a site to incorporate both types of substations within one building.

In 1945 a small parcel of land was purchased by the Brisbane City Council from Mrs. J. O'Connor. The land was required for an access point at the front of the substation. The small parcel of land also provided a small parklike area in front of the substation toilets. The planting of the *Ficus Elastica* specimen was to eventually provide a shady and attractive entrance to the Racecourse precinct. As an initiative of the Brisbane City Council the planting of the tree was carried out through the Department of Parks and Gardens in the Brisbane City Council.

The period in which the rubber tree (*Ficus Elastica*) was planted on Riverview Terrace was a time of extensive civic beautification throughout Brisbane. With the end of the utilitarian objectives throughout Brisbane during the Second World War, the Brisbane City Council under Lord Mayor John Chandler, implemented a program of tree planting, park refurbishment and park creation to beautify post-war Brisbane. From 1946 to 1963 Harry Oakman served as Parks Superintendent for the Brisbane City Council with a staff of 180. Oakman was successful in creating forty new parks in Brisbane, refurbishing another forty and the planting of thousands of street trees.

The mature rubber tree (*Ficus Elastica*) on the corner of Riverview Terrace and Racecourse Road is historically significant as it represents the post-war beautification of Brisbane and the important role that the Brisbane City Council's Department of Parks and Gardens played in successfully carrying this out. The rubber tree (*Ficus Elastica*) tree is important to the Hamilton area as it creates an aesthetically pleasing entrance into two of Brisbane's most prestigious suburbs, Hamilton and Ascot from busy Kingsford Smith Drive.

Statement of significance

Relevant assessment criteria

This is a place of local heritage significance and meets one or more of the local heritage criteria under the Heritage planning scheme policy of the *Brisbane City Plan 2014*. It is significant because:

Historical

CRITERION A

The place is important in demonstrating the evolution or pattern of the city's or local area's history

as a mature rubber tree (*Ficus Elastica*) planted in the immediate post-war era as a means of beautifying the small triangle of land at the front of Substation No. 12; as an immediate post-war planting carried out by the Brisbane City Council's Department of Parks and Gardens under Harry Oakman as part of an extensive civic beautification program.

Aesthetic

CRITERION E

The place is important because of its aesthetic significance

as an exceptional example of a rubber tree (*Ficus Elastica*); situated on the corner of Kingsford Smith Drive and Riverview Terrace, Hamilton the rubber tree (*Ficus Elastica*) provides a shaded entrance to the Racecourse precinct

References

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Citation prepared by — Brisbane City Council (page revised June 2022)



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