

I see you have listed the property Gable Ends (3 Jubilee Road Parktown). I have an association with that property. It is a property owned by the University of the Witwatersrand. I am not sure when they acquired it but I and a group of activist women campaigned for a multi-racial child care centre in circa 1980. We as a group of young working women wanted a child care facility to be run by Wits as an exemplary progressive employer and as a university for the benefit of the young children of staff and students of Wits. We particularly wanted a facility that would help women but we did not exclude men.

In those days we were taking a big step as it was still apartheid and we wanted kids of all races to benefit. We had to get a legal opinion as we were planning to just break the law in admitting all kids to a planned crèche, nursery school, after school and holiday care centre. The firm Cheadle Haysom gave us a legal opinion which confirmed that we would be breaking the law.

We agreed we would appeal to the University to go ahead and that I as the chair would be willing to stand in the dock and be the one arrested as the "responsible person". My husband just sighed and backed me. The university had no further reason to resist. They gave me Gable Ends, an architect (Fee and Challis) and R50 000 for the alterations to make the house suitable for little ones. We actually had the backing too of the city via the municipal nursery school inspector, the professional and indefatigable Miss Katz. We altered the house on the inside to create nursery spaces and play rooms and also to make safe play areas outside. We had to have a proper kitchen to cook nutritious food.

I then gained the backing of the excellent Deputy Vice Chancellor Mervyn Shear and he persuaded the Sutton family to channel a family bequest to Wits to honour Aletta Sutton, wife of Bill Sutton former Vice Chancellor of Wits. So we called the centre the Aletta Sutton Child Care Centre. We employed staff and had to charge fees but offered bursaries for children of students. Within about 3 years we doubled in size to cater for 95 children aged about 3 months to school going age. The stable / carriage house was converted into a holiday centre for school kids. No one came to arrest me and we were the first in Johannesburg to create a multi racial kids centre. I did this while maintaining a full time job as an academic and raising two young children myself. I used to start and end my working day at Gable Ends or as we called it Aletta Sutton. It was a very hands on voluntary sort of management job.

I know all the headaches of that house. It has a shingle roof that needs oiling to thrive. The house was built to the side of the stand and is all wrongly positioned for the Southern Hemisphere. Windows were a headache. The style is stockbroker Tudor. I think at that stage dare I say it I would have voted for demolition and building a new child centre. The University always saw their asset in the value of the huge stand and it was always thought that maybe one day the house would be demolished. Of course we kept and gloried in the fireplaces and wooden staircase; there was a great dovecot and summer house in the garden. But then parents complained about the noise damage to the ears of their kids because of the M1 motorway which had cut a swathe through Parktown, down below the ridge. I ran the place as Chair for 5 years and employed 12 staff.

The context of the house was Jubilee Road and as I recall the only private home that remained even in the eighties was Dolobran our next door neighbour belonging to the Anderson family. All the other early 20th century homes of Jubilee Road were put to institutional use with the exception of Savernake, the home of the Vice Chancellor.

In Johannesburg's centenary year 1986 we had the Mayor Harold Rudolph and his wife come to tea. Gable Ends was on the Star's list of 100 treasured buildings and that was one of the antecedents of the Blue Plaque movement.

In the late 1980s I passed the baton to Marie Beaconsfield who took the chair.

The Centre survived for about 24 years by which time in circa 2007 all schools had become integrated. We all lived in modern South Africa and people had forgotten about what it was like to struggle to get little kids to be allowed to eat and play and be educated together. Then the University during the term of office of Loyiso Nongxa took the decision to close Aletta Sutton as it had become too expensive and was losing money and no longer served Wits people exclusively. By then families had more choices about child care. It was a sad day for me when the decision was taken to because by then I was on the Senior management team at Wits that took that decision. I spoke about my experience and I abstained.

Today Gable Ends is still owned by Wits University and is the HQ of Campus Planning. It's looking better than ever before. The heritage aspects have been preserved.

*Kathy Munro - 31 March 2018*