



Presbyterian residence, former 32 Myers Street

History

The prolific architect, Joseph Watts called tenders for this Presbyterian manse during late 1888¹. Rate books give the construction date of this house as 1889 and the owner the 'Steeple Church' or United Presbyterians in Ryrie Street.²

The Rev. Arthur Davidson occupied it from 1889 until early this century when it was acquired for a YWCA girls hostel in 1915 for £1500³. The YWCA had started in Geelong at the Gaelic school house in 1875 but changed theological streams with the occupation of this manse.⁴ The house was described as of brick and 10 rooms plus a bathroom.⁵

The Rev. Davidson's wife was the YWCA president and instrumental in reopening the women's' refuge on the present Bethany site in the early 1880s⁶. Her husband was also among the clergy who addressed the YWCA anniversary celebrations, in 1898 describing the pathway to ideal

womanhood via 'homely virtues', a 'well cultivated mind and earnest piety'⁷.

Description

A two-storey, hipped roof and verandahed Italianate-designed villa, built in two-colour tuck-pointed brickwork. The cast-iron verandah is highly ornamented and returns on the east as well as the north face. The house is typical of large late 19th century villas in Melbourne's eastern middle suburbs and, to a lesser extent, throughout Victoria but it is unusually large for a Presbyterian minister, comparing with Catholic presbyteries such as at St. Mary's. This building type is not well-represented in Geelong.

External Integrity

The central ground-level window has been converted to a door and the original fence replaced: neither has a great impact on the building's integrity.

1 GA 1.9.88

2 RB 1889,273; RB 1890,277; RB1900, 387; RB1909, 377 cites Ryrie Street Presbyterian church as owners

3 D1890-1961; RB1909, 377 cites Ryrie Street Presbyterian church as owners; RB1920,383

4 *Investigator* 3.1975 1st. YWCA meeting 1.10.75

5 RB1900,387

6 Jones, pp109,115

7 *ibid.*

**City of Geelong Urban Conservation Study
Significant Sites**

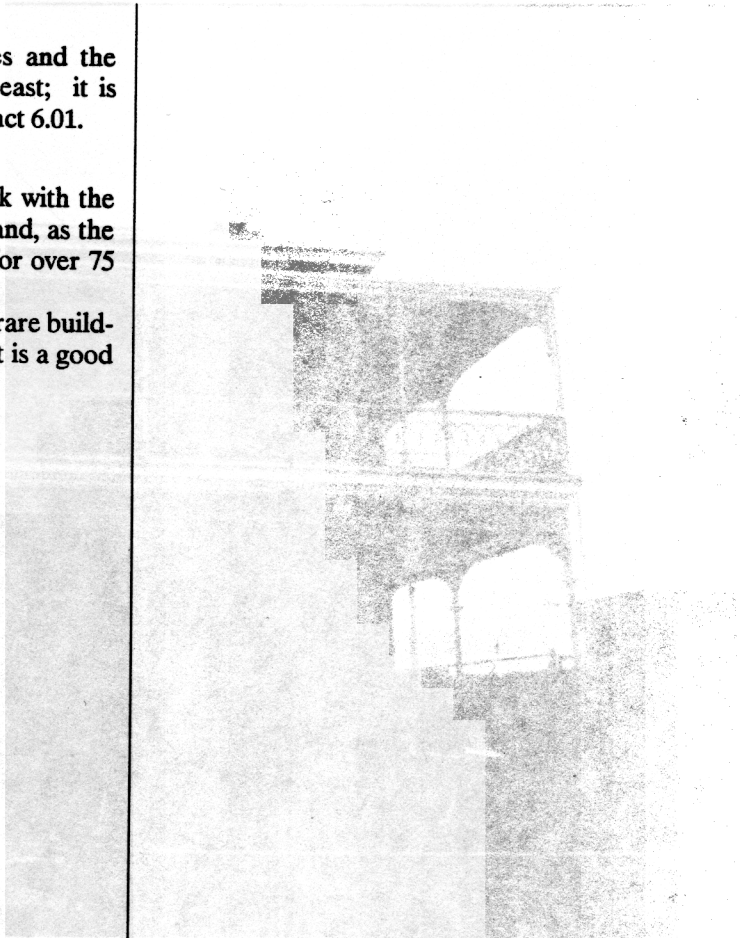
Streetscape

Relates to other late 19th century civic uses and the adjacent coloured-brick row houses further east; it is contributory to the civic and residential precinct 6.01.

Significance

Historically, it has had a near continuous link with the other civic/ecclesiastical uses in the precinct and, as the Y.W.C.A., has performed another civic role for over 75 years.

Architecturally, a near complete example of a rare building-type in Geelong but, judged in the State, it is a good example among a much larger group.



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**Presbyterian Manse, later YWCA Hostel, later Geneva House
32 Myers Street**

History

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also among the clergy who addressed the YWCA anniversary celebrations, in 1898, describing the pathway to ideal womanhood via 'homely virtues', a 'well cultivated mind and earnest piety'⁵.

The YWCA had started in Geelong at the Gaelic school house in 1875 but changed theological streams with the eventual occupation of this manse.⁶ The first girls' hostel was set up in Little Malop Street during 1886, moved to Yarra Street in 1897, and then to Corio Terrace two years later. The manse was acquired in 1915 for around £1500⁷. The YWCA Board members thought it would be admirably located at the new Myers Street site.⁸

The Rev. J A Forrest of St. George's Presbyterian Church conducted the dedication for the new YWCA home for 'young women' at the former manse in August, 1915.⁹ A Mr. S Howell spoke then of the building as '...a home away from home' for the 'spiritual welfare of girls.'

1 GA 1.9.88
2 RB 1889,273; RB 1890,277; RB1900, 387; RB1909, 377 cites Ryrie Street Presbyterian church as owners
3 RB1900,387
4 Jones, pp109,115
5 ibid.
6 Investigator 3,1975 1st. YWCA meeting 1.10.75
7 D1890-1961; RB1909, 377 cites Ryrie Street Presbyterian church as owners: RB1920.383
8 Jones, p.29
9 GA 13/8/15

'In the Hostel girls have a religious environment and feel responsible for others who come into this city, for a lonely woman sometimes takes the line of least resistance and on the YWCA rests the responsibility of stopping drifting.'¹ Miss Winifred Carruthers administered the hostel and Mrs. G.E. England was then the YWCA Geelong branch president. Miss Carruthers said at that time that the hostel work of the YWCA was 'one of the most important departments of our movement.'²

In 1920, the hostel had 13 permanent and 14 casual boarders in January alone.³ A five bedroom wing was added (7 bedrooms to 12) fourteen years later at a cost of £1100. This was after a long-term dire-space shortage. Typically, the Geelong people had paid for much of the work; for example, the Geelong Amateur Dramatic Society had furnished a room, another room was completed by the Girls' Council of the YWCA and another was paid for by Mrs. England. The hostel was then one of 12 in Australia when the YWCA national membership stood at 5,500.⁴

Further space shortages forced enclosure of the balconies in 1934 as a temporary measure. In the same period, the name YWCA Hostel was exchanged for Geneva House, a reference to the associations Swiss headquarters.⁵

Renovations took place in 1951, with further plans by architects, Buchan Laird & Buchan, to attach a two-storey wing in the rear garden.⁶ The rear new wing opened in 1956.⁷

In the early 1970 numbers fell, requiring the upper floor of the new wing to close while further unsuccessful attempts were made to rent rooms to Gordon Tech boys.⁸ A trend for the young to move into flats or share houses rather than seek hostel accommodation was apparent. It was decided to sell Geneva House and the residence section closed at the end of that year. Geneva House and contents were sold in June, 1973.⁹

Photographs of Geneva House taken prior to 1973 show the building much as it is today, with the upper level verandah enclosed and balustrade panels sheeted over. Decorative elements such as the brickwork and cast-iron friezes were intact.¹⁰ Renovations done in 1984 removed the verandah enclosure and installed aluminium balustrading, with a 19th century roundel pattern.¹¹

Description

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large late 19th century villas in Melbourne's eastern middle suburbs and, to a lesser extent, throughout Victoria but it is unusually large for a Presbyterian minister, comparing with Catholic presbyteries such as at St. Mary's. This building type (two-storey dichrome brick verandahed villa) is not well-represented in Geelong.

External Integrity

The central ground-level window has been converted to a door and the original fence replaced: neither has a great impact on the building's integrity. The slate roofing was replaced with corrugated iron after 1984 and the balustrading has been replaced with a common 19th century pattern cast-aluminium.¹²

Streetscape

The former manse relates to other late 19th century civic uses and the adjacent face-brick row houses further east; it is contributory to the civic and residential precinct 6.01.

Significance

Historically, as the former Presbyterian manse, it has had a near continuous link with the other civic/ecclesiastical uses in the precinct as well as performing a quasi-public building role as the home of an influential clergyman and his equally influential wife. This is particularly so given the greater devotion to the church in that era.

As the Y.W.C.A. hostel, it has performed a further civic role for some 60 years. Much of the early work at the hostel was funded by Geelong community groups and individuals, and as such it possessed a high public profile. Similarly many women in the Geelong community ('old girls' of the hostel) will remember it for its role in their lives.

Architecturally, the house is a near complete example of a rare building-type in Geelong, with its use of cast-iron details (friezes, columns) and the polychrome Italianate form but, judged in the State context, it is a good partly altered example among a much larger group of largely privately owned villas from that period.

- 1 ibid.
- 2 Jones, p.29
- 3 Jones, p.31
- 4 GA 26/8/29, p.5
- 5 Jones, p.34
- 6 Jones, p.34; GWB DRP438
- 7 op.cit., p.35
- 8 Jones, p.38
- 9 op.cit., p.39
- 10 op.cit., p.127
- 11 see GCC BA 725/84 specification by Essam & Lowe job 8308
- 12 ibid; letter Barrawinga P/L