

Heritage Overlay No.: 035
Citation No.: 048
Place: ‘Wattle Grove’ House & Shed, 117-125 McPherson Road

Other Names of Place: Former Malcolm McPherson property.
Location: 117 - 125 McPherson Road, Toolern Vale
Critical Dates: Construction: likely mid 1880s
Existing Heritage Listings: None
Recommended Level of Significance: LOCAL



Statement of Significance:

The house at 117 - 125 McPherson Road Toolern Vale is significant as a moderately intact and contextually substantial example of a Late Victorian style. Most likely built c.1885, the house is associated with the locally prominent Malcolm McPherson, former Shire President. A rear shearing shed also contributes to the significance of the place.

The house at 117 – 125 McPherson Road is architecturally significant at a LOCAL level (AHC D.2). Although altered, it still demonstrates original design qualities of a Late Victorian style. These qualities include the hipped roof form, together with the convex profile encircling verandah. Other intact or appropriate qualities include the single storey height, horizontal timber weatherboard wall cladding, corrugated profile sheet metal roof cladding, face brick chimneys with multi-corbelled tops, narrow eaves with decorative timber brackets, symmetrical composition of the front façade with the timber framed doorway having a four panelled timber

door and sidelights and highlights, and the flanking timber framed windows, and the other timber framed windows on the side elevations. The rear gabled addition contributes to an understanding of the historical evolution of the building. The nearby gabled, galvanised corrugated steel 2-stand shearing shed, with timber structural frame (including log posts) also contributes to the significance of the place.

The house and shed at 117 - 125 McPherson Road are historically significant at a LOCAL level (AHC A4, H1). It is one of a limited number of surviving Melton Shire farms that pre-date the break-up of Melton's large Clarke, Staughton, Taylor, and Patterson pastoral estates. It is directly associated with Malcolm McPherson, long serving Shire Councillor (1894-1920) and multiple Shire President, called the 'father of municipal life' in Melton by the local press at the time of his death. The house is also a scarce surviving intact property associated with the enclave of Scottish immigrants who would appear to have been the dominant farming landholders in early Toolern Vale.

Overall, the house and shed at 53-105 McPherson Road is of LOCAL significance.

Description:

The house at 117 – 125 McPherson Road, Toolern Vale, has a rural setting of timbered ranges and a vineyard. The house garden is bound by an introduced open horizontal timber paling fence approximately 1400 mm high. The garden is largely an open grassed area with some perimeter plantings.

The substantial, single storey, horizontal timber weatherboard, Late Victorian styled house is characterised by a hipped roof form, together with an encircling convex verandah. At the rear is an introduced gabled addition that possibly dates from the interwar period, given its timber framed windows arranged in banks of three. The encircling verandah has been extended past the rear gabled addition. These roof forms are clad in introduced grey/green corrugated Colorbond. Two early face brick chimneys with multi-corbelled tops adorn the roofline. Narrow overhangs and decorative timber brackets are features of the eaves.

The encircling verandah appears to have replaced an earlier verandah, possibly of the same convex profile. The existing verandah is supported by introduced turned timber posts and there is an elevated concrete verandah floor at the front and sides which has also been introduced.

Under the verandah at the front is a symmetrical composition defined by the early timber framed door opening with four panelled timber door and sidelights and highlights, and the flanking timber framed double hung windows. The other timber framed double hung windows on the side elevations also appear to be early.

Towards the rear of the house is a Federation vernacular styled, 2-stand shearing shed. It is characterised by a simple gable roof form, the roof and walls being clad in unpainted galvanised corrugated steel. The building has a timber structural frame having log posts. There is a shed attached at one end.

History:

The weatherboard house *Wattle Grove* is situated on Allotment 45, Parish of Yangardook, of 146 acres 3 roods and 33 perches, purchased from the Crown by J Devin on 20th February 1855.¹ The property was acquired early on by Malcolm McPherson, who had arrived in

¹ Parish Plan, Parish of Yangardook

Victoria c.1851, and lived for a time in Camperdown.² He registered the birth of a child in Camperdown in 1854, but by 1861 when he registered the birth of Colin in Gisborne, he had moved to the present property.³ His son Malcolm junior (born c.1858) told his son that he was born on the property,⁴ so it is likely that McPherson moved to allotment 45 sometime between 1855 (its purchase from the Crown by Devin) and 1858. A bluestone house was built around this time, with the existing timber dwelling constructed c.1885.

McPherson is listed as a founding member of the Toolern Vale Local School Committee in 1869.⁵ He is also remembered by James Robertson, former Shire Secretary, as one of the many Scottish clans in early Shire of Melton.⁶ Many of these were in the Toolern Vale area, six of the eight members of the first School Committee giving their religion as Presbyterian.⁷ (There was also a different McPherson family nearby, that of James McPherson, Toolern Vale blacksmith. He then moved to Melton to join other blacksmiths Macdonald, and Cameron.⁸)

McPherson did not acquire abutting properties (Allotments 19 E-H) when they were sold by the Crown to W Smith in 1864. But he had acquired them by 1878, when he is listed as owning 481 acres with a Net Annual Value of £110.⁹ Around the same time he also took advantage of the Selection Acts to purchase a 20 acre allotment, mainly steep forested land, but probably including an alluvial flat, adjacent to the homestead on the opposite side of the creek.¹⁰

An 1857 map of the area, prepared from the earliest surveyors plans, show a large ‘stockyard’ near the southern boundary of Allotment 19F, a few hundred metres further up the spur to the north east of the present Wattle Grove house.¹¹ While this was also situated on land owned by McPherson (by 1878) and may conceivably relate to him, it is more likely to have been built as part of the *Green Hills* pastoral station that predated the Crown survey and sale of land in the area.

In 1876 the *Australasian’s* Travelling Reporter included a report on the McPherson farm of 560 acres. Mr McPherson was described as being one of the oldest settlers in the district, having lived on the property for over 19 years. The farm was reported in detail:

‘Dairying is now the principal occupation on this farm, but there is also a fair amount of land under crop. This year there are 60 acres cultivated, but until the last few years it was usual to have over 100 acres under crops. English barley is the principal crop, covering about 30 acres, and generally yields a very good return. There are 20 acres of

² *Melton Express*, 26/3/1898

³ Victorian Register of Birth, Deaths and Marriages. Colin became the editor and proprietor of the *Shepparton News*, and founder of the ‘McPherson Newspaper Chain’ (J Bilszta).

⁴ Mr Ken McPherson, personal conversation, 5/2/2002

⁵ *Toolern Vale State School Centenary History 1869-1969* (Toolern Vale State School Centenary Celebration Committee, 1969), p.6

⁶ ‘Melton Reminiscences’, by JLR (James Luke Robertson), *Melton Express*, September – October 1905. As well as the dominant Irish there was also a significant population of Scottish people residing in Peel’s ‘Sunbury’ region (which including Melton) in 1861. A high percentage of these were landowners (See LJ Peel, *Rural Industry in the Port Phillip Region, 1835-1880*, MUP, Melbourne, 1974, pp.67-72).

⁷ *Toolern Vale Centenary History*, *loc cit.*

⁸ Alex Cameron, ‘Melton Memoirs’ (M&DHS typescript), p.6; Bob Macdonald ‘History of Melton’ (unpublished M&DHS typescript, October 1969), p.9

⁹ *Express* (Annual Valuation), 28/9/1878; also Shire Map Series (1892): Parish of Yangardook.

¹⁰ Allotment 45A, Selection Act File 15009/31 (freehold obtained 9/10/1879)

¹¹ Lands Victoria, Put Away Plan Y34, ‘Parish of Yangardook’ (Gibbins, 1857); also Geological Survey of Victoria, Map No.7NW (c.1861)

wheat, which crop sometimes does very well, but cannot be depended upon, as it is so liable to the rust. About 8 acres are now under oats and two with potatoes, the latter crop generally turning out well, and last season some of the tubers obtained first prize at the Romsey show. Mr McPherson was also very successful as an exhibitor of grain at the same show, taking first honours for oats and second for barley. About 100 head of cattle are kept; from 20-30 cows are milked throughout the year, the whole of the produce being made into butter. The herd is at present a mixed one, but Mr McPherson intends to work into the shorthorn strain, and a pure bull of that breed is now running with the cattle. There are a few sheep, cross bred Leicester and Lincoln; but though very good prices are always obtained for fat wethers and lambs from this flock, they are not considered to be nearly so profitable as cattle. Among the horse stock there are seven heavy draught animals, some of very fair quality. They include three fine-blood mares, one named Blossom, now 17 years old, having during her career taken 15 prizes at the Melton and Bacchus Marsh agricultural shows. One mare, by Renfrew, has a nice two year old colt by Victor, and there is also a promising three year old colt by the same sire.¹²

In 1883 McPherson was still listed as owning 481 acres (which by this time was valued at only £100).¹³ By 1888 however he is listed as owning 501 acres, and the rate had jumped to £135 NAV.¹⁴ This increase is much more than would be expected for the extra 20 acres of Selection Act land that he now owned, and any general valuation increase in these prosperous times; it is likely to reflect a substantial property improvement such as construction of the present house. This area and valuation then changed little over the next three decades.¹⁵ It is remembered that the house replaced the original bluestone one.¹⁶

Malcolm McPherson senior, farmer ‘of Wattle Grove Toolern Vale’, died in 1898, aged 73.¹⁷ His son Malcolm continued farming on the property until his death in 1920, aged 62. He left his wife Jessie and children Kenneth, Alex and Annie. He had been a Councillor for 26 years, and twice Shire President.¹⁸

In its obituary the *Melton Express* called him ‘the father of municipal life’ in Melton. His determination to keep the Shire finances solvent was evident in the £300 credit in the balance sheet of the North Riding. He worked hard to ensure the quality of Council works, and had refused the honour of Shire President several times in favour of untried councillors. He was a man who fearlessly stood by his convictions, earning him the respect of all. He was described as good natured man, whom many a person had cause to thank for a thoughtful gift in times of distress. A large cortege followed the remains to the Melton cemetery. The ‘beautiful’ wreath of the President and Councillors of the Shire bore the words ‘Much Loved.’ The Melton cricket match was cancelled that weekend out of respect for Cr McPherson.¹⁹ His wife Jessie died at Toolern Vale in 1928.

¹² *The Australasian*, 25/11/1876

¹³ *Express* (Annual Valuation), 18/10/1883.

¹⁴ Shire of Melton, *Ratebook*, 1888.

¹⁵ Shire of Melton, *Ratebooks*, 1892 – 1916.

¹⁶ Ken McPherson, *op cit*.

¹⁷ *Express*, 26/3/1898

¹⁸ Starr, J, *Melton: Plains of Promise* (Shire of Melton, nd, c.1985), p.265

¹⁹ *Melton Express*, 20/11/1920

Mr Eskin had built the stable and sheds that remain on site.²⁰ The 1905, 1952 and 1965 Toolern Vale fires did not affect the homestead or its surrounds, as apparently did the earlier 1890s fires.

After the war the property passed out of the family. Mr Keith Lyons pulled down the original bluestone house, which was situated near the present one. The next owner, Ron Frigo, built on the small flat-roof flat on the east side (not the gable ended addition), apparently to accommodate aged parents.²¹

Numerous descendents of Malcolm McPherson still live in Toolern Vale and Melton, including Mr Ken McPherson, now at *Glencoe*.

Thematic Context / Comparative Analysis:

Melton Historical Themes: 'Farming'

Known Comparable Examples:

Historically, the house is a scarce surviving intact property associated with the enclave of Scottish immigrants who were the dominant farming landholders in early Toolern Vale. With the exception of the former *Yangardook* bluestone cottage (Place No.37), and the relatively modern Campbells/Johnstons Toolern Park (Place No.20), the others are ruins of bluestone cottages: the former McPherson bluestone cottage *The Elms* overlooking Toolern Creek and visible from the road (Place No.38); and the ruin a little further north on the corner of McPherson Road (Place No.36).

Architecturally, other comparable Late Victorian styled dwellings in the Melton Shire that have been constructed in timber include:

- *Hickey*, 30 Hickey Road (Place No. 288): a single storey hipped roof dwelling with a hipped verandah that projects towards the road frontage. This dwelling has a decorative timber fretwork verandah valance more typical of the Federation era. The house appears to be substantially intact although it is in fair condition.
- *Glengallon*, Greigs Road (Place No. 282): a symmetrical, single storey, hipped roof dwelling with an encircling bullnosed verandah. The lattice valance has been introduced. Like the house at McPherson Road, the dwelling *Glengallon* also features early gabled additions at the rear that also contribute to the significance of the place. These additions are reflective of the interwar period.
- Dwelling, 161 Bulmans Road (Place No. 174): a modest single storey symmetrical dwelling with a hipped roof form and skillion verandah that projects towards the front. Like the house at McPherson Road, the symmetry of the design is promoted by the central doorway with single timber framed double hung windows.

The rear, gabled additions at the dwelling at 117 – 125 McPherson Road (Place No. 48) contribute to the significance of the place, like the additions on the comparable Late Victorian styled dwellings mentioned above.

²⁰ Ken McPherson, *op cit*.

²¹ *ibid*; Mrs Mary Tolhurst, personal conversation

Condition:

Good

Integrity:

Moderately intact

Recommendations:

Recommended for inclusion in the Melton Planning Scheme Heritage Overlay.

Recommended Heritage Overlay Schedule Controls:

External Paint Controls:	<i>No</i>
Internal Alteration Controls:	<i>No</i>
Tree Controls:	<i>No</i>
Outbuildings and/or Fences:	<i>Yes – galvanised corrugated steel shearing shed and stable</i>