

Heritage Overlay No.: 086
Citation No.: 229
Place: ‘Macs Cottage’

Other Names of Place: The Willows Historical Park
Location: 68-74 Reserve Road, Melton
Critical Dates: c.1913-14
Existing Heritage Listings: None
Recommended Level of Significance: LOCAL



Statement of Significance:

The house known as Macs Cottage in The Willows Historical Park, Melton, has significance as a moderately intact example of a Late Victorian style. Although relocated, the general form, construction and rudimentary detailing is reflective of late nineteenth and very early twentieth century architectural development.

The house known as Macs Cottage in The Willows Historical Park, Melton, is architecturally significant at a LOCAL level (AHC D.2). Although relocated to this site, it still demonstrates original design qualities of a Late Victorian style. These qualities include the hipped roof form, together with the hipped bullnosed verandah that projects towards the front. Other intact or appropriate qualities include the single storey height, horizontal timber weatherboard wall cladding, corrugated sheet metal roofing, narrow eaves, central timber framed doorway with four panelled timber door and highlight above, flanking timber framed double hung windows,

and the turned timber verandah posts. The front timber picket fence also contributes to the setting of the place.

The house known as Macs Cottage in The Willows Historical Park, Melton, is historically significant at a LOCAL level (AHC A4 B2). It is a rare remaining example of a turn of the century house in the town of Melton, and the only building associated with one of the town's original nineteenth century hotels.

Macs Cottage is socially significant at a LOCAL level (AHC G1). The relocation of the building in The Willows Historical Park is expressive the community's value of the building and the former 'Mac's' (or Minns) hotel with which it was associated during a period of major redevelopment in the town.

Overall, the house known as Macs Cottage in The Willows Historical Park, Melton, is of LOCAL significance.

Description:

The house known as Macs Cottage in The Willows Historical Park has been relocated to this site. It is set on a small allotment having a modest front setback bound by a low timber picket fence at the front. The front garden is comprised of an open grassed area with perimeter garden beds and some shrubbery.

The single storey, horizontal timber weatherboard, Late Victorian styled house is characterised by a simple hipped roof form, together with a hipped bullnosed verandah that projects towards the front. These roof forms are clad in corrugated sheet metal roofing. An introduced rendered brick chimney adorns the roofline to one side. Narrow overhangs are features of the eaves.

Early features of the design include the symmetrical composition of the front façade, with its central timber framed doorway having a four panelled timber door with highlight above, and the flanking timber framed double hung windows.

Another feature of the design is the front verandah. It is supported by introduced (but appropriate) turned timber posts. The interior was extensively renovated for community use in 2006/7.

History:

The four room weather board house originally sited adjacent to Macs Hotel in High street was most likely erected 1913-1914 by William McNicol and his wife, Sarah, who had purchased the property from the estate of Ann Hay in 1911.¹

William McNicol was born in Dundee, Scotland, in 1855. He trained as a baker/pastrycook before moving to London in 1874 where he worked for a short time before taking employment as a ship's cook. In 1880 he married Sarah McLean in London. Both arrived in South Australia in 1881 where William entered his trade in Adelaide. They came to Melbourne, c.1884, and followed the construction of the Ballarat railway line through Braybrook, where they had a business, to Melton.

By 1887 the McNicol's had set up business selling groceries in Mrs Ferris's store, High Street (north side, west of Yuille Street). Some time later they opened the Exchange store,

¹ Shire of Melton, *Ratebooks*, 1911-1914

further west.. William also had an outside round as a produce merchant in consequence of which he was well known in the district. He owned a number of properties within the township and 60 acres of land in the Parish of Djerriwarrh, all of which were rented.²

In 1911 he purchased Minn's Hotel from the estate of the late Mrs Ann Hay. The hotel is described thus in 1911:

‘Accommodation for visitors and boarders; charges moderate; great fishing and shooting; horses and buggies for hire; good stabling; Motor oil. Cab meets train from Melbourne. Telephone Melton 3.’³

McNicol remained the owner of the establishment, but the licence passed firstly to John Darby, and then in 1915 to Blanche McDowall, formerly of the Queen's Mansions Hotel, Little Collins Street. The McNicol's sold freehold of the hotel to Blanche and her husband Wally during 1915 and retired to Sydney where they lived about the Harbour for five years before returning to Bacchus Marsh and finally Geelong. McNicol died in 1922. His link with the growth of the Viaduct Camp, the supply of goods to construction workers and his tent store, the precursor of other stores at Melton South, is an interesting aspect in the development of life around the railway line.⁴

Blanche and Wally McDowall lived in Melton for approximately five and a half years. Although the Hotel is listed as Minn's hotel until 1920, the property was dubbed ‘Mac's’ following McDowall's close association with the local football club from 1918.

A photograph of the football club outside the hotel, dated 1918, shows the cottage in the background.⁵ The hotel at that time had attic rooms facing High Street with an attached building, single storey, on the Palmerston street frontage. The cottage was separated from the stone building by a walkway. It was situated close to the street behind a low paling fence, with a strip of garden along the edge of the verandah. The verandah was trimmed with cast iron frieze. The house contained four rooms and had a detached kitchen and bath area. Open fireplaces provided heating in two rooms.

In April 1920, the *Express* newspaper announced that Mr Reginald Butler had taken over management of Macs, which would ‘be thoroughly renovated and brought up to date’, with meals a speciality of the house. Mr McDowall thanked the residents of the district for their patronage during the past five and a half years and expressed his hope that the same would be extended to his successor.

A number of Melton families had supplied staff to the McDowalls during their licenceeship. One of the last was Miss Alice Watts who married Emil Jongebloed, the local baker.

The hotel changed hands several times during the 1920's. The cottage was used as accommodation for the landlords' families, and possibly for regular commercial travellers and auctioneers.⁶

² *Melton Express* 18th January 1922, William McNicol obituary

³ Sands Directory

⁴ *Melton Express*, *loc cit.*

⁵ Melton & District Historical Society files

⁶ Much of this information has been obtained from personal conversations between Judith Bilszta and Pat Jongebloed; George Arnold; Evelyn Allen.

In 1930 the hotel was sold to William Williams whose wife was the former Miss Millett from The Gap, where the Millett family had conducted hotels for many years. Mrs Williams had two sisters, both of whom married Melton men. A weatherboard cottage was erected west of the hotel cottage for the McDonald family, the family of one of her sisters. The McDonald family resided here before the house was moved to Brooklyn Road (and is now the Melton South Garden Nursery building). It is thought by older Melton residents that this is where the confusion about homes erected for sisters originates.⁷

In the post 1950's era when brewing companies began to buy hotels the Ballarat Brewing Company acquired Mac's Hotel. In 1977 the old hotel that had stood for 100 years was demolished. Macs Cottage was intended to be sold for removal or demolition. This was a period of rapid development in Melton associated with its declaration as a 'satellite city', and a period in which preservation of the 'old' Melton was also a high priority for many residents and municipal councillors. The Council had recently acquired *The Willows* property, which was in the process of development as the 'Willows Historical Park', including the reconstruction of the bluestone house *Dunvegan* on the site.⁸ After negotiation, the Brewing Company offered Macs Cottage to the Shire for re-erection at the Willows Park for removal costs only.

Extensive interior renovation to the building, including the provision of new kitchen, bathroom, lobby, as well as a new roof and verandah, resulted in a home with modern conveniences. At the time, the building was to be the residence for the Park caretaker. While this arrangement went smoothly for some years, lack of interest in the position coupled with rationalisation of Shire rental policies has seen the building occupied by private arrangement.

Thematic Context / Comparative Analysis:

Melton Historical Themes: 'Community'

Known Comparable Examples in Melton Shire:

A typical although relocated example of a Late Victorian style, the design quality of the dwelling is unassuming. This appears to represent a common design quality for these building types throughout the Shire, but rare within the town of Melton itself (161 Bulmans Road and 323 O'Neills Road being comparable). Other comparable dwellings include:

- House, Leakes Road, Rockbank (Place No. 403). Although altered with an introduced verandah and a carport at the side, this house shares a similar hipped roof form, scale and construction.
- Hickey, 30 Hickey Road, Melton (Place No. 288). A more intact example, this house features a hipped roof form and a projecting front verandah with early timber fretwork valance (some components of the valance are missing however) and early timber posts.
- House, 1180 Exford Road, Exford (Place No. 274). Another timber example of the type with a hipped bullnosed front verandah that has been altered. Only one of the early turned timber posts survive.

⁷ Publicity brochures at the Willows Park advise that Mac's Cottage was erected 1911 for William McDowell as a residence for his wife's sister. Further research has shown that this is incorrect. (Neither did Sarah McNicol have a sister living in the Colony.)

⁸ Johnstone, C, 'Rural Heritage Study: Western Region of Melbourne' (Context P/L, Melbourne Western Region Inc, 1994), p.126; Starr, J, *Melton: Plains of Promise* (Shire of Melton, nd, c.1985), p.129)

- House, 161 Bulmans Road, Melton (Place No. 174). A similarly constructed and designed dwelling, the front verandah has also been altered, with introduced timber posts and aluminium valances and brackets.
- House, 1374 Gisborne-Melton Road (Place No. 030). A similarly unassuming Late Victorian example, the verandah has also been altered.
- House, 911 Melton Highway, Sydenham (Place No. 127). A more intact example of the Late Victorian type, although of unassuming design quality.
- House, 32 O’Neills Road, Melton (Place No. 230). A less intact example of the Late Victorian type, the building features a similar hipped roof form, although the front verandah is bullnosed. The front windows have been altered.

Condition:

Good

Integrity:

Relocated – 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>No</i>