	REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES - **ASSESSMENT DOCUMENTATION**

11. ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

The criteria adopted by the Heritage Council in November, 1996 have been used to determine the cultural heritage significance of the place.

PRINCIPAL AUSTRALIAN HISTORIC THEME(S)

- 3.7   Establishing communications
- 5.1   Working in harsh conditions

HERITAGE COUNCIL OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA THEME(S)

- 210   Telecommunications
- 306   Domestic activities
- 309   Technology & technological change

11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE*

Balladonia Telegraph Station (fmr) is a good example of a Federation Bungalow style residence of 1898 constructed of local limestone, and has a pleasing scale and proportion. (Criterion 1.1)

Balladonia Telegraph Station (fmr) is a significant landmark element in the remote regional landscape of the Eyre Highway at Balladonia. (Criterion 1.4)

11.2 HISTORIC VALUE

Balladonia Telegraph Station (fmr) was constructed in 1898 as a repeater station on the inland telegraph line between Eucla and Norseman, constructed from 1896 to carry the increased telegraph traffic generated by the gold boom and to provide the eastern goldfields with a direct link with the eastern states and overseas through Eucla and Adelaide on the East-West line, and operated as such until 1927. (Criteria 2.1 & 2.2)

Balladonia Telegraph Station (fmr) was designed under the direction of PWD under Chief Architect George Temple Poole, who was responsible for many fine buildings in the State during a rapid period of growth from 1885 to 1896. (Criterion 2.3)

Balladonia Telegraph Station (fmr) is associated with the telegraph men and their families, who worked and lived on the line between 1898 and

---

*   For consistency, all references to architectural style are taken from Apperly, R., Irving, R. and Reynolds, P. *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: Styles and terms from 1788 to the present*, Angus & Robertson, North Ryde, 1989.

1927, and is indicative of the isolation and inhospitable conditions they endured. (Criterion 2.3)

11.3 SCIENTIFIC VALUE

11.4 SOCIAL VALUE

Balladonia Telegraph Station (fmr) is valued by the community as an historic landmark and as a reminder of the early telecommunications history of the State and of the isolated and harsh conditions under which those associated with the place lived and worked in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as evidenced by the inclusion of the place on the Dundas Municipal Heritage Inventory with recommendation for registration. (Criteria 4.1 & 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12.1 RARITY

12.2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

Balladonia Telegraph Station (fmr) is a good representative example of a Federation Bungalow style regional telegraph office designed under the direction of George Temple Poole, and established in 1898. (Criterion 6.1)

12.3 CONDITION

Balladonia Telegraph Station (fmr) is in poor to fair condition. It has been uninhabited for several decades and has fallen into disrepair with the north east wing in ruins with roof gone and stone walls collapsed. Much of the verandah on the south and west sides has disintegrated and windows throughout have been smashed. The site has recently been fenced off from public access.

12.4 INTEGRITY

Balladonia Telegraph Station (fmr) has not provided a telegraph office or residential function for many decades. Although the place remains vacant and derelict, there have been minimal alterations to the structure or fabric. It has a moderate degree of integrity.

12.5 AUTHENTICITY

Although the original fabric is in a deteriorated condition, what fabric remain is predominantly original. *Balladonia Telegraph Station (fmr)* has a moderate degree of authenticity.

13.   SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentary evidence has been compiled by Irene Sauman, Historian. The physical evidence has been compiled by Laura Gray, Conservation Consultant.

Proposed curtilage is marked on the accompanying site diagram.

13.1   DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Balladonia Telegraph Station (fmr) is a substantial single-storey limestone building constructed in 1898 as a repeater station on the 1896 telegraph line between Eucla and Norseman. The line was constructed to provide a more direct telegraphic route to the eastern goldfields than that provided by the East-West line, opened in 1877. Associated with the place is an underground parget stone water tank (1905) and drystone wall. *Balladonia Telegraph Station (fmr)* provided a working and residential function until it closed in 1927, following the establishment of a telegraph line along the route of the Trans-Australia Railway. The place has been used as a residence for family members and employees of the Balladonia pastoral station and as a wayside house. It has been unoccupied since the 1970s and is falling into ruin.

The first telegraph line in Western Australia was erected between Fremantle and Perth in 1869, by a privately owned Company. The following year, a second company arranged with the Government to establish telegraph lines south to Albany and Bunbury, and east to York, through Guildford, Toodyay and Northam. The Guildford telegraph station was opened on 23 December 1871 and the rest of the stations followed with the last, Albany, opening a year later, on 28 December 1872. On 1 January 1873, the Government bought out the Company and became the sole operator of the Colony's telegraph system.[1]

During this period, the international telegraph cable had been laid from Java to Darwin, and an overland line connected Darwin with Adelaide in 1872, but news still had to travel from Adelaide to Albany by sea. In 1875, the Governments of Western Australia and South Australia undertook to construct the East-West telegraph line to link Albany with Adelaide. Approximately 1200 kilometres of this route was through Western Australia around the Great Australian Bight, an arid and inhospitable region.[2]

Due to the poor conductivity of the soft iron wire used on the line, repeater stations were required along the route where operators would manually boost the messages in transit. In Western Australia, these stations were at Bremer Bay, Esperance Bay, Israelite Bay, Eyre's Sand Patch and Eucla.[3]

[1]   Stevens, G. P., 'Inauguration of the Electric Telegraph in Western Australia, 1869', 5 pages, Perth, [1936]; Moynihan, J. F., 'Some brief notes on owners and operators of early telegraph lines in Western Australia, 1869-1873, 5 pages, Perth, 1981, PR11168; Stirling, Edmund, 'A brief history of the first establishment and development of the Electric Telegraph in Western Australia', [1897], National Archives of Australia, File K1209, Folder 22, Eucla; *The Eucla Report*, researched and written by L. J. Hanley, Officer in Charge, Commonwealth Archives Office, Perth, 1968, National Archives of Australia, File K30, 1967/24, p. 1.

[2]   Stevens, G. P., 'The east-west telegraph…', op cit, pp. 16-35; *The Eucla Report*, op cit, pp. 1-2.

[3]   Stevens, G. P., 'The east-west telegraph…', op cit, pp. 16-35; *The Eucla Report*, op cit, pp. 1-2.

The telegraph stations were manned by a Telegraph Master (also referred to as a Station Master) and one or more assistants. Linemen were employed to maintain the telegraph wire, with an Aboriginal assistant in the early years. The linemen were stationed at each of the telegraph stations and patrolled halfway to the next station on each side, using camels and bicycles for travelling.[4]

There was little telegraphic traffic on the East-West line initially, and the single wire, which could carry only one message each way (duplex system), was sufficient for the time. By the 1890s, however, gold discoveries had greatly increased telegraphic business. Delays of up to a week were common as a backlog of messages developed at each station. Communication with the eastern goldfields had to go through Albany and Perth and then to Coolgardie and Kalgoorlie. Improvements were required in the telegraphic system as well as larger premises to accommodate expanded operations and staff numbers.[5]

The Manager of the Telegraph Department, G. P. Stevens, recommended the construction of a new two-wire telegraph line from Esperance, on the East-West line, to Coolgardie through Norseman in the Dundas goldfield, and another two-wire line direct from Eucla to Norseman. New technology introduced at this time allowed two messages to be carried each way per wire (quadruplex system). This meant that the existing East-West single-wire line and the new two-wire inland line would be comfortably able to handle the increased telegraphic traffic.[6]

The survey for the route of the line from Coolgardie to Esperance was conducted by surveyor Allan Raeside, who reached Esperance on 24 February 1895. Raeside drowned while swimming at Esperance on the day he arrived. His fieldbooks, found with his clothes on the beach, provided sufficient information for the construction of the telegraph line to commence.[7] On 23 January 1896, it was reported that A. J. Grant, surveyor of the Public Works Department, had arrived at Eucla to begin a survey of the route for the Eucla-Dundas section. He had been provided with a portable condenser and thirteen camels for the journey. Another surveyor was to start at the Dundas end of the route. The survey, estimated at 600 miles, was described as the second largest of its kind in Australia, the survey from Adelaide to Darwin for the Overland telegraph line in 1871, being the longest.[8]

The tender for construction of the lines was awarded to Isidore James Knight Cohn, who quoted for the work at the rate of £30-12-0 a mile. Cohn used 150 camels to transport the materials for the Coolgardie to Dundas section, and by May 1896, he had around 500 camels and 80 men working in teams on various sections of the line. A link from the line was

4   'Eucla Telegraph Station', report by the Postmaster General, 13 July 1876, National Archives File K1209, Folder 2, Eucla; Stevens, G. P., 'The east-west telegraph….', op cit; photograph, telegraph lineman near Eucla, 1910-1920, Battye 000813D.

5   Notes by G. Compton Spencer, National Archives of Australia File K1209, Folder 15, Eucla Post Office; 'Eucla, Ancient and Modern', *Transmitter*, 16 March 1898, typescript copy, National Archives of Australia File K1209, Folder 2, Eucla Post Office; Memories of Jim Hancock, op cit.

6   Notes by G. Compton Spencer, National Archives of Australia File K1209, Folder 15, Eucla Post Office.

7   *The Eucla Report*, op cit, p. 2.

8   *West Australian*, 23 January 1896, p. 5.

constructed to the Eyre telegraph station. The two-strand telegraph line was strung with copper wire on iron poles, the copper providing better conductivity than iron wire and the iron poles being able to withstand the harsh conditions better than the timber poles used on the East-West line.[9]

In 1896, plans for new telegraph stations for the East-West line were prepared by the PWD, under Chief Architect George Temple Poole. A telegraph station was also to be built on the new inland line at Balladonia, halfway between Eyre and Norseman, and a Post Office and Telegraph Station was planned for Norseman. A contract for construction of *Balladonia Telegraph Station (fmr)* was awarded to Walter Harrison, whose tender of £2,988-9-0 was accepted on 24 November 1897.[10] Harrison also constructed the telegraph station at Eyre's Sand Patch (1897).[11]

Balladonia Telegraph Station (fmr) is described in the 1897-98 PWD Annual Report:

> Operating room, 37ft by 15ft, battery room for 1,000 cells, store rooms, and quarters of eight rooms for officer in charge, operators and linemen; with bathrooms and stores, and verandahs all round. Water supply of 6,000 gallons in tanks. Shed for camels. Conversion of old woolshed into temporary office.[12]

Balladonia Telegraph Station (fmr) took its name from the Balladonia pastoral station on which it was situated. The station was established by brothers Stephen and William Ponton and John Sharp. The second homestead on the property was built in 1882, and it was there, in the Balladonia woolshed, that the telegraph station first operated until *Balladonia Telegraph Station (fmr)* was completed.[13]

The first telegraph Master at Balladonia was H. G. Creagh. The *Balladonia Telegraph Station (fmr)* had a larger operating room and provision for a larger number of staff than at Eyre. The operating room was opened on the evening of 8 September 1898 by Mrs Creagh and Miss Martin (daughter of Eucla Telegraph Master Michael Ryan), when they connected the instruments in line 'in the presence of a fair assemblage of residents', after which 'all joined in drinking the good health of the instruments'.[14] The Telegraph Masters on the south coast were the major government official in their respective districts, and often acted in other positions, including Resident Magistrate, Customs Officer, Meteorological Officer and Landing Waiter. At *Balladonia Telegraph Station (fmr)*, the Telegraph Master doubled as Meteorological Observer.[15]

In 1903, it was reported that Balladonia was manned day and night and needed three operators to provide a continuous service. Telegraph operator

---

9   *West Australian*, 21 March 1896, p. 3; 25 May 1896, p. 6; 16 July 1896, p. 5; Jeffery, Chris, *Eucla: Paper for the Royal Western Australian Historical Society*, 23 February 1979, typescript..

10   *West Australian Government Gazette*, 24 December 1897, p. 2853.

11   *West Australian Government Gazette,* 11 June 1897, p. 1135.

12   PWD Annual Report 1897-98, in *Votes & Proceedings of the Parliament of Western Australia*, Vol 1, 1898, quote in Oldham, R. & J., *George Temple-Poole: Architect of the golden years 1885-1897*, p. 170.

13   Crocker, A. E. (nee Baesjou), 'The Early History of Balladonia', *Early Days*, Vol. 4 Pt. 7, 1954, pp. 5-14.

14   *Eucla Recorder*, 15 October 1898, p. 4. The *Eucla Recorder* was produced by the staff at the Eucla Telegraph Station from October 1898 to September 1900; Balladonia station floor plan.

15   *Blue Books*, 1886, 1892; *Yearbook of Western Australia*, 1910, p. 80.

Thomas Lloyd had resigned as of 4 March 1903, after being sent for medical treatment in November 1902 because of 'mental aberrations'. There was four staff at *Balladonia Telegraph Station (fmr)* the following year, including Lineman A. J. M. Cook. Repairs valued at £324 were carried out to the place in 1903, by W. Harrison.[16]

In 1904, an inspection of the telegraph station facilities was undertaken by Inspector Woodrow of the Postmaster General's Department. He recommended the construction of an underground tank for water supply for *Balladonia Telegraph Station (fmr)*. W. Harrison, was awarded the contract to construct the tank, at a cost of £510.[17] To provide water for the linemen catchment sheds with tanks were established at a number of points along both the East-West line and the Balladonia line. A contract for sheds and tanks for the Balladonia line was awarded to H. W. Leask in 1912, at a cost of £595.[18]

In 1907, automatic boosting on the Line was introduced, and the staff at the telegraph stations was reduced. *Balladonia Telegraph Station (fmr)* was reduced to a staff of three, which would appear to have been the minimum number able to keep the place operating. By 1912, the repeaters at Balladonia were getting little use and their necessity was being questioned. In the previous two years, they had been 'brought in' for a total of only 89 days, comprising 66 days due to low circuits and 23 days due to interruptions to the line. It was conceded, however, that the circuit was materially improved when the repeaters were in use, and no change was made to operations.[19]

In 1927, a new three-strand telegraph line was constructed along the route of the Trans-Australia Railway, and the telegraph stations on the coastal and Norseman lines were closed. The line ceased to operate on 26 March 1927, 'give or take a day or two either way' as traffic passed over both lines for several days during the changeover.[20] Lineman in Charge L. H. Chopin and Lineman F. C. Knight were the last telegraph employees at Balladonia. Their positions were abolished as of 24 May 1927.[21]

The telegraph lines, no longer required by the Government, continued to be used and maintained for many years by the pastoral stations along their length, for their private telephone service.[22] The eighteen catchment sheds and tanks along the line either side of Balladonia were offered for sale, but only six were purchased for removal by local pastoralists. Notices were sent to the Automobile Clubs in each State to warn them that the tanks were not being maintained as they were used by the public on occasion.[23]

---

[16]   National Archives file K1, 4616/02, 1902-03; National Archives file K1, 904/05, 1904; *West Australian Government Gazette*, 24 July 1903, p. 1928 .

[17]   National Archives file K1, 904/05, 1904; physical evidence; *West Australian Government Gazette*, 7 July 1905, p. 1990.

[18]   *West Australian*, 13 May 1895, p. 6, letter to the editor on the condition of the Eucla telegraph line; *West Australian Government Gazette*, 7 June 1912, p. 2150; National Archives file K273, 1927/5, Balladonia, disposal of catchment sheds.

[19]   National Archives file K1, 132/12, 1912.

[20]   Information of telegraphist R. Pitcher, 1966, National Archives file K1209, Folder 15, Eucla.

[21]   National Archives file K1184, 288/1, Balladonia staffing, 1927.

[22]   Telephone conversation with Harvey Gurney, Moopina Station, 20 September 2002.

[23]   National Archives file K273, 1927/5, 1927.

After closure of the telegraph stations, *Balladonia Telegraph Station (fmr)* was purchased by the owners of the Balladonia pastoral property.[24] It was occupied as private accommodation by John A. K. Baesjou and his wife Nell (nee Ponton) when they retired. John and Nell died in the 1940s, and *Balladonia Telegraph Station (fmr)* was used for a time in the 1950s as a wayside house prior to the construction of the Balladonia Motel. The Eucla Telegraph Station was used in similar fashion in the 1950s, when motor transport was becoming more popular. In the 1960s, the place provided accommodation for employees and family of Balladonia pastoral station.[25] This is the last known use for the place, although it may have been used by travellers on odd occasions.

Balladonia Telegraph Station (fmr) has been listed with an A management category on the Dundas Municipal Heritage Inventory, adopted on 14 August 1995.[26]

In 2002, the place is unoccupied and deteriorating into ruin.

13.2   PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Balladonia Telegraph Station (fmr) is located on the north side of Eyre Highway at Balladonia, approximately 18 kilometres east of Balladonia Roadhouse, and only 500 metres west of the turnoff to the Balladonia Homestead. *Balladonia Telegraph Station (fmr)* is set back from the road approximately 500 metres, and a gravel track accessing the place has been blocked. A barbed wire fence midway between the road and the place also deters access.

A 0.750 metre high drystone wall encloses the site of *Balladonia Telegraph Station (fmr).* It is approximately 50 metres from the building, to the east and south (front), 70 metres to the west, and on the north side, the wall extends to over 500 metres from the building, including an exposed granite outcrop, and other drystone walls, possibly for water catchment. The surrounding terrain is the natural shrubs and spinifex typical of the Nullabor Plain, although it has been cleared in the immediate vicinity of the building.

Rusted steel telegraph posts form a line parallel with the highway, midway between *Balladonia Telegraph Station (fmr)* and the Eyre Highway, and one post is located in front of the building, outside the drystone wall.

Twin pencil pines on the west side delineate an entry into a court area defined by three wings of the building, behind (north of) the south (front) wing. A number of mature cacti plantings are also in the vicinity of the twin pines. Within the court space is a large parget stone water tank below ground, with a flat iron roof approximately 0.600 metres above ground level. Other remnants in the space include a ceramic toilet pedestal on a concrete block, and a concrete plinth, possibly an engine mount. The site slopes slightly down from the north east to the south west. A peppermint tree obscures views of the front elevation.

---

[24]   No DOLA reserve correspondence files exist for this land. It was hived off from the pastoral station and then returned to it, most likely during 1920s.
[25]   Crocker, A. E. (nee Baesjou), op cit; *The Eucla Report*, op cit, p. 5.
[26]   Hocking Planning and Architecture, *Dundas Municipal Heritage Inventory*, 1995.

Balladonia Telegraph Station (fmr) displays characteristics of Federation Bungalow style. Typical of the style, the place is a ground-hugging, single storey, verandahed building with simple massing and broad roof planes, and constructed of natural materials. The elevations are well proportioned.

Balladonia Telegraph Station (fmr) comprises three wings of a substantial building, with verandahs around most of the perimeter. However, all of the north wing and part of the east wing are in ruin with roofing missing and walls disintegrated. An underground water tank is located within the enclosure of the building wings, and there is evidence of previous structures approximately 20.0 metres west of the exiting building, with concrete pad remains, and rusted steel and timber elements.

The footprint of *Balladonia Telegraph Station (fmr)* is predominantly a 'U', with a dominant south wing extending east west forming a substantial frontage. Verandahs surround the south and east wings, but the north wing is in ruin and there is minimal evidence of the verandah. Except for the ruins of the north wing, no rooms are interconnected. There seems not to have been any one entry into the building, as all rooms open onto the verandah on the court side, and the twin pines delineate an entry into the court.

Balladonia Telegraph Station (fmr) is a single-storey face limestone construction with a corrugated iron roof. The hipped roof is clad with corrugated iron. There is no evidence of any gutters and downpipes. Square stone chimneys remain in place.

The face limestone is regular in shape and laid in random coursing with rendered quoins. The stone is black line pointed on all elevations, although much of the line-work is not clearly visible, particularly the lower sections of the walls where the mortar and some stone has fretted. There is also some evidence of cracking, mostly associated with openings in the walls. Around the perimeter of the wall is a metal flashing, much like an ant cap. Cast iron air vents are also evident at intervals around the lower wall. The verandahs are included under the main roof, at break pitch, and replacement 0.075 metre steel posts are in place, although along the south frontage the verandah floor has eroded away and the steel posts are unattached at the base. The verandah surface is predominantly bitumen, although some sections are gravel and a section on the east side is small flagstones. The verandah surrounding the south wing is built up on a random stone rubble perimeter wall that has since subsided around almost the entire perimeter.

On the inside corner of the east and south wings, the verandah has been enclosed by a flat galvanised iron clad extension with a galvanised iron chimney, and ceiling and walls lined with masonite. No other extensions are evident, although a small section of the adjacent west wall of the east wing has been painted, indicating a previous enclosure.

The few remaining original external doors that have not been removed are four-panelled doors with multi-paned fanlights above. Timber steps are in place at each doorway on the north side verandah of the south wing, up from the verandah floor into each room. The windows throughout are timber framed double casement sashes comprising nine panes to the upper and lower sash windows. Almost every pane of glass in every window has been smashed, and the timber frames are weathered, in some cases, there has

also been vandalism damage to the frames. The interior doors are the original four-panelled doors with original hardware.

On the interior, the original timber floors are 0.135 metre jarrah boards, although some sections in various rooms have been removed or are in a dangerous condition. The timber skirting boards and architraves are mostly in place. The walls are hard plaster in the battery room, but all other interior walls are clad with vertical sheets of ripple iron. Similarly, the ceilings are lined with ripple iron.

There are minimal remaining fitouts: an intrusive timber fire surround is in place in the operating room; c.1950s stove and kitchen fitout in the corner verandah enclosure; c.1960s shower fitout in a sunken floor in room 2, and the original fireplace is still evident in room 4.

The underground water tank is a parget stone structure comprising two compartments with a 'doorway' opening between. The external exposed wall to a height of 0.6450 metres is rendered rubble stone with timber structure over on which corrugated iron sheets are laid to form the roof. The tank is empty.

Balladonia Telegraph Station (fmr) is generally in poor condition. There is evidence of serious neglect resulting in the current condition. The place shows minimal evidence of change, in the installation of shower and kitchen facilities and the enclosure of the verandah to form a kitchen. *Balladonia Telegraph Station (fmr)* has a moderate degree of integrity. The place is mostly intact, with extensive evidence of original fabric, although deteriorated, and demonstrates a moderate degree of authenticity.

The underground water tank and drystone wall are of considerable significance. The remnants of buildings some 10 metres to the west are of little heritage value.

13.3 COMPARATIVE INFORMATION

There are a number of telegraph stations remaining in the State. Most were designed by the PWD between 1885 and 1896, under the direction of Chief Architect George Temple Poole.

The other telegraph station buildings on the East-West line and constructed in 1896-1898, include *Israelite Bay Post & Telegraph Station (Ruin)* (HCWA Place 836); *Eucla Telegraph Station (Ruin)* (HCWA Place 03558); Bremer Bay Telegraph Station (HCWA Place 1248), occupied as a private residence and in good condition but roofed with aluminium tiles; and, *Eyre Bird Observatory* (HCWA Place 16522), occupied since 1976 as the with one room used as a museum of its former history. The Esperance Telegraph Station (HCWA Place 826) was demolished in the 1960s. On the line constructed from Eucla to Norseman in 1896, the *Norseman Post Office* (HCWA Place 767), which was also a Telegraph Office, is still in use as a post office and residence.

Former telegraph stations on other lines include Cossack Post and Telegraph Office (HCWA Place 2347), a two storey building which has been restored and occupied as an art gallery, and Hamelin Pool Post & Telegraph Station (HCWA Place 11720), is now occupied as a museum.

Bremer Bay Telegraph Station and *Balladonia Telegraph Station (fmr)* are entered on the Register of the National Estate, while *Israelite Bay Post & Telegraph Station (Ruin)* and *Cossack Post and Telegraph Office* are entered in both the State Register of Heritage Places and the Register of the National Estate. *Eyre Bird Observatory, Eucla Telegraph Station (Ruin)* and *Norseman Post Office* are on the Register of Heritage Places.

Balladonia Telegraph Station (fmr) is a good example of its type but is deteriorating into ruin through lack of use and maintenance.

13.4   REFERENCES

13.5   FURTHER RESEARCH

There is currently no survey of drystone wall structures in Western Australia to determine the rarity of the drystone walling at this place.