



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.

11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE*

With its various components connected by verandahs and a breezeway, *Mount Welcome House* is a good example of North-West vernacular architecture, designed to meet local climatic conditions. (Criterion 1.1)

The distinctive barrel vaulted roofs of *Mount Welcome House* have a landmark quality in Roebourne, as they are unlike other buildings in the town. (Criterion 1.3)

Mount Welcome House is a key visual element in the Hampton Street streetscape and contributes to the character of Roebourne. (Criterion 1.4)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

Mount Welcome House has significant associations with the first pastoral leases in the Pilbara region and the subsequent development of the town of Roebourne. (Criterion 2.1)

The place has associations with the local Aboriginal community, initially as one of the first sites of contact with European settlers, and later as a meeting place for the Ierajmugadu Aboriginal Corporation. (Criterion 2.3)

The site of *Mount Welcome House* is significant for its associations with the Withnell family, who were renown for their hospitality to new settlers and travellers in the latter half of the 1800s. (Criterion 2.3)

11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

Knowledge of the history of the place contributes to understanding the development of the Roebourne region since 1864. (Criterion 3.2)

11.4. SOCIAL VALUE

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

The place is valued by the community for its associations with the Withnell family, and the Ieramugadu Aboriginal Corporation. (Criterion 4.1)

The distinctive style and landmark quality of *Mount Welcome House* contributes to the character of Roebourne and the community's sense of place. (Criterion 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12. 1. RARITY

Mount Welcome House has some rarity value due to the distinctive barrel vaulted roofs of the house and outbuildings. (Criterion 5.1)

12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

Mount Welcome House is a representative example of north-west vernacular architecture. (Criterion 6.1)

12. 3 CONDITION

The condition of the place is fair due to the lack of care and maintenance over the past years. The building shows evidence of vandalism and neglect.

12. 4 INTEGRITY

Although vacant, the original residential intent of the place is still identifiable. The place retains a moderate degree of integrity.

12. 5 AUTHENTICITY

The place demonstrates a high degree of authenticity with no interventions to the original fabric.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentary evidence has been researched and compiled by Laura Gray, heritage and conservation consultant, with some primary research by Gillian O'Mara, archival researcher. The physical evidence has been compiled by Laura Gray.

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Mount Welcome House comprises a group of single-storey timber-framed, corrugated iron buildings with barrel-vaulted roofs. The current house was built c. 1937 by the Stove brothers and replaced an earlier building on the same site.

In 1861, Francis T. Gregory and his exploration party arrived at the head of Nickol Bay, landing near the site of what was to become the town of Roebourne. Gregory led an expedition inland, reaching the area of the existing Millstream Station. After the publication of Gregory's journal, in which he recorded the agricultural potential of the land, prospective settlers from the Swan River and the Eastern colonies vied for pastoral leases in the area.¹

Arriving in 1863, Walter Padbury and John Wellard were among the first to take advantage of the north-western opportunities. The following year, John and Emma Withnell and their two young sons ventured north on the recommendation of Gregory, Emma's cousin.² The Withnell party included John's brother, Robert, and Fanny and John Hancock, Emma's brother and sister. They were accompanied by three servants.³ The Withnells had intended to sail to Port Hedland, where Padbury and Wellard had established themselves, but after an arduous time off the coast near Cossack (then known as Tien Tsin) they landed at Nickol Bay. They established themselves on the banks of the Harding River, at the foot of Mount Welcome, where they had access to a reasonable fresh water supply.⁴ The Withnells initially built a single roomed house constructed of stone, mud bats and the remains of their cargo, with a spinifex roof.⁵

The Withnells took up Sherlock Station, comprising 100,000 acres and 30,000 acres at Mount Welcome.⁶ In common with settlers throughout the north of Australia, they quickly recruited Aboriginal people to work on their

¹ Withnell Taylor, N. E. *A saga of the Northwest Yeera-muk-a-doo; The first settlement of north-west Australia told through the Withnell and Hancock families 1861-1890*. Hesperian Press, Carlisle, 1987, pp. 16-22.

² *ibid.*, pp. 22, 23, 30. Emma was about seven months pregnant at the time.

³ *ibid.*, p. 33. The servants were Peter Frarrey, Jack Meloney and John Ridgeman. They also took with them 1,000 sheep, 10 draught horses, 1 saddle horse, 6 cows and enough provisions for 12 months. A considerable amount of stock was lost on the journey north.

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 34; Gallaher, P. E., 'Early Days in Roebourne 1865-1866', unpublished manuscript, 1978, p. 1.

⁵ Withnell, C., 'North West Pioneers: John and Emma Withnell', unpublished manuscript, 1968, p. 6.

⁶ Extract from letter written by Emma Withnell, in Withnell, C., *op. cit.*, p. 11.

properties as shepherds, labourers and shearers. Aboriginal women were also employed to assist in running the Mount Welcome homestead.⁷

Other settlers followed and by 1865, the population of the Nickon Bay area had grown to about 200. Although many established themselves on runs some distance from the Withnells, their homestead was regarded as the hub of the small community from the outset, being at a natural crossroads between the port at Cossack and the outlying stations. John Withnell built a lighter, which he used to convey settlers' stores from the port up the river to the settlement.⁸ By 1865, John was also selling meat from a store he built near the homestead.⁹

In 1865, the Government Resident R. J. Sholl arrived to provide assistance in developing the region. Sholl set up camp close to the Withnells and set about finding a suitable townsite. After extensive explorations, he decided that the area where he was already camped was the most appropriate. The following year, Surveyor Charles Wedge drew a draft plan of the then unnamed townsite, comprising 106 lots. Named for J. S. Roe, the first Surveyor-General of the Swan River Colony, Roebourne was proclaimed on 17 August 1866.¹⁰ The Withnells selected six acres around their house.

Roebourne was the first gazetted town in the North West and as the administrative centre, grew as government buildings, shops, services and hotels were established and roads constructed.¹¹ Located in the centre of town, the Mount Welcome homestead was regarded by all who travelled through Roebourne as an open house.¹² Prior to a church being built in the town, services were held at the Withnell home and Emma commenced a Sunday School for the local children.¹³

In 1872, a cyclone destroyed most of the buildings in Roebourne, including the Withnells' house. The rebuilding of Roebourne commenced soon after, and John Withnell built his second homestead and store with walls of stone, pug and timber.¹⁴

The Withnells remained at Mount Welcome until September 1878, when they sold the property to Magistrate Sholl.¹⁵ Circa 1907, Mount Welcome Station (including both *Mount Welcome House* and Sholl's residence, Weerina) was purchased by Percy, Thomas and Arthur Stove.¹⁶ At this time, Tom moved

⁷ De La Rue, K., *Pearl Shell and Pastures: The Story of Cossack and Roebourne, and their place in the history of the North West, from the earliest explorations to 1910*, Cossack Community Project, 1979, p. 97.

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 17.

⁹ De La Rue, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

¹⁰ Withnell Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

¹¹ *ibid.*, pp. 98-99, 238.

¹² *ibid.*, pp. 74, 246.

¹³ Withnell, C., *op. cit.*, p. 19.

¹⁴ Withnell Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp. 159, 162.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 140. The Withnells moved to Sherlock Station. Members of the Withnell family established several stations in the North West, aside from Mount Welcome and Sherlock. These included Mallina, Karratha, Dirk Hartog, Chirrita, Mardie and Edjudina.

¹⁶ Memo, HCWA File 2343, 20 May 1997, L Gray interviewing Doug Stove. C.T. Vol. 574 Fol. 59 date indiscernible (either 1907 or 1911). The Stove brothers had come to Western Australia from South Australia in the early 1900s to work for the Murray family on Mallina Station. They soon purchased their own station, Mt Satirist, east of Mallina. After Percy took up a cartage

into Weerina, and Arthur and Percy lived in the Mount Welcome house.¹⁷ The brothers built a kitchen at the back.¹⁸ Following Percy's marriage in 1920 and subsequent departure to manage Cooya Pooya Station, Arthur remained in *Mount Welcome House* alone.¹⁹

Circa 1937, by which time the c. 1872 homestead was deteriorating, Arthur and Tom built new sleeping quarters and a dining room, adjoining the existing kitchen. The accommodation section replaced the c. 1872 house. In 1950, ownership of *Mount Welcome House* was extended to include shares for other members of the Stove family and Tom's son Murray, and his family, moved into *Mount Welcome House*.²⁰ Soon after, the kitchen was rebuilt and fitted and a bathroom was added.²¹

Mount Welcome House and station were sold to the Federal Australian Government on 16 May 1974, for use by the Aboriginal community of the Roebourne area.²² At the time of the sale, the property consisted of approximately 137,600 hectares. When Mt Welcome Pastoral Company Pty Ltd took over Mt Welcome Station, *Mount Welcome House* became the office, and meetings were held there. There were about 20,000 sheep on the station at the time, but the stock soon dwindled. Doug Stove, Percy's son who had grown up at Cooya Pooya and later owned and managed Pyramid Station, was brought out of retirement to manage and train Aboriginal workers on the property. He spent two days a week for a few years, working with the Aboriginal men, to try to make the station viable.²³

Management meetings were held every six weeks with the Aboriginal elders at *Mount Welcome House*. Peter Dowding, the Port Hedland legal aid lawyer, came to the meetings, and was responsible for starting the Ieramugadu (Yeera-muk-a-doo) Group which Carol Churnside (nee Lockyer) managed, with assistance from David Daniels and Yilibee Warrie.²⁴

Until 1996, caretakers lived at *Mount Welcome House*, but conflict within the committee of Ieramugadu resulted in the place being vacated and a new committee took responsibility for the place. In 1997, the homestead remains vacant.

contract to carry copper from the Windmill Mine down to Balla Balla, the brothers sold Mt Satirist so that they could work the contract together. Tom managed Sherlock Station for the Withnells for a time.

¹⁷ Withnell Taylor. op cit., p. 140.

¹⁸ Memo, HCWA File 2343, 20 May 1997, L Gray interviewing Doug Stove.

¹⁹ ibid. The Stove brothers later purchased Chirrita and Cooya Pooya stations, the latter in partnership with John Herbert Church, a member of Parliament. Circa 1937, Percy took over sole ownership of Cooya Pooya Station. In 1939, he withdrew from Mt Welcome Station, leaving Tom and Arthur as owners.

²⁰ ibid., C.T. Vol. 574. Fol. 59.

²¹ Memo, HCWA File 2343, 20 May 1997, L Gray interviewing Doug Stove.

²² CT. Vol. 451. Fol 184A.

²³ Memo, HCWA File 2343, 20 May 1997, L. Gray interviewing Doug Stove.

²⁴ ibid.

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Mount Welcome House is a collection of timber framed and corrugated iron clad structures with barrel vault roofs, in a climate responsive North-West vernacular style. Typical of the vernacular style are the two wings of the homestead building, which are joined by skillioned verandahs and breezeways.

Facing Hampton Street, *Mount Welcome House* is located opposite the Roebourne Courthouse and 50 metres south of Weerina homestead, which is now a ruin. The setting is stark, with some lawn in front and various machinery artefacts on display. To the north and rear, the ground is, for the most part, bare red earth and gravel. A large tree close to the house on the northern side provides a picturesque setting, as the site slopes away to the rear and provides views through to the range of hills several kilometres beyond.

The two main structures of the homestead are joined by skillioned verandahs to form a T shape. The accommodation wing runs north-south, parallel to Hampton Street, while the kitchen and dining room runs east-west. Various small outbuildings of timber frame and corrugated iron construction are in close proximity to the two sections of the main building. On the northern side, a detached c. 1950 bathroom building abuts the verandah, with a toilet on the northern side of the bathroom. North-west of the rear of the kitchen is a former wash house and utility room, and on the southern side of the kitchen dining room section is a small structure with a barrel vaulted roof and doors each end.

Externally, the buildings are clad with sheets of vertical corrugated iron. The verandah of the accommodation wing is enclosed with a dado wall of painted asbestos sheets and a series of steel framed and flat metal clad shutters which open on top hinges. They are located around the north, east and southern perimeters of the verandah, between the railway irons at approximately 1.2 metre intervals. The north-eastern corner of the verandah has full height asbestos cladding and a small window on each of the two elevations. The north-western corner is infilled with timber and asbestos above the dado wall, around the corner of the two verandahs.

The central corrugated iron roof over the accommodation building is barrel vaulted, and the hipped corrugated iron verandah roof extends from that. Cyclone battens are in place around the verandah roofs.

The walls of the accommodation wing are clad with painted vertical sheets of corrugated iron. The paint is weathered and peeling. The windows around the perimeter of the accommodation building are 12-pane double hung sashes with timber ledge and brace top hinge shutters on the exterior. The shutters are held in an open position by a rod and wire attached to the timber verandah roof structure.

The accommodation wing consists of three rooms in a row, interconnecting and opening onto the verandahs on the eastern and western sides. The rooms are clad with caneite sheets with exposed battens, and the corners of the rooms are chamfered. The base of the walls are concrete to a height of

approximately 0.45 metres. The ceilings are lined with flat asbestos sheets and battens.

The dining room and kitchen wing shows evidence of at least three periods of construction: the c. 1937 dining room, the c. 1950 breezeway and first part of the kitchen, and a late 1950s addition to the kitchen. The dining room section is symmetrical, with a central door between two windows on the northern and southern sides, opening onto the verandahs. The barrel vault roof rises from the walls which extend almost a metre above the verandah roof. The interior of the dining room is detailed in the same manner as the accommodation wing. The floors are concrete throughout.

On the western end of the dining room is a 'breezeway' which opens into the kitchen as well as the northern and southern verandahs. The kitchen is the same width as the breezeway and dining room. It extends westwards, and is elevated from the ground on steel posts, with corrugated iron form work in place for the concrete floors. The kitchen and breezeway have a separate roof from the dining room. It is a lower level barrel vault roof, with no verandah.

The external walls of the breezeway are clad with asbestos and c. 1970s veneer panelling, with a set of louvred windows each side of the central door. The kitchen external walls are clad with unpainted vertical sheets of corrugated iron.

The kitchen shows evidence of two stages of construction. The western end of the ceiling is lined with asbestos. This is divided from the eastern section, which is lined on the vault with tongue and groove boards, by a truss. The bench high cupboards extend around three walls of the kitchen and are clad with asbestos and Masonite and painted and wallpapered in varying degrees. Various metal structures support remnants of the hot water system and other service items around the west end of the kitchen.

The bathroom is a formed concrete detached building with a hipped corrugated iron roof unlike the other structures on the site. The bathroom is wallpapered on three walls of the concrete walls. The bath is raised on a concrete floor. The wash room is unlined. The double concrete wash trough and the concrete block which were the copper once stood remain. The other outbuilding, which was possibly a storeroom, has timber shelves along both side walls.

13.3 REFERENCES

Gallaher, P. E., 'Early Days in Roebourne 1865-1866', unpublished manuscript, 1978.

Withnell, C., 'North West Pioneers: John and Emma Withnell', unpublished manuscript, 1968.

Withnell Taylor N. E., *A saga of the Northwest Yeera-muk-a-doo; The first settlement of north-west Australia told through the Withnell and Hancock families 1861-1890*, Hesperian Press, Carlisle, 1987.

Memo, HCWA file 2343, 20 May 1997. L Gray interviewing Doug Stove.

13.4 FURTHER RESEARCH

The small iron buildings, to the rear of the site warrant further investigation. According to the Shire of Roebourne Municipal Inventory, these buildings provided housing for Aboriginal workers.

Federal Government policy of purchasing pastoral properties for lease and management by local Aboriginal communities.