

HERITAGE PLACE

NAME OF PLACE: MONIVAE

ADDRESS/LOCATION OF PLACE: Hamilton-Port Fairy Road HAMILTON

STUDY NUMBER: 009

HERITAGE OVERLAY NUMBER:

PRECINCT: outside

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA: Southern Grampians Shire

PARISH: PARISH OF HAMILTON SOUTH

ACCESS DESCRIPTION:

CFA 473 B26; VicRoads 73 B6; located on west side of the Hamilton-Port Fairy Road about 2.0kms south of Hamilton on the Muddy Creek.

SIGNIFICANCE RATING: Local



Monivae Homestead, Hamilton - Port Fairy Road, Hamilton. Looking west from the driveway entrance to the

Image Date: 09/02/02

EXTENT OF LISTING:

To the extent of: 1. All the buildings, all the garden including the drive, and all of the surrounding park.

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PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:

The house is symmetrical about the front door with side lights and a semicircular fanlight, all surrounded by rusticated quoins, which is further emphasised by a projecting bay in the cast iron verandah. There are separate entrances from the verandah to a passage between the dining room and breakfast room on the south side and the office on the north side. The verandah columns, MacLean's patented composite columns, are paired and, on the ground floor, are set on bluestone plinths. The cast iron panels of the first floor balustrade are especially fine and have a design of crossed diagonals reminiscent of the Regency origin of cast iron verandahs. The paired windows of the principle rooms further emphasise this symmetry. The whole of the façade, while conservative in its styling, is particularly fine in its execution. It represents the more formal extreme of the common domestic Italianate style.

The interiors of the house survive unaltered except for the loss and, in some sense, compromise of their historic decoration. Their style is a conservative Classicism, of quite strongly architectonic character in the main hall. In 1877 it was described as having Keen's patent polished plaster but this has since been painted. Again, the planning of the rooms is conventional in its hierarchy but grand in its scale. Of special note are the office on the north side of the house with access from within and without and the butler's pantry between the front wing and the service wing. The finest feature of the house is the main staircase, with cast iron balusters which were originally 'bronzed' and a dominating newel post. The stairwell and hall are lit by a large window of patterned glass surrounded by a border of stained glass. The usual range of service rooms extend in a wing behind the front wing. There is a cellar below the service wing reached from an external stairwell. Beyond this there is a timber laundry, possibly dating from after the construction of the main house. It has been suggested that the first outbuildings were parts of the original Monivae homestead relocated to the new. The woolshed, which dated from the early twentieth century has been demolished and the early wool press removed to a museum in Hamilton.

HISTORY:

James Thomson purchased Monivae from the estate of Acheson French in October 1870 after he died in a swimming accident at St Kilda. Thomson, his wife Christian (known as Christina) and their six children moved into the original prefabricated homestead, which dated from the 1840s. Three more children were born. Possibly because of the size of their increasing family, the Thomsons abandoned the original homestead and, in 1876, began a new house and garden across the road on a slight rise beside the Muddy Creek. The local Hamilton architect and engineer, William Smith whose drawings survive, designed the house. It was completed in 1877. In a complete but florid description of the house when it was completed, a journalist from the Hamilton Spectator regretted that, because of the current heavy taxes, it was not possible to build a tower at that time. It is not known who designed the garden although James Thomson was an acknowledged and skilful gardener.

The bluestone for the house was quarried on the site immediately to the north of the existing house. Other materials such as the McLeans patent columns and cast iron for the verandah were imported from Melbourne. Other specialist materials would also have been imported such as the marble mantles, the stained glass of the stairwell window, the roof slates and the structural Oregon timber. These are said to have been imported through Port Fairy. The house cost 7,000 pounds.

James Thomson bred Aberdeen Angus cattle, Lincoln sheep, goats, rare Scottish ponies and Collie dogs, the first pack in the Western District. He was a staunch Presbyterian and supported the local Presbyterian church in Hamilton, donating the bluestone for its construction from the Monivae quarry.

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In February 1891, dreadful fires burnt much of the southern part of the district. Monivae, Cape Wrath and Brisbane Hill respectively lost 14,000 acres, 5,000 acres and 6,000 acres (Garden, 148). The Monivae estate was subdivided in the early twentieth century.

James and Christina Thomson's eldest son, John and his wife Christina nee Robertson continued to live at Monivae. He was a councillor for the Shire of Dundas for fifteen years and first contested the seat of Dundas in the Legislative Assembly in 1892 when he failed but, in extraordinary circumstances, he won the seat soon after and held it for most of the next twenty-two years. He was regarded as an 'advanced Liberal'. He continued his father's support of the Presbyterian Church and was active in local organisations and institutions.

After the Second World War Monivae was used from 1947 until 1955 as a boys school run by the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart and the property gave its name to the school. Little was done to the house and grounds during this period except for the conversion of the double reception rooms on the north side into a chapel and the introduction of communal bathrooms in two of the smaller rooms on the first floor. The property proved to be inappropriate for use as a school so land on the eastern side of Hamilton on the Glenelg Highway was swapped for Monivae. For many years Monivae was used as a dairy farm when the house was, for the most part, unoccupied. Substantial dairy buildings were erected at the rear of the homestead complex. The Glenelg Region Water Authority then purchased the property principally for its water storage capacity.

THEMATIC CONTEXT:

Theme 3 Developing Local Regional and National Economies

3.5 Developing Primary Production

3.5.1 Grazing stock

3.5.2 Breeding animals

Theme 6 Educating

6.2 Establishing schools

Theme 7 Governing

7.2 Developing institutions of self-government and democracy

7.2.2 Struggling for inclusion in the political process

Theme 8 Developing Australia's Cultural Life

8.10 Pursuing excellence in the arts and sciences

8.10.3 Designing and building fine buildings

CONDITION:

The house is in excellent condition both structurally and in detail. It retains a very high degree of integrity although the decoration of its interiors, from each of its historic periods, and all the furnishings have been lost. The joinery and cast iron of the exterior retains a simple and early, certainly pre-WW2 colour scheme of cream and light stone.

The garden still retains many significant plantings although the main trees, *Pinus radiata* of the drive have been cut down recently and little survives in the pleasure garden immediately to the north of the house and associated with the drawing room. Some Italian Cypresses, *Cupressus sempervirens* in poor condition remain in the drive. Nothing survives of the productive parts of the garden such as the orchard and vegetable patches which were so important to James Thomson.

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INTEGRITY:

Substantially intact

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

What is significant?

Monivae Homestead, the second property by that name, is located two kilometres south of Hamilton on the Hamilton-Port Fairy Road on the Muddy Creek and beside the Hamilton-Portland railway line. It replaced the much earlier homestead of Acheson French on the opposite side the road. Designed as a very conservative interpretation of the Italianate style and completed in 1877, Monivae is a two-storey, symmetrical villa set within a substantial garden at the end of a straight drive. The bluestone for its construction was quarried on site. The cast iron and patent metal columns of the verandah were imported from Melbourne. The architect was a local, the English-born William Smith, who was also the town clerk of Hamilton. The owners were Scottish-born James Thomson (1823-1910) and Christina Thomson, nee Armstrong, and their family of eleven children and they were directly related to the Learmonth family of Prestonholme, pioneers in Mexico. The excellence of the building's construction and detailing indicates the calibre of the architect as much as the wealth of the owner. James Thomson was a pastoralist who had bought the run from French's distressed estate. Thomson's son John continued the family's pastoral interests and was MP for Dundas when the house was redecorated. For sometime after World War Two, the property was used as the boy's boarding school, called Monivae. Most of the original outbuildings have been lost to bushfires caused by the nearby railway. Much of the garden and surrounding park has been lost and the drive of Monterey Pines, *pinus radiata* has been replaced. The main house is in excellent condition although its interior decoration has been lost.

How is it significant?

Monivae Homestead is of historical and architectural significance to the Shire of Southern Grampians.

Why is it significant?

Monivae Homestead is of historical significance for its direct connections with several generations of the Thomson family and their extended family including the Learmonth's. It is significant as an example of a grand homestead built after the difficulties for squatting interests caused by the Selection Acts. Monivae, a very conservative interpretation of the Italianate style, is of architectural significance as an example of the work of William Smith. While the house is relatively grand, its sobriety demonstrates the position and values of its owners and the skills of its architect.

COMPARISON:

054 The Gums Homestead and Garden, Woolsthorpe Road, Penshurst
115 Arrandoovong Homestead and Garden, Henty Highway (Chrome Rd), Branxholme
107 Monivae Homestead Original Site, Hamilton-Port Fairy Road, via Hamilton
369 Wando Dale Homestead and Garden, Wando Dale Road, Wando Heights
078 Gringegalgona Homestead and Garden, Gringe Dip Road, Gringegalgona
232 Prestonholme, Strathkellar Road, Strathkellar

ASSESSED BY: tfh

ASSESSMENT DATE:

04-Aug-01

EXISTING LISTINGS:

Name

Southern Grampians Shire Planning Scheme

HERITAGE STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Include in VHR Include in RNE Include in Local Planning Scheme

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No Recommendations for Inclusions

REFERENCES:

Author	Title	Year	Page
Billis, R V and Kenyon, A S	Pastoral Pioneers of the Port Phillip District	1974	var.
Diana M Halmarick, comp.	Thos. Robertson & Sons "Mainstays of Our Earliest Days"	2000	var.
Garden, Don	Hamilton, A Western District History	1984	
Ian Black	Monivae	1996	1-32
Macdonald, Anita	Mariposa, a story of the Learmonths of Western Victoria and Mexico, 1834-1930	1981	x, 286
Timothy Hubbard and Karen Olsen	Monivae Homestead Hamilton, Conservation Management Plan	1996	var.