

# HERITAGE PLACE

**NAME OF PLACE:** MURROA HOMESTEAD COMPLEX

**ADDRESS/LOCATION OF PLACE:** Murroa Lane BUCKLEY SWAMP

**STUDY NUMBER:** 138

**HERITAGE OVERLAY NUMBER:**

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**OTHER NAME/S OF PLACE:** CAPE WRATH (ABANDONED)

**PRECINCT:** outside

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA:** Southern Grampians Shire

**PARISH:** PARISH OF MONIVAE

**ACCESS DESCRIPTION:**

CFA 474 A-68; VicRoads 73 B7; located

**SIGNIFICANCE RATING:** Local



Murroa, Buckley's Swamp, facade

**Image Date:** 08/04/02

**EXTENT OF LISTING:**

To the extent of: 1. All the main house and its extensions but excluding the interiors, the garage, generator shed, quarry, the stables and coach house, and the main garden.

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## PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:

Murroa is a large, single storey asymmetrical red brick house in the Italianate style. The house faces east towards Mount Napier and the site of the original Cape Wrath homestead in the south-east. An extensive garden surrounds the house with significant original plantings.

The house has been built in three main stages, all of which were designed by the local Penshurst architect, Frank Hammond and which are closely sympathetic in style, scale, form, detailing and materials. There is a slight shift to towards detailing in the Federation style towards the rear. There have been minor additions at the rear for garages, which are of interest for their planning, detailing and multiple access. Beyond the garages the quarry remains, now used to store water, from which stone was taken to construct the plinth of the house walls. The red bricks used in the construction of the walls came from the Glenthompson brickworks. They are tuck-pointed with a white mortar. The roofs of the house are slate. The rooves above the main sitting room and the master bedroom are fluted into a conical shape, flashed with copper, and with the remains of a copper boss and finial effect. The roof of the verandah is corrugated iron. The structure and decoration of the verandah is cast iron using a frieze with a typical 'rinceau' motif.

The interiors of the house are very plain and little original decoration survives, except for a large stained glass lantern above the main hall crossing. Substantial alterations have occurred in the original service areas of the house. A modern sunroom has replaced the original which was built into the verandah on the north side.

## HISTORY:

Murroa was originally the Cape Wrath squatting run, No. 229 in the Portland Bay district and located 6 miles south of Hamilton. It comprised 11,000 acres and ran 5,000 sheep making it a relatively small station. John and Robert McKay first took up the licence in 1842 but probably achieved little because of the depression in the wool trade at that time. The original homestead site was on the north-west slopes of Mount Napier, the Aboriginal name for which is "Murroa".

John Ritchie (1801?-1887) held the licence for six years from 1846. He married Sarah Davis with whom he had seven children, some of whom married into important local families (de Serville, 330). He was the second settler at Port Fairy having squatted on 26,000 acres at Ouranga-Ouranga, now Aringa as early as 1839. "He was born in 1801 in Scotland, the son of a Presbyterian minister, and started studying law in Edinburgh, and there was about his face some vague suggestions of the law ? the shaved chin and long upper lip, the side whiskers, the wide, close-lipped mouth; somehow John Ritchie had a resemblance to some of those Scots advocates and judges who were sketched in court ... But the law, and especially the Scottish law, is an exhausting study; Ritchie's health broke down, and after some years of farming with his uncle, he decided, on the advice of Lord Dundas, to go out to "the colonies"" (Powling, 36). Ritchie migrated first to Van Diemen's Land, settling near Launceston, and, influenced by the Henty family, decided to cross the Bass Strait. After Aringa and Murroa, he held View Lake and Fiery Creek runs until 1865 (B&K, 131). He was an important and influential man, appointed as Justice of the Peace, a founding Trustee of the Belfast Savings Bank, and standing for the Legislative Council, unsuccessfully.

George Wyndham Elms held the licence from 1852. In July 1847, he and Alexander Dennistoun Lang had taken up Lyne, located some eight miles east of the township of Branxholme with the intention of using it as a cattle station (B&K, 64 & 239). By 1850, it was apparent that the idea of running the large run Lyne as a cattle station was not viable, the herd was not developing as well as expected, and the decision was made to subdivide the run into two parts. Alexander Lang retained the southern section which stayed known as Lyne, and George Elms took the section closer the Grange Burn where he built a homestead, this portion was then re-named Brisbane Hill (Garden, 26). In 1851, Lang renounced his lease holding in the area, selling his share of Euremete to Elms. After the division of the two properties, Elms became one of the leading pastoralist in the district, and assisted with the formation of the first gentleman's club and cricket club in Hamilton (Garden, 41). In 1855, Elms and

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Lang renounced their interest in all their properties and left the district for Fiji, where they both died many years later.

The Cape Wrath or Murroa licence then passed to John McLellan (1815-1874). He was born in Argyle, Scotland, had arrived at Port Phillip in 1841 and married Marion Brownlie before 1842, with whom he had at least seven children (Garden, 52; de Serville, 478). He had been on the Tullich run fifteen miles west of Casterton from 1846 but may have had interests in Mount Elephant and Ardachy where the births of his first two and then his second two children were registered (B&K, 107, 293).

John McLellan was prominent in public affairs in and around Hamilton. In 1858, he was one of the major pastoralists who objected to an increased squatting licence fee based on the number of sheep and cattle they ran (Garden, 54). When the Hamilton Joint-Stock Newspaper Company was floated in 1861 "the Provisional Directors were headed by John McLellan of Cape Wrath and included many of the town's leading businessmen" (Garden, 75). He was elected a councillor of the Shire of Dundas in 1864, representing the pastoralists' interest and served as its President (Garden, 111). For a while McLellan lived in town at the Manor House at 4 Dryden Street (formerly Market Street) near the Shire offices and formerly the home of and designed by John McSheehy, the engineer of the Dundas Road Board (Garden, 120; Hubbard, 1991). He died at Cape Wrath aged 58 and his obituary appeared in the Hamilton Spectator (HS, 8/4/1874; 12/8/1874). The Murroa licence was cancelled in 1881 (B&K, 187).

William Philip (c. 1858-1933) owned Cape Wrath from 1884-1891 "who was one of the largest, and most restless, of the Hamilton district graziers" (Garden, 141). Garden notes that, by this time, it was one of perhaps only five estates ... which fitted into the traditional Western District image of grazier families living in the big house, waited on by servants, with the work of the run undertaken by numerous employees" (Garden, 141). It may be that Philip sold Cape Wrath to his relative, John Robertson of Skene in 1891. The Western Agriculturalist announced that it had "Changed hands by private sale. Messrs Philip Bros. To Mr. Thomas Robertson 7700 acres freehold. Mr Robertson intends to run it in conjunction with his Moyne Falls Estate" (WA, 07/12/1895, 4). By 1896 it had certainly passed to John's son, Thomas Robertson (1864-1936) "who ran it for thirty years in conjunction with the Moyne Falls estate near Macarthur" (Garden, 141).

In February 1891 there were disastrous bushfires across much of the country to the south of Hamilton which effected Monivae, Brisbane Hill and Cape Wrath. This appears to have been the reason for the Robertson family to abandon the old site, change the name and to build a new homestead away from the slopes of Mount Napier. The important local architect, Frank Hammond (1858-1932) designed the new house which was built in three stages. The original drawings survive in the possession of the current owner of Murroa.

Hammond, who lived in Penshurst, was highly regarded as an architect and municipal officer in the Hamilton district for many years. "Hammond could not be described as an innovative architect. In fact his strictly correct Classicism was rather old fashioned although inventive with its ornament" (Hubbard, 69). Amongst many domestic, secular and religious buildings, he designed extensions to the Catholic churches in Hamilton and Penshurst, the Catholic convent in Coleraine, and the new Bethlehem Lutheran Church at Tabor. He had designed the extensions to Koornong Homestead in the late 1890s and the Croxton East homestead after 1902. As late as 1902, he designed Lyndhurst in McIntyre Street, Hamilton as an Italianate villa, perhaps the last of its genre to be built in Victoria. And, in 1915, as the Worshipful Brother Hammond, he designed the Hamilton Masonic Temple in an appropriately strict neo-Classical style. The new Murroa homestead was transitional in its style and form, being mostly Victorian at the front in its form, planning, cast iron verandah and some details but forward looking in its half-timber timbered rear gables. The original Cape Wrath site was abandoned and now nothing remains of it.

Thomas Robertson was an important philanthropist. In 1915 he donated 250 pounds towards the purchase of an ambulance for the Australian troops and in 1918 he donated a plane, named Murroa, for the British Air

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Force in the First World War worth thousands of pounds (Garden, 188). In the 1920s he was part of the group which established the Kia Ora Private Hospital (now the Grange Hostel). His widow, Annie Robertson suffered from bush fires again in the Black Friday fires in January 1939 and not only from the fires. Several property owners in the Buckley Swamp area sued her for damages "because they believed one fire spread from live coals from her house fires which had been placed on an ash heap. They lost their case" (Garden, 219). In 1921, Annie Robertson was one of the founders of the Napier Club, the women's equivalent of the Hamilton Club, which had been found in the 1870s (Garden, 223).

After the Second World War, Murroa passed into the ownership of the Gubbins family, managed firstly John and Jenny Gubbins and then by their eldest son, Simon. Simon Gubbins died in March 2003. "At his funeral he was described as one of Australia's best and most innovative sheep and beef producers. Busloads of farmers, students, academics, and overseas visitors made the long trip to his Western District property Murroa to see how Mr Gubbins had doubled his property's stocking rates in a decade through new pastoral technology. He had been a district councillor for the Victorian Farmers Federation, was president of the Grassland Society of Victoria, a director of the Australian Beef Association, chairman of Rural Industries Skill Training, an adviser to Melbourne University's agriculture faculty, and - naturally - captain of the local Buckley Swamp fire brigade" (Age, 19/803).

## **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

3.5.3 Developing agricultural industries

Theme 5: Working

5.8 working on the land

## **CONDITION:**

The house is in excellent condition.

## **STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:**

What is significant?

Murroa located 9 kilometres south of Hamilton was originally the Cape Wrath squatting run. John and Robert McKay first took up the licence in 1842 but probably achieved little because of the depression in the wool trade at that time. The original homestead site was on the north-west slopes of Mount Napier, the Aboriginal name for which is "Murroa". John Ritchie (1801?-1887) of Aringa and Boodcarra runs, one of the earliest settlers in the Western District, held the licence for six years from 1846. George Wyndham Elms, of Lyne and Brisbane Hill runs, held the licence from 1852. The Cape Wrath or Murroa licence then passed to John McLellan (1815-1874), who was prominent in public and business affairs in and around Hamilton. William Philip (c. 1858-1933) owned Cape Wrath from 1884-1891 passing it on to his relatives, the Robertson family, one of the most important pastoral dynasties in Victoria. Thomas Robertson (1864-1936) rebuilt the renamed Murroa homestead after devastating bushfires in 1891. The new house was designed by the important Hamilton architect, Frank Hammond (1858-1932) and built in three stages. The house is a conservative single storey asymmetrical Italianate villa built in red brick with a cast iron verandah on three sides. It is surrounded by a mature garden and appears to be set within the broader landscape, especially addressing Mount Napier. The original Cape Wrath site was abandoned and now nothing remains of it. Thomas Robertson was an important philanthropist who donated a plane, named Murroa, for the British Air Force in the First World War. His

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widow, Annie Robertson suffered from bush fires again in the Black Friday fires in January 1939. In 1921, she was one of the founders of the Napier Club for women in Hamilton. The homestead complex survives substantially intact, although there have been extensive modernisations internally, and it is in good condition.

How is it significant?

Murroa Homestead Complex is of historical, social and architectural significance to the Hamilton community and to the southern Grampians Shire.

Why is it significant?

Murroa Homestead Complex is of historical significance for its various associations with important pastoralists including John Ritchie, George Elms, John McLellan, William Philip, and Thomas and Annie Robertson, all prominent and influential members of the community. The Robertson family is particularly important for their philanthropy. Murroa homestead is of social significance as a one of the last examples to reflect the squatters' way of life. The new Murroa homestead is of architectural significance as one of the best domestic examples of the work of Frank Hammond, architect. Although conservative in his practice, this suited his clientele, which ranged across the squattocracy, the German migrants and various religious denominations in the Hamilton area.

**ASSESSMENT DATE:** 16-Dec-03

**EXISTING LISTINGS:**

**HERITAGE STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Include in VHR  Include in RNE  Include in Local Planning Scheme

No Recommendations for Inclusions

**REFERENCES:**

Author	Title	Year	Page
Diana M Halmarick, comp.	Thos. Robertson & Sons "Mainstays of Our Earliest Days"	2000	265, 211, 230, 257- 262, 265- 267
Don Garden	Hamilton, A Western District History	1984	var.
J. W. Powling	Port Fairy, the First Fifty Years	1980	35-7
Paul de Serville	Pounds and Pedigrees	1991	330, 478, 484
R. V Billis & A. S Kenyon	Pastoral Pioneers of Port Phillip	1974	pp. 64, 104, 107, 130- 1, 187
Timothy Hubbard Pty Ltd	City of Hamilton Conservation Study	1991	69-70