

HERITAGE PLACE

NAME OF PLACE: MECHANICS INSTITUTE

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

STUDY NUMBER: 186

HERITAGE OVERLAY NUMBER:

OTHER NAME/S OF PLACE: MECHANICS INSTITUTE AND FREE LIBRARY

PRECINCT: Byaduk

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA: Southern Grampians Shire

ACCESS DESCRIPTION:

CFA 473K 18; VicRoads 72 H9; located on the Hamilton-Byaduk Road, opposite the intersection of Swamp Road and immediately south of the intersection of the Byaduk-Penshurst Road.

SIGNIFICANCE RATING: Local



Mechanic's Institute, Hamilton - Port Fairy Road, Byaduk.

Image Date: 30/01/02

EXTENT OF LISTING:

To the extent of: 1. All of the building including the exteriors and the interiors and all the land.

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PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:

The Mechanics Institute and Free Library is located on the Hamilton-Port Fairy Road Byaduk, some 100 metres south of the intersection with the Byaduk-Penshurst Road. The Mechanics Institute is a large structure of several rooms, which have been added to the main hall at various stages in the 20th century. The original external timber cladding has been replaced with Hardiplank weatherboards in recent years.

The main hall of the Mechanics Institute is a substantial structure of approximately 25 X 10 metres, with a plaster ceiling and timber floor. The walls are lined with tongue-in-groove pine boards, with a dado. The stage is located at the east end of the hall, and the proscenium is clad in pressed metal, with an ornate plaster border in a continuous chain pattern. At the other end of the auditorium, a door leads through to the vestibule and Reading Room. Above the door is a timber structure, now boarded up, which housed the projection equipment for the screening of films in previous years. An early photograph of the Institute reveals that this projection room was approached by an external wooden staircase, since removed. A ticket booth is located at one side of the vestibule.

To the left of the main auditorium, accessed through a door to the side of the stage is the Ladies Room and bathroom. To the right of the auditorium is the Supper Room and kitchen. The walls of the Supper Room are hung with a large number of photographs relating to the early history of Byaduk, and a display case on the far wall holds the records of various societies which met in the Institute. Likewise, the walls of the main hall feature many photographs of early settlers, together with a World War 2 Honour Roll, and a mounted commemorative tablet, salvaged from the ruins of the Presbyterian Church. The tablet, badly cracked, is dedicated to Private Frank Suttie, killed in the Boer War.

HISTORY:

The Mechanics Institute stands on land which was permanently reserved in the survey of the Township of South Byaduk (now Byaduk). It comprised two sections, both very small, immediately south of Scotts Creek and beside an unmade road on its eastern boundary. An initial survey of the subdivision of Allotment 6 of Section 19 of the Parish of Byaduk indicates two much larger allotments comprising over 6 acres. The same plan notes a 'Wesleyan Chapel' immediately to the south and 'Cannon's Store' on the west side of the main road as already existing.

The Mechanics Institute movement had emerged in Scotland at the end of the eighteenth century. It quickly spread to London and the developing industrial cities of England in the first half of the nineteenth century. The movement succeeded best in Australia and that success was especially strong in colonial Victoria. This was due to a combination of social, economic and political factors, although the discussion of politics and religion was usually banned by an institute's regulations. Over a thousand institutes, some with associated free libraries and lecture halls, were built in the city and country. The first to be built was the Melbourne Athenaeum in 1848, the majority of examples were built in the 1860s and 1870s, and the last examples in the more remote parts of Victoria were built up to the outbreak of World War One if not later. Although dominated by the middle class, the movement could cross class and religious divisions, often uniting a town in its aspiration so that the construction of a mechanics institute represented not just a practical civic achievement but a real expression of shared cultural values.

Don Garden, [Hamilton, p. 164.] notes that the Mechanics Institute was opened in 1905. It took the usual form of a public hall at that time and claimed no special architectural style. The building has been much altered with the replacement of the weatherboards by pressed cement sheeting being the most serious change.

The Mechanics Institute functioned as an important education and social centre for the Byaduk community.

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The building would have witnessed the usual broad range of cultural activities including balls, plays, concerts, public lectures and fetes. Local associations and clubs held their meetings in the meeting room and ran functions in the hall. It functioned for many years as the town's library.

THEMATIC CONTEXT:

3. Developing local, regional and national economies

3.21 Entertaining for profit

6. Educating

6.1 Forming associations, libraries, and institutes for self-education

8. Developing Australia's cultural life

8.5 Forming associations

8.5.3 Associating for mutual aid

8.5.4 Pursuing common leisure interests

8.14 Living in the country and rural settlements

CONDITION:

The condition of the Mechanics Institute and Free Library is excellent.

INTEGRITY:

very low degree of integrity externally

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

What is significant?

The Byaduk Mechanics Institute and Free Library is located on the Hamilton-Port Fairy Road Byaduk, some 100 metres south of the intersection with the Byaduk-Penshurst Road. The Mechanics Institute is a large structure of several rooms, which have been added to the main hall at various stages in the 20th century. The main hall of the Mechanics Institute is a substantial structure of approximately 25 X 10 metres, with a plaster ceiling and timber floor. The walls are lined with tongue-in-groove pine boards, with a dado. The stage is located at the east end of the hall, and the proscenium is clad in pressed metal, with an ornate plaster border in a continuous chain pattern. At the other end of the auditorium, a door leads through to the vestibule and Reading Room. Above the door is a timber structure, now boarded up, which housed the projection equipment for the screening of films in previous years. An early photograph of the Institute reveals that this projection room was approached by an external wooden staircase, since removed. A ticket booth is located at one side of the vestibule.

To the left of the main auditorium, accessed through a door to the side of the stage is the Ladies Room and bathroom. To the right of the auditorium is the Supper Room and kitchen. The walls of the Supper Room are hung with a large number of photographs relating to the early history of Byaduk, and a display case on the far wall holds the records of various societies which met in the Institute. Likewise, the walls of the main hall feature many photographs of early settlers, together with a World War 2 Honour Roll, and a mounted commemorative tablet, salvaged from the ruins of the Presbyterian Church. The tablet, badly cracked, is dedicated to Private Frank Suttie, killed in the Boer War. The Mechanics Institute and Free Library are in excellent condition, but retain a very low degree of integrity.

How is it significant?

The former Mechanics Institute Hall and Free Library are of historical, cultural and social significance to the township of Byaduk.

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Why is it significant?

The former Mechanics Institute and Free Library are of historical significance to Byaduk because, in the 19th and early 20th centuries the institution reflected the town's status and aspirations as well as the cooperation of civic leaders. It is of cultural significance not only for its association with the self-improvement of its citizens through reading, lectures and concerts but also for the shared values it represents which are the basis for a sense of community. The hall is of social significance because it provides a focus for community activities such as dances and film nights. These roles continue and the hall is now used for infant welfare and other community support groups.

COMPARISON:

244 Memorial Hall/Mechanics Institute, Glendinning St, Balmoral
134 Coleraine Mechanics Institute, corner Winter and Pilleau Streets Coleraine

ASSESSED BY: mgt

ASSESSMENT DATE: 30/01/2002

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
	Mechanics' Institutes The Way Forward, Conference organised by the Kilmore Mechanics' Institute	1998	66
	Rediscovering Mechanics' Institutes, Australian Mechanics'Institute Conference 2000	2000	128
Donald, Budge, and , Lloyd, Jenkins	Dundas Shire Centenary, 1863-1963	1963	75-8
Frances Clancy	The Libraries of the Mechanics' Institutes of Victoria	2000	
George Nadel	Australia's Colonial Culture, Ideas, Men and Institutions in Mid-Nineteenth Century Eastern Australia.	1957	var.
R. W Cornell & T. H. Irving	Class Structure in Australian History, Documents, Narrative and Argument	1980	var.