

# HERITAGE PLACE

**NAME OF PLACE:** BETHLEHEM LUTHERAN CHURCH COMPLEX

**ADDRESS/LOCATION OF PLACE:** Tabor Road TABOR

**STUDY NUMBER:** 388

**HERITAGE OVERLAY NUMBER:**

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**PRECINCT:** outside

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA:** Southern Grampians Shire

**ALLOTMENT:** part of **SECTION:** VII **PARISH:** PARISH OF CROXTON EAST  
3

**ACCESS DESCRIPTION:**

CFA 474 B 42; VicRoads 73 E7; located in the north-east corner of the intersection of the Tabor Road and the Tabor siding Road, approximately 2.5kms south of the Hamilton Highway.

**SIGNIFICANCE RATING:** Local



Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Tabor

**Image Date:** 15/05/02

**EXTENT OF LISTING:**

To the extent of: 1. All the present church including its interiors, fittings, fixtures and organ, the former church (now a Sunday school) but excluding its interiors, the former primary school and hall including their interiors, the manse, including the interiors of the building, the bell tower, the cemetery and its plantings, the pair of Italian Cyresses, Cupressus sempervirens, the Monterey Cypress plantings, Cupressus macrocarpa, the perimeter wall and all of the land contained within a radius of 30m from any edge of the

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## PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:

The second church at Tabor, formerly used as a school and now the earliest surviving building, is built of bluestone in a simple version of the rare Romanesque style. The use of the parallel German Rundbogenstil or 'round arch style' of Kolor Homestead at Penshurst may have influenced this choice of style. The church faces north-west, is three bays long and a belfry surmounts the front gable. There is a plaque in the front gable and a vestry at the rear. The building has been substantially altered for its use as a classroom, the most serious changes being the replacement of the original single lancet windows with two large aluminium windows on the south-west side and the glazing of all the other windows being replaced. A heater has been introduced into the middle window on the north-east side. The interior is much altered. The building is in good condition.

The third church is aligned perpendicular to the second and faces south-west. It is in the Early English Gothic revival style, combining bluestone for the walls with sandstone, probably Grampians sandstone, for all the major details such as coping stones, string courses, voussoirs, quoins and sills. It is five bays long with a more complicated plan, including a front porch, two side porches, two vestries and a chancel. The roofs are pitched at 60 degrees and are all slate. The interior is entirely intact with a gallery, organ, pulpit and full altar furnishings. On one wall there is a brass memorial to Pastor Schurmann. The building is in excellent condition.

There is a post World War 2 school building to the rear of both churches, built on the site of the original manse. It is in the Moderne style using cream bricks, large aluminium windows, wing walls and a shallow pitched metal roof. A cross is built into the end wall.

Beyond the school there is a cemetery with the graves aligned to face south-east. A low Cyclone wire fence encloses it. The grounds are landscaped with shaped Monterey Cypress trees, *Cupressus macrocarpa*. The most important trees are two Italian Cypresses, *Cupressus sempervirens*, which originally marked the gateway to the first manse. These almost certainly date from the mid-1850s and may be amongst the oldest in Western District. The whole of the church grounds are enclosed in a low stone wall.

Beyond the main compound, to the south-east, there is the third manse, the second having been relocated to Batesworth Homestead complex, Batesworth Lane near Penshurst, the home of a parishioner where it survives. This house is cream brick and built in a quasi-American Colonial style. It is an asymmetrical bungalow in form and scale. The projecting room on the north-west side is balanced about the central porch by a segmental parapet over an arched window. The low-pitched roof is dark terra cotta. The house is set in a garden typical of the period. It is in excellent condition.

## HISTORY:

Pastor C W Schurmann arrived in the Hamilton district in 1854 and an Evangelical Lutheran congregation was established at "South" Hamilton, about a mile east of the township. The first building was a pug and timber framed church with a thatched roof. This would have been similar to the first residences built by Lutherans, some of which still survive. Michael Deutscher had purchased the land, allotment 3 of section 1 of the Parish of South Hamilton comprising some 81 acres, in 1854 and ten acres was subdivided from it for the purpose. In 1855 Oscar Muller was called to become the first teacher using the primitive church as a classroom. More land in the Parishes of Yatmerone and Boram Boram, closer to Penshurst, was made available for purchase and many recently arrived Lutheran settlers bought blocks there. This became the district of Gnardenthal, which Pastor Schurmann would visit on a regular basis, and which was to become the congregation at Tabor. The first services were held in the homes of Andreas Urban and Johann Burger at Gnardenthal.

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A "John" Mibus purchased allotment 3 of section 7 of the Parish of Croxton East from the Crown comprising about 121 acres (49ha) on the 18th of November 1858. With his wife, Johann Mibus was one of the more important German immigrants, founding a large and interconnected family. He was born in Prussia in 1816, married Dorothea Huf there and arrived in South Australia in 1847, settling at Hoffnungsthal. They moved to the Hochkirk area in the mid-1850s. He sold several acres to the Tabor congregation in 1860. "Immediately steps were taken to build the first church at Tabor. The foundation stone was laid on December 27 and early in 1861 this blue-stone church was completed and dedicated" (Tabor Centenary; Garden, 47).

The cemetery dates from at least the late 1860s and the oldest record grave is that of Pauline Gessert, who was buried in 1869. There are over 300 recorded burials, which, through the family names, clearly reflect the German origin of the community and the inter-relationship of the families. The monuments of the cemetery are also a reflection of the changing fortunes of the community as well as changing fashion in funerary styles. Perhaps the most poignant reminders of what death must mean to a community are some of the earliest burials. Paul Ludwig Huf, the son of Johann Huf and his wife Pauline, nee Uebergang, was buried in 1871 aged just four months. Johann Carl Augustus Kruger, on the other hand, who was born in Prussia, also died in 1871 aged 69 and unmarried (PI, Reg. No. 4784 & 9245).

Many years later, the first church at Tabor threatened to collapse so, in 1884, the congregation decided to build its second church. The architect was Mr. John Montgomery of Penshurst and the contractors were Messrs. Collis and Son of Penshurst. John (or Jonathan) Montgomery, who described himself as a surveyor, rented the home of Dr Dickinson in Penshurst from 1884 until he died at the age of 60 in 1886 (SMR 1884 Rate Book, No. 313; PI, Reg. No. 10404). No other building in the Shire is known to have been designed by him. William Collis is listed in the Shire of Mount Rate Books as a carpenter from 1871 (SMR Rate Book, 1871 No. 286). The second church was dedicated on 10th July 1884. It was replaced, in turn, by the third and present church, becoming the school room which was in use until the late 1950s.

The third church was necessary because of the increasing size of the congregation. In 1910, "Mr. Ham[m]ond, architect of Hamilton, was instructed to draw up plans and specifications. A tender of 4,500 pounds was accepted and Mr. Frank Lodge was engaged to do the stonework. He had the reputation of being the best stone mason in the district" (Tabor Centenary). Indeed, the Lodge Brothers went on to build the Shrine of Remembrance and the spires of St Paul's [or St Patrick's] Cathedral in Melbourne. Frank Hammond who lived in Penshurst was an important and highly regarded architect and municipal officer in the Hamilton district for many years. Amongst many domestic, secular and religious buildings, he designed extensions to the Catholic churches in Hamilton and Penshurst and the Catholic convent in Coleraine. The foundation stone of the Lutheran church was laid on 25 May 1911 and the building was dedicated in March the next year. The organ from the second church was brought across to the new church. A new organ, made by Mr. Fred Taylor of Melbourne was installed in 1938 and rebuilt by Laurie Pipe Organs in 1967. The organ is now a Peace Memorial dedicated in 1967.

The date of construction of the first school at Tabor is not certain but it was probably in the early 1860s. It was a small weatherboard building with a simple verandah, which seems to have been both classroom and residence. The first teacher was Wilhelm Eltze who started in 1863. The school was a wooden building located near the site of the third church. It was shifted for the construction of the new church in 1911 but burnt down in 1948. The two Italian Cyresses, which survive were planted in its front garden. The longest serving teacher was Heinrich Zeunert from 1891 until his sudden death in 1932. He lived in a house, since demolished, which was separate from the complex (Janetzki, 39). The second church was converted into a school with the introduction of larger windows in two bays on the south side and the modification of the

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other windows. It was substantially refurbished in 1947. A teacher's residence was built in 1933, a single storey timber bungalow. The contractor was a Mr. Eddy. It was modernised in 1952.

The Tabor school was run from time to time in conjunction with other 'day-schools' at Lake Linlithgow and Purdeet. They were closed in 1954 under a program of consolidation. The Purdeet school was shifted to Tabor and was used as the girl's shelter shed for some time while the Lake Linlithgow school was moved to Minhamite and used as a Presbyterian church (Janetzki, 34). Other important teachers at Tabor and elsewhere were William Oster, Naomi Hoff, Irma Schultz, Myrtle Rentsch, Patricia Hermann and Helen Zweck. These were supported by assistant and relieving teachers, many of whom were women. As well as the usual curriculum, there was a strong emphasis on religious instruction, and extra-curricular activities such as music and publishing school newspapers. There was also a Sunday school held at Penshurst where services were held on a regular basis from 1931, firstly in the Penshurst Mechanics Institute hall and, from the early 1950s, in the Presbyterian church. The present school building, combining a new large hall with classrooms, was constructed in 1955-56. The school reached its highest enrolment of 77 children in 1955 (Janetzki, 23-4). It has since closed.

As with the three other Lutheran schools at Hochkirk, Warrayure and Lake Linlithgow the teaching of German language, history and culture during the First World War provoked antagonism and prejudice amongst the general population. There were calls to close the schools but an examination by an Education Department Inspector in 1916 found no disloyalty (Garden, 191). The campaign against the schools continued for some time after the end of the war. The Tabor school was closed during the Second World War but this was due to the acute shortage of teachers rather than any other reason (Janetzki, 22)

The first parsonage was built in 1909 for Pastor Otto Nichterlein, the first resident pastor. It was located near the Tabor railway siding. A conventional timber building, it was altered and extended over the years. For a while its detached timber sleep-out was used as the boys' shelter shed. With the construction of a new parsonage, it was finally moved to the property of the Rentsch family, Batesworth in Batesworth Lane, north of Penshurst where it survives. Albert Rentsch was chairman of the Building Committee. The committee commissioned the Warnambool architect, W. J. T. Walter, originally of Glenthompson, to design the new parsonage. Notwithstanding the acute shortage of building materials after the Second World War, the residence was built to a very high standard. Cream bricks from St Arnaud were used for the external walls contrasted with glazed brown bricks. The internal walls are Mount Gambier limestone. The floors are of hardwood and the joinery is maple. Other finishes and fittings were noted as exceptional and innovative at the time, such as cherry-red 'Laminex' in the kitchen. Also important for the congregation were the prints of religious pictures and Christian emblems. The house was dedicated in July 1952 when the first occupants were Pastor Wiebusch and his family.

The Board of Elders, other boards and committees did much of the administration of the congregation in association with the incumbent pastor. The broader cultural interests of the congregation included a choir, women's and youth groups, the Guild and the Luther Society which were both founded in 1925, the publication of a newsletter, the Tabor Tidings, and the screening of films. A combined Parents' Club was established for the Tabor and Lake Linlithgow schools in 1948. The congregation has always undertaken charitable works and is clearly devout in its adherence to Christian values and Lutheran principles.

Lutherans in south-eastern Australia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were seriously divided by doctrinal differences (Phillips in Lewis, 14-5). The personality of leaders seems to have influenced allegiances as well. There was a schism in 1846. The congregations in the Hamilton district continued to look to the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of South Australian led by Pastor Fritzsche Lobethal. Pastor Schurmann had died at Bethany in the Barossa Valley attending a Synod in 1893. The other Lutherans in

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Victoria were further divided but came together as the General Synod of 1876 only to split in 1884. The Lutheran Church Federation was formed in 1920 but still did not include the Hamilton congregations. It was not until 1966 that the two streams came together as the Lutheran Church of Australia.

The Tabor congregation must be seen in association not only with the original Evangelical Lutheran congregation at South Hamilton and the Gnadenhal, Purdeet and Lake Linlithgow districts but also the congregations at Warrayure, Byaduk and the very strong community at Tarrington, formerly Hochkirk. These relationships were always cordial and supportive. In the early twentieth century there was a direct connection with Lutherans who had migrated even further north when their children came to the Tabor school as boarders, living with relatives. More difficult was the relationship with the utopian settlement nearby at Herrnhut established on a mixture of Moravian and communist principles by Friedrich Johann Krumnow in the mid-1850s. Their differences were not just philosophical and doctrinal but also moral. "In Pastor Schurmann's eyes, the immoral actions of Krumnow and his communards defiled the good name of all the other Germans in the area" (Metcalf and Huf, 36-7). Most importantly, the 'prophetess', Maria Heller who had spent some time at Herrnhut, went across to the Tabor congregation, although eventually expelled from the Lutheran church (Metcalf and Huf, 82). Others also crossed over sapping the settlement of its younger members (Metcalf and Huf, 117). Several former Herrnhut communards are buried at Tabor and the last surviving member of the abandoned settlement, Johanna Rohr was buried at Tabor in 1911 (Metcalf and Huf, 123).

## **THEMATIC CONTEXT:**

Theme 6 Educating

6.2 Establishing schools

6.5 Educating people in remote places

Theme 8 Developing Australia's cultural life

8.6 Worshipping

8.6.1 Worshipping together

8.6.3 Founding Australian religious institutions

8.6.4 Making places for worship

~~8.12 Living in and around Australian homes~~

8.14 Living in the country and rural settlements

## **CONDITION:**

All the buildings are in very good condition.

## **INTEGRITY:**

Excellent degree of integrity as individual buildings and as a complex.

## **STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:**

What is significant?

The Bethlehem Church complex at Tabor, between Penshurst and Hamilton, dates from the mid-1850s when the general area south-east of Hamilton was settled by devout German Lutherans. It now comprises the second and third churches, the third school, the third manse and the cemetery as well as important trees. Many pastors have served the congregation, some of the more important being the first, Pastor C W Schurmann who was based at Hochkirk, later Tarrington and Pastor Otto Nichterlein, the first resident pastor. The first teacher was Wilhelm Eltze who started in 1863 and the longest serving was Heinrich Zeunert from 1891 until 1932. Johann Mibus sold the land to the congregation in 1860. The first building was a primitive church and classroom built in bluestone but long since demolished was dedicated in 1861. The first manse, a small timber cottage dated from about the same time, which has also been demolished

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although the two Italian Cypresses, which marked its gateway, survive. The second manse, a single storey timber house in the Federation style was relocated to a nearby property called Batesworth, the home of a parishioner where it survives. After the Second World War the parishioners built the third manse, designed by Warrnambool architect, W. J. T. Walter. It was dedicated in 1952. The second church survives, a rare example of the Romanesque style, although much altered for its role as school. John Montgomery, a surveyor cum architect living in Penshurst, designed it in 1884. The important Hamilton architect, Frank Hammond, designed the present church in 1911. Hammond, who was a long-serving and distinguished member of staff of the municipality of Hamilton, designed for a wide range of clients, including many successful Lutherans. The church survives with a very high degree of integrity including its organ, furnishings and memorials. It is in excellent condition. The cemetery in the west corner of the compound has been in use at least from the late 1860s and probably earlier. The important Warrnambool architect, W. J. T. Walter designed the present manse in 1952. The quality of its construction is remarkable for a period of serious building material shortage and reflects the dedication of the congregation. It is in excellent condition and substantially intact including its garden setting.

How is it significant?

The Bethlehem Lutheran Church complex is of historical, social and architectural significance to the communities of Tabor, Tarrington and Gnadenthal and to the southern Grampians Shire.

Why is it significant?

The Bethlehem Church complex is historically significant as the continuing spiritual, educational and social focus of one of the several branches of German Lutheran settlement in the Shire. It is architecturally significant because the sequence of churches, through the use of the Romanesque and Gothic revival style, reflects the spiritual values as much as the means of the congregation. Similarly, the sequence of schools reflects the congregation's efforts to maintain its cultural as well as spiritual identity. The Bethlehem congregation must be seen in association not only with the original Evangelical Lutheran congregation at South Hamilton and the Tarrington, Gnadenthal, Purdeet and Lake Linlithgow districts but also the congregations at Warrayure, Byaduk. The churches are of specific architectural significance as examples of the work of John Montgomery and Frank Hammond. The organ made by Fred Taylor is also significant.

## COMPARISON:

002 Lutheran Church, Bunbury St, Cavendish  
066 Zion Lutheran Church, Old Crusher Rd, Byaduk  
239 Herrnhut, Day's Lane (Tobin's Lane), Penshurst  
353 Gnadenthal Lutheran Cemetery, Day's Lane, Penshurst  
354 South Hamilton Lutheran Cemetery, Hamilton-Chatsworth Road, South Hamilton  
382 St Michael's Lutheran Church Complex, Hamilton Highway, Tarrington  
390 Lutheran Manse (Former), 8 Hiller Lane, South Hamilton  
391

**ASSESSED BY:** tfh

**ASSESSMENT DATE:**

7/02/2003

**EXISTING LISTINGS:**

**HERITAGE STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Include in VHR  Include in RNE  Include in Local Planning Scheme

No Recommendations for Inclusions

**REFERENCES:**

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<b>Author</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Page</b>
Don Garden	Tabor Centenary, 1853-1953	1953	
	Hamilton, A Western District History	1984	47, 83, 164, 190- 1, 219
John M Janetzki, ed.	Tabor, 1853-1976 The Pilgrimage of Life	1976	variou s
Timothy Hubbard Pty Ltd	City of Hamilton Conservation Study	1991	69-70
Walter Phillips, in Miles Lewis, ed.	Victorian Churches, their origins, their story & their architecture	1991	14 & 15
William J Metcalf & Elizabeth Huf	Herrnhut, Australia's First Utopian Commune	2002	36, 82, 117, 122- 7, 130-2