

# HERITAGE PLACE

**NAME OF PLACE:** NIGRETTA HOMESTEAD COMPLEX

**ADDRESS/LOCATION OF PLACE:** Nigretta Road WANNON

**STUDY NUMBER:** 457

**HERITAGE OVERLAY NUMBER:**

**OTHER NAME/S OF PLACE:** NIGRETTI, NIGRETTO, NAGERTU, THE UPPER FALLS

**PRECINCT:** outside

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA:** Southern Grampians Shire

**ALLOTMENT:** 1      **SECTION:** 4A      **PARISH:** PARISH OF BOCHARA

**ACCESS DESCRIPTION:**

CFA 431 D28; VicRoads 72 G4; located at the end of a long drive off the north side of Nigretta Falls Road and close to the south bank of the Wannon River.

**SIGNIFICANCE RATING:** Local



Nigretta Homestead, Nigretta, facade from NE

**Image Date:** 14/05/03

**EXTENT OF LISTING:**

To the extent of: 1. All the homestead building but excluding the interiors, the outbuildings and the immediate garden down to the edge of the River Wannon.

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## **PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:**

The new Nigretta homestead complex is located on the north side of the Wannon-Nigretta Falls Road off the Glenelg Highway, about 12.5kms north-west of Hamilton and overlooking the Wannon river. It is 3.5kms to the east of the site of the former Nigretta Homestead, now the Nigretta Falls Reserve.

The New Nigretta homestead is a large two-storey timber residence with picturesque massing and detailing in a loosely American bungalow style. The house is sited on rising ground, faces north and overlooks a picturesque stretch of the Wannon River. The walls are weatherboard with half-timbering in the gables. A porch of unpainted roughcast, partly enclosed as a sunroom, occupies the north-east corner and has a flight of steps leading to the front door. A polygonal turret dominates the north-east corner and another large dormer is located over the entrance. The front gable projects over an angled bay window below. A chimney divides the side gable. Windows have either six paned upper sashes or are divided into several panes where they are irregular. The principle rooms are on either side of the central hall and stairwell. A service wing extends to the rear. Bedrooms occupy the upper floor. The roof, which has wide eaves supported on timber brackets, is corrugated iron. The house is painted white and the roof is painted grey. There are outbuildings at the rear, the most important being a timber meathouse.

## **HISTORY:**

The Nigretta run was first taken up officially by Henry Baynton, a Hobart butcher in 1841 (B&K, 23 & 260). The squatting lease was taken over by William Affleck in 1843 and by Trevor Winter in 1845. In May 1848, Thomas Murphy took over the lease and he took out the Pre-emptive Right. It seems likely that he built the first substantial homestead, a stone cottage, probably in 1848 or soon after. James Bonwick in 1857 mentions "Murphy's Falls" as "Five miles further" from the Wannon Falls (Bonwick, 164). Angus Kennedy held Nigretta from May 1860 until June 1861 when Donald Cameron took it over. In August 1862, Alexander Cameron took it over until 1866, when the lease was forfeited.

John Cameron and his family occupied the homestead. They were Scottish Presbyterians who had come from South Australia where Alexander Cameron held the Penola run and where their first two children, Ewen and Even were born. They had six more sons, the last of whom was born at 'Negretu' but he died as an infant in 1863 (VPI, Reg. No. 8225 & 4289). John's wife Isabella, who was born in Argyle Scotland, died there aged 40 years in 1864 (VPI, Reg. No. 5889). Another son, Ewen Alexander died at the age of 14 in 1873 (VPI, Reg. No. 9851).

When Nigretta was put up for sale in 1861 as Nigretto and The Upper Falls, the property was described in some detail. "The improvements consist of a five-roomed substantial Stone Cottage, with verandah; garden well stocked with fruit-trees; Woolshed; Stock and Sheep Drafting-yards; an excellent Sheepwash and dip; together with every requisite for the efficient working of the station. The House, situated on a grassy knoll, commanding the Cataract over which the Wannon tumbles one hundred feet or more, has a deep and long reach of the river in front, extending above the Falls for about half a mile, and for picturesque and romantic beauty the aspect of the Homestead is unsurpassed in this or any other country" (HS, 16/02/1861). The cottage had fallen into ruin by the 1930s. The management committee demolished it in the 1960s. The stone from the house was used to create fireplaces and children's play equipment near the existing pear trees at Fisherman's bend, within the Nigretta Falls Reserve. The garden around it is now the Nigretta Falls reserve with some exotic trees remaining.

The earliest parish plan of Bochara available, dated 1879, indicates the land which became the modern reserve as the eastern third of the Nigretta pre-emptive right, in the name of Thomas Murphy. It consisted of 160 acres one third of which was north of the surveyed road which became the Nigretta Fall Road. Subsequently, a small portion of this third with access to the road was excised as a 'public park and recreation reserve'. It is now 8.1 hectares. Another reserve on the south side of the river, upstream and to the east, of just over 41 acres became

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private land. The adjacent land on the south side of the river, including the former reserve, was purchased by the squatter, Alexander Cameron. The earliest parish plan of Toolka, dated 1880, indicates a reserve of exactly 30 acres to the north of the falls 'for public purposes'. It was noted in the parish plan of 1918 as 'water reserve'. The adjacent land on the north side of the river was purchased from the Crown by the squatter, William C. Messer. The falls were also known as the Upper Wannon Falls.

William C Messer (or Mercer), for the most part an absentee owner, purchased the Nigretta property in 1868. He also owned Kanawalla and Springwood. He died in Scotland in 1889 and his executors continued to lease the runs during the 1890s. In 1907 the property was purchased by Messrs. Palmer and Moodie. Nigretta East was formed from Moodie's share (HHC, 'Retrospect'). In all this time it is presumed that the original cottage was occupied by managers, lease holders or abandoned.

In 1927 Nigretta was purchased by O M and G K Halford. The present homestead was built in 1929 by Reg Williams, the leading Hamilton builder. The design is said to have been based on houses in Kelowna, British Columbia, which were seen by the Halfords on a visit there in 1924. It is possible, however, that the architect was J Carlisle Robinson of Thompson Street, Hamilton, who is said to have been a Canadian. He designed Dunroe at Byaduk North which is similar. In 1950 the property was sold to John Hutton of Cheviot Hills, Penshurst. The land to the north of the river was acquired by the Soldier Settlement Commission and was divided into four farms (HHC, 'Retrospect').

## **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 building is in excellent condition. The interiors were not inspected.

## **INTEGRITY:**

High degree of integrity

## **STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:**

What is significant?

The new Nigretta Homestead complex is located on the north side of the Wannon-Nigretta Falls Road off the Glenelg Highway, about 12.5kms north-west of Hamilton overlooking the Wannon River. It is 3.5kms east of the former Nigretta Homestead. It is two-storeys, timber and loosely American bungalow in style with picturesque siting, massing and details. The house was built in 1929 for the new owners, O M and G K Halford. Reg. Williams, the leading Hamilton builder, built the house and the architect was probably J Carlisle Robinson of Hamilton. It is said to have been influenced by Canadian houses. It can be compared with Dunroe at North Byaduk which was designed and built by them in 1935. The new house was necessary after the subdivision of Nigretta by the previous owners and because the original homestead had fallen into ruin. The new homestead is in excellent condition and retains a high degree of integrity.

How is it significant?

The Nigretta Falls Reserve is of historical and architectural significance to the Southern Grampians Shire.

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Why is it significant?

The new Nigretta Homestead complex is of historical significance as the continuation of the early and important former Nigretta squatting run, demonstrating the changed circumstances of the twentieth century. It is of architectural significance as one of the few designs of local architect, J Carlisle Robinson and as the work of important local builder, Reg. Williams. It is of interest for a direct link with West Coast American domestic architecture while continuing the Picturesque tradition of the original homestead.

## COMPARISON:

152 Dunroe, Hamilton-Port Fairy Road, North Byaduk

**ASSESSED BY:** tfh

**ASSESSMENT DATE:**

09-Jul-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
Department of Crown Lands & Survey	Parish of Bochara, County of Dundas	1879	
Department of Justice Victoria	Pioneer Index Victoria 1836 - 1888	2001	
Donald Garden	Hamilton, A Western District History	1984	var.
Hamilton History Centre	Nigretta File'Retrospect'	n.d.	
James Bonwick, and C E Sayers, ed.	Western Victoria, Its Geography geology and Social Condition	1857	164
R V Billis and A S Kenyon	Pastoral Pioneers of Port Phillip	1974	var.