



REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES - ASSESSMENT DOCUMENTATION

11. ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

The criteria adopted by the Heritage Council in November 1996 have been used to determine the cultural heritage significance of the place.

11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE*

Tom Collins' House is aesthetically significant as an example of a modest timber house of simple yet pleasing form and design typical of those constructed during the first decade of the twentieth century. (Criterion 1.1)

There is considerable aesthetic value in the interior decorative works such as the copper panels which are set into the fireplace surrounds and various doors in the house. These panels exhibit artistic excellence of design and execution. (Criterion 1.2)

The house has been relocated to a lightly wooded parkland setting which creates a pleasing semi-rural ambience to the place. (Criterion 1.3)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

Tom Collins' House has historic value as one of the early houses erected in the district following the establishment of the Perth-Fremantle railway line. The re-location of the house from its original site in Servetus Street is indicative of the developments and changes to the district due to population growth and the volume of vehicular traffic along major routes such as Servetus Street. (Criterion 2.1)

The place is historically significant for its association with the Australian writer Joseph Furphy who wrote under the pen name Tom Collins. His major work *Such is Life* (published 1903) was considered an Australian literary classic. Joseph Furphy built the house and spent the remaining five years of his life there. (Criterion 2.3)

The decorative copper panels produced by Furphy's daughter-in-law, Mattie Furphy, are important for their association with the history and practice of the visual arts in Western Australia. (Criterion 2.4)

11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

* For consistency, all references to architectural style are taken from Apperly, Richard; Irving, Robert and Reynolds, Peter *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present*, Angus & Robertson, North Ryde, 1989.

11. 4. SOCIAL VALUE

Tom Collins' House has value to the community as the house which was built and lived in by the renowned Australian writer, Tom Collins. (Criterion 4.1)

The place has been the headquarters, and first home, of the Fellowship of Australian Writers (WA) since 1949 after it was offered to the Fellowship by Joseph Furphy's son, Samuel Furphy. The intention was the house should be a memorial to Joseph Furphy. (Criterion 4.1)

Tom Collins' House has developed into one of the most significant museums of Australian literature in the country. (Criterion 4.1)

The place has value to the Australian literary community which considers it to be unique in Australia as a place built by a writer and which has evolved into a significant literary museum as a tribute to that writer. (Criterion 4.1)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12.1. RARITY

Tom Collins' House has considerable rarity value because of the unique and distinctive beaten copper panels which have been incorporated into the fireplace surrounds and doors. These panels are uncommon aspects of the cultural heritage of Western Australia. (Criterion 5.1)

The house is considered by the literary community to be unique in Australia as a place built by a writer and which has evolved into a significant literary museum as a tribute to that writer. (Criterion 5.1)

12.2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

Tom Collins' House is a typical example of a 'working man's cottage' built during the first decade of the twentieth century. It is representative of the timber and iron houses which were built before building by-laws prohibited the erection of timber houses in much of the metropolitan area. (Criterion 6.1)

12.3 CONDITION

Tom Collins' House is in excellent condition. The place has been refurbished in accordance with a heritage conservation plan. At present (April 1998) the house is without a garden setting.

12.4 INTEGRITY

Tom Collins' House was originally built as a private home and retains the appearance of a private home; however, this function changed when the house became the headquarters of the Fellowship of Australian Writers (WA) and was renamed *Tom Collins' House*. Certain interior changes were made to accommodate this new function, with these changes in turn becoming part of the historical and social development of the place. The conservation and continuation of the place as the headquarters of the Fellowship has ensured the long time viability and sustainability of its identified cultural and heritage values. The place has moderate integrity.

12.5 AUTHENTICITY

As a re-located place *Tom Collins' House* has moderate to high authenticity. During the history of the house certain parts of its fabric had to be replaced such as rotting weatherboards. It is possible that sheets of corrugated roofing iron were also replaced from time to time. Such repairs and replacements are part of the life of timber houses. Before relocation, *Tom Collins' House* was in a bad state of repair. With relocation the place was re-roofed with zincalume and a number of rotting boards replaced. The brick fireplace and chimney has been reconstructed. The place has been repainted with colours determined from paint scrapes.

The site is not original; however, the house has been relocated with the same east-west alignment and facing east towards the road. The open bushland setting with some nearby residential development is similar to

the descriptions of what the original site was like before the pressures of population growth and the development of Servetus Street.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentary evidence has been compiled by Robyn Taylor and Dorothy Erickson, (Erickson & Taylor) Research Historians. The physical evidence has been compiled by Murray Slavin, Architect.

The proposed curtilage for *Tom Collins' House* within Allen Park is attached. This curtilage has been established for several reasons:

- (i) in order to provide equivalent outdoor space for the Fellowship to hold its annual Corroborees;
- (ii) to allow for the eventual building of a caretaker's cottage. The building of the cottage has been agreed to by the City of Nedlands and has been incorporated into the Allen Park Management Plan; and
- (iii) to provide a setting for the house.

It is not proposed to have a fence separating *Tom Collins' House* from its surroundings; however, some areas will be delineated by plantings and some minor fencing.

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Tom Collins House comprises a weatherboard cottage built in 1907 by the writer Joseph Furphy (Tom Collins) in a style typical of a number of timber houses erected during the first decade of the twentieth century in the Fremantle and Perth areas. Since 1949 the house has been the headquarters of the Fellowship of Australian Writers (WA). It was originally located at 9 Servetus Street, Cottesloe¹ before being moved in 1996 to its present location in Allen Park, Swanbourne. Other structures which were removed with the house include the garage (c.1940s) and a brick outdoor lavatory.

Joseph Furphy and his wife Leonie (nee Germain) arrived in Western Australia from Victoria on 20 January 1905 to join their sons Felix and Samuel and their families. The sons had arrived about two years earlier and had established the Furphy foundry in Grey Street, Fremantle in 1903.²

The sons were paying high rents for their houses in Fremantle and, as the families had no reserves of cash if the business declined or failed, a decision was made to establish their own homes. Joseph undertook to find suitable residential blocks on coastal land north of Fremantle on which to build. Adjacent blocks in Clement Street, Claremont (now Swanbourne), were purchased in the newly subdivided Langoulant holding, and Joseph set about clearing the land and building temporary

¹ The suburban address for *Tom Collins House* in Servetus Street was historically given as Swanbourne, even though with boundary changes it was located in Cottesloe. The house is now within the City of Nedlands in the suburb of Swanbourne.

² Lang, J. *At the Toss of a Coin - Joseph Furphy: the Western Link*, (Tom Collins Press, Perth, 1987) p.1. Lang's book states the foundry was established in March 1903. The bible belonging to Emily Main (Joseph Furphy's grand-daughter) which records the births of Joseph and Leonie's grand-children, refers to Felix Furphy leaving Victoria on 24 June 1903. The Victorian Furphys were well known for their foundry which had produced the water tanks which serviced the trenches during the World War One.

galvanised iron shacks (which he called 'hovels') or skillions. These consisted of two rooms and a back porch, though the home for Felix and his wife, their four children and mother-in-law needed to be larger and the family's move was delayed until they could afford something more substantial. According to Joseph's letters this was a 'wild bush spot' with scrub 'much thicker than anywhere about Rushworth or Whroo'.³

In 1906, Felix and Leonie sold their allotments in Clement Street to Sam. Felix then bought two allotments in Servetus Street near the railway station, and Leonie and her daughter Sylvia bought adjoining blocks.⁴ Joseph then started clearing the land.

By 1907, Felix's home at 5 Servetus Street was completed. According to Jean Lang's history, it was built for Felix by Mr Bob Seed of Claremont.⁵ Joseph started constructing his own home at 9 Servetus Street.

For my part I would have preferred a skillion; but I had to yield to pressure; so that the house will be a half-finished villa-fronted cottage, containing at first two rooms and a passage (20 x 13 and 13 x 13, with 4ft passage), planned for 2 more rooms and a verandah.⁶

Felix's daughter Emily who was about 13 years of age at the time witnessed the house's construction which she described in a legal document written in 1977.⁷

The boys, that is my father and Sam Furphy, helped him to put in the stumps, but Joseph designed the wooden building himself, constructing sections of timber framework on the ground. As lifting these into position was too heavy for one man, he enlisted the aid of Thomas Reinfeld, a German builder who lived in Balfour Street just behind Servetus Street. Mr Reinfeld also helped him with the finer cabinet work, such as making the window frames, etc. Joseph constructed the roof timbers and put on the galvanised iron roof. The walls were of weatherboard, unlined.

Originally the house at 9 Servetus Street had only four rooms, with a straight-through passage, a front verandah but no porch. The front door thus faced east and opened into a passage that ran the full length of the house to the back door.⁸

Recollections of the interior of the house, Joseph's writing den, which he erected in the back garden and from which he could see the 'bright flush of the Rottnest light'⁹, and the garden, have been given by Alva Furphy, Felix Furphy's second son. According to Jean Lang, who married Alva and subsequently wrote a book about Joseph Furphy and the house, Alva

³ Barnes, John, *The Order of Things, A Life of Joseph Furphy*, (Oxford University Press, Australia, 1990,) p.356.

⁴ There are some discrepancies in the information about the purchasing of the allotments in Clement Street and Servetus Street provided in the stories told by Jean Lang and John Barnes. According to Lang, four allotments were bought in Servetus Street, with Felix buying three of them, when the Clement Street allotments were being purchased. Lang, p.7.

⁵ Lang, p.7.

⁶ Barnes, p.370.

⁷ This document was produced to prove that Joseph Furphy had in fact built and lived in the house at 9 Servetus Street.

⁸ Statement made by Mrs Emily Main, dated 25 February 25 1977. Copies held by the Fellowship of Australian Writers and the National Trust of Australia (WA). pp.1-2.

⁹ Lang, op. cit., p.17.

'recollects how the rooms were first calsomined with a special mixture concocted by his grandfather.'¹⁰

Joseph Furphy planted vegetables, grapevines, trees and shrubs. The fruit trees, a mulberry and a fig were still bearing fruit in 1986.¹¹ On the morning of Joseph's death, when he collapsed and died outside the Clement Street house, he had been staking and tying up one of his trees. In 1996, cuttings were taken from the fig and mulberry trees and have been successfully struck for transplanting into a garden once this is established at Allen Park.

After Joseph's death in 1912 and before his wife Leonie's death in 1936, the title deeds to the house were transferred to Sam's wife, Martha (Mattie) Furphy, on 19 July 1935.¹² In 1939 Sam and Mattie moved into 9 Servetus Street after selling the Clement Street home. The writing den was used as a wash-house, and renovations and alterations were made to the house.

According to Emily Main's legal statement:

Sam and Mattie Furphy shifted to 9 Servetus Street from their place in Clement Street in 1939, making some alterations to the house. They built the small porch at the front with the leadlight window so that the door now faced north, but the passage still ran as before. They also renovated the interior, adding the copper panelled doors and the overmantel which had previously been in their Clement Street home... Sam and Mattie also added the garage at Servetus Street, but the basic design of *Tom Collins House* remained very much as Joseph had designed and built it.¹³

The Clement Street House - links with furnishings in *Tom Collins' House*.

Between 1907 and 1912,¹⁴ Sam and his wife Mattie built the substantial timber home on their land in Clement Street (cnr Pine Close) which still stands largely unaltered today. Joseph's letters indicate he had some involvement with this house, and had helped Mattie by making pitch boxes on which she could beat out the copper panels which were to adorn five doors, and the fireplace surrounds in the living room. These panels were later transferred to 9 Servetus Street and inserted into another fireplace of similar design.¹⁵ Mattie was a student of J. W. L. Linton, a renowned artist and craftsman who lectured at the Perth Technical School. An example of her student work, a 1906 drawing of the overmantel panel, had won a prize when it was exhibited in London. Her copper panels for the doors were based on motifs depicting grapes and grapevines, the native quandong tree, and kangaroo-paws. The quandong design, which appears to be a local version of the Art Nouveau fruiting tree motif much used at the time in England and in the eastern states, was also incorporated, in a simplified form, in the timber detailing of the Clement Street home living room. The front vestibule has stained glass windows with the Mangles kangaroo-paw motif. The panels in the fireplace surrounds

10 Lang, op. cit., p.11.

11 Lang, op. cit., p.11.

12 Certificate of Title, Volume 410, Folio 4.

13 Legal statement by Emily Main, p.3, point 10.

14 The Clement Street house has not been dated. A letter by Joseph Furphy indicates Mattie was working on the copper panels to go into the timber fireplace surrounds in 1905. This suggests the so called 'hovels' that Furphy built may not be as primitive as he suggests.

15 The two fireplaces are very similar but not identical in design.

included rondels with lion heads, while the large central panel depicts two wyverns (griffin type creatures) facing each other.

Joseph Furphy described the making of the copper panels by Mattie in a letter he wrote to his friend Miss Kate Baker in October 1905:

...for the last couple of weeks Mattie has been spending an hour or so every day at her Art work. Not painting, sad to say, but embossing copper panels and placquets for her over-mantle. One panel of that work - about a yard square - took her nearly a year to belt into shape, and the shape was a couple of hideous wyverns glaring at each other. Which is supposed to be the highest Art.¹⁶

Other examples of Mattie's work such as the fine copper and enamel mirror frame, and a pair of brass and copper candle sconces are part of the *Tom Collins' House* furnishings.

Mattie Furphy died on 25 July 1948 and probate of her will was granted to her husband Sam with the title of the house going to him in January 1949. Sam wanted to move back to Victoria, but he was concerned that the house should remain and not be demolished. He established the Joseph Furphy (Tom Collins) bequest with the University of Western Australia as a way of honouring his father's memory, and after discussions with members of the WA Branch of the Fellowship of Australian Writers, a Deed of Gift of the house was passed to the Fellowship to be used as their headquarters.

Repairs were undertaken, and on 25 September 1949 a ceremony took place in the front garden to officially open and dedicate the house by George Alexander Currie, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Western Australia. It was then decided to make the rear section of the house available rent-free to a caretaker, this included 'an all-electric kitchen, lounge-room, bedroom, bathroom and vestibule... and to preserve the front two rooms for memorial purposes'.¹⁷ The Fellowship then began to acquire many significant items which were added to the collection of Joseph Furphy memorabilia such as the typewriter he used to type his novel *Such is Life*. Another item was the jarrah bureau, hand painted by Henrietta Drake-Brockman in c. 1920 for her mother Dr Jull, which was presented to the Fellowship after the house became the Fellowship's headquarters. Apart from many first edition books, photographs, paintings and sketches, a number of pieces were placed in the grounds of *Tom Collins House* such as a Furphy water tank, a sun dial said to have been cast at the Fremantle Furphy foundry, memorial seats, and planters. The grounds of *Tom Collins' House* were also used for the Fellowship's annual outdoor Corroborees.

In 1956, Marshall Clifton was appointed Honorary Architect. During the 1960s, he undertook alterations to the interior of the house to increase the space in order to accommodate the Fellowship's meetings and social functions. The rear skillion verandah was also extended to improve the caretakers' quarters and new toilets erected at the back of the house. In 1993, one former bedroom was converted into a library.

¹⁶ Lang, p.29-30.

¹⁷ Ewers, J. "The Tom Collins House", in *Walkabout*, 1 July 1952.

When *Tom Collins' House* was built, Servetus Street was not much more than a dirt track with few other houses in the vicinity. Over the years it was to develop into a major road linking up with the West Coast Highway. The planned widening of Servetus Street (as part of the Metropolitan Region Scheme formulated in the 1970s), and the proposed reclamation of homes and land along the western side, had for many years placed the future of *Tom Collins' House* in doubt.

To bring the heritage values of the house to the public's attention, *Tom Collins' House* was submitted to the National Trust of Australia (WA) for classification. The house was classified on 6 August, 1973 and entered on the Register of the National Estate on 21 March 1978.¹⁸ It was registered on the State Register of Heritage Places on an interim basis on 16 June 1992.¹⁹

In 1994, the Fellowship of Australian Writers (WA) applied for and received a National Estate Grant to undertake a Heritage Assessment and Conservation Plan. The Plan sought to identify the heritage values of *Tom Collins' House* and its site, and the impact on those values if the house was relocated. Recommendations regarding re-location were included in the Conservation Plan's management guidelines. In 1996, *Tom Collins' House* was moved to Allen Park, Swanbourne, a public reserve within the City of Nedlands,²⁰ and conservation work commenced. The fireplace surrounds and doors with the beaten panels, which had been removed prior to relocation, were placed on temporary exhibition at the Art Gallery of Western Australia. They have now been re-installed.

A celebration to mark the return of the Fellowship to *Tom Collins' House* was held on Sunday 23 November 1997. The official opening of the *Tom Collins' House* Writers' Centre was undertaken by Professor John Barnes, a recognised authority on Joseph Furphy, on Sunday 29 March, 1998.

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Before relocation, *Tom Collins House* was situated on a traditional 'quarter acre' block (1012 square metres) on the west side of Servetus Street. The street frontage had a picket fence and overgrown vegetation behind the fence. This partly obscured the house from view while affording some protection from the traffic noise of Servetus Street. The house was set well back on its block which sloped down from the road with a driveway on the north side of the block. A fence and various planting separated the drive from the vacant lot next door where a house had been demolished some years ago. A deserted house stood on the southern side of *Tom Collins' House*. The driveway led to a fibro-cement garage which was forward of the house. Between the house and the garage a gate and side passage led to the back of the house and yard. There were no other structures in the backyard apart from a brick toilet located near the south-west corner of the house. The place contained a number of

¹⁸ The place was removed from the Register of the National Estate on 9 December 1997 after the buildings had been relocated.

¹⁹ HCWA database.

²⁰ Reserve No. 7804, originally gazetted on 12 July 1901. The name Allen Park was gazetted on 6 May 1983 after a former Councillor, Mr Jack Allen.

mature tree plantings. These included a Chinese pepper in the front yard, an almond tree on the south-east corner of the house, a ficus on the south-west corner of the house, a mulberry on the north-west corner, and a large flame tree in the rear yard. Remnants of the fig tree which had been planted by Joseph Furphy could be found in the overgrown back section of the yard. Generally, there was an 'open park land' ambience to the grounds due to the lack of other plantings. Because of the heavy traffic in Servetus Street the open grounds in front of the house were used for parking. Various objects such as a memorial seat, planters, a sun dial and a Furphy water tank were also located in the front yard. A lattice fence on the south-east side of the house formed a light screen separating the front from the side and back sections of the grounds.

Tom Collins' House is now located in a lightly wooded section of Allen Park facing east towards Kirkwood Road. The former east-west alignment of the house has been retained on its new site, and by coincidence, the land also has a gentle slope down from the road. A pedestrian walkway and cycle path runs roughly parallel to Kirkwood Road between the road and the house which is set well back from the road. Unlike its former setting, the house has no enclosing fence or screening vegetation, and is therefore much exposed on all sides. It is envisaged that future landscaping will return something of the domestic ambience to the place which it has lost through its relocation into a park setting. Also, because of the current open nature of the house and grounds, the garden furniture has been kept in storage.

An extension of Wood Street runs along the north side of the house, but this is only vaguely defined. The road is a dirt track within an open space which provides access from the road to a nearby Council owned house. There are mature trees on the site but virtually no undergrowth. The surrounding areas about *Tom Collins' House* is covered with a thick layer of leaf litter and mulch with a cleared space of bare earth about the house. To the south-west corner of the house is a large sump area. The above-mentioned Council house, of uncertain date, has a garage and fenced garden and is located to the north-west of *Tom Collins' House*. Another Council owned house is located further away to the south-west beyond the sump.²¹ Both houses are sympathetic with *Tom Collins' House* in their form and scale. To the west and north behind the houses the park rises into hilly sand dune and bush areas. The east side of Kirkwood Road facing *Tom Collins' House* is residential. Adjacent to the wooded area of Allen Park are playing fields which extend to Clement Street which acts as a southern boundary. The Clement Street house faces these playing fields.

A metal sign board which stood at the entrance of the driveway to *Tom Collins' House* in Servetus Street has been located in front of the cottage. The original fibro-cement and iron garage has been relocated behind the house, rather than to the north side of it, because of the proximity of the Wood Street extension. The outdoor brick WC, while still to the rear of the house, had to be aligned differently because of the proximity of the

²¹ The Fellowship proposes to build a new caretaker's house to the north-west of *Tom Collins House* and together with the existing caretaker's house, it is envisaged that a small residential precinct will be established.

sump area. A new water tank has been installed on the southern side of the house outside the kitchen and bathroom areas. The tank was installed as a fire protection measure and at present is used purely for storage of mains water. In the future the tank will be connected to the guttering to collect rain water.²²

Externally *Tom Collins' House* is a single-storey timber framed dwelling. It has an asymmetric front with a projecting front room and verandah. The design is typical of a number of timber cottages constructed in the Perth metropolitan area during the first decade of this century. The house is raised on stumps, with the projecting front of the house kept above the ground.²³ It is clad with jarrah weatherboards, painted cream white with green trims to windows, doors, guttering and barge-board. The new zincalume roof and shelter hoods over the front and side windows are painted red. The front verandah and steps are natural jarrah. The house and roof forms reveals that the front rooms were constructed first with subsequent additions added over the years. These include the enclosure (between 1939-1948) of part of the front verandah to form an entrance vestibule resulting in the front door facing north instead of east. A lead light window has been inserted into the east wall. The rear of the house has a sloping ramp with railing along the back of the house. The brick toilet (c. 1939-67) has a section of pressed metal facework attached above the door. This is an unusual feature.

From the vestibule there is a central passage through the house. This passage had been widened in 1967-68 by the removal of sections of the internal walls. The former living room/meeting room is of generous proportions with good light provided by side and front sash windows. The front window has side lights. Special glazing has been installed in the windows to reduce UV levels. The walls are of plasterboard with decorated cornices. The room has timber plate rails which are used to support photographs and other items in the Fellowship's collection. The jarrah floor boards are exposed. The projecting fireplace with the timber frame and copper panel insets is located at the west end of the room. There is a hatch in the west wall which opens into the kitchen.

The room to the right of the central passage is used as an office. Three copper panelled doors have been joined to create folding doors which can be used to enclose the office or be opened up to increase the internal floor area with the meeting room and passage. These doors with their decorative panels of grape vines and kangaroo paws with finger plates create a striking effect. Another copper panelled door separates these areas from the middle section of the house which contains the kitchen and the library. The doors to this section and the library bear the quandong motifs. Another door leads to the back section of the house which had formerly been the caretaker's quarters. On the left side there is a bathroom, (with restored chromium fittings over the bath tub), and another bathroom for

²² Apparently the water pressure from the main water supply can be reduced by up to 50% during bush fire fighting. Hence a storage tank was recommended as a back-up protective measure.

²³ Over the years, before relocation, the level of the land in front of the house had built up due to the downward slope from Servetus Street. This area had been concreted contributing to the rising damp problem evident in the rotting weatherboards.

the disabled which replaces the former brick toilets which had been constructed as additions in 1968. As these additions were considered to have low level significance and were unsympathetic to the overall nature and appearance of the timber cottage, a decision was made to exclude these in the relocation. There was also the requirement to provide facilities for the disabled within the house. The remainder of the house consists of a central working area with a door leading to an outside ramp and a store room. This back area will no longer function as caretaker's quarters and will be used by the Fellowship.

Security systems have been installed with smoke detectors and external sprinklers.

The removal of *Tom Collins' House* and subsequent conservation work has been carried out using funds from the sale of the Servetus Street site. The painting was undertaken by students from the Plumbers and Painters Institute, and interior carpentry and plaster work by students from Balga TAFE. This work was supervised by the staff of both institutions and the conservation architects.

13.3 REFERENCES

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13.4 FURTHER RESEARCH

For comparison it would be useful to compare the design and original ground floor plan of *Tom Collins' House* with timber cottages of similar date and design, to determine whether Joseph Furphy had used a standard pattern and what alterations and additions he may have made to this.

The design of the fireplace surrounds could be researched further. The differences between the Clement Street and *Tom Collins' House* fireplaces indicates this wasn't a prefabricated item.