

# 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.

# PRINCIPAL AUSTRALIAN HISTORIC THEME(S)

- 3.8.7 Building and maintaining roads
- 7.6.1 Developing local government authorities

# HERITAGE COUNCIL OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA THEME(S)

- 401 Government & politics
- 404 Community services & utilities

# 11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE\*

*Irwin Roads Board Office (fmr)* is valued for the pleasing use of materials, scale and proportion of the building, and the setting, that contributes to the character of the town of Dongara. (Criterion 1.1)

*Irwin Roads Board Office (fmr)*, together with the well and Moreton Bay Fig trees, forms a significant cultural environment associated with the early civic development of the Irwin Roads Board and the town of Dongara. (Criterion 1.3)

*Irwin Roads Board Office (fmr)*, together with the well and Moreton Bay Fig trees, is an important part of the historic precinct of Dongara. Its aesthetic character, together with those of the other buildings within the precinct, collectively form a significant streetscape. (Criterion 1.4)

*Dongara School Master's House* is an important part of the historic precinct of Dongara. Its aesthetic character, together with those of the other buildings within the precinct, collectively form a significant streetscape. (Criterion 1.4)

# 11.2 HISTORIC VALUE

*Irwin Roads Board Office (fmr)* was constructed in 1910, to house the Roads Board in the developing Irwin River district. (Criterion 2.1)

The well situated beside *Irwin Roads Board Office (fmr)* was part of Dongara's first public water supply, established in 1906. (Criterion 2.2)

For consistency, all references to architectural style are taken from Apperly, R., Irving, R. and Reynolds, P. A *Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: Styles and terms from 1788 to the present*, Angus & Robertson, North Ryde, 1989.

The Moreton Bay fig trees, which dominate the site, are part of the larger street planting undertaken by the Roads Board in 1906, and are an early significant example of rural town beautification. The choice of species is typical of Paradise style public gardens of the period. (Criterion 2.2)

*Irwin Roads Board Office (fmr)* was associated with the Irwin Roads Board and local government in Dongara from 1910 to 1958. (Criterion 2.3)

# 11.3 SCIENTIFIC VALUE

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# 11.4 SOCIAL VALUE

Irwin Roads Board Office (fmr) is highly valued by the local community as a place of early local government. This is demonstrated by the integrity of the front verandah restoration and the ongoing use made of the place as a commercial premise. (Criterion 4.1)

*Irwin Roads Board Office (fmr)* is valued for the variety of community uses it has housed since 1966, including an RSL meeting place, gift shop, Red Cross shop and music studio. (Criterion 4.1)

*Irwin Roads Board Office (fmr)* contributes to the local community's sense of place for its historical associations with the development of the town and shire and the aesthetics of its construction and setting. (Criterion 4.2)

### 12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

# 12.1 RARITY

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# 12.2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

*Irwin Roads Board Office (fmr)* is a representative example of a Federation vernacular style regional roads board office, established in 1910, and its subsequent development. (Criterion 6.1)

# 12.3 CONDITION

*Irwin Roads Board Office (former)* is in fair condition. Some maintenance takes place but it is on an adhoc basis.

### 12.4 INTEGRITY

*Irwin Roads Board Office (former)* has provided many functions since it was last used as the Roads Board office in 1958. The place has adapted to changing needs with no alterations to the structure or fabric. It has a moderate degree of integrity.

# 12.5 AUTHENTICITY

There is considerable evidence of the original fabric of *Irwin Roads Board Office* (*fmr*). Changes have included rendering of the rear brick wall, painting of the front stone wall, covering of the two front windows, removal of the rear lean-to roof and brick toilet, and reconstruction of the front verandah. The place has a moderate degree of authenticity.

# 13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentary evidence has been compiled by Irene Sauman, Historian. The physical evidence has been compiled by Laura Gray, Conservation Consultant.

Curtilage comprises an area 19.5 metres wide and 12.5 metres deep, fronting Point Leander Drive on the west with Memorial Park on the north, and encompassing the building, the well on the north side and two Moreton Bay Fig trees on the southwest. The site comprises parts of Reserve 27587 and former Reserve 9922.

# 13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Irwin Roads Board Office (fmr) is a one-room stone, brick timber and iron building constructed, in 1910, for the Irwin Roads Board by builder George Carter. In 1966, the place was granted to the RSL who used it as a meeting place for a number of years. Since 1972, the place has been used for commercial purposes, as a gift shop and a Red Cross shop and, for many years to date, as a music studio.

The district along the lower Irwin River was initially taken up as pastoral leases. In 1852, 100-acre agricultural blocks were surveyed, the first taken up in 1859, when there was no more land available in the settled Greenough district, twenty miles away. Within a decade, the seventy-one surveyed blocks had been occupied. The town of Dongara developed beside the river, with a store established at one of the five river fords. A mill was built in 1865, and a hotel shortly after. The district was serviced by shipping at nearby Port Denison. The Midland Railway line between Perth and Geraldton was constructed, with the Walkaway-Mingenew section through Dongara completed in 1891. This gave greater impetus to the development of the town and district.

In the early days of settlement, Government ordinances provided for the establishment of roads committees, where local people took responsibility for making and maintaining roads in their district, with a little financial assistance from the Government. The General Road Trust had overall control of the committees, and was responsible for the roads in the metropolitan area. In 1847, a central Board of Works replaced the General Road Trust.<sup>3</sup> With the introduction of convicts in 1850, the road system in the State was greatly extended as gangs of convicts built new roads and bridges and improved those already existing. Representative Government was conferred on the colony in 1870, and this was followed a year later by the Municipal Institutions Act which allowed towns and rural areas to take control of their own affairs.<sup>4</sup> The Act established Perth and seven other towns as municipalities, and set up eighteen Roads Boards to construct and maintain roads in designated Districts in the rest of the State.<sup>5</sup>

Bain, Mary Albertus, 'The Irwin Story', *Early Days*, Vol. 6 Part 5, pp. 7-21.

Gunzberg, Adrian & Austin, Jeff *Rails Through the Bush*, Light Railway Research Society of Australia, Melbourne, 1997, p. 206.

The Roads Act, 1847, Statutes of Western Australia, No 10, 1847.

De Garis, B. K. 'Political Tutelage, 1829-1879', In Stannage, C. T. (ed) *A New History of Western Australia*, UWA Press, Perth, 1981, pp. 297-325. Prior to 1870, members of the WA Legislative Council were appointed on the Governor's recommendation and remained on the Council for life, unless they left the colony permanently. In 1870, for the first time, elections were held in which the people of WA elected half the Council members.

Municipal Institutions Act, Statutes of Western Australia, No. 6, 1871.

Roads Boards received their funds from Government grants and vehicle licences. The *Cart and Carriage Licensing Act, 1876* gave Roads Boards the power to grant licenses for carts, wagons, drays, carriages and traps, meaning that those who used the roads contributed towards their upkeep.<sup>6</sup>

In 1902, a new Roads Act set out in detail the powers and responsibilities of Roads Boards. To be a member of the Board, one had to be an adult male of British or Australian nationality and the owner or occupier of rateable land in the district. To be an elector, one had to fulfil the same requirements, except for being male. Women could vote in a Roads Board election if they were the head of a household, but they could not stand for membership. Each elector was allotted from one to four votes depending on the value of his or her property. The duty of the Board was to make and maintain roads and bridges, construct and maintain wells, bores and tanks along the lines of roads, provide drainage from the roads, and plant and maintain trees and shrubs on roadsides and in public places. The Roads Board could get its revenue from rent of Board property or reserves under its control, from licences, registration, fines and penalties, and from general rates. Boards also received a regular annual grant from the Government.<sup>7</sup>

When first established on 25 January 1871, the Irwin Roads Board District covered some 89,000 square miles (230,500 sq kilometres). It ran north and south from latitude 29 to latitude 31, with the Indian Ocean as the western boundary and the South Australian border as the eastern boundary.<sup>8</sup> As with other Roads Boards, it received an initial grant of £400 with which to begin its work. The first president of the Board was Samuel F. Moore. The Boards' headquarters were at Dongara, and Board meetings were held in the newly constructed Court House. In 1881, the Mechanics Institute hall was built, and the Roads Board is believed to have moved its meetings to that building.<sup>9</sup> At some time, the Board reverted to holding its meetings at the Courthouse, as it was meeting there in 1910 when *Irwin Roads Board Office* (fmr) was constructed.<sup>10</sup>

As well as works financed with funds generated locally, and with the annual grant, Irwin Roads Board also applied for grants for special works. The Board received a grant of £700 in 1884, £200 of which was a special grant for construction of a bridge over the Irwin River at Mountain's Crossing.  $^{11}$  In 1910, the annual grant was £190. $^{12}$ 

In 1906, the Roads Board planted Moreton Bay and Port Jackson fig trees along both sides of Main Street (later Moreton Terrace) and along sections of other streets including the central portion of Point Leander Drive. The trees cost sixteen shillings and fourpence, and were planted by Robert Russ, an employee of the Roads Board.<sup>13</sup> The choice of these trees, with their rich green foliage and grand scale, is typical of Paradise style public gardens of the period, which demonstrate a desire to be elsewhere by transplanting

<sup>6</sup> The Cart & Carriage Licensing Act, 1876, Statutes of Western Australia.

<sup>7</sup> Roads Acts, 1902, Statutes of Western Australia.

<sup>8</sup> West Australian Government Gazette, 1871, p. 11.

Ellery, Kit & Bunney, Ron, *History of Dongara and the Shire of Irwin: 1839-1971*, Shire of Irwin, 1971, pp. 8 & 26; Bain, Mary Albertus, 'The Irwin Story', op cit.

<sup>10</sup> Irwin Roads Board minutes, 5 September 1910.

West Australian Government Gazette, 1884, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> Irwin Roads Board minutes, 3 October 1910.

Ellery, Kit & Bunney, Ron, op cit, pp. 8 & 26; Bain, Mary Albertus, 'The Irwin Story', op cit. The 1901-1907 volume of Irwin Roads Board minutes could not be located at SRO and this information could not be verified.

something of that elsewhere to the alien environment. The plantings of Moreton Bay figs at the Esplanade Reserve and Hyde Park in Perth are other examples.<sup>14</sup>

The early water supply to Dongara residents consisted of individual rainwater tanks, and wells, which were usually associated with a windmill. In 1906, the Roads Board established the first public water supply for the town, with the construction of a well and windmill on Point Leander Drive. Windmill, tank and troughs were listed as assets on the Irwin Roads Board balance sheet for 1907-08, and possibly refer to the facilities shown in the 1910 photograph of the property. In July 1910, the water supply site was gazetted Reserve 9922, and vested in the Irwin Roads Board as a reserve for water and hall site. The Reserve was half an acre (2024 sq metres) in size. Is

Irwin Roads Board applied to the Public Works Department for a grant of £100 toward the cost of *Irwin Roads Board Office (fmr)*, on a pound for pound basis. The grant was approved in February 1910, and tenders were immediately called for construction. The successful tenderer was George Carter. *Irwin Roads Board Office (fmr)* was sited on a section of Reserve 9922, beside the well and windmill. The place was constructed as a single room, the exterior measurements being 7m x 5m. The front and both side walls of the place were constructed of stone, and the rear wall was rough brickwork, suggesting that there were plans to extend the building at a later date, perhaps with another room or two for offices. Attached to the rear of *Irwin Roads Board Office (fmr)* was a lean-to roof providing cover between the building and the brick toilet (not extant). The toilet can be seen in the 1910 photograph, situated behind the northeast corner of the place. 22

The 1909-1910 Irwin Roads Board balance sheet shows an amount of £47.0.0 expended on the construction, followed by the amount of £66.9.6 the following financial year, which, together with the building grant, brought the cost of *Irwin Roads Board Office (fmr)* to £213.9.6.<sup>23</sup> Another £12.2.8 was spent on furniture and fittings, which included a table, lockers, doorstops and hooks, chairs and a mat. On 5 September 1910, the Board accepted the tender of H. J. Criddle for the erection of a picket fence around the site of *Irwin Roads Board Office (fmr)*.<sup>24</sup>

Ramsay, Juliet, *Parks, Gardens and Special Trees: A classification and assessment method for the register of the National Estate*, Australian Heritage Commission, 1991, pp. 22-23.

PWD, Water Supply Division, *Geraldton Regional Water Supply: Dongara-Denison Area Development Study*, July 1980, p. 3; Education Department file, Dongara State School, SRO, ACC 1629 Item 3139/07.

Ellery, Kit & Bunney, Ron, op cit, pp. 8 & 26.

West Australian Government Gazette, 1908, p. 779; Photograph, 1910, Ellery, Kit & Bunney, Ron, op cit, p. 26.

West Australian Government Gazette, 15 July p. 1678; DOLA Reserves Index Enquiry, Reserve 9922.

<sup>19</sup> Irwin Roads Board minutes, 7 February 1910, 2 May 1910.

Irwin Roads Board minutes, 6 June 1910.

Physical evidence; Telephone conversation with Bevan Trouchett, Dongara RSL president, 14 July 2001.

Photograph, 1910, Ellery, Kit & Bunney, Ron, op cit, p. 26. The photograph is claimed to have been taken at the opening of the place, but no report of that occasion has been located.

West Australian Government Gazette, 1911, p. 837 & 1912, p. 2561; Irwin Roads Board minutes, 7 February 1910.

Irwin Roads Board minutes, 16 July 1910, 5 September 1910.

The Roads Board wrote a letter to the Under Secretary for Law informing him that the Board 'had now a room of their own', and thanking the Department for the use of the Dongara Courthouse as a meeting place for many years. <sup>25</sup> The Roads Board held their first meeting in *Irwin Roads Board Office (fmr)* on 1 August 1910. The following is noted in the minutes for that day:

The chairman opened the meeting by expressing the pleasure he had in welcoming the members to the first meeting held in their own Board Room, and called on Mr Phillips as senior member to declare the room duly open for the transaction of the Board's business.<sup>26</sup>

Members of the Irwin Roads Board in 1910 were: James Delmage (chairman), Edward Clarkson, Irwin Moore, Samuel Pole Phillips, Fred Waldeck and Harry Money (secretary).<sup>27</sup> The first annual ratepayers' meeting was held in *Irwin Roads Board Office (fmr)* on 17 September 1910.<sup>28</sup>

A Roads Board Office was a symbol of self-government and a source of pride for local residents. The building was expected to reflect the growth and progress of the district, as well as projecting a certain element of dignity. The construction of *Irwin Roads Board Office (fmr)* in stone, with brick quoining achieved that aim. The S-shaped striped verandah roofing, however, is perhaps more suggestive of carnival and seaside than dignified local government.<sup>29</sup>

The construction of *Irwin Roads Board Office (fmr)* in 1910, many years after the construction of a courthouse (1871) and mechanics institute (1881), could partly reflect the earlier dominance of shipping, and later rail, over road transport in the early years of the district's history, or indicate that all available funds were needed for roads and bridges. It could also have been that with other suitable venues available there was perhaps no great need for a dedicated Roads Board office. It is not kown what prompted the construction of *Irwin Roads Board Office (fmr)* in 1910, especially as the restricted size of the place suggests that funds for the complete building were not available. Then again, Irwin Roads Board may have been particularly frugal and cautious, not wanting to outlay a large amount on a building for their own use, but preferring to spend ratepayers' funds on roadworks while intending to enlarge their office building at a later date as needed.<sup>30</sup>

Over the years, as the population of the State grew, and gold was discovered further inland, the Irwin Roads Board District was gradually broken up into smaller areas, until it was reduced to its current size of about 2,223 sq kilometres.<sup>31</sup>

In 1950, the Mechanics Institute/Dongara Hall was burnt down, and a new hall was built on the site in 1953. In 1958, offices were added to the hall and occupied by the Roads Board, which in 1961 became the Shire of Irwin following the passing of the *Local Government Act*, 1960.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Irwin Roads Board minutes, 5 September 1910.

Irwin Roads Board minutes, 1 August 1910.

Ellery, Kit & Bunney, Ron, op cit, p. 26.

<sup>28</sup> Irwin Roads Board minutes, 5 September 1910.

<sup>29</sup> Physical evidence & consultant's knowledge of local government buildings.

Analysis of local history and available evidence.

Bain, Mary Albertus, op cit, p. 7.

Ellery, Kit & Bunney, Ron, op cit, pp. 26; Shire of Irwin, Minutes, 1959-1961, 3 July 1961.

Irwin Roads Board Office (fmr) was occupied by the Dongara Branch of the Returned Sailors' Soldiers' & Airmen's Imperial League of Australia (RSL) in the 1960s, at a peppercorn rental. In 1966, the place was granted to the RSL, and the immediate site designated Reserve 27587, with an area of 208 square metres. The Reserve included the well but not the two Moreton Bay Fig trees on the southwest of the place.<sup>33</sup> When Irwin Roads Board Office (fmr) became too small for their purposes, the RSL moved into other Shire owned premises in about 1972, and the place was leased for use as a gift shop for about eighteen months, and than as a Red Cross shop for five years. When the Red Cross shop outgrew the space, the place was leased to a music teacher, who runs the Jump Music Studio from the premises.<sup>34</sup>

Prior to the RSL obtaining *Irwin Roads Board Office (fmr)*, the west-facing front windows were covered over to shut out the glare from the afternoon sun, and the rough brick rear wall was rendered. The rear lean-to roof was removed when the timbers deteriorated, and the brick toilet was removed following replacement of the town's pan system with septic sewerage. New public toilets were erected in the adjoining Memorial Park. The front verandah of *Irwin Roads Board Office (fmr)* was reconstructed to the original design by the RSL in the early 1980s. The windmill on the old water supply well on Reserve 9922 was still extant in 1971, but has since been replaced with a windlass, and the 20 foot (6 metre) deep well has been filled in as a safety measure. <sup>35</sup> In 1989, Reserve 9922 was cancelled, and the land designated for the use and requirements of the Shire of Irwin. <sup>36</sup>

In 2001, *Irwin Roads Board Office (fmr)* continues to be owned by the RSL and occupied by the Jump Music Studio.

# 13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Irwin Roads Board Office (fmr) is situated on the east side of Point Leander Drive in the town of Dongara. The building is located close to the road, with a short bitumen path leading directly off the footpath to the front entry steps. There are grass and groundcover plantings on the north side and some groundcovers on the south side where a bush pole sign is in place. Irwin Roads Board Office (fmr) is bounded by Memorial Park on the north side, on the corner of Moreton Terrace, and two Moreton Bay Fig trees (Ficus macrophylla) close to the road on the south side. On the north side of the building is a well surrounded by a grassed area with some plantings that extend uninterrupted into Memorial Park. The south side is undeveloped with ad hoc car parking on the natural ground, mostly shaded by the Moreton Bay Fig trees. The rear of the property is bounded by a 2-metre high chain link fence. The site is flat.

Irwin Roads Board Office (fmr) does not display any particular style characteristics. It is a single-storey Federation vernacular stone construction. The coursed stone is pointed and the quoined openings and corners are detailed with tuck-pointed face brickwork. The gable roof is clad with corrugated iron. The front and rear gables are infilled with weatherboards, the front ones featuring three vertical battens and an RSL badge located central within the gable space. The front façade is entirely painted over the face stone and brickwork, and the rear wall has been cement rendered. The two side walls remain intact. The reconstructed front verandah has an 'S' roof

<sup>33</sup> Crown Grant in Trust, Vol. 1318 Fol. 684, 2 March 1966.

Telephone conversation with Bevan Trouchett, op cit.

Physical evidence; Telephone conversation with Bevan Trouchett, op cit.

Reserves Index Enquiry, Reserve 9922.

supported by square timber posts on metal stirrups. The verandah roof is painted on alternating sheets with 'heritage' red and beige, forming stripes, which correspond to the original verandah roof. The verandah has a red concrete floor, accessed at the central front by a set of red concrete stairs.

On each side of the building there are three equally spaced windows. The tuckpointed red face bricks are quoined along the straight edge surrounds and a double-header course is in place around the arched top windows. The sills are timber and the eight paned arched windows are set into timber frames. The windows open on a central pivot. The central entry doors are flush panel timber, and there is a double panel glass fanlight above. The central front doors are flanked by a small window each side. Both windows have been infilled and painted and the north panel has a square timber and glass notice board fixed within the space.

The footprint of the building is a rectangle. The double entry doors under the front verandah open into a single space. The room has the original 0.135 metre timber floorboards and 0.300 metre high moulded timber skirting boards. The walls are hard plaster with a timber chair rail around the perimeter at sill height and c.1960 plaster wall vents. The window reveals are hard plaster and metal curtain rods have been fixed in recent times. The ceiling is coved along the sides of the hall. It is lined with ripple iron and features a decorative central ceiling rose. Metal tie rods are visible across the room.

The well is lined with off form corrugated iron around the inside, above the stone lining that is further down inside the well. At ground level, a square concrete slab surrounds the well. An angle-iron framed windlass is in place over the well. There is a steel-framed interpretative signage located on the west side of the well.

Two mature Moreton Bay Fig trees are located close to the road on the south side of the building. They form an integral element of the streetscape of Point Leander Drive, that links to Moreton Terrace.

Irwin Roads Board Office (fmr) is generally in fair condition. The timber window frames and other timber detailing are weathered and paint is flaking. The stone wall on the north side is deteriorating and the mortar is fretting, and the rear wall has been rendered. The place has facilitated many functions with minimal changes to accommodate those various uses, including the infill of the west windows, replacement of the front doors, the installation of wall vents and curtain rods, and retains a moderate degree of integrity. Except for the reconstructed front verandah and infilled front windows, replacement of the front doors and rendering of the rear wall, the place is mostly intact, and demonstrates a moderate degree of authenticity.

### 13.3 COMPARATIVE INFORMATION

*Irwin Roads Board Office (fmr)* is one of over fifty Roads Board buildings listed on the Heritage Council database, two of which, at Nanson and Upper Gascoyne, are entered on the State Register.<sup>37</sup>

As symbols of local government and a source of pride in the growth of the district, Roads Board Offices were generally constructed in brick or stone, in a classical style. Examples of this are the Roads Board offices at: Nanson (brick, Federation Free Classical, 1913); Chittering (stone, Inter-War Academic Classical, 1929); Victoria Plains (brick and render, Inter-War Free Classical,

<sup>37</sup> HCWA database.

1937); Murray (brick, Federation Free Classical, 1910); and Kalgoorlie-Boulder (two-storey brick and stucco, Federation Free Classical, 1901).<sup>38</sup> The Kalgoorlie-Boulder Roads Board Office reflects the affluence of the goldfields at the turn of the century. Those buildings constructed, or enlarged, in the 1920s were generally a result of the growth and wealth of the agricultural districts during that period. The Victoria Plains Roads Board Office, 1937, is an example of the optimism and short boom period experienced at the end of the Depression.

Examples of Roads Board Offices built in other than masonry construction include: Upper Gascoyne (timber kit-construction, Federation Bungalow, 1913); Drakesbrook (timber, 1933) and Capel (timber, 1926).<sup>39</sup>

The Roads Board Offices constructed in the agricultural areas between 1900 and 1914, may be of a more modest size and style than those found in the goldfields, or constructed post World-War One. Nanson, although comprising at least two rooms, is only a small building costing about the same as *Irwin Roads Board Office (fmr)*, and the Roads Board Office at Upper Gascoyne, built in 1913, is a Federation Bungalow timber kit-construction. Other small Roads Board Offices exist in Wandering, Wagin and Cuballing. *Irwin Roads Board Office (fmr)*, built as a one room building with plans to extend, which did not eventuate, may be one of the smallest surviving Roads Board Offices in the State, and perhaps, with its unusual front verandah roof, one of the least dignified local government buildings.

# 13.4 REFERENCES

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# 13.5 FURTHER RESEARCH

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Various Municipal Heritage inventories; Register documentation, *Road Board Office (fmr)*, *Nanson*, database no. 474.

Various Municipal Heritage inventories; Register documentation, *Upper Gascoyne Road Board Office (fmr)*, database no. 15408.