



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)

- 3.8.6 Building & maintaining railways

HERITAGE COUNCIL OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA THEME(S)

- 202 Rail & light rail transport
- 106 Workers

11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE*

Station Master's House, Leonora is a simple vernacular interpretation of the Federation Bungalow style. (Criterion 1.1)

11.2 HISTORIC VALUE

Station Master's House, Leonora was part of a railway complex constructed in 1902 by the Public Works Department as a result of the extension of the narrow gauge Eastern Goldfields line from Menzies during the gold boom period of the early 1900s. The Leonora railway station complex also included a galvanised iron station building, goods shed, 'out of' shed and porter's house, which are not extant. (Criterion 2.1)

In the 1950s, *Station Master's House, Leonora* accommodated part of Leonora's large community of railway employees, which included post-World War Two European migrants working as part of bonded immigration arrangements. (Criterion 2.2)

Where other gold-fields stations and lines closed due to population decline following the abating of the gold rushes, *Station Master's House, Leonora* survived with a railway function throughout the twentieth century. The Sons of Gwalia gold mine operated until 1963, and reopened in 1984. From 1979 nickel was mined at Agnew, and from 1981 lead, silver and zinc were mined at Teutonic Bore. Leonora served these mining communities, and survived as the railhead and centre of supply for the district administration (Criterion 2.2)

Station Master's House, Leonora was constructed in 1902 for the occupation of the Station Master at Leonora, and was occupied by him until 1975, when a

* 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.

more modern residence was provided in the town. The place has since been continuously occupied by other railway workers, except for a three-year period in 1979-1982 when it was rented privately. It is currently occupied by a retired employee. (Criterion 2.2)

11.3 SCIENTIFIC VALUE

11.4 SOCIAL VALUE

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12.1 RARITY

Station Master's House, Leonora is the only remaining example of early railway accommodation in Leonora, and together with the loading ramp, is all that remains of railway structures in the station yard. It is one of the longest serving Station Master's residences in the State, having been occupied in that capacity from 1902 to 1975. (Criterion 6.1)

12.2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

Station Master's House, Leonora is the only remaining example representing the railway presence in Leonora. It represents a way of life no longer practiced, when the station master was required to live in close proximity to the railway station, and contrasts with the modern operation of the Kalgoorlie-Leonora line, which was replaced with a standard gauge track in 1974. (Criterion 6.1)

12.3 CONDITION

Station Master's House, Leonora is in fair to poor condition. It is obvious that very little maintenance has been undertaken for many years.

12.4 INTEGRITY

Station Master's House, Leonora operated continuously as a dwelling, originally for the Station Master and then for other railway employees. The place has retained a high degree of integrity.

12.5 AUTHENTICITY

The place shows minimal evidence of changes to the fabric with the 1958 replacement of wall and ceiling cladding in the corridor being the most noticeable change. Despite that, the place displays a high 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.

This assessment has been prepared from a site inspection and information gathered in March 2001, during preparation of an assessment for the West Australian Government Railways Commission.

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Station Master's House, Leonora is a timber and iron residence constructed for the Station Master at Leonora by the Public Works Department (PWD), in 1902. The place was occupied by the Station Master at Leonora until 1975, when a transportable house was provided for him in the town. *Station Master's House, Leonora* is currently occupied by a retired railway employee.

The discovery of gold at Southern Cross and the subsequent declaration of the area as the Yilgarn goldfield in 1888, prompted the State Government to commence construction of a railway to serve the area. The line, known as the Yilgarn Railway, began at the head of the Eastern Railway at Northam.¹ Gold was subsequently discovered at Coolgardie and then Kalgoorlie. The line to Southern Cross was opened on 1 July 1894, and construction of the line to Coolgardie began the following year, and it reached Kalgoorlie on 8 September 1896.²

Plans were already underway to construct a branch line to Menzies, as prospectors located gold further north. Both Coolgardie and Kalgoorlie vied to be the junction for the line to Menzies, and thus become the centre of the eastern goldfields.³ By that time, prospectors had found good gold deposits at the northern end of the North Coolgardie field, and on 12 March 1897, the area was declared the Mount Margaret goldfield. One of its most prominent mines was Sons of Gwalia. The railway line from Kalgoorlie to Menzies was begun in August 1897, reaching Menzies on 23 March 1898. The railway provided efficient transport of mining machinery, timber, food and other goods, which had previously relied on camels and horses.⁴

The township of Leonora, further north in the Mount Margaret goldfield, was gazetted on 15 April 1898, the site being between the Sons of Gwalia mine and other mining leases four miles to the north.⁵ The town grew rapidly, as was common with goldfield settlements. It was gazetted a municipality on 21 August 1900.⁶

In 1901, the town was described:

The town is lighted by kerosene lamps and footpaths have been formed, gravelled and kerbed. The first view of the locality impresses the beholder with an idea of solidity and prosperity; for, although there are the customary iron and wooden structures which are to be found in all goldfields' settlements, the hotels and different large business establishments have a most imposing appearance, being constructed mostly of

¹ The name 'Yilgarn Railway' was replaced with 'Eastern Goldfields Railway' in 1899-1900 (*WAGR Annual Report*, 1900, p. 2), and included at that time the lines from Northam to Kalgoorlie, the Boulder Loopline Railway, and the lines from Kalgoorlie to Kanowna and Menzies.

² Gunzberg, Adrian & Austin, Jeff, *Rails Through the Bush*, Light Railway Research Society of Australia, Melbourne, 1997, p. 206; Le Page, J. S. H. *Building a State: The story of the Public Works Department of WA, 1829-1985*, Perth, UWA Press, pp. 221-225; Webb, M. & A. *Golden Destiny: The Centenary History of Kalgoorlie-Boulder and the Eastern Goldfields of WA*, (2 vols), Hocking & Co and St George Books, Perth, 1995, p. 208-211; *A Brief History of the Western Australian Government Railways*, WAGR, 1975.

³ Wilson, H. H., *The Golden Miles*, Rigby, 1977, pp. 173; Webb, M. & A., op cit, pp. 208-211, 288-293.

⁴ Gunzberg, Adrian & Austin, Jeff, op cit, p. 207 & 229.

⁵ *West Australian Government Gazette*, 15 April 1898, p. 937.

⁶ *West Australian Government Gazette*, 21 August 1900, p. 3171.

brick... The business establishments, which must be regarded as the barometer of the commercial element, undeniably indicate that Leonora is advancing by rapid strides.⁷

Menzies was the railhead for the Mount Margaret goldfield until February 1901, when the Railways Construction Branch of the Public Works Department began construction of the line from Menzies to Leonora. This section of the northern branch of the Eastern Goldfields line was constructed with basic buildings in galvanised iron or timber, in contrast to the stone residences and station buildings on the Kalgoorlie to Menzies section, constructed in 1897-1898. Early Railway Department policy had been to construct permanent buildings of stone on the goldfields lines, but it soon became apparent that such structures were an unnecessary expense, as goldfields generally had a short life span and the buildings quickly became redundant. Built in stone, they could not be easily moved to another site. With transportability and cost an issue, many buildings constructed on the goldfield lines after 1901 were of timber or iron construction. The general approach was that the facilities of the railways should grow with the expansion and development of traffic.⁸

The Menzies-Leonora line was taken over by the Railway Department on 12 January 1903.⁹ Leonora then became the railhead for the Mount Margaret goldfield and outer settlements, and for the pastoral industry that had developed in the region to supply meat to the prospectors and mining towns. *Station Master's House, Leonora* was constructed in 1902 by the PWD as part of the contract to construct the railway line. Other elements of the railway complex were probably also built at this time, although the contract for this work has not been located. The Leonora station building was a galvanised iron structure, as was the 'out of' shed, goods shed and porter's house.¹⁰ (An 'out of' shed was a small structure that operated something like a parcels office, from which people could collect their goods). The first station master at Leonora was Robert McFarlane.¹¹

In 1905, staff barracks were constructed on the railway reserve for the locomotive drivers and guards, and the permanent way gang who were located at Leonora.¹² In 1910, an extra room and a washhouse are recorded as being added to *Station Master's House, Leonora*.¹³ The extra room may have been the cabin, which was used as a kitchen, possibly to free the kitchen for use as extra living or bedroom space or to prevent the house heating up excessively in the summer.¹⁴

From 1903, when the Leonora station yard opened, gold production in the goldfields generally began to decline, with a resultant drop in population. The success of the Sons of Gwalia mine, however, meant that Leonora continued as an active town while many other goldfield towns disappeared altogether. The mine continued to operate through the vicissitudes of World

⁷ *Twentieth Century Impressions of Western Australia*, Facsimile of 1901 edition, Perth, Hesperian Press, 2000, p. 659.

⁸ WAGR *Annual Report*, 1903, p. 14 & 1904, p. 15.

⁹ Gunzberg, Adrian & Austin, Jeff, op cit, p. 207.

¹⁰ WAGR *Annual report*, 1903-04, p. 78; WAGR Plan, CCE 31063, 1937, SROWA, ACC 1781 Item 20745A.

¹¹ *Wise's Post Office Directories*, 1902-1903.

¹² WAGR *Annual report*, 1905, pp. 87-88; WAGR file, Leonora departmental houses, SROWA, WAS 1208 CONS 4771 Item R6621; WAGR Plan, CCE 31063, 1937, op cit.

¹³ WAGR *Annual Report*, 1910-11, p. 62.

¹⁴ WAGR property file DP 465. Pages dated prior to 1951 have been removed.

War One, the Depression, labour shortages, explosions and fires.¹⁵ *Station Master's House, Leonora* continued to be occupied by the Leonora Station Master, who had the added facility of a tennis court at his residence in the 1930s.¹⁶

Following World War Two, railway services were in high demand as the country recovered from years of restraint. Housing for railwaymen in country areas was in short supply and a higher standard of living was becoming expected by employees wherever they were stationed. Many immigrants were employed on the railways after the war, and in 1951, a 'New Australian' Permanent Way gang stationed at Malcolm was relocated to Leonora where there were better services, such as school, hospital, and doctor. Three houses were moved from Malcolm and Morgans, both townships east along the railway, and placed on a railway housing reserve established in the Leonora township. The Railway Department also took over the vacant police quarters and the former residences of the mining registrar and mining engineer to accommodate additional staff.¹⁷

On 23 February 1958, *Station Master's House, Leonora* was damaged by fire, caused by an exploding kerosene refrigerator. The refrigerator was situated in the passage and the explosion and resulting fire caused 'complete demolition' of floor and ceiling in the passage, and 'a lot' of burnt trimmers, bearers and rafters, with scorching of walls and architraves. Two sheets of fluted iron were blown through into the adjoining room by the detonation.¹⁸ Glass in the fanlights of the front and back doors were broken. Relieving Station Master M. Parnell was the occupant of *Station Master's House, Leonora* at the time of the fire, as Station Master A. Sharpe was on leave. He was out when the explosion occurred. Repairs to the place cost £208. Wider floorboards were used in the passage, relacing the original narrow profile boards, and plasterboard wall lining replaced the damaged fluted iron.¹⁹

In December 1963, the Sons of Gwalia mine closed. There was an immediate exodus of residents as the mine workforce of about 250 moved to the mines at Kalgoorlie-Boulder, and supporting businesses closed. In 1966, the population of Leonora and Gwalia was 338, compared to 970 in 1961.²⁰ The owner of *Clover Downs Station*, which surrounds Leonora, made application for lease of the stockyards and *Station Master's House, Leonora*, presuming the Kalgoorlie-Leonora line would close following closure of the mine. There were changes: the gang stationed at Leonora was closed down and railway houses surplus to requirements were sold for demolition or removal, but Leonora survived as the railhead and the centre for supply and district administration. *Station Master's House, Leonora* continued to be occupied by the Station Master.

On 25 November 1974, a fire damaged the kitchen cabin attached to the place. The cabin caught fire while the fire brigade was burning off high grass and rubbish in the railway reserve. Two walls and the ceiling of the cabin were

15 Webb, M. & A., op cit, pp. 523-524.

16 WAGR file, Leonora departmental houses, Item R6621, op cit, 10 September 1951; WAGR plan, CCE31603, 1937, SROWA, ACC 1781 Item 20745A.

17 WAGR file, Leonora departmental houses, Item R6621, op cit, 10 September 1951.

18 WAGR property file DP 465, op cit; WAGR file, Leonora departmental houses, Item R6621, op cit.

19 WAGR property file DP 465, op cit; WAGR file, Leonora departmental houses, Item R6621, op cit; physical evidence.

20 Shire of Leonora Town Planning Scheme No. 1, p. 17.

guttered and Station Master Eddy Weribee received burns to his shoulder. No damage is reported to have been done to *Station Master's House, Leonora*.²¹

In the mid 1960s, the standard gauge line was put through from Kalgoorlie to Fremantle. Nickel was discovered first at Kambalda, near Kalgoorlie, and later at Agnew, 133 km northwest of Leonora. At Teutonic Bore, 60 kms northwest of Leonora, lead, silver and zinc deposits were found. Nickel mining began at Agnew in 1979, with workers housed at the new mining town of Leinster, and the Teutonic Bore concentrator began production in 1981.²² Leonora's function as railhead, and administration and supply centre was enhanced by these developments.

To service the new mining developments in the region, a standard gauge line was laid from Kalgoorlie to Leonora in 1974, terminating north of the narrow gauge station yard, which was then redundant. The railway workforce at Leonora was increased, with a permanent Second Class Maintenance Gang stationed at the town and housed in transportables on the corner of Rochester and Kurrajong streets, opposite the former railway yard. The porter's house had been removed in 1972, and the station building, goods shed and trainmen's barracks were removed sometime after construction of the standard gauge track.²³

In 1975, the Station Master was provided with a transportable house with garage, as befitted his position. *Station Master's House, Leonora* was occupied by other railway employees. Trackman S. Vincent was the tenant from 1975 to 1978, followed by Length Runner A. McGillivray. From 1979 to 1982, the place was rented privately at \$15 a week. Extra power points and light points were added during this period.²⁴

The price of gold rose dramatically in 1980, leading to resurgence in gold mining in the region. The Sons of Gwalia mine reopened in 1984, to be mined by open cut, and the Tower Hill mine was re-developed.²⁵ These activities meant more traffic for the railway. In 1982, railway guard Murray Robertson occupied *Station Master's House, Leonora*. He qualified for the 40% reduction in his water costs in 1984. This was an incentive offered to railway employees to encourage them to establish and maintain lawns and gardens at the railway houses they occupied. The practice, begun in 1978 was discontinued in 1985-86, but the lawn at *Station Master's House, Leonora* has continued to be maintained.²⁶

Murray Robertson retired on 18 July 1998 and in 2002, occupies *Station Master's House, Leonora* as a private tenant. While WAGR has no further use for the place, and wishes to dispose of it, the organisation is also aware of its

21 WAGR property file DP 465, op cit.

22 Webb, M. & A., op cit, pp. 814-835; *A Brief History of the Western Australian Government Railways*, WAGR, 1975, pp. 7-12.

23 *A Brief History of the Western Australian Government Railways*, op cit, pp. 7-12.; WAGR file, Leonora departmental houses, Item R6621, op cit. It is not known exactly when the station building, sheds and barracks were removed. A 1978 WAGR plan shows the Station building extant.

24 WAGR file, Leonora departmental houses, Item R6621, op cit; WAGR property file for DP 465.

25 Webb, M. & A., op cit, pp. 903-917.

26 WAGR property file for DP 465; *WAGR 1972 Housing Review: Report on future housing requirements*, bound typescript; WAGR Property File, 24 Kitchener St, Merredin, DP 1005; photographic evidence, March 2001.

obligation to retired employees in remote areas where alternative accommodation is not available.

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Station Master's House, Leonora is located in Kurrajong Street in Leonora, and backs on to the railway that runs parallel to the road on a north south alignment. The house faces east, and the street is located in the southwest corner of the town of Leonora. The only other remnant of the original railway presence in Leonora is the loading ramp on the west side of the line several hundred metres north of the house.

The street view of the place is partially obstructed by a group of shrubby plantings, and on the day of inspection, by a large earthmoving vehicle parked on the verge. A post and wire fence delineates the front boundary and there is an open driveway on the north side. The site is flat red gravelled earth with a lush lawn across the front between the house and the front boundary fence, and near the rear verandah. The only planting is a lilac tree in the back yard.

Station Master's House, Leonora is a vernacular interpretation of the Federation Bungalow style. It also displays some characteristics of Victorian Georgian style, such as a simple rectangular form, symmetrical façade, unsophisticated details and sash windows.

Station Master's House, Leonora is a single storey timber framed weatherboard-clad construction on timber stumps. The main gable roof is clad with corrugated iron. The roof continues at the front and rear over the front and rear verandahs, and hips around the north side verandah. The corbelled brick chimneys show evidence of having been painted, although much of the paint is weathered. The original weatherboard walls are painted. The front verandah is enclosed by a timber framed vertical profile corrugated iron dado. The verandah floor is concrete. The verandah ceiling is unlined but the corrugated iron has been painted on the under side. The verandah is supported by evenly spaced square timber posts. The verandah ends on the south side, the west bay on the north side, and the north bay on the east side, are enclosed with vertical sheets of corrugated iron.

The original twelve-pane double hung sashes and timber frames are still in place except for the lower sash of the north front window that has been removed for an air conditioner. The original profile gutters (possibly the original gutters) are in place, although there was minimal evidence of downpipes to provide adequate discharge from the roof, or any ground level drainage. The timber roof trim is very weathered and there is evidence of some new galvanised fascia on the south gable. The timber foundation stumps were inaccessible, as they have been enclosed by sheets of corrugated iron on the south side.

The floor plan is simple with a central front door opening into a wide corridor with two rooms each side and a doorway and fanlight at the end opening onto the rear verandah. The rear verandah is open, and there is a bathroom and storeroom on the left and a semi-enclosed laundry off the verandah on the west side.

The interior fabric is intact except for the replacement plasterboard lining in the walls and ceiling of the central corridor. The remaining original ceilings and walls throughout are lined with painted ripple iron in vertical sheets. The floorboards are 0.100m (4") jarrah boards except in the corridor where they are 0.135m (5") boards. The skirtings, architraves and original four panel

doors are in place. The south front room on the left has a fireplace on the south wall, with modest timber mantelpiece similar to the mantelpiece on the kitchen fireplace, which is located on the north wall. Both chimneys are separate brick structures on the exterior of the house. The Metters wood stove remains in place in the kitchen and the remainder of the kitchen fitout is very basic.

The laundry is a skillion roofed structure opening onto the verandah at the rear. It is enclosed with vertical corrugated iron on the north and west sides. On the south side of the rear yard is another skillion roofed corrugated iron building and an adjacent timber framed and weatherboard clad, gable roofed toilet. There is also a corrugated iron water tank on the west side, and the remains of the original post and wire prop clothesline that is still useable.

Except for the under verandah walls that are in good condition, the external weatherboard walls and other timber elements are in poor condition with split weatherboards and weathered paint, in many areas revealing bare timber. Similarly, the painted corrugated iron wall and dado claddings are in poor condition with paint flaked off revealing bare and rusted metal. The floorboards are in relatively good condition throughout. The painted underside of the roof on the verandahs is in poor condition. Generally, the place is in fair condition with no evidence of any maintenance having taken place.

13.3 COMPARATIVE INFORMATION²⁷

Station Master's House, Leonora, constructed from c.1902 to around 1920, were generally four room residences constructed in brick and iron, with front and rear verandahs, and fireplaces on the internal walls. The design resulted in a vernacular interpretation of the Federation Bungalow style. Examples can be found at Brunswick Junction (1902), Cranbrook (1902), Darkan (1913) and Bowelling (1919). Variations to the plan occurred in the 1890s, before the standard plan was devised, and occasionally in the early 1900s. The *Station Master's House, Leonora* at Wagin (1902), for example, is in timber but otherwise conforms to the standard design.

A variation in *Station Master's House, Leonora* is the position of the fireplaces on the external walls, and in this it is similar to the *Station Master's House, Leonora* at Donnybrook (1895), also a timber residence, and Kalgoorlie (1897), which was built in stone. The addition of another room at the rear for use as a kitchen appears to have been a common occurrence in these houses, with both the Kalgoorlie and Donnybrook residences having later kitchen additions on the rear verandah, while *Station Master's House, Leonora* had a cabin addition used as a kitchen.

Station Master's House, Leonora had another variation in the form of a verandah on three sides, rather than just at the front and rear. This may have been an adaptation for the hot goldfields summer, and without an early plan of the place, it is impossible to ascertain if the extra verandah was a later addition or part of the original design. Another goldfield's railway residence at 1 Wittenoom Street Kalgoorlie, a brick house built to the standard plan in 1901 for the Locomotive Inspector, has been adapted in a similar manner. Early photographs of this residence, however, indicate that the verandah on the third side was not part of the original design.

Leonora Station Master's House, Leonora was occupied by the station master until 1975, a similar length of time to a number of station master's residences in agricultural areas, such as: Brunswick Junction (occupied by station master to mid 1960s), Wagin (1979), Wongan Hills (early 1980s), Wyalkatchem (1985), Donnybrook (1979) and Cranbrook (1978).²⁸

Leonora Station Master's House, Leonora could claim to be the longest utilised by a station master on a goldfields' railway line. Station master's residences on the Eastern Goldfields line between Kalgoorlie and Leonora were generally not occupied by station masters after the late 1920s, and most of the remaining buildings were removed after construction of the standard gauge line in 1974. *Kalgoorlie Station Master's House, Leonora*, 12-14 Forrest Street, was vacated by the station master in the 1950s when a more modern residence was provided for the position. This house has been much altered for use as part of the singlemen's barracks. The Golden Loopline railway stations, except for Boulder, closed in 1928 and station master's residences were occupied by other railway employees or rented privately before eventually being removed. Latest occupation of *Boulder Station Master's House, Leonora* by the station master is not known, but the house was sold into private ownership in 1961. It is extant but much altered, specifically, a standard brick *Station Master's House, Leonora* that has been clad in weatherboards. The Northern Railway, which served the Murchison goldfields, and the Marble Bar line were closed in the 1950s.²⁹

13.4 REFERENCES

WAGR property files.

13.5 FURTHER RESEARCH

Further research may reveal evidence of whether the station building, goods shed and trainmen's barracks were built at the same time as *Station Master's House, Leonora*, and when they were removed.

The dates of construction for the shed, laundry, and toilets.

²⁸ Heritage assessments of these places undertaken by Irene Sauman and Laura Gray for WAGR, 2001-2002 and currently in HCWA assessment programme.

²⁹ Heritage assessment of *Boulder Station, Subway and Loopline*, HCWA 4639; *Kalgoorlie Station Master's House, Leonora* assessment for WAGR; Conservation plan of Golden Loopline Railway for City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder, currently being undertaken by Irene Sauman & Laura Gray; Keefe, Bert, *Eastward Ho: To Mullewa and the Murchison*, Mullewa Shire, 1995; Edwards, Hugh, *Gold Dust and Iron Mountains: Marble Bar and Beyond, The story of the Eastern Pilbara*, East Pilbara Shire, 1993.