

Essendon Historical Society

The Essendon Historical Society wishes to make to following submission in relation to Moonee Valley Racecourse(MVRC) Redevelopment.

The Moonee Valley Racecourse is important to the people of the region for a number of reasons. The history of the racecourse, as well as some of its features, is of significant heritage value on both a local and regional level. The following notes relate to the need for heritage protection for the racecourse, and the Essendon Historical Society supports the application from the Moonee Valley Council for a heritage overlay on the site (C124).

The following information is provided in support of the heritage overlay, as well as some specific heritage sites which the Society believes need to be preserved.

History of the Course

Moonee Valley Racecourse has been operating since 1883. Prior to this a Mr “Long” John Moonee secured this Crown Land in 1847. According to *The Stopover That Stayed*¹

‘One Sunday a Mr Richard Feehan rode to Keilor with Mr Mooney. During the ride the purchase of Moonee Valley was discussed and on the return ride a deal was made. During the week a deposit was paid and soon afterwards Mr Feehan took possession, using its 98 acres for farming and grazing.

In 1874 Mr William Samuel Cox, a noted sportsman and amateur rider arranged to lease Feehan’s property – then known as Feehan’s Farm - for seven years with the option of purchase which was subsequently effected.

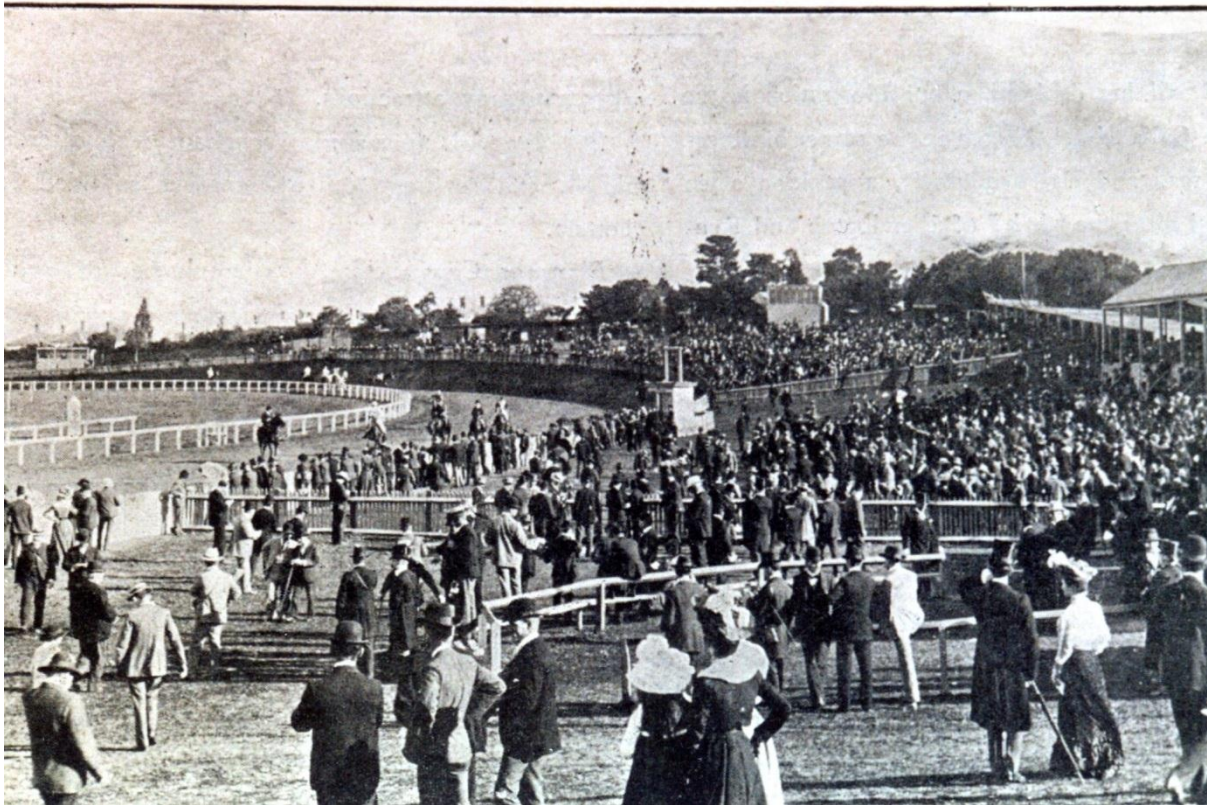
However during this time part of the Feehan’s farm property was used for market gardens, on the McPherson side of the farm. These market gardens were run by Chinese market gardeners. They were removed from the property by the executors of the Feehan family in 1911.

Around 1900 there were at least 100 Chinese people living in the area, a number of them market gardeners as well as laundrymen. There is no record of these early

¹ Aldous, Grant *The Stop-over That Stayed: A History of Essendon*. City of Essendon. Melbourne. 1988

residents of the area, except occasionally in court records. There was a report in the local paper of residents complaining about the smell from the Chinese market gardens. These markets were on the McPherson side of the property.

The first race meeting under proprietary control was held on 15th September 1883.



Moonee Valley Racecourse 1907. (held by the Essendon Historical Society.)

Specific Heritage Sites

1. Manikato site

Manikato (1975-1984) was a champion Australian Thoroughbred racehorse of the late 1970s and early 1980s. He established new track records in three races and was inducted into the Australian Racing Hall of Fame. Manikato was the second Australian horse, after Kingston Town, to win \$1 million in stakes, and, by today's standards, won 20 races which are currently (2012) classed as Group 1 races.

Manikato won the William Reid Stakes 5 times from 1979 to 1983, a feat which has not been matched by any other horse. The William Reid Stakes is a Group 1 Australian thoroughbred weight-for-age race over 1200 metres at the track. In 2013 the prize money was \$400,000.

William Reid was a former committee member of the MVRC . He was the owner of a number of prominent racehorses in the early 1900's including Uncle Sam who won the Caulfield Cup in 1912 1nd 1914, and who came third in the Melbourne Cup in 1912.

After retiring from racing in 19893, Manikato was plagued by a virus which he could not shake off. He was humanely euthanized on 13th February 1984. He is buried in site of some of his greatest wins in "Manikato Garden" at Moonee Valley Racecourse.

The Group 1 Manikato Stakes named in his honour is contested annually at the racecourse.²

2. Club Secretary's House and Edna Walling Garden

H.J.Wagstaff (1886-1962) designed the Club Secretary's house on the corner of McPherson Street and Wilson Street.

H.J. Wagstaff commenced his architectural career in 1913 and designed a number of significant buildings in Melbourne. However he was best known for his association with racing in Victoria. This professional relationship dated back to the 1920's when he designed new grandstands for the Victorian Racing Club(VRC) and the Werribee Racing Club.

By the middle of the 1940's he was both the official architect for the VRC at Flemington as well as the Moonee Valley Racing Club.

However the house at Moonee Valley is, from the evidence available, the only house he designed on a racecourse.

As the website *Built Heritage Pty Ltd* says

One of Wagstaff's more unusual racecourse-related commissions was the large two-storey house that was erected in 1937 on the north-eastern edge of the Moonee Valley Racecourse for occupation by the new ..Secretary William Stanley Cox (whose similarly –named grandfather, William Samuel Cox, had founded the Moonee Valley Racing Club back in 1883)³

There is only one other house that is identified as Wagstaff's work which was a private one in Birdwood Avenue, Brighton.

The Club Secretary's house was described as:

² <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/manikato>

³ http://www.builtheritage.com.au/dua_wagstaff.html

A large inter-war dwelling of a particular type, scale, style and grandeur that is typically associated with suburbs such as Toorak, South Yarra, Brighton and Kew, but is considerably more unusual in Moonee Ponds.⁴

Other work undertaken at the Moonee Valley Racecourse by H.J.Wagstaff was:

1946: Additions to grandstand (camera and judges' box).

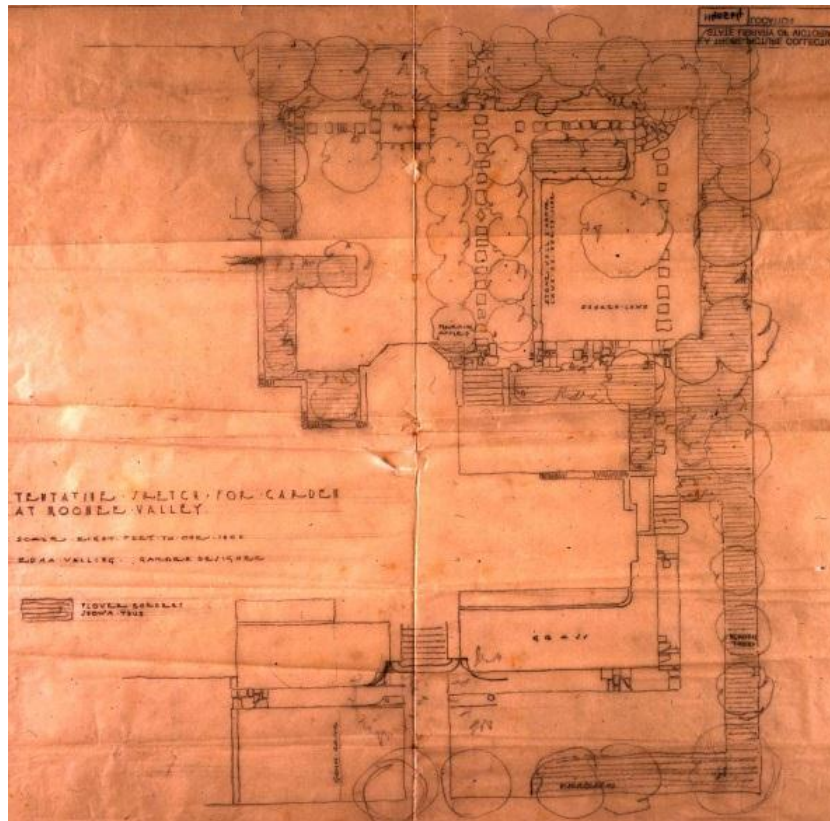
1951: Alterations to the entrance building.

The garden at the Residence was designed by Edna Walling. It is believed to be the only garden designed by Walling in the Moonee Valley area.

Edna Walling (1895-1973) garden designer was born in Scotland and moved to Melbourne in 1914.

She developed a sophisticated style, which attracted an equally sophisticated clientele, and rapidly became the leading exponent of the art in Victoria. Soon her reputation spread to other states.⁵

Design of the Edna Walling Garden at Moonee Valley. Held by the State Library.



⁴ Simon Reeves, Principal, Built Heritage Pty.Ltd. from <http://www.savemooneeponds.com/heritage.html>

⁵ Peter Watts, *Australian Dictionary of Biography* Volume 16, Melbourne University Press. 2002.

3. S.R Burston Stand

This stand is significant for a number of reasons and should be preserved.

Major-General S.R.Burston was the Director-General of the Australian Army Medical Services from 1942 until the end of the war when he was appointed honorary physician to the King.

The architect for the stand was Edward F Billson, the first student to graduate from the University of Melbourne.

He was influenced by Frank Lloyd Wright and Walter Burley Griffin and especially is known for his Art Deco work. The grandstand was built in 1958 and then extended by his son, Edward Billson in 1972-73.

The builder was E.A.Watts. Ernest Alfred Watts (1893-1979) was a major builder in Melbourne, his buildings including Coles in Bourke Street, the Chevron Hotel and the Hotel Australia. He was elected as President of the Master Builders Association in 1938.

According to the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*:

Patrick Tennyson has described Watts in 1963 as 'impressively agile and forceful' and quoted one of his employees as saying that 'he never asks [his men] to do anything he couldn't do himself. Needing little sleep, Watts was usually at his huge desk in the company's Collingwood headquarters by 7.45am and was widely likely to have risen three hours earlier in summer to water his garden....On 28th April 1966 he announced his retirement. He was a life governor of the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind and the Austin, Freemasons' and Royal Children's hospitals. Survived by his five daughters, he died on 4th January 1979.

4. Alister Clark Rose Garden

Alister Clark (1864-1949) was the best known and most influential Australian rose breeder. His roses were the most widely planted in Australia between the World Wars and made an enduring difference to the appearance of Australian cities.

Alister Clark was the son of a Scottish immigrant tenant farmer who did well in Australia. Alister never had to work, but gave 'himself over to the business of being a gentleman, huntsman, polo player, racehorse owner, golfer, photographer- and rose breeder.

Alister Clark was the foundation Chairman of the Moonee Valley Racing Club and master of Oaklands Hunt Club from 1901 until 1908.

The Alister Clark Stakes, named after Alister Clark was first run in 1939.

It is a Group 2 Australian Thoroughbred horse race, run over the distance of 2040 metres.⁶

The Alister Clark Rose Garden was built in memory of Alister Clark.

5. Horse stalls

This area includes the horse stalls/birdcage and perimeter fence, saddling paddock/parade ground and mature trees in the south-west corner.

This area includes stalls which housed many famous horses including Phar Lap in the 1930's.

There is also a number of mature trees in the area including a very old peppercorn tree.

The Moonee Valley Council has already recognised this area as one of historic importance and there submission deals with this.

Recommendations.

The information provided here is just some of the information available about the history of the Moonee Valley Racecourse.

The racecourse has been an important part of the history of the area, having both social and architectural merit. For this reason the Essendon Historical Society recommends:

1. That a heritage overlay be established on the site
2. That as the site for development at the McPherson Street end is the location of the Chinese market gardeners, that some archeological examination be undertaken prior to any development of the site.

(There are no Chinese graves at the local cemetery, the Keilor cemetery and the Melbourne General cemetery, at this stage is unable to confirm if any of these early Essendon residents were buried there.)

A list of the Chinese living in this area is included as Attachment 3.

3. That specific heritage protection be given to the Club Secretary's house and Edna Walling garden, the S.R. Burston stand and the horse stalls area .

⁶ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alister-Clark-Stakes>.

4. That as Alister Clark rose varieties are easily obtainable, that the Alister Clark Rose Garden be restored.

5. That the Manikato site be recognised, restored and an appropriate historic marker be erected.

One of the interesting aspects of the Racetrack is the significant architects, builders and others who have been associated with the racecourse, and the racecourse provides some very special and unique examples of their work.

On the social history side, the Racecourse has been a central part of the local community of Moonee Ponds and indeed Essendon. Not only the local community but the racecourse community, trainers, jockeys and others have often expressed their support for the current racetrack. It has been described by many in the industry as the best weight for age course in the country.

These are just some of the arguments that support strong heritage protection for a site that is integral to its local community. The Moonee Valley Racecourse is of significant at both the local and regional level. The Essendon Historical Society is of the view that these essential parts of the region's history cannot be ignored and indeed, destroyed.

Perhaps an appropriate conclusion would be the words from the Moonee Valley Racing Club itself, printed in their Centennial meeting programme, dated 17th September 1983:

The track is 1800 metres in circumference with a short straight but with turns correctly cambered and a rise of 16ft.in the last 400 metres. Although often referred to as 'tight', 'tricky' and 'small' the tape measure shows it is anything but. From the winning post to straightening up for the run in, it measures 1,637 metres which compares favourably with such acknowledged roomy course as Sandown (1,485 metres between the same points), Rosehill (1,628 metres), Doomben (1,395meters). Eagle Farm (1,593 metres) etc.

Moonee Valley has always been recognised as a test of the thoroughbred and the fact that there has barely been one good horse to race in Victoria that has not won at Moonee Valley is the answer to the track's critics.⁷

⁷ *Moonee Valley Centennial Meeting Official Card*. Moonee Valley Racing Club. 17 September 1983.
(Held by the Essendon Historical Society)

Whilst the Essendon Historical Society has not sought to be heard, I am happy to answer any questions you may have in relation to the submission made by the Essendon Historical Society.

Judy Maddigan

President

Essendon Historical Society

Ph. 0417 398 498.



CENTENNIAL MEETING
17 September, 1983

Cards Sold on the Course, 6d. each.

MOONEE VALLEY

** Racing Club. **



Official : Card.

PUBLISHED BY AUTHORITY.

PRICE, **6d.**

Saturday, 15th September, 1883

H. H. ROCHE, Hon. Sec

Cards Sold on the Course, 6d. each.

Walker, May and Co., Printers, Melbourne.

Appendix A