

## Heritage Citation

### William Guy Higgs' Cottage

#### Key details

Addresses	At 60 Kennigo Street, Spring Hill, Queensland 4000
Type of place	House
Period	Victorian 1860-1890
Style	Queenslander
Lot plan	L63_RP9789
Key dates	Local Heritage Place Since — 14 September 2018 Date of Citation — September 2014
Construction	Walls: Timber
Criterion for listing	(A) Historical; (H) Historical association

This small timber cottage was built as rental property in the mid- 1870s for William Phillips Roe, a basket maker in George Street. In 1897 the property was sold to William Guy Higgs, influential politician. During the years Higgs resided in the cottage he played an important role as editor of the Queensland Worker, as an alderman with the Brisbane Municipal Council, a member of the State Government's Legislative Assembly and as one of the first Queensland senators in the newly formed Commonwealth Parliament. Higgs lived in the house until 1902. The cottage is not only a fine example of a small timber 1870s cottage in Spring Hill, but is important as the Higgs' home at the time of his rise to political success.

#### History

The convict settlement was closed in 1839 and in 1842 Moreton Bay was officially opened for free settlement as part of the colony of New South Wales. At this time the area now known as Spring Hill was Crown Land and by

1856 the government had begun to subdivide the land and sell to private investors. Initially the land on top of the hills was bought by wealthy Brisbane residents who established large houses overlooking the town. Smaller and less expensive lots were bought by those of slighter means on which modest workers' cottages were erected. Spring Hill quickly became one of Brisbane's earliest dormitory suburbs, where most of its inhabitants went to jobs every day in other areas. The town limit was denoted by Boundary Street at this time. By the 1870s, following further subdivision of land in the Spring Hill area, the lower slopes of the hills were becoming increasingly crowded.

In 1885 the Queensland Government introduced the *Undue Subdivision of Land Prevention Act 1885*. The government began to have concerns with over-population in inner-city areas from as early as the 1870s. The construction of small tenements and tiny cottages on very small parcels of land increased the risk of disease and fire throughout the inner-city suburbs. With the passing of the 1885 legislation it became illegal to subdivide land into lots of less than sixteen perches (405m<sup>2</sup>). It also regulated the width of new roads and lanes and the distance between new houses and the road.

In a February 1886 article in the *Queensland Figaro and Punch*, Spring Hill's overcrowded conditions were commented on:

Some steps should be taken in order to put a stop to the manner in which buildings are huddled together in the suburbs of Brisbane. One has only to visit, say, Spring Hill, and he will see three or four dwellings on a small allotment of ground barely sufficient for one decent dwelling house ... fever and other diseases will be breaking out which will spread like a plague, and the cry then will be "I always said it would end badly" (*Queensland Figaro and Punch*, 13 February 1886, p15).

By the 1890s, Spring Hill had become Brisbane's most crowded suburb.

In 1873 William Phillips Roe purchased a newly subdivided 15 perch lot on Kennigo Street, Spring Hill. Roe was a basket maker in George Street and built the Kennigo Street cottage as a rental property. This continued until 1897 when the property was bought by William Guy Higgs. Prior to this date, Higgs and his family had been residing in the cottage since 1895. It is unclear whether they moved into the house initially as renters and then decided to buy the property, or if the transfer of the Certificate of Title was delayed.

William Guy Higgs first came to Brisbane from Sydney in 1893 where he had been heavily involved in the union and labour movement and where he became the editor of the *Australian Workman*. Twelve months later he accepted the position of editor of the publication *Queensland Worker* which had been established in 1890 as "an epic of a desperate struggle against unprecedented obstacles and against the unscrupulous scheming of capitalistic and reactionary forces" (*Worker*, 8 August 1939). This was a time when the rights of workers were brought to the forefront of the Queenslanders' conscience following the 1891 shearer's strike, the catalyst for the founding of the Australian Labor Party. There was also public focus on the rights and conditions of factory and shop workers who very often worked extremely long hours in appalling conditions for low wages. As editor of the *Queensland Worker* Higgs played an important role in exposing these conditions to the public and lobbying for change.

While residing in the Kennigo Street cottage, Higgs' political career took shape. As a staunch Labor Party representative, he contributed to the country's political history. In 1899 he became an alderman with the Brisbane Municipal Council and later the same year was elected to the Legislative Assembly. Higgs was noted as upholding family values and "His greatest possession is his home. Reckons that the man who would ask him

to give up his family, his home and his books for any individual or party would have a warm time" (*The Queenslander*, 28 July 1900). On 1 January 1901 Australia became a Federation and a Commonwealth Parliament was formed. Higgs served as a senator from 1901 and was one of the first from Queensland to do so. He held this position until 1906. He moved out of the Kennigo Street cottage in 1902 but continued to own the property and rented it to tenants. Higgs' continued to play an important role in federal politics in the early twentieth century, including as Federal Treasurer for some years and deputy leader.

The Kennigo Street cottage, is not only a good representation of a small timber 1870s cottage in Spring Hill, it is also important as the home of William Guy Higgs who resided in the cottage throughout the time his successful political career was taking shape.

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## Description

This cottage is a small one-story, timber framed, low set cottage with attached rear service wings. It has hipped and gables roof clad with corrugated metal sheets. A timber framed verandah with central gable portico spans the front. The exterior is clad in wide timber chamfer boards and the cottage retains early timber French doors. The cottage has an original face brick chimney.

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## Statement of significance

### Relevant assessment criteria

This is a place of local heritage significance and meets one or more of the local heritage criteria under the Heritage planning scheme policy of the *Brisbane City Plan 2014*. It is significant because:

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### Historical

#### CRITERION A

The place is important in demonstrating the evolution or pattern of the city's or local area's history as a small 1870s timber cottage which demonstrates the residential pattern in Spring Hill at this time.

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### Historical association

#### CRITERION H

The place has a special association with the life or work of a particular person, group or organization of

importance in the city's or local area's history

as the residence of Labor politician, William Guy Higgs, from 1895 to 1902.

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## References

1. Post Office Directories.
  2. Certificates of Titles, Department of Natural Resources and Mines
  3. Queensland Electoral Rolls
  4. Allom Lovell Marquis-Kyle, *The Character of Residential Areas, Brisbane*, A Study for the Brisbane City Council, 1994
  5. Brisbane History Group, *Housing, Health, the River and the Arts*, Papers No. 3, 1985
  6. 1914 *Metropolitan Water and Sewerage Map*, Brisbane City Council Archives
  7. *Queensland Figaro and Punch*
  8. *The Queenslander*, 28 July 1900
  9. Australian Dictionary of Biography, *William Guy Higgs*
  10. *Queensland Figaro and Punch*, 13 February 1886, p15
  11. *Worker*, 8 August 1939
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**Note:** This citation has been prepared on the basis of evidence available at the time including an external examination of the building. The statement of significance is a summary of the most culturally important aspects of the property based on the available evidence, and may be re-assessed if further information becomes available. The purpose of this citation is to provide an informed evaluation for heritage registration and information. This does not negate the necessity for a thorough conservation study by a qualified practitioner,

before any action is taken which may affect its heritage significance.

**Citation prepared by** — Brisbane City Council (page revised September 2020)



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