

Heritage Citation



Floraville

Key details

Addresses	At 115 Laurel Avenue, Chelmer, Queensland 4068
Type of place	House
Period	Victorian 1860-1890
Style	Queenslander
Lot plan	L2_RP69024
Key dates	Local Heritage Place Since — 1 January 2005 Date of Citation — December 2015
Construction	Roof: Corrugated iron; Walls: Timber

People/associations the Morley family (Association)

Criterion for listing (A) Historical; (E) Aesthetic; (H) Historical association

'Floraville' was constructed circa 1887 for journalist Walter Morley and his family. Morley was active in the local community, serving on the Sherwood Divisional Board. He is credited with planting the street's eponymous camphor laurel trees in the late nineteenth century. Morley renamed the house 'Maroomba' in the 1920s, and resided there until his death in 1937. Alterations were made to the house in 1938, when the property was renamed 'Tresta', but were reversed in the 1980s. The house was used to host numerous social functions through the 1940s and 1950s by its well-known occupants, including doctor and sportsman Otto Nothing.

History

The area from Chelmer to Corinda, traditionally owned by the Jagera people as part of their extensive home land, was released for European settlement in 1851 and developed as farmland. Cut off from North Brisbane by the river, the area was remote, although it was accessible from Indooroopilly by ferry and less directly by road to the city via the Rocky Waterholes (Rocklea). This isolation was reduced in 1876 with the completion of the Ipswich to Brisbane railway line that passed through Chelmer and a station built at 'Oxley Point', which became known as Chelmer in the early 1880s. Despite a wave of building in the 1880s resulting from a population boom in Brisbane, many Chelmer allotments remained vacant and the area retained a rural feel.

In 1886 journalist Walter J Morley acquired a one acre and 13.5 perch site (0.44ha) in Chelmer, which was conveniently close to Chelmer railway station. It faced a street then known as Riverview Terrace or Florence Street, and overlooked the river at the rear. It lacked a river frontage but this proved an advantage when the property was spared damage from the severe floods of the 1890s. The site was on the western side of the railway line, which in Chelmer was beginning to feature more substantial and prominent residences than the eastern side, where the residents were mainly blue collar working families.

Morley had arrived in Brisbane at the age of five in 1858. He joined the staff of the Brisbane Newspaper Company in 1865 and was the editor of the Evening Observer, becoming the editor of the Queensland Government Mining Journal in 1900. At the time of his land purchase he was living with his growing family in Quay Street, Petrie Terrace. His choice of this site may have been influenced by his family, as his parents resided in Sherwood and his sister Martha had married into one of the area's European settler families.

Morley had a house constructed shortly after purchasing the site. He may have built the house himself as he was listed in the 1887 Post Office Directory as a 'carpenter' rather than 'journalist' as in earlier directories. The large timber house was to accommodate his family, then consisting of Morley, his wife Victoire and seven children. The family took up residence in their house, called 'Floraville', in 1887. Morley resigned from the Brisbane Sailing Club in August 1887 'owing to inability to attend the meetings' – possibly because of the distance between Chelmer and the city. The Quay Street home was advertised for sale or lease in September 1887, and in October that year Morley was enrolled to vote in the Oxley electoral district, using his Chelmer residence as qualification.

Morley and his family took an interest in local matters, particularly those associated with outdoor recreation. Morley served on the Sherwood Divisional Board from 1895 and encouraged the planting of street trees, including Laurel Avenue's eponymous camphor laurel trees (*cinnamomum camphora*). Though it has not been verified, local history credits the Morley family with planting the entire avenue of camphor laurels, which stretches approximately 1 kilometre in length. As an enthusiastic sportsman, Morley became involved in tennis clubs while living in Chelmer, including the Queensland Lawn Tennis Association and the Indooroopilly Lawn Tennis Club. Morley had a lawn tennis court constructed in the Floraville's yard immediately behind the house and it was one of the courts used by the Indooroopilly club in the 1900s. The Morley family also participated in tennis club competitions in the early twentieth century. When Morley's age forced him to give up tennis, he became a foundation member of the Graceville Bowls Club in 1919.

From the twentieth century Chelmer was recognised as a desirable residential suburb. The Laurel Avenue plantings were anticipated to 'add greatly to the attractions of Chelmer'¹ in the early 1900s. By the 1920s properties like Morley's added to the view of Chelmer as 'essentially a home-like suburb – with its pleasant level stretches of green, its prettily planned villas, with ample room for the tennis courts that often adjoin them in this district and its white tree-ordered streets.'²

Morley reduced the size of his holding in 1919, retaining a block of nearly three roods (0.3 hectares) on the corner of Laurel Avenue, Jarrott Street and Morley Street. He renamed the house 'Maroomba', a word from the Jandai language (spoken on Stradbroke and Moreton Islands) meaning 'good'. The name may have been inspired by a yacht of the same name, which the Royal Queensland Yacht Club built in 1922. Morley resided in the house until his death in 1938, six years after retiring as editor of the Queensland Government Mining Journal.

After Morley's death Floraville/Maroomba became the property of a series of prominent Brisbane residents. By the late 1930s Chelmer was considered one of the 'dress-circle'³ suburbs of Brisbane. The appeal of the suburb increased with the opening of the Walter Taylor Bridge in 1936, providing better accessibility to the city by car. This made the house, with its already appealing facilities, even more attractive to purchasers.

John Park, a tea company manager, purchased the property with his wife Barbara in 1938. The couple renamed the house 'Tresta' and undertook extensions, which were built by Barbara's father Charles Abernathy. The front was modernised in art deco style and the verandahs were enclosed. The garden was completely rebuilt by Mrs Park's friends, though the tennis court remained and hosted afternoon tea and games for the garden workers.

In 1943 Tresta was transferred to Clive and Dorothy Sippe. Clive Sippe, a medical doctor, had returned to Brisbane earlier in the year from service in World War II, and was considered by fellow medical practitioners to be 'one of the most brilliant physicians in Brisbane'⁴. In addition, the Sippes took part in numerous sporting events, including sailing, golf, tennis and racing, and had celebrated their marriage with a fishing honeymoon. Clive Sippe was a member of the Warehouse Tennis Association, providing another use for the house's tennis court.

Clive Sippe died in 1949. Dorothy retained a section of the land but sold the house and 65.7 perches (1661.74m²) of the land to Dr Otto Nothling in 1951. Like Clive Sippe, Nothling was a well-respected doctor and sportsman. Nothling had represented Australia in both rugby union and cricket and was selected to replace Donald Bradman in the 1928 Test match against England. He then became a Maryborough alderman before moving to Brisbane, where he was the first skin specialist appointed to the Brisbane Children's Hospital. He resided at the Chelmer residence until his death in 1965.

The Chelmer house provided an ideal function venue for its owners through the 1940s and 1950s. Dinners, wedding parties and fundraisers hosted at the residence by Mrs Park, the Sippes and Nothling were described in

social sections of the newspapers, including a bursary fundraiser with one hundred guests at the 'attractive riverside home' in 1948.⁵

The house was transferred through a number of proprietors in the late twentieth century. In the 1980s owners renovated the property, which reopened the verandahs and instated a traditional appearance to the house. An extension was added to the north in 1993. In 2015 it remains a substantial intact timber residence with generous garden and tennis court on leafy Laurel Avenue.

Description

Floraville (c1887) is a substantial, intact, high-set timber residence with attractive architectural qualities representative of its construction period. Standing on a prominent corner site in a manicured landscaped garden setting, the house has visual prominence in the street and is a strong contributor to the extensive and remarkable verdant beauty of Laurel Avenue. It includes a tennis court at the rear (by 1905), which is an important, characteristic element and elegant domestic interiors enlivened by restrained timber architectural joinery. The northern wing addition (1993) is not of cultural heritage significance.

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:

Historical

CRITERION A

The place is important in demonstrating the evolution or pattern of the city's or local area's history

as an 1880s home built on a large block of land during Chelmer's early development as a primarily residential suburb of fine houses on large allotments.

Aesthetic

CRITERION E

The place is important because of its aesthetic significance

as a prominent, fine timber residence encircled by wide verandahs and standing in a manicured landscaped garden with tennis court. It contributes strongly to the verdant beauty of Laurel Avenue.

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 a fine residence built by Walter Morley, journalist and local alderman, who is credited with the planting of the distinctive camphor laurel trees of Laurel Avenue.

References

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2. *The Daily Mail*, Saturday 12 August 1922 p9
3. *Truth*, 8 April 1934 p23
4. *Courier Mail*, 18 January 1949 p3
5. *Sunday Mail*, 14 March 1948 p6
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7. Brisbane City Council Building Registers
8. Brisbane City Council, City Architecture & Heritage Team, heritage citations
9. Brisbane City Council Heritage Unit, *Walter Taylor South Character and Heritage Study*, 1997
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11. Brisbane City Council Water Supply and Sewerage Detail Plans
12. Department of Natural Resources, Queensland Certificates of title and other records.
13. Department of Natural Resources and Mines, Queensland Place Names: Chelmer
14. McKellars' Map of Brisbane, 1895 and 1907
15. Pugh's Almanac
16. Centre for the Government of Queensland, Queensland Places: Chelmer
17. Queensland Post Office Directories
18. Queensland Electoral Rolls
19. Queensland Births, Deaths and Marriages

20. National Library of Australia, Trove digitised newspapers, *Telegraph, Daily Mail, The Week, Brisbane Courier, Courier Mail, Daily Standard, Worker*
21. Mrs Cyril Bodes, *Chelmer Through the Years 1860 to 1973*, 1973
22. Nanette Lilley, *Welcome to Laurel Avenue*, Graceville: Nanette Lilley, 2014
23. G. P. Walsh, 'Nothling, Otto Ernest (1900–1965)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/nothling-otto-ernest-11264/text20093>, published first in hardcopy 2000
24. Austin, CG, 'One hundred years of sport and recreation in Queensland', *Journal of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland*, Vol 6 No 1 (1959), pp 268-293
25. Fones, Ralph, 'Tennis Anyone? Tennis Almost Everyone!', in Fones, Ralph (ed), *Oxley-Chelmer Places, Patriarchs and Pastimes*, Oxley Chelmer History Group Papers 1 (1996-7)

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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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