

Heritage Citation



Muller Brothers Building (former)

Key details

| | |
|------------------|--|
| Addresses | At 194 Wickham Street, Fortitude Valley, Queensland 4006 |
|------------------|--|

| | |
|------------------------------|---|
| Type of place | Shop/s |
| Period | Victorian 1860-1890 |
| Style | Italianate |
| Lot plan | L5_RP9541; L4_RP9541 |
| Key dates | Local Heritage Place Since — 30 October 2000 Date of Citation — January 2010 |
| Construction | Walls: Masonry - Render |
| People/associations | Andrea Giovanni Stumbuco (Architect) |
| Criterion for listing | (A) Historical; (A) Historical; (B) Rarity; (E) Aesthetic; (H) Historical association |

The Muller Brothers building was built in 1886 to a design by notable architect Andrea Stombuco, for site owner John Watson. Watson played a large role in nineteenth century society as a property owner, politician and builder, and he had worked as a contractor on buildings designed by Stombuco. The building was constructed during the boom of the 1880s, when masonry buildings began to replace timber shops in the Valley. It was leased to a range of small business tenants, whose nationalities (Chinese, Greek and German) reflected the multicultural nature of the Valley from the late nineteenth century.

History

Until the mid-1880s, Wickham Street was a quiet and sparsely populated street. Although the section between Duncan and Brunswick Streets hosted the Roman Catholic chapel from the late 1850s and the Prince Consort hotel from the early 1860s, Anne Street (as it was then spelled) was the main commercial district of Fortitude Valley. The Valley itself was a quiet and sparsely populated town until the 1880s, when an economic boom encouraged the construction of brick and stone buildings, replacing wooden ones. Residents of the Valley also began demanding better services, including improved transport, roads and sewage systems. The boom also assisted the development of Wickham Street, which became an increasingly important retail area from the 1880s.

Phillip Bolger obtained title to the site in April 1882, with the help of a £3,000 mortgage, and ran an oyster saloon on the site. The property was sold in 1885, firstly to Benjamin Waylett in May and then to John Watson in July. The site was located between stores run by drapers Quinn and Moylan and the former Roman Catholic Chapel.

The building was constructed for John Watson in 1886. Watson was a renowned figure in nineteenth century Brisbane, a Scottish immigrant whose varied career included roles as contractor, former lessee of the Bulimba Hotel and ferry and postmaster of the Breakfast Creek area. In the 1880s he began his first forays into his career as politician, elected to the Bulimba Divisional Board. He had become its chairman in 1885, when a financial scandal erupted and caused the resignation of all board members. Watson disclaimed knowledge of

the problem (defrauding the Treasury) and was reinstated to the Board. In 1886 he was a member of the Booroodabin Divisional Board and stood for election for the seat of Fortitude Valley, which had been vacated after the sudden death of Francis Beattie.

Tenders were called in March for the construction of two two-storey brick stops for J. Watson, Esquire, by renowned and flamboyant architect Andrea Stombuco, who was also the Catholic Diocesan architect. Stombuco, like Watson, attracted a great deal of notice in nineteenth century Brisbane society, infamous for his fiery temper and his manner of dressing. He was also responsible for the design of several heritage listed buildings, including St Patrick's Church in the Valley (1882) [600210]; St Francis Xavier Church, Goodna (1881) [600553]; Heckelmann's Building, Brisbane (1884) [600104]; and a residence, Bertholme (1883) [600263]. Stombuco began practising with son Giovanni in 1886 (Watson's building being one of its first commissions) and the partnership was responsible for the design of, inter alia, St Joseph's Catholic Church at Kangaroo Point and St Joseph's Christian Brothers' College at Nudgee, before Andrea Stombuco left Brisbane for Perth and Giovanni Stombuco retired.

Watson's choice of Stombuco to design his new building may have been influenced by his long connection with the architect. In his work as a contractor, Watson had worked with Stombuco on Benjamin Bros' new warehouse (1884) and 'Palma Rosa', Stombuco's residence (1887) [600219]. He was in attendance at the opening of the latter building in 1887, along with a number of other prominent contractors. Watson had also erected the new belfry for the new St Patrick's church in 1886, a building which Stombuco had designed. Stombuco had also designed the Brunswick Street drapery of Watson's father-in-law, John Gillies, in 1880.

The construction of Watson's new building was preceded by excavation work, carried out by Cornelius Ryan. The presence of porphyry under the site necessitated blasting operations, which were commenced in early April. On 16 April a passer-by, Felix Henry, was killed by a large stone (estimated as weighing between 5-7lb) loosened by a blast. Watson's name was not mentioned in newspaper reports of the blast, and Watson was not reluctant to mention in May that he was undertaking the construction of two new shops which would cost £3,000 and would help beautify Wickham Street. Despite this dedication to his ward, he lost the election by 26 votes. He later won the seat and represented the Valley in 1888.

The shops were finished and leased to tenants from around 1887. Watson's father-in-law, Gillies, managed the lease of the building, known as 'Watson's buildings'. Although it was a single building, it contained two shops which were considered to be separate 'buildings'. Each building contained six rooms, including a shop and dwelling and was described as being in the best part of Wickham Street, located next to drapers Quinn and Moylan and the former Catholic chapel. The building could also be accessed by a small laneway running behind the property, which backed onto the Valley rail line, under construction at the time Watson's building was completed. Watson had been a member of the Valley Railway Committee and an active participant at meetings in the 1880s calling for a railway to be extended to the Valley. Although Watson had favoured a line through Petrie's Bite and not through Watson's properties, as the line eventually ran, he continued to support the railway and encourage the extension of the line to Bulimba, or at least to the Bulimba reach of the river. John McMaster, a fellow politician, later credited Watson with being instrumental in the development of the Valley railway.

From the 1890s, the building hosted a succession of Chinese merchant businesses. The presence of Chinese merchants in the Valley was not uncommon; the first Chinese shops had opened in the 1880s, located mainly along Wickham Street, and Chinese market gardeners worked on the edge of the Valley. However, the occupation of Watson's buildings by Chinese merchants was somewhat unusual, as John Watson was the leader of the Valley branch of the Anti-Chinese League and had stirred up anti-Chinese sentiment in the months leading up to the 1888 elections. The first round of elections had culminated in an anti-Chinese riot on 5 May, in

which a large group had run through the city and Valley damaging the shops of Chinese merchants. Watson, who had campaigned on a stance of removing the Chinese from the country, was elected to the seat of Fortitude Valley by a considerable margin a week after the riots. Police were positioned in front of every Chinese shop in the Valley on the evening of the election, discouraging any further damage from the 'larrikin classes'. The Chinese Immigration Restriction Act 1888 was passed later in the year. Nevertheless, tea importer James Yeteng and merchants Wo Yick Chong and See War and Company ran their businesses in succession from one of the shops for ten years, from 1892-1902.

Watson's building was occupied by small drapery businesses and Muller Brothers, importers, from 1902. The Muller brothers (Max and Emil) resided upstairs at number 194. A 1913 photograph of Wickham Street shows Watson's buildings, Maher's building and the Prince Consort Hotel.

Following the death of John Watson in 1912, the property and the McGeehin building next door were placed in trust. The remarriage of Watson's wife Christina left her unable to inherit and the five remaining beneficiaries, Watson's children, intended to divide the properties so that each owned one of the shops on Wickham Street.

The new Undue Subdivision of Land Prevention Act 1923 passed by the City Council intended to restrict subdivisions to properties with over 20 foot frontages, but the Watson beneficiaries successfully appealed the Council's decision in 1924. The Muller Brothers building was passed to Charles Ferrier Watson, who inherited shop 194, on 6.98 perches of land and George Alexander Hilliary Watson, who received shop 196 on 7.43 perches. The properties also carried charges in favour of Mary Murray (another of Watson's children, who had not inherited a property) and Christina Scott, Watson's widow.

The Watson brothers leased the properties separately, although to similar tenants who ran tailoring or drapery businesses, and from the 1940s cafes and saloons, which had become increasingly popular in the Valley. Both properties were sold in the late 1940s and alterations were made to the shop-front of 194 in 1950 (owned by M. Andronicos, 1948-1967) and 1956 (leased by G.F. Price); and to the shop-front of 196 in 1952 (owned by D. Mee Sing), to the café in 1953 (owned by Leonard Young) and to the awning in 1965 (owned by Joe Kong).

The shops continue to be owned separately and run as commercial properties (restaurants and cafes).

Description

The building is two storeyed, of rendered masonry construction, divided into two adjacent tenancies. The upper floor has four narrow semi circular arched openings, with the right hand tenancy retaining the original pairs of French doors, while the left hand portion contains top hung awning sashes. A double string course occurs mid way between the tops of the window openings and a heavily moulded and bracketed cornice.

The parapet contains four piers with the outer panels in filled with masonry interlocking circles. The wider central panel is solid, and surmounted by a triangular pediment with a moulded infill. Five large ornate urns are mounted above the piers and at the apex of the pediment.

Alterations have occurred to the ground floor shopfronts, and left hand upper floor doors, replacement of the original post supported awning with two suspended awnings, and removal of the original convex roofed, cantilevered balcony from the upper floor.

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

for its reflection of the historic ethnic composition of Fortitude Valley, having been occupied by a succession of German, Greek and Asian merchants.

Historical

CRITERION A

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

for its reflection of the second wave of growth of Fortitude Valley as a commercial centre, when masonry buildings replaced earlier timber shops.

Rarity

CRITERION B

The place demonstrates rare, uncommon or endangered aspects of the city's or local area's cultural heritage

as a relatively intact example of a late nineteenth century Italianate commercial building.

Aesthetic

CRITERION E

The place is important because of its aesthetic significance

for its contribution to the streetscape as part of an extensive group of similarly scaled buildings.

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

for its association with designer Andrea Stombuco.

References

1. Brisbane City Council Heritage Unit Citation May 1991
 2. Queensland Post Office Directories
 3. Queensland Land Titles Office Records
 4. John Oxley Library Photograph Collection, 1913
 5. *The Brisbane Courier*, 1885-8
 6. Donald Watson and Judith McKay, *Queensland Architects of the Nineteenth Century*, South Brisbane: Queensland Museum, 1994
-

Copyright Brisbane City Council

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)



Dedicated to a better Brisbane