

Heritage Citation



Tombs Duplex

Key details

Addresses	At 15 Union Street, Spring Hill, Queensland 4000; At 19 Union Street, Spring Hill, Queensland 4000
Type of place	Duplex
Period	Colonial 1842-1860
Style	Georgian
Lot plan	L1_SP100254; L2_SP100254
Key dates	Local Heritage Place Since — 14 September 2018 Date of Citation — August 2014
Construction	Roof: Corrugated iron; Walls: Masonry

George Tombs, a wheelwright, constructed this brick duplex at the St Paul's Terrace end of Union Street in 1868, a time when Spring Hill was becoming established as the first dormitory suburb of Brisbane. It demonstrates the pattern of development at Spring Hill in the mid-nineteenth century when accommodation for the working classes consisted largely of tiny cottages and duplexes on very small allotments on the slopes and hollows between Gregory Terrace and Wickham Terrace.

History

This brick duplex is situated on a small block of land (almost 14 perches) purchased by wheelwright, George Tombs, in 1868. Shipping records show a George Tombs arrived at Moreton Bay in 1858. Postal records indicate that Tombs, whose occupation was also given as "carpenter", was living on the site the same year. At this time, Spring Hill was established as Brisbane's first dormitory suburb.

The Moreton Bay convict settlement was closed in 1839 and in 1842 Brisbane 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 allotments 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 lesser means who erected modest workers' cottages. Some enterprising residents constructed more than one cottage or a duplex on already small lots creating a source of rental income. Duplexes, both brick and timber, became a particular feature of Spring Hill.

Surviving duplexes from the nineteenth century are rare in Brisbane, however, Spring Hill has retained several. They range from fine 1860s masonry buildings such as 'Callender House' (now the Theosophical Society) and 'Athol Place' along the elevated ridge of Wickham Terrace to more middle class dwellings built on the slopes of Spring Hill such as the 1860s stone duplex at 19 Gloucester Street and the 1870s brick semi-detached Moody's cottages in Victoria Street. Humble timber duplexes built in the hollows of Spring Hill for the working classes included those in Birley Street and a slightly larger one on the corner of Gloucester and Thornbury Streets.

Spring Hill quickly became one of Brisbane's earliest dormitory suburbs, where most of its inhabitants went to jobs every day in other areas and many working class residents lived in rental accommodation. 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 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”.²

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 (405m²). It also regulated the width of new roads and lanes and the distance between new houses and the road.

At the time when wheelwright, George Tombs built his brick duplex, Union Street was named Skinner Street. It ran down the slope from St Paul's Terrace (then Leichhardt Street) to Water Street (then known as Spring Hollow) before climbing the slope to Gregory Terrace. Skinner Street was renamed Union Street in the late 1870s, by which time there were some 17 households in the street between St Paul's Terrace and Water Street. The street was populated by skilled and unskilled workers, including a jeweller, stonemason, tailors, carpenters, labourers and mariners. The names of residents in Union Street at this time indicate many skilled workers from Continental Europe for example, tailors by the names of Gottschalk, Asmussen and Zeilk. George Tombs' close neighbours in 1888 included Lott Schmidt, a jeweller, Ferdinand Brandenburg, a grocer's assistant and Henry Stretke, a joiner.

Postal records indicate that George Tombs took up residence in the St Pauls Terrace side of the duplex. This was initially no. 6 but was renumbered no. 15 by the turn of the century. A succession of tenants, mostly carpenters, wheelwrights and labourers, resided in the lower half of the duplex which steps down along the slope of Union Street. By 1913, a large, separate timber “room” had been added at the rear of the upper half of the duplex (no. 15). This possibly provided additional accommodation.

No. 15 is on a slightly larger area of land than the other half of the duplex. However, the two sides of the original duplex building are of a similar size. Both sides had verandahs along the front boundary and a small central verandah at the rear with steps leading down to the yard. The front verandahs are now enclosed with a central entrance doors. The two halves of the duplex have iron gabled roofs which extend at an angle over the verandahs.

The building provided a family home for George Tombs who married Mary Woodcraft in 1873. Upon Tombs' death in 1905, the property passed to his widow, Mary, who died in 1909. The duplex was transferred to their daughters who sold the site the following year. The duplex has since had several owners.

The original allotment of almost 14 perches purchased in Union Street by Tombs has changed little since the 1860s. It was, however, strata titled in 1997 allowing each side of the duplex to be owned separately. Like other early duplexes on small allotments in the area, this building demonstrates the particular pattern of development that occurred on the slopes of Spring Hill in the nineteenth century – particularly for the working classes. The pressures of rapid population increases, particularly immigration, resulted in overcrowded living conditions at Spring Hill causing widespread concern about ‘slums’ and contributing to the passing of the 1885 Undue Subdivision of Land Protection Act.

Description

Tombs' Duplex is a pair of modest, brick attached houses directly fronting Union Street, Spring Hill. They have a

gabled roof made of corrugated metal sheeting and a front verandah spanning the front.

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 a brick, working class duplex constructed in the 1860s on a very small block of land it demonstrates the intense development of land in Spring Hill which contributed to the introduction of the Undue Subdivision of Land Preventions Act 1885.

Rarity

CRITERION B

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

as a very early example of a brick duplex built in Brisbane in the 1860s.

Representative

CRITERION D

The place is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a particular class or classes of cultural places

as a good example of a small, mid-nineteenth century, single storey, brick duplex in Brisbane.

References

1. *Queensland Figaro and Punch*, 13 February 1886, p15
 2. *Queensland Early Pioneers Index 1824-1859 Transcription*. 16 Feb 1858. Find My Past. <http://www.findmypast.com.au/> 18 Aug 2014
 3. *Australian Marriage Index, 1788-1950* – Ancestry.com. <http://www.ancestrylibrary.com/> 18 Aug 2014
 4. Brisbane City Council Detail Plan no. 146, 1914
 5. *Brisbane City Archives. Surveyor's Field Book* – Spring Hill – Union St – 15 – C102-38 and Spring Hill – Union St – 19 – C102-37
 6. Post Office Directories
 7. Department of Natural Resources and Mines, Queensland Certificates of Title
 8. Queensland Electoral Rolls
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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.

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