

IDENTIFER	HOUSE		
Other/s	Fankhauser farmhouse (former)		
Address	224 Belmore Road BALWYN	Date/s	1870s/80s
Designer/s	-	Builder/s	-
Theme/s	2.5 Migrating and making a home	Heritage Group	Residential Building (Private)
	4.4 Farming (horticulture)	Heritage Category	House
		Heritage status	-
Intactness	Good (typical rear additions)	Significance	Local
Condition	Good	Recommendation	Include in HO as individual place



Extent	Building and curtilage to street	Survey date	10/01/12
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History

This house was erected for George and Louisa Fankhauser, who were members of a German migrant family that pioneered farming and orcharding in Melbourne's eastern suburbs in the second half of the nineteenth century. Migrating from Prussia in 1853, patriarch Johann Fankhauser (1799-1882) and his wife, the former Elizabeth Geisler (1808-1984) settled in a part of Hawthorn that was then known as "German Paddock" due to its high migrant population. George Fankhauser (1837-1897), the eldest son of Johann and Elizabeth's four children, married fellow *emigre* Louisa Neumann (1840-1916) in 1860, and the couple moved eastwards to Elgar's Special Survey, where their first child, George Frederick, was born on 12 June 1861. A month earlier, Fankhauser had requested an extension of time to 'clear stumps and trees in Ewart's Road' (ie Belmore Road), where he had taken up land of Portion 18. According to rate records, a house (of unspecified size and construction) had been erected there by 1862. It is unlikely, however, that this refers to the present house, which would appear, on stylistic grounds, to date from the 1870s or '80s.

The Fankhausers' property was subsequently recorded in rate books as a house on 11 acres (1875) and a house on 22 acres (1887), albeit without providing any further descriptive detail. It was not until after George's death in 1897 that the property was described more definitely (in an inventory of assets in his probate papers) as "twenty three acres and eleven perches or thereabouts ... on which is erected a brick and weatherboard house, 6 rooms, pantry, scullery and dairy, WB, also WB stables, barn, cow sheds, pigsties". It was also noted that ten acres of the land was devoted to an orchard that was then 25 years old (ie, established c.1872). The relatively modest size of the house belied the size of the Fankhauser family, which comprised eight sons and four daughters, born between 1861 and 1884.

Under the terms of George's will, ownership of the house passed to his eldest son, George Frederick, although his widow was permitted to reside there for the rest of her life. As it turned out, Louise Fankhauser stayed there for only a few more years before returning to Hawthorn, where she lived with another son, Walter, until her own death in 1916. Four years later, ownership of the 23-acre property on Belmore Road transferred to George Frederick Fankhauser, who wasted little time in subdividing it. The following year, it was carved up to create 30 allotments with frontages to Belmore Road, Raynes Street, Flora Street and Bruce Street. Most were standard rectangular blocks for residential development, although a few larger ones were also provided. The brick farmhouse was retained on Lot 5, which was just over one acre in area and fronted Belmore Road. To the south, it abutted another one-acre block, Lot 19, extending back to Rayner Street. In 1927, these two lots were consolidated under a single title (along with the adjacent but smaller Lot 18) to create a single holding of just over three acres. Ownership of the property was jointly vested in Victor and Catherine van Lavick, farmers of Doncaster Road, and one Annie Sharp of Belmore Road, who was evidently the occupant of the house. The latter is confirmed by electoral rolls of the early 1930s, which identify Annie Sharp as a resident of "Belmore Road East", along with presumed family members Harry Sharp (a carpenter), Robert Sharp (a labourer) and Ivy Phoebe Sharp (home duties). In 1946, the consolidated Lots 5, 18 and 19 were subdivided for closer settlement, creating three much smaller allotments along Belmore Road, another three on Raynes Street, and six more fronting a new *cul-de-sac*, Collins Court. The farmhouse was retained on Lot 12, fronting Collins Court, although the adjacent Lot 1, to the north, remained vacant thereafter, preserving the property's original Belmore Road frontage to the present day.

Description and Integrity

The former farmhouse consists primarily of a single-storey double-fronted Victorian bichromatic brick villa with a slate-clad hipped roof, to which some twentieth century brick additions have been made to the rear (south) side. External walls to the front and sides of the house are of tuckpointed dark brown brick, laid in English bond, with stringcourses, quoining, voussoirs in contrasting cream and red brick. The Belmore Road frontage retains the characteristic Victorian symmetrical facade, with a central doorway flanked by two pairs of tall rectangular windows; there are several bays of matching windows to the two side (east and west) elevations. All of these openings have segmental arched heads; the windows contain timber-framed double-hung sashes, while the front entrance contains an ornate timber door-case with fanlight, sidelights and six-panel door with prominent bolection mouldings and fielded panels. The slate-clad roof (which includes some contrasting darker slates to create a chevron pattern) has narrow eaves, supported on paired brackets, and is penetrated by two pairs of brick chimneys. Only one of two front chimneys (to the west side) retains its original form with bichromatic brick plinth, banding and moulded coping; the other (to the east side) has been partially demolished to form a stub. The two rear chimneys have also been altered by the removal of their moulded coping.

The rear additions (visible from the property's Collins Court frontage) comprise a small projecting wing of clinker brick construction, which has a low hipped roof (also clad in slate) and tripartite bays of timber-framed windows with brick sills. There is also an flat-roofed red brick garage with a narrow vehicle doorway facing Collins Court. On this side, the property boundary is marked by a low red brick wall and a timber paling fence.

The house is set well back from the property's Belmore Road frontage, and its landscaped setting includes a mature pepper tree (*Schinus molle*).

Historical Context

Although the present house itself evidently dates from the 1870s or '80s, it was erected by a pioneer family that had originally settled in Balwyn back in 1860. As such, the house should be seen in the context of the earliest phase of post-contact settlement in the study area, coinciding with the subdivision and sale of Elgar's Special Survey under the name of the 'Boroondara Estate'. The growth of the area during these years is reflected in statistics cited by Gwen McWilliam: according to directory listings, there were only eighteen residents of Elgar's Survey in 1847 but, by the time of the first rate assessment in 1858, the number of individual properties had almost trebled to fifty.

Comparative analysis

The former Fankhauser farmhouse is one of several residences in the study area that provide evidence of the district's nineteenth century origins as an agricultural community. While most are associated with important pioneering families on par with the Fankhausers, individual examples tend to survive with varying degrees of physical intactness and potential for clear interpretation. John Towt, who is recorded in the area as early as 1858, occupied Portions 6B, 7B and 18A and erected a brick house on the north side of Belmore Road. The property was subdivided soon after Towt's death in 1900, leaving the house on a 28-acre block fronting what is now Greythorn Road. Following further subdivision, it now occupies a site addressed as 47-51 Kenny Street that, while relatively small, is still large enough to evoke some of its former pastoral setting. Unfortunately, the house itself was either substantially remodelled or entirely rebuilt at some point in the early twentieth century, and, with its heavy rendered porch, now barely resembles a Victorian brick farmhouse.

Still with a comparably generous curtilage, and somewhat more externally intact, is the former residence of the Nott family. Following the familiar pattern, this house originally occupied land between Belmore and Gordon Streets, with its principal frontage to the latter. After twentieth century subdivision, it is now addressed as 14-16 Sevenoaks Street. While the large red brick and slate-roofed dwelling has much in common with the surviving Fankhauser farmhouse, its original facade faces south (ie away from the street), and a new principal facade, with square bay windows and a central doorway with gabled porch, has been created to what was formerly a side wall, facing Sevenoaks Street.

While a number of other farmhouses exist, these tend to occupy more significantly reduced curtilages, rendering them even more difficult to interpret. A sprawling single-storey weatherboard residence, built by the Tedstone family, originally fronted Whitehorse Road (west of Balwyn Road) but now stands on a large but tight block in a cul-de-sac, Tedstone Crescent. While the grounds retain some remnant mature trees, the house itself appears to have been re-roofed and its walls re-clad in relatively recent times, diminishing the patina of age.

Assessment against Criteria

The former farmhouse is associated with early agricultural activity in the study area (*Criterion A*)

The building is one of the more intact and readily interpretable of few surviving pre-Boom era residences (*Criterion B*)

The building retains associations with the Fankhausers, a German *emigre* family that were significant pioneers of agricultural activity (and specifically orchard) in Melbourne's eastern suburb (*Criterion H*)

Grading and Recommendations

The farmhouse at 224 Belmore Road, Balwyn, is an individually significant heritage place in the City of Boroondara.

Statement of Significance

What is significant?

The house at 224 Belmore Road, Balwyn, is a single-storey double-fronted bichromatic brick Victorian villa with a hipped roof and symmetrical facade incorporating central doorway with ornate timber door-case, and narrow pairs of flanking segmental-arched windows with timber-framed double-hung sashes. The house, believed to date from the 1870s or '80s, was erected by the Fankhausers, a German *emigre* family who, after living in Hawthorn, settled in Balwyn in 1860 and became noteworthy pioneers of agriculture and, specifically, orcharding.

How is it significant?

The house is of historical and aesthetic significance to the City of Boroondara.

Why is it significant?

Historically, the house is significant for its ability to demonstrate early agricultural occupation of the study area in the second half of the nineteenth century. While the present building dates from the 1870s or '80s, it occupies the remnants of a large holding of land that had been originally settled by the Fankhausers back in 1860. Although a number of remnant mid-Victorian farmhouses still survive in the study area, most of have altered (in at a few cases, almost beyond recognition) and/or now occupy greatly reduced sites that render them difficult to interpret. The former Fankhauser farmhouse stands out as one that is significantly intact, still retains an extremely generous curtilage, and, furthermore, uniquely presents its principal frontage to the original road on which it was built – Belmore Road. As such, it has a physical presence, historical continuation and potential for interpretation that all other surviving examples lack.

Historically, the house is significant for associations for its original occupants, the Fankhauser family, whose name recurs throughout the history of the study area in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Originally from Germany, the family initially settled in Hawthorn and moved thence to Balwyn in 1860, where they were amongst the first to take up agricultural pursuits (notably orcharding) on a commercial scale. With other members of the family settling in Doncaster, the Fankhausers are acknowledged as significant pioneers of farming across Melbourne's entire eastern suburbs.

Aesthetically, the house is significant as a representative and substantially intact example of late Victorian residential architecture. Although representing an entirely typical architectural type (ie the symmetrical double-fronted villa), it is noteworthy for its lively bichromatic brickwork, comprising tuckpointed brown brick walls with stringcourses, quoining and arch voussoirs highlighted in contrasting cream and red brick. Set well back from the street on a very large and open allotment, the house is an entirely unexpected and eye-catching element along a busy major thoroughfare otherwise dominated by twentieth century development.

Identified by

Built Heritage Pty Ltd

References

Lodged Plan No 16,987, dated 26 August 1946.

Gwen McWilliam, *A Balwyn Survey*, pp 80-81.