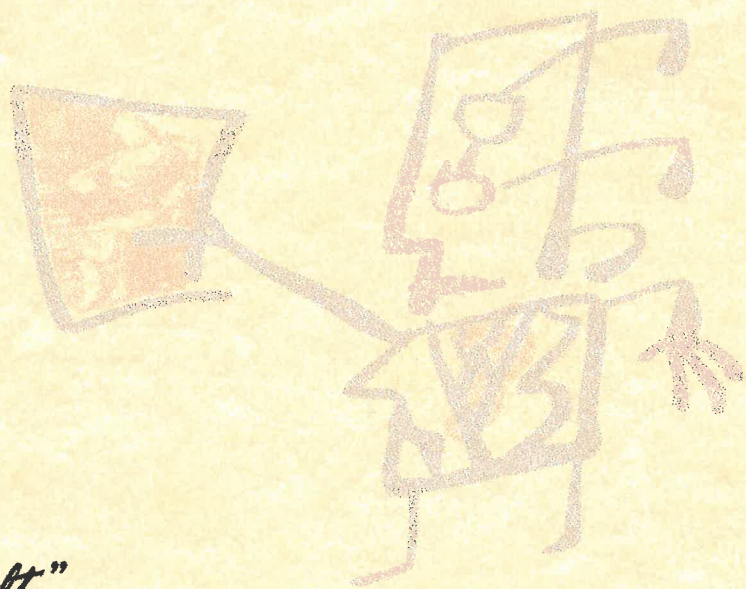


TOWN OF VICTORIA PARK LIBRARY  
LOCAL STUDIES COLLECTION

# History Competition

# 1999



*"The house that Mack built"*

by Fleur McLennan

LOCAL HERITAGE STUDY.

THE HOUSE THAT MACK BUILT:  
NUMBER ELEVEN SWANSEA STREET.

BY FLEUR MCLENNAN.

The definition of history is usually restricted to the recorded events of the past, and in the case of local history, it is often limited to just the history of the district, irrespective of the local, unrecognised identities and social significance that is brought to the history of an area. The study of local history not only provides an active link between the past and the present but preserves the memories of the community, whether they have been recorded or not into the pages of history. The local history of Victoria Park has a direct link to the history of the McLennan family, which has resided in the Victoria Park area for four generations, spanning over eighty- eight years. The significance that this family has had to the Victoria Park area is astonishing, yet unrecognised and almost completely anonymous, for the simple fact that the lore contained in this family was thought to be a-historical. This study was undertaken as a series of interviews with 78 year old Nora McLennan, over a period of three weeks, and has finally recorded (in material form) the exciting connection the family has with Victoria Park and, in particular, number 11 Swansea Street.

1940's Victoria Park was very different from the modern, busy, urbanised area that it is today. The causeway that linked Victoria Park to Perth was not the concrete and steel construction that it is today, but it was in fact, a rickety wooden bridge with multiple lanes for both horse and cart, and trams to traverse between the city and the barely established area of Victoria Park. The number 11 tram used to travel down Albany Road (now Albany Highway) as far as Mint Street as it picked up and dropped off commuters to and from Perth everyday. A single fare cost 6d. (sixpence) and the tram-lines were located in the centre of the highway, so commuters had to stand in the middle of the road in order to hail one. Traffic was not an obstacle to be overcome as horse and cart was still common, and automobiles were limited to the few that could afford them in the post-depression years. In those days of the 1940's, Nora McLennan recalled being kept awake at night by the tram she called "The Old Rattler", which was the last tram of the night returning to the Perth depot; the sounds of the tram car could be heard from her bedroom at number 11 Swansea Street, a house that was built by her father-in-law, Andrew Tate McLennan.

Andrew Tate McLennan immigrated from Scotland to Australia, by ship, on Christmas Eve, December 24, 1911. He originally landed in Albany but went to Perth in search of work, he settled in Victoria Park. Work was not a hard thing to find for Andrew McLennan, he was a master builder, conquering the skills of carpentry, stonemasonry, and brick labour. He learned his trade in the dirty shipyards on the banks of the Clyde River near Glasgow, walking between six and nine miles everyday to get to work on the docks, and eating a fried egg between two bits of bread, everyday, for lunch while he worked there. Like many others before him, he immigrated to Australia in the hope of building a better life for his wife and their children. He had left them in Scotland when he immigrated, preferring to settle first before sending for them to come and join him in Australia. Nora McLennan remarked to me that at one time, Andrew McLennan had said he could have bought half of Victoria park for the tidy sum of 100 pounds, as land was so cheap and readily available. Unfortunately, he did not have the finances at the time to fulfill such a grand dream, and instead he set about building the town of Victoria Park rather than buying it.

Andrew McLennan used his skills to build three houses in Mint Street and, further down the same street, he built the original hall for the Mint Street Presbyterian Church which is still standing today, although it has been renovated from the original and, a new facade masks that of the older building. While interviewing Nora she alluded to the fact that Andrew McLennan actually laboured on the Presbyterian Church for no compensation or wages; the building materials used in the construction of the Church were also donated, but Nora was not sure whether they were supplied by Andrew or, accumulated through donations from the community of Victoria Park.

Andrew also laboured on the Freemasons Lodge on the corner of Albany Highway and Temple Street. The society itself was founded in 1873, but the building was a more modern construction, around the early 1920's. Andrew did not construct the Freemasons

Lodge alone, as he had previously done on the Mint Street houses, but actually worked in a team of building constructors as a brick labourer.

Technically, he did not build any houses on his own, as there was always his working companion, "Dick", that helped to transport the building materials between construction sites. "Dick" was Andrew's horse, and accompanied Andrew on most of his building jobs until he was retired due to age. Together, though, they did complete one of the most important buildings to the McLennan family, the original house at number 11 Swansea Street which was originally known as Albert Street until it was renamed in 1920.

Number 11 Swansea Street was designed and constructed by Andrew and "Dick" alone, and was built for his wife, Christina, so she could join him from Scotland. The house was completed in 1913 and the same year Christina immigrated to Australia with her two eldest children, Meg and Andy. In this house Nora's husband, William Todd McLennan, was born on February 26, 1915. He was born in his mother's black wrought iron bed which, ironically, he also died in 67 years later the bed itself was sold for twenty dollars in 1982 and is quite possibly still in use today making it over 84 years old. He was christened in a Methodist Church on the corner of Duncan and Albany Highway (which is now the car park of Woolworths) even though the McLennan family was Presbyterian (N.B. The Mint Street Church was yet to be completed when William McLennan was christened).

The Swansea Street house was a weatherboard house, finished on the inside with lath and plaster. Andrew completed this all by hand and his skills as a builder. The original house also had stables in the backyard for "Dick" to be kept in, but these were modified later into a double garage after the days of horse and cart were replaced by motor vehicle. When I asked Nora about what she remembered of the house she first drew me a diagram and then told me the about the household items they used to use in the past which have surpassed by technology and convenience appliances.

The kitchen contained an "ice box" which is comparable today with a refrigerator. The ice box was a large chest with a compartment in the top that held the ice; underneath that a compartment for storing food kept it cool from the melting ice above it, which made it necessary for a drip tray to be placed underneath the food to collect the water as the ice melted. It looked very much like the old refrigerators in physical appearance except the big blocks of ice for the ice box was delivered and put in every second day by the "ice man" who serviced a small area for obvious reasons. The kitchen also contained a wood fired stove which was extremely difficult to cook on, but this was later replaced by an electric stove when the electricity was connected to the house.

Nora told me there was no sink in the tiny bathroom for a long time, so washing of hands and faces was done outside from water from the water tank. The bathroom also contained a cold water shower only, a chip heater was used to create hot water for baths. The chip heater was about as big as a 44 gallon drum and had a small hole in the top where paper and other combustible materials were placed to be burnt. Around the outside of the heater was a tank of water which would be heated by the burning paper and then siphoned off through a tap which was located outside of the house itself. Oddly enough, dish washing was done by using the hot water from the chip heater for the washing water and carrying the dishes out in a tub to be washed outside of the bathroom.

The house originally had a large water tank located between the bathroom and water closet and was mainly used for the washing of clothes, but it got a hole and was removed.

What we would call a "laundry" today, was called a "washhouse" back then. It was large empty room, save for a copper and large grey cement laundry troughs. These laundry troughs were removed and replaced with smooth metal ones in the 1940's. Nora McLennan actually received the cement troughs as a wedding present for her new life with William in Hyden where they had a farmhouse and property. Clothes washing was

done on Mondays and was done by hand, using a corrugated wood wash board, which later became corrugated iron, and later still, was made out of glass. A “pot stick” was used to stir the boiling water of the copper, plunge the clothes down into the water and also to remove them from the copper as they were too hot to touch. A “draining cradle” used to drain water from the wet clothes which were finally hand wrung and placed on the clothes line. The clothes line consisted of two upright poles with a cross bar which was movable upon the upright beams. Two metal lines extended from both ends of the cross beams, therefore, the line could be moved in accordance with the height of the user.

The toilet or water closet was perhaps the most morbidly interesting thing of the Swansea Street house that Nora told me about. The toilet housing was brick, and was built before the sewerage went through, so the back of the house was weatherboard containing a hinged flap in the back so that the chamber pot could be removed and emptied every morning by a contractor. The raw sewage was collected in the early morning so as not to offend anyone and the collector would travel down the alley ways at the back of each house so that it was not seen by the public either. In later years, the alleys behind the houses were removed and fencelines were extended, though some still remain around the Victoria Park area.

The Swansea Street house was in the McLennan family for three generations but unfortunately was sold for \$7000 in 1964. It has now been demolished and a contemporary style brick and tile house has been constructed on the same site. The house at number 11 Swansea Street is quite unassuming in its appearance; who would know that it contains so much history? A man that had a vision for his family and his community helped shape the Victoria Park that we know today, with lasting examples of his skill and craftsmanship that still stand proud after the man has ceased to be. Everyone contains some history of their locality within their memory, and it fills me with pride to have illuminated this peice of heritage into the memories of those who read about Andrew Tate McLennan, so that the history of his work will remain.

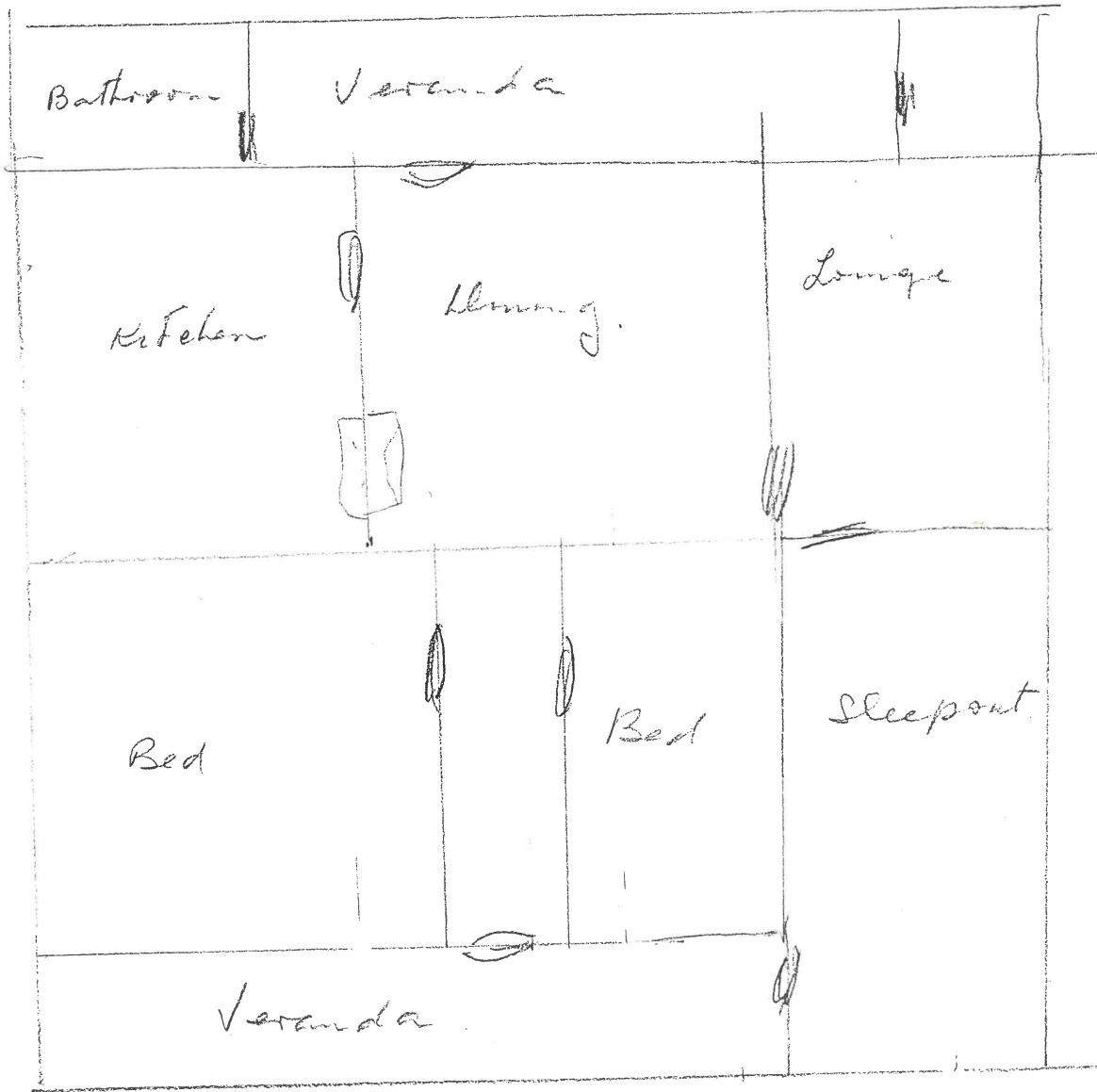
WE

Big Laurel Tree

Garage (Stables)

Grape vines

Washhouse & shed



FRONTAGE TO SWANSEA-ST., PREVIOUSLY ALBERT-S

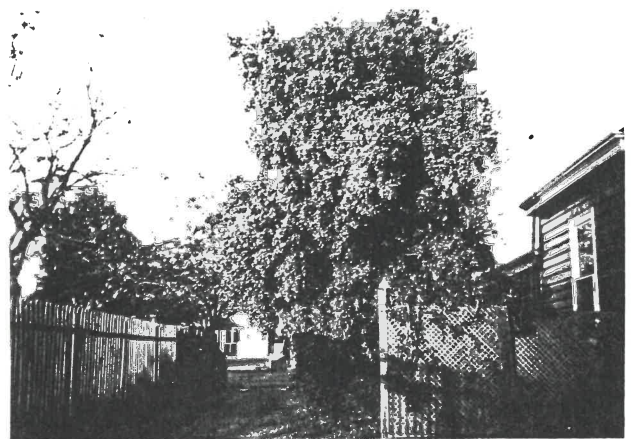




LEFT TO RIGHT : ANDREW TATE McLENNAN , ANDY McLENNAN (ON HORSE) ,  
WILLIAM McLENNAN AND "DICK" THE HORSE .  
PHOTO TAKEN AT THE BACK OF 11 SWANSEA STREET  
NEAR THE STABLES .



11 SWANSEA STREET PRIOR TO  
BEING SOLD .



BACK VIEW OF 11 SWANSEA STREET .

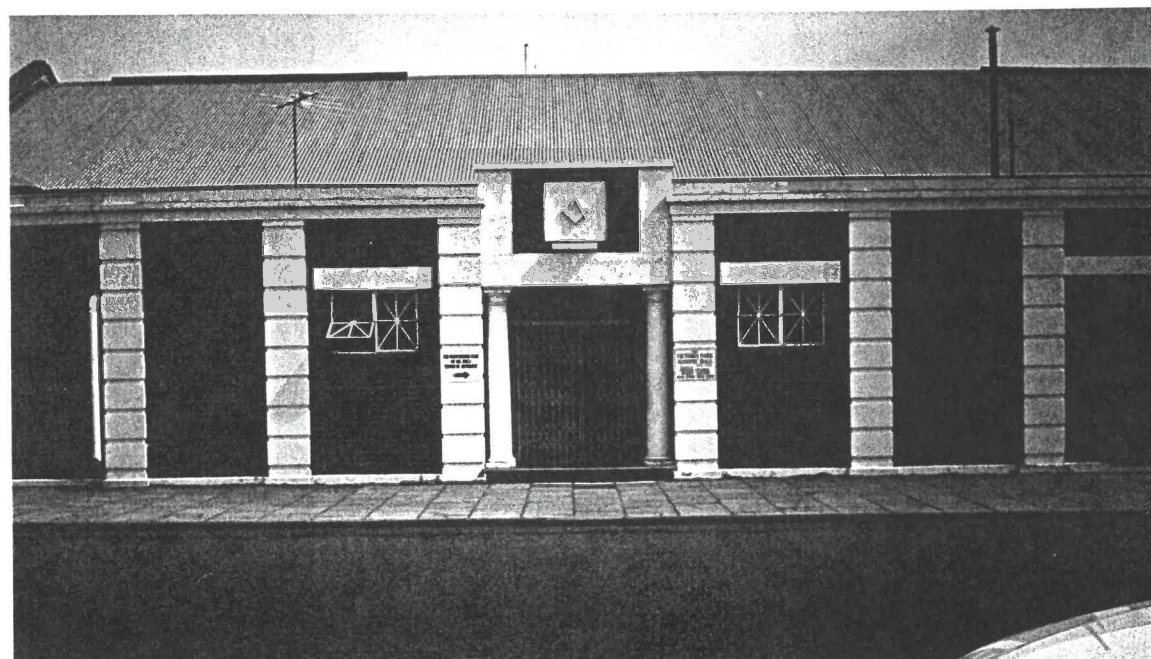
THE NEW HOUSE  
THAT NOW STANDS  
AT 11 SWASEA  
STREET.  
THE OLD HOUSE  
WAS DEMOLISHED.

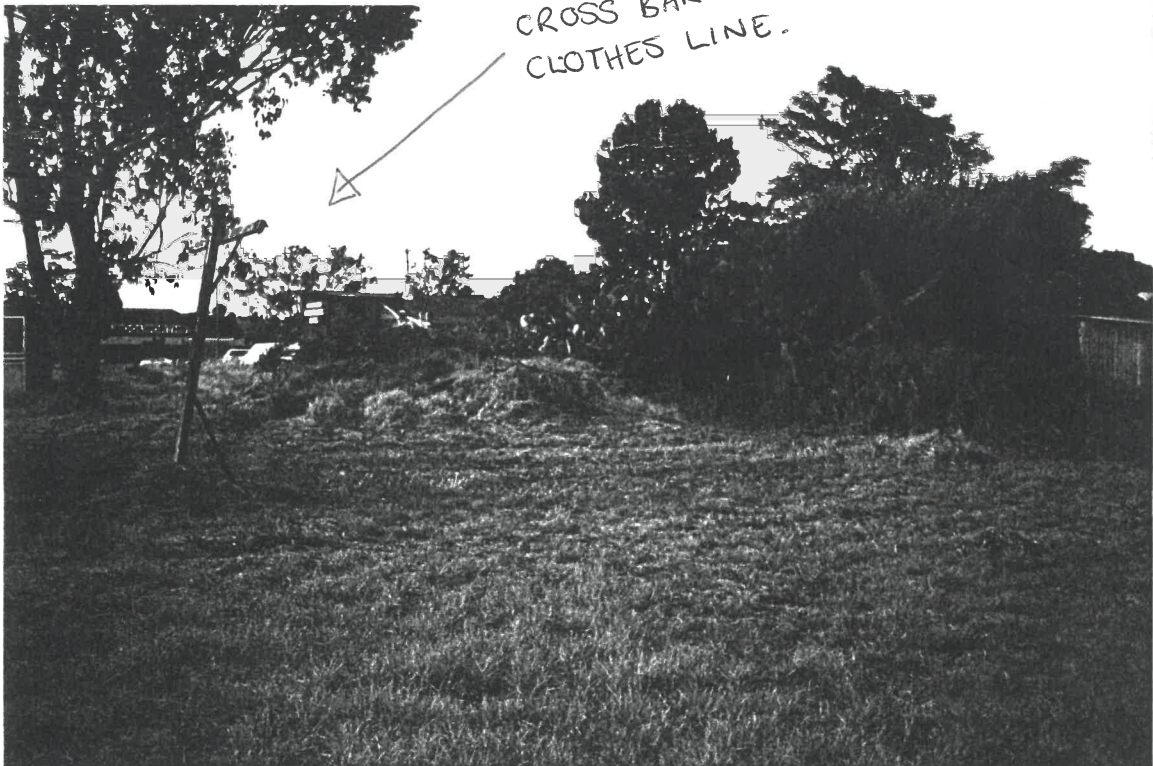


MINT STREET  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
THE WHITE BUILDING  
IS THE ORIGINAL  
HALL THAT ANDREW  
TATE McLENNAN  
BUILT.



FREEMASON'S LODGE  
(MASONIC HALL)  
CORNER OF TEMPLE  
STREET AND ALBANY  
HIGHWAY.





EXAMPLE OF OLD STYLE CLOTHES LINE. PHOTO TAKEN AT THE REAR OF 19 PATTIE STREET CANNINGTON.