



superintendent's residence

fact sheet

History

The Superintendent's Residence is a fine example of a nineteenth century Victorian style residence. Built from sandstone quarried directly from the site, its location at the Paddington Gates offers a superb view down Parkes Drive and across Centennial Park to the suburbs beyond.

The historic and aesthetic richness of the Superintendent's Residence is recognised by the NSW Heritage Council and contributes to Centennial Park's status on the Heritage List.

Designed by colonial architect James Barnet, construction of the Residence began in 1891 and was completed in 1892. The Victorian-style residence is a single storey sandstone building with a slate roof, timber floors and corrugated iron verandah. In 1907, well-known Government Architect Walter Vernon directed the construction of an additional sandstone bedroom and weatherboard bathroom on the southeast corner of the Residence. Vernon also designed the Shelter Pavilion that stands beside Duck Pond in Centennial Park.

The Residence is a significant example of one of Barnet's few residential buildings. Barnet is thought to have designed the Director's Residence (now known as the Cunningham Building) and Victoria Lodge in the Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney, both of which are described as being 'asymmetrical Italianate' in design.

More well known buildings designed by Barnet include The Garden Palace, (Royal Botanic Gardens 1879); the original Sydney General Post Office, erected at the George Street end of Martin Place in 1947; and courthouses and post offices throughout regional NSW. Other examples of Barnet's work include the Wilcannia Courthouse Residence as well as the Glasshouse 10 (now known as the Palm House) and the original Kiosk in the Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney.

Conservation works

During 2001 and 2002, conservation works began on the Superintendent's Residence to protect its significant heritage features and to prepare it to be opened to the public for the first time in history. The conservation process, overseen by architect Mark Bullen, restored elements of the five front rooms and halls of the building back to a heritage style.

Original features and new work

Many classic features are evident throughout the Residence. Carpets have been pulled up to reveal timber floorboards, which have been sanded and polished with Tung Oil to retain their original look. Sealed chimneys have been reopened and gas heaters removed to reveal marble fireplaces in three of



the front rooms. The work begun by Superintendent Ron Salkeld (who occupied the Residence from 1965–1990) on scouring back paint and polishing the Australian cedar doorframes and skirting boards has been completed as part of the conservation process. Paint scrapes from both the interior and exterior of the house have been used to identify the original colour scheme. The verandah posts and gable ends were originally a sand belt and cream colour. The external door and window frames were a very dark green.

Perhaps the most exciting find is the internal colour scheme – a gold leaf dado and rich, vibrant colours including turquoise, apricot, sienna, maroon and deep brown in the public rooms. This colour scheme suggests that the Residence may have been used during formal occasions. Further work on the Residence may include a complete restoration back to these original colour schemes

New work inside included the installation of new lighting and air conditioning and the removal of built-in cupboards that were not in keeping with the heritage style. New drainage, joinery and trim and an accessible entry have been added to the building's exterior. Soft landscaping and new paintwork on the garden's existing picket fence contribute to the beautiful setting of the Superintendent's Residence.

Residents

Despite a quite detailed history of its occupancy, records do not indicate whether the early Park Overseers, Forsythe (appointed in 1896), Dawes (appointed in 1911) and Hardie (appointed in 1923) actually lived in the Superintendent's Residence.

Park Superintendent John Nichol, appointed in the 1930s, lived in both residences in the Park and lived in the Superintendent's Residence with his family during the 1930s. His daughters, Mrs Irene Chapman and Mrs Edna Laing, visited the Park in 1997 and recounted some of their childhood memories of the Park to Ranger Brian Page who was living in the Residence at that time. As children, Edna and Irene were the envy of their Paddington Public School classmates because they lived in Centennial Park. Whilst at the Superintendent's Residence the Nichols had a full time gardener to tend the front and back gardens.

Superintendent Nichol had made the decision to convert the back garden from a lawn tennis court to a vegetable garden as the court was often wet in winter and he thought it to be a waste of ground. The garden was planted with many different vegetables and Edna remembers the gardener picking beans from the garden for her mother. Today there is no sign of the extensive vegetable garden, instead fruit trees grow in the back garden of the Residence.

By contrast, the front garden was a mass of colour. Visitors to the Park would stand and gaze at the delphiniums, poppies, pansies and roses growing right around the garden. "That was a beautiful garden. It was a real showpiece," Edna recalls.

As children living in the Park, Edna and Irene's days were spent collecting tadpoles, feeding ducks and riding horses with the rangers. They recalled their mother purchasing groceries from vendors that visited the Park to return with their orders the next day. They also spent time in the Park with their father John, who was also a Government Botanist, learning about native flora and the layout of the gardens.

Others to live in the Superintendent's Residence were a number of Superintendents, foremen, gardeners and Park Rangers. In addition to being home to many Park staff, the Superintendent's Residence was occupied for a brief period from 1993 to 1995 by the Park's Administration.