
GRANT TOWNSHIP AND CEMETERY

Location

WONGUNGARRA, WELLINGTON SHIRE

Municipality

WELLINGTON SHIRE

Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H8323-0004

Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO107

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

Hermes Number 10985

Property Number

History

Heritage Inventory History of Site: Grant was the main township established during the Crooked River reefing rush of 1864, and the only one situated away from the river itself. In July 1864, the Union Reef was discovered near Isaac's Shanty, a grog shop on Mt Pleasant. Within a month, the hilltop was taking on the appearance of a town, with a butchery and boarding house, and other buildings (including a pub) under construction. Many more reefs were shortly struck and the locality became the centre of activity on the Crooked River field. The township was called Skye or Mt Pleasant; but in April 1865, it was surveyed and given the name Grant. At that time, the digging population of Crooked River was estimated at about 1,250, and it continued to increase throughout 1865.

A Cobb and Co. coach service operated from Sale, bringing new arrivals. Town allotments were sold in August that year. According to the Illustrated Australian News, Grant was 'composed of buildings which for material comfort and appearance are comparable with goldfield townships of much longer standing'. Another visitor in 1865 saw 'a large and flourishing township composed of substantial weatherboard and log buildings'. Not all structures could be called substantial, though: the courthouse comprised just 'a few slabs and half a dozen sheets of bark'. A directory of the period listed eighteen hotels, four banks, fourteen general stores, two cordial manufacturers, nine stores, three wine and spirit dealers, two chemists, several barristers and solicitors, a post office, a great number of restaurants (including Australia's first beer garden—Muller's Cafe—where Italian diggers gathered to sing opera), a school, church, mining exchange, newspaper office, and government camp. Most of the buildings were on Gertrude, Dawson and Darling streets, although the surveyor had calculated that Winchester Street would develop as the town centre. Before the end of the 1860s, the Crooked River reefs were largely abandoned. At the beginning of 1867, only one of the four banks still operated at Grant, and many other businesses had closed. The cost of bringing food and other supplies in from Sale or Bairnsdale was crippling, and self-sufficiency was out of the question as the rugged land around Grant was scarcely suitable for growing crops. In 1875 only 18 diggers remained at Grant, and 30 on the river. A visitor wrote: Grant is now a deserted village. A great number of houses are empty. The windows of most of them are boarded, and where not boarded they are broken; the once busy streets are now silent and the pathways are thickly covered with broken bottles, rusted sardine tins, iron hoops, staves of casks and fragments of bush furniture. (A.W. Howitt in GSV Progress Report III, p. 13, 1876, quoted by Flett) In fact, the town was not quite deserted. The school remained until 1890, when it closed, leaving Henry Harrison's store and two hotels. A policeman based at Dargo estimated the average takings of the Grant hotels to be five shillings per week, as there were only about six families living in the town and very few visitors. 'I may say,' he remarked, 'that Grant people are always quarrelling amongst themselves, in fact there are hardly two of them that are on speaking terms.' Just a couple of prospectors and a two old age pensioners remained in 1916, one of them Mick Murphy who been at Grant since 1864. Apart from a couple of houses, the only buildings were the 'recently abandoned Pioneer Hotel, a couple of dilapidated shops and a fine old church now crumbling to decay'. In 1931 a visitor wrote that the only thing left at Grant was the cemetery. A bushfire had recently been through, but one huge pine tree overlooked the few standing headstones. A visitor the following year found 'the streets red tracks in grassy sward and some inverted bottles and a gooseberry bush where once was a flower bed, and some hardy fruit trees.' Grant had a government battery then, but it was used infrequently and was soon moved on.

This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.

For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>