
MELBOURNE ATHENAEUM



THE ATHENAEUM BUILDING SOHE
2008



1 the athenaeum building collins street
melbourne street view feb1986



the athenaeum building collins street
melbourne front view jan1979



the athenaeum building collins street
melbourne shop front oct1982

Location

184 - 192 COLLINS STREET MELBOURNE, MELBOURNE CITY

Municipality

MELBOURNE CITY

Level of significance

Registered

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H0501

Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO587

VHR Registration

July 29, 1981

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - January 11, 2000

What is significant?

The Melbourne Athenaeum is a three storey stuccoed brick structure completed in 1886 to designs of architects Smith and Johnson. Giant order Corinthian pilasters divide the main facade into three bays. The central bay projects slightly and rises through the parapet to finish as a niche containing a statue of Minerva. Established in November 1839 as the Melbourne Mechanics' Institute and School of Arts with Captain Lonsdale as the first president, the Institute changed its name in 1873 when the theatre was added at the rear to the designs of architect Alfred Smith. The theatre was remodelled as a cinema in 1924 by architect HE White, and the front canopy was added at the same time.

How is it significant?

The Melbourne Athenaeum is of historical and architectural significance to the State of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

The Melbourne Athenaeum is historically significant as the home of the oldest public institution in Victoria. It is additionally significant as the site of the first Melbourne Council chambers. The council met on this site from 1842 to 1852. In 1929 the theatre was the first in Australia to exhibit films with soundtracks.

The Melbourne Athenaeum is architecturally significant as an unusually late example of the Renaissance Revival style. The style was considered appropriate for an institution with an emphasis on learning. The statue of Minerva is an unusual addition.

Construction dates	1885,
Architect/Designer	Smith & Johnson,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place,
Other Names	ATHENAEUM THEATRE,
Hermes Number	726
Property Number	

History

History of Place:
In August 1840 the Melbourne Mechanics Institution purchased 110 feet of frontage to Collins Street, running back to Little Collins Street, for 285 pounds. The first building was completed in December 1842, a two storey brick building known as the Hall of Arts. The Municipal Council occupied the ground floor until 1852. The Institute received an annual grant of 150 pounds from the government and in 1854 received 5000 pounds towards the cost of a new building. From 1857 it had to rely on its own resources. In 1851 there were 488 members. It was also the headquarters of the First Church of Christ, Scientist.

In 1855 new the new building was begun, but only the front was completed. The hall to be built at the rear was to be to a design by Charles Webb, but financial problems meant that only alterations to the existing building were executed. The new hall was left until 1871 and finished in 1872. The architect was Alfred Smith, and the builders were Turnbull and Dick. The Institution renamed itself the Melbourne Athenaeum in 1873. Scots Church were the first occupiers whilst its own church was being rebuilt(?) The In 1877 membership had grown to 1681. The remodelled facade was finally completed in 1886. The statue of Minerva was from a gift of 100 guineas and was modelled by Mr Kretzschmar. The theatre at the rear was converted to a cinema in 1924 to the design of leading theatre architect H E White. It was subsequently converted back again. The verandah was erected in early 1920s but entailed destruction of trees to Collins Street.
 Associated People: Captain Lonsdale (first president)

Extent of Registration

Historic Building No. 501 - The Athenaeum Building, 188 Collins Street, Melbourne (to the extent of the facade, the exterior fabric, the interiors of the library, experimental theatre and main theatre).

[Victoria Government Gazette No. 76 29 July 1981 p.2483]

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/>