

Tower House, 1146 Frankston Flinders Road Somerville, Statement of Significance

Heritage Place: Tower House 1146 Frankston Flinders Road Somerville	PS ref no: HO465
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Photo: Landmark Heritage, 2019



Photo: Early photo c1900 of Tower House showing the roof-top balustrade and octagonal lookout tower. Photo provided by Somerville, Tyabb & District Heritage Society.

What is significant?

Tower House, at 1146 Frankston-Flinders Road, Somerville, is significant to the Shire of Mornington Peninsula. It was built in 1890 and was owned by Alfred Jones.

The house is significant to the extent of its original fabric. The later rear addition and outbuildings are not significant.

How is it significant?

Tower House is of local historical (associational), architectural, aesthetic and scientific significance to the Shire of Mornington Peninsula.

Why is it significant?

Tower House is of historical significance for its associations with Alfred Jones. Jones purchased the property from local builder Charles Ireland in December 1889, and the house was constructed some time between September 1889 and September 1890, so the house was either constructed expressly for Jones or he purchased it upon its completion. While he did not reside at Tower House, letting it to a range of tenants including his nephew, Jones had a close connection with the house, as demonstrated by a photo of him and a horse from his Almond bush Stud in front of it. Alfred Jones was one of the early European settlers of the Mornington Peninsula and an important figure in the foundational years of Somerville. England-born in 1822, he moved with his family to Canada as a child, and then to the Victorian gold rush in 1853. He soon switched to supplying firewood to Melbourne from Mt Eliza, and was one of three men who gave the name to Canadian Bay. He first purchased land, 500 acres, in what would become Somerville in 1860, and played a leading civic role in the area. In 1860 he was elected to the first Mount Eliza District Roads Board (the earliest form of local government on the Mornington Peninsula), and was still a councillor in 1900. When the Frankston and Hastings Shire was formed, in 1893, Tower House served as one of the first places that council meetings were held, and it became the official shire office when occupied by council secretary James Butler in 1903-04. Jones was also instrumental in founding the Somerville school, being one of two men who purchase the site and chair of the first school committee in 1864. Jones' Almond bush Stud is gone, commemorated only by a street name, as is his town residence at 309 Jones Road and the 1864 Somerville schoolhouse was replaced in the 1920s, leaving Tower House as the place most closely associated with this Somerville and Mornington Peninsula pioneer. (Criterion H)

Tower House is of architectural significance as a Victorian double-fronted villa which is distinguished by its intactness. It demonstrates the characteristics of the Italianate houses so popular in this era, including a hipped roof with a projecting bay and bracketed eaves, front verandah with cast-iron ornament, four-panelled front door with sidelights and highlight, and double-hung sash windows. It is of aesthetic significance due to its ornate façade treatment focused on a canted bay window with its own semi-hexagonal roof, heavy mouldings around it, pilasters between the windows, and separate highlights with margin glazing above the three double-hung sash windows. This level of ornament is rare amongst the Victorian houses on the Mornington Peninsula. (Criteria D & E)

Tower House is of scientific significance (research potential) due to the possible survival of an octagonal lookout tower that could reportedly be raised into place from below the roof. While many substantial Italianate residences had a square tower to provide picturesque massing, there are very few lookout towers associated with early houses in the Mornington Peninsula, and none known in Victoria that were retractable. (Criterion C)

Primary source

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