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Hobart Tasmania 7001
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Name: Swanston Street Free Kindergarten
Status: Permanently Registered
Tier: State
State

THR ID Number: 10878
Municipality: Hobart City Council

Location Addresses

Location Addresses	Title References	Property Id
80-82 SWANSTON ST, NEW TOWN 7008 TAS	223236/1	5532014
80-82 SWANSTON ST, NEW TOWN 7008 TAS	225869/1	5532014
80-82 SWANSTON ST, NEW TOWN 7008 TAS	74653/2	5532014

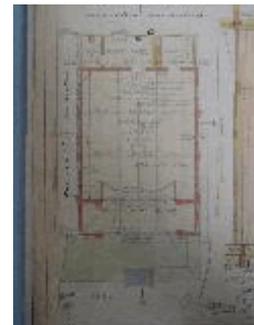
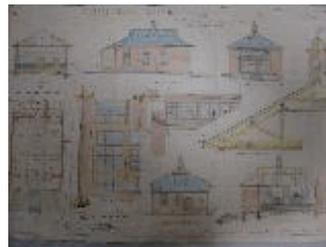


Swanston Street Free Kindergarten, front facade
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Swanston Street Free Kindergarten, side elevation
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Swanston Street Free Kindergarten, rear elevation
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Swanston Street Free Kindergarten, play area and s
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Swanston Street Free Kindergarten, interior
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Swanston Street Free Kindergarten, interior.
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Swanston Street Free Kindergarten, plans
State Library of Tasmania

Swanston Street Free Kindergarten, floorplan
State Library of Tasmania

Setting: The Swanston Street Free Kindergarten is situated within the crowded and narrow streets of the densely populated suburb of New Town, toward the northern end of Swanston Street. This part of Swanston Street includes a mix of single storey weatherboard or brick cottages from the early C20th, situated behind small gardens.

The Kindergarten is set back from the street, with a brick and timber fence facing directly onto the footpath. The building blends into the residential character of the streetscape, and it is only when directly opposite that the institutional nature of the enclosed yard and building architecture is apparent.

Description: The property consists of three parcels of land. The front of the property on Swanston Street is fenced by a stepped red brick base and pillars with short painted timber pickets. It is accessed through a tall childproof gate with a concrete path leading up to the kindergarten building. A concrete area is located directly in front of the building. A small grassed front yard area features a few small shrubs and larger mature tree that provide shade. The Kindergarten is a rectangular single-storey red brick building with a corrugated iron gabled hip roof and boxed eaves. The small gabled forms at each end of the main hip feature stuccoed and timber panelling. An ornate domed ridge vent with weathervane adorns the centre of the main ridge.

The side elevations are broken up by three evenly spaced window openings and pilasters. The tall multi-paned windows have three sections with sliding sashes at the top and middle. The lower sections are hinged at the bottom and swing inward. The side windows have stone lintels.

A weatherboard skillion at the rear houses the bathroom, wet area and small storage/toilet areas for carers and teachers. The rear elevation features a wide doorway with a solid timber door. To the left of the door are two multi-paned sash windows, with a small bathroom window in between. The small window and sash window closest to the corner feature vertical metal bars fixed to the exterior. To the right of the door is a small single window. A flat roofed porch that extends off the skillion partly covers a concrete area at the rear. There is another small window on the side of the skillion.

The building is accessed at the front by large glazed multi-paned double doors that open out onto the front yard area. The doors are flanked by side lights of matching size and style, and a long fanlight above. Corbelled brickwork decorates the pilasters flanking the glazed front opening. Large metal hooks attached to the exterior of the door slot into metal loops/hooks fixed to the edge of the windows. Door handles and fixings are thought to be original. The foundation stone, dated September 14th 1929, is located on the front elevation.

The original plans and photographs dating from the 1930s show that there was an open porch at the front of the building. Large bi-folding doors that opened inwards sat behind brick piers set in under the porch. The doors have since been relocated to the front of the porch opening. The piers are finished with bull-nose bricks that are both decorative and functional, avoiding sharp edges that might injure the children. Built in storage cupboards with painted vertical timber doors are at both ends of the porch area.

Internally the classroom is a large open space with high ceilings. The ceiling is constructed from plaster sheets, with both painted and exposed timber batons fixing it in place. The original circular vents have been temporarily boarded up with masonite. The walls are painted brick, with an Australiana type mural painted onto the back wall. The majority of the floor is covered with green carpet tiles. There are sections of grey blue linoleum at the rear of the room where the kitchen and childrens tables and chairs are located. Kitchen benches form an L shape, with early drawers and shelving running under the side windows and a modern laminex bench and sink along the back wall. Open shelving is fixed to the wall above. Within the space there is a piano and low hardwood book shelves that are on castors and can be rearranged within the space. The Kindergarten still has the original c1929 rocking horse and furniture including childrens chairs that have lino tiles of various colours on the seats.

A small staff office with sink and toilet are accessed through a door in the opposite corner. The rear door next to the kitchen leads into the bathroom/wet area. At the left are two sinks, low to the ground. The area adjacent has a low rail with rows of double hooks attached underneath. To the right are two low timber partitions that form toilet cubicles. There are larger metal hooks attached to the outside of the cubicle wall. A tall double cupboard is opposite the toilets. A shelf next to the cupboard also has a row of double hooks. The internal walls are lined with painted vertical timber boards. A wide doorway with solid timber door leads through to the partly covered concrete play area at the rear.

The outdoor play area forms an L shape around the building. A narrow concrete path dissects the play area which also features a butterfly roofed weatherboard shed/outbuilding (used to store outdoor toys and bicycles), a covered sandpit, picnic table and play equipment.

History:

The New Town Free Kindergarten was established in 1920 in the Methodist Church Hall in Cross Street (Pearce & Doyle 2002:43). The Methodist Hall was rented at 26 pounds per annum, which included the use of the piano and kindergarten chairs. The kindergarten grew by 'leaps and bounds, wholly because of the loyalty and zealous work of the ladies' committee. There were 22 children enrolled at its inception, and numbers soon increased to 45 (The Mercury, Monday, September 16, 1925).

Free Kindergartens, mostly for children of poor families, were established in Hobart from 1910, by a group of middle class women activists that included Emily Dobson and Edith Waterworth. These women campaigned for a range of measures to improve the health and welfare of children (Hudspeth & Scripps 1990:91, ADB Edith Alice Waterworth (1873 - 1957) & Emily Dobson (1842 - 1934)).

Their original intention was to 'civilise' working class children who they believed would 'otherwise lack interest and employment, or worse still, run wild and drift into bad habits. The more crowded and poor a neighbourhood is the better the Association regards it as a settling for one of the schools'. The Associations philosophy was to provide children with opportunities within an atmosphere that encouraged 'natural development and expression, not repression and suppression' (Pearce & Doyle 2002:43).

Free Kindergartens received little financial assistance from governing bodies, especially during the early 'pioneering' days. In 1921 an application for a municipal subsidy by the New Town Free Kindergarten was rejected by the Hobart City Council, who encouraged the organisation to merge with the Hobart Free Kindergarten. New Town however maintained their independence and in 1922 was granted a 10 pound subsidy by the Council.

The Treasurer of the Free Kindergarten Association, Mrs HH Cunningham, reported that in September 1922 100 pounds had been placed on fixed deposit, and since 1925 202 pounds had been raised by entertainments and the mothers' committee. In addition the government subsidy increased from 100 pounds to 130 pounds. Other fundraising efforts included a button and stall day, organised by both the Hobart and New Town Free Kindergarten Committees, which raised 70 pounds (The Mercury, Monday, September 16 1929).

The Association initiated the construction of a purpose built Kindergarten building in the late 1920s. Built on land originally granted to Charles Swanston, 14 perches and three tenths of a perch were transferred from

Richard Charles Barnett to the National Executors and Trustees Company of Tasmania on the 15 April 1929, at a cost of 150 pounds (The Mercury, Monday, September 16 1929). A further 3 perches and one half of a perch were transferred on 16 July 1935, and 14 perches and two tenths of a perch were transferred on the 20 December 1948 from Barnett to the Trustees (CT 573/9, 398/188, 359/61).

The foundation stone of the Free Kindergarten was laid by the Hon JC McPhee, Premier of Tasmania on September 14 1929, in the 'presence of a fairly large gathering, which included the President of the Legislative Council (Hon WB Propsting CMG), Hon T Murdoch, MLC, Alderman JJ Wignall, E Verrell and FD Valentine and the Rev C Barber'. The Premier 'declared that no foundation-stone could be laid for a better purpose than to assist the valuable community service which the free kindergarten was performing. There was nothing finer in the community than work which gave children an opportunity to start life under the best conditions possible, both in physical and mental equipment' (The Mercury, Monday, September 16, 1925).

The building was described by the Premier, as it would be when completed; 'It would be of brick and cement and strict attention would be paid to hygiene. The classroom would be 32 ft by 28 ft, and the front porch 28 ft by 8 ft. The porch would be separated from the room by folding glass doors, and when they were swung back in suitable weather the children would benefit as much as possible from the open air. Special windows would provide ventilation, and electric light and heating would be installed. Cupboards, seating accommodation, and fencing were wanted' (The Mercury, Monday, September 16, 1925).

During the early 1960s enrolments at the Swanston Street Free Kindergarten had declined. The Cressy Street Pre-School Association and St Johns Park applied for use of the building. In 1964 the Supreme Court handed down the decision that the trustees should now look after the property and its assets for the Cressy Street Pre-School Association in the same way as it had for the New Town Free Kindergarten Association. The building and grounds were bequeathed for use by the New Town community, with the Supreme Court decision specifying that the property should be used as 'a pre-school centre but to no other purpose whatsoever'. During the 1970s through to 1995 the place was known as Swanston Street Pre-School and Swanston Street Kindergarten. In 1992 the place was attached to New Town Primary School, who was responsible for running the Kindergarten (Pearce & Doyle 2002:43, Swanston Street Childrens Association Inc).

Since the closure of the Kindergarten, the site has been utilised by various early childhood groups including the Swanston Street Playgroup, two multicultural playgroups and Kindermusik. The building is in use five days a week, run by volunteers and a committee, made up of parents of children who attend groups at the centre (Swanston Street Childrens Association Inc).

Statement of Significance:
(non-statutory summary)

The former Swanston Street Free Kindergarten is of historic cultural heritage significance for its historical and social associations with the development of pre-school education during the early twentieth century, specifically for its demonstration of the social demands of the interwar period in respect of providing education to economically-disadvantaged children. Of specific importance, the Kindergarten was constructed out of the social philosophy of the interwar period by which the education of economically-disadvantaged children was seen as desirable for its potential to improve both the future prospects of the children and the quality of life for the whole community. Swanston Street Free Kindergarten has association with prominent female activists Emily Dobson and Edith Waterworth. The Kindergarten is a rare example of a predominantly intact early Twentieth Century purpose-built kindergarten and childcare facility. The unusual form and general characteristics of the structure identify it as an educational building, especially the front facade that consists of fenestration of multi-paned doors and windows, proportioned casements and double and triple hung sashes of multiple panes. The place is of social value to the community of New Town, having served it for over 80 years as a Kindergarten and childcare facility.

Significance:

The Heritage Council may enter a place in the Heritage Register if it meets one or more of the following criteria from the Historic Cultural Heritage Act 1995:

a) The place is important to the course or pattern of Tasmania's history.

This site reflects the development and evolution of New Town as a rural area into a densely populated suburban district of greater Hobart. The former Swanston Street Free Kindergarten is of historic cultural heritage significance for its historical and social associations with the development of pre-school education, and State education infrastructure within communities during the twentieth-century. Of specific importance, the Kindergarten was constructed out of the social philosophy of the interwar period by which the education of economically-disadvantaged children was seen as desirable for its potential to improve both the future prospects of the children and the quality of life for the whole community.

b) The place possesses uncommon or rare aspects of Tasmania's history.

The former Swanston Street Free Kindergarten is a rare example of a predominantly intact early Twentieth Century purpose-built kindergarten and childcare facility.

c) The place has the potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Tasmania's history.

d) The place is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of place in Tasmania's history.

The former Swanston Street Free Kindergarten demonstrates the principal characteristics of an Inter-war Educational style building. These characteristics are found in the simple external form, construction methods and the detailing, both externally and internally. The unusual form and general characteristics of the structure identify it as an educational building, especially the front faade that consists of fenestration of multi-paned doors and windows, proportioned casements and double and triple hung sashes of multiple panes.

e) The place is important in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement.

f) The place has a strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social or spiritual reasons.

The Swanston Street Free Kindergarten provided pre-school education to the children of New Town for over 60 years. Former students of the Kindergarten have fond memories of time spent there. The place continues to serve the greater New Town community through its use by other community organisations, including playgroups and Kindermusik. Dedicated volunteers, made up of parents of children who attend groups at the centre, staff and maintain the community oriented establishment. The place has served the community of New Town for over 80 years.

g) The place has a special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in Tasmania's history.

The Swanston Street Free Kindergarten is significant because its establishment and management was part of a wider movement of women, including prominent activists Emily Dobson and Edith Waterworth, to improve the health and welfare of children in the early twentieth century.

h) The place is important in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics.

PLEASE NOTE This data sheet is intended to provide sufficient information and justification for listing the place on the Heritage Register. Under the legislation, only one of the criteria needs to be met. The data sheet is not intended to be a comprehensive inventory of the heritage values of the place, there may be other heritage values of interest to the Heritage Council not currently acknowledged.