

## Wharekoa Homestead, 426A No 1 Line, Kairanga



**Architect:** Unknown

**Construction date:** 1892-3?

**Visible materials:** timber cladding & joinery, steel roof

**Architectural style:** Victorian Italianate/Eastlake Villa

**Use/building type:** Residential

**Date and compiler:** Ian Bowman, 1996; 2021

**Proposed ranking:** B

### PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL HISTORY

Lack of the necessary primary sources for the 1890's (i.e. Palmerston North newspapers and Kairanga Block rating and land valuation records) has proved a hindrance to researching the early history of this house. Fortunately some key details obtained from oral sources could be verified, especially those from Noeline Voss (nee Bee) who lived there between 1935 and 1972. This information indicates that the house was built between 1890 and October 1895, with the period 1892-1893 having the strongest claim. The architect and builder are unknown.

Mildon includes a list of owners and lessees for the original farm, namely Sections 1583 and 1584 of Block IX, Kairanga. These were based on its certificates of title. They indicate that the property was first in the name of Hirst (1881), then Bell (1885), Walker (1889), Best (1911) and Bee (1935). While a Best did lease the property prior to buying it in 1911, perhaps Mildon's claim that someone of that name leased it from 1883 is incorrect.

The only Manawatu Road Board Rate Book, that being for 1889-1890, states that James Walker of Paramata, was then owner-occupier of Sections 1583-4, 1587 and 1591-3. He paid the rates for these in December 1889.

James Walker's entry in the 'Cyclopaedia of New Zealand' in 1897 reveals that he had been born in Scotland in 1838 and that he had come to New Zealand as a "lad" (c1847). Well known in aquatic

circles of his day, he had been as captain of the 'Dolly Varden' in Wellington. He had also won competitions with the boat. Walker had extensive interests in farming and, in addition to his Longburn property, he also held a 2,550 acre run apparently in the Taupo area. He left Wellington in 1890, presumably for Longburn.

Noeline Voss understands that Walker at first lived in a smaller house on the property. It was at the time of his marriage, to a woman who was somewhat younger than himself, that he had the present house built onto the front of the older house. In fact Walker was about 55 years on in 1893 when he married Louisa Martha Collins.

In the late 1980s former owners, the McOvineys, were visited by an elderly Dannevirke woman named Eline Gimblett. She had grown up nearby and recalled the house being built when she was a certain age. This indicated 1892. Thus probably Walker built the house just prior to his marriage. Mrs Gimblett gave the McOvineys some very early photos of the house, one of which showed Mrs Gimblett's mother. The McOvineys understand Louisa Walker may have been in her mid twenties at the time of her marriage.

The older house, consisting of three or four rooms, became the servants' quarters after 'Wharekoa' was built. Noeline Voss' father eventually demolished this part, although it is possible to see where it was attached. The Voss family think the heavy heart rimu doors in 'Wharekoa' came from Wellington. The mantelpieces are of kauri and the weatherboards of matai, while the interior walls are seven inches thick due to 5 x 2 inch studs and the 12 x 1 inch sarking. They considered that there was enough space for more rooms above the ceiling.

It was Louisa Walker who hand painted the mirror panels on the doors in the hallway of the house – and Noeline admits attempting to scratch the paint off with her fingernails as a child. Louisa's high regard for the house evaporated abruptly, however, with the death from nephritis convulsions of her baby son, James Raymond Walker. The five-month-old died on 27 October 1895 after an attack of the illness lasting one hour. Tradition has it that after his sudden death Louisa returned to Wellington. She refused to live in the house again.

It appears from the aforementioned 'Cyclopaedia' entry that James stayed on at 'Wharekoa' alone. Named 'Jimmy's Farm' at that time, the then 600 acre Longburn property was, in 1897, used exclusively for fattening stock.

The next known occupants of 'Wharekoa' were Joseph and Mary Ann Best and their eleven children. They had arrived in Palmerston North in 1899. Although they leased the property for some time, the 'Evening Standard' of 19 November 1900 recorded that Joseph Best, who had recently sold his property at Richmond, had just "purchased" a farm four miles out of Palmerston North. In fact he did not buy the property from Walker until 1911. A member of a well-known Nelson family, Joseph Best went on to take an active part in agricultural and local body matters in the Manawatu. He was also a Justice of the Peace.

Following Joseph's death aged 70 in 1919, his son, Harold Edward Best, took over the farm. He in turn died in 1930, aged 42. Noeline Voss recalls that Harold's widow, Anne, and their two children remained at the farm until selling it to the Bees in 1935. Anne married Laurie Davies from Auckland at some point.

Charles Edwin and Olive Beatrice Bee, their son Guy and seven-year-old daughter Noeline were from Pori, 35 miles toward the east coast out of Pahiatua. Olive named the farm 'Glenburn', after a place in the Wairarapa (possibly Glenburn Station, in south Wairarapa), and wool bales from the property bore this name. The Bees bought sheep and cattle for resale to butchers, and this stock was often only on the property a few days. Later they went into cropping in addition to deal in sheep and cattle.

The house originally consisted of five bedrooms, but after a good win at the races Charles had one bedroom converted to a bathroom. During the war an earthquake brought down two of the double chimneys (billiard room/bedroom and lounge/family room). Charles did not replace them.

In early 1950, Noeline and her husband Len Voss took over the farm after Charles had a heart attack and decided to retire to town. Charles died in 1967 aged 77, with Olive dying in 1970 also aged 77.

The Voss family subdivided the property in 1972, and the McOvineys bought a 50 acre block including the homestead. The Williamses bought the balance. The Campbells of Opiki bought one of the original fire surrounds for \$5 after rain disrupted a clearing sale held by the Voss family. The original big solid iron front gates, removed some time earlier, went to an elderly couple named Walker from Woodville. The wife had visited the property as a child.

The McOvineys gave the name 'Wharekoa', meaning 'house of joy', to the property as the Voss family wished to retain the name 'Glenburn' for a future property. During their ownership, they maintained the exterior of the house in its original style and painted it to resemble the aforementioned early photos. They made significant changes internally in order to bring the service areas up to a high standard.

Associated with the house is a large two-storied woolshed, built with a lot of native timber. The woolshed is located a short distance from the house and is also of an early vintage. Little is known of its history. A Lister stationary engine once operated the shearing plant, but this has now gone. It now has a two-stand electric shearing plant. The night pens hold about 300 sheep, while yards dating from the time of the Voss family are outside to one side of the shed. Originally the shed also contained about 3 loose boxes but the Bees converted these into a woolshed. There is space for wool bale storage both downstairs and upstairs in the huge loft. John McOviney felt that the shed is not in the best condition but ensured that it remained rainproof.

### **ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN**

The house is a large villa designed with exterior Classical detailing suggesting the Italianate style. These details include the semi-circular window heads with keystones, pedimented bay and flush windows with acroteria, bracketed eaves and oculus ventilator. The asymmetrical massing and faceted bay are also consistent with the style.

The Italianate style was made popular particularly for large English residential buildings from the early 1800's with Cronhill, the first building in the style, designed by architect, John Nash. Pattern books were influential in the spread of the style with Englishman Charles Parker's Villa Rustica, and American Calvert Vaux's Villas and Cottages. Prince Albert also encouraged the style when he assisted in Thomas Cubitt's design for his house on the Isle of Wight, Osborne. Many of the larger houses in the style were designed with arcaded porticos which was quickly adapted into the ubiquitous verandah in

Australasia. The development of the bay villa style in New Zealand was largely a modest interpretation by speculative builders of the Italianate style.

The evolution of timber residential styles in the States included the Eastlake style which was based on an exuberant use of jig-saw and turned patterned timber decoration on Queen Anne, Italianate, Stick, and other late nineteenth century 'eclectic' styles. Various timber companies in New Zealand published catalogues showing a wide range of these highly decorative timber elements which could decorate windows, verandahs, gables and roofs. The extent of decoration in the exterior of Wharekoa reflects the Eastlake influence of many Italianate villas of the period.

The original part of the house is planned around a large 'L' shaped hall off which are located a large living room (the original billiard room), large bedrooms, a further living room (previously a bedroom and living room), and further original bedrooms are located off another 'L' shaped hall. The significant fabric retained in these original rooms includes architraves, skirtings, fire surrounds, six panelled and reeded doors with toplights, and hall archway.

Several of the doors, as explained above, have painted mirrors in the two middle panels.

Associated with the house is a large woolshed (Figure 1), which is a symmetrical gabled structure, the design of which suggests an architect.



**Figure 1** Woolshed alongside Wharekoa.

### **SUMMARY OF HERITAGE VALUES**

The house has **moderate** to **high local** significance for **physical, historic** and **cultural** heritage values.

The house has **high architectural** and **technological** heritage values as a good representative example of the Victorian Italianate style with Eastlake detailing with a high quality of materials and workmanship.

The house retains **high levels of** exterior, interior and setting **authenticity** of design, craftsmanship, materials.

The house has **high group** and **rarity** values as a surviving building on the site that relate to late Victorian farming in the Manawatu.

The house has **moderate people** associational values as the house was built for James Walker a local farmer with substantial land holdings. Walker had national rowing prowess as captain of the *Dolly Varden*, the most famous four-oared boat in New Zealand in the 1870s.

The house has **moderate pattern** values as it demonstrates the early settlement and growth of rural Manawatu.

Given the moderate to high levels of physical and historic values, the house has **educational** values.

### SOURCES

Cyclopaedia of New Zealand, Volume 1, (Wellington, 1897). Pp. 1126

Evening Standard: 'Personal' (Joseph Best) 19/11/1900 2(6); 'Obituary – Mr Joseph Best' 27/10/1919; 'Obituary – Mr H D Best' 8/12/1930; Death – C E Bee 27/6/1967 1(1); Death – O B Bee 23/10/1970 1(1)

Mildon, R G., Kairanga: More Than One Hundred Years, (Waikanae, 1989). pp 177.

Saunders, B G R, Manawatu's Old Buildings, (Palmerston North, 1987). pp. 48.

Manawatu District Council: Building Consents Dept, Permit files.

Palmerston North City council: P N City Archives: Terrace End and Kelvin Grove Cemetery Records and headstone transcripts;

Manawatu Road Board Rate Book 1889-90; Kairanga County Council Valuations Rolls 1907, 1912;

Official Records: Death Registration of James Raymond Walker (27/10/1895); Index to Marriage Registrations re James Walker and Louisa Martha Collins (1893).

NZ Historic Places Trust, Manawatu Committee: File on 'Wharekoa', including letter from J S McOviney to Patrick McHardy, Manawatu District Council, dated 15/9/1995.

HPT Manawatu Committee No: 120028

Interviews: John McOviney, Palmerston North (16/8/1996); Ian Matheson, Palmerston North (20/7/1996); Andrew Voss, Karere (20/7/1996); Noeline Voss, Taupo (8/8/1996).

VNZ No: 14430/01100

Legal Description: Lot 1 DP 34162 Blk IX Kairanga SD