

Local Heritage Nomination

Former Maryborough Baby Clinic Building & Curtilage



Location: 445 Kent Street, Maryborough

Real Property Description: Lot 9 on SP280415

Background: In the late 1800s the high mortality rate for children, meant that one in ten infants failed to reach their first birthday. The need for action on the subject started in early 20th century and this resulted in the first baby clinic being opened in Brisbane in 1908. It was a private clinic providing a free service to up to 100 babies per week. The move to professional help for mothers gained momentum in Queensland around the end of World War 1 with the successful lobbying of the Home Secretary by various women's organisations, benevolent societies and the Creche and Kindergarten Association. This resulted in Brisbane opening its first government run facility in 1918.



The Queensland Government moved in line with the national and international movement to improve the health of mothers and babies by the passing of the Maternity Act in 1922. By 1923 moves were made to open baby clinics in country centres and in that year a parcel of land was allocated locally for such a building at the corner of Kent and Lennox Streets. This land was then part of a Technical College Reserve and had earlier been used as the site of Maryborough's first Town Hall (now relocated to Richmond Street). The Maryborough Baby Clinic building, erected on it, was officially opened on September 13, 1924 by the then Home Secretary, M Kirwan MLA.

Nursing Sister, MA Maclean, was placed in charge and it is understood she worked together with another nurse, Caroline Martin. One of those nurses lived in the building. Their functions included urging young mothers to bring their infants along for a weekly visit where observations were made, the child weighed, and advice given. Where physical visits were not possible, they corresponded with mothers on the subject. Infant's dietary needs were also an important area covered and relevant literature made available. Their work gradually grew, and it was recorded that in August 1926 there were 430 actual inspections at the clinic in that month.

These and other measure helped reduce the mortality of young infants. By the mid-1920s the death rate for those young children in Queensland had dropped to 50 per 1,000 while the average for Australia was 15.22%.

The Baby Clinic building was designed and built by the Queensland Government to a common design used across the state in 10 locations¹ (see Appendix A for the Gympie Baby Clinic local heritage listing). It appears that JL Comley, the District Foreman of Works, supervised the construction of the subject structure.

The building is a single storey structure of rendered cavity brick walls with timber floors supported on a brick base and concrete stumps. Ceilings used the then new material of fibre asbestos sheeting. It is roofed with interlocking Marseilles terra cotta tiles supported on a timber frame and topped with a tall decorative ventilator. Windows are multi-paned glass with timber frames.



Accommodation included a covered entrance, framed by four concrete pillars, a reception room (waiting hall), a doctor's room, a treatment room, retiring room and nurses' rooms. It is understood that that the nurses had a separate kitchen to the one where baby formulas and bottles were prepared. The building also had the convenience of a water closet and associated septic system.



¹ Other similar Baby Clinic buildings were constructed to the standard Department of Works design at Rockhampton, Townsville, Ipswich, Toowoomba, Bundaberg, Gympie, Mackay, Charters Towers and Warwick.

The original quoted building's dimensions were a frontage of 12.2 metres (40 feet) and depth of 11.6 metres (37 feet) and it covered an area of approximately 150 square metres.

On the Lennox Street side is a latter addition of a free-standing single vehicle carport constructed of a steel sheeted skillion roof supported on a timber frame by sawn timber posts in



turn having part height timber battens on the sides. Its floor consists of reinforced concrete.

The property originally sat on a larger allotment, but this has been reduced in size due to a larger truncation of the street corner and a reduction of its frontage on its southern side (for the building of the Maryborough City Administration Building in the 1960s ... since recently demolished) to currently be about 480 square metres in area.

The name of the Maryborough Baby Clinic was changed to the Maryborough Maternal and Child Welfare Centre in 1939. It has sub-centres at Biggenden, Childers, Howard and Pialba. It operated up until at least 1979 and possibly later.

On February 21, 1997 the building became the home for a youth information centre offering 10 to 24 year old persons information on drugs, alcohol, etc. and a place for recreation. In 2001 it was sold to a private individual with the building used from then to 2020 for a number of commercial and professional purposes. In March 2020 the property was sold again with the buyer being the Fraser Coast Regional Council.

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30 June 2020

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References:

Maryborough Chronicle - 3 September 1926 page 8 (history, use, staff and tasks performed)
<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/153171241>

Maryborough Chronicle – 18 October 1923 page 6 (building construction details)
<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/rendition/nla.news-article151417714.5>

Maryborough Chronicle - 13 September 1939 page 6 (named Maryborough Maternal and Child Welfare Centre and list visitations and sub-centres)
<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/151183107>

Survey Plan – M20165 (plan of subject land with original building outlined on it)

Queensland Globe (aerial image)

Qld Heritage Register – Entry for ID 602789 (Details on the history of Baby Clinics in Qld)

PRD Nationwide real estate listing Property Id. 503125978 - realcommercial.com.au

Queensland State Archives

- Item ID582552 (Gympie Baby Clinic construction details)
- Maternal and Child Welfare Annual Reports (Change of name from Baby Clinics and Infant Welfare in 1939)

Other information sourced from Wide Bay Hospitals Museum Society Inc. and local historian Janice Downman of Maryborough

Local Heritage Register Criteria:

(a) The place is important in demonstrating the evolution or pattern of the region's history.

The Maryborough Baby Clinic shows an important element in the evolution of local women's and children's health services in the 20th century.

(b) The place demonstrates rare, uncommon or endangered aspects of the region's cultural heritage.

None of Maryborough's numerous health service buildings of the early 20th century have survived in a virtually unmodified form except this structure. It is unique and it is noted that the original Baby Clinic building in Gympie, an almost identical structure to the subject, was placed on that LGA's local heritage register and is also on the Queensland state heritage register.

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

For any future research into the history of health services of the Fraser Coast this building provides an ideal snapshot of an almost unmodified structure, that is nearly 100 years old, and used in that era.

(d) The place is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a particular class of cultural places important to the region.

The sighting of the building in such a prominent position was controversial when first proposed as early 20th century. This was due to the fact that it was considered inappropriate to site women's health establishments where their 'comings and goings' could be viewed easily by the general public.

(e) The place is important to the region because of its aesthetic significance.

This building is unique in Maryborough and is considered aesthetically significant, especially due to its pillared portico with its terra cotta tiled roof and crowning ventilator. Many have erroneously considered it to be modelled from the original Town Hall (which is located opposite) before it has its clock tower and frontage extended.

(f) The place is important in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period for the region.

N/A

(g) The place has a strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons important to the region.

This building was the place where many mothers and their infants visited for health assessments and advice. There are many community members today that have memories of such visitations as mothers or accompanying them as their mothers took younger siblings for check-ups, etc.

(h) The place has a special association with the life or work of a particular person, group or organisation in the region's history.

Nursing service to the community is considered a very important function, however there is little history on the role of Maternal and Child Welfare nurses. A separate nursing certificate was required undertake those roles. Nursing sisters that operated the Baby Clinic and its later entity include the original staff of Marion A Maclean and Caroline Martin, Miss Smith (35 years' service) and Hamah Williams (1966 – 1979).

It is noted that 2020 was proclaimed the International Year of the Nurse and the Midwife by the World Health Organisation.

Appendix A:

Gympie Baby Clinic Local Heritage Register Place Card

Place Details	
PROPERTY DESCRIPTION:	10 on G14758
PLACE NAME:	Formerly Maternal & Child Welfare Clinic
ORIGINAL USE:	Public services and defence
DATE OF CONSTRUCTION:	1904
AREA (m ²):	3592.00m ²
ASSESSMENT NUMBER:	2799
PARCEL NUMBER:	11154
OWNER:	Gympie Regional Council
HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE:	Local
CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE:	Historical



Photo sourced from Mark Baker Town Planning
Consultants Pty Ltd in association with
Ivan Mc Donald Architects

Note 1: The construction date on this place card incorrectly says 1904 when it was 1926.

Reference: Qld State Archives Item ID582552

Note 2: This property is also listed on the Qld State Heritage Register as part of the Gympie Town Hall Reserve Complex.

Reference: Qld Heritage Register ID 602789