

Lambhill Homestead



Location: Warrengate
GR 961.347

Heritage NZ Pouhere Taonga
List Number: Nil

Physical Description: The two storied, timber framed gable roofed house with a 'T' shaped plan and has typical characteristics of the Carpenter Gothic style. The longer wing faces west and has a mono pitched and concave roofed verandah around three sides, while the smaller wing is at right angles and faces east. The internal corner at the junction of one of the two wings has been filled in with lean-tos. All of the gables have simple finials.

The west elevation is almost symmetrical with a faceted conservatory in the centre of the elevation on the ground floor and above it are two gabled dormers. This elevation also has the main entry which leads to living rooms either side, the kitchen, scullery and dining towards the east and stairs to the first floor bedrooms.

The posts supporting the verandah are chamfered and there are simple curved brackets supporting the roof framing. The north verandah has trellised balustrading.

Register Item Number:

110

Building Type:

- Residential
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Recreation
- Institutional
- Agriculture
- Other

Significance:

- Archaeological
- Architectural
- Historic
- Scientific
- Technological
- Cultural

Thematic Context

- Early Settlement
- Residential
- Industry
- Agricultural
- Commerce
- Transport
- Civic/Admin
- Health
- Education
- Religion
- Recreation
- Community
- Memorials
- Military

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Associated with the house is an external toilet and a stable block of similar age and significance to the house.

Other known names: Lamb Hill

Current Use: House, Residence

Former Uses: Residence

Heritage Status:

District Plan Class: Class B

Architectural Style: Carpenter Gothic **Date of Construction:** 1870s-80s

Materials: painted timber clapboard weatherboards, box corners and joinery, long run metal roofing

Registered owner:

Legal Description:

History: In their 1979 book, *Wanganui: Buildings of Historic Interest*, Des Bovey and Kathleen McDonald stated that the present Lamb Hill homestead was built by Alexander Allison in either 1870-71 according to his second son Archie Allison, or in the late 1880s according to other members of the family. Bovey & McDonald state that stylistically it could date from anytime in that period, having the recognised features of early colonial houses. (Local consensus suggests 1880. Photograph from 1883 exists. JG)

Bovey & McDonald wrote that: *"To step into the Lamb Hill homestead today is almost to enter another world for the owners, the Sutherland family, have kept the house in its original style and furnishings for nearly ninety years. Everything has been in continuous use throughout the years and nothing has been replaced simply to suit changes in fashions. The result is a house that has retained its own true setting of Victoriana. The house stands on gently sloping land in a peaceful rural setting a few kilometres inland from the main south highway, which in turn is sixteen kilometres from the city of Wanganui."*

The house's studs (joists? JG) are of matai and came from the previous house on the property that had been built by Doctor James Allison (father of Alexander) on the same spot and exactly the same in every respect. The current house is thus a replica of the c1856 house. The hard timber used to build it came from Silverhope, near Marton, and this was still sound in 1979. The house was built on ironstone piles and the house is set more or less on three levels. A steep staircase leads – in two stages – to the upper floor. The rooms on the

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lower floor are larger with doors leading to the wide verandah that encircles the house.

The Lamb Hill property was originally part of a 400 hectare property that was later divided into four farms – Lamb Hill, Thorn Hill, Fern Hill and Overletham. The block at first belonged to Dr. James Allison, who emigrated from Glasgow to New Zealand in 1840 with his brother Joseph. Dr. Allison named the property Lamb Hill after a farm near his old family home in Scotland.

In 1844, Dr. Allison married Georgianna Gilfillan (who had just turned 15), the daughter of a Scottish settler, John Alexander Gilfillan, who with his very large young family had taken up land in the nearby Matarawa Valley. Despite Allison's apparent wealth, when they were subsequently visited by Rev. Richard Taylor, who had conducted their wedding amidst Wanganui's social elite, he found the couple living in what he described as a hovel.ⁱ (This was an earth-floored whare, similar to other first homes built on settlers' farms. He soon built a 1 1/2 story cottage in a valley a few hundred metres north of the current house, beside a reliable stream. JG)

On 18 April 1847, the Gilfillan homestead was attacked by six young Maori men, and Mrs Gilfillan and three of her children were killed. At the time, ten-month-old Alexander Allison, the son of Dr. James and Georgina Allison, was staying at the Gilfillan home. He was found safe and fast asleep under a nearby fern – however, he died a few months later, as did his (by then) five-month-old auntie, Agnes Gilfillan.ⁱⁱ John Gilfillan then took his three remaining children to live in Australia.ⁱⁱⁱ

Meanwhile, Dr. Allison and his wife moved to Wairau, where their second son was born in 1849 at Boulderbank, Marlborough. He was named Alexander in memory of the baby who died. The family remained at Wairau until 1855, when they returned to Lamb Hill, where they built the first of two homesteads on the current site, in about 1856. (This house was of kahikatea, with severe borer damage requiring its replacement in 1880. The replacement was the same in every respect, and on the same spot. The site, a hill with extensive views, was chosen for fear of Maori attack. The lookout platform on the roof was built for the same reason. JG) Dr. Allison died in 1867 en route to England.^{iv}

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Flora Spurdle's book, *New Stories of Old Whanganui*, (p. 76) published in 1958, also included a brief history of Lamb Hill. She also described the day that Nathaniel and Archibald Sutherland, and several of Nathaniel's little girls, arrived to look at the property. One of the girls later recalled: "*Mrs Allison there in her pretty sitting-room, the French windows opening out on to the garden. There was a sloping lawn flanked by flower beds and shrubs, and at the end of the lawn were box-edged paths, which led to the shrubbery, orchard and a huge plantation.*"

Like her husband, Georgianna Allison also died at sea some twenty years later, in 1887.^v

In March 1893, Alexander Allison married Kate Shaw Willway at Shannon. The couple lived on the 200 acre section of the original Lamb Hill block now known as Letham, where their first child was born in February 1894.^{vi} Alexander bred stud Lincoln sheep at the property,^{vii} as well as ostriches, and grew the first Chinese gooseberries (kiwifruit) in New Zealand. JG

Lamb Hill's new owners, the Sutherland family, owned a nearby property called Craigie Lea. In 1886 Lamb Hill was bought in partnership by Nathaniel and Archibald Sutherland, whose father, also named Nathaniel, had originally purchased the Craigie Lea property. Initially Archibald ('Archie') Sutherland, Nathaniel's younger brother, managed Lamb Hill. However, in 1906 the brothers swapped, Nathaniel taking over Lamb Hill, while Archie took over Craigie Lea.^{viii}

In January 1874, Nathaniel jnr. had married Catherine McGregor, the daughter of a neighbouring farmer, Gregor McGregor,^{ix} and they had thirteen children who in due course grew up in this house.

Newspaper references around the start of the 20th century list Lamb Hill Farm as being the home of purebred Clydesdale stallion 'Prince William'.^x The Wanganui Hunt Club regularly used the farm (and the neighbours' farms) for their runs – although "puss" (the rabbit or hare - hopefully) regularly escaped the hounds, including by heading into "forbidden country". After the hunt there in August 1900, Mrs Sutherland is recorded as the hostess who provided the much appreciated afternoon tea.^{xi}

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In 1907, the Wanganui Chronicle reported that “*Mr Sutherland’s well-known Lamb Hill Estate*” was sold to Arthur Harding of Hawkes Bay; however the sale fell through. The property was described in the report as being 1,400 acres near Fordell, and one of the finest farms in the district.^{xii} (Three of Nathaniel Sutherland’s granddaughters still own most of the farm in 2012. JG)

Three sons of the family served in the First World War, the next of kin being named as Nathaniel Sutherland of Lamb Hill. Of these, Lance Corporal Ross Sutherland of the NZ Rifle Brigade is recorded as embarking on 16 July 1917^{xiii}, while Riflemen Donald and Graeme Sutherland were listed as wounded and admitted to hospital in April 1918.^{xiv} All three returned home.

Spurdle (p. 76) stated that the house in 1958 was much as it was when the Sutherland children first saw it in the 1880s. The same: *“pretty sitting-room, lawn and box-edged paths, but the plantation has become a forest and, like all forests, has fallen giants, young trees, creepers, lichens and mosses – a wonderful place for birds and small boys. The old house with its dormer windows and lovely old furniture must look very much the same today as it did when the Allison’s were there. For the Sutherlands were also farming people from Scotland, and their furniture and silver would be of the same period. Today the atmosphere of Lambhill is that of 100 years ago, for the old house does not countenance new ways – lamps and candles still shed their soft lights in the evenings, and no radio breaks the old-world peace. But many guests come to ‘Lambhill’ and very, very often they come weary or ill and go away healed by the gentle kindness of the sisters and the peace and the beauty.”*

In 1979, the house was described by Bovey & McDonald as having had very little done to it, although a parapetted look-out platform that had been situated in the centre of the iron roof had been removed. At that time, the “roomy old kitchen” contained a long kitchen dresser that had been made from a large wattle tree that had grown on the property. This remained in 2012. Both the Allison’s and Sutherlands had been tree lovers and as a result there are now many fine tree specimens on the property.

Gilfillan Family

In 1880, Alexander Allison built a small cottage on the property for his aunts, Mary and Sarah Gilfillan. They had returned from Australia with their brother

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John (then of Wanganui), who had in the meantime drowned in Lake Rotorua, aged 35, on 27 May 1875.^{xv} In her book, *New Stories of Old Whanganui*, Flora Spurdle states that after the sisters returned, they came to Lamb Hill and often helped teach their older sister's children.

Spurdle described the cottage as being close to a belt of shelter trees and that one sister or the other, or both, often stayed there. She also mentioned a child named Beatrice Davis (later wife of John Russell) who often stayed at the Lamb Hill cottage. Beatrice recalled that Mary Gilfillan retold the story of the tragedy every single night, while the young girl sat awestruck. Later, when Mary wished to move into Wanganui (perhaps when their nephew sold Lamb Hill), John Russell gave her a section in Seddon Street, where the Allison's built her another cottage.^{xvi}

Mary Jane Gilfillan, who was very severely injured by a blow to the forehead during the attack, died on 26 July 1909 aged 79.^{xvii} Sarah St. Clair Gilfillan (83) died on 21 April 1924, following a trap accident.^{xviii} In 2012 their Lamb Hill cottage is still standing, but it is now derelict. Spurdle noted that the cottage in Seddon Street, Wanganui, was still standing in 1958.

The *Evening Post* of 12 June 1920, p. 4, reported that Mr T. Allison had donated the 1½ acre site of the murders to the Wanganui County Council, and suggested that it become a reserve to be used as a recreation group or a site for a memorial of the tragic event. The council accepted trusteeship of the property. Its present circumstances have not been researched. However, it is listed as No. 276 (GR 934.383) on the Wanganui District Council Heritage Inventory.

(The Allison's preserved the piece of bush on the corner of Kaimatira Road and No 3 Line. They donated it to the Council and it was first known as Allison Park. It is now named Gordon's Bush, administered by the Department of Conservation. JG)

Bibliography

Bovey, Des, and McDonald, Kathleen, *Wanganui: Buildings of Historic Interest*, (1979)

Cyclopedia of New Zealand, Vol. 1 (Wellington, 1897)

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Spurdle, Flora, *New Stories of Old Whanganui* (Wanganui, 1958, this reprint 1959)

Voelkerling, Rex H., & Stewart, Kevin L., *From Sand to Papa: A History of the Wanganui County* (Wanganui, 1986)

Also newspapers and online articles as referred to in the footnotes.

Architect/Designer: Unknown

History of changes:

Date Period: 1880, replica of 1856 original

Rarity / Special Features: The house is almost authentic from its original construction.

Integrity: The house is in reasonable condition, based on a brief visual assessment for this report.

Representativeness: The house is representative of the Rustic Gothic style, a residential category of Carpenter Gothic.

Context/Group Value: Associated with the site of the Gilfillan Homestead, WDC No. 276, GR 934.383. It is also one of a number of large scale timber houses of the mid to late nineteenth century in the Fordell area, including Oneida, Netherdale and Fernielea.

Diversity (Form and Features):

Fragility / Vulnerability: As a timber building, it is potentially vulnerable to damage from fire.

Summary of Significance:

Archaeological Qualities

Having been constructed in the 1880s, its site is an archaeological site and falls within the requirements of the Historic Places Act 1993.

Architectural Qualities

The house is a typical example of the Rustic Gothic style a sub-category of the general Carpenter Gothic style which was a common style in the period. Largely derived from the cottage orné of the mid nineteenth century,

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Australasian examples abounded in the latter part of the nineteenth century influenced by pattern books such as those of Englishman, J C Loudon's Encyclopaedia of Cottage, Farm and Villa Architecture, and American, Calvert Vaux's Villas and Cottages. Although Rustic Gothic houses typically had a profusion of Gothic detailing, the main characteristics in this house are asymmetry of plan form, irregular skyline, steeply pitched conspicuous roofs, prominent gables, gable dormers, bay window, timber verandah, and simple finials.

Historic Qualities

The house is associated with the Alison family who built it, the Sutherland family and subsequent owners. As a once large farm, it is representative of the agricultural development of rural Wanganui in the mid 1870s. The farm was noted as being the home of a well-known pure bred Clydesdale stallion.

Technical Qualities

The house uses typical materials and construction techniques of the period, but with the matai framing and ironstone piles of interest.

Cultural Qualities

The house and farm are representative of historic patterns of ownership and use from the 1870s.

Reference Source:

Associated Pictures:

Date of Survey: 2012

Prepared by: Ian Bowman, Val Burr and Nick Cable. Additional information Janette Godfrey,(JG), owner

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- ⁱ Rex H. Voelkerling & Kevin L. Stewart, *From Sand to Papa: A History of the Wanganui County* (Wanganui, 1986), p. 31
- ⁱⁱ *Wanganui Chronicle*, 22 March 1902, p. 3
- ⁱⁱⁱ Voelkerling & Stewart, pp. 34-38
- ^{iv} *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, Vol. 1 (Wellington, 1897), p. 1441
- ^v *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, Vol. 1 (Wellington, 1897), p. 1441
- ^{vi} *Wanganui Chronicle*, 7 March 1893, p. 2, 3 February 1894, p. 2
- ^{vii} *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, Vol. 1 (Wellington, 1897), p. 1441

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- viii The Obituaries of the parents of the two brothers are as follows: Nathaniel Sutherland senior: *Manawatu Standard*, 4 August 1883, p. 2; their mother (Christian name not given): *Wanganui Chronicle*, 1 November 1905, p. 5. Archibald's obituary is at: *Wanganui Chronicle*, 17 December 1917, p. 4
- ix *Wanganui Herald*, 10 January 1874, p. 2
- x eg. *Wanganui Chronicle*, 29 September 1899, p. 3
- xi eg. *Wanganui Chronicle*, 7 August 1900, p. 2, 13 August 1903, p. 2
- xii *Wanganui Chronicle*, 12 February 1907, p. 4
- xiii Auckland War Memorial Museum Cenotaph Database:
<http://muse.aucklandmuseum.com/databases/Cenotaph/95895.detail>
- xiv *Wanganui Chronicle*, 20 April 1918, p. 4
- xv *Wanganui Herald*, 1 June 1875, p.2, 21 June 1875, p. 2
- xvi Flora Spurdle, *New Stories of Old Whanganui* (Wanganui, 1958, this reprint 1959), pp. 76-77
- xvii *Wanganui Herald*, 28 July 1909, p. 2
- xviii *Hawera & Normanby Star*, 23 April 1924, p. 5