PEAK HILL RAILWAY STATION

ANYTHING INTERESTING ABOUT PEAK HILL STATION?

Yes, there is, provided the reader has an interest in the history of railway station buildings. Peak Hill station was the only location on the New South Wales railway system to possess two platform buildings with the same alpha-numerical code "A". The first building located on the platform in 1910 with the "A" classification was a primitive timber structure with a single-pitched or skillion roof. The second building with the "A" classification, which was located on the platform in 1934, was a slightly less primitive structure with a double-pitched roof.

How come the two buildings could be of different designs with the same alpha-numerical "A" coding?   The answer is that the New South Wales Railway Department issued standard plans on two occasions – 1899 and 1913.   The Department change the design of the buildings in 1913 but retained the original alpha-numerical code.

Peak Hill station became the only location where two "A" style buildings displaying the different styles were provided, based on both plans displaying the "A" classification.[1]

THE FIRST PLATFORM BUILDING

There were rumours about the nature of the platform buildings to be erected by Railway Department over a year before the opening of the line from Narromine to Peak Hill. One press report stated that:

> "the Department intends putting up a substantial station here, also a nice Station Master's residence. A goods-shed and a 20-ton weighbridge are to be erected. The station will be on the western side, and the goods-shed on this side".[2]

By 1909, there were very few large towns in rural New South Wales without a railway connection to Sydney. The town of Peak Hill was pretty small and only three mixed trains, containing both freight and passengers, operated to the town each week upon the opening in 1910, which was evidence itself of a pretty small place. The fact that the freight facilities for the station were located on the town side of the line was an indicator that freight rather than passengers was the primary business to be conducted at the station.

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[1] There was a near-parallel instance at Lockhart, where the single-pitched roofed building of "A" classification was burnt down in April, 1920. A replacement building was provided in 1921 along the lines of an "A" type building with a double-pitched roof but, on that occasion, the plan for the replacement building did not display the "A" classification because the plan was approved by the Existing Lines Branch, which did not utilise the alpha-numeric coding system.
[2] *Western Champion*, 9th July, 1909, p. 8.

William Hutchinson approved the platform building for Peak Hill on 8th September, 1909. At the time, buildings on new rural railway lines were built to a series of standard plans that had been approved in 1899 using an alpha numerical coding system. Hutchinson had approved an "A3" building for Peak Hill. It was a simple, timber framed and timber clad structure with a single pitched roof sloping towards the rails. It measured 53 feet long external by 10 feet wide internal and contained a store, a ticket office, a general waiting room and a ladies' waiting room and toilet.

Tenders closed on 6th September, 1909 for the construction of all five station buildings between Narromine and Peak Hill, namely Narwonah, Fairview, Wyanga, Tomingly West and Peak Hill.[3] Five tenders were received and T. E. Quiggan from Balmain with the lowest tender won the contract.[4]

By June, 1910, the press reported on construction of the facilities. One report stated:

> "Good progress is being made with work at the railway station. The Station Master's house is nearly completed, and the framework of station building is erected".[5]

The platform building was completed at the time of the station opening.

THE STATION OPENING

The station opened on 12th December, 1910, with the opening of the line from Narromine. The line from Parkes to Peak Hill opened on 30th September, 1914.

Although the platform building provided was of moderate size, frugal in design and void of decoration, no protest was made at the opening of the railway about the functional design of the platform building. The only complaint made by the public was the large distance between the station and the businesses in the town, which was a typical complaint because the New South Wales Railways nearly always chose to build a station and yard on the outskirts of town, where land was cheaper to acquire. The story of the arrival of the railway at Peak Hill was typical of most small centres newly served by the arrival of the railway and local residents were thankful for the railway connection itself and not worried too much about what their station looked like. Of course, this was a different story to the one in the 19th century when the railway arrived at much larger rural towns, such as Tamworth, Wellington or Wagga Wagga. In those cases, the attractiveness of their station was of major importance to town leaders.

At the opening of Peak Hill station in 1910, the Minister for Public Works, Arthur Griffith, provided his audience with the interrelatedness of the expansion of the railway system. He said that "he wanted railways and public works (meaning

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[3] *Government Gazette NSW*, No. 109, p. 4473.
[4] *Evening News*, 6th September, 1909, p. 5 and 20th September, 1909, p.4.
[5] *Western Champion*, 10th June, 1910, p. 21.

irrigation schemes, dams and town public water supply systems) here, there and everywhere" and he went on to say that "the most effective way to get closer settlement was to encourage the wheat industry".[6] Thus, railway expansion, closer settlement and an increase in the acreage of the wheat crop were closely linked. On the same occasion, another newspaper reported Griffith as saying, "railway development and (closer) settlement should be regarded together".[7]

The town's people were getting annoyed with the slowness of the connection southward to Parkes. One blistering press comment indicates the level of community anger. It stated:

> "Operations on the Parkes Peak Hill line are progressing slowly. The earthworks are approaching completion, and men are engaged in pile-driving for the culverts. About 10,000 sleepers for use on the line have been delivered and stacked at the Parkes railway station. This course has been necessary owing to the dilatoriness of the Railway Department in having the necessary interlocking gear etc., placed in position at the Parkes-Peak Hill junction, and the whole of the sleepers will in consequence, have to be loaded and unloaded a second time. It is now six months since operations on the Parkes-Peak Hill line were commenced, but the railway authorities have not found time to complete the junction, and so give access to the work in progress. This, we suppose, is one of the results of having a Napoleon of business like Czar Johnson at the head of the railway service".[8]

THE SECOND PLATFORM BUILDING

On 30th January, 1934, the Peak Hill railway station and its contents were destroyed by fire. The press reported that "it is understood that a kerosene lamp which was burning in the Station Master's office was accidentally knocked over, and that the lamp exploded. The Station Master obtained a fire bucket, but the flames had too great a hold when he returned, and he was unable to extinguish them".[9]

One might think that the Railway Department might commence drawings on a replacement building, as had been done in 1920 at Lockhart for a similar designed building, but this did not occur. A large meeting of Peak Hill citizens was held in mid-February, 1934, to protest against the decision of the railway authorities to move the Goonumbla station building to Peak Hill as a replacement structure. The press reported that:

> "Indignation was expressed by all speaking and a resolution was carried that, as the proposed building did not meet with the requirements of consignees, consignors, or of the public, consideration should be given by the

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[6] *Western Champion*, 16th December, 1910, p. 6.
[7] The *Dubbo Liberal and Macquarie Advocate*, 14th December, 1910, p. 3.
[8] *Western Champion*, 7th November, 1912, p. 19.
[9] *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30th January. 1934, p. 10.

Commissioners to the erection of a more commotion station that would be in keeping with other buildings in the town".[10]

Notwithstanding the objections by the local council and other bodies against the relocation of Goonumbla Station, the Railway Department went with the removal and re-erection of the Goonumbla building.[11]

The Goonumbla building was also coded with the letter "A" and was designated an "A4" structure but its design was different to the "A3" design of the then burnt, original Peak Hill platform building. By the time the building for Goonumbla had been approved, the alpha-numerical coding system had been revised in 1913 and the single-pitched roof style had been replaced with a double-pitched or gabled roof.

The people of Peak Hill wanted a larger and more modern structure and, although they did not know it at the time, that is what they got with the relocation of the building from Goonumbla. It was more modern by a period of 10 years and more commodious by an additional length of 15 feet and an additional width of two feet. The new Peak Hill building was 68 feet long external by 12 feet wide internal and contained the following rooms – out of room, Station Master's office, open-fronted general waiting room and ladies' waiting room and toilet. These room designations were basically the same as the 1909 building approved initially for Peak Hill but all the rooms were larger. Additionally, the people at Peak Hill benefitted from the extra width of the platform awning from three to nine feet. Had the people of Peak Hill examined some press clippings dating back to the opening of the Parkes-Peak Hill line in 1914, they would have noticed at least one press report that commented that the buildings on that section of line "are said to be a vast improvement on the station buildings on the Peak Hill-Narromine line".[12]

The relocation from Goonumbla to Peak Hill went ahead and a one room waiting shed from Uranagong on the Oaklands branch line was relocated to Goonumbla station in 1935 to replace the departure of the much larger structure. Uranagong station must have been a station of minimal use as it was closed in 1950.

In its last years that the Goonumbla building was at Peak Hill, there were a couple of alterations made to the structure. A timber screen enclosed approximately half of the opening to the general waiting room. As well, the ladies' waiting room was converted into a female toilet and the former ladies' toilet was rebadged as the male toilet. These changes can be seen at the building's present site at Linder Oval in Peak Hill.

THE SECOND PLATFORM BUILDING ON THE MOVE - AGAIN

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[10] *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15th February, 1934, p. 12.
[11] *Narromine News and Trangie Advocate*, 2nd March, 1934, p. 7.
[12] *Dubbo Liberal and Macquarie Advocate*, 3rd July, 1914, p. 6.

The people of Peak Hill have a sense of heritage. They organised the relocation of the station building from the station to nearby Linder Oval sometime between 1991 and 2006. It continues in use in 2017 as an amenities block.

THE PLATFORM

The platform upon opening had a timber platform wall. The platform was reduced from 250 feet (the length upon opening in 1910) to 110 feet in 1978. Nothing remains of the platform in 2017.

THE RAILWAY REFRESHMENT ROOM

Chris Banger is the authority on New South Wales refreshment rooms and he reports that the Peak Hill refreshment room was opened between 1946 and 1949. The refreshment room was shown on a plan in 1954 but Banger states that it was closed between 1958 and 1960.[13]

STATION MASTER'S RESIDENCE

The "J2" type structure at Peak Hill had features that reflected New South Wales Railway design policy relating to official residences. The preferred roof design for New South Wales Railway residences was a hipped roof, as occurred at Narromine. Gabled roofs, apart from some gatehouses, were used when money was short and this was particularly the trend from the 1890s to 1914. The "J1" and "J2" standard residences were examples of the gabled roof and were widely used from the start of the 1890 Depression until the First World War. The distinguishing feature between the "J1" and "J2" buildings was the location of the chimneys. For the "J1" design, the chimneys were set to the rear of the roof ridge while they penetrated the roof ridge for the slightly-larger, "J2" style.

The house was built by the competitive tender system. By no means was the structure large or grand. Indeed, the opposite is the case. Under the main roof, there were two bedrooms, a sitting room and a living room. There were fireplaces in three rooms, with one bedroom missing out. As was the custom at the time, the fireplaces were positioned in the centre of walls and their positions were reflected by the two symmetrically placed brick chimneys through the roof ridge. A chimney also served the wash house copper at the rear of the house. There were several features that demonstrated the tight financial situation, these being:

- the use of timber construction,

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[13] C. Banger, "The Railway Refreshment Rooms of New South Wales 1855-1995," *Bulletin*, August, 2003, pp. 297-304.

- the relatively small size of the building (measuring 30 feet across the front by 31 feet along the side, including the front verandah),
- omission of heating to one bedroom,
- the restriction of an internal corridor to the front two bedrooms only (there was no partition between the rear bedroom and the living room), &
- the use of above ground fresh water tanks rather than the use of an underground facility.

The plan for the Peak Hill residence was officially labelled "J2". The house was not served by the road approach in the forecourt to the station but was positioned approximately 160 feet from the railway line and over 100 feet from the forecourt road. Reticulated water was piped from the 20,000-gallon overhead tank for locomotives into the three rainwater tanks adjacent to the house.

The size of the allotment was 198 feet by 66 feet (i.e. three chains by one chain). Paling fences were provided on the sides of the property and a picket fence at the front. In the centre of the front fence was a pedestrian gate three feet six inches wide and, on the left side, a set of two cart gates four feet six inches wide. These were standard land size dimensions and fencing styles for the period.

The origin of the design as used at Peak Hill and the features of the building are discussed in Appendix 1.

WHAT'S STANDING IN 2017

The platform at Peak Hill was located on the western side of the railway line. Although the platform and platform building have been demolished, a telegraph pole and a tree mark the position of those facilities.

The only structure surviving at the station site in 2017 is the former Station Masters residence, also located on the western side of the railway line. It is now in private ownership. The 1934 building from Goonumbla survives nearby at Linder Oval.

Stuart Sharp

17th June, 2017

APPENDIX 1

THE EMERGENCE AND FEATURES OF THE DESIGN OF THE PEAK HILL RESIDENCE

The style of the structure as at Peak Hill will never be found in the classic British book on standard domestic buildings, namely John Loudon's *Encyclopaedia of Cottage, Farm and Villa Architecture and Furniture*, published in London firstly in 1833. That book provided the origin of many 19th century government residences and was used frequently by Engineer-in-Chief, John Whitton. Similarly, the design of the Peak Hill structure will not be found in other popular texts on architecture, such *as The Penguin Dictionary of Architecture* or Boyd's *Australia's Home*.[14] The residence at Peak Hill is "a building used as a separate self-contained dwelling" and, under that definition is a house.[15] However, the word "house" can refer to the grandest of designs or the most uninspiring hut. Professional advice was sought from the one-time Manager of State Rail Heritage, Dr Donald Ellsmore, now a Senior Lecturer in heritage conservation at Deakin University. His view is that the Peak Hill residence belongs to a group of structures known as cottages. The use of the word cottage implies two things. Firstly, that the structure is small and, secondly, it houses the family of a worker towards the lower end of the socio-economic structure. So, the building at Peak Hill is a residence, a house and a cottage.

The residence at Peak Hill mirrors one of the great issues in Australian history. The clash between the City and the Bush is long and factual. The residence at Peak Hill was a low-cost structure which was used only in rural areas. The design was not used in Sydney, as far as is known. One case study will demonstrate the division of people in NSW according to location. In 1908, the Railway Commissioners were considering the choice of a design for a Station Officer's house at Wollstonecraft. Pencilled on the plan are the words/code "standard J1".[16] This was one of the rare occasions when the Railway Commissioners considered the use of a standard plan that was prepared by and associated with the Department of Public Works. The Commissioners never used the J1 design at Wollstonecraft nor at any other location in Sydney.[17] The answer was pencilled on the plan "cheap type". Instead, the Commissioners built an attractive double-brick residence which survives today in

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[14] J. Fleming, H. Honour & N Pevsner, *The Penguin Dictionary of Architecture*, Second Ed., Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1976 and R. Boyd, *Australia's Home*, Second Ed., Penguin, Ringwood, 1978
[15] Definition from D. McLagan, *A Glossary of Building and Planning Terms in Australia*, National Committee on Rationalised Building, Canberra, 1978, p.40
[16] Plan entitled *Wollstonecraft*, created 12th July 1906
[17] The closest structure to the design of the J1 was an 1888 timber building erected at Gordon for use of Resident Engineer Quodling, who was in charge of the construction of the Hornsby-Milsons Point branch. After the line was opened, the residence was used by the Gordon Station Master until 1929. It was then demolished.

private ownership. It was a case of brick residences for Sydney and timber for the Bush in the early 20th century.

The clash between City and the Bush was not only based on quality of presentation. About 1900, the NSW Government Railways abandoned the policy of building residences for staff in the Sydney area. Station Masters in Sydney, if there was not an existing residence, were paid a rental allowance equal to the subsidy that they would have received if they had occupied an official residence. Occasionally, the Railways purchased an existing residence for a Station Master in Sydney in response to political or union pressure or when land was resumed for railway purposes when a new line was opened.[18] However, the NSW Government Railways rarely designed and built a railway residence beyond the railway corridor boundary. Outside of Sydney, the Railways continued to build residences of traditional design up to the 1950s for Station Masters and other staff. After that, the design of residences had no defined railway style and the NSW Housing commission basically took over the role of providing accommodation for railwaymen and women. Clearly, there was a decision taken and implemented not to provide railway-style buildings in Sydney. The Bush was then doubly insulted. It was good enough to use timber construction and have a distinct railway style in the Bush but not in Sydney.[19]

The origin of the type of construction of the Peak Hill cottage is American. Eminent architects in Australia refer to the type of building as having a "balloon frame".[20] In this system, all vertical structural elements of the exterior load-bearing walls and internal walls consist of single, vertical studs which extend the full height of the frame from the base plate to the top plate. All floor joists are fastened by nails to the studs.[21] The term "balloon frame" was used to express the belief that such frames were too flimsy and would have a short life, like a balloon. This system contrasted with an earlier system in which all the joints were morticed, rather than nailed.

The balloon system was first imported from America by miners coming to Australia following the Californian gold rush. The link between the cottage at Peak Hill and its American heritage is shown in the 1925 silent movie called *The General*. This is a movie where Johnny Gray (Buster Keaton) visits his girlfriend, Annabelle Lee, in a timber cottage and where Johnny falls off the balcony because of the absence of a balustrade. A similar cottage is also shown at the end of the movie when Johnny receives his commission into the southern army. The American precedents were

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[18] Such as 56 Merton Street, Sutherland, which was acquired in conjunction with the opening of the Cronulla branch in 1939. One third of the property was required for construction and, therefore, the remainder of the block was purchased, which contained a residence

[19] Oral advice from Colin Millard, former State Rail Property Manager, dated 4th April 2006

[20] For example, see H. Cowan, *From Wattle and Daub to Concrete and Steel*, Melbourne University Press, 1998, pp 32 & 33 and P. Cox, J. Freeland & W. Stacey*, Rude Timber Buildings in Australia*, Sydney, A & R, 1980, p. 60

[21] Definition from C.M. Harris (Ed.), *Illustrated Dictionary of Historic Architecture*, New York, Dover Publications, 1983, p. 42

enclosed by fences and, by their addition to the Peak Hill residence, the NSW Government Railways emphasised its "sense of order", which was also evident in the hierarchy of the organisation, the operation of trains to timetable and other ways, such as the prompt closing of the yard gates at the close of business each day.[22]

In America, balloon framing was more important because many two-story residences were made of timber. The wall studs for both floors were long enough for both floors and built as a single unit. In NSW, the railways had only very few two-storey timber building, one of which was the former refreshment room at Gloucester. This structure used balloon framing.

There is a number of stylistic features of the structure at Peak Hill which identify it as a NSW Railway design. These are:

• the medium pitch of the gable roof,
• the symmetry of the front elevation,
• the use of a centre front entry leading to a hallway,
• the front door with glass in the top two panels,
• the placement of the chimneys through the ridge of the roof of the structure, &
• the use of a different style of fencing on the front elevation.

The building was externally clad in seven-inch-wide horizontally laid weatherboards with a rusticated profile. Three features reflect an adaptation to the Australian climate. These are, firstly, the use of horizontal, tongue and groove timber lining boards for internal walls, rather than lath and plaster. This allowed walls to lose heat faster and helped cool the house particularly at night. Secondly, the application of external hoods over windows prevented direct sunlight from entering the house. Thirdly, air ventilators in the gables allowed hot air to escape. These features were designed to mitigate the structure becoming excessively hot in summer. However, the use of the J1 or J2 design had no regard to climatic or geographic variation within NSW. It was used in both hot and cold locations. In the entire history of railway residential construction, the NSW Railways amended designs for climate on only two occasions. Both of these were to attempt to reduce heat in western NSW. [23] Whereas building materials in the 19th century changed according to status of location and occupant, materials in the 20th century were much more universally applied. The verandah is often regarded as an Australian design feature but that is not the case at Peak Hill since the residence faces south. Thus, it only has a visual role.

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[22] For the style and role of fencing, see I. Evans, *The Australian Home*, Glebe, Flannel Flower Press, 1983, p. 126

[23] On a number of residences and platform buildings, asbestos cement sheeting was also added to external walls after initial construction to eliminate winter winds penetrating the concrete unit form of construction.

The origin of the design of the Peak Hill building had a gestation period of about 30 years prior to the 1907 plan of Peak Hill residence. Real estate agents would describe the Peak Hill cottage as double-fronted, meaning that the house was two rooms wide on the front elevation. This design feature dominated NSW railway houses from 1880 until the early 1930s. It was in 1877 that the NSW Government Railways built the precedent for the Peak Hill cottage. At Werris Creek and Cootamundra, the buildings for the Station Masters were both of timber construction and basically had the same floor plan as the Peak Hill building. The floor plan consisted of four rooms (three bed rooms and a sitting room) at the front of structure with the service functions (kitchen and wash house) at the rear but to one side. The major difference was that the 1877 buildings had hipped roofs. The floor plan was also used in the 1880s for brick residences, such as Glenn Innes, Mudgee, Bourke and Tenterfield, though they were larger and most had four windows rather than two on the front elevation. Again, hipped roofs were used. There was also a smaller version in the 1880s which had only two windows in the front. Some had a gabled roof similar to Peak Hill, such as Belmore and Shellharbour while others had a hipped roof as at Sydenham, Tempe, The Rock and Lue. Both types had the appearance of their Victorian origins with moulding under the front window sills and parapets hiding the skillion roof over the kitchen and wash house at the rear.[24]

The near-same size of structure, the same floor plan, the same design and same roof pattern as at Peak Hill was first used in 1893 and 1894 at Temora, Parkes and Forbes. These were brick examples. At Murwillumbah, the NSW Government Railways drew plans for a similar structure in both brick and timber, the latter being built. This example at Murwillumbah in 1894 was the precedent of the Peak Hill building. Thus, the issue of the design for the J1 standard plan in 1899 post-dated the first examples by five years. It was only in these examples that the toilet, called an air closet, was attached to the rear of the structure. Prior to 1893, residential air closets were provided in detached sheds down the backyard of the allotment. Another modern convenience was the provision of an enclosed wash-house (a house within a house). Up to the time of the Peak Hill residence, a wash house was a three-sided room. It is of more than passing interest to note that the change from the use of hipped to gabled roofs on residences parallelled a change at about the same time to the design of platform buildings.

The design as at Peak Hill continued to be used for the next 40 years, without competitors. From the 1930s, there was an overlapping of designs with the trend to provide a "sleep-out" on a side verandah, making the design two and half rooms wide. The double fronted design as at Peak Hill was not entirely replaced until 1952 when the triple fronted design was implemented universally.

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[24] The residences at Gerringong, Berry and Bomaderry planned in 1892 were also very similar to Peak Hill but they had two chimneys extended from the ridge of the roof and, hence, were the prototypes for the J2 standard

The style of residence as at Peak Hill was also used as the basis for many other types of uses, such as office accommodation for loco, traffic and perway staff, and barracks at smaller locations for loco, traffic and refreshment room staff. Some were built to a slightly tweaked design and others converted once the residential purposes were no longer required, as was the case with a "J1" residence in Havannah Street, Bathurst, which was converted into a store. At Taree, a "J1" residence was modified in 1926 to form the building for the Railway Institute.

The residence at Peak Hill is a hallmark structure in the history of cottage, house and residential design in Australia and is a statement of the former departmental caring policies which once focused on the welfare of staff.

Stuart Sharp

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