

Victorian Heritage Database Report

# **Mechanics Institute; Free Library & Athenaeum Theatre (Former)**

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**Location:**

39-41 Castella Street Lilydale, YARRA RANGES SHIRE

**Heritage Status / Level of Significance:**

Included in Heritage Overlay

**Heritage Inventory (HI) Number:**

**Listing Authority:** HI

**Heritage Overlay Number:** HO51

**Statement of Significance:**

The region's oldest and most elaborate civic building, for many years the centre of social activities in Lilydale. Its facade is of an interesting architectural design. Included with the Lillydale Shire Offices, the facade of the adjacent Athenaeum, Mechanic's Institute and Free Library, a single storey facade with sympathetic neo-

classic detail including pilasters, pairs of engaged columns supporting a pediment above and arched entrance door and a balustraded cornice. (National Trust citation as quoted by Tansley, 1978)

The building is important for its associations with Dame Nellie Melba and her performances there, including her appearance during her farewell concert series in 1928 (Criterion H.1). (RNE, 015547)

The Athenaeum is one of the region's most elaborate civic buildings and reflects characteristics of Victorian Free Classical style. Such characteristics include its strong symmetry, pilasters, Corinthian columns supporting a pediment above, its floral motif and a balustrated parapet (Criterion D.2). (RNE, 015547)

Together with the Shire Offices next door, the building forms an important streetscape element (Criterion E.1). (RNE, 015547)

## Description

The front section of the building is constructed of brick and the ornate front facade is cement rendered. The large hall at the rear is of stud-frame and weatherboard construction with a corrugated iron roof. (Tansley, 1978)

The building adjoins the former Lilydale Shire Offices building, which is now the Lilydale Museum. It has a single storey facade with Victorian Free Classical detail including pilasters, pairs of engaged Corinthian columns supporting a pediment above, arched entrance and a balustrated parapet. The cornice is dentilated, round arched windows have keystone decoration and there is decoration at impost level. The front section of the building is constructed of brick and the ornate front facade is cement rendered. The large hall at the rear is brick with a corrugated iron roof (and corrugated iron to the rear wall). There is also a brick extension at the very rear. The Athenaeum forms, with the adjacent Shire Offices, an important element in this Lilydale streetscape. (RNE, 015547)

The interior has been altered quite considerably, but the exterior is of good condition and integrity. (1990) The exterior form, including the facade and the main roof to the hall, appear to be substantially intact. The cement rendered facade retains much of the original detail and ornamentation including the balustrated parapet, central pediment, dentilated cornice, signage and engaged columns. The facade has been recently painted in acrylic paints, which has thoroughly sanitised the age and patination of the cement rendered facade. The building is generally in good condition and maintained and is currently used as a theatre. It appears to have been restored recently. The galvanised iron roof and the rainwater goods are new. The brick chimneys are intact. Behind the facade the building is constructed from brick and there is a recent brick extension to the rear. The painted timber window frames and doors are aged but intact. Some window openings in the brick hall have been bricked up or covered over with plyboard. (1996) (RNE, 015547)

Good

Heritage Study / Consultant	Yarra Ranges - Shire of Yarra Ranges Heritage Study, Context Pty Ltd, 2000
Construction Date Range	1888 - 1888
Architect / Designer	Treeby, Philip Edward
Municipality	YARRA RANGES SHIRE
Other names	
Hermes number	115534

Property number	
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*This place/object may also be State heritage listed. Check the Victorian Heritage Database. For further details, contact the local Council or go to Planning Schemes Online*