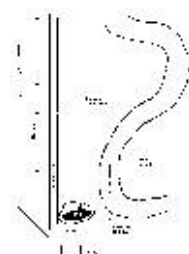


Victorian Heritage Database Report  
**PADDLE STEAMER GEM**



**Location:**

SWAN HILL PIONEER SETTLEMENT, MONASH DRIVE SWAN HILL, SWAN HILL RURAL CITY

**Heritage Status / Level of Significance:**

Registered

**Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number: H1742**

**Listing Authority: VHR**

**Heritage Overlay Number: HO151**

**Statement of Significance:**

What is significant?

The Paddle Steamer Gem was launched in Moama, NSW on 17 June 1876. The vessel is of composite build: red gum planking over iron frames and was built for the Echuca shipowner Elliot Randell by the firm of Air & Westergaard. Gem was originally fitted with a 40 horsepower steam engine and wood fired boilers and carried

freight and passengers, mainly in the lower reaches of the Murray below Mildura. In 1882 at Goolwa in South Australia the vessel was lengthened from 28 metres to 40 metres by inserting a section amidships at the same time having its passenger accommodation increased and making it one of the largest steamers to have ever worked the Murray-Darling rivers. Gem passed through several ownerships including the Chaffey brothers at Mildura. Gem was able to keep trading right up until the end of the steam boat era on the Murray in the early 1950s. The vessel, minus its steam engine which had been scrapped then served as a floating residence and boarding house at Mildura until 1962 when it was purchased by the Borough of Swan Hill for use as a floating art gallery and focal point of Australia's first outdoor folk museum. The impetus for this came from Eric Westbrook, the director of the National Gallery of Victoria. The engineless Gem was towed to Swan Hill where it has floated in its own pool since 1963 serving for most of that time as an art gallery and restaurant. In recent years it has been undergoing a complete refit which has involved the removal of all the art gallery and restaurant fittings.

How is it significant?

The Paddle Steamer Gem is of historical and scientific (technological) significance to the State of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

The Paddle Steamer Gem is historically important as a rare survivor of the steam boat era of trading along the Murray-Darling. This nationally significant river trade was vitally important in the economic development of Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia. Gem, which had a long and active career, is one of only a handful of survivors to remain in Victoria. Gem is also significant for its role as the focal point of the Swan Hill Pioneer Settlement, the earliest example of its type in Australia.

The Paddle Steamer Gem is scientifically (technologically) important as an example of an iron framed wooden planked vessel designed for river use. Although unfortunately missing its original steam engine and despite several refits, Gem nonetheless retains much of its early fabric which can give insights into nineteenth century river boat building techniques.

Heritage Study / Consultant	
Construction Date Range	1876 -
Architect / Designer	
Municipality	SWAN HILL RURAL CITY
Other names	
Hermes number	5439
Property number	

*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*