



Andrea Stombuco

(John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland)

Andrea Giovanni Stombuco (c.1820-1907) was born in Florence, Italy. Newspaper death notices state that he was born in 1820, conflictingly an 1882 oath of allegiance states he was 44 years old, and cemetery records note that he was 82 years old when he died in early 1907!. Stombuco left Italy when he was quite young and travelled extensively in Russia and America. He then spent some years in South Africa, where he is said to have owned a quarry and worked in the stone-building industry. At Cape Town he married fifteen year old Jean Frances Miles in late 1849. The discovery of gold in Australia drew Stombuco to Victoria in 1851; he travelled to the Eaglehawk diggings near Bendigo with Jean and their infant daughter Marie. Andrea turned to sculpture, monumental masonry, building and later, architecture. He endeavours to establish a position as a sculptor included a group of statuary executed in cement, wax and marble - exhibited in the rotunda of the Intercolonial Exhibition at Melbourne in 1866, colloquially known as Judge Barry's Exhibition. He worked in Melbourne, was contractor for Catholic churches at Kyneton, Malmsbury and Taradale (all north-west of Melbourne on the road to Bendigo), and for some of the stonework of Ballarat Cathedral.

Stombuco moved to Goulburn, NSW in 1869, where he was appointed Catholic diocesan architect by Bishop William Lanigan. He carried out a number of projects there, but is best known for the first part of the nave of the Cathedral of St Peter & Paul at Goulburn in 1871-72. A newspaper article at his death notes involvement with „churches at Yass, Young, Burrowa and other places“. Andrea also did Church of England work – St Matthias" Church at Currawang and a rectory at Gunning in 1873. Stombuco lived with his growing family in Victoria and NSW for around 25 years, designing and superintending private and public buildings before moving to seeking new ventures at Queensland in 1875.

It has been claimed that Bishop James O'Quinn treated Stombuco as Brisbane Catholic diocesan architect in deed, if not in title. Among Stombuco's earliest Queensland commissions was a series of ecclesiastical buildings for Ipswich parish in collaboration with Father Andrew Horan, Quinn's nephew. He also began designing schools, churches and convents in and around Brisbane, including St Joseph's Christian Brothers College, Gregory Terrace in 1875-76. Stombuco also designed for other denominations – he won a competition for St Andrew's Church of England, South Brisbane in 1879. His Theatre Royal in Elizabeth Street, Brisbane of 1881 lasted until demolition in 1986.

Amongst buildings credited to Stombuco at his death were Dalgety's stores, corner of Creek and Elizabeth Streets, Brisbane. Queensland architectural historian Donald Watson notes that Stombuco's commercial buildings in Brisbane were more flamboyant than his Catholic work, generally Venetian palazzos with enriched stucco decoration. They include Grimes & Petty's shop (1881), Maurice D. Benjamin & Co.'s warehouse (1883) and Her Majesty's Theatre (1888) – although it is likely that Stombuco's final design incorporated many aspects of the earlier scheme by George Raymond Johnson (1840-1898). Of Stombuco's major houses - which include his own residences, 'Bertholme', Bowen Terrace, New Farm (1883) and 'Sans Souci' (now 'Palma Rosa'), Queens Road, Hamilton (1887) - which are mostly conventional, perhaps the best was 'Frascati', Ann Street, Brisbane (1882).

An online compilation of Stombuco's heritage-listed work in Brisbane includes: the Allan and Stark Building in Queen Street; the Main Building of All Hallows' School at Fortitude Valley; Bertholme, a residence in New Farm; Heckelmanns Building in Elizabeth Street; Montview House, a residence in Spring Hill; Palma Rosa, a residence in Hamilton; Rhyndarra, a residence in Yeronga; St Andrews Anglican Church in South Brisbane; the Main Building at St Joseph's College, Nudgee; and St Patricks Church in Fortitude Valley. West of Brisbane, St Francis Xavier Church in Goodna; and St Marys Church Precinct at Ipswich are also listed.

Andrea's son Giovanni (1861-1945) trained and practised briefly with his father from 1886. At this time it appears Stombuco lived a fairly opulent lifestyle, and with the success of projects in the 1880s his personal residences were of great

interest in Brisbane. The 1890s began poorly for Stombuco, and his „Magnificent Residence“ with frontages to Lechmere and Bailey Streets, New Farm, was advertised as a mortgagee sale in the *Brisbane Courier* during February 1891. With declining fortunes in an east-coast economic depression Stombuco moved across the continent to Perth, Western Australia in December 1891, where he again practised as an architect. His wife did not accompany him - she remained south-east of Brisbane as the postmistress at Eight Mile Plains, and Stombuco descendants remain in that area today.

The elderly Stombuco arrived at the port of Fremantle 9 July 1891 on the steamer *Flinders*, having sailed the wintery seas of the south and west coasts via Adelaide, Albany, Hamelin Bay, Busselton and Bunbury. Setting himself up in business at Perth, Stombuco was soon busy with a competition entry for the design of the proposed new Weld Club, advertised the day after his arrival. A correspondent of a Queensland newspaper recorded in early August 1891:

There is [are] quite a number of Queenslanders in town now. Strolling down Hay-Street I was much surprised to see the name of Stombuco (architect from Brisbane) on a window. Going up I found the old man busy and enthusiastic, drawing a design for a club ... There is a prize of £50 for the best design, and Mr Stombuco is a competitor. Around his walls hang some of the designs of [his] leading buildings, amongst which the Town Hall is conspicuous.'

Later in August, the *Inquirer and Commercial News* in Perth advised that young architect J.J. Talbot Hobbs (1864-1938) had been successful in the Weld Club competition, and that all the competition drawings were on display at the A.M.P. Society Building. Various comments on each of the designs were made, and somewhat less favourably that: *'Signor Stombuco's design is exceedingly grandiose, and is a cross between the Washington Capitol and St. Peter's at Rome, and although no doubt clever is most unsuitable for a Club house.'* Despite this unflattering introduction to his work, Stombuco was initially well received in Perth, and was again provided with work by the Catholic Church. At the end of August 1891 *The West Australian* newspaper provided affirmative news of Signor Stombuco's tributes brought from Queensland, and more positive note of his proposed design for the Weld Club:

WE have been favoured with a sight of the testimonials brought by Signor Stombuco, an architect lately arrived from Queensland. Mr. Stombuco brings with him testimonials from Sir Samuel Griffith [lawyer-politician, recent Premier], and many of the most prominent men of Brisbane. These testimonials are very satisfactory, and state Mr. Stombuco to be an architect of a high order. He has designed and carried to completion many of the leading buildings in Brisbane, including the new Opera House [opened 2 April 1888 as Her Imperial Majesty's Opera House], and it is amongst the best of its kind in the Australian colonies. It can contain two thousand, and can be emptied in four minutes. He also designed the Town Hall in that city. Sir Samuel Griffith states that Mr. Stombuco is pre-eminently fitted as an architect for the Australian colonies, blending together beauty of design with thorough ventilation, in which, as well as in acoustics, he is-a specialist. His design for the Weld Club was of a superior character, and was much admired, the chief fault found with it being that a doubt was expressed as to the probability of its being completed for the money. The architect assures us, however, that he had a tender to complete it under the specified price. Mr Stombuco should be an acquisition to a town where a better style of building will in the future be needed to do justice to the capital of a large colony.

Stombuco called tenders for a Catholic school at Subiaco in October 1891, and it was built for St Vincent's Orphanage in 1892. The school building is now incorporated as the Martin Kelly Centre within the Catherine McAuley complex. Following its opening in January 1893, *The Record* of 26 January 1893 described the school building as:

... a handsome structure in the Gothic style. It is in two wings arranged in the form of a T. ... The main wing is 42 feet long by 21 feet wide, and the transverse wing is 36 long feet (sic) by 21 feet wide. The walls are 16 feet high and the roof is of a steep pitch thus giving a large space internally. Externally the effect is pleasing, and, as a school, it is suitably designed to admit an abundance of light and fresh air. The architect was Signor Stombuco, of Perth, and the builder Mr. David Gray.'

Involving himself in local professional affairs, Stombuco formed part of a deputation of architects and surveyors to Premier John Forrest in September 1892, the group including other prominent local practitioners such as Talbot Hobbs and James Wright (1854-1917). Wright read a petition signed by sixteen architects, protesting about Government officials doing private work in and out of office hours, thereby competing with private professionals. Stombuco spoke

in support, referring to the practice of the Government of Queensland, and the diplomatic Forrest agreed to look further into the matter.

During 1892 Stombuco designed shops in Perth for prominent Catholic businessmen Daniel Connor and Timothy Quinlan, jointly one of the largest landholders in the central business district of Perth from the late 1880s. In November 1892 the structure was described in *The West Australian*:

PROMINENT amongst the many buildings recently erected in Perth are the shops now approaching completion in Barrack Street, and which have been erected by Messrs. Connor and Quinlan. There are four divisions on the ground floor with living accommodation upstairs. ... The front elevation is treated in a classical style. Double Corinthian columns fluted, support the entablature which is of mediaeval design, the cornice being enriched with medallions and various other ornaments. The central feature is bold and massive, being crowned by a pediment, and beside the balustrade which runs along the whole elevation, the central feature is carried up and gives relief and boldness to the whole. The front is certainly an attractive one, and greatly adds to the appearance of the building. The architect is Signor A. Stombuco, and the contractors, Messrs. J. Hurst & Son.

During 1893-1894 architects Stombuco & Moran are listed in William Street, Perth. Stombuco initially employed Queensland-born Charles John Moran (1868-1936) as an articled apprentice, but the energetic Moran soon moved-on and worked his way into prominence in the goldfields, becoming a Member of Parliament in 1894. In later times a newspaper article joked that “Stombuco drew his plans in Italian, and Charlie used to translate „em”. Stombuco called tenders for several Hay Street houses on Moran’s behalf in December 1896, but he does not appear to have much work after 1893, unlike the many other architects exiting an east-coast economic disaster and flooding into the booming State. In June 1894 the sale was advertised of the whole of Stombuco’s furniture and household effects at his residence in James Street, Perth – suggesting his economic woe continued. During 1895-1897 Stombuco is not listed as an architect in *Wises Directory*, but in 1898-1899 Signor Antonio Stombuco is listed at 35 Moore Street, Perth.

Stombuco designed his most prominent Western Australian building, the flamboyant Hotel Metropole built in central Hay Street, Perth for another well-

known Catholic, Thomas Molloy in 1893 – who was provided with financial assistance from the Premier's entrepreneurial brother Alex Forrest. As the 1890s moved on, Stombuco appears to have fallen out of favour in Perth, possibly due to elderly frailties or eccentricities. Molloy initially used architect John Stuart Jackson (1858-1903) to design the adjoining Theatre Royal Metropole, for which the foundation stone was laid in early May 1895. But Jackson had previously been remanded by a magistrate for medical treatment, suspected of being of „unsound mind“ in August 1894, and by mid August 1895 Jackson was supplanted as architect by George Raymond Johnson. Johnson with his extensive experience designing theatres in Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide may well have acted as a consultant from as early as May, when he established temporary offices at the Hotel Metropole. The opening night report in *The Western Australian* hailed Johnson as the creator of „the exceedingly pretty design“.

Family records in Queensland may be able to provide further details of the elderly Stombuco's circumstances in Perth, where daughter Marie joined him, but it is possible that he was approaching senility in the later 1890s. In January 1897 Andrea advertised that he had mislaid some plans, and „could the finder kindly return them to 139 Roe Street“. In September 1898, Stombuco sued Thomas Molloy for £75, alleging a lack of payment for the preparation of plans and specifications for shops in Hay Street, Perth. Although it was acknowledged that Stombuco had designed the Hotel Metropole, Molloy denied having ever seen the shop documents, or giving instructions for their preparation. Judgement was given for the defendant, although costs were not asked for, perhaps suggesting some sympathy from Molloy toward Stombuco.

At his death it was stated that Stombuco designed 54 public, educational, ecclesiastical, commercial and residential buildings around Australia, and that at least 20 survive in southeast Queensland, where his work is best recognised. Ultimately Andrea Stombuco failed to redeem his fortunes in WA, and died as a senile pauper at the Fremantle Asylum on 6 February 1907. He was buried in the Catholic section of Fremantle Cemetery. His estate, placed in the hands of Gervase Clifton, Curator of Intestates' Estates, was valued at less than £2.

References:

„Tenders“, *Brisbane Courier*, 29 June 1880, p.1 (Stombuco invites tenders for rebuilding the Queensland Theatre, renamed Theatre Royal on completion).

„Magnificent Residence“, *Brisbane Courier*, 17 February 1891, p.8 (mortgagee sale of Stombuco's residence with frontages to Lechmere and Bailey Streets, New Farm, Brisbane).

„Shipping“, *Inquirer and Commercial News*, 10 July 1891, p.4 (arrival at Fremantle).

„General News“, *Inquirer and Commercial News*, 26 August 1891, p.3 (entries for Weld Club).

„News and Notes“, *The West Australian*, 29 August 1891, p.4 (testimonials).

„Tenders“, *Daily News*, 20 October 1891, p.3 (school at Subiaco).

„Tenders“, *The West Australian*, 8 February 1892, p.8 (villa near tannery Duke Street, Perth).

„News of the Week“, *Western Mail*, 2 July 1892, p.19 (shops Barrack Street, Quinlan & Connor).

„Private Work by Public Officers“, *Inquirer and Commercial News*, 14 September 1892, p.5.

„Prominent“, *The West Australian*, 23 November 1892, p.4 (Barrack Street, Quinlan & Connor).

„Tenders“, *The West Australian*, 21 April 1893, p.7 (hotel Hay Street for T.G. Molloy).

„Sale of Household Furniture“, *Daily News*, 20 June 1894, p.3 (sale of furniture and effects).

„Tenders“, *The West Australian*, 25 December 1896, p.6 (houses Hay St West for C.J. Moran).

„Lost and Found“, *The West Australian*, 19 January 1897, p.3 (plans mislaid).

„Tenders“, *The West Australian*, 31 July 1897, p.2 (villa).

„An Architect's Claim“, *Daily News*, 5 September 1898, p.3 (Stombuco sues T.G. Molloy).

„The New Member“, *Western Mail*, 19 July 1902, p.10 (C.J. Moran articulated to Stombuco).

„Dear Figaro“, *Queensland Figaro*, 7 August 1902, p.7 (St Stephen's Cathedral campanile).

„Brisbane's Historic Churches“, *Brisbane Courier*, 4 February 1905, p.12 (St Andrew Vulture St).

„Charlie Moran“, *Sunday Times*, 20 August 1905, p.4 (joke on C.J. Moran, with Stombuco).

„Andrea Stombuco“, *Brisbane Courier*, 13 February 1907, p.7 (death, background in Australia).

„Death of the Architect“, *Goulburn Evening Penny Post*, 21 February 1907, p.2 (background).

„Estates Placed“, *The West Australian*, 9 September 1907, p.3 (Intestate Estate).

Watson, Donald, and Mackay, Judith, *A Directory of Queensland Architects to 1940*, University of Queensland Library, 1984, pp184-5.

Giorgi, Piero P., *Stombuco: the building of Brisbane in the 19th century*, Brisbane, 1998. [Giorgi cites the B.Arch thesis *Andrea Stombuco* by Caroline Cox, University of Sydney, 1977.]

Smith, Caroline, 'Overview', in Fisher, Rod (eds), *Stombuco Heritage Tour*, Brisbane History Group, 1999.

„Andrea Stombuco - Queensland Stories“, narrated by Simon Farley, State Library of Queensland, www.youtube.com/watch?v=RUzxxkO9I3Y

Watson, Donald, „Stombuco, Andrea Giovanni (1820-1907)“, *Encyclopedia of Australian architecture*, pp. 654-5, Cambridge University Press, Port Melbourne, 2012.

„Andrea Stombuco Architect“, 22 January 2014 at <http://www.yourbrisbanepastandpresent.com>

„Andrea Stombuco“, 22 January 2014 at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrea_Stombuco

„Stombuco-GRJ“, notes including work by G.R. Johnson, by Peter Johnson, 30 January 2014.

Contributing author: John Taylor

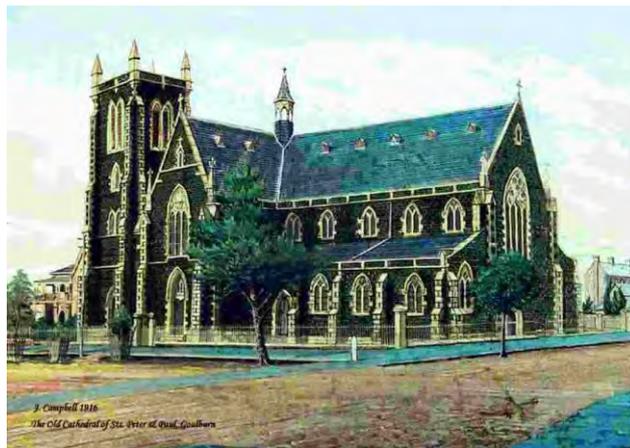
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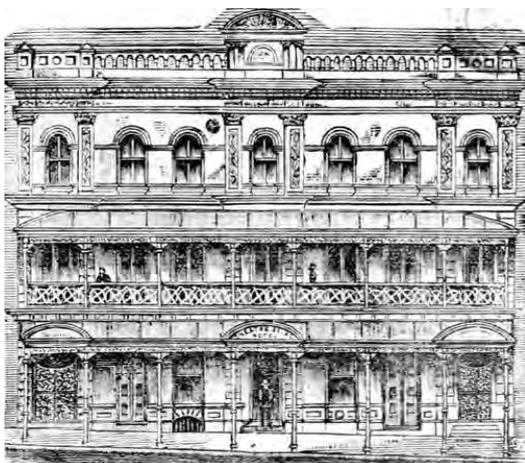
Taylor, Dr John J., „Andrea Giovanni Stombuco (1820-1907)', Western Australian Architect Biographies, <http://www.architecture.com.au/> accessed DATE.



Stombuco built this residence, later named *Carrick*, for himself at 31 Hutton Street, Kyneton, Victoria in 1859 (<http://therealestatehelpers.com.au/property/kyneton-bluestone-mansion>)



Stombuco was responsible for the nave of the Cathedral of St Peter & Paul, Goulburn in 1871-2 (<http://site.stspeterandpaulsoldcathedral.org/history.htm>).

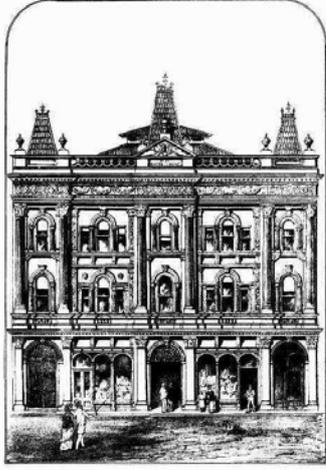


Architectural drawing of the facade of Theatre Royal, Elizabeth Street, Brisbane 1881; and photo in August 1986, just before demolition (SLQ; SLQ neg. no. 137156, courtesy P. Johnson).



Rear view of 'Sans Souci' (now 'Palma Rosa'), Queens Road, Hamilton of 1887 (John Oxley Library SLQ 92286 at <http://www.yourbrisbanepastandpresent.com/2010/03/palma-rosa.html>)

SEPTEMBER 29, 1888. THE QUEENSLAND FIGARO. 489



HER MAJESTY'S OPERA HOUSE, BRISBANE.
(See Prospectus, page 492.)

A. STOMBUCO & SON,
Architects, Valuators, &c.,

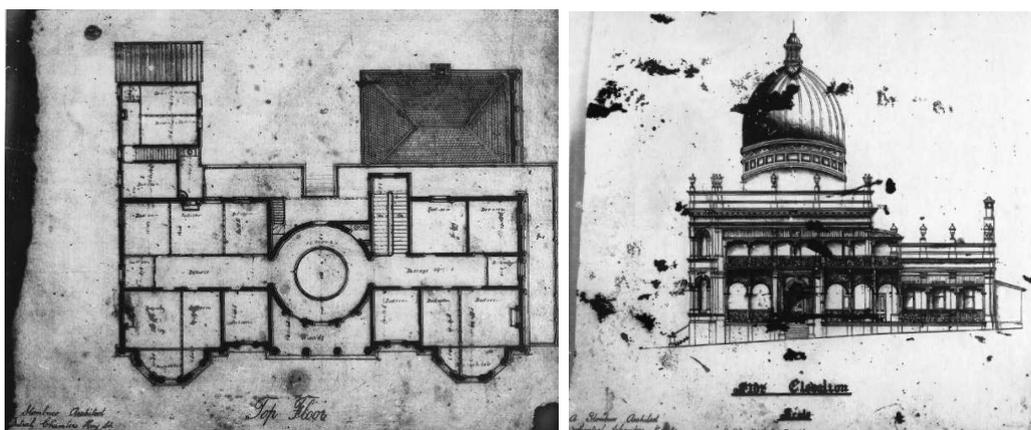
No. 13 GRAND ARCADE,
QUEEN STREET, BRISBANE.

Designs for Pulpits, Alters, Church Fittings, Pavilions, Book-cases, Tombstones, &c., prepared in Gothic, Renaissance, Classical or other styles. Valuation made of City and Suburban Property. Estimates and Quantities made out.

All Hallows Convent, the Royal Bank, Benjamin's Stores, and several other notable buildings in Brisbane were designed by the above Architects, and persons giving instructions for designs can rely upon prompt attention.

Pugh's, 1888

Sketch of Her Imperial Majesty's Opera House Brisbane opened 2 April 1888, demolished 1985 (*Queensland Figaro*, 29 September 1888, p.489); and advertisement for Andrea Stombuco and his son Giovanni, of 1888 (Watson & McKay p.184)



These drawings produced by Stombuco at „Central Chambers Hay Street“ [Perth] are his design for the Weld Club competition of 1891. Reproduced in Carolyn Cox's thesis, Cox notes that the drawings “appear to be of a hotel situated on a corner with entries from both streets”, but with the benefit of new research, we now see the drawings provide valuable comparison with the Talbot Hobbs designed Weld Club that was built in Perth. (Cox, C., „Andrea Stombuco“, 1977, p.236, illustrations 8.02-8.03)



Stombuco designed this school built at St Vincent's Orphanage, Subiaco in 1892 – it is now used as the Martin Kelly Centre at the Catherine McAuley Family Centre. (<http://www.mercycare.com.au/resources/Heritage-Trail-Booklet-A5.pdf>)



Andrea Stombuco designed four shops for Connor and Quinlan at 87-95 Barrack Street, Perth in 1892. The distinctive central pediment and top balustrade mentioned in initial newspaper description of the place have been removed. (SLWA 099567PD c.1955; John Taylor, July 2008)



Severely altered, the Hotel Metropole (at this time Fink's Hotel) and the Theatre Royal are extant in Hay Street, Perth (*Twentieth Century Impressions of Western Australia*, 1901, p.423).