



William George Wolf

(Battye, J.S., *Cyclopedia of Western Australia*, Vol.1, 1912, p.636)

Wolf, William George (1855-1925) was born 21 November 1855 in New York, where his father, highly likely to be of German origin, was involved in building work. Of all the ports of arrival in the USA, New York was by far the most active in terms of immigration at this time, and Germans made up a great percentage of the new arrivals in the 1850s – reaching nearly 50% in 1854. Later in life, Wolf noted that he was educated at Fort Lee in New Jersey, and then perhaps using language skills derived from his parents, at Heidelberg, Germany, where he ‘obtained his diploma as an architect’, although this claim is questionable given that there was no architectural education facility at Heidelberg.

Moving to London, Wolf worked for a period in the office of Hewitt & Son in Euston Road. He migrated to Australia in 1877, working in Melbourne for Lloyd Tayler as a draftsman before progressing to independent practice. He first appeared in Melbourne directories in 1878, and was initially based at Richmond. Wolf completed a number of substantial hotels and coffee houses including the Grand Hotel at Burnley, the Family Hotel in Portarlington, and many villas, shops and terrace houses - including the Lalor House, Church Street Richmond in 1888; Nathan’s Terrace, Wellington & Shields Streets Flemington in 1889; and the Hawthorn mansion ‘Abergeldie’ in c.1890.

Wolf took George Lewis into partnership at Collins Street in 1890, the commencement of what was to be a disastrous economic period in Victoria. ‘The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne’ in the 1880s and 1890s is renowned. Consequently Wolf moved to Sydney around 1892, where business activity also suffered a major decline, and from there to Western Australia’s gold boom in Perth, arriving 1 April 1896 with only £7 to support his family. Wolf was soon in business, with note of his important design for the McNess Arcade published in May 1896. This first substantial commission in Perth was followed with the laying of foundation stones for the impressive Brisbane Street Jewish Synagogue in October 1896, and the Swan River Mechanics Institute, Hay Street during June 1898.

Despite his initial success, Wolf's tenuous financial position continued in Perth, and he was declared a bankrupt. By August 1898 he had six children aged from fourteen to two years old, and an outbreak of typhoid had led to major illness within his family. Attempting to explain his circumstances in the Supreme Court, Wolf claimed he had been unable to work for a period of eighteen weeks, and that his wife and children had been unwell for five months in total. Wolf's major client Charles McNess had to employ another person to supervise completion of the Royal Arcade, finished in 1897.

At the time of his bankruptcy Wolf owed around £470, most borrowed at exorbitant rate from money lender Albert Shaw. Wolf's deposition to the court revealed he had been a bankrupt in Victoria c.1882, owing a similar amount, and in that instance claiming a partner 'Campbell' was the cause. Although he had suffered misfortune, the creditors listed in 1898 suggest that Wolf had fled both Melbourne and Sydney with other un-remitted borrowings, and he must be characterized as a man who employed sloppy business practices, and lived beyond his means. Despite these failings, Wolf continued to secure further prominent commissions in Western Australia.

It is likely that the Hyde Park (formerly Commonwealth) Hotel, North Perth, is his design. Wolf's most significant contribution to Australian architecture, the now revered His Majesty's Theatre and Hotel in Hay Street, Perth was completed in 1904, and Wolf soon completed four shops adjacent for the same client, Thomas Molloy. Mention was made in 1912 of Wolf's design for the *new* Theatre Royal, perhaps an update of the 1897 accommodation which has been erroneously attributed to him in the past. Wolf designed a number of prominent residences, including 'Avro' in Nicholson Road, Subiaco, and the Catholic Presbytery at McNeil Street, Peppermint Grove.

Wolf had married Maria May Jordan in 1883, and biographical notes published in 1912 note the family had grown to include four sons and six daughters. As with any large family, there were ongoing joys and sorrows. The marriages of various sons and daughters were duly celebrated. However, in July 1913, William George Wolf junior, an analyst just 29 years of age, died at his father's 2 Onslow Road, Subiaco residence of 'paralysis of the brain'. Wolf's draftsman son Eugene was charged with theft in 1915, but was subsequently cleared by the testimony of his father and family, at that stage living in Hay Street, Subiaco. In October 1916 William and his wife were required to register as 'aliens', and Wolf may have been hindered from practicing effectively during the privations of the First World War. Despite this, there is note of at least one son, George, enlisting in the Australian Imperial Forces in 1918. Never seeming to settle for long at one address, William was at 603 Murray Street Perth at the time. George had been born at Richmond, Victoria during

January 1900, perhaps during a family vacation, as records note the birth of two other children at Perth around that time, Olga in 1898 and Karl in 1902.

William Wolf does not seem to have had any involvement with the West Australian Institute of Architects, formed in 1896, preferring in his pre-war advertisements to note membership of the 'Imperial German Institute of Architects'. Wolf was still practicing in the 1920s, as in March 1924 he was preparing plans for the Hotel Australia in Murray Street Perth (as with the Jewish Synagogue and Swan River Mechanics Institute, now demolished). This project may have led to his first registering with the Architects Board of Western Australia in April 1924. Research by His Majesty's Theatre historian David Hough has found that Wolfs moved to Adelaide to live with a daughter around this time. A heavy pipe smoker, Wolf had developed cancer of the tongue, and he died 28 June 1925, following which he was buried at the North Road Cemetery, Nailsworth SA.

References:

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'Quarterly Licensing Courts', *The West Australian*, 3 September 1901, p.3 (Commonwealth Hotel).

'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 28 May 1910, p.4 (R.C. Presbytery, Cottesloe [Peppermint Grove]).

'Deaths', *The West Australian*, 5 July 1913, p.1 (death of William George Wolf junior).

'A Farmer and his Money', *The West Australian*, 6 May 1915, p.4 (Eugene Wolf accused of theft).

National Archives of Australia, 'WOLF George': Service Number - W16920 : Place of Birth - Richmond VIC : Place of Enlistment - Perth WA 1918 : Next of Kin - (Father) WOLF William

'Houses and Land', *The West Australian*, 7 December 1921, p.4 (Avro - Jacoby House, ... designed by W. Wolf, Esq., Architect, and built by day labour, under personal supervision).

'General news', *The West Australian*, 8 March 1924, p.8 (John Guilfoyle's Hotel Australia ... by Mr. W. Wolf, architect, ... of reinforced concrete, with Oriental facade, ... estimated cost is £30,000).

'William Wolf', Architects Board of Western Australia, 14 April 1924, registration number 91.

'On The Terrace', *West Australian Mining, Building, and Engineering Journal*, 3 September 1904, p.20, 17 September 1904, p.19 ('Four large three-storey shops', south-east corner Hay and King Streets, Perth).

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Swan River Mechanics Institute, Hay Street 1898
SLWA 011480d



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McNess Royal Arcade (at right), Hay Street 1896-7
SLWA 006324d

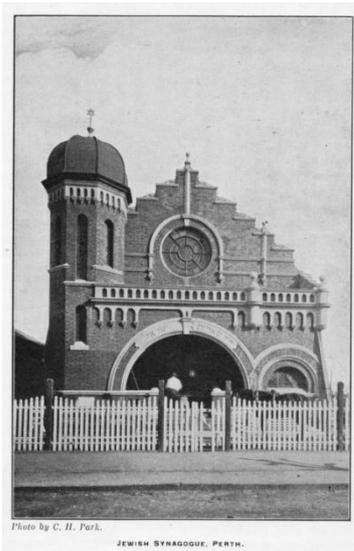


Photo by C. H. Park.
JEWISH SYNAGOGUE, PERTH.

Jewish Synagogue, Brisbane Street 1896-7
Batty, *Cyclopedia of Western Australia*, Vol 2, p.103



Four shops and His Majesty's Theatre-Hotel, Hay Street 1904-5
Austen, Tom, *The Streets of Old Perth*, p.69



Castle Hotel York – major additions 1905
HCWA Pic 4711



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Australia Hotel, Murray St, 1924
SLWA 095,072PD