

**Identifier** Houses  
**Formerly** “Lorne” (No 54) and “Omeo Villa” (No 56)



Not within a HO area

**Address** 54 & 56 Spray Street  
 ELWOOD  
**Category** Residential: detached  
**Constructed** 1887 (No 54) & 1888 (No 56)  
**Designer** Unknown

## Significance

### *What is Significant?*

The houses at 54-56 Spray Street, Elwood, comprise a detached pair of double-fronted Victorian single-storey brick villas, both much altered during the twentieth century. Erected in 1887 and 1888 respectively, they were two of only eleven houses built in the 1880s and '90s on the *Seaside Estate*, one of Elwood's largest (and ultimately unsuccessful) Boom-period subdivisions. No 56 was originally occupied by Dr James Stirling (1852-1909), one-time Government Geologist and a significant figure in various scientific fields in Victoria.

### *How is it Significant?*

The houses are of historical significance to the City of Port Phillip.

### *Why is it Significant?*

Historically, the houses are significant as the only surviving evidence of the *Seaside Estate*, an ambitious 192-lot subdivision in Elwood that was laid out in 1885. Of the less than a dozen houses actually built on the huge estate before the end of that century, only these two examples now remain (albeit in a much altered state) to demonstrate the optimistic but ultimately unsuccessful phase of Boom-period speculative residential development in Elwood.

The house at No 54 is of some historic interest in its own right as the home of Dr James Stirling, former Government Geologist who was instrumental in the mapping of Victoria's brown coal deposits in Gippsland in the 1890s, and was otherwise highly regarded for his pioneer research in many scientific fields including geology, botany, speleology, ethnography and meteorology.

## Description

The houses at 54-56 Spray Street, Elwood, comprise a detached pair of double-fronted Victorian single-storey brick villas, with hipped roofs and asymmetrical frontages with a projecting bay to the right side. Both houses have been somewhat altered. No 56, the more intact of the two, was evidently remodelled in the inter-war period. Front and side walls have been roughcast rendered and the original front windows replaced by timber double-hung sashes with lozenge glazing and flat architraves. The roof has been reclad with pressed metal sheeting (in imitation of terracotta tiles), and the original verandah replaced by a reproduction Edwardian-style one, with fluted timber posts, slat frieze and fretwork brackets. The house at No 54, remodelled in the post-war period, now has a flat rendered façade (with remnants of the original bichromatic brickwork still evident on the side wall). The roof has been reclad in terracotta tiles, the chimney and brackets have been removed, and the original windows replaced with steel-framed casement sashes. The original verandah has been replaced by a small corner porch, with a cantilevered concrete slab roof over a terrazzo paved base.

## History

These sites formed part of the *Seaside Estate*, a 192-lot subdivision bounded by St Kilda Street, Glen Huntly and Ormond roads, gazetted in January 1885. The estate developed slowly, with 56 Spray Street – one of the first houses – appearing in the 1888 rate book (dated 13 December 1887) as a four-roomed brick dwelling, valued at £40, owned and occupied by William G Reynolds, clothier. The next year, the rate book lists Reynolds (described as a wool merchant) with a new neighbour, James Stirling (listed in the corresponding directory as Government Geologist) in two five-roomed brick houses, each valued at £42. By early 1890, Reynolds had been replaced by Andrew Bray, who lived in the house (listed in directories as *Lorne*) until 1897, followed by his wife, Mrs Annie Bray, until 1908. Stirling remained until c.1893, whereupon his house was occupied by a succession of short-lived tenants including George Renshaw (1894), music teacher Joseph Lomax (1897-98), James Unsworth (1900), Samuel Walsh (1902-03) and John Hudspeth (1905). During Walsh's brief tenure, the house was listed as *Omeo Villa*.

Dr James Stirling (1852-1909) joined the Victorian Department of Crown Lands & Survey in 1873, working in various positions before becoming Government Geologist. As a Lands Officer at Omeo, he surveyed the Victorian alps and sent botanical specimens to Baron von Mueller, who subsequently named one after him, *Helychrysum stirlingii*. Stirling was instrumental in the mapping of brown coal deposits in Gippsland in the 1890s, and has been described as one of Victoria's pioneer speleologists. His scientific interests included geology, botany, ethnography and meteorology, and he published numerous books and papers. Details of his life, including brief mention of life in the Elwood house, can be found in the published memoirs of his daughter.

## Comparative Analysis

As the last remnants of the *Seaside Estate*, these two houses are unique. Historically, they can be only compared with *Ivica* at 95 Ormond Road, a large timber villa built in 1889. Much altered in later years (including removal of verandah), this was included in the *City of Port Phillip Heritage Review* in 1998, but has since been demolished. Setting aside their unique historical significance, 54-56 Spray Street can only otherwise be considered as fair or even poor examples of Victorian brick villas, as their integrity is greatly compromised by subsequent alterations. As such, they are comparable to many much-altered villas around Elwood, including 99 and 101 Tennyson Street, 34 and 40 Byron Street, and several houses in Scott and Rainsford streets.

## Recommendations

recommended inclusions:

Schedule to the Heritage Overlay Table in the City of Port Phillip Planning Scheme

## References

Lodged Plan No 699, dated 24 January 1885.

*City of St Kilda Rate Books*. South Ward.

*Sands & McDougall Melbourne Directory*

Amie Livingston Stirling, *Memoires of an Australian Childhood*. pp 56-59.

