
NAME: Former American River Methodist Church

PLACE: 26585

ADDRESS: Ngarrindjeri, Ramindjeri, Kurna and Narungga Country
24 Ryberg Road, American River

This heritage assessment considers that the place meets criterion (e). Refer to Summary of State Heritage Place for final approved wording, including criteria statements.



Former American River Methodist Church

Source: DEW Files, 4 October 2024

ASSESSMENT OF HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

Statement of Heritage Significance:

The former American River Methodist Church, built in 1965-1966, is an outstanding example of late twentieth-century ecclesiastical Modern Movement architecture in South Australia. Drawing on vernacular traditions while remaining architecturally minimalist, South Australian architect Eric von Schramek's innovative and economical design employed a distinctive splayed pyramidal roof to set the building apart as a place of worship, while the selection of familiar, domestic materials and construction systems grounded the church into its local context.

Relevant South Australian Historical Themes

4. Building Settlements, Towns and Cities

4.5 Living in country towns

6. Developing Social and Cultural Life (supporting and building communities)

6.1 Supporting diverse religions and maintaining spiritual life

6.7 Continuing cultural traditions

6.8 Marking the phases of life

Comparability / Rarity / Representation:

The former American River Methodist Church is associated with the Methodist Church, late twentieth-century ecclesiastical architecture, postwar places of worship, and South Australian architect Eric von Schramek. Each is considered in turn.

Methodism in South Australia

At least 60 Methodist churches or chapels were built in South Australia between 1945 and 1977, of which less than 50 retain a high level of intactness.

There are 22 State Heritage Places in South Australia which are former Methodist churches or chapels. Only one was built after 1945:

- Nunyara Chapel, 1963, 5 Burnell Drive, Belair, criterion (e) (SHP 14785).

Examples of State Heritage Places that are former Methodist churches include:

- Former Way Memorial Bible Christian Church, 1851, 30 Sixth Street, Bowden (SHP 13682, listed 1989),
- Auburn Uniting (former Bible Christian) Church, 1861, Main North Road, Auburn (SHP 10999, listed 1986),
- Religious Building - Uniting Church, Old Marion Methodist Church, 1862, 9 Township Road, Marion (SHP 12776, listed 1989),
- Wesley Uniting Church, 1864, 31A Fullarton Road, Kent Town (SHP 10543, listed 1981),
- Moonta Mines Uniting Church, Outbuildings and Front Fence (former Wesleyan Methodist Church), 1865, 557 Milne Street Moonta Mines (SHP 13499, listed 1981),
- Religious Building - Gartrell Memorial Church and Hall, 1914, Alexandra Avenue Rose Park (SHP 13988, listed 1989),

Additionally, the Epworth Building (SHP 13389) served as the Methodist Church of Australasia's South Australian administrative and commercial headquarters between 1927 and 1977 and is State Heritage listed for this association.

There are at least two Local Heritage Places that are former Methodist churches built between 1945 and 1977:

- Former Elizabeth South Methodist Church Hall, 1956, 85 Fairfield Road, Elizabeth Grove (LHP listed 2003),
- Vermont Uniting Church, 1964, 574-578 Cross Road, South Plympton (LHP listed 2015).

Late twentieth-century ecclesiastical architecture in South Australia

Before 1945, churches were generally designed in decorative historicist styles derived from ancient or medieval precedents. After the Second World War, traditional decorative styles became less prevalent for several reasons. Notably, the loss of skilled trades and the time involved in traditional construction techniques led to increased costs, making traditional styles less economical.¹ Further, architects who followed the Modern movement in architecture tended to reject the decorative nature of historical styles, deeming it to be superficial, regressive and 'dishonest'.²

Apperly, Irving and Reynolds identify two styles associated with places of worship constructed in Australia since 1945: the post-war ecclesiastical style (c.1940-1960) and the late twentieth-century ecclesiastical style (c.1960-1990). The late-twentieth century ecclesiastical style is understood to continue and extend the trends exhibited by the post-war ecclesiastical style while also demonstrating a tendency towards more unusual floor plans and roof shapes.

The late twentieth-century ecclesiastical style is characterised by the following key style indicators:

- radical plan shapes, responding to liturgical change,
- steel, reinforced concrete or glulam portal frames, especially when exposed inside the building as an architectural feature,
- distinctive roof shapes, designed to set churches apart from secular buildings and connote a religious function,
- coloured glass windows,
- windows with accentuated mullions,
- windows with vertically proportioned openings, frames or panes,
- clerestory or skylight windows,
- plain wall surfaces, of undecorated face brick or concrete blockwork,
- play of light from unseen or unexpected sources to create a special mood,
- unbroken straight lines emphasising verticality,
- inverted V shapes reminiscent of Gothic pointed arches,
- elements reminiscent of Gothic flèches or spires, pointing 'heavenward',
- architectural 'distinctiveness' achieved through experimentation in space and form,
- integration into community expressed through familiar, 'humble' materials such as brick and timber, with domestic associations,
- utilisation of newly available structural materials facilitating dramatic shapes.³

In *Postwar Places of Worship in South Australia 1945-1990*, Burns outlines a typology of nine common types associated with post-war churches in South Australia,⁴ based on

the typical roof shapes of such places. The former American River Methodist Church is associated with the 'pyramidal' type.

Pyramidal-roofed churches are distinguished by a dominant, steeply-pitched roof; a regular polygonal plan; overhanging eaves, which sometimes form a wide verandah; and a central roof feature, which may be a tower, spire, belfry or lantern.⁵ Relatively few churches with such roofs were built in South Australia.



St Neot's Anglican Church, Port Vincent, 1964 (left) and St Albert's Catholic Church, Loxton, 1988 (right) are both pyramidal-roofed churches.

Source: Chris Burns, "Postwar Places of Worship in South Australia 1945 – 1990" p. 114

Postwar places of worship

Fourteen post-1945 places of worship are State Heritage Places. Examples include:

- St Maximillian Kolbe Catholic Church, 1984, Agnes Street, Ottaway, criteria (f) and (g) (SHP 26473),
- Holy Cross Catholic Church, 1969, 159-165 Goodwood Road, Millswood, criteria (d), (e) and (g) (SHP 26498),
- St Alphonsus' Catholic Church, 87 George Street, Millicent, criteria (a), (d) and (e) (SHP 26544),
- Naracoorte Church of Christ, 1966, 64 Jenkins Terrace, Naracoorte, criteria (d) and (e) (SHP 26550, confirmed 23 May 2024),
- Cathedral of Angels Michael and Gabriel Greek Orthodox Church and Bell Tower, 1966, 282-288 Franklin Street, Adelaide, criterion (f) (SHP 13205),
- Shri Ganesh Temple, 1990s, 3A Dwyer Road, Oaklands Park, criterion (f) (SHP 26361).

The Australian Institute of Architects South Australian Chapter has identified four extant postwar places of worship as significant examples of twentieth century architecture in South Australia:⁶

- St David's Anglican Church, 492 Glynburn Road, Burnside, 1962 (SHP 26553),
- Nunyara Chapel, 5 Burnell Drive, Belair, 1963 (SHP 14785)
- Immanuel Lutheran College Chapel, 32 Morphett Road Novar Gardens, 1971,
- Jubilee Chapel, Centennial Park, 760 Goodwood Road, Pasadena, 1987.



Nunyara Chapel (SHP 14785)

Source: DEW Files

Eric von Schramek

Sir Eric Emil von Schramek OAM (b.1921 – d. 2010) was a leading designer of modern churches in South Australia during the postwar period.⁷ Von Schramek was born in Prague and studied architecture at Prague Technical University. After the Second World War, he migrated to Germany where he obtained postgraduate qualifications and worked as a town planner and architect before emigrating to Australia with his wife Edith (nee Popper) in 1948.⁸

In 1951, von Schramek joined Evans, Bruer and Partners and became a director of the firm in 1953, which became known as Bruer, von Schramek and Dawes in 1960. From c.1969, the firm became known as von Schramek and Dawes and merged with Walkley and Welbourn in 1971. Von Schramek became an Associate of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (RAIA) in 1953, a Fellow in 1967 and a Life Fellow in 1977.⁹ He retired in 1989.¹⁰

Over the course of his career, von Schramek designed at least twenty-two Lutheran churches, twelve Methodist Churches and several places of worship for other denominations in South Australia.¹¹ In 1948, two Lutheran synods existed in Australia, namely the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Australia (UELCA) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia (ELCA). Von Schramek became a communicant of the UELCA, but designed churches for both synods. The UELCA and the ELCA united in 1966, becoming the Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA).

From 1967 to 1987, von Schramek was Chair of the LCA's Commission on Worship, Department of Church Architecture and Commission on Church Properties. In 1971, he was appointed to represent South Australia in the Liturgical Arts Society of Australia. Von Schramek was the first Australian to become a member of the American Society for Church Architecture (established 1960),¹² a key US-based, national organisation which played an important role in advocating for modern church architecture.¹³ Von Schramek was knighted in 1982 for service to architecture.

No places designed by Eric von Schramek have been State Heritage listed, and only one is a Local Heritage Place, the former Trinity Methodist Church, 25 Moseley Street, Glenelg, opened in 1959.

Notable places of worship in South Australia designed by Eric von Schramek include:

- Immanuel Lutheran Church, 1956, 139 Archer Street, North Adelaide; von Schramek's first church in South Australia and his regular place of worship,
- Strait Gate Lutheran Church, 1961, Light Pass Road, Light Pass; von Schramek considered this his most progressive church design,
- St Richard of Chichester Anglican Church, 1964, 1 May Terrace, Brooklyn Park,
- Former American River Methodist Church (subject of this assessment), 1966, Ryberg Road, American River,
- Immanuel College Chapel, 1971, 32 Morphett Road, Novar Gardens,
- Unitarian Church, 1971, 99 Osmond Terrace, Norwood.

Von Schramek's early architectural commissions, such as Immanuel Lutheran Church, North Adelaide, Trinity Methodist Church, Glenelg and Strait Gate Lutheran Church, Light Pass were important influences on the development of post-war ecclesiastical architecture in South Australia and were widely emulated.

Notable non-religious projects designed by Eric von Schramek include:

- Former TAA Building, c.1980, 144 North Terrace, Adelaide,
- Former Bank of New South Wales Building, c.1975, 50 Pirie Street, Adelaide,
- Former SGIC Building, c.1979, 211 Victoria Square, Adelaide.



Former Trinity Methodist Church, Glenelg, 1959 (LHP) (left) and Strait Gate Lutheran Church, 1961 (right)

Source: Google Street View



Former TAA Building, Adelaide, c.1975 (left) and former Bank of New South Wales Building, Pirie Street, Adelaide, c.1975 (right)

Source: Google Street View

Assessment against Criteria under Section 16 of the *Heritage Places Act 1993*. All Criteria have been assessed using the 2020 Guidelines.

(a) it demonstrates important aspects of the evolution or pattern of the State's history.

Criterion arguments have considered the *Guidelines for State Heritage Places*:

The place should be closely associated with events, developments or cultural phases which have played a significant part in South Australian history. Ideally it should demonstrate those associations in its fabric.

Places will not normally be considered under this criterion if they are of a class of things that are commonplace, or frequently replicated across the State, places associated with events of interest only to a small number of people, places associated with developments of little significance, or places only reputed to have been the scene of an event which has left no trace or which lacks substantial evidence.

The former American River Methodist Church is associated with the historic themes Building Settlements, Towns and Cities and its subtheme Living in country towns; and Developing Social and Cultural Life (supporting and building communities) and its subthemes, Supporting diverse religions and maintaining spiritual life, Continuing cultural traditions, and Marking the phases of life.

Like many churches built in South Australia after the Second World War, the construction of the former American River Methodist Church was precipitated by rising church attendance brought about by regional population growth. The former American River Methodist Church is one of many former Methodist churches in South Australia (see Comparability, Rarity, Representation), and one of many Methodist churches built after the Second World War. As the former American River Methodist Church demonstrates a typical pattern of development rather than an important

aspect of the evolution or pattern of the State's history, it is not considered to meet the threshold for its associations with the identified historic themes at the State Level.

It is recommended that the nominated place **does not fulfil** criterion (a).

(b) it has rare, uncommon or endangered qualities that are of cultural significance.

Criterion arguments have considered the *Guidelines for State Heritage Places*:

The place should demonstrate a way of life, social custom, industrial process or land use which is no longer practised, is in danger of being lost, or is of exceptional interest. This encompasses both places which were always rare, and places which have become scarce through subsequent loss or destruction.

Places will not normally be considered under this criterion if their rarity is merely local, or if they appear rare only because research has not been done elsewhere, or if their distinguishing characteristics have been degraded or compromised, or if they are at present common and simply believed to be in danger of becoming rare in the future.

The former American River Methodist Church is associated with both Methodism and the Uniting Church in Australia. The former American River Methodist Church is one of hundreds of former South Australian Methodist churches still in existence, meaning it is not considered to be rare, uncommon or endangered for this association.

While organised Methodist worship came to an end in South Australia in 1977, when the Australian branches of the Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian churches merged to form the Uniting Church of Australia, this transition was achieved with minimal disruption. For most former Methodist congregations active today, the key characteristics of Methodist worship, such as lay leadership and ministry, including leadership and ministry by women, and the traditions of preaching, hymnody and monthly Holy Communion have continued as before within the Uniting Church.

Worship within the Uniting Church is an ongoing practice in South Australia, and while some congregations have declined in recent decades, others have grown in strength. Consequently, the former American River Methodist Church is not considered to demonstrate cultural qualities that are rare, uncommon or in danger of becoming lost.

It is recommended that the nominated place **does not fulfil** criterion (b).

(c) it may yield information that will contribute to an understanding of the State's history, including its natural history.

Criterion arguments have considered the *Guidelines for State Heritage Places*:

The place should provide, or demonstrate a likelihood of providing, information that will contribute significantly to our knowledge of the past. The information should be inherent in the fabric of the place. The place may be a standing structure, an archaeological deposit or a geological site.

Places will not normally be considered under this criterion simply because they are believed to contain archaeological or palaeontological deposits. There must be good reasons to suppose the site is of value for research, and that useful information will emerge. A place that will yield the same information as many other places, or information that could be obtained as readily from documentary sources, may not be eligible.

The former American River Methodist Church was built on what was previously undeveloped rural land. The site is not believed to contain any archaeological deposits beyond what is considered commonplace in a rural context. The American River Methodist Church is thoroughly-documented in architectural drawings, photographs and other primary and secondary sources. There is no evidence, either documentary, oral history or physical, to suggest that the place may yield information that will contribute meaningfully to an understanding of the State's history beyond what is readily available.

It is recommended that the nominated place **does not fulfil** criterion (c).

(d) it is an outstanding representative of a particular class of places of cultural significance.

Criterion arguments have considered the *Guidelines for State Heritage Places*:

The place should be capable of providing understanding of the category of places which it represents. It should be typical of a wider range of such places, and in a good state of integrity, that is, still faithfully presenting its historical message.

Places will not be considered simply because they are members of a class, they must be both notable examples and well-preserved. Places will be excluded if their characteristics do not clearly typify the class, or if they were very like many other places, or if their representative qualities had been degraded or lost. However, places will not be excluded from the Register merely because other similar places are included.

The former American River Methodist Church is associated with the class of place known as postwar churches. Postwar population growth resulting from migration and the baby boom, suburban and regional development, and the evolving role of churches in community life led to the construction of 650 new churches between 1945 and 1990 in South Australia. Churches constructed during this time played a prominent role in South Australia's physical, cultural and spiritual development.

The principal attributes of the class of place 'postwar church' comprise a range of physical elements including the setting and exterior form of the building, materials and the layout, furnishing and decoration of the interior spaces. Outstanding representatives of the class of place will possess a range of both exterior and interior characteristics that define the class. Outstanding representatives of the class of place will also be either churches built in a single construction phase or in several stages according to a preconceived master plan, resulting in a cohesive architectural expression, and demonstrate a considered engagement with site and context.

Principal characteristics of the class include distinctive roof forms employed to set the churches apart from secular buildings; the adoption of commonplace materials with domestic connotations employed to integrate the church into community; the adoption of newly-available materials, processes and technologies; expression in mid- or late twentieth-century ecclesiastical styles; the provision of community facilities or amenities; a considered engagement with site and context; and the presence of bespoke artworks created as an integral part of the church's design.

While the former American River Methodist Church demonstrates several of the principal characteristics of the class, the place does not demonstrate the provision of any notable community facilities, nor does it demonstrate the provision of bespoke sacred artworks. In comparison to other places that represent the class at an outstanding level, such as Naracoorte Church of Christ (SHP 26550), the former American River Methodist Church is not considered to be an outstanding example of the class of place.

It is recommended that the nominated place **does not fulfil** criterion (d).

(e) it demonstrates a high degree of creative, aesthetic or technical accomplishment or is an outstanding representative of particular construction techniques or design characteristics.

Criterion arguments have considered the *Guidelines for State Heritage Places*:

The place should show qualities of innovation or departure, beauty or formal design, or represent a new achievement of its times. Breakthroughs in technology or new developments in design would qualify, if the place clearly shows them. A high standard of design skill and originality is expected.

Places would not normally be considered under this criterion if their degree of achievement could not be demonstrated, or where their integrity was diminished so that the achievement, while documented, was no longer apparent in the place, or simply because they were the work of a designer who demonstrated innovation elsewhere.

The former American River Methodist Church is an outstanding, highly innovative example of late twentieth-century ecclesiastical Modern Movement architecture in South Australia. Distinctive yet minimalist, Eric von Schramek's economical design drew upon varied vernacular architectural traditions, employing a distinctive, splayed pyramidal roof to set the building apart from surrounding secular buildings and to connote a religious function. To ground the church in its rural setting, von Schramek employed familiar, 'humble' materials and construction systems not dissimilar from those used in nearby buildings, most notably studwork walls; asbestos cement and fibrous plaster sheet cladding, with contrasting battens nailed over seams; and an asbestos-cement shingle roof.

The former American River Methodist Church articulates many key attributes of late-twentieth century ecclesiastical architecture, namely:

- a radical plan-shape, in this instance, a square plan, with implied aisles under an exterior verandah, breaking down traditional boundaries between interior and exterior space,
- architectural 'distinctiveness' employed to set the church apart from secular buildings and connote a religious function through its large, splayed pyramidal roof,
- integration into community expressed through familiar, 'humble' materials with domestic associations, such as brick, concrete, and asbestos shingles and cement sheeting, the latter reflecting the materials predominating in nearby holiday houses,
- windows with accentuated mullions,
- windows with vertically proportioned openings, notably on the eastern and western sides,
- plain wall surfaces achieved through the use of asbestos-cement sheet and fibrous plaster,
- a skylight window admitting light from an unexpected source to create a special mood,
- unbroken straight lines emphasising verticality, notably contrasting jarrah battens applied over seams in asbestos cement and fibrous plaster sheet, externally and internally.

In c.1966, the former American River Methodist Church received a merit award from the Timber Development Association of South Australia, Incorporated 'for the graceful, practical and beautiful use of timber.' Subsequently in c.1980, the former American River Methodist Church was recognised by the Royal Australian Institute of Architects South Australia Chapter, as a significant example of twentieth-century South Australian architecture. The Chapter considered that the former American River Methodist Church 'successfully combine[d] an accepted idea of church form with the Australian rural vernacular, making it most appropriate in its country town setting.'

While a number of minor changes have occurred to the church, such as the addition of studwork rooms under the verandah on the eastern and western side, most are considered to be reversible. These changes have not diminished the place's architectural integrity to the point that its values can no longer be understood and appreciated.

It is recommended that the nominated place **fulfils** criterion (e).

(f) it has strong cultural or spiritual association for the community or a group within it.

Criterion arguments have considered the *Guidelines for State Heritage Places*:

The place should be one which the community or a significant cultural group have held in high regard for an extended period. This must be much stronger than people's normal attachment to their surroundings. The association may in some instances be in folklore rather than in reality.

Places will not be considered if their associations are commonplace by nature, or of recent origin, or recognised by a small number of people, or not held very strongly, or held by a group not widely recognised, or cannot be demonstrated satisfactorily to others.

From 1966 until the present, the former American River Methodist Church has been a place of worship for the Methodist and later, the Uniting Church community. The Uniting Church was created in 1977 following the amalgamation of the Methodist, Congregationalist, and Presbyterian Churches in Australia, and continued the key practices and traditions of Methodist worship.

While the Uniting Church as a whole may be considered a group that resonates broadly across the state, there is no evidence to suggest the Uniting Church collectively has a strong cultural or spiritual connection with the former American River Methodist Church, as it is only one of numerous Uniting churches South Australia.

It is recommended that the nominated place **does not fulfil** criterion (f).

(g) it has a special association with the life or work of a person or organisation or an event of historical importance.

Criterion arguments have considered the *Guidelines for State Heritage Places*:

The place must have a close association with a person or group which played a significant part in past events, and that association should be demonstrated in the fabric of the place. The product of a creative person, or the workplace of a person whose contribution was in industry, would be more closely associated with the person's work than would his or her home. Most people are associated with many places in their lifetime, and it must be demonstrated why one place is more significant than others.

Places will not generally be considered under this criterion if they have only brief, incidental or distant association, or if they are associated with persons or groups of little significance, or if they are associated with an event which has left no trace, or if a similar association could be claimed for many places, or if the association cannot be demonstrated. Generally the home or the grave of a notable person will not be entered in the Register unless it has some distinctive attribute, or there is no other physical evidence of the person's life or career in existence.

The former American River Methodist Church is associated with South Australian architect Eric von Schramek, who made a notable contribution to South Australian history through his role in the development of innovative ecclesiastical architecture in South Australia during the 1950s and 1960s.

The former American River Methodist Church is one of many South Australian churches designed by Eric von Schramek. While an outstanding, highly innovative example of late twentieth-century ecclesiastical Modern Movement architecture in South Australia, the former American River Methodist Church is one of numerous architecturally outstanding churches designed by von Schramek. The church is not considered to mark a notable change in the development of von Schramek's ecclesiastical architecture, nor is the church considered to have been a substantial

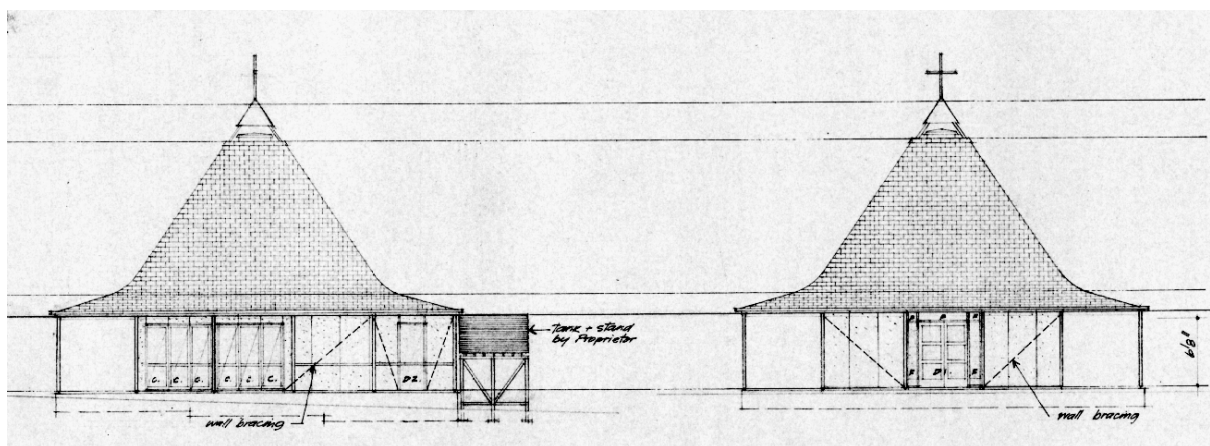
influence on postwar church architecture in South Australia. Unlike other places such as Strait Gate Lutheran Church and the Immanuel College Chapel (see Comparability / Rarity / Representation), the former American River Methodist Church is not considered to have a special association with Eric von Schramek.

The former American River Methodist Church is also associated with the Methodist Church in South Australia and the Uniting Church in South Australia. The Methodist Church played an important role in South Australian history as the dominant South Australian Christian denomination during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, before it amalgamated with the Congregational and Presbyterian churches to form the Uniting Church of Australia in 1977. The Methodist Church experienced considerable growth during the post-war period before declining from the late 1960s.

The former American River Methodist Church is one of many former Methodist Churches in South Australia and from 1977 one of many Uniting churches in South Australia. When compared with other places such as the Epworth Building (SHP 13389) (see Comparability / Rarity / Representation), which served as the Methodist Church of Australasia's South Australian administrative and commercial headquarters between 1927 and 1977, the former American River Methodist Church is not considered to have a special association with the Methodist Church at the State level.

It is recommended that the nominated place **does not fulfil** criterion (g).

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION



Former American River Methodist Church, western (left) and northern (right) elevations

Source: S207/4/6/19/CH.6.5 Architecture Museum

The former American River Methodist Church is a single-storey, timber-framed church with a square floor-plan and a pyramidal roof. The roof is splayed to form a wide verandah on three sides, supported by jarrah posts.

Additional external features include:

- concrete slab floor to church and verandah,
- doormat inset in verandah floor by main entrance,
- verandah posts mounted on steel stanchions,
- asbestos cement sheet cladding to walls,

- main entrance in centre of northern side, comprising timber-framed double doors, with side and transom lights,
- beaten copper fields to entry doors,
- rows of outward-opening single doors on eastern and western sides, 6 on each side,
- beaten copper lower fields and glazed upper fields to side doors,
- timber-framed sash windows on the southern side,
- jarrah battens and beading to cladding seams and edges,
- creosote stain finish to external timber,
- pendant light fittings under verandah,
- autoclaved Asbestoslite shingles covering roof, with Alcor hip capping,
- acrylic Marvelcraft skylight at peak of roof,
- skylight surmounted by sheet copper pyramidion and cross,
- exposed timber frame between peak and pyramidion,
- studwork extensions under verandah on eastern and western sides,
- tank and tank stand to rear.

Internal features include:

- square worship space,
- glossy-face off steel trowel finish to concrete floor (under carpet),
- exposed Oregon timber structural frame with steel gusset plates at joints,
- fibrous plaster walls, with jarrah battens to seams and jarrah beading and skirtings to edges,
- lens-shaped sanctuary plan, with curved step to sanctuary floor and curved, studwork reredos behind,
- red brick sanctuary floor paved in herringbone pattern,
- narrow fibrous plaster sheets forming reredos surface, with jarrah side and top rails, skirting, and battens to seams,
- fibrous plaster soffit and timber pelmet to junction of walls and ceiling,
- pine matchboard ceiling,
- fluorescent light fittings around skylight opening,
- kitchen and vestries, accessed through doors behind reredos on both sides.¹⁴

Elements of Significance:

Elements of heritage significance include (but are not necessarily limited to):

- Church building,
- Original exterior and interior materials and material finishes, including timber, concrete and brick,
- Plain internal and external wall surfaces,
- Form and detail of roof,
- Original fittings including porch pendant light fittings,
- Concrete path leading from street to church.

Elements not considered to contribute to significance of place include (but are not necessarily limited to):

- Studwork additions under verandah on eastern and western sides,
- Trees, shrubs and landscaping.

HISTORY

Methodism in South Australia

Founded by Anglican clergyman John Wesley, Methodism began as a network of religious societies within the Church of England and only emerged as a distinct denomination a few years after Wesley's death in 1791.¹⁵ Divisions that proliferated within English Methodism were transplanted to South Australia, and by the mid-1870s there were four Methodist denominations in the State: the Wesleyan Methodists, the Primitive Methodists, the Bible Christians and the Methodist New Connexion. Methodism was the most 'potent' religious movement in nineteenth century South Australia¹⁶ and by 1870 most communities in South Australia contained at least one Methodist chapel, some more than one. In 1888, the South Australian branch of the Methodist New Connexion was absorbed into the Bible Christian branch of the church, and in 1900 the Wesleyan, Primitive Methodist and Bible Christian branches of Methodism amalgamated to create the Methodist Church of Australasia.¹⁷

Methodist membership grew steadily during the interwar period from 23,112 in 1920 to 27,823 in 1940. 52 churches and 49 halls were built by Methodist congregations in South Australia during the 1920s, but construction was slowed first by the Great Depression,¹⁸ and then by building controls during the Second World War.

Methodist membership increased steadily after 1950.¹⁹ American Baptist evangelist Dr. Billy Graham visited Adelaide in 1959, bringing an 'influx'²⁰ of new parishioners to the Protestant denominations and boosting the size of Methodist congregations during that year.²¹ Methodist membership reached its all-time peak in 1968,²² then entered a sharp decline.

Post-war church-building in South Australia

Over 650 new places of worship were built in South Australia between 1945 and 1990. Most were churches built by Christian denominations, and most were built during an intensive church-building boom, which occurred between 1953 and c.1967. The end of building restrictions in January 1953 heralded the beginning of post-war church building. Migration and the baby boom led to suburban expansion and regional development and each denomination sought to establish footholds in newly subdivided areas by building churches.²³ Simultaneously, the congregations of established churches swelled, leading to the replacement or augmentation of some smaller buildings with new churches.²⁴

From the late 1960s, Church attendance in South Australia entered a long, steady decline²⁵ as dissatisfaction with traditional organised religion turned large numbers of young people away from churches. Notably, the generation of children who attended Sunday School in the 1950s did not typically transition to adult churchgoing.²⁶

Churches that were constructed after the building boom typically resulted from, and were funded by, the rationalisation and sale of existing church properties, sometimes due to dwindling congregations, but especially resulting from denominational unions

leading to a surplus of church buildings.²⁷ In many Protestant denominations, these purpose-built late twentieth-century churches responded to a shift towards more informal worship styles, which traditional church buildings did not easily accommodate.

European settlement of Kangaroo Island and the establishment of American River

First Nations people have a long association with Kangaroo Island, living there before rising sea levels about 11,000 years ago separated it from the mainland. Thereafter First Nations people intermittently travelled to Kangaroo Island until about 400 years ago.²⁸ Mainland First Nations people know Kangaroo Island as Karta Pintingga, meaning 'island of the dead.'

Kangaroo Island was named by Captain Matthew Flinders, who sailed the sloop *Investigator* into Eastern Cove, adjacent to the site of present-day American River, in March 1802. Flinders named the associated tidal inlet Pelican Lagoon due to the prevalence of pelicans in the area.²⁹ French cartographers and naturalists Baudin and De Freycinet visited Kangaroo Island in 1802 and 1803. On their return voyage, they encountered American sealers aboard the brig *Union*. Learning of Kangaroo Island, the Americans proceeded there and built the schooner *Independence* at Pelican Lagoon,³⁰ which is believed to be the first European-style ship built in South Australian waters.³¹

Afterwards, Europeans visited Kangaroo Island regularly to hunt seals, kangaroos and to extract salt from dry lagoons for curing skins. From c.1806, Kangaroo Island also attracted escaped convicts and deserters.³² These early European inhabitants of Kangaroo Island abducted First Nations women from South Australia and Tasmania, whom they held captive as slaves.³³

Kangaroo Island was first formally settled by the South Australian Company at Reeves Point in 1836. Afterwards, Kangaroo Island attracted limited European settlement through the nineteenth century. The American River area was settled from 1854 and by the turn of the century, four families lived in the district.³⁴ Several short-lived industries were established nearby between 1890 and 1910 including fish canning, cray fishing and salt harvesting.³⁵ The popularity of boating on Pelican Lagoon led American River to emerge as a holiday destination by the late nineteenth century. Several guest houses were established, beginning in the 1890s. Later, holiday shacks were established on former Crown Land close to the waterfront from 1946.³⁶ Until 1982, fuel and general cargo arrived by sea.³⁷

Methodism on Kangaroo Island and the American River Methodist Church

The first recorded Methodist worship on Kangaroo Island occurred in 1836, when Captain Robert Clark Morgan held a short thanksgiving service following the safe arrival of the *Duke of York*, the first South Australian Company ship to reach South Australia. Later that year, Samuel East held the first regular Methodist services in a Kingscote carpenter's shop. Later, Methodist services were held in private homes. Permanent Wesleyan chapels were built at Penneshaw in 1883 and Cygnet River in

1885. The latter church was relocated to Kingscote in 1896, but later closed and became a private residence. In 1906, it reopened, and was subsequently replaced with a new stone Methodist Church in 1907.³⁸ The first church services in American River were held in private homes. Later services were held in the government school, completed in 1922, and afterwards in the district hall.³⁹

In 1924, the Kangaroo Island mission was split into separate Kingscote and Penneshaw missions, with a minister serving each. Later in 1946, Kangaroo Island became a circuit, comprising worship places at Kingscote, American River, Penneshaw, Parndana, Pioneer Bend and Karatta, with the circuit administration and parsonage based in Kingscote.⁴⁰

In March 1963, population growth in and around American River and the seasonal influx of holidaymakers encouraged the establishment of a church trust and the acquisition of land to erect a purpose-built church at American River.⁴¹ The American River Methodist Church was designed by Eric von Schramek of Bruer, von Schramek and Dawes, Adelaide-based architects, engineers and town planners. By the early 1960s, von Schramek was already an experienced church architect and was most likely engaged on the project due to his successful design for the new Maughan Methodist Church in Franklin Street, Adelaide, completed in 1965 (demolished 2016).

Distinctive yet architecturally minimalist when compared with contemporary 1960s churches, von Schramek's design for the American River Methodist Church featured a tall, pyramidal roof, splayed downwards to form a wide verandah. This approach reflects von Schramek's first-hand experience of vernacular architecture in the Pacific region, where he travelled extensively from 1958 onwards, including work trips to Fiji, Singapore and Papua New Guinea. Notably the former American River Methodist Church resembles a chapel, designed by von Schramek around the same time, for the Martin Luther Seminary at Lae, Papua New Guinea.⁴²



The Martin Luther Seminary Chapel at Lae, Papua New Guinea, also designed by Eric von Schramek (designed c.mid-1960s)

Source: <https://pngmissionsociety.org/>

Von Schramek designed the American River Methodist Church to accommodate a regular congregation of 80, with provision to seat holiday overflow congregations outside, under the wide verandah. To facilitate a clear view of the sanctuary from the verandah, von Schramek provided rows of external doors between verandah and

nave along the eastern and western sides.⁴³ These doors also enabled effective cross-ventilation of the nave.

Von Schramek employed light, timber-framed construction, clad in asbestos-cement sheet, instead of brick or concrete blockwork. The choice of design and materials reduced the need to import heavy materials by sea and helped to integrate the church into its local community by employing the same 'humble' materials and construction systems used to build nearby holiday houses and shacks. Externally, he specified timberwork to be treated with Samuel Cabot Inc's Creosote Shingle Stain, a product advertised to enhance natural grain while also protecting timber from insect damage and decay.⁴⁴

Built by Kingscote-based W. K. Zealand & Co, the American River Methodist Church was considered to be an 'economical building' at the time of its completion, costing only \$12,000.⁴⁵ The church opened on 9 January 1966.⁴⁶ News reports described the church roof and verandah as resembling 'early pioneers' houses,' while the natural white colour of the Asbestoslite shingles and the copper cross were said to make the church a landmark 'visible from far away on land and sea.'⁴⁷ In c.1966, the American River Methodist Church received a merit award from the Timber Development Association of South Australia, Incorporated 'for the graceful, practical and beautiful use of timber.'⁴⁸



American River Methodist Church, pictured soon after completion, c.1966, note collapsible seating arranged under verandah to serve a holiday overflow congregation.

Source: *Building and Architecture* August 1966 p. 2

Prior to 1980, fundraising by the American River Methodist Ladies Guild allowed the enclosure of the verandah on the eastern and western sides creating additional rooms.⁴⁹ The American River Methodist Church became the American River Uniting Church in 1977.

In c.1980, the former American River Methodist Church was identified by the Royal Australian Institute of Architects South Australia Chapter as a significant example of twentieth-century South Australian architecture. The Chapter considered that the

former American River Methodist Church 'successfully combine[d] an accepted idea of church form with the Australian rural vernacular, making it most appropriate in its country town setting.'⁵⁰

Chronology

Year	Event
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- | | |
|------------|--|
| 14,000 BCE | First Nations people inhabit the landmass now known as Kangaroo Island. |
| c.1600 | First Nations people no longer access Kangaroo Island on a regular basis. |
| 1739 | Methodist founder John Wesley establishes the first Methodist Society in England. |
| c.1795 | Emergence of Methodism as a distinct denomination. |
| 1802 | 20 March, Captain Matthew Flinders sails the sloop <i>Investigator</i> into Eastern Cove, adjacent to the site of present-day American River.
French cartographers and naturalists Nicholas Thomas Baudin and Louis-Claude Desausles De Freycinet visit Kangaroo Island. |
| 1803 | Baudin and De Freycinet return to circumnavigate Kangaroo Island. |
| 1804 | American sealers from the brig <i>Union</i> launch the schooner <i>Independence</i> from the shores of Pelican Lagoon, south of present-day American River.
Europeans begin to visit Kangaroo Island on a regular basis to hunt seals, kangaroos and extract salt from dry lagoons to cure seal skins. |
| c.1806 | Whalers, sealers and others begin to settle on Kangaroo Island, with abducted First Nations women from Tasmania and South Australia, who are held captive as slaves. |
| 1834 | British Parliament passes the <i>South Australian Colonization Act</i> , enabling the establishment of a British province in southern Australia. |
| 1835 | Wealthy merchants including George Fife Angas form the South Australian Company to facilitate the colonisation of South Australia. |
| 1836 | February, ships owned by the South Australian Company depart Britain for Kangaroo Island.
The first recorded Methodist worship in South Australia occurs when Captain Robert Clark Morgan holds a short thanksgiving service following the safe arrival of the <i>Duke of York</i> .
July, the South Australian Company establishes the township of Kingscote.
August, Colonel William Light arrives in South Australia and rejects Nepean Bay as a site for a proposed provincial capital. |
| 1838 | The South Australian Company relocates its headquarters to Adelaide, with most of the population of Kingscote following. |

- 1845 Local Congregational, Wesleyan Methodist and Episcopalian congregations build a stone chapel in Houghton, to be shared between the three congregations (Houghton Union Chapel SHP 26493).
- 1854 John Buick settles in the area now known as American River.
- 1870s Four Methodist denominations exist in South Australia. Most South Australian communities possess at least one Methodist chapel.
- 1875 The Hundreds of Menzies, Dudley and Haines are gazetted on Kangaroo Island.
- 1881 The township of Penneshaw is laid out.
- 1883 The township of Kingscote is laid out.
A Wesleyan chapel is built at Penneshaw.
- 1885 A Wesleyan chapel is built at Cygnet River.
- c.1895 American River emerges as a holiday destination due to the popularity of boating on Pelican Lagoon. The first guest house, Ryberg House, is built by Swedish migrant Nils Ryberg.
- 1896 The Cygnet River Methodist Chapel is moved to Kingscote and later closes.
- c.1900 Four families live in the American River district.
Short-lived industries flourish at American River including fish canning, cray fishing and salt harvesting.
- c.1905 The introduction of superphosphate leads to a moderate land boom on Kangaroo Island.
- 1906 The Kingscote Methodist Church reopens.
- 1907 The Kingscote Methodist Church is replaced with a new stone chapel.
- 1909 A private jetty is opened at American River.
- 1918 A government jetty is opened at American River.
- 1922 Methodist services in American River move from private homes to the Government School.
- 1924 Kangaroo Island Methodist mission is split into separate Kingscote and Penneshaw missions.
- 1945 The *War Service Land Settlement Agreement Act* is enacted.
- c.1946 Holiday shacks are established on former Crown Land close to the American River waterfront.
- 1946 Kangaroo Island becomes a Methodist circuit, with worship places at Kingscote, American River, Penneshaw, Parndana, Pioneer Bend and Karatta.
- 1951 The inland Kangaroo Island township of Parndana is created to service soldier settlements.

- 1953 January, the end of post-Second World War building restrictions heralds the beginning of a post-war church-building boom in South Australia, driven by post-war migration and the baby boom.
- 1958 Eric von Schramek embarks on his first round-the-world trip, including visits to Singapore and Fiji.
- 1960s A sheet-pile wharf is built at American River.
Eric von Schramek designs the Martin Luther Seminary at Lae, Papua New Guinea.
- 1963 March, population growth at American River and the seasonal influx of holidaymakers encourages the establishment of a church trust at American River and the acquisition of land for the purpose of building a purpose-built church.**
- 1965 The American River Methodist Church is designed by Eric von Schramek of Adelaide-based architects Bruer, von Schramek and Dawes.**
- 1966 9 January, the American River Methodist Church opens.**
- c.1967 The post-war church-building boom ends in South Australia.
- 1968 Adult Methodist membership reaches its peak in South Australia.
- c.1970 Fundraising by the American River Methodist Ladies Guild allows additional rooms to be added by enclosing the verandah on the east and west sides of the church.**
- 1972 The Martin Luther Seminary Chapel at Lae, Papua New Guinea, designed by Eric von Schramek, opens.
- 1977 The American River Methodist Church becomes the American River Uniting Church.**
- c.1980 The Royal Australian Institute of Architects South Australia Chapter identifies the former American River Methodist Church as a significant example of twentieth-century South Australian architecture.**
- 1982 Coastal ketches cease calling at the American River town wharf with fuel and general cargo.

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Timber Development Association of South Australia, Incorporated, Certificate of Merit, held by
American River Uniting Church

CT 2047/37 via SALLIS

SITE RECORD

NAME: Former American River Methodist Church **PLACE NO.:** 26585

FORMER NAME: American River Methodist Church

DESCRIPTION OF PLACE: Single-storey timber and fibro-asbestos sheet church

DATE OF CONSTRUCTION: 1965 – 1966

REGISTER STATUS: Nominated 4 November 2021
[\[Date of Provisional Entry\]](#)

LOCAL HERITAGE STATUS: N/A

CURRENT USE: Uniting Church place of worship
1977 – present

PREVIOUS USE(S): Methodist place of worship
1966 - 1977

ARCHITECT: Eric von Schramek, von Schramek and Dawes
1965 – 1966

BUILDER: W. K. Zealand & Co, Kingscote
1965 – 1966

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA: Kangaroo Island Council

LOCATION:

Street No.:	24
Street Name:	Ryberg Road
Town/Suburb:	American River
Post Code:	5221

LAND DESCRIPTION:

Title	CT 5701/547 A235 FP181077
Reference:	
Hundred:	Haines

MAP REFERENCE 35°46'24.70"S 137°46'45.97"E

PHOTOS

NAME: Former American River Methodist Church **PLACE NO.:** 26585

All images in this section are from DEW Files and were taken on 4 October 2024, unless otherwise indicated.



Former American River Methodist Church, northern elevation.



Former American River Methodist Church, corner view showing side doors.

PHOTOS

NAME: Former American River Methodist Church

PLACE NO.: 26585



Former American River Methodist Church, interior of worship space.



Former American River Methodist Church, worship space ceiling showing lens-shaped sanctuary.

PHOTOS

NAME: Former American River Methodist Church

PLACE NO.: 26585



View under verandah showing lined soffit



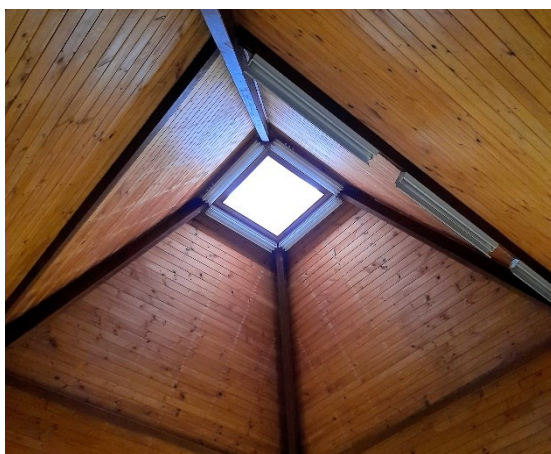
Side doors



Southern elevation showing enclosed verandah



Detail of beaten copper panel in entrance doors



Worship space ceiling showing skylight



Entrance doors

SITE PLAN

NAME: Former American River Methodist Church **PLACE NO.:** 26585



Former American River Methodist Church (CT 5701/547 A235 FP181077 Hundred of Haines)

Elements of heritage significance include (but are not necessarily limited to):


- Church building,
- Original exterior and interior materials and material finishes, including timber, concrete and brick,
- Plain internal and external wall surfaces,
- Form and detail of roof,
- Original fittings including porch pendant light fittings.

Elements not considered to contribute to significance of place include (but are not necessarily limited to):

- Trees, shrubs and landscaping.

N ↑

LEGEND

 Parcel boundaries (Indicates extent of Listing)

 Outline of Elements of Significance for State Heritage Place

*Red outline is indicative of elements of significance, noting imperfect alignment of aerial imagery with parcel cadastre.

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- ² Chris Burns, *Liturgy, Community, Modernity: postwar places of worship in South Australia 1945 – 1990* (2020) Adelaide SA: Architecture Museum, University of South Australia p. 21
- ³ Adapted from Richard Apperly, Irving and Reynolds, *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: styles and terms from 1788 to the present* (1989) North Ryde NSW: Angus and Robertson pp. 230-231
- ⁴ Chris Burns, 'Postwar Places of Worship' p. 87
- ⁵ Chris Burns, 'Postwar Places of Worship' p. 113
- ⁶ RAI A Significant 20th Century Architecture Card Index (RAIA Collection S301/2 AM); https://web.archive.org/web/20160304002703if_/http://www.architecture.com.au/docs/default-source/act-notable-buildings/120-notable-buildings.pdf accessed 31 January 2021
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- ¹⁴ Specific material and product details were verified from Bruer, von Schramek and Dawes, Architects, Engineers and Town Planners, Specification for Erection and Completion of New Church at American River, Kangaroo Island for the Trustees of the "American River Methodist Church", April 1965, Job No. 3870, SRG 4/53/20 SLSA
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- ¹⁷ Arnold D. Hunt, *This Side of Heaven* p. 15
- ¹⁸ Arnold D. Hunt, *This Side of Heaven* p. 303
- ¹⁹ Arnold D. Hunt, *This Side of Heaven*; see graph on p. 431
- ²⁰ David Hilliard, *Godliness and Good Order* p. 130
- ²¹ Arnold D. Hunt, *This Side of Heaven* p. 369
- ²² Arnold D. Hunt, *This Side of Heaven* p. 376
- ²³ David Hilliard, *Godliness and Good Order: a history of the Anglican Church in South Australia* (1986) Netley SA: Wakefield Press p. 119
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- ²⁶ Chris Burns 'Postwar Places of Worship' p. 25
- ²⁷ Chris Burns, 'Postwar Places of Worship' p. 25; Robert J. Scrimgeour, *Some Scots Were Here: a history of the Presbyterian Church in South Australia* (1986) Adelaide, SA: Lutheran Publishing House p. 224
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⁴⁰ Methodist Church of Australasia, South Australian Conference, Kangaroo Island Circuit, SRG 4/53 Series List SLSA

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⁴¹ CT 2047/37 via SAILIS

⁴² The chapel roof timbers were left to season under cover 'for as long as possible'; see Eric von Schramek and Helen Gordon, *Reminiscences: Eric von Schramek and his churches* (2007) Adelaide: Lutheran Archives, South Australia p. 86; this chapel is also a square building with a tall, pyramidal roof and a wide verandah, reflecting local vernacular architecture. Lae also features a concrete path leading to the church to both create a sense of arrival and enhance the symmetry of the building by introducing an element of perspective.

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⁴⁵ "Timber Adds Charm to Tiny Church"

⁴⁶ 'Welcome – American River' The Uniting Church in Australia Kangaroo Island Congregations <https://kangarooisland.ucasa.org.au/welcome-american-river/>

⁴⁷ "Timber Adds Charm to Tiny Church"

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https://web.archive.org/web/20160304002703if_/http://www.architecture.com.au/docs/default-source/act-notable-buildings/120-notable-buildings.pdf

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