Name:	Former Dix fruit shop and residence
Address:	399 Mt Alexander Road, Ascot Vale
Place Typology:	Retail/residential
Construction date range:	Circa 1930
Architectural style:	Interwar
Assessment:	heritage ALLIANCE, May 2021
Recommendation:	That the place be included in the heritage overlay schedule

Photo of place:



399 Mt Alexander Road, Ascot Vale. Source, heritage ALLIANCE, May 2021.

Statement of Significance:

What is significant?

The shop and residence at 399 Mt Alexander Road, Ascot Vale is significant as an Inter-war building from c. 1930 that was purpose built for the Dix family of fruiterers for their business and residence and was then operated as a fruit shop by members of the Dix family for 35 years. The following elements are of heritage significance:

- The Inter-war rectilinear parapet with Stripped Classical styling and rendered signboard and banding in brick.
- The multi-pane sash windows of the first floor façade.
- The original rear face brick accommodation quarters.

How is it significant?

399 Mt Alexander Road, Ascot Vale is of local historic and architectural (representative) significance to the City of Moonee Valley.

Why is it significant?

399 Mt Alexander Road, Ascot Vale illustrates a period of limited commercial infill development along Mt Alexander Road in the Interwar period. A limited number of new commercial buildings were constructed in Mt Alexander Road after 1929 and this is a rare example of a depression era development. The stripped façade of the building and very humble accommodation to the rear possibly reflects the straitened circumstances of local businesses in the Depression era, and it stands in great contrast to the gothic E.S. & A. bank next door. (Criterion B & D)

The Dix family of fruiterers moved to Ascot Vale in 1921 and different family members operated numerous fruit shops in Ascot Vale, Moonee Ponds and Bendigo. The building at 399 Mt Alexander Road was purpose built by the Dix family in c.1930 as their home and business and they lived and worked here until the death of Francis Dix in 1966. (Criterion A)

Description:

The double fronted two storey brick building includes a sizeable first floor residence and ground floor office, which has been rebuilt in the late twentieth century. The building is attached to the garage next door and has a narrow walkway beside the bank on the North side to allow for access to the residence. This shop was originally a fruit shop and probably had a central doorway, metal framed windows and tiled stall riser before the flat render and aluminium windows that exist now.

The rectilinear parapet has Stripped Classical styling with discrete ornamentation in brick as bands across the windows and triangular patterns at the top of the façade. A large and prominent painted signboard is now blank. The whole has been rendered in roughcast render and the brick banding which would have been face brick is now painted. The sides and rear are face brick also painted. The two paired front windows above the verandah have timber multi-pane sashes and rendered sills. The whole effect is very pared back.

The bull-nose cantilever verandah on steel brackets might be original as other examples can be seen down Mt Alexander Road and there is no evidence of the usual Inter-war cantilever verandah

History:

Contextual History

City of Moonee Valley occupies part of the Traditional lands of the Wurundjeri-willam clan of the Woi-wurrung people. Many sites in the area now known as City of Moonee Valley show evidence of Woi-wurrung activities and spiritual connections.

Fish were trapped in the rivers and creeks, stone was quarried from the river edges, murnong daisy was collected and kangaroos hunted across grassland areas, and bark was harvested from trees in the river valleys. This relationship between the Woi-wurrung and the land, water, animals and plants, continues to this day (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p.29).

The first Europeans to explore the area known as Moonee Valley was a surveyor, Charles Grimes in 1803. In 1836, settlers moving from Van Diemen's Land crossed the area in the hope of finding empty, cheap and plentiful land for sheep. By 1842, surveyors had created the first map of the Parish of Doutta Galla and then Woi-wurrung lands were offered for sale by the British Crown to Europeans (noting that the land was never ceded). The Wurundjeri were moved off their land which had a profound impact on their culture, health and language. By 1860, the entire parish was sold (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p.32-33).

Early development of the area began with the goldrush period of the 1850s which saw Mount Alexander Road used as a thoroughfare to the diggings with over 30,000 people estimated as moving along the dirt road each week. Businesses and shops sprang up providing sustenance, transport and accommodation to service the passing gold rush trade. Some very early wayside hotels and shops still survive from this period (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p.51-54).

After the heady days of the goldrush, the 1860s saw Essendon, Ascot Vale, Moonee Ponds and Flemington develop into permanent townships. The development of railways by private companies gave huge impetus to suburban development of the area with the opening of the Essendon railway in 1860. The government purchased the line in 1868. Suburban trains terminated at Essendon and it wasn't until 1889 that Ascot Vale, Moonee Ponds and Newmarket stations were completed. By 1893 stations opened at Strathmore and Pascoe Vale and in 1922 Glenbervie Station opened. The railways provided an enormous boost to residential development along the line and those who had previously moved to areas without trains, now clamoured for them (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p.59).

By the 1880s Essendon had become a Borough and by 1891 had a population of 14,411. Many subdivisions occurred during the land boom of the 1880s and many failed to eventuate due to the depression of the 1890s. In the interwar period a boom in subdivision and residential infill occurred in Travancore, Essendon, Ascot Vale, Strathmore and Moonee Ponds, which was focused on new transport routes along the tram lines, first established to Essendon in 1905. In 1919 the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board was formed and lines were extended and improved. The tram lines saw development occur either side of Maribyrnong Road, further along Mt Alexander Road, Buckley Street and Keilor Road (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p.65-68; p.115).

In the three decades after the Second World War, Melbourne's suburbs ballooned outward to cater for post-war migration, the baby boom, an increasing need for new housing, and a more car-centred economy. Areas to the north of Essendon had been open paddocks in 1945, but by 1950 the Shire of Keilor found themselves with a developing suburb with no name. It was later called Niddrie. Similarly, Airport West was developing quickly with houses being built before the roads. By 1964 it was claimed that Airport West had the cheapest cream brick veneers in Melbourne (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p.120-121).

Many houses in these post-war areas were austere weatherboard or brick veneer bungalows, with a few scattered architect designed or project homes on new blocks, particularly along the Boulevard in Aberfeldie. These post-war housing areas were car-centred communities located close to industry along Keilor Road, Matthews Avenue around Essendon Airport and East Keilor. By 1960 Airport West had its first hotel, the famous Skyways Hotel and then in the 1970s the first shopping centre, owned by Westfield was begun (heritage ALLIANCE, *Gap Heritage Study*, 2005: p.28-30).

Post-war housing pressure also saw a huge investment by the Housing Commission of Victoria who developed 150 bungalows in concrete, weatherboard and brick in Aberfeldie. They then began an ambitious estate of houses and flats on a 77 acre site at Ascot Vale in 1949. These low-rise walk-up flats eventually gave rise to the high-rise flats of Flemington which opened in June 1965 (Living Histories, *Thematic History*, 2012: p.123).

Many post-war migrants bought or built houses in the outer areas of the municipality, close to employment and industry and where new, cheaper housing was readily available. These developments and public housing in Aberfeldie, Ascot Vale and Flemington have had a long-lasting effect on the nature of the Moonee Valley community which today is one of the most diverse and vibrant in Melbourne (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p.124).

Place history

The two-storey shop and residence at 399 Mt Alexander Road was constructed in c.1930 for Francis "Frank" Dix (1883-1966), fruitier, by builders Rodwell & Thomson of Essendon (Sands & McDougall, 1931; Essendon Historical Society Notes).

The building appears to be the first constructed on the site as neither the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) map of 1904 nor a photo of the E.S. & A. Bank taken in ca.1910 show any developments (MMBW Plan no. 834, 1904*; E.S. & A. Bank*, photo, State Library of Victoria, ca.1910). The latter does show a tall timber picket fence used for advertising along the site's frontage.

Dix moved to the district in 1921 from Wonthaggi where he worked as a miner. At this time, he opened his first fruit shop at 577 Mt Alexander Road, Moonee Ponds (Sands & McDougall, 1921). Then in 1926, Dix opened a second fruit shop at 387 Mt Alexander Road, Ascot Vale (Sands & McDougall, 1926). It appears that Dix may have shared in the business with a number of family members, including brother-in-law Herman Kruse who took over the shop at 577 Mt Alexander Road in 1928 (Sands & McDougall, 1928). Kruse had previously run a fruit shop at 179 Pascoe Vale Road, Moonee Ponds (Sands & McDougall, 1926). Two of Dix's nephews, Frederick and Harold Henry Dix also ran fruit shops during the Interwar period (Australian Electoral Commission, 1924; Sands & McDougall, 1919).

Dix continued to live and work out of 387 Mt Alexander Road until 1931, when he is first listed in the Sands & McDougall directory at 399 Mt Alexander Road (Sands & McDougall, 1931). This is the first time the address is listed in the directory. Therefore, it is likely to have been constructed around this time for Dix who also resided at the address.

In 1934, Dix opened another fruit shop at 282 Hargreaves Street, Bendigo (*The Argus*, 22 Dec 1933; Australian Electoral Commission, 1934). The businesses remained operating under Dix until 1942, after which it appears he retired (Australian Electoral Commission, 1942). He continued to reside at 399 Mt Alexander Road along with his wife Selena, sister Violet Dix, and his daughter Gladys and her husband John A. S. McKenzie (Australian Electoral Commission, 1942; 1954; 1963). Gladys and John ran the shop until Francis Dix's death in 1966 (Australian Electoral Commission, 1942).

Following Dix's death, the shop was sold, and in 1970, Sands & McDougall lists it as Pender's News Agency (Sands & McDougall, 1970).



Photo illustrating the gap where 399 Mt Alexander Road was later built (note the sign hoarding beside the E.S. & A. bank in the left foreground) (Source: Mt Alexander Road, State Library of Victoria, 1906)

Sources:

Primary Sources

Australian Electoral Commission
The Argus
E.S. & A Bank, photo, State Library of Victoria, ca.1910
Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works Plans, State Library of Victoria
Mt Alexander Road, photo, State Library of Victoria, 1906
Sands & McDougall Directories, State Library of Victoria

Secondary Sources

Essendon Historical Society Notes

Thematic Context:

City of Moonee Valley Thematic Environmental History, 2012

5. Building Victoria's industries and workforce

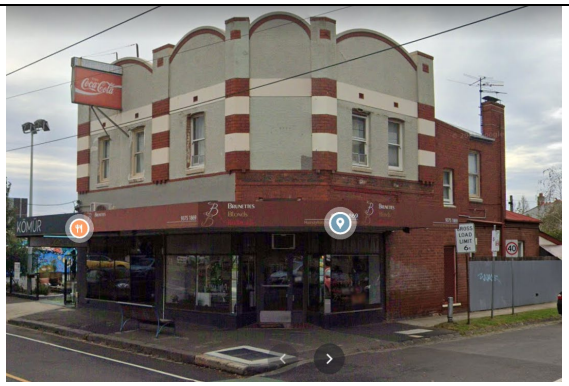
5.3 Marketing and retail

Comparative Analysis:

The Interwar period was one of great stylistic eclecticism for both domestic and commercial architecture. In the commercial realm, common styles ranged from Free Classicism popular in the Edwardian period and characterised by curvilinear parapets framed by piers; the more geometric and simplified Stripped Classicism, one variant of which is the Neo-Grec; the more decorative but geometric Jazz Moderne and horizontal Streamlined Moderne; and the 'exotic' Spanish Mission, drawing inspiration from Baroque Spain and its colonies (Context, *Heritage Study*, 2016).

In Ascot Vale, the only Interwar commercial buildings in the Heritage Overlay are a small group of contributory buildings in the Union Road Precinct (HO15), two Interwar garages at 646 (HO313) and 546 Mt Alexander Road (HO366), a group of shops at 488-500 Mt Alexander Rd (HO398) and 444-446 Mt Alexander Rd (HO397). Other significant Interwar commercial buildings in Moonee Valley include the following places:

- 1033-1041 Mt Alexander Road, Essendon (HO202), a row of four two-storey brick shops with simple geometric parapets and box windows to the first floor. One retains its original shopfront.
- The Junction Buildings, 942-950 Mt Alexander Road and 3-17 Napier Street, Essendon (HO314), a two-storey Stripped Classical building containing a number of shops on a triangular site. The two-storey section at the corner has lost its original shopfronts, but a number survive on Napier Street below single-storey parapets with simple geometric designs created in roughcast and smooth cement render.
- The Rose Street and Buckley Street Precinct, Essendon, (HO424) comprising 112-118 and 123-131 Buckley Street, 1-51 Rose Street, and the Essendon Railway Station.
- 37 Glass Street, Essendon (HO414) is a beautiful milk bar designed by Harry Norris in 1929.
- Holmes Road and Norwood Crescent Precinct (HO307), significant places include two two-storey Stripped Classical shops with interesting combinations of materials and window forms at 18 and 19 Homes Road, one of which retains its original shopfront (No. 19), and along Norwood Crescent are two rows that retain their original shopfronts: gabled Edwardian shops at Nos. 1-5, and very simple Stripped Classical shops of 1919 at Nos. 7-11.

	All photos sourced from Google Streetview
444-446 Mt Alexander Road, Ascot Vale (HO397), is a Free Classical style two storey building with an intact Inter-war shopfront. It was built in 1925 by designer-builders Knight & Harwood for the owner. The two-storey shops are in the Free Classical style with arched parapets between raised piers. The shops are finished with red and clinker faced brick as well as roughcast and smooth render. The detailing of this building is far more interesting than 399 Mt Alexander Rd and the corner arrangement makes it far more prominent in the streetscape. At the rear is a similar two storey residence like 399 Mt Alexander Rd.	
Keilor Precinct Interwar shops and commercial buildings, (HO425). After the shops were built in 1933, there was a pause in the precinct's development due to the Depression. It was not until the end of the decade that construction began again. These were a two-storey cake shop at 19 Keilor Road and a composition of three shops at 4-8 Keilor Road. Though for different clients, all four shops were designed by architect Francis T Humphryis. This group of shops are the most comparable in date to 399 Mt Alexander Road and shows the original face brick and tile decoration and cantilever verandah which might have graced the façade of 399 Mt Alexander Road as well.	
The Rose Street and Buckley Street Precinct, Essendon, (HO424), comprising 112-118 & 123-131 Buckley Street, 1-51 Rose Street, and the Essendon Railway Station. All single and double-storey shops constructed from 1910 to 1926. They are all of masonry construction, some employing red brick and render banding, many rendered with brick accents, and later examples using roughcast render or clinker brick to contrast with red face brick. Styles in the precinct are primarily Edwardian Free Classical, and Interwar Stripped Classical. The Rose Buildings (shown) are almost identical in style to 399 Mt Alexander Road with multi-pane sash windows, restrained rectilinear parapet and stripped classical detailing.	

Recommendation:

To be added to the Heritage Overlay Schedule

Schedule:

External Paint Controls	No
Internal Alteration Controls	No
Tree Controls	No
Solar Energy Controls	Yes
Fences and Outbuildings	No
Prohibited Uses	No
Aboriginal Heritage Place	No