



**Olaff Nicholson**

(SLWA 009970PD cropped)

**Olaff Nichol Nicholson** (1842-1912) was born 5 May 1842 at Tingstade in Sweden. Initially trained as a carpenter, he emigrated to Australia, and married Anna Maria Lester at Melbourne in 1873. In Victoria, Nicholson spent four to five years working for architects Twentyman & Askew, and also seems to have spent time working for contractor James Moore. Miles Lewis' research for the book *Fitzroy – Melbourne's First Suburb* records that Nicholson established himself in Brunswick Street, Fitzroy, where he practised for a number of years, then worked for the Public Works and Railways departments for three years. As such, he supervised the erection of many school buildings, railway stations and other buildings. He then set up practice in Collins Street, Melbourne before moving to Western Australia in 1893. Another architect who fled economic depression in Victoria for gold-boom WA, Norman Hitchcock, was in partnership with Nicholson for at least a short time in 1891. Nicholson and Hitchcock continued practice in WA using many details developed in their Victorian work.

Surviving drawings of Nicholson's Victorian designs include a two-storey terrace house with a verandah and balcony of a fairly standard character, though with a canted bay window projecting into the verandah. Buildings in North Fitzroy that can be attributed to Nicholson on documentary evidence include a large detached house at 223 McKean Street, built for Albert Tucker, MLA in 1884-85, which is two-storeyed with a projecting canted bay, and a verandah and balcony across the rest of the facade. John McMahon, twice Mayor of Fitzroy built firstly in 1886 two townhouses at 53-55 Alfred Crescent, and then in 1890 a large and impressive mansion at 75 Alfred Crescent, North Fitzroy. Both projects were designed by Nicholson. The most dramatic of Nicholson's surviving Fitzroy buildings is the three-storey mansard-roofed house of Dr Peacock, at 120 Johnston Street.

When Nicholson first arrived in Western Australia, he was employed by the Government to manage the harbour works being carried out at Fremantle. He then returned to private work and became one of the leading architects in Fremantle, establishing his office in the west end with a home close by. In Victoria, Olaff Nicholson appears to have mainly been an architect of domestic scale works, but in WA he was also successful with commercial work at the expanding port town, including hotels, shops and offices.

With respect to Nicholson's domestic work at Fremantle, in January 1896 the *Inquirer & Commercial News* reported on the works of a very busy architect:

*In Quarry-street, two fine six roomed houses are being erected for Mr J.A. Smith, the material being brick and stone. On South Beach, facing the sea, a six-roomed villa residence of brick, with verandahs all round, is being built, and when completed it will form a valuable addition to this favorite terrace. In Howard Street two semi-detached dwellings of brick and stone, with front and back verandahs, have lately been built; while further on in Hampton Road two brick and stone houses, each of five rooms, are in the course of erection. ... Russell Street will soon see two nice dwellings out of the contractors' hands. On South Terrace the trustees of the Wesley Church are erecting two pairs of semi-detached houses ... Plans have been executed for a two-storied brick and stone residence in the Gothic style for Mr Sewell. The dwelling will be located in Quarry Street, and is to contain eight rooms. Designs are also out for two four-roomed semi-detached villa residences of brick and stone in Hampton Street. One of the largest terraces of houses in Fremantle is now approaching completion in Cantonment Road. It comprises four two-storied buildings, each containing 11 rooms, with verandahs and balconies both in front and at the back. ... Mr O.N. Nicholson is the architect for all the dwellings mentioned in this paragraph. ... He has plans in hand for several other houses and larger buildings.*

In the latter 1890s, Nicholson secured a number of prominent hotel commissions at Fremantle, and this may have become a lucrative portion of his business. At this time, Nicholson's family endured some tragedy, with the death of the eldest daughter from typhoid in 1897. He is listed as an architect in *Wises* directories up until 1901, and it can be surmised that Olaff retired around the age of 60 years. Nicholson died on 13 December 1912 at his home in Congdon Street, Osborne (now Claremont). A funeral report notes that he 'resided in Victoria 32 years, and in WA for 20 years. Some years ago he was

Consul for Sweden and Norway in Western Australia. He leaves a widow and grown-up family of two sons and two daughters.'

References:

'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 25 October 1895, p.6 (villa High Street Fremantle for M. Luber, 4 houses South Terrace Fremantle).

'Progress of Fremantle No.1', *Inquirer & Commercial News*, 24 January 1896, p.9 ('Swan Chambers' for Messrs Gallop & Payne - 2 shops and 8 offices, Henry Street Fremantle).

'Progress of Fremantle No.2', *Inquirer & Commercial News*, 31 January 1896, p.14.

'Fremantle Improvements', *Inquirer & Commercial News*, 22 May 1896, p.1 ('Imperial Chambers' for E.F. Duffield, 2 storey building - 6 shops & lecture room, corner Market & Leake Streets, Fremantle, adjacent to the National Hotel).

'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 10 August 1896, p.8 (2 residences Mary Street, Fremantle for Alexander and Albert Spence).

'Hotel Accommodation at Fremantle', *The West Australian*, 18 September 1896, p.5 (Proposed £10,000, 3 storey 'Grand Hotel' with frontage to Quarry, Stirling, and Finnerty Streets).

'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 23 September 1896, p.6 (2 storey Hotel for Hughes & Day).

'New Hotel at Beaconsfield', *The West Australian*, 12 October 1896, p.4 (Sea View Hotel for Hughes & Day).

'Fremantle Buildings', *The West Australian*, 27 January 1897, p.4 (2 storey house cnr High Street & Queen's Square Fremantle for James Gallop – Dalkeith House).

'A New Hotel at Fremantle', *The West Australian*, 2 April 1897, p.4 (£5,000 Sea View Hotel).

'Bereavement Notice', *The West Australian*, 17 August 1897, p.4 (death of daughter - typhoid).

*Melbourne Weekly Times*, 10 September 1898, held in Railway Hotel file at Fremantle Local History Collection, cited in HCWA register documentation for Railway Hotel, North Fremantle.

'The Hotel Australia', *The West Australian*, 11 October 1898, p.2 (£14,000 hotel).

'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 30 November 1901, p.3 (villa North Fremantle).

'Funeral Reports', *The West Australian*, 19 December 1912, p.7.

Lewis, Miles, 'Terrace Housing', in *Fitzroy – Melbourne's First Suburb*, Cutten History Committee of the Fitzroy History Society. Melbourne University Press, 1991, pp.107-109.

Hokanson, Stig R & Johnson, Eileen B & Martin, John S & Sharpe, Birgitta, *One way passage: Swedish migrants to Australia in the James Sanderson Archive*, WordWright, Sydney, 1996.

HCWA register documentation for Woodside Hospital, 18 Dalgety Street, East Fremantle.

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223 McKean Street, North Fitzroy (Google 2012)



75 Alfred Crescent, North Fitzroy (Google 2012)





Railway Hotel, Tydeman Road, North Fremantle (Google 2012)



Sea View Hotel, 282 South Terrace Fremantle (Google 2012)



Australia Hotel, Beach Street Fremantle (Google 2012)



James Gallop's *Dalkeith House*, 160 High Street Fremantle (Google 2012)



A photo captioned 'Mr Olaff and Mrs Anna Maria Nicholson and Hilda Nicholson in front of their house *Cliveden*, Cantonment Street, Fremantle' (SLWA 010001PD). *Wises* directory of 1898 notes that Nicholson's *Cliveden* was on the east side of Cantonment Street between Market and Point Streets. The street appears to have a fair slope left to right, whereas Cantonment Street is relatively flat, suggesting the photo may in fact be at another Nicholson residence?