



**Edgar J. Henderson c.1890s**

(courtesy Bill Henderson)

**Edgar Jerome Henderson** (1861-1928) was born at Hawthorn in Melbourne, educated at St Francis' College, Kew, and served articles with Ernest A. Barker, architect and surveyor of Melbourne. His father, Peter Edwin Henderson, was an engineer, and had married Frenchwoman Jeanne Louisa Caroline Le Blond in Scotland during 1848, then migrating to Australia in 1857. The couple eventually had around eleven children. In 1883 Edgar commenced practice on his own account at Fraser's Buildings in Queen Street, Melbourne. He became a member of the Victorian Institute of Architects, and in 1887 was made an honorary member of the South Australian Institute, possibly through connection to elder brother Henry John, an architect in Adelaide. In 1888 it was noted that 'Among his principal early works is the Catholic Cathedral at Sale, Gippsland, and he also designed several churches and schools, and many private residences and business premises in and about Melbourne.'

At Moonee Ponds, a suburb of Melbourne, commercial development intensified following the construction of a new railway station in 1888-89. A prime site for development was opposite the railway station on the north-east corner of Puckle and Margaret Streets, and in 1888 Henderson designed a block of shops for the site. They have aesthetic significance as a prominent 'Queen Anne' influenced building, in the manner of other works designed by Henderson including the Rochester convent of 1891. He also designed the Shamrock Hotel in Echuca and the Rochester Shire town hall, both in 1892.

Of Henderson's ecclesiastical work, the previously mentioned St Mary's Cathedral at Sale was constructed in 1886-7 to the design of Barker and Henderson. Henderson was also to design St James' Church, Gardenvale, the

nave of which was built in 1891, and the enormous St Mary's Star of the Sea Church, West Melbourne. The foundations of St Mary's, West Melbourne were laid in June 1892. As a relatively young and at that time little-known architect, Henderson produced plans for a sandstone church in simplified Gothic style. At 175 feet long and 94 feet wide, the proposed church was criticised for being too large, but parishioners embraced the ambitious design. Within a year, however, economic depression wrought havoc on the project's finance. Remarkably, in the face of devastating poverty, parishioners managed to fund ongoing construction, and St Mary's was built in eight years. Phillip Kennedy took over an architectural role following Henderson's move to Western Australia, and the contrast between the church exterior and interior can be attributed to this fact. In February 1900, Cardinal Moran opened the new church to great fanfare before an assembly of 1,400 and the church was finally completed in 1925.

Edgar's grandson Bill holds beautiful drawings of a Gothic Revival design titled 'Competitive Design for the Proposed Cathedral at Bendigo'. These drawings, marked with the *nom-de-plume* 'Faith', are likely to have formed an unsuccessful submission by Edgar Henderson for the Sacred Heart Cathedral at Bendigo. In 1895 Martin Crane, the first bishop of the diocese, called for competitive designs for a cathedral from several architects, and the winning architect was William Tappin of Reed, Barnes & Tappin. With depressed economic conditions in Victoria, and perhaps the disappointment of the lack of success at Bendigo, Henderson and his young family joined an exodus of architects (and many others) for the gold boom conditions of Western Australia. The Hendersons arrived in Perth from Melbourne in 1896.

In 1897 Henderson formed what was to be a successful partnership with Harry Jefferis at the Austral Chambers in Barrack Street, Perth. Through Henderson, the firm secured a great deal of Catholic work, and their buildings included the first portion of St John of God Hospital, Subiaco; Christian Brothers School and Brothers quarters at Fremantle; Highgate Hill School and Convent; and the Convent, School and Bishop's Palace at Geraldton. Projects included the Bayswater and Claremont Hotels; a block of shops for financier Samuel W. Copley; *Ivanhoe*, the Victoria Avenue residence of Sydney Stubbs, Mayor of Claremont; and one lot of 27 houses for gold magnate William G. Brookman.

Other buildings designed by the partnership Henderson and Jefferis in 1903-1904 include a fire station at Leederville; a two storey residence in St Georges Terrace, Perth; a two storey brick convent at Newcastle (Toodyay); a villa at Claremont for H.T. Hardy; a villa at Subiaco; a stone & brick villa for A.R. Gillespie, West Perth; five residential shops in Beaufort Street, Highgate; and 18 Francis Street, Subiaco. With a slowing of building activity, the joint practice was formally dissolved as from 1 January 1906, and both parties then carried on business on their own account in Perth. The split may have been amicable, as it was advertised that 'if desired by clients' all works in progress and any future works could be 'carried out as joint architects'. Jefferis was still working with Henderson on the Congregational Church at Claremont in 1906.

It was noted in *The West Australian Mining Building and Engineering Journal* during 1910 and early 1911 that plans were being prepared by Henderson & Jefferis as joint architects for the first portion, estimated to cost about £4,000, of a Catholic cathedral proposed to be erected at Geraldton using local stone. In March 1911 it was optimistically stated that 'during the visit of Cardinal Moran the foundation stone for the Roman Catholic Cathedral at Geraldton will be laid', but this did not occur. In November 1911 *The Sower*, the Diocese of Geraldton's periodical, recorded the demolition of the old St Francis Xavier Church and the removal of its foundation stone - stating Bishop Kelly intended to use it 'to build into the cathedral which he proposes to erect at once'.

The projected cost of the cathedral may have temporarily been found to be beyond local means, as it was soon noted that 'alterations may have to be made to the original plans', and further work by Henderson & Jefferis was suspended. In late 1913 *The Sower* reported Bishop Kelly leaving from Derby for Europe, where he would meet the architect-priest John Hawes in Rome, eventually recruiting Hawes to come to Western Australia and design a completely new cathedral. The Henderson & Jefferis drawings for the cathedral at Geraldton have not been located.

Other buildings attributed to Edgar Henderson include four two-storey shops in Subiaco and two shops in Leederville during 1905. After Fred Upton had withdrawn from involvement in a partnership with Richard M. Hamilton in 1906, Henderson joined Hamilton and completed the design of the Town Hall at

Midland, opened in January 1907. In July 1908 Edgar called tenders for a brick school-church at Subiaco. Residential work during 1908-1914 included projects at lot Y186, 434 Newcastle St, West Perth; lot 8-9, 23 Coolgardie Street, Subiaco; lot 15, 147 Beaufort Street, Perth; 117 Heytesbury Road, Subiaco, and a residence in St Georges Terrace, Perth. With his son Edgar Le Blond having joined the practice, in 1914 *Edgar J. Henderson & Son* called tenders for the Presentation Sisters to build a school hall, and the building remained at Palmerston Street, Mosman Park till the end of the twentieth century.

In Victoria, Edgar Henderson had married Mary Josephine O'Neill in 1885. Edgar fathered at least eight children with Mary, but only five survived infancy. William Edgar was born at Essendon in 1887, but passed away at 5 months old. George Francis was born in 1888, identical twin boys Gilbert Dowling and Edgar Le Blond born at Hawthorn in 1890, Marie Kathleen born at Hawthorn in 1892 but also passed away as an infant, Victor Leo at Hawthorn in 1894, Moya at Hawthorn in 1896 but passed away at just 11 months in Perth during May 1897, and Marie born at Perth in 1898. Unfortunately, Edgar's wife Mary ("Minnie") died in 1901 aged just 40 years, and is remembered along with his parents in a stained glass window installed at St Mary's Cathedral, Perth.

At the start of the twentieth century, the Henderson family lived for some time at 19 McCourt Street in Leederville, across the road from the first portion of the St John of God Hospital that Edgar designed. The land on which the house once stood is now part of the major hospital complex. Edgar remarried, to Esther Ann Speight in February 1905. Esther was a niece of the late Richard Speight snr, railway commissioner from Victoria, whose family included an architect-son Richard, and a daughter married to architect Thomas Anthoness, all in Perth. Tragically, Esther had a stillborn child later in 1905, but then Allan was born in 1907, Barbara in 1909 and Richard in 1910. With Esther, Edgar developed a farm *Kokkapinn* at Kwollyin, south of Kellerberrin. Farming appears to have been a pursuit of a number of Perth architects at this time, with Duncan Inverarity also moving to a property at Kellerberrin, and Harry Jefferis took up 3,000 acres of wheat belt land at Latham around 1910. Sadly, Esther died in 1914 aged 42, and in 1925 Edgar married for the third time, to Edith Beecroft.

Edgar Jerome Henderson died 27 December 1928 at Subiaco aged 67 years, and was buried in the Catholic section at Karrakatta Cemetery. His son Edgar Le Blond Henderson, often referred to as 'E Le B', benefited from his father's tutelage and after joining the practice around 1914, practiced successfully in WA for many years, later in partnership as Henderson & Thompson. E Le B's twin, Gilbert, married Frances Dennehy, daughter of architect Richard Dennehy.

References:

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'Mr E.J. Henderson', *The West Australian*, 5 May 1896, p.5 (commenced practice in Perth).

'Dissolution of Partnership', *The West Australian*, 2 February 1906, p.2.

'Midland Junction Town Hall', *The West Australian*, 23 January 1907, p.3.

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Note: Catholic Church Archives in Perth hold the Michael Broderick Collection (not viewed), containing plans for churches, religious orders, schools, hospitals, private residences, banks, hotels and commercial buildings, many by E.J. Henderson and E.Le.B. Henderson.

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St Mary's Cathedral, Sale, constructed in 1886-7 (Picture Australia)



Rochester Shire town hall, built in 1892 (Wikipedia)



Henderson's design for St Mary's Church, West Melbourne 1892 (Wikipedia)



The first portions of the Sacred Heart School and Convent, Highgate Hill were opened in 1899.  
The church at left, designed by Richard Dennehy, was opened in 1906 (SLWA 239050PD)



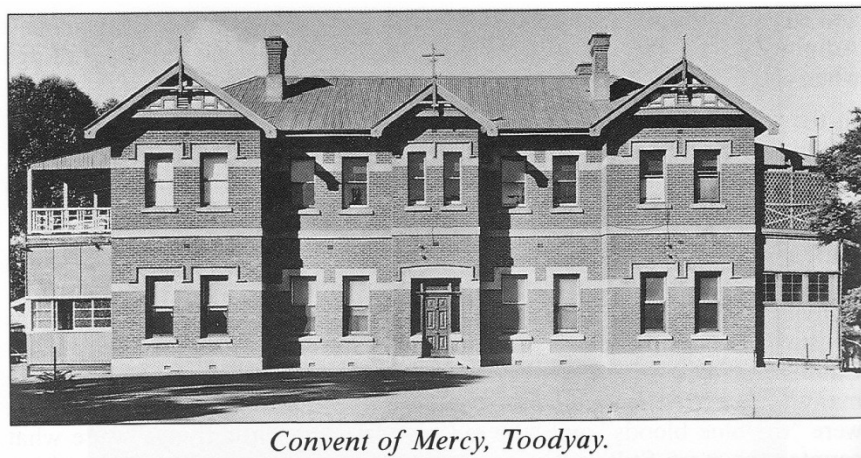
St John of God Hospital, Subiaco (SLWA 001173D)



Bishop Kelly's Residence, Geraldton 1900 (Diocese of Geraldton)



Presentation Sisters' Convent, Geraldton, opened in 1903 (Presentation Sisters Archives)

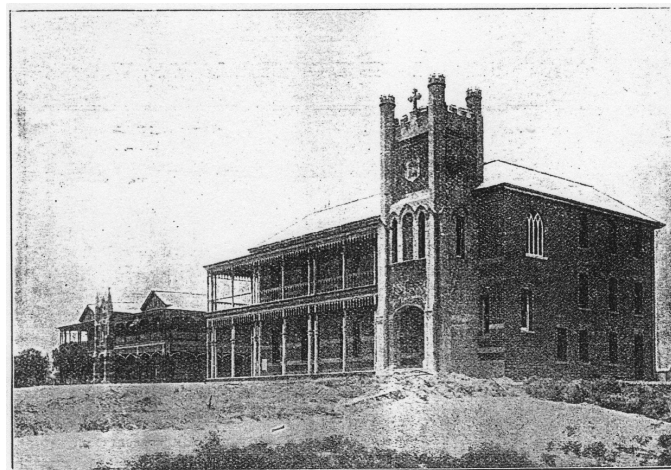


Sisters of Mercy Convent, Toodyay of 1903 (McLay, Anne, *Women out of their sphere*, p.106)

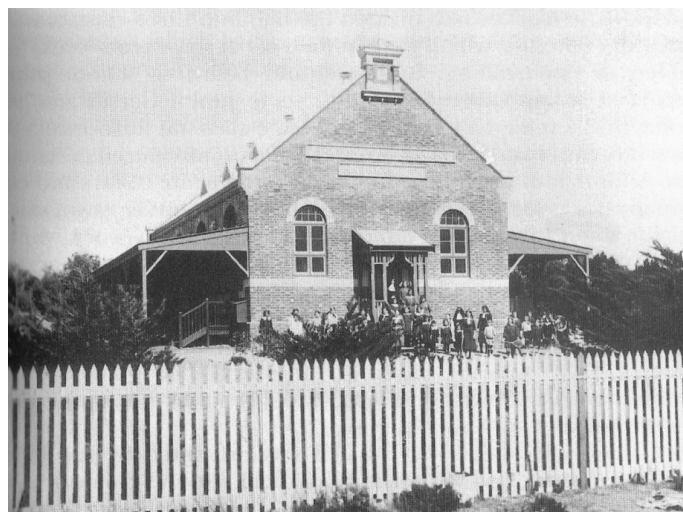




Harry Trigg designed Congregational Hall at left, and EJ Henderson designed Congregational Church at right, church completed in 1906 on Stirling Highway, Claremont (Google 2013)



First portion of the Presentation Sisters' Stella Maris College, Geraldton, opened in 1912, with the 1903 convent behind (*The Sower*, January 1918, p.2)



Presentation Sisters' School Hall (at Iona Presentation College), Palmerston Street, Mosman Park 1914 (Ruth Marchant James, *Cork to Capricorn*, p.439)