JAMES WALLACE SPROULE

An article written by Jan Hunter.

615 Lindsay Avenue Albury is featured in architecture books and art deco articles, but often without any acknowledgement of the architect or builder. It was designed by James Wallace (Wal) Sproule, an art deco architect of Albury.

Wal was the eldest child of John and Ellen Sproule, Farmers, near Kiama, but his father died when Wal was young. His mother married Alvis Ried, bricklayer, in 1904 and the family moved to Rutherglen. Wal was taught the bricklaying trade by his stepfather. Wal was musical and when the family moved to Elsternwick in 1910 he joined various bands, playing the trombone. He also had a fine singing voice.

Wal married Florence Ann Rowe in 1912 and in 1915 they were in Sydney. Wal enlisted in WWI and the Sproules called their first son Berrima after the troop ship Wal had sailed on to German New Guinea. In 1917 Wal was granted a soldier settler's block at Oban's Estate Coolah NSW. That year a second son was born and named James Oban Sproule (known as Otto). A daughter and 2 more sons followed. While at Coolah, Wal studied to become an architect supporting the family by building and bricklaying.

Moving to Queanbeyan in 1923 he worked as a draughtsman on the plans for Parliament House. In 1924 he qualified as architect 640 in NSW. He designed many important buildings in Queanbeyan including the Town Hall, the School of Arts, the Masonic Temple, Christ Church Parish Hall, the Methodist Parsonage. Decades later he was called 'a most imaginative product of his profession' by a Queanbeyan historian.

After a short stay in Bathurst the Sproules were at 682 Sackville St Albury in 1937. Wal marched in both Wodonga and Albury Anzac Day parades, won prizes at the Albury Show for pen and ink studies and was active in the Soldiers' Memorial Fund.

When WWII began, Wal, aged 50, enlisted in the CMF in 1940 in Melbourne and was transferred to Bonegilla. Not long after the Sproules came to Albury the whole family attended a mission at the Church of Christ. Florence persuaded Wal to attend to hear the excellent singer. As a result of this mission the family became active church members including Wal's participation in running a Sunday School at the RSL Returned Soldiers' housing settlement at Mungabareena (1947-1957).

Wal took part in the Albury City Choral Society's first concert in 1947. He was also an honorary architect for the Albury District Hospital. James Wallace Sproule was to the forefront in the art deco designs of Albury houses and buildings.

Houses designed by Wal Sproule include:

- 636 Grafton Street Albury – this house was designed in 1939, two years after the Sproules arrived in Albury. It was for Arthur Newnham of 2CO radio fame.
- 438 Bellevue Street – Designed in 1947 for Mrs Ada Marks, builder BM Griffith & Co with Percy Sampson as Clerk of Works.
- 615 Lindsay Avenue, 1948 – this prime example of Moderne design by J W Sproule is well known in Australian Art Deco circles. The owner was Mrs A D Roberts and the builder was Wal's son, Otto.
- Baker Motors, Olive Street – Sproule's commercial premises showed Art Deco motifs – in this case, the popular Aztec winged serpent motif, the rounded balcony and circle on the door.
- 755 Jones – 'Thatswi' was built for the family in 1951. Wal worked from home and his sons set up as Sproule Bros builders.
- The White House, 1949 – in David Street is a simpler art deco design, with portholes and a straight parapet line.
- 493 Beyer Street, 1953 – for R W Faul.
- Boomerang Hotel/Motel for Pearsall & Frauenfelder – it was the first Motel in Albury. Sproule designed the motel units in 1959
- Albury Grammar School – Wal drew the plans for a grandstand and recreation room in 1962. The building was a memorial to Alan Hamilton Smith.

The Sproule sons helped develop the northern end of Jones Street, building to designs by their father. Houses included 729, 753 749 Jones and 735 with builder Gordon Benson who was a nephew of James Wallace Sproule, son of his sister.

Wal designed the Pivot Arcade on the site of the Town Hall Hotel in 1962. As well as the Pivot, it contained the Carousel Cafe and Peters and Grabbe, butchers. It is now the site of Thomas Jewellers [2017].

Other projects included a house at Tooma for the Patons, the Myrtleford Hospital and the Walla Bowling Club. Because of his early involvement with bands, Wal was the honorary architect for the Albury Band, designing their rooms in Reserve Street Albury. Sproule designed the Myrtleford Hospital, Walla Walla Bowling Club, 'Uppingham' Tooma for the Patons, 641 Elm Street Albury, Church of Christ Wodonga, 758 Fellowes Crescent Albury (1953).

James Wallace (Wal) Sproule's life included many moves and many aspects. He worked till he was 74 and died in 1970, leaving an architectural legacy of art deco designs in Albury.

See also Canberra Historical Journal, New Series, No. 62 October 2009:
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