

# Valetta

*Ray Gear*

In 1969 a proposal to demolish a house in Swift Street known as *Valetta* to implement a vision for a Civic Centre Precinct saw a local action group emerge to preserve the seventy-year-old house.

A Federation Queen Anne style house, *Valetta* was a single storey red brick building with a hipped roof covered with orange Marseille roof tiles imported from France. It contained over twenty rooms including surgical and dispensing quarters. It was designed by Melbourne architect Mr Beverley Ussher.



*Valetta*, Swift Street, as it appeared in the early 1920s

Dr William Cleaver Woods commissioned the construction of the house. Born in Liverpool, England, in the early 1850s Woods came with his parents to Australia as a 10-year-old. After completing his medical studies at Edinburgh University, in May 1883 he took over the medical practice of Albury doctor James C Duncan.

Active in the local community, Woods was three times elected mayor between 1894 and 1918. By 1897, he had purchased Allotment 7 and part of Allotment 8 Section 12 and, in the following year, began constructing *Valetta*.

Seventy-one years later Council purchased *Valetta* which according to the local newspaper allowed, "Albury to make up its mind about a new City Hall", part of a long-term plan for a Civic Centre Precinct.

This purchase and the likely loss of *Valetta* saw a campaign from individuals, a petition raised by a 'Save *Valetta* Committee' and objection from the National Trust which rated the building "as worthy of preservation". This campaign was one of the earliest in Albury to save an original building.

Despite objections lodged, Council at its meeting of April 23, 1969, selected the *Valetta* site as one of two sites to be considered for the erection of its City Hall.

Notwithstanding this determination, the 'Save *Valetta* Committee' and others continued the fight to save *Valetta*. In early May 1969 Council re-affirmed its previous decision, "to demolish *Valetta* and build a new City Hall".

Undeterred by Council's decision to demolish, the campaigners against demolition proposed having the City Hall relocated elsewhere or having *Valetta* removed and re-erected at another site.

Following submission of a report by architects Berg & Alexandra, on February 11, 1970, Council confirmed its earlier decision and resolved to invite fresh tenders for the demolition of the house.

In late March 1970 *Valetta* was demolished. Over two years later on May 19, 1972 'City Hall' later to be known as 'Albury Entertainment Centre', opened.