

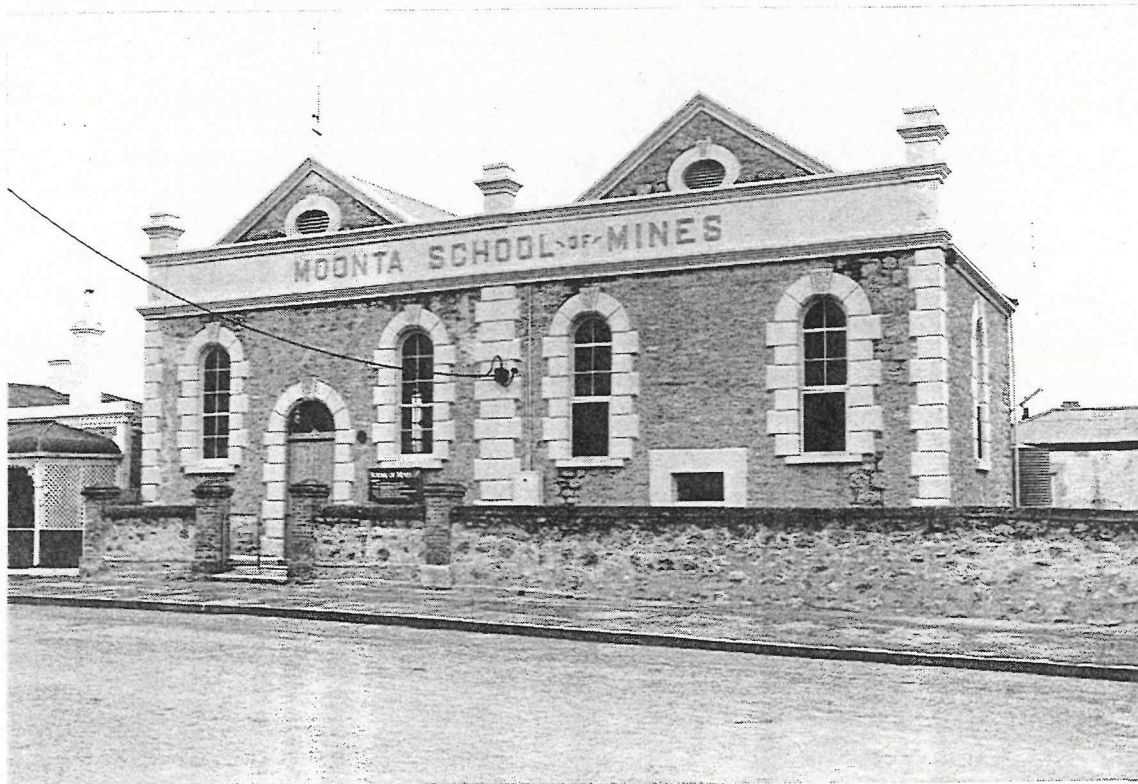
**former School of Mines and Fence****CC:082****LOCATION**

**Address** 29 Ellen Street, Moonta SA 5558  
**Land Description** Pt Section 224, Hundred of Wallaroo  
**Certificate of Title** 592/140

**Owners** National Trust of South Australia, 452 Pulteney Street, Adelaide SA 5000

**State Heritage Status** Registered, 28 May 1981 **SHR File No** 10142  
**Other Assessments** Register of the National Estate, Registered  
National Trust of SA, Classified (File No. 1969)

**Photograph No** 10/17, 18



*former School of Mines*

**former School of Mines and Fence****CC:082****DESCRIPTION**

The School of Mines is designed as a pair of gable roofed buildings with random limestone walls, rendered ashlar quoins and architraves and entablature. The entablature incorporates the 'Moonta School of Mines' sign. The surrounding wall is similarly constructed of random limestone with masonry capping and pillars.

**STATEMENT OF HERITAGE VALUE**

The Moonta School of Mines is significant in establishing the role of mining in the economy and social fabric of the town, and as a statement of the government's faith in the future of the mining industry.

**HISTORY**

The southern half of the building was built as the Moonta Baptist Church in 1866, which makes it the oldest church building standing in the town. In 1891 the South Australian Government purchased the church to establish the Moonta School of Mines. This was the first School of Mines outside Adelaide, and was a clear statement of government support to the mining industry. It also indicates the mining industry's growing dependence on specialists with expert scientific training rather than on artisans trained in the craft tradition.

The building proved to be inadequate for the new role, and in 1903 was enlarged by the addition of the northern wing. The enlargement was carried out with an unusual sensitivity, the additions carefully matching the construction details and ecclesiastical styling of the original church. It was considered appropriate for educational buildings to be in the Gothic Revival style. The façade with the words "Moonta School of Mines" dates from the 1903 extension.

The School of Mines closed in the 1920s. The building stood vacant for some years, was occupied as a private residence and was put to a variety of other uses. In the 1960s it was taken over by the Moonta branch of the National Trust as a museum and administrative offices.

**References**

- State Heritage Branch Files, File No. 10142  
Drew, G. J. (ed.) 1991, *Discovering Historic Moonta, South Australia*, Department of Mines and Energy, DC of Northern Yorke Peninsula, p. 18  
Hand, M. J. 1973, *Moonta's Monuments*, National Trust of South Australia, Moonta  
Pinson, T. et. al. (eds.) 1978, *Moonta Primary School 1878-1978: A Centenary History of Education at Moonta Primary School and the Moonta Area*, Moonta Primary School, pp. 46-47  
Moonta Business and Tourism Association Inc, *Walk With History, Up Street Moonta*, Yorke Peninsula, South Australia, Cultural Tourism SA and National Trust, Item 8



6429 10142  
 Oswald Pryor -  
 'Australia's Little  
 Cornwall' -  
 Moonta School of  
 Mines

*Oswald Pryor - Australia's Little Cornwall*  
*Moonta School of Mines*

hold all the children, and some classes had to use the shelter sheds. This overcrowding ended when many miners left Moonta to work on the new silver-lead field at Broken Hill, New South Wales, which was opened in 1885, taking their wives and families with them.

\* The establishment of the Moonta School of Mines, which was founded in 1891, was a great benefit to the mining community. This institution grew out of a visit by a party of students from the newly established Adelaide School of Mines and Industries. Hitherto there had been no secondary education of any kind in the Moonta district, which put higher education out of the reach of all young people whose parents could not afford to send them to colleges in Adelaide.

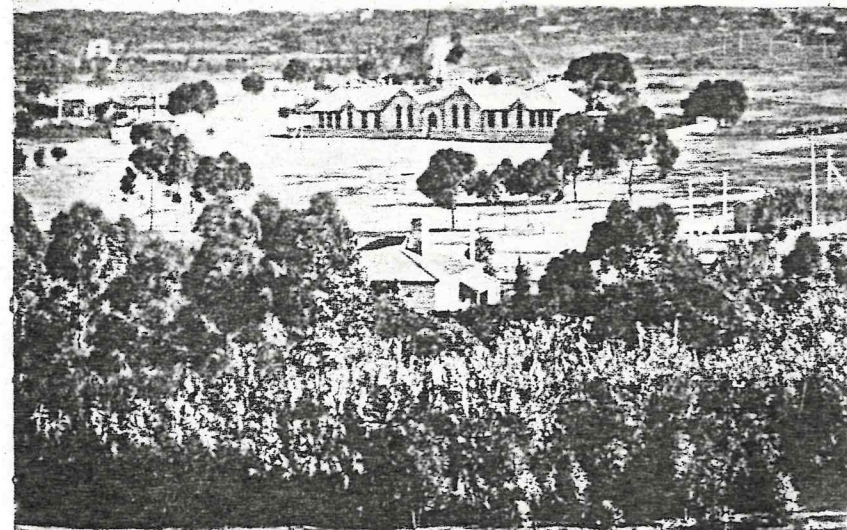
Constituted under an Act of Parliament, Adelaide School of Mines and Industries—later to become the South Australian Institute of Technology—had the power to form branch schools. Applications were received from Gawler, Kapunda, and Moonta, but only the Moonta application was granted. It was estimated that £300 a year would be sufficient as a subsidy, mainly to help pay the salaries of the instructors.

A building which had been a Baptist church was purchased by the Government and fitted out. From its inception the school functioned as a self-contained unit, run by a local committee responsible to the Minister for Education. The curriculum included only subjects essential in mining: surveying, mechanical drawing, practical chemistry, assaying, and elementary mathematics. Classes were held at night, and on Saturday afternoons. Fees were nominal: half a crown a term for all subjects except chemistry, for which five shillings was the charge. The extra half-crown covered the cost of material used in the laboratory.

S. I. Evans, the first principal, was soon succeeded by George T. Bill, M.A., a Cambridge graduate. Other lecturers in the early days, engaged on a part-time basis, were T. C. Cloud, G. C. McMurtrie, and G. J. Rogers, of Wallaroo Smelting Works, and H. Lipson Hancock,

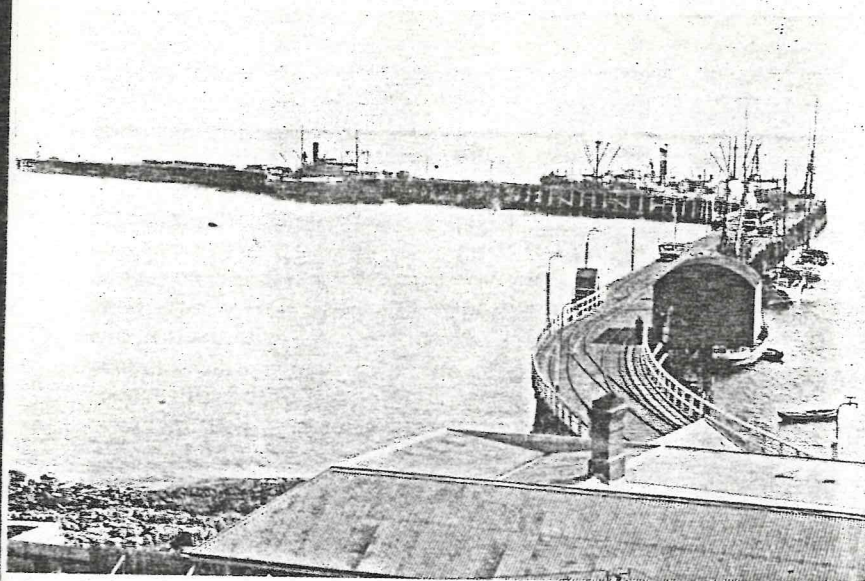


30/05/02  
 In the garden at  
 Ivymede—Captain  
 and Mrs Hancock  
 at right

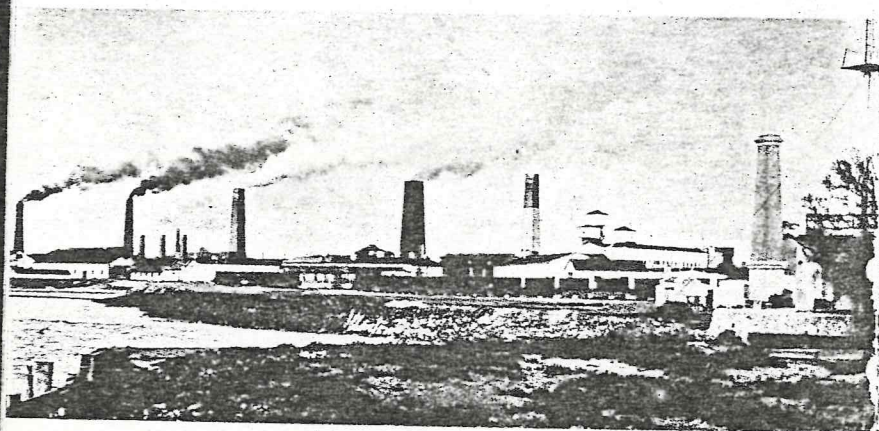


Moonta Mines, looking west, showing State School  
 and Moonta in the distance





Wallaroo Jetty



Wallaroo Smelting Works in the busy days

who was now chief surveyor and draughtsman at Moonta Mines.

This local School of Mines gave boys an opportunity to gain a higher education, and some went on to become university graduates. Forty-seven pupils were enrolled in the first year, by 1893 the number was 109, and by the end of the century there were between three and four hundred students. The original students included some adult men who were working underground on the mines. Side by side with youngsters straight from the primary schools, who could outclass them easily at this type of work, these miners found it hard to master the decimal system and the "rule of three," but, once these hurdles had been surmounted, often did quite well at the practical work. Some of these men rose to high executive positions in the local mines or on other Australian mining fields.

The annual Government grant for the school was increased in 1892 to £600, and remained at that figure during the rest of the school's existence. The State has seldom spent money to better advantage. Those who graduated from the school, however, had a great deal of prejudice to overcome. The old-style captains, some of whom secretly feared the competition of the youngsters with diplomas, held that a little practice was worth more than all the theory, and condescendingly asked what did these young "School o' Mineses" fellows know?

A piece of satire, purporting to be by a miner, that set out the views of the old brigade, contained a few grains of truth:

He (the graduate) wants to learn a little about mining when he gets out of the School of Mines, so his father gets him a job underground, where he is put to work with a miner named Pete. . . . In most mines, two men are supposed to do two men's work. Consequently, when Pete draws this mining engineer for a partner, he realizes that he has his choice of two methods of procedure. He may either do two men's work or quit.

Usually the condition of his finances makes it more diplomatic to pursue the former course and he resigns himself to fate.



When, after about three weeks, his partner gets a position as superintendent through his father's influence, Pete is rewarded by being taken along as foreman. And, be it said to his credit, a Pete has built up the reputation of many a superintendent.

The superintendent can be recognized in many ways; so many that it would be useless to enumerate them. His dress would indicate that mining camp life is one perpetual masquerade ball and he acts accordingly. He is selected for the position because he is the nearest relative of some influential shareholder, who has given an indication of an infinite capacity for interfering with his own business. Then, being a mining engineer, he has a head full of intellectual suet accumulated at the School of Mines. . . .

His first move on "assuming the superintendence" is to change all of the methods previously used at the mine to conform to the methods of the mine where he received his three weeks of practical experience. This usually lasts for about a month, by which time Pete is able to persuade him that the methods used in a fourteen-foot vertical vein of copper are not applicable to the three-foot vein of gold ore dipping forty-five degrees.

As it is undignified for a superintendent to recede from a position once taken, he never changes his methods. He simply "modifies" them, but in most cases the modification gets right back to the methods originally used. He seldom tries to apply any of the methods he learned at the School of Mines, because within three weeks practical experience even a mine superintendent will learn enough not to try to apply them to actual mining.

A change of methods is frequently advisable, but is best made by a miner who has had experience in both methods, and not because the methods to which the change is made have been used advantageously in an entirely different kind of deposit. These mistakes have been made by every young School of Mines superintendent who has had charge of a mine in the last forty years and they are being made today just as often as they ever were. It is really astonishing how much damage can be done by three weeks' "practical experience." It often requires years to overcome the evil effects of it.

Another favourite stunt is for the young superintendent to take charge of the mine itself. After fifteen or twenty years he learns that the proper one to direct the actual operations of a mine is a miner, but he seldom learns it in less time. So he takes "personal charge" of the mine, retaining the faithful Pete in order that he may put in his reports such expressions

as: "My foreman, acting under my orders," did so-and-so. In the reports "I" gets the credit for everything correctly done and "my foreman" makes all the bulls.

If ever there was a mine personally managed by a superintendent and made it pay, it was a very rich one. I do not believe it was ever done, but if it was, I know from what I have seen them do to ordinary mines that it took a rich one to stand it. I have worked for forty or fifty mine superintendents and have yet to see one who is capable of taking "personal charge" of a mine. As a matter of fact they only think they are in charge. In ninety per cent of the cases a Pete is directing the work and he must be a pretty able miner to make a mine pay when handicapped by one of the 24-carat boss-heads so frequently inflicted upon him.

It is said that a veteran Moonta miner nodded approvingly after reading the above, then said, "If you want mine to pay, 'point practical miner to manage 'er—not one o' they university chaps what spend all their time in lavatories."

