"Avondale' – a History

'Avondale' is a late 19th century farmhouse, still in its original position. It was the centre of a farm that operated in the surrounding area for well over 100 years.

**Heritage Listing**

'Avondale' is part of the State Heritage-listed Sinnamon Farm precinct. Sir Hercules Sinnamon initiated the heritage listing by nominating all of the buildings for the Register of the National Trust of Queensland in 1980. This was accepted and the properties were entered on the Register on 24 November 1980. Subsequently, with State and Council heritage registers being created, the properties were entered on the Queensland Heritage Buildings Protection Act (1990) schedule, the Queensland State Heritage Register (October 1992) and the Brisbane City Council Heritage Register (2000).

The listing in the Heritage Register refers not only to the 'Avondale' house but also to outbuildings to the west of the house and stone remnants of a circular horse-powered mill race. The old farm milking shed is still standing on the property as are remnants of the mill race.


**Avondale's History - Overview**

'Avondale' homestead is considered to have been built in the 1890s but the land was being farmed from at least 1879 and possibly from 1865. In the 19th century, the major land usage was agriculture and market gardening. Towards the end of the century, farms in this area gradually moved to mixed farming then dairy farming. Dairy farming was the major activity on 'Avondale' for most of the 20th century until its sale to developers in 1996.
The property has had a strong association with the Sinnamon family from the early days of settlement. The first owner of the land on which 'Avondale' stands was John Guilfoyl, thought to have been a speculator. In 1879 it was purchased by Collin White who also owned the adjoining property where the White family lived. Collin was a son-in-law of James Sinnamon senior. Collin's wife Sarah (née Sinnamon) inherited when Collin died. Subsequently, Sarah's brother Benjamin Sinnamon acquired the 'Avondale' property in late 1886 and, with his wife Elizabeth, raised his family there. The 'Avondale' house was built for the Benjamin Sinnamon family.

After Benjamin's death in 1941, his son Stanley worked the farm for a time, but Benjamin's widow sold the property in late 1942. It had successive owners and occupants for the next 7 years until Hercules Sinnamon purchased it in September 1949. Being a senior accountant himself and residing in Chelmer, he engaged share farmers to continue to operate the property as a dairy farm.

**Consolidation of farm - small to larger land holding**

The changing composition of 'Avondale' farm over time reflects the land ownership pattern throughout the district, where small blocks of 15-30 acres originally sold by the Government with assumption of agriculture for crops, primarily food crops, were gradually purchased by one owner and a larger farm created.

The original 'Avondale' land portion 304, on which the house stands, comprised only a little more than 20 acres, but Benjamin expanded it with the 1891 acquisition of the approx. 28 acre portion 308 on the opposite side of Seventeen Mile Rocks Road extending through to Oldfield Road. In 1908 the ownership of a 15 acre block (portion 298) with river frontage was transferred to Benjamin but it is possible that he was working this for 12 years prior to that as it was owned by his brother Samuel Sinnamon who was not a farmer. From 1908, the 'Avondale' farm comprised approximately 63 acres.

In 1915, after the death of his brother John Sinnamon, Benjamin acquired portion 299, one of his father James Sinnamon senior's original Sinnamon landholdings. This provided another block with river frontage and the hope of more fertile alluvial soil. 'Avondale' then comprised approximately 79 acres.

After Benjamin's death in 1941, dairy farming on 'Avondale' continued, with successive owners working the farm: Spressor family, Hogberg family, Mrs Susannah Rohlf (a widow), Mr and Mrs
Kennedy (owned it only for 7 months) and the Richters family. Eventually, in Sept. 1949, Sir Hercules Sinnamon, who also owned 'Glen Ross' and 'Beechwood', acquired the 'Avondale' farm. Dairy farming continued, with share farmers working 'Avondale'.

Post-farming Period

At the time of Sir Hercules Sinnamon's death, he had already gifted the 'Avondale', 'Glen Ross' and 'Beechwood' homes and farms to his brother Ivan Sinnamon and his friend and carer Norman Henry. These two people were upheld as legitimate heirs/owners by the Supreme Court after hearing challenges to Sir Hercules' Will. Unfortunately, the legal costs associated with the challenges, combined with the costs in maintaining the properties as a farm, led Messrs Sinnamon and Henry to sell the whole property in 1996. The purchaser was Larna Pty Ltd, a development company owned by Ronald William Baldwin.

Much of the former 'Avondale' farm, as also the Beechwood and Glen Ross farms, formed the basis of Windermere Estate (now part of Sinnamon Park), developed by Baldwin Riverland Estate Pty Ltd. The larger property on which 'Avondale' was located was re-configured in 2004 to create the lot at number 645 Seventeen Mile Rocks Road.

There remained the issue of what to do with the two parcels of land that comprised the Sinnamon Farms heritage precinct. One is occupied by 'Avondale', the other, larger section is occupied by 'Glen Ross', 'Beechwood' and the re-located Seventeen Mile Rocks school building. About 2006-7, Mr Baldwin's intention was to develop the 'Avondale' site first and use some money from the sale of that site to develop detailed plans for the 'Glen Ross'- 'Beechwood'-School precinct. He planned to submit the development application for the 'Avondale' site by 30 November 2007 and to commence work the following year.

These plans did not come to fruition. In September 2011, Larna Pty Ltd sold the 'Avondale' site. Renard Developments Pty Ltd became the registered owner of the property where 'Avondale' and its outbuildings are situated. In 2012 the 'Avondale' farmhouse underwent some renovations with care to retain original features of the building. 'Avondale', still owned by Renard Developments Pty Ltd, was placed on the market as a 2500 sq metre property that retained the old farm milking shed and farm artefacts. In 2014 'Avondale' was sold to Mrs Sandra Ivy Mar-ree Dunstan.
The People of 'Avondale'

A number of individuals and families additional to the Benjamin Sinnamon family lived and worked on 'Avondale', either as owners or as share farmers for Hercules Sinnamon, after 1942. The Historical Society does not have information on all owners, nor the names of all the share farmers so the information below is limited to known families.

**Benjamin and Elizabeth Sinnamon and their family** were the most long-standing occupants of 'Avondale', from their marriage in late 1889 until the property was sold in 1942. They had seven children, two boys and five girls of whom one died in infancy. Benjamin was the eighth of James Sinnamon senior's and Margaret's 11 children. Benjamin had arrived in Queensland as a young lad of 7 years, with his parents and siblings who migrated from northern Ireland.

Benjamin was a well-known, much loved figure in the local community. A Sinnamon descendant of another branch has described him as 'everybody’s uncle Benny and everybody’s favourite uncle found time to help everyone, as well as carrying out his usual occupation as stud master and dairy farmer.' Benjamin was very religious and also very talented. He played the violin, painted floral studies and portraits, and wrote poetry.

During Benjamin and Elizabeth's time at 'Avondale', they cultivated crops such as potato and pumpkin, raised fruit orchards and also engaged in dairy farming. A 1930 newspaper article commented on the fine quality of their Jersey stock.

**Osgar William Spresser and his wife Maria** bought 'Avondale' from the Sinnamon family about September 1944. The Spresser family, including previous generations, had been showing stud jersey dairy cattle at the Brisbane EKKA since the early 20th century. The Spressers stayed in the Seventeen Mile Rocks farming district only about 2 years, possibly because of the relatively small size of the farm and poor state of the pastures. They moved to Amberley then Rosewood where their well-known Carnation Jersey stud is based.

**John Valentine (‘Val’) Hogberg and Gladys Irene Hogberg** purchased the property from Spressers in Nov. 1944. Val had a broad work background in rural occupations and was qualified as a milk and cream tester, but he had an ambition to own a dairy farm. They moved in with their 6 children: Valda 17, John 15, David 14, Margaret 9, Dorothy 4 and Robert 2. Valda stayed at home to help with the
house and farm while the three next oldest children went to Corinda State School, riding their bikes along short cuts through the bush. John did his scholarship examination that year.

In 1946, the Seventeen Mile Rocks State School, which had been closed for a few years due to insufficient pupils, reopened. Dorothy, though still below school age, started school to boost numbers of children and justify it being opened. John stayed at home to work on the farm.

John Hogberg recalls that maintaining the farm was hard work and that the farm was not prosperous, with blue couch grass pasture that they considered not ideal for dairy cattle. The family moved after 2-3 years, to a house on acreage in Eddystone St, Corinda.

Walter Richters (also spelt Richter) owned the 'Avondale' farm from late 1948 to late 1949 when Hercules Sinnamon bought the property. Walter and his wife Elsie and their children lived at 'Avondale'. The Richters boys attended the Seventeen Mile Rocks State School. The family does not appear to have remained long in the area as Walter and Elsie were at Oxley Road, Oxley, his occupation a labourer, at the time of the 1954 electoral roll.

Charles (‘Charlie’) and Edna Smeaton were sharefarmers on ‘Avondale’ for approximately 8 years, from 1952 until early 1960. Their four children - Kevin, Janet, Clive and Gail - attended the one-teacher, one classroom Seventeen Mile Rocks State School from 1952-1957. They then transferred to Corinda State School as their parents wanted them to be exposed to a larger school with more children and a broader educational experience.

Toward the end of the family time on ‘Avondale’, Charlie Smeaton, in an effort to make more money, operated a milk run in Inala while continuing to run the farm. For approximately 18 months, his wife and the two older children (before and after school) did more work on the farm, particularly milking in the mornings and evenings, and his older son did ploughing, using the tractor. The family then discontinued farming and moved to Sherwood.

Past and Changing Lifestyles

This early 20th century photo of Vera Sinnamon, born in December 1892 and the second eldest of Benjamin and Elizabeth's family, illustrates the then newly emerging custom of women riding astride rather than using a sidesaddle. Courtesy of David Bailey.

The 19th century farmers in Seventeen Mile Rocks were very familiar with and at ease with the river, taking their goods to market by boat for many years. Gradually horse-drawn transport and later motorised vehicles took over. Although a motor vehicle was first owned by a local farmer in the 1920s, many people continued to use horse-drawn transport well into the 20th century, as late as the early 1950s.
In the mid-1940s Valda Hogberg, the eldest daughter who helped at home, had to take the milk and cream from the 'Avondale' dairy on a horse-drawn cart to Oxley Station, over the rough gravel road. By the 1950s however, when the Smeatons were on 'Avondale', a milk carrier with a truck used to call at the farms to collect the milk. This also reflected the changing organization of the dairy industry.

Horses were still used for ploughing in the Smeatons' early period on the farm. But later, Hercules Sinnamon bought a tractor to be shared between 'Glen Ross' and 'Avondale', each share-farmer having it week about and using the draught horses, but only if essential, on alternate weeks.

Although electrical appliances were becoming widely used in the 1950s, there was little such equipment at 'Avondale'. The house still had a wood stove in the 1950s. Hot water for the bath was obtained by heating the outdoor wood-heated washing copper, that was also used for washing clothes in the absence of a washing machine. The hot water and steam essential to keeping the dairy, with all its implements and containers clean was obtained by heating water in a wood-fired boiler that produced both hot water and steam. As a result, chopping wood to maintain a regular supply for the stove, copper and boiler was a constant chore.

The horse-powered mill-race

With the advent of combustion engines and electricity, live horse-power was no longer needed. In the 1980s, when this photo was taken, dairy cattle occupied the area where the former horse-driven mill race operated.

![Remnants of 'Avondale' mill race. Gordon Hanley, photographer.](image)

A built up circle was created, with a beam extending outside the circle from machinery in the centre. A horse was attached to the beam. The horse walked around in a circle moving the beam around the race, thus providing the power to operate the implement.

Such mill races are known to have been used for grinding grain and also for operating a chaff cutter. The usage to which the 'Avondale' mill race was put is not on record but it seems likely that, being on a diary farm, it was used to operate a chaff cutter as was a similar mill race on the neighbouring Counihan farm.
The Lagoons; and Bamboo

The 'Avondale' land between Seventeen Mile Rocks Road and Oldfield Rd contained large lagoons. Sunday school picnics of the local Methodist Church were held here during Benjamin Sinnamon’s lifetime. Velyian Todd, who lived with her grandparents at 'Avondale' for a time during the 1930s, recalls it being ‘a magical place, with waterlilies’. Hogberg family members also remember the lagoons from their time at ‘Avondale’ in the mid-1940s. They said that the lagoons were surrounded by paperbark trees and had waterlilies and violets in them.

Hogberg family members recalled large stands of bamboo on that side of Seventeen Mile Rocks Road in the mid 1940s. Another former ‘Avondale’ resident, who lived as a child at ‘Avondale’ during the 1950s, also recalled bamboo, in particular, two large clumps of bamboo opposite ‘Avondale’ house. Most weekends, people came from far and wide to obtain bamboo and could be seen chipping it out.

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Photo courtesy of Gaylene Bourgignon and Deirdre Farbotko.

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