



VANCOUVER ARTS CENTRE

OFFICE OPEN:
MONDAY TO FRIDAY 10AM - 4PM

P: 08 6820 3740 E: arts@albany.wa.gov.au
www.artsandculture.albany.wa.gov.au



Albany



VISITOR INFORMATION



A black and white photograph of a large, two-story house with a prominent gabled roof and a central dormer window. A group of people is standing in front of the house, and a vintage car is visible on the left. The house has a covered porch area and a large chimney.

The state heritage listed Vancouver Arts Centre occupies a complex of buildings on Vancouver Street in Albany. The complex was originally constructed as a hospital. The hospital, the first building on the site was constructed in **1887** and designed by colonial architect George Temple Poole. This limestone construction contained a single ward. A second ward and bathroom were added in **1895**. The complex was subsequently added to with orderlies' rooms, infectious diseases ward, nurses' quarters, a native ward, a laundry,

and a morgue. After more than 70 years the site was considered too small to meet the needs of the Albany community, and eventually the hospital was relocated to a new hospital in Spencer Park, **1962**. When a new hostel was built, it became vacant again in **1974**. It was then occupied in **1980** by the Albany Arts Council and in **2000** management of the Centre was taken over by the City of Albany.

- Albany Cottage Hospital.

- Vacant.

- School Hostel for Boys.

- Albany Arts Council,
- Vancouver Arts Centre.

- City of Albany,
- Vancouver Arts Centre.



EARLY MEDICAL SERVICES & ESTABLISHMENT

1829 – 1888

Albany's first hospital was established in May **1829** by Lieutenant George Sleeman within a modest four-room surgeon's house on Parade Street. No physical evidence of this early structure exists. In **1836**, construction began on a formal government complex in what is now Lawley Park, incorporating official buildings including a barracks, guardroom, commissariat store, and hospital. By the **1880s**, Albany's role as a major seaport exposed it to epidemics such as smallpox, typhoid, and influenza. Public

pressure led to the planning of a new hospital. In **1886**, a petition was presented to Governor Sir Frederick Broome for improved healthcare infrastructure. The new hospital was approved and designed by architect George Temple Poole in the emerging Domestic Revival style, which shaped many public buildings in Western Australia during that period. By August **1888**, the new Albany Cottage Hospital opened, and the old Lawley Park facility was subsequently demolished.

● 1829

- First hospital opened on Parade Street.

● 1836

- Government hospital built at Lawley Park.

● 1880s

- Epidemics increased demand for better care.

● 1886

- Petition for new hospital submitted.

● 1887

- Construction began on Vancouver Street.

● 1888

- New hospital opened; old one demolished.

GROWTH, MODIFICATION & WARTIME SERVICE 1895 – 1918

Due to funding restrictions, Poole's original design was not fully realised. By **1895**, further expansion was required. A female ward was added, although it was criticised for inadequate planning.

In **1900**, a stovepipe fire threatened the new facility, prompting the installation of water and fire protection systems by **1901**.

During the Boer War in **1902**, the hospital admitted injured soldiers from New South Wales and Victoria, marking its first role in supporting Australian military efforts.

By **1909**, the State Government proposed transferring hospital management to the Albany Town Council, offering a subsidy. After prolonged negotiation, an increased subsidy was accepted, although the specific figure remains undocumented.

In response to the risk of infectious diseases brought by increasing sea traffic, an Infectious Diseases Ward was constructed in **1917** and opened in **1918**. Built from jarrah weatherboards with asbestos-lined walls, it housed male and female wards, nurses' quarters, and an operating theatre, with views over the harbour.

Although exact construction dates are unrecorded, several rear outbuildings played important roles in the hospital's operations. The Native Ward, a weatherboard structure east of the morgue, appears on historical plans but is otherwise undocumented. The morgue, a square timber building with a pyramid-shaped roof south of Mary Thomson House (formerly the nurses' quarters), still retains its original mortuary slab. South of the driveway, **1925** additions included a laundry (now a pottery workshop) and a carpenter's workshop.

MODERNISATION EFFORTS & CONTINUED OVERCROWDING 1936 – 1962

By the mid-**1930s**, surgical demand necessitated upgrades, including a Britannia boiler and new hot water system in **1936**. Plans for a modern operating theatre and children's ward followed.

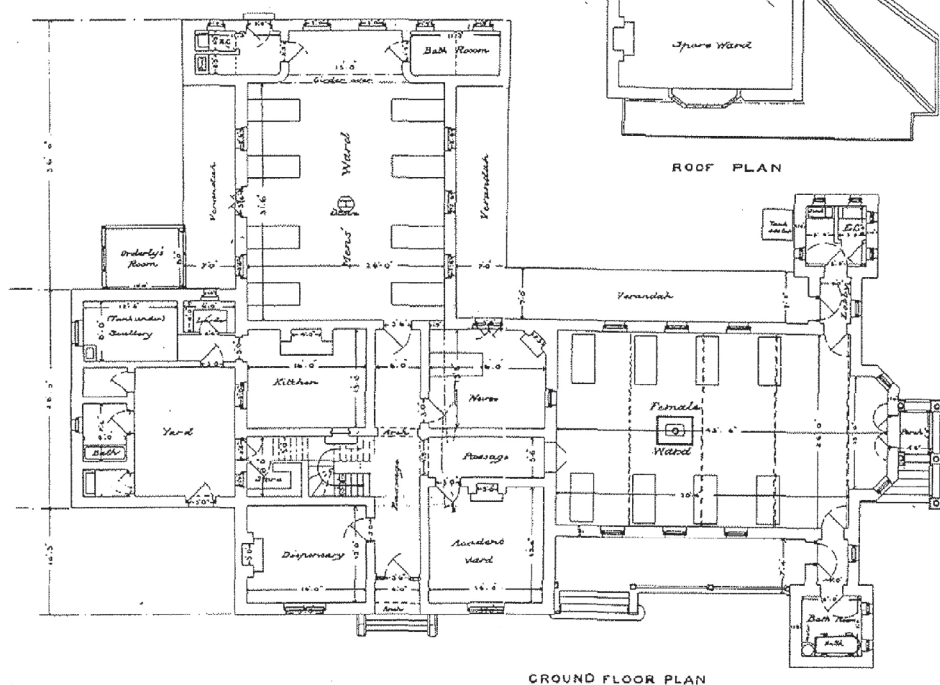
In **1937**, the hospital underwent substantial redevelopment, including the Dickson Wing, funded by A.H Dickson and the RSL. Previous plans were scrapped and replaced with a major eastern extension. New one- and two-bed wards were added, along with male and private wards, a laundry extension, and expanded staff facilities.

Despite these improvements, the hospital still lagged behind modern standards. Calls for further expansion, including improved outpatient facilities, persisted.

By the late **1940s**, consistent public and media criticism highlighted space and staffing constraints. The Vancouver Street site was increasingly viewed as inadequate. By **1953**, the State Government had agreed to construct a new hospital in Spencer Park.

- **1895**
 - Female ward added.
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 - **1900-1901**
 - Fire safety upgrades installed.
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- **1902**
 - Treated Boer War soldiers.
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 - **1909**
 - Gov offered hospital control to Albany Council with subsidy.
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- **1918**
 - Infectious Diseases Ward opened.
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 - **1920s**
 - Rear outbuildings added (Native Ward, morgue, laundry, workshop).
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On 1 March **1962**, the new Albany Regional Hospital at Spencer Park was officially opened, and the Vancouver Street hospital ceased operations as a healthcare facility.



- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1936 • Boiler + hot water system installed. • • • • 1937 • Major expansion – Dickson Wing, new wards, RSL veteran ward. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1950s • Children's ward. • • • • 1952 • Outpatient block. • • • | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1956 • Other small upgrades. • • • • 1962 • New hospital opened at Spencer Park; old one closed. |
|---|--|--|



SCHOOL HOSTEL FOR BOYS **1962 – 1974**

Following the hospital's closure, the State Government repurposed the Vancouver Street site as a boys' hostel, replacing Norman House. The building was adapted to accommodate up to 75 students.

- **1962-1974**
- Boys Hostel.

- **1974-1980**
- Vacant.

- **1980**
- Opened under Albany Arts Council.

- **1981**
- 21-year lease + \$30,000 renovation loan secured.

- **1982-1985**
- Workshops, resident artists, major roof restoration.

- **1984-1985**
- Artist-in-Residence program began.

VACANT 1974 – 1980

By **1974**, a purpose-built hostel opened near Albany High School, and the former hospital buildings were vacated and left in a derelict state.

In **1978**, the Albany Arts Council proposed converting the neglected hospital into a community arts centre. A fire in **1979** destroyed a wing of the structure, raising fears of demolition. However, sustained community fundraising and advocacy ensured the preservation of the remaining buildings.

ALBANY ARTS COUNCIL VANCOUVER ARTS CENTRE 1980 – 1999

The Vancouver Arts Centre (VAC) officially began operations in **1980** under modest and challenging conditions. Early events were held without electricity, including a candlelit poetry reading that has become a memorable part of the Centre's early history.

The VAC is named after Vancouver St., which honors British naval explorer George Vancouver, who landed here in 1791.

By **1981**, the Albany Arts Council (AAC) secured a 21-year lease from the State Government, enabling the legal occupation of the building. With this, the Council took on a \$30,000 renovation loan, supported by fundraising and community donations, to begin much-needed upgrades to the facility.

Between **1982** and **1985**, the Centre evolved into a more active community hub. Resident artists commenced work, and regular workshops were offered to the public. Major restoration work was undertaken, including the installation of 38 tonnes of she-oak shingles to restore the original roof. In **1984**, the Artist in Residence program began. While most artists moved on, their contributions brought fresh ideas to the local arts scene.





ALBANY ARTS COUNCIL

Day of the Arts

Thurs. June 7th. 10a.m. - 1 p.m.

THE ARTS IN ACTION

Learn how~ All day

- Corn dollies
- Porcelaine painting
- Screen printing
- Cake decorating
- Greetings cards
- On-the-spot portraits
- Oil painting
- Natural dyeing
- Pressing e' Preserving flowers
- Floral art
- Spinning
- Weaving
- Felting
- Papermaking
- Pottery
- Dance
- Embroidery

Special Times:

10.30 a.m. + 2.30 p.m. - Historical talks + tours
 1.00 p.m. - Poetry reading
 4.00 p.m. - 'Youth time' face painting - E.S.P.

Devonshire Teas on sale!
A video + photographic record will be made!



Visiting artists were accommodated at Mary Thomson House (MTH), originally the Nurses' Quarters and Matron's Cottage, which had been renovated by the AAC one of its first major projects. MTH was named after Mary Thomson, who was a driving force behind the formation of AAC.

By **1986**, the VAC had gained further momentum. With support from both State and Federal governments, paving was installed, and carpet was laid significantly improving the facility's usability.

In **1987**, the VAC Board was formally established to oversee governance and programming.

In **1988**, responsibility for local arts programming was transferred from the Town of Albany to the AAC. A survey of local craftspeople conducted that year led to the formation of Viewpoint Inc., aimed at supporting and promoting regional artists.

By **1989**, the internal layout of the building was improved with the installation of stairs connecting the upper and lower levels for the first time.

- **1986**
- Paving, carpets installed.
- **1987**
- VAC Board established.
- **1988**
- Albany Arts Council took over local arts programming.
- **1988**
- Albany Arts Council took over local arts programming.
- **1989**
- Internal stair added.



In **1990**, the VAC was officially opened by the Hon. Yvonne Henderson, Minister for the Arts.

Between **1992** and **1995**, the Centre hosted the Albany Art Prize and became home to 24 permanent tenant groups engaged in a wide range of art forms and cultural activities.

In **1996**, renovations began on MTH, further expanding the Centre's facilities.

However, between **1997** and **1999**, the VAC faced increasing financial difficulties. By the end of **1999**, the AAC voted to withdraw from the Centre. In response, the City of Albany stepped in to ensure its continued operation.

- **1990**
- Official opening.

- **1992-1995**
- Albany Art Prize hosted; 24 tenant art groups active.

- **1996**
- Renovations to Mary Thomson House began.

- **1997-1999**
- Faced financial issues; Albany Arts Council withdrew.

- **1996**
- Renovations to Mary Thomson House began.

- **1999**
- City of Albany took over VAC operations.



CITY OF ALBANY

VANCOUVER ARTS CENTRE **2000 – PRESENT**

By **2000**, the City of Albany formally assumed management of the VAC. This transition secured the Centre's future as a vital cultural facility in the region and laid the groundwork for its continued development into the 21st century.

Between **2001 & 2005**, the Centre experienced significant growth, with vibrant contributions from local artists, TAFE students, and tertiary institutions enriching a diverse calendar of exhibitions and events. Music and performance programs, notably nurtured emerging talent.

From **2005 to 2010**, the VAC solidified its cultural influence through ongoing community events which became vital platforms for local engagement. The annual Noongar exhibitions gained prominence, celebrating Aboriginal artists and culture within the region. Support for artists expanded through residencies, cross-cultural collaborations, and retrospective exhibitions showcasing both emerging and established practitioners.

- **2000-2005**

- City took over VAC & Growth in events, exhibitions, and youth programs.

- **2005-2010**

- Continued events and artist residencies. & Noongar exhibitions.



GROWTH & TRANSFORMATION OF THE VANCOUVER ARTS CENTRE

Between **2011** and **2013**, the Centre entered a phase of artistic expansion and infrastructural improvement. The concluding years of the Curator's Choice exhibition series featured distinguished curators and attracted national attention. In **2013**, the Great Southern Art Award established a new and highly successful home at the VAC. To enhance the event, a public program featuring artist talks and children's workshops was launched, offering added value and community engagement.

From **2014** to **2018**, the VAC renewed its focus on heritage, identity, and strategic partnerships. The Vancouver Street Festival was revitalised with a stronger emphasis on cultural programming.

- **2011-2013**
- Great Southern Art Award moved to VAC. &
- Public programs added: talks, kids' workshops.

- **2014-2016**
- Focus on heritage, Noongar identity,
- and partnerships. & Vancouver Street
- Festival revitalised.



The VAC continued to reinforce its role in regional cultural storytelling and legacy projects, celebrating Albany's wool heritage, Noongar songlines, and the Centenary of Armistice.

As the Centre evolved, several changes occurred, including the conclusion of both the Vancouver Street Festival and the Albany Art Prize in **2018**. Following the end of the Vancouver Street Festival, the VAC Open Day was introduced to provide the community with an opportunity to experience and engage with the activities at the Centre. During this period, significant facility upgrades were also completed, including improvements to climate control.

In **2020**, the centre faced challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in a temporary closure. Nevertheless, the VAC marked its 40th anniversary with reflection and celebration, while continuing to advance accessibility improvements. Mary Thomson House was transformed into dedicated artist studios, and the Albany History Collection returned to the Albany Public Library after a temporary location here. Signalling a broader redefinition of the roles of the Vancouver Arts Centre and Albany Town Hall within the city's cultural landscape.

• **2017-2018**

- Facility
- upgrades.

• **2019**

- VAC Open Day
- launched.

• **2020**

- COVID closure; 40th anniversary
- celebrated. & Artist studios
- opened in Mary Thomson House.



40 YEARS of the VANCOUVER ARTS CENTRE

Celebrating Creativity



In **2021**, the Centre launched several key initiatives to deepen artistic engagement and broaden opportunities for local creatives. A revised Artist in Residence model provided structured support for artistic development, complemented by a new Exhibition Callout Program designed to encourage wider community participation and highlight the outcomes of VAC's growing creative programs.

In **2022**, infrastructure enhancements included the installation of new flooring in the Large Meeting Room, improving the facility's functionality for exhibitions and events.

- **2021**
- Annual Group Exhibition, revised residencies. New programs: Exhibition Callout.

- **2024**
- VAC Open Day reinforced public engagement.

- **2025+**
- Continued focus on innovation, inclusion, and community.



In **2024**, the Centre completed the installation of track lighting throughout its gallery spaces, enhancing exhibition presentation and flexibility. This was also the year a retail space the 'Pharmacy Store' was launched. Formerly the hospital pharmacy, the space was repurposed to provide local makers with an opportunity to sell their creations.

Looking ahead to **2025** and beyond, the VAC remains committed to evolving as a vital cultural institution, building on a strong foundation of community involvement, artistic innovation, and cultural connection.

SEE & DO

AT THE VANCOUVER ARTS CENTRE

“Our key purpose is to develop the creative capacity of our region. We will focus on the practice of art-making and achieve our purpose by delivering a diverse and engaging artistic program that empowers our community and the cultural sector.”

Vancouver Arts Centre is a vibrant community arts centre, gallery, and home to many local arts and craft groups. The Centre is dedicated to delivering an inclusive and diverse arts program for all sectors of the community across all art forms

“Our key purpose is to develop the creative capacity of our region. We will focus on the practice of art-making and achieve our purpose by delivering a diverse and engaging artistic program that empowers our community and the cultural sector”

Through our Artist in Residence Program, exhibitions, workshops, community arts projects and partnerships with other organisations, the Vancouver Arts Centre provides a vibrant and dynamic foundation for the arts in our community and a resource for outlying areas.

A number of creatives have their homes at the VAC and meet regularly throughout the year. Groups include:

- **Albany Art Group**
- **Albany Pottery Group**
- **ACE Camera Club**
- **Floral Art Group**
- **Porcelain Painting**
- **Albany Spinners**
- **Albany Weavers**
- **Albany Film Society**

For more information about our programs, head to our website and sign up to receive our newsletter.



Paint & Play workshop



Ace Camera Club



Albany Pottery Group



Floral Art Group



Arts & Culture Exhibition Volunteers



Albany Weavers



Albany Spinners

PHOTO CREDITS INDEX

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Jenny Feast, 2023

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Western Australia Museum
& Museum of the Great Southern (n.d)

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Conservation Plan 2000 – Original
Floor Plan for Proposed Albany Cottage
Hospital. 1886-1887

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School Hostel For Boys Photo:
History Great Southern – Kaartdijin Biddi
Albany. c.1962-1974.
Albany Arts Council (n.d)

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Albany Arts Council (n.d)

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The Curators Choice, 2010
INHOUSE, 2010
Band Duo: Marshall & the Fro, 2010
Vancouver Arts Centre, Old Signage
Bella Kelly, Ripples in the Pond - with
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Bella Kelly, Retrospective, 2016
40 Years of the VAC, 2020
VAC Open Day photo by: Warren
Lilford, ACE Camera Club.
A Story of Wool, 2017
Vancouver Street Festival, 2018
Great Southern Art Award, 2019

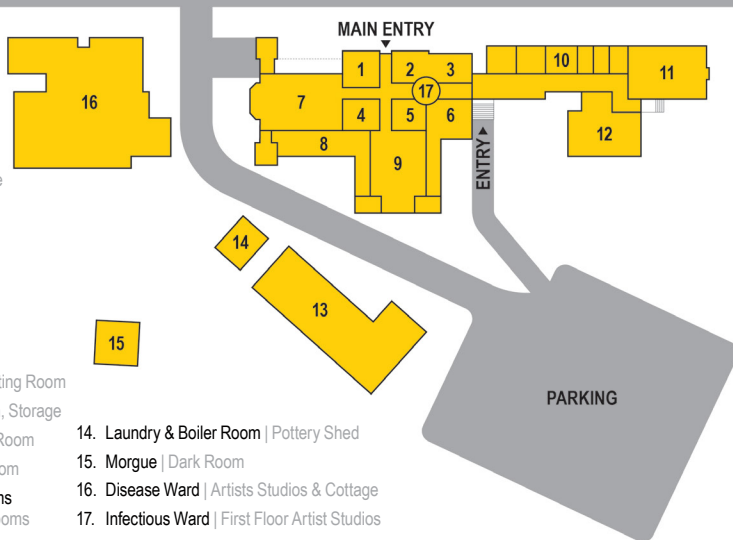
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Jenny Feast, 2023

SELF GUIDED HERITAGE TOUR MAP

VANCOUVER ARTS CENTRE

1. Pharmacy | Front Gallery
2. Accident & Emergency | Office
3. Operating Theatre | Office
4. X-Ray Room | Small Gallery
5. Kitchen | Courtyard Room
6. Courtyard
7. Men's Ward | Main Gallery
8. Verandah | Verandah Gallery
9. Women's Medical Ward | Meeting Room
10. Single Wards | Toilets, Kitchen, Storage
11. Women's Surgical Ward | Art Room
12. Children's Ward | Weavers Room
13. Native Ward/ Domestics Rooms
Pottery Studio + Workshop Rooms
14. Laundry & Boiler Room | Pottery Shed
15. Morgue | Dark Room
16. Disease Ward | Artists Studios & Cottage
17. Infectious Ward | First Floor Artist Studios



Special thanks to Sue Lefroy, City of Albany Local History Co-ordinator , the Western Australia Museum and Museum of the Great Southern for contributing to this document.

