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### **Alfred 'Fritz' Kursteiner**

(courtesy x x)

**Alfred Friedrich Kursteiner** (c.1829-1897) was born at Basel, Switzerland. Located where the Swiss, French and German borders meet, Basel also has suburbs in France and Germany. An advertisement for Kursteiner appeared in *The West Australian* during 1895, suggesting that he preferred to note German origin and training - the notice records *Fritz Kursteiner, Deutscher Architect*. In Melbourne from the early 1850s to early 1890s, Fritz is associated with German-origin groups and activities.

Kursteiner's first attempt to establish himself as an architect in Western Australia was short-lived. Just days after disembarking from the vessel *Mary Ann* on 6 March 1851 at Fremantle, Alfred Kursteiner advertised in *Perth Gazette* editions: *A. Kursteiner, Architect, having just arrived from London, purposes [sic] establishing himself at Fremantle, and hopes the residents of that town and other parts of the Colony will honour him with their patronage and support. Having a large and valuable collection of Designs and Plans for houses and cottages of various kinds, he invites an inspection of them, or will wait upon parties desirous of having his services. ...*

Despite this encouraging display of design ability available to the Swan River Colony, it appears Kursteiner was no more successful than the few previous private architects in attempting to obtain commissions within the youthful and impoverished economy of the time. Unencumbered by family or ongoing business, and consequently armed with great mobility, in 1852 Kursteiner escaped to the east coast of Australia, where the discovery of gold at Ballarat in 1851 had commenced Victoria's gold boom. There he was far more successful, earning a living in Melbourne for the next forty years. Ironically, a failing economy in Victoria, and a gold boom in WA were to trigger his return to the west coast in the 1890s. Despite his Australian work beginning and ending in WA, we have no record of Kursteiner completing a design in the western State.

By the late 1850s, Fritz was working in a partnership Ohlfesen-Bagge & Kursteiner Architects, and he applied for naturalisation at Melbourne in February of 1859. He married Catherine Mahoney at the Unitarian Church in Melbourne during September 1859. By the early 1860s he was quite active in the St Kilda and Fitzroy areas, and was designing for the completion of the Unitarian Christian Church at Gipps Street, Melbourne in early 1863. There is notice of a 'first and only meeting' for A.F. Kursteiner surveyor at the Insolvent Court during March 1867, suggesting his business was not always profitable. It has been noted that Kursteiner painted a façade for the Melbourne Public Library Building to conceal its unfinished front during the visit of the Duke of Edinburgh in 1867. By the late 1860s Austin & Kursteiner Architects were working on residences in St Kilda, at Albert Street in East Melbourne, and on a hotel & shops in Lonsdale Street. A notice of May 1870 publicised the dissolution of the partnership with J.E. Austin.

In one of his more readily visible achievements, Kursteiner designed the mansion *Linden* at St Kilda in 1870 for Moritz Michaelis, a German born Jewish merchant. It remained in the Michaelis family until 1957 and was purchased by the St Kilda City Council in 1983 for use as a community art gallery. The pair of houses at 64-68 Napier Street, Fitzroy for Henry Raphael in 1869-1874 has been cited as 'the grandest residential design' by Kursteiner. Fritz did work elsewhere for Raphael, constructing two shops and dwellings in Little Lonsdale Street in 1871. The compiler of the Napier Street record notes that Kursteiner was an active architect in Fitzroy at this time. "In 1866 he undertook alterations to the Belvidere Hotel, now the Eastern Hill hotel, Brunswick Street, and was probably responsible for the upper floor facades which remain intact today. In 1870 he designed 14 cottages and 2 two storey houses in Mary Street Fitzroy and in 1871 designed 16 cottages and 4 stone houses, Mary Street Fitzroy. These are the unique group of houses in Greeves Street, Mary Street having become part of Greeves Street as from 1895. In 1871 he designed two houses in Victoria Parade, and there are other Fitzroy residences also designed by him." The terrace at 148 Victoria Parade, East Melbourne is one of a pair of houses that James Simeon Raphael erected for himself to the design of Kursteiner during 1880-1881.

With regard to his personal affairs, in April 1876 Kursteiner was saddened by the death of his wife Catherine at their residence 10 Palmer Street, Fitzroy aged just 38 years. He remarried in January 1885 to widow Margaret McRae (nee Munro) at the Presbyterian Manse in Carlton, but the union was short-lived, as Margaret died at East Melbourne in October 1886 aged 51 years.

Kursteiner designed a brick hotel at Euroa for M. McKenna in early 1889, but it appears that the severe recession on the east coast of Australia in the early 1890s drove Kursteiner back to Western Australia in search of work. An advertisement for Kursteiner & Dunn, Architects and Surveyors, appeared in *The West Australian* during September 1895: *Fritz Kursteiner, Deutscher Architect, lange zeit in Melbourne; Office, Stunden, Morgens von 10-12 Uhr, Nachmittags von 4-8 Uhr.* Kursteiner's working time in the west was again short-lived, as he was appointed a draughtsman with the West Australian Public Works Department in late 1895, but had resigned by February 1896.

With further interrogation of archival newspaper records etc, Kursteiner's contribution to Australian architecture would best be analysed in Victoria, where he was a successful architect in the forty year period c.1853-1893, and some knowledge of his work is already available from heritage documentation. Western Australian 'Births, Deaths and Marriages' records note the death of 'Frederick Alexander Kursteiner' in 1897 – a copy of the death certificate may reveal further details of his passing. Newspaper notices are not apparent, perhaps suggesting a pauper's burial.

#### References:

- 'Shipping Intelligence', *Inquirer*, 12 March 1851, p.2 (passengers of *Mary Ann* – 'Fritz Kerstlud').
- 'Shipping Intelligence', *Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News*, 14 March 1851, p.2 (*Mary Ann* passengers – 'F. Kerstind').
- 'A. Kursteiner Architect', *Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News*, 28 March 1851, p.1 (advertisement).
- 'Tenders', *Argus*, 19 March 1858, p.7 (Royal Hotel, Ohlfesen-Bagge & Kursteiner Architects).
- 'Law Report', *Argus*, 13 August 1858, p.6 (Bagge & Kursteiner Architects).
- Kursteiner, Alfred Friedrich, application for naturalisation of 18 February 1859, NAA series A712, control symbol 1859/K1403, barcode 1811576.
- 'Marriages', *Argus*, 13 September 1859, p.4 (marriage to Kate Mahoney at Unitarian Church).
- 'Tenders', *Argus*, 25 February 1861, p.8 (res J.A. Newnham cnr Gray & Burnett Sts St Kilda).

'Tenders', *Argus*, 23 February 1863, p.7 (additions St Kilda, residence Hanover St Fitzroy for James Hosie, public house for Caspar Marks).

'Melbourne Unitarian Christian Church', *Argus*, 5 March 1863, p.5 (church Gipps Street).

'Insolvent Court', *Argus*, 21 March 1867, p.6 (first and only meeting, A.F. Kursteiner surveyor).

'Tenders', *Argus*, 15 May 1869, p.3 (Austin & Kursteiner Architects - residences St Kilda, Albert St East Melbourne, hotel & shops Lonsdale St).

'Deaths', *Argus*, 31 August 1869, p.4 (death of mother at Basel).

'Public Notice', *Argus*, 18 May 1870, p.3 (dissolution of partnership with J.E. Austin).

*Telegraph St Kilda Prahran and South Yarra Guardian*, 6 January 1872, p.7 (cart accident).

'Fatal Road Accident at St Kilda', *Argus*, 16 January 1872, p.6 (death of architect Thos Taylor in cart accident, Kursteiner thrown clear).

'Tenders', *Argus*, 23 March 1872, p.7 (Vic. Fancy & Musical Repository Russell St, C.A. Mater).

'Der Melbournier Euruberein', *Sud Australische Zeitung*, 3 November 1874, p.8 (Kursteiner in Melbourne).

'Tenders', *Argus*, 26 May 1875, p.3 (alts adds Wellington St East Collingwood for S. Flatau).

'Deaths', *Argus*, 22 April 1876, p.1 (death of wife Catherine at 10 Palmer St Fitzroy aged 38).

'Marriages', *Launceston Examiner*, 10 January 1885, p.1 (2nd marriage, at Presbyterian Manse Carlton, to Margaret McRae nee Munro).

'Deaths', *Argus*, 14 October 1886, p.1 (second wife Margaret at East Melbourne aged 51).

'Tenders', *Euroa Advertiser*, 1 February 1889, p.2 (brick hotel at Euroa for M. McKenna).

'Bowling', *Fitzroy City Press*, 3 April 1891, p.3 (involvement with Fitzroy Bowling Club).

'Public Notices', *The West Australian*, 3 September 1895, p.7 (Kursteiner & Dunn).

Birth, death, marriage index at [www.bdm.dotag.wa.gov.au](http://www.bdm.dotag.wa.gov.au) (1897 death of Kursteiner).

Linden, St Kilda, [http://vhd.heritage.vic.gov.au/vhd/heritagevic#detail\\_places;1089](http://vhd.heritage.vic.gov.au/vhd/heritagevic#detail_places;1089)

'64-68 Napier Street', <http://applications.doi.vic.gov.au/ImageFactoryWeb/getfile>

148 Victoria Parade, East Melbourne, <http://www.onmydoorstep.com.au/heritage-listing/404/terrace>

Dictionary of Australian Artists Online at [www.daa.org.au](http://www.daa.org.au) (Melbourne Public Library facade).

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*Linden*, 23 Ackland Street, St Kilda ([www.walkingmelbourne.com](http://www.walkingmelbourne.com))



Austrian Consul Emil Thoneman's Residence, St Kilda (State Library of Victoria Acc No. H87.91/12 Image No. b47385.)