HISTORY

Previously published theories concerning the origin of this building suggest that it was constructed prior to the onset of closer settlement in the Samford region, possibly for the use of surveyors who were active in the area from 1864, but more likely as a stockman's hut. New evidence suggests, however, that the slab hut was built in or around 1869 for the selector and entrepreneur George Atthow (1828-1891). Atthow selected 126 acres of second-class pastoral land in the vicinity (Portions 42-45, Parish of Samford) on 17 April 1869 (Selection 307). Although these Portions were placed on sale from 8 March 1865, they were not attractive to those farmers who first sought to purchase land in the Samford Valley. Atthow was the senior member of a large and well-known Brisbane entrepreneurial family. His occupation is shown in various sources as 'grazier' and his selection documents confirm that the primary use of the Samford land was to graze cattle. He later selected additional land parcels in the Samford and
Albany Creek areas, also for grazing purposes. Many Samford families, including the Richards family who selected the neighbouring Portions 39, 40 and 41 in 1870, have referred to the pioneer hut as a 'shepherd’s hut', a description not inconsistent with the known land use in this area during the 1870s.

A selection inspection report of 18 October 1875 describes a "slab house, shingle roof, verandah in front, 2 rooms" and the accompanying sketch locates the building at its present site on Portion 42. We can be fairly certain that this is the first version of the pioneer slab hut and that it did not pre-date the selection. Atthow's bailiff resided on the selection from at least January 1870 to January 1873. By the time of the 18 October 1875 inspection, however, Atthow was living in the slab house. It seems likely that he added the two front rooms (under the verandah) and replaced the shingle roof with galvanised iron during the mid 1870s, or these may have been added by one of the subsequent owners: John Coe (1877-1880), Frederick George Coe (1880-1884) or Andrew Gordon (1884-1887). These additions were in place prior to the date of the Marks family's purchase of the property in 1887; an 1887 photograph shows clearly the sawn timber additions and the iron roof. Although the late Dr. Pat Marks had been advised that there was no indication from the rafters that the existing corrugated iron roof, fixed with hand-made nails, had been preceded by a shingle roof, alternative advice has indicated that re-arrangement or rebuilding of the rafters at the time of the installation of the iron roof could easily have removed any evidence of an earlier shingle roof. As early residents of the region invariably roofed their buildings with bark or shingles, the use of corrugated iron would have been highly unusual, given the relative remoteness of the site in the 1860s.

Pioneer Hut, Camp Mountain, 1887

It should also be noted that none of the early survey plans such as 'Plan of South Pine River, upwards from Cash’s 86 acres, 1864' (S31.48) or 'Plan of Portions 1-28 and 32-52, Parish of Samford, 1864' (S31.49) show any pre-existing buildings or tracks in this vicinity. By 1864,
large areas surrounding the South Pine River were traversed by a network of tracks, mainly used by timber-getters who were targeting the rainforested or 'vine scrub' areas for Red Cedar and Beech. The plans show that the area in the vicinity of the building, however, was relatively open country.

Much has been made of the fact that the original skillion-roofed rear extension (long since removed) reached almost to the Portion boundary fence in such a way that "nobody in his right mind would build his house so close to his boundary". This line of argument has, of course, been advanced to lend support to the idea that the building pre-dated survey and closer settlement. In countering this argument, surveyors have produced numerous plans where boundary fences, buildings, etc., have been built completely out of alignment with surveyed boundaries. The slab hut was also built on a small area of rising ground, close to the boundary line, which afforded an extensive view over the surrounding countryside. A careful examination of the surrounding terrain confirms the impression that it was the most logical place to site the building.

Hay Cottage in Dayboro has a similar history. It was built around 1872 by the selector/entrepreneur Ernest Augustus Morris Goertz to house his bailiff; it was not purchased by the Hay family until 1879.

Portion 42 and several adjoining sections were purchased by the Marks family in 1887 and became the nucleus of 'Cushleva' farm. The cottage, which remained in the hands of the family until recent times, became the first 'Cushleva' homestead. A pit nearby was used for storing cream, milk and other perishables.

SIGNIFICANCE

The building has major historical significance because of its age and is extremely rare for its type. It has major importance for its associations with the early settlement of Samford Valley, and as one of the Shire’s oldest buildings. The 2002 Archaeo Pine Rivers cultural heritage study recommended that the Pine Rivers Shire Council should negotiate with the owner to ensure that this very important building is preserved in situ.

REFERENCES


Queensland State Archives: Selection file 307, George Atthow; 31667.