

St Laurence's Anglican Church



Location: 12 Gibson Street, Whanganui
Heritage NZ Pouhere Taonga List Number: nil

Physical Description: the timber framed, gable roofed chapel has been designed with a symmetrical cross shaped plan, an apsidal chancel and a porch facing the street in line with the nave but narrower and with a lower roof. The church is designed in the Carpenter Gothic style, with steeply pitched roofs, simple lancet shaped windows and a fleche over the crossing.

Other known names: St. Lawrence's Anglican Church (in error)

Current Use: Church in recess

Former Uses: Anglican Church

Heritage Status: District Plan Class: Class B

Architectural Style: Carpenter Gothic **Date of Construction:** 1895

Materials: Painted timber rusticated weatherboards, coverboards and joinery, corrugated steel roofing with shingled fleche.

Registered owner:

Legal Description: PT SEC 22 RBWR

Register Item Number:

350

Building Type:

- Residential
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Recreation
- Institutional
- Agriculture
- Other

Significance:

- Archaeological
- Architectural
- Historic
- Scientific
- Technological
- Cultural

Thematic Context

- Early Settlement
- Residential
- Industry
- Agricultural
- Commerce
- Transport
- Civic/Admin
- Health
- Education
- Religion
- Recreation
- Community
- Memorials
- Military

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History: Much of the general history of St. Laurence's Anglican Church, Aramoho, is covered in the Rev. Colin Venimore's 1992 book *In the Steps of the Roasted Saint: a history of the Aramoho Parochial District*. However, the newspaper record is a vital resource for the early 'milestone' information on this church. This dilemma resulted in the church community itself overlooking its own fifty-year birthday by almost two years.

There is no indication as to why the church was named after 'St. Laurence', but this saint, also known as Lawrence of Rome (c225-258), was martyred for refusing to hand over the church riches to the prefect of Rome, and instead giving them to the poor, the crippled, the blind and the suffering. His particularly unpleasant manner of execution is recorded in Rev. Venimore's book – and seemingly the only occupation amongst his list of patronages that is applicable to 1890s Aramoho, is that he is the patron Saint of cooks.¹ Perhaps this is reflected by Venimore's repeated comments as to the relatively prominent role women played in the early years of this church. Undoubtedly one of these was Frances Stewart, the "social activist" wife of John Tiffin Stewart who designed the church (and who is said to have also donated the site).²

Venimore (p. 8) records that Maori missionaries introduced Christianity to Whanganui, and that the Rev. Henry Williams conducted the first Christian service in the area on 14th December 1838. He further records (pp. 10-11) that Rev. Richard Taylor described in his journal – dated 8th August 1844 – visiting the Christian pa at Aramoho to open a new chapel there. He described it as a "neat little building." However, it was burnt down by aggrieved Maori three years later.

By the mid-1890s, around 600 people lived at Aramoho, many of whom walked across the Aramoho Railway Bridge daily to work in the Eastown railway workshops. Meanwhile Aramoho School, which had opened in 1879, had, by 1897, 198 pupils on its roll, and an average of 166 children attending daily.³ Prior to 1895, the school buildings were also used for "regular" Anglican

¹ Wikipedia: Lawrence of Rome: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lawrence_of_Rome He is also the patron Saint of comedians, librarians, students, miners, tanners and roasters.

² Bronwyn Labrum, 'Stewart, Frances Ann, 1840-1916' in *The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, Vol. Two, 1870-1900* (Wellington, 1993), p. 480

³ *The Cyclopaedia of New Zealand*, Vol. I (Wellington, 1897), pp. 1347 & 1352

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services.⁴ The *Wanganui Chronicle* of 30 July 1886 (p. 2) outlines the curate's annual report on behalf of the Wanganui Parochial District. This mentions a new organ harmonium having been obtained for Aramoho. However, it does not state where the instrument would be located.

Most of Venimore's remarks on the lead-up to the building of St. Laurence's Church are of necessity generalised and speculative. He found that no Christ Church Vestry minute books had survived from between July 1878 and July 1895. Rev. T.L. Tudor had ministered there for nineteen years - his last recorded service being on 4th June 1893. The Rev. T.B. Maclean followed him, and Venimore comments that "*From quite early in his term of office there are signs that Aramoho is beginning to be looked at in terms of a separate ministry.*" Venimore considered that the vicar would have been fully taxed to minister to communities outside town, and that the limited number of services held at Aramoho had apparently not satisfied the local people.⁵

Venimore (p, 26) discovered the Christ Church Vestry Minutes to be "strangely" silent on both the building of St. Laurence's and on its opening. He wondered if it had been "a purely Aramoho Project."

The issue of *St. Laurence's and St. Oswald's Church News: Jubilee Number*, published in November 1947, states that the church was built on land donated for the purpose by John T. Stewart. However, this has not yet been verified and some mixing of Stewart's and fellow surveyor, Mr H.C. Field's contributions to the early church is evident. However, the large Stewart family had owned a 17-acre property at Aramoho, upon which they had built a house they named 'Haumoana'.⁶

The local newspapers record a little on the construction of the church. For example, the *Wanganui Chronicle* of 22nd April 1895 (p. 2) records that: "*A meeting of the members of the Church of England at or near Aramoho is to be held in the schoolroom, Aramoho, tomorrow evening at 8 o'clock for the purpose of approving of plans for the church building and to authorise money for building*

⁴ Venimore, Colin, *In the Steps of the Roasted Saint: a history of the Aramoho Parochial District* (Wanganui, 1992), p. 23: *Wanganui Chronicle*, 29 July 1895, p. 2

⁵ Venimore, pp. 22-23

⁶ Labrum, p. 480

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the same.” The edition of 29th July 1895 (p. 2), when outlining Christ Church’s balance sheet (which was to be presented to the annual meeting of parishioners a few days later), stated that: *“The new church at Aramoho will be completed by October 1st.”*

Finally, on 9th November 1895 (p. 2) the *Wanganui Chronicle* announced that: *“Tomorrow the new church at Aramoho, which has been named St. Laurence, will be opened with special services. At 11 there will be Matins and Holy Communion, the preacher being the Rev. T.B. Maclean. In the afternoon the service will be conducted by the Ven. Archdeacon Towgood, and on this occasion the members of the Christ Church Choir will assist Evening service will be at 7 o’clock, the preacher being the Rev. A.O. Williams. The new church of St. Laurence is situated close to the River Bank and is seated for about 120 persons. Liberal donations have been made towards its cost, but there is a balance unpaid. The offertories at all services tomorrow will therefore be for the building fund.”*

Three days later the same newspaper recorded the opening event in detail – but (as would often happen thereafter) misspelt the name of the new church as “St. Lawrence”. The article described the building as being neat and substantial and situated in Gibson Road halfway between the Aramoho Schoolhouse and the riverbank. *“It had been erected by Mr Meuli, from plans by Mr J.T. Stewart, and is constructed to seat about 120 persons. It is nicely furnished, the reading desk being subscribed for in England by friends of some of the congregation, and the communion table, chancel carpet, lectern and a very excellent harmonium, being also gifts from the worshippers; while the alter cloth drapes for the super-alter, reading desk and lectern, and also the book markers and the bags for collecting the offertories are very handsome specimens of needlework, by ladies of the congregation.”*

The article then went on to describe the three services held in the church during the opening day. For the morning service, the church had been *“quite full though not inconveniently so”* For the afternoon service, *“the church was crowded, there being extra persons in every seat, and forms placed along the aisle, and even the chancel steps being fully occupied by worshippers. (With) some members of the Christ Church choir and the organist it was estimated that nearly 200 persons also assisted with the musical portion of the service.”* The evening

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service "was again crowded, but not quite so much as in the afternoon, when (almost 200) were present. Eloquent services were preached at all three services, at which the members of the congregation were commended for the earnest manner in which they had worked together in erecting the church, and congratulated on the results of their efforts. The offertories, which were for the building fund, realised £15 11s 9d."⁷

The first two baptisms at the new church – both babies - occurred six days later. The next two sets of baptisms, both family groups (two Maconochies' and four Lethbridges') occurred the following April. As the children in each family were of a range of ages (but each including a newborn), Venimore suggests it might not have been easy for some families to get their young children from Upper Aramoho to Christ Church for baptism with the transport limitations of the time.⁸

Venimore notes that at the Annual Meeting held on 28th July 1898, women were granted equal rights with men as regards voting at parish meetings. A similar resolution was passed at the 1899 Annual Meeting, with a copy of the resolution to be sent to the Bishop of the Diocese. Venimore wondered if these efforts placed them in the forefront of a Diocesan movement to accord women equality in Church affairs.⁹

The church was under pressure in terms of space almost from the start, and in 1898, when alterations were made to Christ Church, the old portico was to be donated to St. Laurence's Church. It is thought that this may be the vestry on the right side of the church, its old-style door perhaps also coming from Christ Church.¹⁰

On 16th November 1899, a garden party was held at Mrs Haywood's Aramoho Tea Gardens, "*the returns of which are to aid the completion of St. Laurence's Church.*" An auction was also held that night in aid of church funds.¹¹

The first wedding held at the church was that of Frank Haywood and Annie

⁷ *Wanganui Chronicle*, 12 November 1895, p.2

⁸ Venimore, p. 26

⁹ Venimore, p. 27

¹⁰ Wendy Pettigrew, File No: Ara1, Wanganui District Heritage Inventory draft file No: Ara1 (Wanganui District Council Archives)

¹¹ *Wanganui Chronicle*, 16 November 1899, p. 2

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Wood. They married there on 19 January 1900, and subsequently remained long-term members of the church. Frank Haywood's mother operated the popular aforementioned Aramoho Tea Gardens. For the occasion, *"an artistic archway of toi-toi and greenery was erected at the (church's) gate, the main entrance to the pretty little church was similarly festooned, and another and more massive archway of flowers was constructed in the centre of the aisle, a striking feature of the latter being a dainty floral horse-shoe suspended by a silken cord."* The happy couple honeymooned in England.¹²

The *Wanganui Herald* of 13 November 1900 (p. 2) records the decision of the members of St. Laurence's to complete the church *"in accordance with the original plan. At present only the nave has been built. The plan provides for two vestries in the form of transepts, a chancel and a spire. The building, when completed, will be a great ornament to the rising suburb of Aramoho. A good sum is already in hand toward this work, but the congregation is anxious not to incur any debt, and desire to have the whole of the estimated cost in hand before commencing to build."* To this end, they had arranged a Flower and General show at Mrs Haywood's Aramoho Gardens, complete with the Wanganui Garrison Band.

The Aramoho- Waitotara Parochial District

Venimore considered that the difficulty in finding suitable assistance clergy was a factor behind plans made in 1902 to split the parish. For example, in early 1900, the church's curate, the Rev. J.G.S. Bartlett resigned, and replacing him proved difficult. By April 1901, a "layhelp", Mr Aston was recommended to take over the role in the expectation he would in due course be ordained. However, he also resigned (by which time he was a deacon) in May 1902.¹³

At a well-attended meeting of the congregation on 26th February 1902, the vicar, the Rev. T.B. Maclean, put to those present *"a project which amounted to constituting a new parish out of the outlying parts of the Christ Church parish and the adjacent portions of the Waitotara parochial district, and to appoint an experienced clergyman in charge."* Maclean outlined the ability of the immediate Aramoho community to contribute to the clergyman's stipend – to which Mr Field objected strongly as the church community *"were trying just now to raise a*

¹² Venimore, p. 202; *Wanganui Chronicle* 19 January 1900, p. 2

¹³ Venimore, pp. 28-29

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small balance ... to pay for the recent enlargements, and that there was an original debt which had to be paid off before the church could be consecrated." He thought they should get out of debt before burdening themselves with further liability. During the discussion, Mr J.T. Stewart suggested testing the church community's view on subscriptions toward paying a clergyman's subscription, and *"a number of the ladies agreed to act as canvassers."*¹⁴

Thus at a Vestry meeting on 20th April 1902, the vicar (the Rev. T.B. Maclean) outlined a proposal to separate Aramoho, Mosstown and Castlecliff. The intention was that the clergyman would reside at Aramoho, although initially under the jurisdiction of the Vicar of Christ Church. In due course, the Rev. E.T.W. Bond was appointed to this new position, and Venimore (p. 29) comments that the Christ Church Vestry minutes are silent on this matter for the next two years. He assumed this to mean that things were working out satisfactorily.

The first minutes relating to an Aramoho Church Committee are for a meeting held at the church on 3rd May 1904. Of those present, Venimore (p. 29) comments: *"Three women on the committee! The Aramoho parishioners were definitely in advance of their time."*

Various thoughts were put forward on how to separate the Aramoho church from the mother church. Finally, on 31 August 1905, the vicar advised the Aramoho parishioners that the *"Synod had debated the matter and resolved that as Aramoho-Waitotara parochial district should be formed."* The surprised parishioners objected strongly to the way their proposals had been set aside by the Synod in terms of the way the boundaries were set out. St. Laurence's Church was not to return to Christ Church Parish until 1972.¹⁵ Venimore (p. 34) notes with sadness that the subsequent members of the new Vestry were all male. *"Where are those ladies who served so faithfully (on) the former St. Laurence's Church Committee?"*

¹⁴ Venimore, p. 29; *Wanganui Chronicle*, 27 February 1902, p. 2

¹⁵ Venimore, pp.30-31

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Further boundary changes came into effect on 1st May 1910, when (with the addition of Brunswick, Westmere, Kai Iwi, Rapanui and Raorika) the new Parochial District of Aramoho was constituted.¹⁶

The minutes of the annual meetings of the Aramoho-Waitotara Parochial District were often published in the local newspapers, and some of these provide relevant information for this study. For example, the 1908 minutes record that Mr D. Harding had paid off the church's debt of £50. However, no mention was found during this study of the date when the church was consecrated – despite Mr Field's abovementioned comment from February 1902 that the church had not yet been consecrated due to the unpaid original debt.¹⁷ At the 1911 annual meeting, consideration was given to building a new church and converting the old one into a Sunday School.¹⁸ However, the 1915 annual meeting reveals that a new Sunday School had instead been built by volunteer labour at a cost of £165.¹⁹

In mid-1947, church members suddenly realised that their church was due for its Fiftieth Jubilee. However, after publicly announcing the celebratory festival, it was realised that the church was in fact almost fifty-two years old! The problem was caused by the lack of available information from its earliest years. The festival went ahead anyway, but with the official age corrected.²⁰

St. Laurence's Church celebrated its Centenary in 1995. However, the Christ Church website indicates that it is now in recess.²¹

Some Additions and Alterations to the Church (excluding hall & vicarages)

1901 – Church completed to original plan which added two vestries in the form of transepts, a chancel and a spire, to what had previously been just the nave.²²

1904 – A picket fence to be built in front of the church “not to exceed five pounds.” A sketch dated 1900 shows such a fence already there. The topic reappeared the minutes in 1906, with the estimate sought to include a gate this

¹⁶ Venimore, p. 51

¹⁷ *Wanganui Chronicle* 27 February 1902, p. 2, 4 May 1908, p. 7

¹⁸ *Wanganui Chronicle*, 3 May 1911, p. 5

¹⁹ *Wanganui Chronicle*, 1 May 1915, p. 7

²⁰ Venimore, pp. 200-203

²¹ <http://www.christchurchwanganui.org.nz/churches/st-laurences>

²² *Wanganui Herald*, 13 November 1900, p. 2

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time.²³

1907 – Gas lights replace oil lamps. A gas lamp was also installed at the church gate in 1909.²⁴

1950-1952 – Wallpaper removed from sanctuary and eventually left as wood.²⁵

1951-1953 – New porch planned, built and dedicated. Architect: Mr Hodge. Builder: Mr Madder. Cost: Over £200.²⁶

The church's designer, civil engineer, John Tiffin Stewart, moved to Aramoho in 1889 - his large home there being called 'Haumoana'. He is widely recognised as a senior surveyor throughout the Lower North Island in the latter 1800s. His work included laying out and completing the Manawatu Gorge Road (a task believed at the time to have been impossible), and supervising the subdivision of Palmerston North, Feilding, Halcombe and Rongotea – all of which are noted for their large town-squares. He was appointed district engineer for the Public Works Department in 1870, being in charge of the Hawkes Bay, Taranaki and Wanganui Districts. In 1885 he transferred to Wanganui, where he retired as district engineer in 1889. However, he remained active in the community, including in a range of roles linked to his considerable civil engineering skills. Stewart had designed most of the road and railway bridges in Manawatu and Rangitikei.

His wife, Frances Stewart, was very active in the community, including being president of the local division of the St. John's Ambulance Association, being very well-known for her association (with her husband) with the Wanganui Orphanage, and the first superintendent of the new Anglican Sunday Schools at Christ Church and Aramoho. Amongst her many prominent roles, she also advocated women's participation in church and school affairs.²⁷

The Stewarts left Aramoho in about 1908, after building a large house that J.T. Stewart had designed himself, on the corner of Campbell and Plymouth Streets.²⁸ J.T. Stewart died on 19 April 1913, and this house, in accordance with

²³ Venimore, pp. 30, 37

²⁴ Venimore, p. 38

²⁵ Venimore, p. 335

²⁶ Venimore, pp. 226, 230-231, 338

²⁷ Labrum, p. 480

²⁸ 'John Tiffin Stewart' by his granddaughter, Barbara Marshall (nee Stewart) <http://horowhenua.kete.net.nz/site/topics/show/218-john-tiffin-stewart> (This article refers to J.T. Stewart having designed the house used by Karitane.)

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his Will, was left to the Plunket Society after his wife's death. It subsequently became a Karitane training hospital - following Frances Stewart's death in 1916. The hospital closed in July 1978, and the present use of the house, which is at 57 Plymouth Street, has not been researched.²⁹ There are no other known buildings designed by J.T. Stewart listed in his biographical material.³⁰

The Swiss-born contractor who built the church, Nicholas Meuli, also built the Wanganui Municipal Opera House (now Royal Wanganui Opera House) in 1899-1900³¹; St. Joseph's Catholic Church, Aramoho in 1907³², and buildings at Wanganui Collegiate School.³³ His son, Sergeant-Major Lorenz Meuli, was killed in action in France on 22 August 1918, and in his memory, his father presented Lorenzdale Park to the Gonville Town Board on 11 November 1923. This was the same day that the Wanganui War Memorial was unveiled. Nicholas Meuli died in 1926.³⁴

Architect/Designer: John Tiffin Stewart (& E.R. Hodge for 1951-53 porch)

History of changes:

1895 – Built as nave only

1901 – Added two vestries in the form of transepts, a chancel and a spire.

1950-52 - Wallpaper removed from sanctuary and eventually left as wood

1951-53 – New porch planned, built & dedicated.

Date Period: 1890s

²⁹ Joyce Powell, *A suitable Job for Young Ladies: The Karitane Story 1907 to 2007* (Palmerston North, 2007), pp. 18-21, 88, 90

³⁰ *Wanganui Chronicle*, 21 April 1913, p.4; Athol Kirk. 'Stewart, John Tiffin, 1827-1913, in *The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, Vol. Two, 1870-1900* (Wellington, 1993), p. 482.

³¹ *Wanganui Chronicle*, (including) 13 April 1899, p. 2, 13 July 1899, p.2, 14 July 1899, p. 2 & 10 February 1900, p.2

³² *Wanganui Herald*, 11 March 1907, p.7 & 2 September 1907, p.7

³³ *Wanganui Chronicle*, 23 April 1919, p.5

³⁴ *Wanganui Chronicle*, 13 September 1918, p.4; *Hawera & Normanby Star*, 13 November 1923, p.6; Nicholas Meuli death registration reference: www.bdm.govt.nz

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Rarity / Special Features:

Integrity: The church has been the subject of alterations and additions including an early addition of two vestries. Other modifications other than the addition of a new porch in the 1950s the building appears to have retained many of its original features.

Representativeness:

Context/Group Value: Associated with other early Christ Church Parish churches – especially St. Peter's (Gonville) and St. John's Lutheran Church. Also with the former Stewart house at 57 Plymouth Street (former Karitane Hospital), these being the only buildings now known to have been designed by J.T. Stewart.

Diversity (Form and Features):

Fragility / Vulnerability: As a timber church, it is potentially vulnerable to fire.

Summary of Significance:

Archaeological Qualities

The building is pre-1900 and should be considered as an 'archaeological site' as defined by the HPA 1993.

Architectural Qualities

The architectural style of the building is typical for churches of the period. The Carpenter Gothic style is a simplified version of standard gothic of European churches of mediaeval period. It has steeply pitched gabled roofs, simple lancet shaped windows and designed in symmetrical cross shaped plan completed 1901. Fleche over the crossing (not proper spire).

Planning of church is also typical of period entry knave, chancel and vestries on either side of knave in the form of transepts.

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The builder Nicholas Meuli was a well-known builder in the District having constructed significant structures such as the Opera House and certain of the Wanganui Collegiate buildings.

Historic Qualities

The building is associated with JT Stewart a significant figure in the District with his construction and surveying expertise and with his wife who strongly promoted the role of women in the Church.

Cultural Qualities

The church has been in use since 1895 and will have strong spiritual and social meaning for many of the community.

Reference Source:

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Pettigrew, Wendy, *File No. Ara1*, Wanganui District Heritage Inventory draft file, 'St. Laurence's Church, Aramoho' (Wanganui District Council Archives)

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Venimore, Colin, *In the Steps of the Roasted Saint: a history of the Aramoho Parochial District* (Wanganui, 1992)

The Cyclopaedia of New Zealand, Vol. I (Wellington, 1897)

St. Laurence's and St. Oswald's Church News: Jubilee Number, published in November 1947

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Also newspapers and online articles as referred to in the footnotes.

Associated Pictures:

Date of Survey: 2012

Prepared by: Ian Bowman and Val Burr