

## Bastia Hill Water Tower



**Location:** 13 Bastia Avenue, Whanganui  
**Heritage NZ Pouhere Taonga List Number:** 970

**Physical Description:** The structure has a circular, domed, concrete water tower at the top and is supported on eight rectangular, splayed concrete columns. Under the tower are three concrete floors, each with concrete balustrading and the tank and each level are accessed by a central concrete

Register Item Number:

38

**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

# Built Heritage Inventory



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spiral stair. The lowest floor is supported on arches between the columns as is the tower floor level. The second level from the ground is supported on a slender central column and matching horizontal beam between each column. The third level is similar except the beam is a shallow arch. The outer perimeter of the tank has a tall arcade which supports and dome. The base of the dome has a cornice with dentils.

**Other known names:**

**Current Use:** Water tower

**Former Uses:**

**Heritage Status:** Heritage NZPT List **District Plan Zoning: Class B**  
(Cat. 2)

**Architectural Style:** Neo-Romanesque **Date of Construction:** 1927

**Materials:** Reinforced concrete, metal roofing?

**Registered owner:**

**Legal Description:** Lots 19-21 & Trig Res DP 2448

**History:** The problems of supplying water to the Durie Hill suburb were first raised as an issue 1916.<sup>1</sup> The low pressure was barely enough to provide water to the private houses and there was insufficient flow for fire purposes.<sup>2</sup> Mr J. K. Law appeared as a deputationist before the Borough Council to present the only solution – a water tower on either Durie Hill or Bastia Hill.<sup>3</sup>

In 1919, the Borough Engineer, Mr. N. Crofton Staveley, submitted a report to the Borough Council recommending the construction of a 100 foot high water tower on Bastia Hill.<sup>4</sup> The tower would contain up to 200,000 gallons of water and would be fitted with a high-pressure mechanical filter.<sup>5</sup> The tower would be supplied with water from the Westmere Reservoir, a distance of approximately 4 and a half miles.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Wanganui Chronicle* 6/09/16 p.4

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Wanganui Chronicle* 13/2/1919.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

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Construction of the water tower began in 1925.<sup>7</sup> It was an ambitious project, with the proposed height of the tower being 100 feet, making it the biggest in the Southern hemisphere at the time and the extent of ornamentation on the tower.<sup>8</sup> The project was controversial from its inception and increasing time delays and costs did little to deter public criticisms.<sup>9</sup> The tower took two year to build, with the last section of the tower completed in July 1927.<sup>10</sup> Soon after completion, the tower was used to supply water to firefighters.<sup>11</sup>

Structural repairs were undertaken on the tower in 1996 and 1997.<sup>12</sup>

**Architect/Designer:** N Crofton Staveley (City Engineer)

**History of changes:**

**Date Period:** 1927, 1996, 1997

**Rarity / Special Features:** The neo-romanesque style is unusual for a utility structure as it has strong architectural appeal. At the time it was constructed it was the highest water tower in the Southern Hemisphere.

**Integrity:** From a visual inspection only the structure is in tact. A number of aerials have been placed on the building via various resource consents and this to some extent from a visual perspective detracts from the tower.

**Representativeness:** The general form and structure of the tower are likely to be typical.

**Context/Group Value:** The tower is one of two landmark towers highly visible from Wanganui.

**Diversity (Form and Features):**

**Fragility / Vulnerability:** As a concrete structure, it is potentially vulnerable to earthquake damage

<sup>7</sup> *Wanganui Chronicle* 31/1/1925 p.5

<sup>8</sup> *Wanganui Chronicle* 20/2/1926 p.6; *Wanganui Chronicle* 16/10/1926 p.6)

<sup>9</sup> For example, *Wanganui Chronicle* 28/04/1919.

<sup>10</sup> *Wanganui Chronicle* 28/7/1927 p.6.

<sup>11</sup> *Wanganui Chronicle* 8/11/1927 p.6)

<sup>12</sup> *Wanganui Chronicle* 23/2/1996; *Wanganui Chronicle* 9/5/1997.

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## Summary of Significance:

### **Architectural Qualities**

The design of the tower is unusual, if not unique in its use of the Romanesque style, more usually associated with churches. As a highly visible structure, it is a landmark on the skyline of Whanganui.

The structure is associated with N Crofton Staveley the Wanganui City Engineer.

### **Historic Qualities**

The construction of the water tower reflects the history of infrastructure development of Whanganui and, as was common, came about because of a concern about the lack of water supply and pressure to fight fires.

### **Technical Qualities**

As the tallest water tower in the southern hemisphere, it was a considerable technical achievement for the period.

### **Cultural Qualities**

The tower is a landmark in Whanganui as it is highly visible.

## Reference Source:

NZHPT Buildings File

*Wanganui Chronicle*

## Associated Pictures:

*Date of Survey: 2012*

*Prepared by: Ian Bowman and Nick Cable*