

## Cinema 3 (Embassy Theatre)



**Location:** 34 Victoria Avenue, Whanganui  
**Heritage NZ Pouhere Taonga List Number:** nil

**Physical Description:** The visible street elevation of the theatre shows a symmetrical elevation of rendered Art Deco decorative elements either side of a central curved and pleated pediment. The decorative elements divide the elevation vertically and horizontally with plain panels and others with chevrons and angled glazed elements. The ground floor is glazed and has pairs of glazed double entry doors.

**Other known names:** Embassy Theatre, Joseph Paul & Co's, National Mutual Life Association State Theatre

**Current Use:** Cinema

**Former Uses:** Drapery Emporium, offices

**Heritage Status:** District Plan: Old Town Area, Class B, 2013

**Architectural Style:** Art Deco **Date of Construction:** 1903

**Materials:** Painted cement render, glazing and timber joinery

Register Item Number:

383

**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



WHANGANUI  
DISTRICT COUNCIL  
Te Kaunihera a Rohe o Whanganui

## Registered owner:

**Legal Description:** Pt Secs 61 & 62 Town of Wanganui, Lots 1, 4, 5, 6, 7

**History:** The building was originally known as **Paul's**, a drapery and clothing store run by **Joseph Paul & Co.**<sup>1</sup> It was designed in 1903 by Thomas Harvey James, a local architect also responsible for the Wanganui Rowing Club and a number of other central city buildings from the 1900s.<sup>2</sup> It was built by John Randal and John Jones.<sup>3</sup>

Joseph Paul (1838 -1904) was a well-known draper from Wellington and Nelson who arrived in Wanganui during in the 1880s. He was born in Dunpole, Somerset and served an apprenticeship in the drapery trade before moving to London.<sup>4</sup> After a brief stay in Canada, he left for New Zealand in 1859.<sup>5</sup> Paul settled in Nelson and established a drapery business there with his brother Edmund.<sup>6</sup> He moved to the West Coast for four years and was engaged in the shipping trade.<sup>7</sup> He was, for a time, owner of the steamer "Murray".<sup>8</sup> After this, he briefly tried his hand at farming, before shifting to Wellington and entering into partnership with McDowell & Co.<sup>9</sup> In 1875 Paul started his own business in Cuba Street.<sup>10</sup> In 1879 he moved to Wanganui where he purchased the bankrupt stock of H. L. Nicholas & Co.<sup>11</sup> The venture proved successful and he went on to purchase the business and premises of Cass & Co. on Taupo Quay, later occupied by the Union Bank (Fosters).<sup>12</sup> In 1903 he moved to new premises in Victoria Avenue. However, soon after this he died suddenly at his home of "Riverlands" on 25th August 1904.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Wanganui Chronicle* 2/11/1903.

<sup>2</sup> W. Pettigrew 2004. Wanganui District Heritage Inventory.

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

<sup>4</sup> *Wanganui Herald* 25/08/1904.

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

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

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid. Wanganui Chronicle* 23/04/1880

<sup>12</sup> *Wanganui Herald* 25/08/1904; *Wanganui Chronicle* 7/02/1881.

<sup>13</sup> *Colonist* 25/08/1904

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Paul was a well-known local identity and was a principal shareholder in the Loan and Mercantile Company, Wanganui Sash and Door Company, Wanganui Freezing Company and various other local concerns.<sup>14</sup>

The business, Joseph Paul & Co. continued to be operated by the remaining Paul family until at least the 1920s.

By the 1930s, the insurance firm **National Mutual Life Association** had purchased the building. The National Mutual Life Association of Australasia Ltd had formed in Victoria in 1869 by J. M. Templeton as a life assurance business for the colonies.<sup>15</sup> The New Zealand branch of the association opened in 1880 and spread rapidly.<sup>16</sup> The head office was located in Wellington although the district manager William Linguard was based in Wanganui.<sup>17</sup> The NMLA continues today as AXXA Insurance.

A building permit was sought for alterations in 1933.<sup>18</sup> The alterations were carried out by John Jones and Son and cost £1016 and required 2 cubic yards of concrete and 2000 bricks.<sup>19</sup> A 1934 plan of the changes is signed by R.G. Talboys & Associates, Architects and Structural Engineers.<sup>20</sup>

The building was not converted into a picture theatre until 1950.<sup>21</sup> Plans were drawn up by H. Francis Willis and C. Newton Hood, associated registered architects.<sup>22</sup> These plans identified the new name of the building as the **State Theatre** for National Mutual Life Association Amalgamated Theatres Ltd.<sup>23</sup> A prominent facade was built on the front of the building with the writing "National Mutual Life" and "State" in italics above entrance. It was later renamed the **Embassy Theatre**.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Wanganui Herald* 25/08/1904.

<sup>15</sup> *Cyclopedia of New Zealand* [Wellington District] 1897. Cyclopedia Company Ltd, Wellington.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Building Permit application 248. Wanganui District Building File.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Deposited Plan, dated 3 Jan 1934. Wanganui District Council Building File.

<sup>21</sup> W. Pettigrew 2004.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Deposited Plan, not dated. Wanganui District Council Building File.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

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The theatre was modernised in 1994 and reopened as the Cinema 3 Complex. Substantial alterations were completed by Bruce Dickson (Dickson Lonergan Ltd), including the present Art Deco upper facade and internal alterations.<sup>25</sup>

**Architect/Designer:** T.H. James / John Randel & John Jones

**History of changes:**

1903 Building constructed as a drapery emporium.

1933 alterations in concrete and brick for NMLA (now Axxa).

1950 conversion into picture theatre, facade added to front.

1994 modernisation of the theatre, new 'Art Deco' styled facade added.

**Date Period:** 1900s

**Rarity / Special Features:**

**Integrity:** From a brief visual inspection the building appears in a fair condition.

**Representativeness:**

**Context/Group Value:** The building is associated with a number of significant heritage buildings in the OTCOZ.

**Diversity (Form and Features):**

**Fragility / Vulnerability:** The building could potentially be vulnerable to earthquake damage.

**Summary of Significance:**

**Architectural Qualities**

The building has had an interesting history having been originally a drapery built in 1903 and then converted into a theatre in 1950 using a style common two decades prior.

**Historic Qualities**

The building is associated with a number of firms including Paul's Drapery, NMLA and State Theatre, as well as the various architects who have been involved with the building during the twentieth century including TH James, RG Talboys and H. Francis Willis and C. Newton Hood, associated registered

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

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architects.

## **Technical Qualities**

It is presumed that the building was constructed using typical materials and techniques for the period.

## **Cultural Qualities**

In its current form as a theatre, the building has sentimental qualities for the many patrons attending screenings of movies.

## **Reference Source:**

W. Pettigrew 2004. Wanganui District Heritage Inventory - B5-19.

Wanganui District Council Building files:

- Wanganui Borough Council Register of Building Permits
- Wanganui Borough Council 1908 Insurance Assessment Plan

Cyclopedia of New Zealand [Wellington District] 1897. Cyclopedia Company Ltd, Wellington

*Wanganui Herald*

*Colonist*

*Wanganui Chronicle*

## **Associated Pictures:**

Date of Survey: 2012

Prepared by: Ian Bowman & Nick Cable