



Whanganui Heritage Inventory

Whanganui County Council

Item Number: 400

Administration Centre 7 Rutland Street, Whanganui

Former Names: Wanganui County Council Offices, Cosmopolitan Club Library

Legal Description: Pt Section 85, Town of Wanganui

Certificate of Title: WN 141/119 issued 8 Sept 1905

Current Owner: Whanganui District Council

Original Owner: Wanganui County Council

Date: 1913 (completed 1914)

Architect/Designer: AC Mannington, County Engineer

Location of Original Plans: Copies on WDC Building file & with BSM Group Architects.

Builder: JW Alderton

District Plan Class: Class B, 2013, in Old Town Conservation Area



The former Wanganui County Council building on Rutland Street.

History:

Of the site:

- 1895: The site with a house been owned from 1895 Marion McCaul, wife of Wanganui Commission Agent, George McCaul until she transferred it to George Stannard Gordon in 1907.
- 1907: The wooden building on this part of Section 85 was previously occupied by J Lain Poys' **Chinese laundry**. In August 1907, another Chinese laundryman, Wah Lee, moved here when he was burnt out of his Victoria

Avenue premises. At the time, Mr Wah Lee advertised that “he makes a speciality of washing and ironing shirts and collars.” By 1914, Wah Lee’s laundry was located around the corner in Wicksteed Place, in the small brick building between the Chronicle and the Backhouse buildings.

Of the building:

1913: The building was constructed as offices for **Wanganui County Council**, which had previously operated from various rented premises since its inception in 1876 following the abolition of Wellington Province. The Council agreed to raise a £2,000 loan in 1913 to construct a two-storied office building in Rutland Street (then known as Campbell Place). Plans were prepared by the County Clerk and Engineer, AC Mannington and agreed by Councillors in August. The *Wanganui Chronicle*, 2 August 1913, enthused that “the front elevation will have an imposing appearance. The brick facings will be relieved with stucco plasters, pediments and entablature...from an architectural standpoint, the building will be a decided acquisition to the town.” The building was to provide accommodation for the County Council on the ground floor, including their boardroom and offices. A strongroom with a Milner “Thief-Resisting” safe door was installed on the ground floor. Two office suites upstairs were to be rented out to provide income to service the loan. The ceilings and walls throughout the interior were to be finished with asbestos sheets picked out in panels.

The building permit was issued 21 August 1913 to Wanganui builder, JW Alderton, for a 9-room brick office building estimated to cost £1,389.

1914: Construction work on the new county chambers was completed early in 1914. A commemorative banquet was held on 25 March 1914 to celebrate the opening of the new offices, held in the boardroom with catering by Dustin’s. This gentlemen-only occasion was attended by a number of local dignitaries and local body representatives, although the Minister of Public Works and local MPs were unable to be present. Many toasts were drunk, memories of old times revived and songs sung by members of the official party.

1950s: Little work requiring a building permit appears to have been done on the building while it was County Council offices. In 1956, a space heater was installed in the front office (ground floor) and minor additions were made to the rear extension building, which probably housed toilets but the plans are not clear. New interior partitions have been put in place, probably in the 1950s, but no record of this work is on the Building File. The ground floor boardroom must have been changed at some time, possibly when more office space was required for Council officials, and the boardroom moved to the first floor.

Wanganui County Council remained in the Rutland Street building until it decided to join forces with Waitotara County Council to build new office premises in Wanganui. These were opened in February 1984 in upper Victoria Avenue. The two counties decided to merge as of January 1988, but subsequent local government reorganisation resulted in the abolition of the county councils and the establishment of Wanganui District Council.

- 1984: The **Cosmopolitan Club** purchased the building from the County Council to serve as their Library. The Club had established its library for members in 1898, moving into their new Rutland Street/Drews Avenue premises in August 1900, from which time the library was on the first floor of the Club building. The Cosmopolitan Club built new premises in Ridgway Street in 1979 [WHAT HAPPENED TO LIBRARY FOR 5 YEARS?]. The Club's fortunes were at a low ebb at the time, but by 1985 they had 2,300 members and the organisation was enjoying a surge in popularity.
- 1986: The Cosmopolitan Club made alterations to the building in 1986, by which time there was a caretaker's flat in the front rooms on the first floor with a boardroom on the first floor. These alterations would have included putting in suspended ceilings and making some changes to partitions.
- 1994: The Cosmopolitan Club moved its library to the Ridgway Street premises. The Wanganui Regional Community Polytechnic took out a caveat on the building, reserving it for their future needs.
- 1996: Minor alterations were undertaken (Architects: Southcombe McLean) to provide office space for **Quay School of the Arts Administration**.

Description of Heritage Features:

Exterior:

This two-storey brick building still has its original plastered front elevation, with pedimented openings and other classical features. The name "Wanganui County Council" and date "1913" are still in place. The other exterior masonry walls are original, as are the four chimneys (which is most unusual as many have been taken down in other similar buildings). The double-hung sash windows are original, as is the front door.

Interior:

The staircase with its match-lining to dado level is original, as are the banisters on either side. The matai floors are intact (some covered by carpet) and two offices have their original timber mantelpieces. Many of the doors and their door furniture are original. The Council strongroom, manufactured by Milner as one of the "Thief-Resisting" safes, now serves as a storage area for files.

The Architect:

Alfred Clement Mannington (1867-1960) was born in Battle, Sussex, England and emigrated to New Zealand in 1888. He settled in Whangarei at first, then moved south to the Wanganui area in the early 1890s and took up farming at Mangamahu, having bought a 300 acre block of land on Creek Road. While little is known of his educational background, he had some engineering training in England and became clerk and engineer for the Upper Whangaehu Road Board, designing the Mangamahu Creek Bridge which was built of totara in 1895. He was then chairman of the Mangamahu Road Board from 1909 to 1912 when he moved to Wanganui to become clerk and engineer to the County Council. It was in this role that he designed the new County Council offices in 1913. Mannington's stay in Wanganui was brief, however, as he moved north in 1915 to become engineer to Hokianga County. He later returned to farming near Whangarei and died in Otahuhu aged 93.

Resources Consulted:

Wanganui District Council Building File for 7 Rutland St:

Includes copy of 1913 plan for building; no other papers until 1956.

Wanganui Borough Council Register of Building Permits, Archives Ref AAF 174:1:

Permit issued 21 Aug 1913 for 9-room brick office building, £1,389, JW Alderton (builder).

LINZ Wellington Registry:

(1) Deeds Index Vol 7: page 85, for Section 85 notes Crown Grant, 18 Jan 1853 to IE Featherston was registered 12 June 1900.

(2) CT WN 141/119 issued 8 Sept 1905 to Marion McCaul, wife of George McCaul, Commission Agent, Wanganui. [Note: No previous CT referred to, only Application 3696.] Transferred (1) 12 Apr 1907 to George Stannard Gordon, Solicitor of Wanganui; (2) 15 Aug 1913 to Chairman, Councillors and Inhabitants of the County of Wanganui; (3) 23 Feb 1984 to Wanganui Cosmopolitan Club; (4) Caveat 23 May 1994 by Wanganui Regional Community Polytechnic; (5) 11 Mar 1996 to Wanganui Regional Community Polytechnic then to Wanganui District Council.

Wanganui Borough Council Rates Book, Archives Ref: AAF 64/6:

1900/1901, Section 85, Campbell Place has three Owners listed: Marion McCaul (pt Section, Property Value £16); Sarah Hogg (pt Section, Property Value £90 & £8, occupier William Hall); John Coburn (pt Section, Property Value £16). By 1901, Thomas Glover has taken over from William Hall and by 1902, Sarah Hogg is deceased and her Estate owns her property.

Wanganui Borough Council Valuation Rolls Database 1863-1920/21:

1895/96 is first entry for Mrs Marion McCaul, pt Sect 85, Campbell Pl, house value £16.

1908 Wanganui Borough Insurance Assessment map:

Shows previous buildings on Section 85, including two Chinese laundries and Cosmopolitan Club stables.

1990 Heritage Study, Item 4/2. Recommended Registration by Historic Places Trust.

Building Progress, August 1913 – notes name of Chinese laundry previously on section that Wanganui County Council has purchased in Campbell Place for two-storey brick & stucco building.

From Sand to Papa: A history of the Wanganui County, Rex H Voelkerling and Kevin L Stewart, Wanganui County Council, 1986.

The Road to Mangamahu, MH Campion, PM Garland & JD Morris, Wanganui Newspapers, 1988.

Wanganui Chronicle, 2 Aug 1913 – re plans for the building.

Wanganui Chronicle, 26 March 1914 – report on banquet to celebrate opening of new County Council offices.

Wanganui Chronicle, 10 Nov 1960 – obituary for AC Mannington.

Yeoman, 10 Dec 1898 – opening of Cosmopolitan Club library.

Wanganui Herald, 21 & 24 Sept 1979 – new Cosmopolitan Club building.

Wanganui Herald, 27 July 1985 – Cosmopolitan Club makes comeback; now has 2300 members.

Midweek, 6 Dec 1995 – article on Cosmopolitan Club library, back in new building.

QSA1 Significance:

Historic

This building is an important reminder of Wanganui County Council, one of the original counties established in 1876 after the abolition of the Provinces. The County Council played an important part in opening up the rural areas of Wanganui, especially as it was responsible for building roads and bridges.

Architectural

This is the only known architectural work by AC Mannington, the County Engineer. It is also the only remaining example of early local government offices in Wanganui, the Borough Council's first offices in St Hill Street having been demolished. The building retains many of its original features, especially externally with its façade and chimneys totally intact. The Milner "Thief-Resisting" safe still has its brass embossed door plate, a feature which currently is in demand by collectors of such memorabilia.

Research by: Wendy Pettigrew

Date: 2004?