

Stevenson's Building



Location: 42-44 Drews Ave (formerly 14 Wicksteed Place), Whanganui
Heritage NZ Pouhere Taonga List Number: nil

Physical Description: this two storeyed masonry building is designed in the Free Classical style with unusually interpreted Classical detailing, a rusticated base with semi-circular headed windows, open pedimented entry canopy, apron panels under the first floor windows, a cornice with modillions and a pavilion on the south east corner with an inverted pediment.

Other known names: Wanganui Chamber of Commerce (former site)

Current Use:

Former Uses: Offices for barristers, solicitors, agents etc.

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

Architectural Style: Free Classical **Date of Construction:** 1921

Materials: painted cement render, timber joinery

Registered owner: The Whanganui Regional Development Trust Board

Legal Description: Sec 1 SO 35796

History: This and the adjacent building, Stevenson's Store (1877) are

Register Item Number:

401

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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associated with James Lockhart Stevenson (1848-1919), a former mayor and local solicitor who lived at “Campbelltown” on Durie Hill.¹

J. L. Stevenson was born in Glasgow in 1848.² He came to New Zealand when he was six years old and was educated at Wanganui Collegiate School under Rev. C. H. Nicholls.³ Stevenson spent the early part of his working life in the grocery trade and married Helen Parkes, eldest daughter of Captain Frederick Parkes, one of Wanganui’s founding settlers.⁴ Stevenson later joined the Wanganui Harbour Board and was chairman of the Castlecliff Railway Company, Chamber of Commerce, Wanganui Gas Company, treasurer of the Orchestral Club, a freemason and one time chairman of the Wanganui School Committee.⁵ In 1893 he took a trip around the world, visiting the Middle East, Europe and the World Fair in Chicago.⁶ An account of his travels was published and circulated around his friends.⁷ He was mayor of Wanganui from 1896-7.⁸ Stevenson died at the age of 71 in 1919.⁹

The Stevenson Building was built posthumously for J. L. Stevenson in 1921 by C. Newton Hood, whose offices were in the adjacent Stevenson’s store building. This building was one of a number of lawyer’s offices located along this section of Wicksteed Place (later Drews Ave), described as a kind of “Chancery Lane” by local historian Cornelius Burnett.¹⁰

This building replaced an earlier building which J. L. Stevenson used as his principal offices. The 1910 *Wises Street Directory* identifies the occupants of the original building as the ‘Wang Chamber of Commerce’ (J. L. Stevenson secretary); J. L. Stevenson – shipping and insurance agent; Castlecliff Railway Company (J. L. Stevenson managing director); Atlas Insurance Company (J. L. Stevenson agent); Tyser Line Shipping Company (J. L. Stevenson agent); and Baldwin & Rayward, patent agents. By 1915, several other business were

¹ *Wanganui Chronicle* 8/08/1919.

² *Cyclopedia of New Zealand* [Wellington District] 1897.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Wanganui Chronicle* 8/08/1919

¹⁰ W. Pettigrew. 2004. *Wanganui District Heritage Inventory* B5-3.

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resident in the building: Takarangi & Hiroti - licensed native interpreters; Bullock, Currie & Douglas – barristers and solicitors; Douglas Hamilton McKenzie (of the firm Bullock & Co.); and the New Zealand Flourmillers Association (Charles Oscar Berg agent).

Following the opening of the new building in 1921, the occupants were Currie & Jack (later Watt, Currie & Jack), barristers and solicitors; Murray, Roberts & Co. Ltd, stock agents; and Kempthorne, Prosser and Co.'s New Zealand Drug Company Ltd.

Architect/Designer: C Newton Hood

History of changes:

Date Period: 1921

Rarity / Special Features:

Integrity: From a cursory inspection for the purposes of this study, the building appears to be in a fair condition.

Representativeness: The building is representative of the Free Classical style.

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

Diversity (Form and Features):

Fragility / Vulnerability: As a masonry building, it is potentially vulnerable to earthquake damage.

Summary of Significance:

Archaeological Qualities

As the existing building replaces a previous building constructed before 1900 its location is an archaeological site.

Architectural Qualities

The building is a good representative example of the Free Classical style, with unusually interpreted Classical detailing, a rusticated base with semi-circular headed windows, open pedimented entry canopy, apron panels under the first floor windows, a cornice with modillions and a pavilion on the south east corner

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with an inverted pediment. The style was followed by architects who were unwilling to comply with the rigours of academic Classicism.

Historic Qualities

The building is associated with J L Stevenson a former mayor and solicitor of Wanganui, although it was built after he died. It replaced an office from which he practised prior to 1921. Drews Ave was known as Chacery Lane at the time because of the number of lawyers offices in the street.

Technical Qualities

The building uses typical construction materials and techniques of the time

Reference Source:

W. Pettigrew. 2004. *Wanganui District Heritage Inventory B5-3*.

Wises *New Zealand Post Office Directory* 1910, 1915, 1921, 1937.

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

Associated Pictures:



J. L. Stephenson. (Cyclopedia of NZ)

Date of Survey: 2012

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