



WHANGANUI DISTRICT HERITAGE INVENTORY

Register Item No: 406 **Type:** Building
Site & Building: Pre-1900 Archaeological Interest
Name: ODDFELLOW'S HALL
Location: 32 Ridgway Street, Whanganui
Legal Description: Lot 3, DP 53014 (Part Reserve A, Town of Wanganui)
Current Details: Owner: [Contact Whanganui District Council for details]
Occupier: Cambet Developments

Original Owner: Manchester Unity IOOF
Date: 1895
Architect/Designer: HT Johns
Builder: Olliver & Simpson

Status: District Plan Class: Contributory Precinct, 2013, in Old Town Conservation Area.
Thematic Context: Cultural/Social/Civic
Significance: Historic, Cultural, Context
Integrity: Altered sympathetically

Photo Reference:

WDC File Ref: Heritage/Inventory/B17 5m
See p3 for additional photograph(s)

Date: December 2003



The timber building constructed for the Manchester Unity Lodge in 1895 takes in the full depth of its section (B17 5m).

History:

Of the site:

The previous wooden building on this site was occupied by the photographer, WJ Harding. However, the Lodge had been granted this section “Reserve A” in Ridgway Street by the Government in 1865. A condition of the Government grant was that the Lodge should pay £500 back to the Government if any part of the reserve land was ever sold. Such a payment was made, amounting to \$1,000, when the Lodge sold property on the Reserve in 1983.

Of the building:

It was built in 1895 to the plans of local builder-cum-architect, HT “Tommy” Johns. The Lodge’s acceptance of Johns’ plans for the building was controversial. Another architect, TB Jacobsen, who was practising in Wanganui at the time, was sufficiently upset to write to the Editor of the *Herald* (published in *The Yeoman*, 20 July 1895) complaining that the plans of a qualified architect had not been selected. If Jacobsen’s letter is factually correct, the Lodge building committee had also “condemned” Johns’ plans. However, as HT Johns was a Lodge member, and offered to provide plans, etc free of charge, no doubt this helped him to gain the commission. (He also became Grand Master of the Lodge in 1896.) Johns’ chose local builders, Olliver & Simpson, to construct the building. Their tender amounted to £544 18s 6.

The new building was completed by December 1895 and opened in style with a banquet and dance that followed a street procession led by the Garrison Band. It was apparently a very jolly occasion, reported in full in *The Yeoman*, 14 December, with a lengthy description of the building, which was constructed of red pine, matai and totara heart timber. The upper parapet was finished with a carved pediment and panels of cast iron ornamentation – this must have been removed by the 1930s at least as it does not appear to be illustrated in early photographs of the building.

As well as being a Lodge meeting room, the Oddfellows’ Hall quickly became an important local theatre, especially in the years prior to the building of the Opera House. The building also provided office space (often housing accountants or solicitors) and by 1903, George Greener’s Billiard Room was located there.

Work on the building included altering partitions in 1931, installing a strongroom in 1950 and a fire escape in 1962. Major alterations took place in 1965, when Earles Lamont Dobbin & Bycroft planned changes that involved moving the staircase to the middle of the building and providing a new side entrance to the upper floor. As a result, the left front entrance was removed and a window installed in its place.

The Lodge moved out of the building in the early 1990s, although its continued ownership is acknowledged with the lodge name on the parapet.

Of the Manchester Unity Independent Order of Oddfellows in Wanganui:

With a number of Oddfellows living in Wanganui by the 1850s, the decision was taken following a meeting at the Rutland Hotel on 21 January 1857 to form a local chapter of the Manchester Unity IOOF. The chapter was formally established in August 1858 with the election of a Grand Master, Brother D Richardson.

The provision of social services was a major reason for the establishment of the Wanganui chapter. Support for members who were ill was put in place from the beginning, while the fraternal association between members did much to further the commercial life of Wanganui in its early period of growth up to the 1930s in particular. Many of Wanganui’s eminent businessmen were Lodge members, with one of them, Brother Isaac Salek, becoming Grand Master of New Zealand 1916-1918.

Their first Lodge building was built in 1865 and used as the Oddfellows Hall until the new building was constructed in 1895. The old hall then became the Lyceum Theatre, later Empress Theatre, and was demolished in 1916 to make way for Empress Building (see B17.7). [Note that historical information about the Lodge incorrectly states that the Stroud’s building, B17.8, was the first Oddfellows Hall.]

Description:

Two-storied timber framed and weather-boarded building on concrete foundations, with corrugated iron roof as well as iron cladding at rear and southern side. The Ridgway Street façade is largely original (the second entrance having been removed in 1965) although much work has been undertaken on the interior.

Condition:

Good.

Resources Consulted:

Wanganui District Council Building file for 32a Ridgway Street – includes 1965 plans for major alterations, including front entrances.

Yeoman, 20 July 1895 – TB Jacobsen letter to Editor re architect chosen for Oddfellows' Hall contract.

Yeoman, 24 Aug 1895 – notes that Oliver & Simpson's tender of £544 18s 6d has been accepted by Mr HT Johns for the Oddfellows Lodge.

Yeoman, 14 Dec 1895 – article on Wanganui Lodge celebrations and the New Hall.

Yeoman, 1 Feb 1896 – report on IOOF MU AGM, with reference to new Hall in Wanganui.

Wanganui Herald, 18 Aug 1911 – Greener's Billiard Saloon reopening after fire at Graham's, the plumber (next door).

Wanganui Chronicle, 25 Sep 1958 – history of MU IOOF Lodge, 100 years in operation in Wanganui.

1990 Heritage Study, Item #17/2 – with no information about the building.

Loyal Wanganui Lodge No 4738, unpublished historical information c1988, at Alexander Heritage and Research Library, Wanganui. These papers incorrectly state that the old Oddfellows Hall was occupied by Stroud's in 1988. A photograph of the Lyceum/Hayward's theatre c1910 clearly shows Duigan's building next door, the building number B17. 8 in the Heritage Inventory.

Comments on Significance:

Historic

This Lodge building in Wanganui reflects an organisation whose members contributed much to the development of the town since 1858.

Architectural

This is a good example of a largely intact timber building of the 1890s that has escaped "modernisation".

Cultural

As well as its association with the Manchester Unity IOOF Lodge, the Oddfellows' Hall has been the scene of many theatricals and meetings, particularly in the period before the construction of the Opera House.

Context

The building occupies a corner site and makes an important contribution to the streetscape of Ridgway Street and the Old Town.

Recommendations:

Date: 21 September 2004 **Research by:** Wendy Pettigrew

Historical photographs to scan:

WC 25 Sep 1958 – photo still available? Shows building before 1965 alterations to front façade.