

Sarjeant House



Location: 47 Bell Street, Whanganui

Heritage NZ Pouhere Taonga

List Number: 985

Physical Description: The two storied, timber framed house has an almost square plan with hipped roofs, the ridges of which form a 'U'. Chimneys are located on the rear two ridges and are visible from the street. The front elevation has a two storied faceted bay window on the north east corner projecting beyond the main body of the house, and an arched verandah extends from the bay to the north west corner. The main entry, adjacent to the bay, is celebrated with a pediment over the archway and a handrail to the upper floor of the verandah extends from the pediment to the corner of the house. To the west of the main entry and on the first floor are French doors with toplights giving access to the verandah. A bay window matching that on the north elevation is located on the north west corner. The eaves of the house are supported in ornate brackets and is exceptionally wide. Other interesting details include blind arcading between the upper and lower windows of the bay window and on the lower verandah handrail, verandah columns with entasis, quoins on corners, and strapwork above the arches of the verandah.

Register Item Number:

60

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

Other known names:

Current Use: House, residence

Former Uses: House, residence

Heritage Status: Heritage NZPT List **District Plan Zoning:**

(Cat. 2)

Architectural Style: Italianate

Date of Construction: 1893-1899

Materials: Painted timber rusticated weatherboards, coverboards, quoins, soffit, brackets and joinery, corrugated steel roofing, brick chimneys

Registered owner:

Legal Description: Lot 1 DP 6791

History: This house was built for Henry Sarjeant and his wife Ellen Agnes, nee Stewart, the eldest daughter of surveyor John Tiffin Stewart. It is said to have been built in 1909, but the evidence for this was not found during this study. Rather, what evidence did appear, suggests it dates to the mid or latter 1890s.

Henry Sarjeant was born in Gloucestershire, England, in 1829, the son of a farmer. His brother Isaac was already farming in the Wanganui area when Henry arrived in New Zealand in the late 1850s or early 1860s. Henry then bought two farms in the Mangamahu Valley, and later more land at Whangaehu, Lake Wairitoa and Fordell. By 1882, he had acquired 3,595 acres in the Wanganui district.¹

Sarjeant was still living at his farm 'Riverlea', Fordell in 1893 when he married Ellen Stewart. Their wedding, at Christ Church, on 11th February 1893 evidently "*aroused more than usual interest in Wanganui...*" Possibly this was because the groom was aged 63 at the time, while the bride was aged about 24.² After the wedding, the newlyweds returned to their home at 'Fordell House', where they were to stay until their departure on their honeymoon – a two-year trip around the world.³

It was during this trip that Ellen sketched a house that impressed her at Lake Como, Italy. And that house in due course became the basis of the design she did for their new home in Wanganui, which the couple then named 'The Loggia'.

¹ Hilary Wooding, 'Sarjeant, Henry', in *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*: <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/2s4/1>

² Ellen was born in 1868 (Ref: 1868/7858: <https://www.bdmonline.dia.govt.nz/>)

³ *Wanganui Herald*, 13 February 1893, p. 2 (notice); *Wanganui Chronicle*, 13 February 1893, p. 2; *Observer*, 25 February 1893, p. 6. The spelling of 'Riverlea' varies somewhat with subsequent owners of that property.

Built Heritage Inventory



WHANGANUI
DISTRICT COUNCIL
Te Kaunihera a Rohe o Whanganui

Doubtless her father also provided technical advice during the design process. The word 'Loggia' describes an architectural feature. *"It is often a gallery or corridor at ground level, sometimes higher, on the façade of a building and it is open to the air on one side, where it is supported by columns or pierced openings in the wall."*⁴

The first evidence noted that suggests the house was built in the 1890s, comes with the advertisement of their *"Villa Residence to Let"* in October 1899. The house, which was to be let from about 1st December for a term of two years, was described as: *"That commodious and desirable 11-roomed Residence in Bell and Campbell Streets, at present occupied by Henry Sarjeant, Esq. 1½ acres land, tennis court, stable and coach-house, and every convenience."*⁵

On 29th November 1899, auctioneer J.H. Keesing auctioned off a substantial list of *"high class furniture"* on behalf of H. Sarjeant Esq., who was leaving for England. Sarjeant was selling *"the whole of his valuable household furniture and effects"*, and the extensive list ranged from furniture, carpets, ornaments, pots, pans and so on.⁶ Sarjeant's 770-acre Fordell House Farm had also been put up for lease earlier in the year.⁷

In September 1899, the Wanganui Borough Council transferred (on the Borough's rating records) *"six different properties to Mr H. Sarjeant."* It is not known if this involved the Bell Street property.⁸

The couple were back by May 1904, at which time Ellen, of 47 Bell Street, advertised seeking a missing diamond and rubies ring.⁹ In 1909, Henry Sarjeant gave his address as 47 Bell Street when he called for tenders to undertake filling work on sections further along Bell Street.¹⁰

The Sarjeants were both involved in many public activities. Ellen was involved in Plunket and the Wanganui Arts and Crafts Society. Meanwhile, Henry had had a lifelong interest in the arts. He had visited the major galleries of Europe during

⁴ 'Loggia', on Wikipedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Loggia>

⁵ *Wanganui Herald*, 14 October 1899, p. 3

⁶ *Wanganui Chronicle*, 27 November 1899, p. 3

⁷ *Wanganui Herald*, 1 April 1899, p. 5

⁸ *Wanganui Herald*, 27 September 1899, p. 1

⁹ *Wanganui Herald*, 10 May 1904, p. 1

¹⁰ *Wanganui Herald*, 17 August 1909, p. 1

Built Heritage Inventory



WHANGANUI
DISTRICT COUNCIL
Te Kaunihera a Rohe o Whanganui

his many trips there. His obituary stated that: *"For a considerable number of years... Mr Sarjeant has lived a life of comparative retirement as a citizen of Wanganui, although he never failed to manifest a keen and active interest in all public affairs. In the days before the existing system of State-administered charitable aid was inaugurated, and when the luckless and distressed members of the community had to rely on a voluntary organisation for relief, Mr Sarjeant was a generous and every-ready contributor toward the funds of the Benevolent Society..."*¹¹

When Henry died, at home, on 12 February 1912, aged 82, he bequeathed property valued at £30,000¹² in trust to the Wanganui Borough Council for the purpose of building and maintaining an art gallery. As a result, the Sarjeant Gallery, which has been described as *"perhaps the finest provincial gallery in New Zealand,"* came to be officially opened in 1919.¹³

On 30 April 1913, about fourteen months after Henry's death, Ellen married John Armstrong Neame, at the Wanganui Collegiate Chapel. Neame was a teacher at Wanganui Collegiate, and is said to have been Ellen's childhood sweetheart. In announcing the marriage, the *Wanganui Chronicle* stated that due to a recent bereavement, the wedding had been a *"very quiet one."*¹⁴ There had been no children to the first marriage and she was now aged about 45.

Although Henry Sarjeant left his Estate to the Wanganui Borough Council, Ellen held a life interest in it. In 1919, the Borough Council agreed to acquire the Sarjeant Estate with the exception of the Bell Street property, with the Council to pay Ellen *"£1,000 per annum in consideration thereof during her life. With regard to the Bell Street property it is not to be leased for a longer period than seven years, subject to certain conditions, and should Mrs Neame agree at any time for the Council to take it over the Council will accept same on a six per cent valuation."*¹⁵

¹¹ *Wanganui Chronicle*, 14 February 1912, p. 5

¹² The Wanganui District Council's 'Community Link' webpage for 9th February 2012, states that the sum was instead £35,000, and that in 2012 values, this would be the equivalent of leaving over \$26, million for the establishment and maintenance of a Fine Arts Gallery for the people of the Borough of Wanganui.. <http://www.wanganui.govt.nz/news/commsLink/issue557.asp>

¹³ Wooding: <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/2s4/1>

¹⁴ *Wanganui Chronicle*, 2 May 1913, p. 4 & 6 May 1913, p. 4; Wooding: <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/2s4/1>

¹⁵ *Wanganui Chronicle*, 27 August 1919, p. 4

The Borough Solicitor subsequently advised that a private Bill would be required in relation to the surrendering of Ellen's life interest in the Estate¹⁶. The following year the Wanganui Borough Council Empowering Act, 1920 was passed "to enable or authorize the Borough Council of the Borough of Wanganui to acquire the Interests of Ellen Agnes Neame, formerly Ellen Agnes Sarjeant, under the Will of Henry Sarjeant, late of Wanganui, Gentleman (deceased), in certain properties situate in the Borough of Wanganui. (5th November 1920)"¹⁷

The Act specifically excluded the Bell Street property "known as 'The Loggia'" from the above arrangement.

The Neames continued the activities started by Henry Sarjeant. In 1919, they went to England and were authorised to purchase paintings and china on behalf of the Sarjeant Gallery.¹⁸ In 1922, they presented a bust of Henry Sarjeant to the citizens of Wanganui, and this was formally unveiled at the gallery.¹⁹ In 1926, the couple were again in Europe, and in addition to participating in a cycling tour, had also been commissioned to purchase more pictures.²⁰ Ellen died in London on 22 September 1939.²¹

An undated article about the house when it was for sale in about the 1990s to early 2000s, provides some information on the house:

"(The Sarjeant) house stands on a ridge in Bell Street just a couple of blocks from the city centre, and while its former grandeur is still readily apparent, much work is needed to restore it to its original condition. The two-storey, eight bedroom house has something of a chequered past. In later years it was divided into flats and according to the local grapevine was at one time occupied by bikies. Lately, whole again, it has been used as a rest home."

'The Loggia' has a weatherboard exterior with an iron roof (at that time) recently painted. Inside the finishing is in rimu, matai, totara and kauri. Throughout the house are original cast-iron fireplaces (there are eight chimneys). The one in the

¹⁶ *Wanganui Chronicle*, 19 November 1919, p. 6

¹⁷ *NZ Statutes*, 1920, pp. 690-692

¹⁸ *Wanganui Chronicle*, 8 October 1919, p. 4

¹⁹ *Hawera & Normanby Star*, 7 April 1922, p. 4

²⁰ *Evening Post*, 6 July 1926, p. 13

²¹ Wooding: <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/2s4/1>

Built Heritage Inventory



WHANGANUI
DISTRICT COUNCIL
Te Kaunihera a Rohe o Whanganui

downstairs front sitting room is set in a huge recessed ornate wooden surround. Opposite it is a separate dining room. There is also a second sitting room. A wide staircase leads upstairs where the ornate wooden ceilings can be seen. Those downstairs have been covered with gib-board. There are two bathrooms and three toilets."²²

The house was registered with the Historic Places Trust on 2 July 1892 and has a Category II listing.²³



'The Loggia' amidst its landscaping, from a photo published in the 1911 book *Pretty, Prosperous, Progressive: Wanganui, New Zealand: Its Interests and Facilities* (p. 43)

Bibliography

Wanganui Chronicle, *Pretty, Prosperous, Progressive: Wanganui, New Zealand: Its Interests and Facilities* (Wanganui, 1911)

Wooding, Hilary, 'Sarjeant, Henry', in *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*:
<http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/2s4/1>

Also newspapers and online articles as referred to in the footnotes.

²² Newspaper clipping from the 1990s or early 2000s, my undated/unsourced copy obtained from the files of the Wanganui branch committee of the NZ Historic Places Trust (the original clipping probably has this information on its reverse side)

²³ 'Sarjeant House', No. 985:

<http://www.historic.org.nz/TheRegister/RegisterSearch/RegisterResults.aspx?RID=985>

Built Heritage Inventory



WHANGANUI
DISTRICT COUNCIL
Te Kaunihera a Rohe o Whanganui

Architect/Designer: Ellen Sarjeant (probably assisted by her father, J.T. Stewart)

History of changes: Was converted to flats at one time, then back to a whole house for use as a rest home.

Date Period: 1890s to 1909

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 house is representative of the Italianate style.

Context/Group Value: the house is one of a number of substantial and well-designed houses on Bell Street.

Diversity (Form and Features):

Fragility / Vulnerability: As a timber building, it is potentially vulnerable to fire.

Summary of Significance:

Archaeological Qualities

As the house is likely to have been constructed prior to 1900 its location is likely to be an archaeological site.

Architectural Qualities

The house has most of the characteristics of the Italianate style. These include asymmetrical massing, wide bracketed eaves, faceted bays, arcaded loggia or verandah, shallow pitched hipped roofs, quoins and Classically inspired balustrading. Ellen Sarjeant is suggested as the designer of the house who was inspired by a house at Lake Como in Italy.

Historic Qualities

The house is associated with Henry Sarjeant, a farmer who has substantial landholdings in the Wanganui District, and his wife Ellen. There were major public benefactors in the arts, the Benevolent Society, and the Plunket Society. When he died, Sarjeant bequeathed his property to the Council to enable a public art gallery to be built. His wife ensured that the bequest was honoured as well as presenting artworks and china to establish the collection. The Sarjeant

Built Heritage Inventory



WHANGANUI
DISTRICT COUNCIL
Te Kaunihera a Rohe o Whanganui

Art Gallery, today, is one of the most significant provincial galleries in New Zealand.

Technical Qualities

The house uses typical technologies, materials and construction techniques of the period.

Cultural Qualities

The house has sentimental values as the home of Henry and Ellen Sarjeant both of whom saw to it that Wanganui had an art gallery and collection of significance.

Reference Source:

Associated Pictures:

Date of Survey: 2012

Prepared by: Ian Bowman and Val Burr