

## Whanganui Regional Museum



**Location:** Watt Street, Whanganui

**Heritage NZ Pouhere Taonga**

**List Number:** 1009

**Physical Description:** The three storied, cement rendered building, has an elongated plan with the long elevation, including recent extensions, on Watt Street and the main, narrow, elevation and entry facing the War Memorial Hall. Several flights of steps to the main entrance hide the lowest floor, following Classical tradition with the main floor nearly the full height of the building with a small attic storey. The entry is emphasised with a shallow pavilion extending forward of the main elevation with full height flat pilasters on its corners, matching those on the corner of the building. The doorway has wide architraves and a shallow parapet. The shallow pitched roof is hidden by a flat parapet under which is a wide cornice.

**Other known names:**

**Current Use:** Museum

**Former Uses:**

**Heritage Status:** Heritage NZPT List **District Plan Class:** Class B  
(Cat. 2)

**Register Item Number:**

64

**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  
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**Architectural Style:** Free Classical      **Date of Construction:** 1928

**Materials:** Painted cement render, timber joinery, steel joinery?

**Registered owner:**

**Legal Description:** Secs 558,559,549 Pt 548 Town of Wanganui - Queens Park

**History:** Samuel H Drew, an avid collector, started to build and catalogue his own private collection of insects and shells in 1880. This collection grew as he and his family collected Maori artefacts and exchanged objects from overseas museums. By 1885 he had amassed an extensive collection that he opened to the public.

In 1891 the need for a publicly owned museum was acknowledged and a trust was established to raise funds. Mr Drew generously sold the trust his valuable collection for 1,200 pounds, far below its real value of 2,246 pounds and this formed the nucleus of the new museum's collection. Opened in 1895, Wanganui's first public museum was situated in the present Savage Club Hall.

Some years later, a generous legacy from the estate of Henry Alexander enabled a new two-storied building with basement to be built in Queen's Park. Architect Robert Talboys designed the building and when opened in 1928 it was named the Alexander Museum after its main benefactor.

A bequest from the Davis Trust in 1968 funded the rear extension that houses the Maori Court with its famous waka, the Davis Lecture Theatre, a classroom and a multi storied parking building. In 1997, to alleviate storage problems, the 2000 square metre car park building was converted into storage facilities for the Museum and Whanganui District Council's archive department.

Now named after the region it serves, the Whanganui Regional Museum displays and cares for a diverse range of artefacts from all over New Zealand and around the world.

<http://www.wanganuilibrary.com/site/pages/heritage/queens-park-tour/whanganui-regional-museum.php>

Museum report – follow this link: <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast?a=d&d=WC19080904.2.5&e=-----100-WC-1----0Wanganui+Museum-->

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Museum extension <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast?a=d&cl=search&d=WC19110802.2.7&srpos=22&e=-----100--1-0Henry+Sarjeant+>

Alexander bequest <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast?a=d&cl=search&d=WC19171103.2.15&srpos=14&e=-----100-WC-1----0Wanganui+Museum->

**Architect/Designer:** Robert Talboys

**History of changes:**

**Date Period:** 1928

**Rarity / Special Features:**

**Integrity:** From a brief visual only inspection, the building appears to be in reasonable condition but the level of earthquake risk is unknown.

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

**Context/Group Value:** The museum is one of a number of regionally or nationally significant heritage structures in the immediate vicinity including, the Sarjeant Gallery, the War Memorial Hall, the Cenotaph and the Veterans' steps. Slightly further afield are the war and other memorials in Moutoa Gardens, one of which is New Zealand's first war memorial, which commemorates 15 kupapa and one European who were killed at Moutoa Island 80 km upriver from Wanganui on 14 May, 1864.

**Diversity (Form and Features):**

**Fragility / Vulnerability:** As a masonry building, it is potentially at risk from earthquake damage.

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## Summary of Significance:

### **Archaeological Qualities**

The museum is reputed to have been close to the former Rutland Blockhouse erected in 1847, therefore the steps are likely to be an archaeological site.

### **Architectural Qualities**

The building is typical of the Free Classical style, popular between the wars and is characterised by a symmetrical façade, implied pediment, unconventional order of architecture and of Classical detailing such as the entablature and pediments, giant order, and unconventional proportions. The building is associated with local architect R G Talboys.

### **Historic Qualities**

The building and contents are associated with Samuel H Drew whose extensive collection formed the basis of the museum's collection, and the generosity of Henry Alexander whose bequest allowed the construction of the building.

### **Scientific Qualities**

The contents of the museum have scientific interest.

### **Technical Qualities**

The building is constructed using typical materials and techniques for the time.

### **Cultural Qualities**

As a museum the place has scientific and amenity values as well as sentimental values for keen museum visitors. The place has landmark values as one of a number of significant buildings arranged around the Veteran steps.

## Reference Source:

## Associated Pictures:

*Date of Survey: 2012*

*Prepared by: Ian Bowman and Val Burr*