

Winter Gardens Building



Location: Virginia Lake, Whanganui

Heritage NZ Pouhere Taonga

Site Number: nil

Physical Description: This single storey, rendered masonry building, is designed in the Moderne style with a series of attached, rectangular and curved flat roofed pavilions of different heights. The central main entry is denoted by inwardly curved walls and a shallow curved canopy below the parapet. The wintergarden, glass house extends to the north of the building.

Other known names:

Current Use: Winter Garden

Former Uses:

Heritage Status:

District Plan Class: Class B

Architectural Style: Moderne

Date of Construction: 1940

Materials: Cement rendered masonry, steel and timber joinery, flat roofing

Registered owner: Whanganui District Council

Legal Description:

Register Item Number:

92

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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History: Virginia Lake is a 4.5 hectare lake located near the centre of Wanganui.¹ The lake is encircled by a path which traces its way between rose gardens and iris-studded levels and shrubs and trees.²

Known to Maori as Rotokawau (Lake of the Black Shag).³ It was an eeling reserve, with young eels finding their way to the lake by the Mangawhero Stream.⁴ The lake stands on the top of a hill known to the Maori as Taiorenui.⁵ Toronui Pa was built on a small peninsula at the north-west end of the land.⁶ Maori legends recall that Ranginui fought Turere for the hand of Tainui in this location.⁷ Ranginui strangled Turere, and was himself killed by lightning as he started to prepare a meal afterwards.⁸ Tainui, who followed her beloved Turere, came to the spot where he died and shed tears in grief.⁹ These tears formed Virginia Lake.¹⁰

Governor Sir George Grey is reputed to have been so impressed with the beauty of the lake that he named his island home near Auckland “Kawau” after the lake.¹¹

The lake was named “Virginia Water”, by Henry Shafto Harrison, after a lake he had left in Surrey, England.¹² Harrison had purchased the Crown Grant lands, which including the lake, in 1839 via ballot in London.¹³ He arrived in Wanganui on the barque “Clydeside”, accompanied by two servants and a quantity of sheep stock, in 1841. “Virginia Waters”, the Harrison farm, covered an area of six hundred acres.¹⁴ Harrison built two homes on the farm, both of which were destroyed by fire shortly afterwards.¹⁵ The first, a small cottage, was burnt to the

¹ Bolith, H.H. 1920. *Wanganui – the river town of New Zealand*. Wanganui Borough Council, Wanganui.

² Ibid.

³ Kirk, A.L. 1978. *Street Names of Wanganui*. Wanganui Newspapers Ltd, Wanganui.

⁴ McDonald, K.C. 1970. “Virginia Waters”. *Journal of the Whanganui Historical Society* 1(1).

⁵ Kirk, A.L. 1978.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ McDonald, K.C. 1970.

¹² Ibid. Kirk, A.L. 1978

¹³ McDonald, K.C. 1970.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

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ground by Maori raiders.¹⁶ The second, a larger homestead, was razed by Captain Laya of the Militia in 1847, when it was decided that any houses of strategic importance to the Maoris should be destroyed.¹⁷ Harrison's farm at the time was considered to be the most complete and his house the finest in Wanganui.¹⁸

With his land occupied by the militia and his homes destroyed, Harrison went back to Port Nicholson.¹⁹ When he later returned to Wanganui he took up a large area of land that stretched from Fordell to the Whangaehu River.²⁰ He named this farm "Warrengate" after his ancestral home in Yorkshire, England.²¹ The "Virginia Waters" sections were broken up and sold in 1859 to William Russell and John Murray, and in 1862 to Mrs Hare, John Garner and William Park.²²

The lake was purchased by the Wanganui Borough Council in June 1874 as a potential water supply for the town.²³ The first piped water supply in Wanganui was drawn from the lake, but found so unsatisfactory that additional supplies were sought from Westmere Lake shortly afterwards.²⁴ In 1900, the lake levels fell revealing a large quantity of matai logs, subsequently removed.²⁵ A new water supply was commissioned in 1903 and the lake was left as a reserve.²⁶

Residents and members of the Beautifying Society on St John's Hill insisted that the Borough Council should do something with the abandoned reserve.²⁷ In 1904 a competition was held by the Borough Council for the best plan to develop the area.²⁸ The winning plan "Hercurles", by Mr H. Sarjeant, Mrs E.A. Sarjeant and Mr. J.T. Stewart, was adopted and the Beautifying Society spent

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Kirk, A.L. 1978.

²⁴ Ross, W. D. 1968. "Wanganui: 1870-1965" in Saunders, G.R. (Ed) *Introducing Wanganui*. Department of Geography, Massey University, Palmerston North.

²⁵ Kirk, A.L. 1978.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Spurdle, F. 1971. "Virginia Lake Gates." *Journal of the Whanganui Historical Society* 12(1).

²⁸ Kirk, A.L. 1978.

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the next ten years carrying it out.²⁹ Finally on March 21 1914 the grounds were officially opened to the public.³⁰

In 1940 a display house was built to showcase a range of tropical plants.³¹ It was erected to commemorate the centennial of New Zealand (1840-1940).³²

Architect/Designer:

History of changes:

Date Period: 1940s

Rarity / Special Features:

Integrity: The area is managed as a reserve by the Wanganui District Council. Buildings and structures are well maintained.

Representativeness: The building is representative of the Moderne style in its streamlined design.

Context/Group Value: The area is managed as a reserve by the Wanganui District Council and features within it are not considered to be under threat.

Diversity (Form and Features):

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

Summary of Significance:

Architectural Qualities

Designed Moderne style which shows adaptability of the style for use of building types. Typical elongated building form with curved walls, parapets and streamlined detailing. The glass display house extends from back from back Moderne style entry building Because style and location next to Lake highly visible landmark.

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²⁹ Ibid. *Wanganui Herald* 23/09/1903.

³⁰ Kirk, A.L. 1978. Spurdle, F. 1971.

³¹ Kirk, A.L. 1978.

³² Ibid.

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Cultural Qualities

The building is part of the Virginia Lake reserve and provides an important recreational facility for the community.

Reference Source:

Bolith, H.H. 1920. *Wanganui – the river town of New Zealand*. Wanganui Borough Council, Wanganui.

Kirk, A.L. 1978. *Street Names of Wanganui*. Wanganui Newspapers Ltd, Wanganui.

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Ross, W. D. 1968. "Wanganui: 1870-1965" in Saunders, G.R. (Ed) *Introducing Wanganui*. Department of Geography, Massey University, Palmerston North.

Spurdle, F. 1971. "Virginia Lake Gates." *Journal of the Whanganui Historical Society* 12(1).

Wanganui Herald

Wanganui District Council, 2009. "Virginia Lake Reserve Management Plan." Wanganui District Council, Wanganui.

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³³ Kirk, A.L. 1978.

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Associated Pictures:



On-site map of Virginia Lake features (2012).

Date of Survey: 2012

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