

Cameron Blockhouse



Location: Marangai

Heritage NZ Pouhere Taonga

List Number: 7179

Physical Description: The blockhouse is a small rectangular planned storey and a half building with a medium pitched gabled roof. The perimeter of the building has small double paned window openings above door height. Double doors to the eastern gable lead to an attic, while the main entry, near the middle of the elevation, faces north. "As an innovative method of protecting against bullets and fire the walls were packed with clay. The blockhouse was positioned in such a way that the people inside could signal to two other blockhouses belonging to the Campbell and Morgan families, who could in turn relay messages to the York Stockade in Wanganui."¹

Other known names:

Current Use: Museum

Former Uses: blockhouse, barn, shed, stables

Heritage Status: Heritage NZPT List **District Plan Class: Class A**
(Cat. 1)

Register Item Number:

274

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

¹ <http://www.historic.org.nz/TheRegister/RegisterSearch/RegisterResults.aspx?RID=7179&m=advanced>

Built Heritage Inventory



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Architectural Style: Colonial **Date of Construction:** 1868

blockhouse

Materials: painted timber shiplap weatherboards, corner stops and joinery, corrugated steel roofing

Registered owner:

Legal Description:

History: The Cameron Blockhouse is a rare example of a timber blockhouse dating to the time of the New Zealand Wars. John Cameron arrived in New Zealand at the end of 1840 and shortly after journeyed north to take up land at Marangai just south of Wanganui. At Marangai Cameron eventually set up a farm mainly breeding cattle, and in 1855 he built the first homestead. With the outbreak of hostilities between Maori and the Crown in Taranaki in 1862-1863, volunteer military units were formed in Wanganui. Cameron, taking the rank of Captain, organised a cavalry unit, which took the name Wanganui Cavalry. By 1868 Wanganui's settlers believed that an attack by Riwha Titokowaru (? - 1888), the highly effective Maori warrior and leader who campaigned against Crown alienation of Maori land, was a real possibility. As a result, this blockhouse was built to provide a safe place for settlers and their families if they were under attack.

The Cameron Blockhouse was one of a number of redoubts built on high ground in the district. As an innovative method of protecting against bullets and fire the walls were packed with clay. The blockhouse was positioned in such a way that the people inside could signal to two other blockhouses belonging to the Campbell and Morgan families, who could in turn relay messages to the York Stockade in Wanganui. The Cameron Blockhouse never actually came under attack. Over the years the blockhouse was modified use as a farm building, including the removal of the east wall. This was later reinstated in the 1970s. Between 1988 and 1990 the Wanganui branch committee of the New Zealand Historic Places Trust and other volunteers undertook to restore the blockhouse.

The building has great historical significance as a privately constructed, purpose-built blockhouse. It represents a social and cultural attitude toward racial conflict and war. It is located in a dramatic setting and has considerable landscape significance. The building has technological interest for the use of readily available materials to create a protective layer in the building's defence. The blockhouse was built in 1868 and thus has significance as an

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archaeological site. In February 1996 a Heritage Covenant was placed on the property. The blockhouse is open to the public.

Architect/Designer:

History of changes:

Original Construction: 1868

Modification - Removal of a portion of the east gable wall:

Reconstruction - Partial restoration including the reinstatement of the east gable wall Partial restoration including the reinstatement of the east wall: 1979 (circa)

Reconstruction - Complete restoration including a concrete perimeter foundation, foundation, replacement of weatherboards and some windows, realignment of spouting, painting of exterior walls & roof: 1988 - 1990 (circa) – taken from NZHPT.

Date Period: 1868 with partial reconstruction in 1979, complete restoration in 1988-1990.

Rarity / Special Features: The Cameron blockhouse is rare as one of three surviving blockhouses from the New Zealand war period. The other surviving blockhouses are the Upper Hutt Blockhouse, based on North American fort design, and the Onehunga Blockhouse in Jellicoe Park, Auckland.

Integrity: From a brief visual inspection, the building appears to be in an acceptable condition.

Representativeness: The building is representative of military constructions built during the New Zealand wars, with the Cameron Blockhouse having been designed and constructed privately by a volunteer cavalryman.

Context/Group Value: The building is associated with the two other blockhouses constructed in New Zealand as well as other sites associated with the New Zealand Wars.

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Diversity (Form and Features): The building is a simple gabled timber framed and clad structure, it is structure but using clay filled walls to absorb gunshot. This can be compared with the Upper Hutt Blockhouse that had walls filled with pebbles for the same reason.

Fragility / Vulnerability: As a timber framed and clad structure, it is vulnerable to fire.

Summary of Significance:

Archaeological Qualities

As a building that was constructed prior to 1900, it is deemed to be an archaeological site.

Architectural Qualities

This fortified building was a vernacular interpretation of a military construction that was designed and built by a local farmer, John Cameron, using readily available materials. He used an innovative technique of filling the timber frames with clay to absorb gunshot and he located it so that those inside the building could signal other blockhouses so that messages could be sent to the York Stockade in Wanganui.

Historic Qualities

The building is associated with Wanganui farmer John Cameron who constructed the blockhouse to a perceived threat from local Maori during the New Zealand war period of 1862 - 1863. Cameron became a Captain in a local volunteer cavalry unit.

Scientific Qualities

The use of local building materials provides some scientific knowledge of the area.

Technical Qualities

Cameron adapted a typical timber framed construction with clay infill to provide more protection to the inhabitants of the building.

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Cultural Qualities

The Blockhouse is representative of a period of conflict in the Taranaki/Wanganui region between settler and local Maori, where the local community organised their own military units and provided a measure of physical protection. The design also allowed the ability to communicate with other groups. This was one of a number of other redoubts built during the early 1860s and is also associated with other similar constructions surviving in Upper Hutt and Auckland.

Reference Source:

Associated Pictures:

Date of Survey: 2012

Prepared by: Ian Bowman

Amended August 2025 (Plan Change 63)