



Post Office, 47a South Road **c.1912**

Use	Residential	Historic Value	2 out of 5
Materials	Concrete	Architectural Value	2 out of 4
NZHPT Registered	Not registered	Technical Value	1 out of 2
Valuation No	12260-156-00	Symbolic Value	1 out of 3
Legal Description	Sec 2 SO 12958	Rarity	- out of 2
		Townscape Value	2 out of 2
		Group Value	1 out of 2
		Overall Cultural Heritage Value	9 out of 20
Reference	S7		

Description

The old Post Office is a two storey concrete building with windows facing the band rotunda. The upper four windows are oblong, the centre two being close together. The four lower windows are directly underneath, with the top third of each being in a half circle, divided in half length-wise and across into thirds. All other visible windows are the same as the top front ones. The ramp, which is partially covered, was added in the early 1980s.

History

In May 1881 Manaia settlers were agitating for a post and telephone depot. The following year, deputations pressing for a Post Office met with visiting Premier Mr Hall and a Post Office inspector to put their case. In September 1882, Parliament approved the post and telephone office, and on 5 October it was set up in part of the Drill Hall. When the Armed Constabulary was removed in 1883 a permanent Post Office building was erected, using materials from the redoubt. As business increased it was added to three times.

During the process of establishing a post and telegraph depot in Manaia, it was discovered that there was another Post Office named Manaia situated 47 miles from Auckland. Local Manaia residents refused a name change and the Post Office near Auckland was renamed 'Dunbar'.

In 1910/1911 a decision was made to build a new Post Office and for £90 Messrs Lloyd and McVicar moved the existing building on rollers around the corner where it became a library and dental rooms. The telephone exchange, which began in May 1917, now stands in its place.

The new Post Office building, with accommodation upstairs for the postmaster, cost £3,333 and was officially opened by the Premier, the Hon Thomas McKenzie FRCS, and the Minister of Public Works, the Hon R McKenzie.

On 1 April 1987 New Zealand Post was restructured. The effect on Manaia was that the Savings Bank became an agency with a manager replacing the postmaster. When the agency was closed in 1991 the postal side was uneconomic so the building was officially closed on 13 September 1991. It was then bought by the Waimate Plains Property Society Incorporated who leased the building out.

The Post Office building has been privately owned since 1993.

Past Manaia Postmasters include:

A R Langley	J T W Collier	N B Johnson
H Kiernan	J E Ward	J H Haworth
Thomas Dawson	W J Cryer	T R Folley
Joshua King	F C O Griffith	G L Snook
M J Staunton	C J Williams	B R Bryant
Thomas E Clough	L H Ihle	R Tweedie
D H Fox	I G Bell	D King
H Dixon	R B Matheson	R E F Nathan
D S Goodger	J H McIver	Eldon Westhead
S A Johnston	S S Burgess	Julian Chamberlain - Manager

Architect

John Campbell, Government Architect

"John Campbell [born Glasgow 1857, died 1942], government architect during the boom years for public buildings from 1909 to 1922... built Parliament Buildings, Government House, the Public Trust in Wellington, the Dunedin Gaol and the Law Courts that set Edwardian Baroque as the official government style of the time for such as the Wellington and Auckland chief post offices and dozens of local post offices such as Ponsonby, the deceased one at Bulls and another at Cambridge." (McGill and Sheenan, 1997)

Builder

A B Burrell, Hawera

Sources

Postal History Society of New Zealand

National Archives

Hosie J (1982), *Centennial History of Manaia and Manaia School, 1882-1982*, Ekdahl Print; New Zealand

McGill, D (Text) and Sheehan, G (Photographs) (1997) *Landmarks – Notable Historic Buildings of New Zealand*, Godwit Printing; Auckland

Date

January 2000

Memories of Manaia Post Office

"My Dad, William John Cryer, was Postmaster at Manaia for 9½ years, and with my mother, Gwen Cryer, we moved there from Te Aroha in mid-1929. I was 3½ years old at the time and we were at Manaia till December 1938, at which time Dad was appointed Postmaster, Otahuhu. His term at Manaia included the Depression years.

It was during his time at Manaia that all the party-lines were established throughout the rural areas, and this entailed much canvassing and extra work. Staff numbers had been cut back due to the Depression, and Dad had to also do the lunch-hour counter in addition to his normal Postmaster's duties.

He was also Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages and he performed a number of marriages during his term at Manaia. Mum used to put a vase or two of flowers in his office on these occasions, to lessen the austerity of the surroundings. There was even one time when the bridal party were dressed in full wedding attire! On another occasion I recall thinking, childlike, that there should be wedding music, and so pushed up one of the upstairs windows, leant out and played "Pop Goes the Weasel" on my tin whistle, as the newly married couple left the office. Possibly a rather unfortunate choice of tunes, and certainly with unfortunate results for me when my mother connected up with me immediately afterwards.

I can recall Dad working long hours in connection with the administration of "Scheme 13" for the unemployed (There was no overtime) We lived in the upstairs quarters and I can remember him going downstairs after each evening meal and working late into the night in his office, in connection with this scheme. He suffered from poor circulation and in the winter would be wearing mittens. Mrs Adelaide Henderson, a very elderly Manaia identity and family friend, felt sorry for him and made him a foot-warmer – a sort of big padded tea-cosy, lying flat, and large enough to accommodate a concrete hot water bottle and his feet. It worked well. (Mrs Henderson was the mother of Mrs Bessie Sutherland, who was the mother of Mrs Adelaide MacLeod, who was the mother Betty, Peggy, Alistair, Ian and Nigel – four generations in all.)

Mrs Sutherland, with her mother Mrs Henderson, used to drive a horse and gig around Manaia, and at Christmas time they would come and sit at one of the upstairs windows of the Post Office residence, and watch the parades and coloured lights, etc, it being too tiring for them to stand among the crowds down on the street.

I have many memories of the views we had from our upstairs windows. Looking towards the mountain we had an unobstructed view across the plains, right up to the slopes of Mt Egmont, with little pockets of light showing at night where the villages were situated. On occasional very fine, clear mornings we could also see the outline of Mt Ruapehu in one particular spot, further to the right.

Looking towards Opunake across the flat country, we could sometimes see the smoke of a train going along (from Kapuni?) in early days.

Looking seawards, there were several times when we were able to see a coastal steamer passing by, out from the coast. From those same front windows we also used to look down on the band rotunda, where Mr Cosgrove would be conducting the local band of an evening every so often. And the Christmas lights, coloured bulbs strung from the outer edge of the roof of the band rotunda, along the ridges and rising to the flagpole in the centre were a delight to look down upon.

I can recall one public holiday when we were looking out our upstairs kitchen window in the direction of Hawera, and at the back of Mr Neilsen's furniture and picture framing shop (next to Cut Rates Grocers) we could see a large tree laden with fruit. We knew Mr Neilsen was away and we could see a group of children raiding the tree. The policeman was also on holiday, so what did my father do, but go downstairs and borrow the postman's white helmet, put it on his head, turn up the collar on his navy suit jacket, and stride off to the fruit tree, an improvised policeman. He caught the young culprits red-handed, gave them a good warning, and so saved the remainder of the fruit for its rightful owner.

The Public Library (Mr Simpson, Librarian) adjoined the Post Office section at that time, with Mr Craig, the Dentist, in behind, and then a vacant paddock in behind that. A merry-go-round used to come to that paddock from time to time and from our upstairs side windows we had a great view looking down on the horses swinging out as they went round and round, with their riders hanging on tightly, and the music blaring out continuously, to the throbbing of the engine.

I have very definite memories of those library and dental room windows, which were just through and overlooking the slatted board fence which divided the Post Office section from that next-door paddock. My friend, Jean, and I used to play on the Post Office side of the fence. My Dad had made us some bamboo shooters so that we could use the seeds of our tall canna lilies as ammunition to shoot the sparrows that worried his vege garden. But Jean and I had larger targets in mind. The summer was hot, and next door the Librarian and Dentist were working beside their wide-open windows. The fence, being slatted and covered with a climbing rose, was ideal cover for two mischievous imps who could not possibly miss hitting their large human targets. But the repercussions, needless to say, are better not mentioned.

I have a further memory of that paddock, or it may have been the adjoining one. There was a Mr H E Hodder, who I fancy had a drapery store next door to Paynes Tailors, both across the road from the two storey Bank of New Zealand building. Mr Hodder decided to buy a cow at the saleyards, for milking. I'll call her Daisy, though I'm not at all sure that was her name. He bought Daisy believing her to a quiet cow, suitable for hand milking, and put her in the paddock. But Daisy had most likely been mustered in from the wild, and had her own very definite ideas regarding hand milking. Poor Mr Hodder – we saw it all from our upstairs windows – he was nothing if not a trier, but success just did not go his way.

I can't remember what the ultimate outcome was – whether Daisy took off over the back fence on to the road and away to places unknown, or whether she was shot. Perhaps it was both.

And the earthquakes. It was the 3rd of February 1931 when the Hawkes Bay earthquake struck. I was off school sick and was playing with marbles in the concrete fender surrounding the concrete hearth in our kitchen, by the old black coal range. Suddenly all the marbles started running together and making quite a noise. The weights in the push-up windows started banging against the walls, and my mother who was sleeping, having been up half the night with me, woke with a start, grabbed me, and dashed down our back stairs and out on to the road. It was only then that she realised she was just in her petticoat, and standing among all the Post Office staff! Looking up at the Post Office building it could be seen jumping around like a large elephant.

Meanwhile my father had gone up the front stairs from his office, into the residence to look for us, but fortunately got out safely. But from then on, it was a rule that we each got out of the building immediately and did not go back in looking for each other. A day or so later, a group of Manaia ladies held a working bee in one of the upstairs residence rooms, in order to sort and pack clothing, etc, for the victims in Hawkes Bay who had lost everything in the quake.

My father used to ring the bell of St Cuthbert's Church of England every Sunday evening. He was a keen trout fisherman, but would always hurry home in time to ring the 6.30 pm bell half an hour before the second bell at 7.00 pm when the service started. His route took him past the Doctor's residence, and regular as clockwork, young Jim Davies, the Doctor's son, would be waiting to join him and attend the service. This greatly impressed my father, and it was only later that he learnt young Jim had been put to bed each Sunday night, and then got up and dressed himself and climbed out through his bedroom window, to be waiting ready to join my father as he passed by.

Other memories include looking down and seeing one particular old town cow going along to the billboard by the hotel on the corner where the Manaia Road enters the octagon, and pulling off and eating the posters which Mr Lou Simmons, the picture proprietor, had so recently pasted up. It may have been that same knowledgeable old cow which followed the greengrocer's veggie cart and helped herself to cabbages off the back whilst he was delivering an order (all in our line of vision).

In those days, our milk was delivered to our back door by one or other of the Hill family and I can recall Lil measuring out dipper-fulls from the milk can which she carried, direct into our big milk jug. The butcher-boy, too, delivered our meat to the foot of our back stairs, carrying the orders in a large clothes-basket-like container.

Our bread was purchased from Yarrow's Bakery Shop just across the road, and I still smell that lovely fresh-baked bread which sold for just sixpence a barracuta loaf, and which could be broken across the middle into two threepenny sections. Mountain-shaped Vienna buns were a speciality in those days.

My mother rarely baked for her entertaining as such lovely cakes and small goods were always available from Yarrows.

The Kaipokonui store across the octagon delivered our groceries to the top of our stairs. Lawson Young served there, and Brian Scannell, the Policeman's eldest son. Everything was scooped out from bulk bins and containers by hand, weighed and wrapped or bagged in the shop, in quantities ordered by the customer. Cheese was cut into blocks of the required size, bacon was sliced to order, and if requested, everything was delivered to the house.

Yes, sixty years on, I still have many happy memories of our Manaia days – great people in a great little town.

Mr Griffiths followed Dad as Postmaster from the end of 1938."

By Merle Jurgens (née Cryer) 1 February 1999

Date

January 2000