

Heritage Buildings Report

Site ID

Building/Site Name

Regina Place/Victoria Esplanade Retaining Wall

Address

Regina Place, New Plymouth



Statement of Significance

This prominent stone retaining wall was constructed in 1901 during railway reclamation works on the site of what was then New Plymouth's main railway yards. The wall has heritage significance as one of the last tangible links to the former use of this site as New Plymouth's railway transport hub for over one hundred years, with construction of the wall associated with the upgrade and enlargement of rail transport facilities to cater for a growing local population who were heavily reliant on rail for both travel and the export and import of goods. The decision to construct this wall in its present location is largely the result of local public pressure to keep the eastern end of Regina Place/Victoria Esplanade open for public use, and is associated with an early movement to recognise the recreational potential of New Plymouth's waterfront; something that wouldn't be fully realised until the construction of the now renowned New Plymouth Coastal Walkway, the first portion of which opened 100 years later in 2001. This is the largest surviving stone wall of its type in New Plymouth and retains a high degree of integrity. The wall has technical interest for the use of local andesite rock in its construction, with the likely source of stone being the New Plymouth Harbour Board's quarry at Paritutu.



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Legal Information and Heritage Status

Legal Description	-
District Plan Item/ Map No.	
Heritage New Zealand List	Not listed

Construction Information

Date of Construction	1901
Principal Materials	Taranaki andesite
Construction Professionals	New Zealand Railways Department

History

Taranaki's first railway, between New Plymouth and Waitara, was officially opened on the 14th of October 1875.¹ The railway initially terminated at the passenger station located at the foot of Mt Eliot, on the foreshore between Brougham and Queen Streets, but the line was soon extended to accommodate marshalling yards, and by 1885, the railway had been completed to the new breakwater at Moturoa.²

By the late 1890s, the Railways Department was looking to extend the New Plymouth railway yards to cater for growing rail traffic.³ Part of this plan involved substantial reclamation work; extending outwards into the Tasman Sea, and also inwards towards Mt Eliot.⁴ Whilst this plan included the construction of a desperately needed new railway station, residents and the Borough Council voiced their concerns over the loss of the popular swimming beach, and also of part of Regina Place, or as it was widely known 'Victoria Esplanade', a valued seafront recreation area opened in 1897 to celebrate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee.⁵

A compromise was found, and the Railways Department agreed to retain access to the Esplanade from the area in front of the Terminus Hotel and Beach (Richmond) Cottage; this being the present day Regina Place walkway from St Aubyn St, opposite Queen St.⁶ As part of the works, and to protect the cliff face from collapsing, the present retaining wall was constructed. The *Taranaki Herald* of 23 August 1901 reported that "owing to the breaking away of the bank at the entrance to the esplanade, near the Terminus Hotel, the Railway Department is strengthening the embankment by building a stone wall".⁷

The stone for the wall was likely quarried from Paritutu and conveyed to the site in railway wagons, with the Railways Department having an agreement with the New Plymouth Harbour Board to take stone from the Harbour Board's quarry at Paritutu for reclamation work at the New Plymouth yards.⁸ The andesite rocks used in the Regina Place retaining wall are strongly porphyritic and visually similar

¹ Scanlan, A. B (1977). *Taranaki's First Railway*. Masterprint, New Plymouth

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ *Taranaki Daily News*, 22 December 1900, page 2; *Taranaki Herald*, 12 March 1901, page 2

⁶ *Taranaki Herald*, 13 August 1901, page 2

⁷ *Taranaki Herald*, 23 August 1901, page 2

⁸ *Taranaki Herald*, 19 January 1900, page 2

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to those comprising Paritutu and the Sugar Loaf Islands.

By November 1901, it appears the wall was nearing completion, with it being reported that a “...good deal of earth will be required for filling in Victoria Esplanade behind the stone wall”, with this earth to be taken from the Egmont Street Reserve/remnants of Mt Eliot.⁹ During construction, the pedestrian overbridge known as the ‘May-I’ Bridge, was relocated to a position in front of the Terminus Hotel’s balcony.¹⁰ The original steel overbridge was later replaced with a new structure in the same location, the concrete abutment for this later bridge is still clearly visible today.

During the 1980s, the central city railway marshalling yards were relocated to a new site at Smart Road, with the 1960s station building and overbridge removed during the 1990s. In 1999, construction began on the first section of the Coastal Walkway between Port Taranaki and Waiwhakaiho.¹¹ This transformative walkway project opened-up New Plymouth’s waterfront area, which had been mostly inaccessible to the public since the railway reclamation work in 1901. The first sections of the Coastal Walkway were opened for public use during 2001, with a formal opening held in 2003; the walkway has subsequently received numerous awards.¹²

Presently, and despite its prominent position on a well-used section of the Coastal Walkway, there is no signage outlining the history of this retaining wall. It is suggested that this site offers significant opportunities for historical interpretation (signage), exploring both the history of New Plymouth’s railway heritage, and of the development of the New Plymouth foreshore area.



Railway footbridge, New Plymouth foreshore, with stone retaining wall at left. Caleb Wyatt, 06 July 1978. Puke Ariki, PHO2012-0189

⁹ *Taranaki Daily News*, 22 November 1901, page 2

¹⁰ *Taranaki Herald*, 10 September 1900, page 2

¹¹ Coastal Walkway, <https://www.newplymouthnz.com/Residents/Attractions-and-Recreation/Coastal-Walkway>, accessed 3 July 2019.

¹² *Ibid.*

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Retaining wall looking east towards playground area

Reference Sources

See footnotes.

Description

The Regina Place/Victoria Esplanade Retaining Wall is located on New Plymouth's foreshore recreation area, directly below Regina Place (a public walkway). New Plymouth's Coastal Walkway passes below the wall through an area of mown grass and is well used by members of the public; the wall is a prominent and highly visible feature of this area.

The wall is approximately 110 metres in length, encompasses a gentle curve, and is constructed of local andesite rock; this being strongly porphyritic and probably quarried from the Paritutu quarry. The coursed rectangular rubble blocks are of varying sizes and mostly mortared into position.

Moulded concrete coping extends along much of the wall, with the concrete abutment for the now removed railway overbridge clearly visible near the mid-point of the wall. A large Pohutukawa tree is growing directly behind the wall at the western end and is starting to cause visible damage to the structure of the wall itself; the decomposing stumps of previously removed Pohutukawa are visible at other points along the wall.



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Assessment:

Historical	This wall has heritage significance as one of the last tangible links to the former use of this site as New Plymouth's railway transport hub for over one hundred years, with construction of the wall associated with the upgrade and enlargement of rail transport facilities to cater for a growing local population who were heavily reliant on rail for both travel and the export and import of goods. The decision to construct this wall in its present location is largely the result of local public pressure to keep the eastern end of Regina Place/Victoria Esplanade open for public use, and is associated with an early movement to recognise the recreational potential of New Plymouth's waterfront; something that wouldn't be fully realised until construction of the now renowned New Plymouth Coastal Walkway, the first portion of which opened 100 years later in 2001.	✓
Importance to Community	-	
Architecture & Construction	This wall has technical interest for the use of local andesite rock in its construction; this was likely quarried from the nearby Paritutu rock.	✓
Setting and Context	The wall is located in a prominent location on New Plymouth's popular Coastal Walkway and contributes positively to the aesthetic of the surrounding area.	✓
Archaeology	-	
Representativeness, rarity and integrity	This wall is representative of the types of retaining walls constructed in New Plymouth in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is the largest surviving wall of its type in New Plymouth, and retains a high degree of integrity, being little altered since it was first constructed.	✓
Meets threshold for listing (three or more ticks, or two ticks in one criterion)		✓