

The story of the Campbell building

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Next year Hawera residents are likely to see retail and office space removed, not another earthquake risk demolition but one to open up pedestrian access to car-parking spaces behind the retail area in central High St.

Campbell's building is a grey-faced two storeyed structure opposite Paper Plus, the 1893 on its plaster facade refers to the date of Malcolm Campbell's grocery and ironmongery business establishment and not the date of that building.

In September 1893 Malcolm James Campbell decided to open his ironmongery and grocery store having previously been employed at the general store of Gardner and Sutton.

He had already been in Hawera long enough to be described as an 'old and respected' resident.

In 1881 he had married twenty-one year old Mary Douglas, a member of the Middlemiss family who were one of the first families to settle in the town. Mary had

attended the Hawera School on its first day in 1875, no doubt as a senior student.

The Douglas/Middlemiss family group were Canadian Scotch from Galt in Ontario who had arrived in Hawera by way of Wanganui in 1867 having been enticed by the equable climate of South Taranaki.

James' first store was opened in a new wooden building next to Messrs Hannah and Company, shoe and boot retailers, and in 1897 he was joined on the other side by G Murch, drapers, from Wanganui.

In the 1890s Ironmongery was an important line, consisting of metal items from nails and screws to kitchen stoves, cutlery, pots and pans, building and farmer's tools and even firearms. Grocery lines were largely sourced in England, jars, bottles and packets alongside locally produced flour and biscuits. Often store owners advertised that they were unpacking listed items from consignments in ships newly arrived in Wanganui or New Plymouth.



Malcolm Campbell was a well respected citizen, a Presbyterian elder and onetime chairman of the Early Closing Association to encourage stores to close no later than 7.30pm. In time he was joined by his and Mary's son James

Ernest who learned the trade but trained for a London qualification, DBOA, that would allow him to be a 'Sight Specialist' and set up a practice that took him to several different towns each week. For a time in Hawera he used an office

in the family store. Sometime in the pre-WWI era Malcolm Campbell had a large new store built and this gave him a second storey which could be used for stock or accommodation, this is the building that will be

Campbell's building will soon disappear from Hawera's skyline. The building has a long and rich history.

demolished. Before being called up for WWI James (Jim) Campbell sold his Sight Specialist business to his assistant and took up Real Estate in the firm Grant and Campbell.

Local body affairs called him when he tried hard to lessen the effects of the Great Depression in Hawera by finding temporary work for the jobless and food parcels for the needy in his role as Mayor 1933 - 1939 and achieved the respect of all groups within Hawera and the Maori community in particular. His sudden death in 1939 was widely felt from horticultural, farming, professional and business organisations. The fine Wendy Statue in King Edward Park, an amenity in which he took great pride, was given to the citizens of Hawera by his widow Marion in his memory and it recalls his great interest in the children of Hawera; the Campbell's had been childless. Malcolm Campbell's building was sold after the death of Marion in 1940 but his name will be honoured in the proposed pedestrian way that will be created.