

NEW OPERA HOUSE.

CONTRACT LET FOR BUILDING.

WORK TO START IMMEDIATELY.

The directors of the New Plymouth Opera House Company, Ltd., met on Tuesday and accepted the tender of Messrs. J. T. Julian and Sons, Ltd., of Auckland, for the erection of an opera house in New Plymouth on the site of the old Theatre Royal, which was destroyed by fire in 1916.

The new theatre will be of three storeys, and will have seating accommodation for 1200 people, and the stage accommodation will make it possible for the biggest pantomime extravaganzas and plays of every type to be shown here. The building will have a frontage of 63 feet to Devon Street. It will be of reinforced concrete with cement facings, and will constitute a handsome addition to the buildings of New Plymouth. On the ground floor frontage, two shops with generous window space will flank the entrances, of which there are two, one to the stalls and dress circle through an imposing vestibule, and the other to the gallery. Above the vestibule entrance will be a wrought iron and concrete balcony with casement doors from the lounge, while a little further up the tiled roof will slope back, leaving two square towers to set off the front corners of the building.

On either side of the vestibule entrance, close to the door, provision has been made for ticket boxes. Rising from the centre of the vestibule, which will be panelled with rimu, will be the stairs leading to the dress circle lounge. On one side of the lounge will be found ladies' and gentlemen's cloak rooms, and on this floor also the manager will have his office. The lounge itself will be 27 feet 10 inches by 17 feet 7 inches in area.

A feature of the auditorium, which will have boxes on either side of the stage on a level with the stalls and dress circle, will be the almost entire absence of supports to the circle and gallery, leaving an uninterrupted view of the stage. At the front of the stalls will be the orchestra, well below a proscenium measuring 30 feet across the stage will be 40 feet in depth and 62 feet 19 inches in width, while the height of the grid above the stage will be 55 feet 6 inches. The stage is to be equipped with the latest mechanical appliances, including fly galleries built in modern style, paint bridge with frame for scene painting and winches for working the electric light floats, while the latest in electrical gear will also be installed. In the gallery, which will also be provided with cloak-rooms, provision has been made for an operators' box. Thirteen dressing rooms will be built below the stage around the walls, leaving space in the centre for properties and drop act appliances.

In designing the theatre, the architect (Mr. Thos. H. Bates) has naturally devoted special attention to the acoustics. It is a known fact that concrete "rings," and to obviate this the building will be finished in brick inside. Again, one of the latest ideas from America has been imported in the provision of an arch above the proscenium, which will act as a sounding board. Special attention too has been paid to ventilation by the provision of ventilating grids beneath the circle and gallery, which will carry off the vitiated air, fresh air coming into the theatre through ducts in the walls leading to the roof and thence into the auditorium. In the dome, which will crown the auditorium, there will also be a ventilating grid. Lighting will be arranged on the diffused system. The front of the stage and all the balustrading is to be done in fibrous plaster.

Some idea of the amount of work involved in designing the theatre will be gained when it is mentioned that the architect has had to prepare 60 sheets of coloured plans, while the specifications involve over 50 sheets of close typed foolscap.

The building and the land will involve an expenditure of nearly £40,000. The contractors will commence at once with the work of its erection, and it is expected to take about 15 months to complete.