



Post Office, 21 Currie Street (Gill St cnr)

1959

Themes in development: transport and trade, cultural and social, civic.

Cultural heritage values: historical, architectural, technical and townscape values.

Not registered.

Owner

Trans Pacific Post
PO Box 281
Palmerston North

Title

Pt Secs 873-875, 889, 890
Town of New Plymouth (SO 9701)
ID: 013582

Use

Post office, retail,
gymnasium, etc.

Description

The New Plymouth Post Office is a modern four-storey reinforced concrete structure (three above ground on Currie Street), severe in its strict geometric form and near-total absence of decoration or trim. The concrete is finished with smooth and textured plaster, and the window joinery is bronze. The central section of three openings above the main entrance contains six vitrolite (?) panels illustrating the history of travel and communication. There is a light well in the centre of the building down to first floor level, so the main public space on the ground floor is lit from above; the glazing in this ceiling is sand-blasted and acid etched glass depicting the legend of Maui snaring the sun.

History

New Plymouth's first post office was established in 1842 in a raupo whare in Brougham Street, the first of seven temporary buildings occupied by the post office until the construction of a more permanent home in 1877. This was sited on land that now forms the Robe Street park, facing Devon Street West and set well back from it. This allowed the construction of the landmark Edwardian post office building in front of it on the Devon Street boundary in 1906, the prominent clock tower of which is now reproduced in modern form on the same site.

The foundation stone for the new building (and a time capsule behind it) was laid by the Hon T P Shand, Postmaster General on 2 August 1956, and was opened by his successor Hon Michael Moohan on 14 May 1959. It was built by W Williamson Construction Co Ltd of Christchurch, for a cost of approximately £400,000. The building has continued in use as the city's main post office to the present, although with other tenants now occupying upper floors.

Architect

The architect was R W Syme according to the stone commemorating the opening; the drawings held by the District Council are signed Taylor and Syme.

Statement of Significance

The Post Office is a strong no-nonsense piece of architecture, typical of public building of the 1950s, functional and built of quality materials. It is prominent in the townscape and being set back from the building line on Currie Street it has a useful small public space with trees in front of it. The tenth post office in New Plymouth since 1842, there is a modest acknowledgement of history and the tangata whenua in the decorative finish of the entrance bay and the main public space on the ground floor.

Sources

New Plymouth District Council building file 205/2.

Foundation and opening stones on either side of the main entrance.

The Taranaki Daily News, 14 May 1959, New Post Office Supplement.