

Gables may stage a comeback

Plans for museum

Former colonial hospital the Gables, in Brooklands Park, New Plymouth, could become New Zealand's first museum of medicine.

The proposal to set up the museum has come from New Plymouth historian Mrs Gail Lambert who has spent the last five years researching the Gables' history and the colonial surgeons who worked in it.

She says the Gables, one of four colonial hospitals commissioned by Governor George Grey in the 1840s, is an ideal spot for the museum.

The Gables is the oldest hospital still standing in New Zealand.

Mrs Lambert said the idea has met initial support from a variety of organisations and individuals concerned with history and medicine.

Some groups have indicated they could give items to the museum for display. There are also many old medical items kept in hospitals throughout the country that could be

housed in a museum such as this. Mrs Lambert says she will ask other groups for their support and formulate definite proposals early next year. A national appeal is one idea to preserve the Gables. To succeed the project needs the support of the New Zealand Historic Places Trust and approval from the New Plymouth City Council, which now owns the building. Secretary of the Taranaki

regional committee of the trust Mr Murray Moorhead, New Plymouth says his committee supports the move to convert the Gables into a museum. It would be an ideal way to preserve the unique building. The committee also wants

restoration work carried out urgently. Mrs Lambert, also a committee member of the Friends of the Taranaki Museum, said the group had contacted the city council earlier this year urging it to undertake a restoration programme suggesting tem-

porary employment programme workers could carry out the work. At the present time the Gables could be restored to its original condition with only a minimum of work, but if restoration was delayed the project would become quite costly.



The Gables, when built...



The Gables as it is today.



Hospital architect Mr Frederick Thatcher.

Impractical as a hospital

The New Plymouth Colonial Hospital, as the Gables was then known, was commissioned by Governor Grey in 1847 in an effort to promote greater interaction between Maori and Pakeha. Three other hospitals were also set up, in

Auckland, Wellington and Wanganui. The building was designed by well-known colonial architect Mr Fredrick Thatcher.

However, by 1904 the home was too expensive for the board to run so the building was put up for auction.

Story: Julie Gifford
Camera: Jane Dove

Gifted

In 1926 when Mr Newton King died the building and surrounding land in Brooklands Park was gifted to the district authority.

Since that time it has been rented out occasionally. Taranaki artist Mr Michael Smither is among people who have lived in the house. New Plymouth public relations officer Mr Bryce McPherson and his family now live at the Gables.

The Gables can be visited by arrangement with Mr McPherson.



A view of the Gables on its present site in Brooklands Park.

cher Despite its tranquil Elizabethan beauty the building proved to be most impractical as a hospital. It was not built to the sun, had no hot water or toilet facilities and was too far out of town for most people. The hospital was situated on Mangorei Rd the site where New Plymouth Girls' High School now stands. It had three wards, catering for up to 15 people in each.

Tapu

In August 1854 Chief Rawiri Watai, who was injured in fighting between two factions of the Puketapu Hapu of the Atiawa tribe, was treated at the hospital.

Following his death the Maori people put a tapu on the building, this probably saved it from destruction, the fate of many buildings during the Taranaki land wars in the 1860s.

The hospital was rarely used during the wars as there were already two other hospitals in the town. Urgent repairs were carried out in 1872 when there was a smallpox scare. It was intended to use the hospital as a quarantine base but there was no outbreak.

By 1880 the hospital was known as the refuge, as it was used as an old men's home. The home was administered by the Taranaki Hospitals and Charitable Aid Board.

ed by their relatives and friends. During this time the building became known as the Gables because of its structural design.



Mrs Lambert with a medicine chest used by doctors in the 1800s.



Formerly the hospital dispensary, this room has a high ceiling and exposed chimney, typical of the architect's style.



Side view of the Gables. The annexe was added as a storeroom to the original building several years later.

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