

Heritage Buildings Report

Site ID

Building/Site Name

Fitzroy Post Office (Former)

Address

512 Devon Street East, Fitzroy, New Plymouth



Statement of Significance

Despite postal services being available in Fitzroy since 1888, it wasn't until 1921 that the Post and Telegraph Department erected this building as the suburbs' first dedicated post office. It remained in use as a post office until 1988, when it was closed during a major reorganisation of Taranaki postal services. The former Fitzroy Post Office is representative of the government designed post offices erected in smaller regional towns and city suburbs during the 1920s. Its construction is tied to the rapid post-war growth of Fitzroy and its rise as major suburb of New Plymouth. It is the only building of its type to survive in New Plymouth city, and although subject to some modification, the original structure largely retains its original form and key exterior architectural features.

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Legal Information and Heritage Status

Legal Description Section 2 SO 12984

District Plan Item/ Map No.

Heritage New Zealand List Not listed

Construction Information

Date of Construction 1921

Principal Materials Wooden framing, weatherboard, corrugated steel

Construction Professionals John Campbell (architect), Coleman and Son (builders)

History

The first Fitzroy Post Office was opened at the Fitzroy Store, Darnell Street, on the 1st of November 1888, with proprietor Mr D. Jones the first postmaster.¹ On the 30th of June 1891 it was reported that the Fitzroy Post Office would re-open temporarily at the residence of Mrs J. B. Roberts, with John Bowley Roberts acting as postmaster from 1st July 1891 until Mrs Catherine Roberts took over as post-mistress for a short period on 1st February 1900.² The Fitzroy site was upgraded to a post and telephone office on December 12th 1893, with a telephone bureau installed on the 18th of November 1895.³

Storekeeper Edward S. Riggall was Fitzroy Postmaster from the 1st of April 1900, followed by Albert E. Foote from 1st March 1902, Jacob Fisch from 16th October 1904, and John Taylor from 1st August 1909.⁴ On the 1st of April 1916 the Fitzroy Post Office closed without public notification following Taylor giving seven weeks' notice to the chief postmaster at New Plymouth that he would no longer offer postal services at his shop after March 31st 1916, unless his remuneration was increased from £54 to £72 per year.⁵ The Postal Department initially declined this request, and it took a petition by Fitzroy ratepayers and several letters between MP Mr H. Okey and the Postmaster General, Sir Joseph Ward, to resolve the issue.⁶ Eventually the increase to £72 per annum was agreed to and the office re-opened on 1 May.⁷ Taylor relinquished his position as postmaster in mid-1919, resulting in Edward G. Pearce acting as postmaster for two years from 1 June 1919, followed by A. P. Landers from June 6th 1921, and H. Boyd for less than a month from September 19th 1921.⁸

With Fitzroy experiencing rapid post-war growth, existing post office facilities at Fitzroy were proving inadequate. In October 1919, the Postmaster General finally allocated the sum of £1350 for a new post office at Fitzroy; this was approved by Parliament later that month.⁹ This was to be the first

¹ *Taranaki Herald*, 17 October 1888, page 2

² *Taranaki Herald*, 30 June 1891, page 2; Shaw, Noeline. *Hamblyn family history, 1841-1855-1976: Plymouth to New Plymouth*. Wyndham: M. N. Shaw, 1977.

³ Shaw, Noeline. *Hamblyn family history, 1841-1855-1976: Plymouth to New Plymouth*. Wyndham: M. N. Shaw, 1977.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Taranaki Herald*, 8 April 1916, page 2

⁶ *Taranaki Herald*, 25 April 1916, page 7

⁷ *Taranaki Herald*, 1 May 1916, page 7

⁸ Shaw, Noeline. *Hamblyn family history, 1841-1855-1976: Plymouth to New Plymouth*. Wyndham: M. N. Shaw, 1977.

⁹ *Taranaki Herald*, 31 October 1919, page 2

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dedicated Post Office for Fitzroy and would be constructed on a site at the corner of Devon Street East and Paynter's Avenue, which was acquired by the Department some time previously. L. B. Campbell, District Engineer for the Public Works Department, advertised for tenders for the construction of the present post office building in late August 1920.¹⁰ The new building was designed by Public Works architect John Campbell, with the original plans now held by Archives New Zealand.¹¹ The successful tenderers for construction of the post office were the New Plymouth firm of Coleman and Son.¹²

Construction of the concrete foundations for the new post office were commenced in mid-March 1921.¹³ However, an initial set-back occurred soon after construction had commenced, with the Borough Engineer and local ratepayers expressing concern that the building was positioned too close to Paynter's Avenue, and that this would prevent future widening of the street and also create a dangerous corner.¹⁴ A deputation met with the chief postmaster, and also contacted local MP Mr S. G. Smith and the postal authorities in Wellington to try and resolve the issue.¹⁵ Whilst there was some concern that it was too late to change the position of the building, it seems an agreement was reached to alter the foundations and site the post office further to the west.¹⁶ Construction was further delayed by materials shortages that resulted in supplies not being available when required.¹⁷

The new Fitzroy Post Office was completed, and open for business by mid-October 1921.¹⁸ The entire width of the Devon Street frontage was occupied by office space, and staff accommodation was located at the rear. A lobby within the main entrance contained 28 private letter boxes, and from here the main office could be accessed through glass panel doors.¹⁹ Within the office were a number of desks for customers to use when filling in forms, and also a telephone bureau.²⁰ The first postmistress at the new office was Mrs A. J. Riddell, who had been transferred from Auckland.²¹ She was followed by Mrs E. C. Nuttal from 22nd April 1929, Miss M. Ryan from 4th October 1935, Mrs E. Morris from 31 July 1936, Mr L. F. Butcher from 30th November 1944, and Mr C. A. Solomon from 15th October 1958.²²

The Fitzroy Post Office operated from this building until 1988, when its closure was announced as part of a major reorganisation of Taranaki postal services following Telecom's withdrawal of all account payment facilities in Taranaki post offices.²³ Four other Taranaki post offices were also to be closed at the time, with several others downgraded.²⁴ It seems that a postal delivery centre was initially set-up in a Fitzroy business following the closure of the Paynter's Avenue post office.²⁵ However, three years later, following the sale of the Paynter's Avenue site and closure of the Bell Block Post Office, New Zealand Post decided to merge both the Bell Block and Fitzroy operations

¹⁰ *Taranaki Herald*, 23 August 1920, page 7

¹¹ [Public Works Plans – Fitzroy Post and Telegraph Office], John Campbell, circa. 1920, Item ID R18677154, Agency ACHL, Series 22541, Record Group W5, Box 1417, Record 48052, Part 2, Archives New Zealand (ANZ).

¹² *Taranaki Herald*, 20 October 1921, page 6

¹³ *Taranaki Herald*, 19 March 1921, page 2

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Taranaki Herald*, 19 March 1921, page 2

¹⁶ *Taranaki Herald*, 15 March 1921, page 5; *Taranaki Herald*, 20 October 1921, page 6

¹⁷ *Taranaki Herald*, 20 October 1921, page 6

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Shaw, Noeline. *Hamblyn family history, 1841-1855-1976: Plymouth to New Plymouth*. Wyndham: M. N. Shaw, 1977.

²³ *Taranaki Herald*, 25 August 1988, page 1

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *The Daily News*, 2 March 1991, page 3

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into a new Post Shop to be located in central Fitzroy, at the intersection of Clinton Street and Stainton Lane; this new Post Shop was opened on Monday 6th of May 1991.²⁶ New Zealand Post Ltd continued to operate a Post Shop at the Clinton Street site until mid-2011, when it was finally closed, and a smaller post centre opened nearby at the premises of Fitzroy Lotto and Mags.²⁷

The former Devon Street/Paynter's Avenue post office building was occupied by a florist for a considerable period, before being extended and converted into a bed and breakfast called 'Stamps' in 2004. It was sold again in 2008 and has since been used as worker accommodation.



[Public Works Plans – Fitzroy Post and Telegraph Office], John Campbell, circa. 1920, Item ID R18677154, Agency ACHL, Series 22541, Record Group W5, Box 1417, Record 48052, Part 2, Archives New Zealand (ANZ).

Reference Sources

See footnotes.

²⁶ Ibid; *The Daily News*, 18 December 1990, page 3; *The Daily News*, 7 May 1991, page 4

²⁷ *Taranaki Daily News*, 14 May 2011, page 3

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Description

The former Fitzroy Post Office is located on the corner of Devon Street East and Paynter's Avenue, in the eastern New Plymouth suburb of Strandon. The surrounding area was subdivided in the early 1900s, and is largely comprised of 1920s-30s bungalows, interspersed by groups of 1900s-10s villas and a few surviving nineteenth-century homesteads. Many older dwellings have since been removed and replaced with a mixture of townhouses and large modern family homes; this is especially evident along Devon Street East.

The main form of the building is a steeply-pitched half-hipped gable with shallow projecting front hipped gables and recent extensions to the rear western side of the structure. The building is of a domestic scale and style and incorporates features from the bungalow style popular at the time. The building is wooden-framed on concrete foundations, the walls are clad in horizontal bevel-back weatherboards and the roof is sheathed in mild corrugated steel.

The symmetrically composed main front elevation faces roughly north-west into Devon Street East. The principal windows to this elevation are a pair of casements with six-light divided fanlights at the west, and a single casement and timber and glazed entrance door, both with six-light fanlights above, to the east. Within the front wall of each of the projecting hipped gables is a single slender fixed casement with leaded and patterned diamond shaped glass. The gable end rises to a bell-cast with corbels and is finished with a simple horizontal timber beam.

The north-eastern elevation faces into Paynter's Avenue and is separated from the footpath by a small raised grass area. This elevation incorporates three pairs of slender double-hung sashes (four-light upper sash over single-light lower sash, with a smaller side-hinged casement incorporating patterned glass to the rear. As with the other elevations, the eaves feature exposed rafters.

The rear elevation incorporates a small fixed casement, leaded with diamond shaped glass, and a pair of slender double hung sashes to the extreme west. At the south-eastern elevation, the two-storied 2004 addition extends south from the rear of the projecting half-hipped gable. This addition is sympathetic to the original structure, being clad in timber weatherboards with wooden joinery.

Assessment:

Historical	This building has historic significance as the first dedicated post office building erected in Fitzroy; a purpose for which it was used for a period of 67 years until its closure in 1988. Construction of this building is tied to the rapid post-war growth of Fitzroy and its subsequent rise as major suburb of New Plymouth.	✓
Importance to Community	This building remains an important element in the community's consciousness, with many New Plymouth residents still recalling a time when this building was a functioning post office at which they conducted their business.	✓
Architecture & Construction	This building is a good example of a smaller government designed post office building incorporating features from the bungalow style popular at the time.	✓
Setting and Context	Located close to the property boundary adjacent to the busy Devon Street East, the former Fitzroy Post Office is highly visible and contributes positively to the character of the surrounding area.	✓



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Archaeology

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Representativeness, rarity and integrity

This building is representative of the government designed post offices erected in smaller regional towns and suburbs during the 1920s. It is the only building of its type to survive in New Plymouth city, and although subject to some modification, the original structure largely retains its original form and key exterior architectural features.

✓

Meets threshold for listing (three or more ticks, or two ticks in one criterion)

✓

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