

Heritage Buildings Report

Site ID

Building/Site Name

Walker's Workers' Dwelling

Address

23 Paynters Avenue, Strandon, New Plymouth



Statement of Significance

Constructed for carpenter John Walker, this house is one of a continuous row of four bungalows erected in 1917-18 under the provisions of the Worker's Dwellings Act. The dwellings at 23, 25, 27 and 29 Paynter's Avenue have an important place in New Plymouth's history, as the first, and only, houses to be constructed under the Workers' Dwellings Act in the city. The departure from standard Labour Department plans, and the involvement of a local architect to design homes better suited to the applicants' needs, distinguishes these dwellings from other examples across New Zealand. As a representative example of a house in the local bungalow vernacular which has changed little since its construction 100 years ago, both singularly, and as part of a group, this house contributes positively to the surrounding streetscape.



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Legal Information and Heritage Status

Legal Description Allotment 1 DP 3580

District Plan Item/ Map No.

Heritage New Zealand List Not listed

Construction Information

Date of Construction 1917-18

Principal Materials Wooden framing, weatherboard, corrugated steel

Construction Professionals Luke Langridge (contractor)

History

By 1916, New Plymouth, along with other New Zealand towns and cities, was grappling with a severe housing shortage. At this time it was reported that two families occupying one dwelling was not uncommon, new residents were forced into lodgings, and the Borough Council was losing employees who could not find residence in the town.¹ Whilst the shortage could largely be attributed to high construction costs associated with wartime scarcity of labour and materials, the situation in New Plymouth was exacerbated by a number of local factors. The harbour extension works at Moturoa (which saw the breakwater open to international shipping in 1917), the establishment of the tramways in 1916 (whose workshops were at the junction of Devon and Darnell Streets), and also the establishment of the Smart Road Freezing Works (also in eastern New Plymouth), put further pressure on a limited housing supply.²

As a means to improve both the supply and standard of worker housing, the Liberal Government had previously passed the first Workers Dwellings Act in 1905. This Act enabled workers to lease (and later rent) homes constructed by the government, and saw the Liberal government become the first central government in the Western World to provide public housing for its citizens.³ Whilst this Act was revolutionary, it was largely unsuccessful due to high construction costs and a suburban emphasis which failed to recognise the need for workers to live near their places of employment.⁴

A new Workers' Dwellings Act with strengthened freehold provisions was passed in 1910. Under the new Act, the State was prepared to build landless urban workers their own house for just a £10 deposit, and whilst workers could still lease or rent from the state, applicants who were prepared to own were favoured.⁵ Despite Premier Richard Seddon's initial aims of building at least 5000 houses in the first few years, the Workers' Dwellings scheme delivered just 646 houses after fourteen years, and was replaced by the Workers Housing Act in 1919.⁶

In New Plymouth, there were murmurings of central government constructing workers dwellings at the Spotswood Settlement as early as February 1906.⁷ However, this plan never eventuated due to the distance of the settlement from town, and as a result no dwellings were ever constructed in New

¹ *Taranaki Daily News*, 15 June 1916, page 4

² *Taranaki Herald*, 31 January 1917, page 2

³ Schrader, Ben. *We Call it Home: A history of State Housing in New Zealand*. Auckland: Reed, 2005.

⁴ Ferguson, Gael. *Building the New Zealand Dream*. Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1994.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Workers Homes New Plymouth 1905-43, Item ID R16795799, Series 841, Box 104/C, Record 4/16, Archives New Zealand (ANZ).



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Plymouth under the 1905 Act.⁸ In 1911 there was talk of constructing workers dwellings at Veale's Estate in Lynmouth, and in 1913 a worker's settlement was proposed at Westown; however, for unknown reasons neither proposal was proceeded with at the time.⁹ A further attempt to provide workers' housing in New Plymouth was made in December 1916, when the Workers' Dwellings Board sought to purchase four dwellings of 4 and 5 rooms in the New Plymouth Borough.¹⁰ The 'unusual' decision to purchase homes rather than erect new dwellings was strongly criticised by local citizens who pointed out that this would do nothing to increase housing supply, and perhaps unsurprisingly, it seems the Board was unable to find suitable properties and the scheme abandoned.¹¹

By January 1917, when work had started on the construction of six homes at Hawera, the *Taranaki Herald* commented that "it is a pity that the Government has so far neglected the pressing claims of New Plymouth, where the shortage of workers' homes is daily becoming more acute".¹² A few days later, the *Taranaki Herald* again tackled New Plymouth's housing issue and workers' dwellings in a lengthy editorial encouraging workers desirous of obtaining a home under the scheme to get their applications in early; it seems several tramway workers had applied too late the previous year.¹³

One month later, F. W. Rowley, the Superintendent for Workers' Dwellings, called for offers of land for workers' dwellings in New Plymouth Borough.¹⁴ This time suitable land was found in the eastern New Plymouth suburb of Strandon, where sections 11, 12 and 13 of Chilman's Subdivision, Paynter's Avenue, were purchased by the government from Daniel Barry and subsequently subdivided into four lots during July 1917.¹⁵ The new subdivision would be known as Hooper's Workers' Dwelling's Settlement, and Rowley soon called for tenders for the erection of four Workers' Dwellings at New Plymouth.¹⁶ The construction of four dwellings was somewhat unusual given the statutory minimum of six dwellings, although it seems this provision was sometimes waived, and a further two dwellings were also to be constructed at Patea.¹⁷

Early in the project an all too common set-back occurred, with the initial tenders received by the Department considered too high for the type of dwelling being constructed.¹⁸ Fortunately, this issue was overcome through applicants offering to double their deposits, from £10 to £20 pounds, if a higher standard of house could be provided.¹⁹ A local architect then prepared new designs, and together with builder Luke Langridge, submitted a new tender that was eventually accepted by the Department.²⁰ It is currently unclear which local architect produced the new plans, and whether they adapted one of Woburn Temple's standard designs, or started afresh.

By early January 1918, it seems all the homes were nearing completion, with Langridge advertising for a "good painter and paper-hanger" at the Paynter's Avenue Workers' Dwellings.²¹ Woburn Temple visited New Plymouth to inspect the dwellings in early March 1918.²² They were reported upon favourably by a *Daily News* reporter, who despite noting their similarity in design, described them as

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ *Taranaki Herald*, 4 December 1916, page 1

¹¹ *Taranaki Daily News*, 30 November 1916, page 4

¹² *Taranaki Herald*, 24 January 1917, page 2

¹³ *Taranaki Herald*, 31 January 1917, page 2

¹⁴ *Taranaki Herald*, 26 February 1917, page 1

¹⁵ DP3580, Land Information New Zealand

¹⁶ *Taranaki Herald*, 13 July 1917, page 7

¹⁷ *Taranaki Daily News*, 13 March 1918, page 7

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ *Taranaki Herald*, 9 January 1918, page 1

²² *Taranaki Herald*, 6 March 1918, page 7



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presenting “nothing of the monotonous and forbidding appearance usually conceived when “workers’ dwellings” are mentioned.”²³

In alignment with the aims of the Workers’ Dwellings scheme, the four Paynter’s Avenue bungalows were all constructed for skilled or manual workers. This house was built for carpenter John Walker, present number 25 for motorman Richard C. Alsop, number 27 for wool dryer Walter H. Charteris, and number 29 for motorman George Robert White.²⁴ John Walker completed his payments and purchased the property for £723 17s 6d from the Crown in mid-1926, with the certificate of title issued at this time.²⁵

Reference Sources

See footnotes.

Description

Walker’s Workers’ Dwelling is located on 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. In recent years some older dwellings have been removed and replaced with a mixture of townhouses and large modern family homes.

23 Paynter’s Avenue is the northernmost house in an unbroken row of four Workers’ Dwellings, and part of a continuous row of five similarly scaled single storey bungalows. Despite being situated near the front of the section, the house is largely obscured from view behind a hedge. A low concrete block wall runs across the street frontage, and a modern block and weatherboard single-car garage is located at the south-western front corner of the property.

Designed in the local bungalow vernacular, the main form of the house is a single wide gable with rear lean-to. The walls are clad in bevel-back weatherboard, and the roof sheathed in corrugated steel; this was originally malthoid owing to the high cost of iron at the time of construction. A double brick chimney with two terracotta pots rises from the southern side of the roof. The perimeter foundation wall is, rather unusually for a New Plymouth house of this period, solid concrete.

The main front elevation faces south-west into Paynter’s Avenue and incorporates an enclosed entrance porch at the southern corner. The upper section of the porch is glazed with large rectangular sheets of clear patterned glass, with smaller squares of coloured patterned glass above. Beside the porch entrance is a small rectangular leaded window, with a shallow hooded bay window incorporating a set of three casements and fanlights located adjacent. The side-hinged lower windows incorporate clear panes, and the upper top-hinged fanlights utilise patterned coloured glass in a theme continued throughout the house. The upper gable end is finished in a shallow bell-cast.

The north-western side wall incorporates a single small casement, and two sets of casements with fanlights. The south-eastern side wall incorporates a set of three casements with fanlights, a circa 1960s style replacement casement window, and a projecting timber meat safe.

²³ *Taranaki Daily News*, 13 March 1918, page 7

²⁴ *Wises Post Office Directory*, 1919

²⁵ *Workers Homes New Plymouth 1905-43*, Archives New Zealand, Wellington, AALD W3055 841 Box 104, Item Code: R16795799



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Assessment:

Historical	Walker's Workers' Dwelling is historically significant for its association with early central government efforts to address an acute national housing shortage and raise living standards through the Workers' Dwellings Acts. Despite earlier efforts to have Workers' Dwellings constructed in New Plymouth, the Paynter's Avenue houses were the first, and only, dwellings to be constructed in New Plymouth under the Act. The departure from standard plans and collaboration between a local architect, builder, and the Labour Department, established a new precedent for the construction of Workers' Dwellings which better suited the needs of applicants.	✓✓
Importance to Community	-	
Architecture & Construction	This building is a good and representative example of a house in the local bungalow vernacular.	✓
Setting and Context	This building is part of a continuous row of four Workers' Dwellings constructed at the same time and in a similar style. Both individually, and as part of a group, this building contributes positively to the surrounding streetscape.	✓
Archaeology	-	
Representativeness, rarity and integrity	This house retains a high degree of external integrity, and has changed little since its construction 100 years ago. The house has rarity value as one of only four houses known to have been constructed under the Workers' Dwellings Act in New Plymouth.	✓
Meets threshold for listing (three or more ticks, or two ticks in one criterion)		✓