



Heritage Buildings Report

Site ID

Building/Site Name

Messenger House

Address

219 Gill Street, New Plymouth



Statement of Significance

Messenger House has considerable heritage significance as the former residence of Frank Messenger, one of New Plymouth's most accomplished architects. Frank designed the home for himself and his wife Lucy, who lived there until 1916; a period incorporating much of Frank's distinguished solo career in New Plymouth. The house is a substantial and well-proportioned two-storied villa incorporating features from the fashionable Eastern Stick style. Messenger House has a strong street-presence, with a combination of detailed features and bold colour scheme ensuring it stands-out from its visually uninteresting neighbours. Although the house has been altered to a degree, the exterior, with the exception of modern aluminium joinery, retains a high degree of integrity and consequently conveys a strong sense of historical authenticity. The house is a good and representative example of the architect designed two-storied villas constructed around New Plymouth during the late-1890s and early-1900s, of which many have now been demolished.



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Legal Information and Heritage Status

Legal Description Lot 21 DP 1820

District Plan Item/ Map No.

Heritage New Zealand List Not listed

Construction Information

Date of Construction 1903

Principal Materials Wooden framing, weatherboard

Construction Professionals Frank Messenger (architect)

History

Messenger House was constructed in 1903 for Frank and Lucy Messenger as their private residence. Frank Messenger is one of New Plymouth's most accomplished architects, designing many residential and commercial buildings during his fifty years practice in the city.

Francis John Messenger was born on 4 July 1865, the second son of William and Arabella. Frank was educated in New Plymouth, and trained with local architect Henry J. T Edmonds, before moving to Melbourne, where he worked for Oakden and Kemp for ten years.¹ In 1891, Messenger married his second cousin Lucy Messenger, before returning to New Plymouth in 1893; he commenced practice in New Plymouth the following year.² Frank Messenger and Horace Victor Griffiths entered into partnership in 1917, with William Taylor joining in 1920.³ This partnership ceased in 1930, with Messenger and Taylor forming a new partnership; Leonard Wolfe later joined in a partnership that would last up until Messenger's death on 11 October 1945.⁴

The early history of the property can be traced to the mid-nineteenth century, when a board and batten cottage was constructed near the northern end of Autere Street. This cottage was occupied by Major Charles Brown for many years and was known as 'The Pines' after a large row of nearby pine trees. In September 1901, Brown was unfortunately killed by a train at the old Devon Street crossing, and the property was subsequently sold to Messrs Weston, Thompson and Kebell.⁵ On 22 December 1901 the old house was destroyed by arson, with the court case generating considerable local media interest.⁶ In mid-1902 the property was subdivided into 21 smaller residential lots centred on the newly-formed Autere Street.⁷

Frank Messenger purchased Lot 21 of 'The Pines' subdivision in late 1902, with the section registered under his name on December 22nd.⁸ At the time of purchase, Frank and Lucy were living in the two-storied villa at present 17 Vivian Street, designed by Messenger, and constructed during 1899-1900.⁹ Several months after purchasing the section, during February 1903, the *Taranaki Herald* reported that

¹ Pritchard, Ian. *Frank Messenger, Architect: The work of a New Plymouth architect* (New Plymouth: Ian Pritchard, 1994).

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ CT TN48/225, Land Information New Zealand

⁶ *Taranaki Herald*, 10 January 1902, page 2

⁷ DP1820, Land Information New Zealand

⁸ CT TN50/220, Land Information New Zealand

⁹ Gooch, Mike & Crimp, Hamish, '17 Vivian Street (circa 1899-1900)', *Kete New Plymouth*, <http://ketenewplymouth.peoplesnetworknz.info/en/site>; accessed 13 December 2018.



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Messenger was intending to build a house on the section.¹⁰ A construction permit for the house was granted by the New Plymouth Borough Council on the 7th of July 1903, with the estimated construction cost being £650.¹¹ Messenger is first listed as residing at this location in the 1904 Edition of Stones Street Directory.¹² The Messenger's resided in the house until 1916, when Frank designed himself and Lucy a new English Domestic Revival style house at the corner of Eliot and Wakefield Streets.¹³ This was to be the Messenger's final home, with both living there until their deaths, Frank in 1945, and Lucy in 1952; the house was demolished in the late 1960s to make way for the present NPBHS Ryder Hall.

Ownership of the Molesworth Street property was transferred to seed merchant William Parnell Nicoll on the 21st of October 1916.¹⁴ However, Nicoll only retained ownership for a short period, before the property was sold to school teacher Beattie Henderson on the 19th of November 1916.¹⁵ It seems the house was then rented for a period, with William Pannett Nicoll listed in Wises Post Office Directories as the occupier between 1918 and 1920.¹⁶ From 1921 until at least 1940, Robert Hugh Henderson (thought to be Beattie's brother), is noted as the occupier.¹⁷ On the 19th of September 1934 ownership was transferred to Christopher Carter, who retained possession until the 30th of June 1938, when the property was transferred to Allen William Henderson, Barbara Beattie Henderson, and Lorna Jean South, as tenants in equal shares.¹⁸ The house was probably converted into three flats, one downstairs and two upstairs, at this time.¹⁹

Ownership of the property was transferred to Dora Foreman on the 12th of October 1942.²⁰ The house remained as three flats for a period and appears to have been rented by Taranaki Newspapers. Mrs Mary Young and her family resided in the downstairs flat during 1959-60, and the upper flats were occupied by journalists at this time.²¹ The Young's returned to the house as sole occupants between 1961-68; although Mary's mother resided in one of the upstairs flats for a time, before it was rented by Maureen Haggerty.²²

Maxwell John Till, then a law student, purchased the property on the 25th of March 1968, and subsequently completed extensive renovations.²³ On the 9th of August 1977, ownership was transferred to Ian Arthur Lehndorf.²⁴ The Lehndorf's purchased the adjacent property at 217 Gill Street during June 1979, and following the removal of the old villa to Wairau Road, Oakura, extended their garden into the property.²⁵ Ownership was transferred to Thomas Stirling on 4th of July 1980, and later to Kenneth McCullough on the 23 of September 1988.²⁶

Reference Sources See footnotes.

¹⁰ *Taranaki Herald*, 11 February 1903, p.4

¹¹ NPBC Building Register Book 1902-22, Puke Ariki Archives (ARC2011-204)

¹² Stones Street Directory, 1904

¹³ NPBC Building Register Book 1902-22, Puke Ariki Archives (ARC2011-204)

¹⁴ CT TN50/220, Land Information New Zealand

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Wises Post Office Directories, 1914-18

¹⁷ Ibid., 1921-40

¹⁸ CT TN50/220, Land Information New Zealand

¹⁹ McCullough, Mark. *Messenger House* (New Plymouth: Mark McCullough, 1995).

²⁰ CT TN50/220, Land Information New Zealand

²¹ McCullough, Mark. *Messenger House* (New Plymouth: Mark McCullough, 1995).

²² Ibid.

²³ CT TN50/220, Land Information New Zealand

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ McCullough, Mark. *Messenger House* (New Plymouth: Mark McCullough, 1995).

²⁶ CT TN50/220, Land Information New Zealand



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Description

Messenger House is located in the eastern New Plymouth suburb of Strandon, a short distance from the CBD. Whilst this area was settled early in New Plymouth's history, intensification of the immediate area didn't begin until the early-1900s. In recent years, development pressures have seen the demolition and removal of many older residential properties in the area.

Located atop a low cliff on the western side of the Te Henui River, the house has views across East End Reserve towards the Tasman Sea. The eastern slope contains a variety of mature native and exotic trees and shrubs which contribute to the picturesque setting. Of particular interest is a large Queensland Kauri (*Agathis robusta*), an uncommon tree in New Plymouth, growing on the slope below the house, and which is thought to have been planted during Messenger's period of ownership. A weatherboard clad double-car garage constructed in 1993 abuts the rear south-eastern wall of the house.

The main form of the house is a moderately-pitched hipped gable, with further projecting gables and modern rear extensions. The exterior incorporates elements of the Eastern Stick style, with walls clad in horizontal timber weatherboards and then decorated with flat boarding. The roof is sheathed in corrugated steel and a double brick chimney finished with decorative dentil courses rises from the roof; although the original tall ceramic chimney pots have long since been removed.

The original windows were primarily wooden double-hung sashes incorporating Messenger's signature six-light divided upper pane over single lower pane. Whilst these have been regrettably replaced with aluminium versions in a similar style, a number of the original shingled window hoods remain.

Unusually for the time, the main entrance is not on the street frontage, but rather on the principal north-eastern elevation; the house being positioned to take full advantage of the view. This elevation incorporates a two-storey faceted bay, and ground floor sloping post and beam veranda incorporating a low balustrade, stop chamfered posts, fan-shaped brackets, and small pendants. The gable end is finished with wooden fish-scale shingles, and although now removed, originally incorporated timbering and a finial.

The south-eastern and south-western elevations are those visible from the Gill Street frontage. The south-eastern elevation incorporates a full-height projecting bay, beginning as a ground floor faceted bay and rising to a first-floor square bay fitted with a shallow bay window. The south-western bay features an elegant first-floor balcony decorated with fan-shaped brackets and small pendants. The north-western elevation is mostly obscured from public view and has been subjected to a variety of modern ground-floor extensions including the construction of a large deck.

Assessment:

Historical	Messenger House has considerable heritage significance as the former residence of Frank Messenger, one of New Plymouth's most accomplished architects. Messenger designed the villa for himself and his wife Lucy, and they remained in the house until 1916; incorporating much of Frank's distinguished solo career in New Plymouth.	✓✓
Importance to Community	The history of Messenger House is reasonably well-known, and the villa is often admired by locals and visitors.	✓
Architecture & Construction	The building is a good example of a 1900s two-storied villa influenced by the Eastern Stick style popular at the time.	✓



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Setting and Context	The building is located at the end of Gill Street, and set against a backdrop of mature trees. It has a strong street-presence, and a combination of detailed features and bold colour scheme helps it stand-out from its visually uninteresting neighbours.	✓
Archaeology	-	
Representativeness, rarity and integrity	Messenger House is a good and representative example of the types of two-storey villas constructed around New Plymouth during the late-1890s and early-1900s. Aside from the regrettable loss of the original wooden sash windows, the exterior form remains much as it was when first constructed.	✓
Meets threshold for listing (three or more ticks, or two ticks in one criterion)		✓

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