



Old School Site

Cnr of Fenton & Juliet Streets

1892

Use: Commercial
Materials: Brick, weatherboards
NZHPT Registered: Not Registered
Legal Description: Pt Lots 1 & 2 DP 9289

Historic Value: 3 out of 5
Architectural Value: 2 out of 4
Technical Value: 1 out of 2
Symbolic Value: - out of 3
Rarity Value: - out of 2
Townscape Value: 1 out of 2
Group Value: - out of 2
Overall Heritage Value: 7 out of 20



The site known by locals as simply “The Old School” has an interesting history, which is very dear to many of their hearts. Right from the very beginning of Stratford’s settlement, education was given a high priority and the block of land at the corner of Fenton and Juliet Streets was the epicenter of this.

A need to begin formal education for the children of Stratford was identified in the early 1880’s and Mr. Tom Blair began holding some informal school classes in Mr. Hall’s house (on Broadway). By 1882 though, an official primary school had been opened on the site bounded by Juliet Street, Fenton Street and Cloton Road. In 1894, Florance Anthony Tyrer was appointed as principle of the Primary School and he went on to become an instrumental figure in establishing secondary education in Stratford as well.

On the 23rd of August 1897, the Ministry of Education approved establishment of a District High School at Stratford, and it was decided that the then Stratford Primary School would be converted into and established as the District High School. This subsequently occurred in 1898.

In 1900, to compensate for the increased numbers on the site, the Infant Block was built for the Primary School children. It was erected across the courtyard from the original Primary School buildings, on the Fenton Street side. These buildings still remain today.

On 30 July 1903, the foundation stone was laid for the Stratford Technical School on Cloton Road. This school had a curriculum providing for artwork, science, chemistry, woodwork and dairy work. In May 1904, the school building was officially opened and in June night classes commenced, offering shorthand and bookkeeping as available subjects. The Technical School buildings, however, were demolished in the 1960s.



The school log entry for 20 May 1911 reads *“This afternoon at school about 3 o’clock the school broke out in flames. The fire evidently started behind the south chimney in the east wing. The wind was fairly brisk and blowing from S.W. drove the flames throughout the north part of the wing and along all the passages”*. This marked the end of the original wooden Primary School building. On 27 November 1911, Premier Joseph Ward laid the foundation stone for the replacement school building and remarkably the new replacement building

was opened for use in April 1912, only 11 months after the fire. These brick structures are what still remain today.

By 1913, classrooms in the Cloton Road Technical School were being used by Stratford District High School pupils, due to a marked roll increase. When the District High School was established in 1898 there was a first day roll of 18 pupils (ranging from 11-18 year olds). By 1913 though, this had increased to 137.

In 1915, the March entry for the school log recorded “Inspector Gill discussed the question of establishing a separate high school and visited the proposed site”. Unsurprisingly Mr. Tyrer had taken up battle for a separate high school for Stratford earlier that year. In 1917, the Chairman of the Taranaki Education Board recommended the purchase of the Swansea Road site and the Minister visited the site stating he would look into the matter. And so it was that the next major

change for the “Old School Site” was set in motion in 1918.

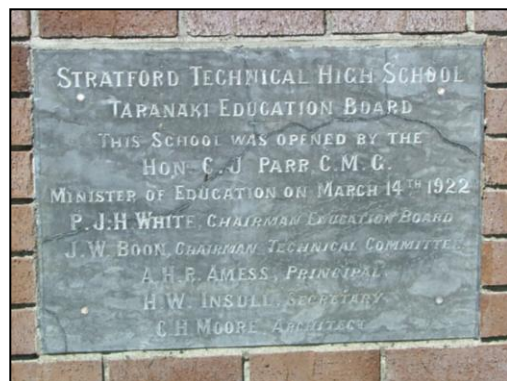


A General Council of Education resolution stated that a secondary school was to be established as a technical school, and that Latin must feature prominently in the curriculum. The actual provision of funds, however, ended up taking another four years, and Secondary Students were forced to remain in cramped conditions at the Juliet, Fenton Streets site. Finally, in October 1919, the foundation stone of the new technical school was laid at the Swansea Road site. In 1920, Mr. Tyrer reported to the School Committee on the important items needing

attention (he especially focused on the grounds), however the committee rejected his advice stating the new Board of Governors would have ample time to see to these matters.

In Tyrer's October Report to the Committee he stated that on 30 September 1921 *“the Secondary Department as a District High School was disestablished ...and we are working as a Technical School”*. Tyrer also recorded his resignation, effective 3 January 1922.

1922 however, did not start as smoothly as expected. The school committee was notified in late January that school would reconvene on 7 February in the old buildings and the new building would be opened in April. The architect gave the delay in furniture arrival as a reason for the late opening. And it was also finally realised that Tyrer's suggestions should have been taken heed of and carried out earlier. On 14 March 1922, the log entry read: *“Official opening of new Technical High School”*.



The Fenton, Juliet Streets school continued to thrive as the Stratford Primary School - large numbers of children were catered for and in 1934, a class for children with special learning needs was started. On Arbor Day in 1936 Kowhai trees were planted along the Fenton Street fence line, and the majority of these remain today.



In 1937 however, the Health Board condemned the southern classrooms of the Primary School. Different alterations and options were suggested to remedy this problem, with the result being that on 12 April 1944, plans for a 13-room Primary School, including a gymnasium, were approved. It was also planned to incorporate a kitchen into the Hall which was a first for any New Zealand school. The Borough Council had offered an exchange of fourteen and a half acres of King Edward Park for the School. And so, on April 21 1948, the new Primary School was opened by the Minister of Education (Hon. T.H. McCombes).

Almost straight after the Primary School departed the buildings, Prestige New Zealand sought approval from the Council to lease the brick building in Fenton Street. The request was agreed to and thus a twenty five year lease began. During their time there, Prestige employed sixty to seventy people in their production of high grade lingerie. They also built three additional

buildings; one to be used as a packing and dispatch store, another specifically for the manufacture of hosiery, and the third was another workroom to manufacture nylon hosiery. Additions were also made to the western end of the original school building to complete a cutting room, pattern room and a cafeteria for the staff.

The old 'Cocoa Shed' was being used by the Stratford Citizens Band, but Prestige then negotiated an exchange so the Band could move to a hall in Regan Street and they could use the 'Cocoa Shed', after altering it, as a pressing room.

Eventually though, it was used to produce fine knit wear on large knitting machines, for Victoria Knitwear, a subsidiary of Prestige Ltd. The iron shelter shed behind the brick building was also put to good use after the Primary School left the site. It was used as a wrestling and boxing gymnasium for a time, and the ghost of a sign on the side still pays testament to this.



Sadly, the use of the school buildings by Prestige came to an end in 1973, when the company closed its operations in Stratford. This marked the beginning of a time of vacancy for the buildings of the old school.

By the early 1980's they were almost all reoccupied again. The Stratford Library used the eastern end of the brick building for almost a year, while their new Centennial Library was being constructed. Also Magnum Sports Limited commenced manufacturing sporting goods in the 'Cocoa Shed' and further expanded it. In the converted cutting room from the days of Prestige Ltd's occupation, Warwickshire Ceramics took up operations. Their business centered around the decoration and firing of china.



In 1949, the Infant Block (pictured) became the Community Centre and this wooden building still serves the same purpose today. It is used also, by the Stratford Savage Club. The Kindergarten established itself in the eastern end of the Infant Block in the early 1950s and the Play centre used it after their departure.

Devon Sweets became the only constant user of the old school buildings (specifically, the main brick part of the original school), having occupied the building since December 1987. The production of all of their confectionary was completed on site and a small retail store was also open to the public.

Although the old school now remains vacant, this site has a proud and interesting history. The sheer numbers of children whom have passed through its gates and the number of people shaped by the institutions on this site mean that it has undeniable heritage value to Stratford district.

Bibliography

*Stratford Primary Centennial 1882-1982
A Century of Education*