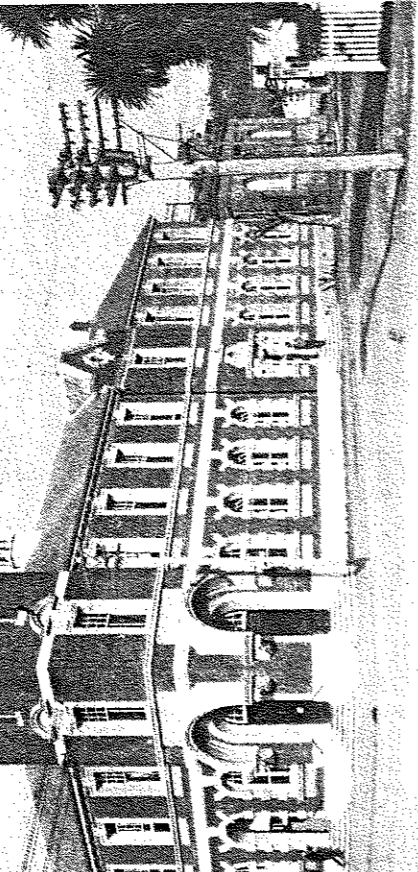


Post Office history one of agitation in Nelson



Office 1928-1930 (Nelson Provincial Museum Jones Collection photo).

Nelson's new multi-million dollar Post Office is a far cry from the makeshift shed that served early settlers more than 100 years ago.

In the early 1800s the Post Office operated from Church Hill near the district's first cathedral building.

Letters from "home" in those days only arrived every few months but were just as important to residents as they are today.

However, complaints were soon being made that the office was becoming too small to handle the increasing amounts of mail.

By 1855 mail was arriving more regularly by boat directly from Sydney as well as over land, so a post office was incorporated in a Hardy St cottage.

Three years later there were a number of post offices receiving mail throughout the district but agitation increased for a "proper" post office.

After much haggling between the Provincial and General Governments over who should pay, a triangular piece of land was bought in Bridge St.

Nelson's first "proper" post office was soon built in a Grecian style designed by surveyor John Rochfort and opened in 1863.

By 1876 the telegraph office was moved into a new building in Trafalgar St and by 1881 the Post Office was moved into the telegraph building, situated between Hardy St and the council chambers.

However, after the turn of the century a much larger post office was needed. Again, finding a site was difficult and the choice was not favoured by many people.

Many considered the chosen site, on the corner of Trafal-

gar St and Haven Rd, too far out of the city. But by 1906 the new building was opened by the Postmaster-General, Joseph Ward.

A chiming clock was stalled in the tower.

By 1970 it was claimed the old building was an earthquake risk and it was pulled down.

Nelson's fourth Post Office, officially opened today, was not without its controversies either.

In 1976 then Postmaster-General, Hugh Templeton, was still not able to say when construction would begin for the new building as its building programme was still under review. Then it was envisaged that the building would be complete by early 1980.

Rising costs

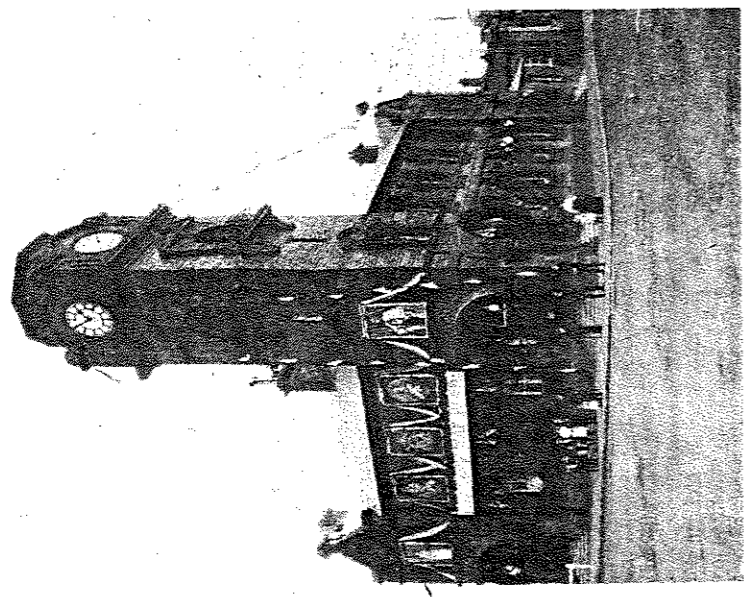
A model of the building was first unveiled in 1974. The planned \$5 million building had seven storeys and a tall white clock tower.

By July 1976 the estimated cost had risen to \$7.3 million.

In the meantime the site was being used as a parking lot and seven different places in Nelson boasted post office facilities, much to the confusion of many people wanting to post a letter.

By 1977 the estimated cost reached nearly \$10 million and still a building date had not been set.

In February 1977 the Nelson Institute unsuccessfully sought support to have the proposed building reduced in size. The case was later taken up by the Nelson sub-branch



Coronation celebrations, Nelson Post Office, June 1911 (Nelson Provincial Museum Jones Collection photo).

of the New Zealand Institute of Architects.

The battles continued and new starting dates were thrown around by the various postmaster-generals. At one stage 1978 was to be the year that work began.

Then in November 1977 the city council condemned the design and proposed to meet with the Postmaster-General, Mr Wilkinson.

Off-street parking became a major point of contention and by May 1978 the council was told a start to the building could be delayed 12 months by new town planning legislation. The site had to be designated which was a lengthy process.

Two months later the Prime Minister, Mr Muldoon, made an on-site inspection and said he expected tenders to be called in about one month.

By November that year tenders were called and on January 25 the \$4,648,573 contract was let to C. Lund and Son Ltd, a Timaru firm. However, this followed a petition to re-design the Post Office.

By November 1979 progress had reached an impasse. The Ministry of Works and Devel-

opment were seeking a legal opinion as to the validity of an injunction against letting the contract.

An unnamed Nelson group had served an injunction on the MWD in December 1978 on the grounds that the seven-storey building did not conform to the Town and Country Planning Act requirements.

The Environmental Defence Society in February 1979 filed a writ in the Supreme Court to prevent work starting.

The MWD filed a statement of defence claiming that the Post Office did not breach the city council code ordinances.

Several months later the MWD was accused of reckless spending in building its \$45,000 staff headquarters on the site.

Court ruling

Work, however, got underway until July 1981 when the Post Office tower was ruled unlawful by Mr Justice Quilliam in Wellington. The declaration shocked government officials in Nelson and the capital.

Mr Justice Quilliam found it was unlawful and beyond the powers of the Post Office and the MWD to commence or continue any work relating to the block and telephone exchange.

His finding came at a time when the Post Office was nearing its final shape with the skeleton of all seven floors completed.

In September 1981 the height of the Post Office was lowered five metres to bring the building down to the 24m maximum height specified in the High Court ruling. However, the final shape and height of the roofline still had to be determined.

Later that month the Government asked the city council for a dispensation so the Post Office could be built to its full height. Five days later the council granted the dispensation.

But that did not settle the question of the height of the clock tower as the council had only allowed a dispensation for the office block.

In December 1981 the MWD had been given the go-ahead to complete the clock tower to a new design, which was one of two alternatives but effectively reduced the height.

And today ... finally ... the new Post Office building was officially opened.



The opening of the Nelson Post Office in March 1906 by the Postmaster-General Joseph Ward (Nelson Provincial Museum Jones Collection photo).

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