



Newsletter No. 24 - August 2026

AGM Sunday 20 September 2026, 2-3pm.

Please see the attached flyer for information about our AGM and the associated talk by Kate Durkheim on **'Shopping in Department Stores in Palmerston North 1945-85'**.

The (brief) AGMs of Historic Places Manawatū-Horowhenua and the Te Manawa Museum Society will precede the lecture and will commence at **2pm**.

ALL ARE WELCOME TO BOTH PARTS OF THE AFTERNOON, AND WE WELCOME NEW MEMBERS! Please consider whether you would like to stand for the committee.

Snippets of the past

We are pleased to report that parts of the Opiki toll bridge live on.

The cabling from this historic suspension bridge was removed this January when it sagged once again into the Manawatu River. The cabling was after all second-hand when the Akers family commissioned the bridge 110 years ago in 1916. Opiki was once New Zealand's longest suspension bridge with each of the two cables 145 metres long.

Samples of the cabling are now in safekeeping – three with the Akers family, one at the Tokomaru Steam Museum (open every 2nd Saturday) and two small snippets are in your chairwoman's garage awaiting other possible homes. As you can see from the image, they are some serious lengths of twisted steel rope with wooden chocks attached to hold the droppers to the bridge deck.



Opiki Bridge cabling snippet, Image taken by Cindy Lilburn, August 2026

Given the six months since the cabling was removed Historic Places Manawatu Horowhenua must thank the engineers at Horizons Regional Council who have honored our request to save these samples

More than just a restroom. The ‘Ladies Rest’, Palmerston North

The Ladies Restrooms , Palmerston North have been in the news recently and provided inspiration for an upcoming exhibition.

This ‘women’s space’ was given Category II status by Heritage NZ Pouhere Taonga earlier this year, one of only ten places listed for 2026 in their Central Regions district. (It has the additional honour of having been named by The Lonely Planet as one of the five most picturesque toilet blocks in New Zealand!)

Its Category II status was based on the Restrooms’ social and cultural significance. Built in 1936 the ladies loos replaced an older restroom from 1918. These facilities gave women the opportunity to work or socialize in town with their children. Prior to the 1910s the few public toilets available were in department stores, restricting women’s ability to be out in the community.

The 1936 version drew on a women's committee as to what services should be included in the structure – for instance, a mother's room with child-sized toilet. They have served Palmerston North well and in the 2000s became part of protest to stay a woman's space when the Information centre was added to the rear. Today it still is for women only; there is a unisex toilet for fathers and children in the new section.



The Ladies Rest, photographed 2020. Manawatū Heritage 2020BD_IMCA-DigitalMaster_031929

Artist Emily Hartley Skudder has been inspired by the Ladies Rest to create an installation at Te Manawa, Palmerston North opening 22 August. Brightly coloured toilet fixtures and conversation pit included! On 24 October 5.30 pm there is also a panel discussion planned in the restrooms as part of a Festival of Design to be held in Whanganui and Palmerston North, 16-25 October. According to the blurb, a lively feminist conversation is proposed about gendered history, cleanliness and control, and the taonga that is Ladies' Rest.

The case of the missing cherub

Spotters have finally located the fourth cherub that once graced a corner of the Palmerston North Opera House ceiling. The gold plaster cherubs went to a local firm after the 1905 Opera House was demolished in the 1990s. In 2025 Historic Places Manawatu Horowhenua worked to re-home the cherubs when the demolition firm holding them went out of business. One went to Carrera Moulding in Wellington who had done the original plasterwork for the Opera House; two are in storage with the City Council. The fourth cherub was gifted to a mate and over a year its location has been

unknown – until sighted in the bar at the Royal Hotel, Palmerston North. As the Royal is this city's oldest pub building, constructed in 1897, the cherub's new home is perhaps age-appropriate! To spot the site of the former Opera House check its foundation stone now standing on display outside Farmers on Church Street.

Some Heritage Happenings:

Palmerston North City Council's Heritage Reference Group

Cindy Lilburn, Margaret Tennant and Val Burr serve on this group as individuals with differing associations with heritage buildings and activities. Many of the matters which come up relate to heritage sites and buildings and we are really pleased to have this conduit to the Council and Council officers.

Recent matters considered by the group include the Savage Crescent heritage precinct and enforcement (or lack of enforcement) of the heritage restrictions around changes which can be made to the street facing parts of properties. (You may note the increasing 'fortification' of some properties via high fences, which goes against the historic community intent of the development.) We have urged greater education about the area's history and the ethos on which it was developed, and, more broadly, education of real estate agents selling properties which have distinctive heritage features.

We have given feedback on the Caccia Birch Master Plan, street naming policies, and heritage signage, including that relating to the old Opera House, where the foundation stone and explanatory signage have been placed on the corner of Church and Ashley Streets.



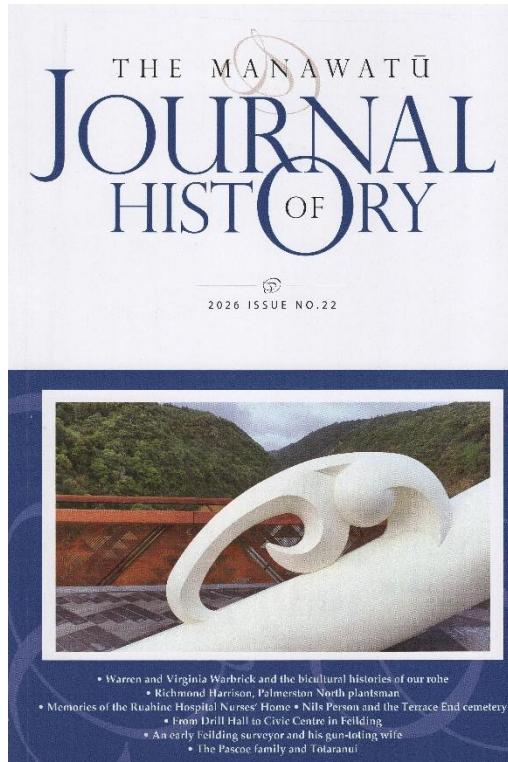
We have also been pleased that the City Council is supporting the repainting of some of the heritage buildings around the City Centre, and also has allocated small amounts of assistance via the Natural and Cultural Incentive Fund and the Earthquake-Prone Buildings Fund to other heritage property owners.

On left – the newly painted Bryant (Forsythe Barr) Building on the corner of The Square and Church Street.

There are still plenty of concerns, not least around the shabby state of some significant heritage buildings around The Square, but it's great that the Council is increasingly recognising heritage as something to be supported.

Significant publications:

Currently with the printer are the 2026 issue of the ***Manawatū Journal of History*** and the **Palmerston North Heritage Trust's 2027 calendar** featuring historic photographs.

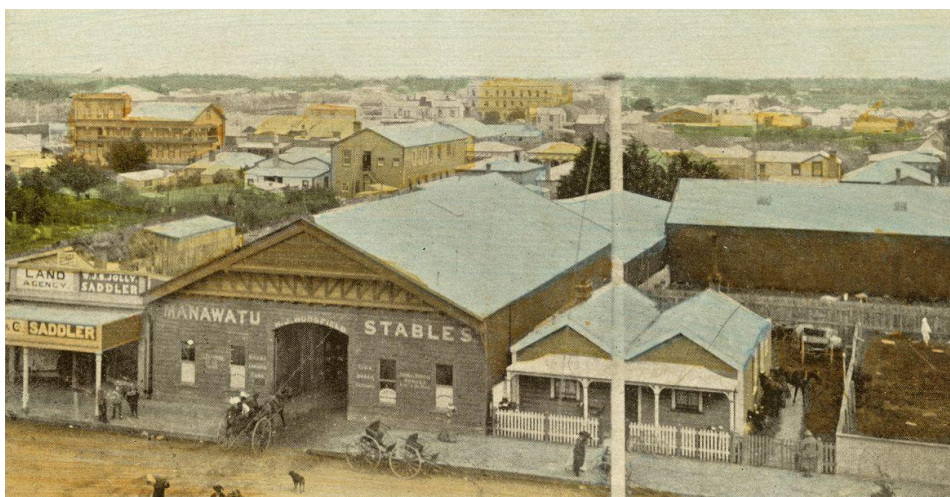


An order form for the Journal is attached to this newsletter email, and it can also be purchased from Bruce McKenzie Books in George Street. Note that the *Journal* contains an essay by Fiona McKergow and Mike Roche on Totaranui, the old house outside Te Manawa, and another on the Feilding Civic Centre and its predecessor, the Drill Hall. There is also an interview-based essay on the activities of Warren and Virginia Warbrick. Significant works by Warren are located around the city are at Te Ahu a Turanga, the new highway, and we welcome Virginia as new heritage programmes coordinator at the heritage section of the City Library.

The Heritage Trust 2027 calendar is taking the theme of 'Scenes Over Time', showing different views of sites and structures around Palmerston North in different periods. There are, for example, views of Te Motu o Poutoa from across the river in 1915 and 2026; the Downtown site, when it was Avon House; the old stables in George Street, which become the site of the Palace and Odeon picture theatres, and is now an entrance to Harvey Norman; and Square Edge over time.

The calendar will be available from the City Library's Heritage Section from September. It will cost \$15 (exact cash preferred) and you can pay by bank transfer in front of staff if that works better for you.

Below: The Manawatu Stables, once located on George Street where the entrance to Harvey Norman now is. Manawatu Heritage 2009P_Bc71_BUI_2621; 2008-72. Featured in the Heritage Trust's 2027 calendar.



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Thank you for supporting Historic Places Manawatū Horowhenua through your membership. We value your membership and invite you to renew your membership. If you have not been a member before, we welcome your membership and involvement in the Society.

Names (family members):

Address:

Email address:

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Bring or fill out this form at the Society's AGM

Or email to The Treasurer, Nick Watson at nwatson500@gmail.com

Payment:

By direct credit to the Historic Places Manawatū Horowhenua's bank account: 15 3977 0028377 00 with your name as reference

In cash at the AGM (to be on Sunday 20 September 2026 at Te Manawa).

Annual membership runs from 1 July 2026 to 30 June 2027

- Individual membership \$20
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- Donation:
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