

Caccia Birch House

112-130 Te Awe Awe Street, Palmerston North

NZHPT Registration Number: 196
NZHPT Registration Type: Historic Place – Category I
NZHPT Registration Date: 24/11/83
City/District Council: Palmerston North City Council
District Plan Status: Category 1

Other Names: Nannestad Homestead, Woodhey, Vice-Regal Residence,
The Convalescent Home for Women of the Services



Brief History

This elegant homestead was completed in about 1892 for Norwegian settler Jacob Nannestad and his wife Anna (nee Moller). The exact date of construction is uncertain. In 1874, Nannestad established a sawmilling business, Richter, Nannestad & Company, near the corner of present day Albert and Main Streets with fellow countrymen John Kristian Richter and Frits Jensen. The company bought 144 hectares (355 acres) of land in Hokowhitu in 1893, and in 1895 Nannestad purchased a portion of this property, which included part of the Hokowhitu Lagoon, and commissioned Danish born architect Ludolph Georg West to design the dwelling, a simple, two-storey native timber weatherboard building with corrugated iron roof and sunburst exterior detailing.

In 1903 the house was sold to Englishman John Henderson Pollock Strang and his wife Mary (nee Ritchie) who renamed the house 'Woodhey' and commissioned the original architect Ludolph West to prepare plans for additions of two large conservatories, two nurseries, servants' quarters, and a coach house. From 1908 to 1910, after a fire that destroyed Parliament Buildings in 1907 forced sessions of Parliament to be held at Government House, Woodhey became the temporary residence of the Governor of New Zealand, Lord William Lee Plunket (1864-1920) and his wife Lady Victoria Plunket (who was patron of the Plunket Society) and family. A billiard room (now the Lord Plunket Room) and extra servants quarters (since demolished) were added at that time.

In 1921 the house was sold to William Caccia Birch and his wife Maude (nee Keiller) who were responsible for developing the grounds around the house. After Mr Caccia Birch's death in 1936, Maude Caccia Birch gifted the part of the Hokowhitu Lagoon included in the title to Palmerston North City Council in 1937 and the remainder of the property to the government in 1941. 'Caccia Birch House' as it was then renamed was used for military staff training during the Second World War and later as a convalescent home for servicewomen and nurses returning from service.

The Education Department acquired the property in 1960 and the house served a variety of roles as an educational institution until 1976. After several years of disuse, the house was declared surplus to government requirements in 1983, and the following year the Palmerston North City Council accepted the gifting of the house to it on the condition that some of the surrounding land would be subdivided to fund redevelopment. In 1989 the Caccia Birch Trust Board was formed to plan its restoration and redevelopment and it was opened as a conference and function centre in 1992. Caccia Birch House is of national historical significance because of its association with Lord and Lady Plunket, both of whom made important contributions to New Zealand's development, and with the country's preparations for and response to the Second World War. It also has local historical significance due to its links to Jacob Nannestad, whose firm was a major early employer and was responsible for the clearing of much of the bush in the Palmerston North area. The house is also an example of one of the larger early homes built in the area.

Principal Sources:

Caccia Birch (Public Building), NZHPT Register no. 196, 1/5/2003 Rebecca O'Brien, NZHPT.

Upgrade Report: Caccia Birch House, n.d., Rebecca O'Brien, NZHPT.

Pilkington, D, *Palmerston North City Heritage Trail*, Palmerston North, Palmerston North City Council, 1993.

Palmerston North City Library Photograph Collection: Bur 11, 25, 38, 40, 41, 54, 56, 61, 94, 95, 119, 130, 157-174; Fm 1-4; J 27-29.