

Find out more



Visit www.doc.govt.nz to find out more about:

- History of the old Government Buildings
- DOC's work at the old Government Buildings
- Old Government Buildings restoration photo gallery

Further reading

The New Zealand Government Buildings Past and Future,
by Michael Kelly.

The old Government Buildings are a Category 1 registered historic place, see www.historic.org.nz

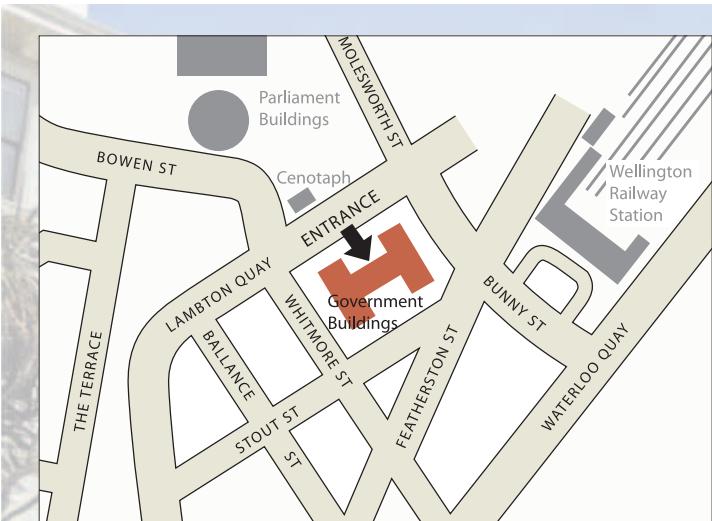
Visit www.dnzb.govt.nz to find out more about the life of architect William Clayton.

Visit the old Government Buildings

The old Government Buildings are located in the heart of Wellington's CBD, just a moment's walk from the Beehive and the railway station.

Visitors may view historical displays and interpretation rooms on the ground floor, and the Cabinet room on the first floor. The rest of the building is leased to the Victoria University Law Faculty.

Open Monday to Friday 9.00 a.m. – 5.00 p.m.



Further information

DOC Wellington Visitor Centre

Conservation House
18-32 Manners Street
Wellington
Ph: 04 384 7770
Fax: 04 384 7773
Email: wellingtongvc@doc.govt.nz
Web: www.doc.govt.nz

DOC HOTLINE
0800 362 468

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Kapiti Wellington Area Office

Ph: 04 472 5821

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New Zealand Government

Government Buildings Historic Reserve

WELLINGTON



Department of
Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

New Zealand's largest and grandest wooden building

The old Government Buildings are an outstanding example of New Zealand's architectural heritage and one of the great wooden buildings of the world.

They were built in 1876—an important turning point in New Zealand's political history. This was the year that provincial governments were abolished and a central government was established. This building was specifically designed to house New Zealand's entire public service as a result of this change of government. For 56 years it was also the home of Ministers' offices and the Cabinet room.



Photo: Museum of Wellington City and Sea.

Government Buildings in 1876, shortly after completion.

Like many colonial buildings of the era, the Government Buildings were built to resemble an Italian stone palace. This was to convey strength and stability in a young country undergoing rapid growth and change.

To avoid being seen as extravagant, the new government chose to build in timber, as stone was too expensive. The building may not have survived subsequent earthquakes had stone been used.

The building is also renowned for its extensive use of kauri, one of New Zealand's premier native timbers. This could never be replicated in any building now because our remaining kauri forests are under permanent protection.

Things to look out for

- The “**hanging**” **staircases** were designed by colonial architect William Clayton. The somewhat impractical stairs were progressively propped up from the time they were built. During the restoration project new steel beams were used for strengthening and hidden from sight, allowing the stairs to be seen as Clayton intended them.
- The original nailing pattern featuring a **Victoria Regina** logo has been replicated in the carpet on the hanging stairs.
- 42 **fireplaces** were cast based on a pattern of an early example found in the building during the restoration project. When the Government Buildings opened in 1876, there were 126 fireplaces. The constant threat of fire meant that it became one of New Zealand's first smokefree buildings.
- The **Cabinet room** was the focus of life in the Government Buildings. Richard Seddon, Prime Minister from 1893 to 1906, held Cabinet Meetings here on Sundays.
- Outside, a statue of former Minister of Education and Prime Minister, **Peter Fraser**, greets visitors to the Lambton Quay entrance. This is a fine location for viewing the 1876 **clock** located under the **Royal Coat of Arms**. DOC staff manually wind the clock once every seven days.



Statue of Peter Fraser in the grounds of Government Buildings.

Photo: Rob Suisted, Nature's Pic Images.

The restoration project

The Department of Conservation managed a major restoration project, spanning 2 years over 1994–95. At its peak, over 200 carpenters were employed on this job. Many heritage trade specialists were utilised, including some brought over specially from Italy.



Photo: Tony Kellaway.

Master carver at work during restoration, 1994–95.

Wherever possible, the building was restored to its 1907 appearance. Many artefacts were carefully preserved or restored, including the vintage water radiators. Verandahs which had been glazed over were returned to their original appearance. Where original fabric was lost, replicas would be created in original materials, or where necessary, modern materials. New kauri joinery was made to match the old. Over 900 m³ of recycled kauri was used to supplement the remaining original timber.

Considerable strengthening was also undertaken to make the building viable again, with all measures carefully concealed. The old Government Buildings officially reopened in January 1996.



Photos: Tony Kellaway.

Original stencils were restored and copied in the entrance foyer.