

United Manawatu Lodge

186 Broadway Avenue, Palmerston North

NZHPT Registration Number: 7378
NZHPT Registration Type: Historic Place – Category II
NZHPT Registration Date: 24/04/97
City/District Council: Palmerston North City Council
District Plan Status: Not in district plan

Other Names: Aqaba



Brief History

The new Temple of the United Manawatu Lodge of the Ancient Order of Freemasons on Broadway was dedicated and opened on 24 July 1931. Meetings of the Lodge had begun in Palmerston North in 1877. In 1880 the first purpose-built Lodge building was opened opposite the corner of George and Main Streets, on land later to become the railway yards.

Twelve years later, when the railway was established, the Lodge moved into a new building along Broad Street (now Broadway) designed by Ernest Lancomb.

The membership rose to 130 and the building gradually became inadequate. This, along with borer damage and dry rot lead to its eventual demolition in 1930 and the site was cleared for the construction of a new Temple in an Art Deco style. The total cost of the building including the interior furnishing and decoration was £4,194.

Over the years, Lodge membership included many notable citizens such as J O Batchelar, G E Warburton, A Nannestad, J E Perrin, L R Bryant and Ernst V West, the architect of the new Temple. West's existing plans are noted as 'alternative' and the building differs slightly from them. The '1721' seen above the front entrance is the registration number of the United Manawatu Freemasons Lodge, and the 'E.C.' is an abbreviation of 'English Constitution'. Symbols from ancient cultures are important in the philosophy and rituals of freemasonry and many were included in the design.

The two spheres above the parapet reflect the Masonic interest in the circle as a symbol. The compass and set square representing the stonemason's tools are key Masonic symbols and several ancient architectural styles are incorporated in the building. Two main pillars are based on those of Solomon's temple, described in *The Bible*, (Chronicles II, Ch 1-10). Members were familiar with the design of the temple from plans donated by a Lodge member. The Lodge also held lectures on Greek and Roman architecture and chose Ionic capitals for the two small pillars at the entrance. The Egyptian motifs are noteworthy. After the discovery in 1922 of the tomb of the Egyptian pharaoh, Tutankhamun, Egyptian motifs became popular in Art Deco architecture. The Egyptian hieroglyphics on the two front porch panels read 'Thy name shall live upon earth; Thy name shall endure upon earth; Thou shall never perish'. The eagle over the door and the repeated design of stylized plant forms are also motifs from Egyptian art.

After the Second World War, many buildings designed in the neo-Egyptian style were demolished or altered to remove any reference to the style. Thus the former Temple of the United Manawatu Lodge of the Ancient Order of Freemasons remains a rare example. The use of elaborate symbolism also marked the interior. Notable New Zealand artist Harry Linley Richardson created the design for a 'celestial canopy' of day and night scenes, which was painted onto the ceiling by the decorator. A mural on the refectory wall depicted the jury of gods at the judgment of the soul and has been preserved. The floor was tiled in a black and white chequerboard pattern with a blazing star in the centre.

In 1987, high maintenance costs and the building's earthquake risk lead to the decision of the United Manawatu Lodge to relocate to the Manawatu Kilwinning Lodge building on Church Street. The building was sold to businessman Brian Ax and was partially stripped of the heart rimu, which was installed in the Manawatu Kilwinning Lodge. It is now the Aqaba café and bar, which was named after the Jordanian port on the Red Sea, appropriate to a building with links to ancient culture of the Middle East.

Principal Source

Manawatu Branch Committee HPT Record 010132.