

Waikouaiti Coast Heritage Centre
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Local Icon Could be Country's Next Major Historic Building

Sitting proudly, but unassumingly, on the southern edge of Waikouaiti, the Waikouaiti Coast Heritage Centre's old bank building is in line to become New Zealand's next fully registered historic building.

The WCHC has recently discovered that its grade 2 building is eligible for registration review as a Grade 1 Historic Building, a designation bestowed by the Historic Places Trust. This would put it in the same league as Larnach Castle and Waikouaiti's two other Grade 1s, Matanaka Farm and St John's church.

Erected in 1869, the building, designed by renowned architect RA Lawson, is one of the last of its type still in use in New Zealand. Much of the interior is original, including the bank counter and vault. It is open to the public as a museum and information centre.

Heritage advisor Erin Williams of Guy Williams and Associates describes the building as a rare example of a relatively complete Bank of New Zealand building that is still accessible to the public, with most chattels of the chamber intact. She says, "It is the only known RA Lawson building in Waikouaiti, and is a very early example of his banking architecture."

She believes the building qualifies for Grade 1 in part because it is recognised by the local community as a significant representation of more affluent times, particularly as other such buildings have been lost i.e. Presbyterian Church, Council Chambers, Malloch's Store, the original Golden Fleece Hotel and the community hall.

Interest in the former BNZ building has been longstanding and the WCHC committee considers it will be the district's major heritage item once the redevelopment plans for the museum precinct are complete.

Plans are in place and fundraising is underway to expand the Museum's heritage precinct by constructing a purpose-built exhibition centre on vacant ground behind the current building. The \$1million project is not expected to be completed until at least 2014. The current building will then be refurbished in line with a conservation plan that will be prepared later this year.

As part of the funding process a structural engineer's report has been prepared that has given the Committee confidence it is making the right decisions for the future of this heritage icon.

President Barbara Nind says, "The committee feels strongly that we have a duty of care, passed from the older residents of Waikouaiti, to preserve this building into the future."

The review application says the building is architecturally, socially, culturally and aesthetically significant. It is now the only pre-1900 commercial building in Waikouaiti.

The application for Grade 1 registration could take up to 12 months to be granted.