

**TIMARU DISTRICT COUNCIL**  
**HISTORIC HERITAGE ITEM RECORD FORM**

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**HERITAGE ITEM NAME** former Criterion Hotel / former Excelsior Hotel/Tavern

**ADDRESS** 132 Stafford Street, Timaru

**PHOTOGRAPH**



(A McEwan, 11 July 2018)

**DISTRICT PLAN ITEM NO.** New                      **HNZ LIST No. & CATEGORY** n/a  
(at time of assessment)

**LEGAL DESCRIPTION** Pt Lots 47 & 49 DP 1

**VALUATION NUMBER** 2500051000

**DATE OF CONSTRUCTION** 1872-73

**ARCHITECT/DESIGNER/  
BUILDER** Francis J Wilson (architect); D West (architect, 1878 additions)

**STYLE** Victorian commercial classicism

**PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION**

Two storey-building with irregular rectangular footprint; flat and half-hipped roof forms. Façade has five openings on the ground floor and six on the first floor; exposed stonework with plastered window surrounds and entablature at first floor level. Side entry at north end of street front has ornamental leaded glass fanlight. Quoins frame ground floor façade with pilasters above, at first floor level. Double-hung sash windows. Suspended veranda, ramp access to first floor at rear; entry sheltered by lean-to canopy.

**MATERIALS/STRUCTURE**

Timaru bluestone (basalt), brick, timber and corrugated metal.

**ADDITIONS/ALTERATIONS**

Brick additions to rear (D West, architect, 1878). Interior alterations (1890). Suspended veranda erected (pre-1970). Panel framed by decorative brackets removed from parapet; plasterwork stripped from façade (post-1995). Forward hip roof removed; replaced by flat terrace (late 1990s).

**SETTING**

The hotel stands on the west side of Stafford Street, south of its intersection with George Street. To the south stands the Theatre Royal (118-122 Stafford Street, heritage item # 46) and the former Gladstone Board of Works building (95 Stafford Street, heritage item # 43).

To the north of the hotel are the Oxford Buildings (148-154 Stafford Street, heritage item # 47) and the former National Bank (129 Stafford Street, heritage item # 45). The extent of scheduling is the two land parcels on which the hotel is located, in view of the potential archaeological values of the site as a whole and the development of the building in two stages during the 1870s.

## **HISTORY**

The Criterion Hotel had opened for business by early March 1873; its first proprietor, and designer, was local architect Francis J Wilson. After the 'big fire' of December 1868 buildings in the town centre had to be of masonry construction, hence the use of bluestone and, later, brick in the hotel. Wilson had acquired the lease of the property in June 1872 and he advertised the hotel for sale in March and April 1873, noting at the time that it was located beside the *Timaru Herald* office. Wilson's sale plans appear to have been thwarted for a time and as he held the lease on the land until October 1877, when it was transferred to John Stansell. In June 1878 Stansell transferred the lease and the license of the hotel to Josephus Murphy, who soon after made extensions in brick to the rear of the building. George Newey was the lessee from 1880 until 1890, when Daniel McGuinness took it over and refurbished the interior. The hotel then passed through a number of hands before it was renovated by its new proprietor Ralph Porter in 1906; Porter renamed the hotel the Excelsior at that time. By the 1920s the hotel was owned, not leased, by its publican and since that time it has changed hands a number of times. The Timaru District Council purchased the property in June 2018 as part of its plans for developing a cultural hub in conjunction with the Theatre Royal.

## **HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE**

The former Criterion Hotel has high historical significance for its continuous use as a hotel for over 145 years and as an example of the role and value of hotels in early Timaru. The hotel is associated with the reconstruction of the town centre after the fire of December 1868 and appears to be one of the oldest surviving post-fire buildings in central Timaru.

## **CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE**

The former Criterion Hotel has cultural importance as a demonstration of the way of life of its former publicans and their patrons. Built to house the publican and his family, as well as accommodating guests and bar patrons, the hotel is valued by members of the community for its age, location and construction materials.

## **ARCHITECTURAL AND AESTHETIC SIGNIFICANCE**

The former Criterion Hotel has high architectural significance as the work of early Timaru architect FJ Wilson. South African-born Francis John (Frank) Wilson (c.1836-1911) was said to have 'practically rebuilt Timaru after the big fire' of 1868 (*Poverty Bay Herald* 21 April 1911, p. 5). Wilson is said to have arrived in Timaru in c.1855 and not only worked as a contractor and architect but also as a publican, holding licenses for hotels in Timaru and Washdyke in the mid-1860s. Wilson also designed the Timaru Main School (1873-74) and the former Bank Street Methodist Church (1874-75, item # 51). He and his wife Emily had ten children and although Frank Wilson died in Gisborne in 1911 he was remembered at the time as one of the 'prominent citizen(s) of Timaru in the early days' (*Timaru Herald* 28 April 1911, p. 7). Wilson left Timaru in the 1880s and, after a period spent in Australia, he later lived and worked in Wellington, Palmerston North and Gisborne. Frank Wilson's son Frank was also an architect and his grandson Francis Gordon Wilson (1900-59) became Government Architect of New Zealand (1952-59). The 1878 brick additions to the rear of the hotel were designed by local architect Daniel West (c.1828-1910) and the 1890 interior improvements were designed by another Timaru architect, Maurice de H Duval.

## **TECHNOLOGICAL AND CRAFTSMANSHIP SIGNIFICANCE**

The former Criterion Hotel has high technological and craftsmanship significance for its stone construction. The building represents both a response to the March 1869 council bylaw stipulating masonry construction in the central business district, which was passed after the December 1868 fire that destroyed around 30 buildings in the town centre, and the use of a building material that is closely identified with Timaru's colonial building tradition.

### **CONTEXTUAL SIGNIFICANCE**

The former Criterion Hotel has contextual significance for the contribution it makes to the historic character of Stafford Street, due to its exposed stone masonry façade and in relation to a number of nearby scheduled heritage buildings.

### **ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND SCIENTIFIC SIGNIFICANCE**

As both stages of the former Criterion Hotel date to the 1870s, the hotel and its site have potential archaeological significance relating to the early development of Timaru and its central business district.

### **SUMMARY OF HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE**

The former Criterion Hotel / Excelsior Hotel/Tavern has high overall heritage significance to Timaru District. The hotel has high historical significance for its association with the rebuilding of Timaru's town centre after the catastrophic fire of December 1868 and its continuous use as a hotel for over 145 years. The hotel has cultural importance as a demonstration of the way of life of its former publicans and their clientele and high architectural significance as the work of Frank Wilson, a colonial architect and contractor who was also the hotel's first publican. The former Criterion Hotel has high technological significance as a Timaru bluestone and brick building that dates to the reconstruction period following the fire of December 1868 and contextual significance for the visible expression of the building's stone construction and contribution to the historic streetscape of Stafford Street. The former Criterion Hotel has potential archaeological significance relating to its two stages of construction during the 1870s.

### **HERITAGE CATEGORY**

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### **REFERENCES**

- *Timaru Herald* 22 July 1865, p. 8; 2 January 1869, p. 6; 27 March 1869, p. 2; 15 December 1869, p. 4; 5 June 1872, p. 2; 5 February 1873, p. 2; 5 March 1873, p. 2; 10 March 1873, p. 1; 21 March 1873, p. 1; 13 May 1876, p. 3; 13 May 1878, p. 1; 5 June 1878, p. 4; 28 June 1878, p. 3; 7 November 1884, p. 2; 21 April 1906, p. 6; 23 February 1910, p. 7; 28 April 1911, p. 7; 16 September 2009, available online.
- *Lyttelton Times* 18 April 1865, p. 6; 27 April 1867, p. 3; 9 March 1885, p. 3.
- *South Canterbury Times* 7 November 1884, p. 3; 18 September 1890, p. 2.
- *Star* 8 December 1868, p. 2.
- *Grey River Argus* 10 December 1868, p. 2.
- *Poverty Bay Herald* 21 April 1911, p. 4.
- *New Zealand Times* 12 April 1911, p. 8.
- *Hawera & Normanby Star* 21 April 1911, p. 7.
- <http://sites.rootsweb.com/~nzlscant/pubs.htm>
- <http://www.heritage.org.nz/the-list/details/3155>
- <http://www.heritage.org.nz/the-list/details/2076>
- <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/5w36/wilson-francis-gordon>



Extent of setting, 132 Stafford Street, Timaru.



'Stafford Street South, Timaru, NZ' in c.1903. The Criterion Hotel is in the centre of the street view, above the figure seated in the carriage. Object # 2177, South Canterbury Museum.



Guests' private entrance; the style of the fanlight suggests that the entry was part of the 1906 improvements to the building. A McEwan, July 2018.