

## Commercial Building

134 Cuba Street



Photos: *Charles Collins, 2014*

### Summary of heritage significance

- 134 Cuba Street is an unusual three-storey Edwardian Venetian Revivalist-style building that has been much-modified. The building is notable for its fine first floor façade that is well-modulated and set with ornamental and polychromatic brickwork. The simplified second-floor façade is a product of the 1942 earthquake. The ground floor verandah, entrances and shopfront are more recent alterations that have less aesthetic value.
- The building has historic value for its association with the development of Cuba Street during the Edwardian period, which resulted in the building of many fine commercial buildings. It was damaged and partly rebuilt after the 1942 Wellington/Wairarapa earthquake and is a built-testament to this historic event.
- The building has some technological value for the unusually ornate brick detailing, and for the use of polychromatic brick – an unusual building material in Wellington. The upper floor façade and parapet, including the

reinforced concrete frame and ring-beam, are examples of reinstatement work from the mid-1940s.

District Plan:	Map 16, reference 81/2
Legal Description:	Pt Lot 1 A Plan 2463
Heritage Area:	Cuba Street Heritage Area
HPT Listed:	Category II, reference 5368
Archaeological Site:	NZAA Central City R27/270
Other Names:	Counties Building (former), Hunters and Collectors
Key physical dates:	Built: 1908
Architect / Builder:	Architect: James Bennie
Former uses:	Retail and residential
Current uses:	Retail and residential
Earthquake Prone Status:	Not Earthquake Prone – SR 188103

Extent: Cityview GIS 2013



## **1.0 Outline History**

### **1.1 History<sup>1</sup>**

There is little known about the history of this strong Venetian-style three-storey Edwardian Classical building. It was designed by prominent Wellington architect James Bennie and constructed in 1908 for Sidney Youmans (Yeomans). The building was designed to accommodate a shop on the double height ground floor, with residential and studio quarters on the upper floors.

The building has been much-altered over the past 100+ years, and now only the first floor street elevation is a true indication of the original design. The roofline appears to have been truncated, and may well have once featured a gabled end (much like its near neighbour at 126 Cuba Street – WCC ref 16/80.1). This feature is noted on a scheme for 'reinstatement' after the 1942 Wellington/Wairarapa Earthquake.<sup>2</sup>

The earthquake appears to have damaged the second floor street façade, and this was rebuilt in 1943 with a reinforced concrete frame that was clad in brickwork to match the lower floors, but to a simplified design. The, presumably ornate, gable/parapet was replaced with a concrete ring beam and the roof was adapted to a new hipped profile.

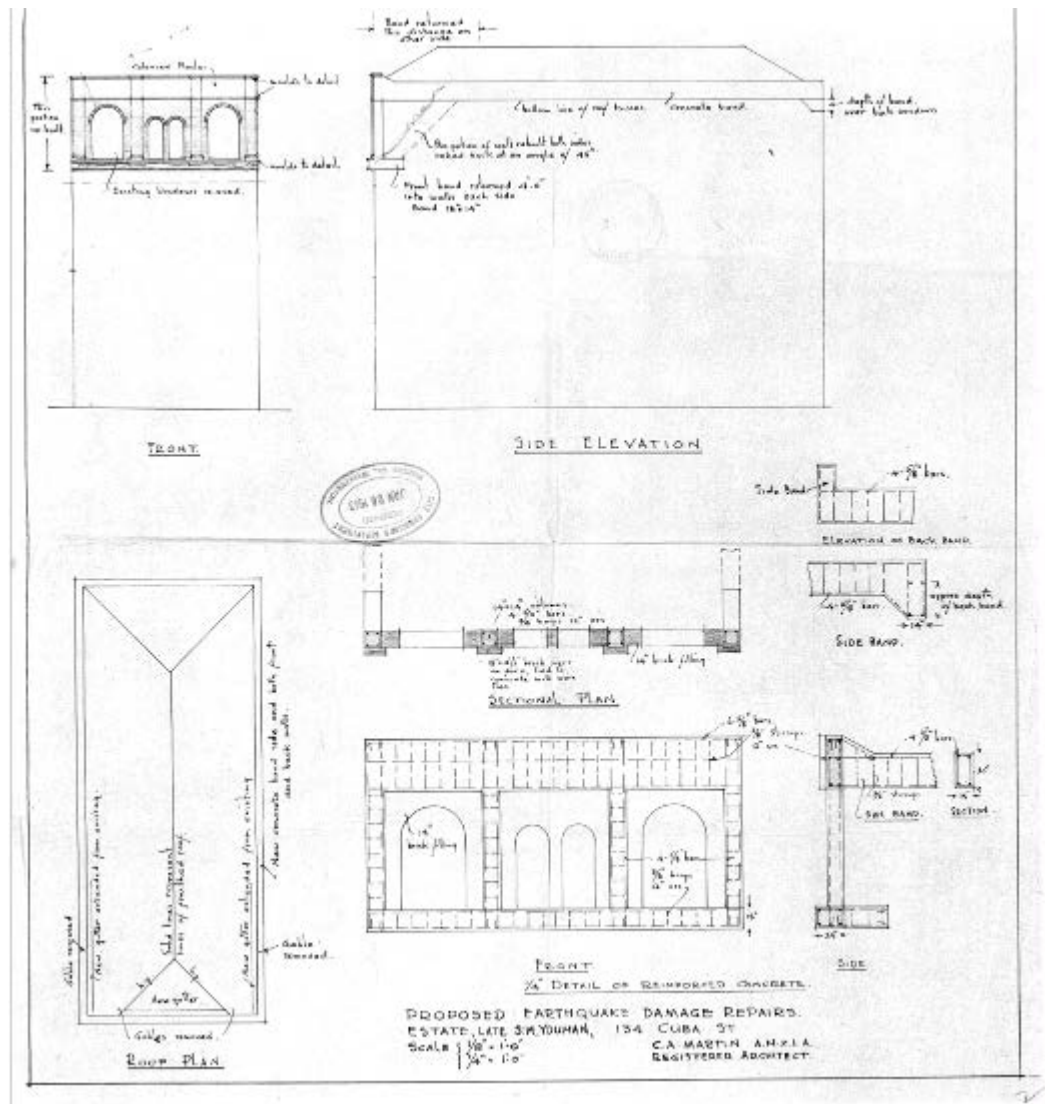
More recent alterations include the modern verandah/ balcony with clumsy timber railings and a slender steel fire escape running diagonally across the façade. Both of these features detract from the appearance of this building.

The building has had a number of tenants since its construction, ranging from pastry cooks, butchers, and restaurants, to its current ground floor occupant 'Hunters and Collectors', a vintage retail store.

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<sup>1</sup> History adapted from Michael Kelly and Russell Murray, *Cuba Street Heritage Area Report*. (Wellington City Council: Unpublished report, prepared for Plan Change 48, 2006), 37.

<sup>2</sup> WCC Archives 00056:282:B22649



1942 Proposed repairs after the 1942 Wellington-Wairarapa Earthquake. Note that the third floor façade was substantially rebuilt at this time, with a reinforced concrete frame that was clad and in-filled with brick. A gable appears to have been removed, perhaps by the earthquake, and the current hipped roof profile adopted at about this time.<sup>3</sup>

## 1.2 Timeline of modifications

- 1908 Original construction
- 1936 134 Cuba Street, erect neon sign (00056:179:B15731)
- 1937 134 Cuba Street, renew shop front (00056:195:B17039)
- 1943 134 Cuba Street, reinstate premises (00056:282:B22649)
- 1947 134 Cuba Street, reinstate floor (00056:332:B25851)
- 1958 134 Cuba Street, verandah (00058:67:C3308)
- 1966 134 Cuba Street, building alterations (00058:460:C19747)
- 1987 134 Cuba Street, upgrading of an existing building (00059:98:D6409)
- 1987 134 Cuba Street, restaurant alterations (00059:122:D7160)
- 2002 134 Cuba Street, earthquake strengthening (00078:1229:96695)

<sup>3</sup> WCC Archives 00056:282:B22649

### 1.3 Occupation history <sup>4</sup>

1910-16	Patrick Taylor, pastrycook (Stones1910-11, 1915-16)
1910-25	Miss Charlotte Youmans, artist (Stones1910-11), 1915-16, 1920, 1925)
1930-45	E & T Hall, soft goods manufacturers (Stones1930, 1935, 1940, 1945)
1940-85	Manawatu Farmers' Meat Company Limited, butchers (Stones1940, 1945, Wises1950-51, 1955, 1961-62, 1967-68, 1971-72, 1975, 1980, 1985)
1950-55	Francis Manufacturing Company, soft goods (Wises1950-51, 1955)
1995	Sala Thai Restaurant
2001	Bandong Traditional Malaysian Cuisine
200?-present	Hunters and Collectors

### 1.4 Architect

#### Bennie, James – Architect

Bennie was born in Ayrshire, Scotland, immigrated to New Zealand in 1880 and settled in Brunnertown near Greymouth. In the early 1890s he attended the Working Men's College in Melbourne, Australia, where he studied under artist and architect Thomas Searell. On completion of his studies he returned to Greymouth and set up in practice as an architect. In 1902 Bennie moved to Wellington and went into practice with E C Farr before establishing his own practice in 1905. Some of Bennie's designs include the Albermarle Hotel, Wellington (1905), the Carnegie Library at Levin (1910), the Karori Methodist Church (1912), and the Oriental Bay Tea Kiosk (1912, demolished 1978). He designed a number of theatres including Kings (1910), Queens (1916), the Crown (1916) and Paramount (1917), all in Wellington and was also responsible for the design of many houses including the Wedge, Glenbervie Terrace (1906) and Bennie house, Salamanca road (1907) both in Wellington. He also had an interest in prefabricated house design. Bennie was an inaugural member of the New Zealand Institute of Architects, founded in 1905, and was later elected a Fellow. He retired in 1935 and his son Malcolm took over the Wellington practice. [Source: an advertisement in the Evening Post, Volume LXIV, Issue 58, 5 September 1902, Page 7 confirms that Bennie entered into partnership with E C Farr on 14 August 1902].<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Historic Places Trust, 'Professional Biographies', accessed 24 July 2013, <http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?CPName=Bennie,+James>

## 2.0 Physical description

### 2.1 Architecture<sup>6</sup>

134 Cuba Street is a three-storey commercial building has been much altered over the past 100+ years. The street elevation is quite stratified; the ground floor shop-fronts date from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the verandah and crude timber balustrade from the c.1960s onwards, the first floor street façade retains much of the original built fabric (albeit partly concealed by a 20<sup>th</sup> c fire escape), and the second floor street façade and parapet were rebuilt after the 1942 Wellington/Wairarapa earthquake.

The original building appears to have been designed in an Edwardian Revivalist style. Most of the surviving elements from the original design can be seen at the first floor façade, from verandah level and above. Here it is clear that the architect has skilfully exploited the brickwork of the façade to create a Venetian-style ensemble. There are three sets of paired windows on each of the upper floors. The flanking windows on both of the upper storeys are designed with two round-arched lights under a single arched opening, with a small circular fanlight above. This feature is not found elsewhere on Cuba Street. The Venetian effect is reiterated in brick arches over the first floor windows, which are flanked by pronounced brick pedestals supporting a double layer of small attached columns. Between the columns, a series of corbels supports the cornice at second floor level.

The second floor façade and parapet were substantially rebuilt after the 1942 earthquake. The street façade was rebuilt with a brick-clad reinforced-concrete frame and to a simplified design. The parapet was replaced with a simple concrete ring beam, the original windows were reinstated and the roof was adapted to a new hipped profile.

More recent alterations include the modern verandah/ balcony with clumsy timber railings and a slender steel fire escape running diagonally across the façade. Both of these features detract from the appearance of this building.

This mix of parts that include ornate original features, simplified replica reconstructions, and intrusive modern elements is quite unusual, and the loss of the original parapet (and possibly the gable end) gives this building a somewhat squat or truncated appearance.

### 2.2 Materials

The construction is load-bearing brick masonry on concrete foundations and piles. The second floor street façade has a reinforced concrete structural frame that is clad in facing brick.

### 2.3 Setting

This building is sited in the Cuba Street Heritage Area and makes a positive contribution to the significant collection of heritage buildings that form the Cuba Street Heritage Area. This building is the second on this block of Cuba Street from the corner with Ghuznee Street to Garrett Street. It is the tallest building in this small block and makes a good contribution to the visual interest of the streetscape. The scale, materials and style of this building contribute to the townscape of Cuba Street.

<sup>6</sup> Wellington City Council, "134 Cuba Street", *Wellington Built Heritage Inventory: Non Residential Precincts 2001*, (Wellington City Council, 2001), CUBA18.

## **Sources**

Kelly, Michael, and Russell Murray. *Cuba Street Heritage Area Report*. Wellington City Council: Unpublished report, prepared for Plan Change 48, 2006.

Wellington City Council. *Cuba Street Heritage Area spreadsheet (blocks 1-3)*. Wellington City Council: Unpublished report, prepared for Plan Change 48, 2006.

Wellington City Council. *Wellington Heritage Building Inventory 2001: Non-Residential Buildings*. Wellington City Council, 2001.

## **Wellington City Archive**

00056:179:B15731  
00056:195:B17039  
00056:282:B22649  
00056:332:B25851  
00058:67:C3308  
00058:460:C19747  
00059:98:D6409  
00059:122:D7160  
00078:1229:96695



## Criteria for assessing cultural heritage significance

### **Cultural heritage values**

#### **Aesthetic Value:**

**Architectural:** *Does the item have architectural or artistic value for characteristics that may include its design, style, era, form, scale, materials, colour, texture, patina of age, quality of space, craftsmanship, smells, and sounds?*

134 Cuba Street is an unusual three-storey Edwardian Venetian Revivalist-style building that has been much-modified. The building is notable for its fine first floor façade that is well-modulated and set with ornamental and polychromatic brickwork. The simplified second-floor façade is a product of the 1942 earthquake. The ground floor verandah, entrances and shopfront are more recent alterations that have less aesthetic value.

**Townscape:** *Does the item have townscape value for the part it plays in defining a space or street; providing visual interest; its role as a landmark; or the contribution it makes to the character and sense of place of Wellington?*

This building is sited in the Cuba Street Heritage Area and makes a positive contribution to the significant collection of heritage buildings that form the Cuba Street Heritage Area.

**Group:** *Is the item part of a group of buildings, structures, or sites that taken together have coherence because of their age, history, style, scale, materials, or use?*

134 Cuba Street is part of an unbroken 'street-wall' of heritage buildings that wraps around the Cuba/Ghuznee Street intersection and signals the 'entrance' to upper Cuba Street. This group is coherent in terms of height, elaborate facades (albeit in a range of architectural styles), age, history, materials and patterns of use.

#### **Historic Value:**

**Association:** *Is the item associated with an important person, group, or organisation?*

This building has historical value for its connection to prominent architect James Bennie, an important architect of the period.

**Association:** *Is the item associated with an important historic event, theme, pattern, phase, or activity?*

The building has historic value for its association with the development of Cuba Street during the Edwardian period, which resulted in the building of many fine commercial buildings. It was damaged and partly rebuilt after the 1942 Wellington/Wairarapa earthquake and is a built-testament to this historic event.

#### **Scientific Value:**

**Archaeological:** *Does the item have archaeological value for its ability to provide scientific information about past human activity?*

Central City NZAA R27/270

**Educational:** *Does the item have educational value for what it can demonstrate about aspects of the past?*



**Technological:** *Does the item have technological value for its innovative or important construction methods or use of materials?*

The building has some technological value for the unusually ornate brick detailing, and for the use of polychromatic brick – an unusual building material in Wellington. The upper floor façade and parapet, including the reinforced concrete frame and ring-beam, are examples of reinstatement work from the mid-1940s.

**Social Value:**

**Public esteem:** *Is the item held in high public esteem?*

**Symbolic, commemorative, traditional, spiritual:** *Does the item have symbolic, commemorative, traditional, spiritual or other cultural value for the community who has used and continues to use it?*

**Identity/Sense of place/Continuity:**

*Is the item a focus of community, regional, or national identity?  
Does the item contribute to sense of place or continuity?*

This building is part of a group of Edwardian commercial buildings on Cuba Street which contribute to the sense of place and continuity of the Cuba Street Heritage Area.

**Sentiment/Connection:** *Is the item a focus of community sentiment and connection?*

**Level of cultural heritage significance**

**Rare:** *Is the item rare, unique, unusual, seminal, influential, or outstanding?*

**Representative:** *Is the item a good example of the class it represents?*

The building is representative of the architecture and history found on Cuba Street. It has a distinctive character and adds significantly to the variety of Cuba Street.

**Authentic:** *Does the item have authenticity or integrity because it retains significant fabric from the time of its construction or from later periods when important additions or modifications were carried out?*

The building retains some original built fabric – most notably the first floor façade above parapet level. Later significant alterations include the reinstatement work after the 1943 Earthquake; this built fabric has value as an early/historically significant alteration.

**Local/Regional/National/International**

*Is the item important for any of the above characteristics at a local, regional, national, or international level?*

This building is of local importance for its contribution to the Cuba Street Heritage Area. It is an unusual building for Cuba Street, designed by a prominent Wellington architect. It retains economic and functional uses as well as retaining a significant amount of original material and authenticity.

### 3.0 Appendix

#### Research checklist (desktop)

Source	Y/N	Comments
1995 Heritage Inventory		
2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory		
WCC Records – building file		
WCC Records – grant files (earthquake strengthening, enhancement of heritage values)		
Research notes from 2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory		
Plan change?		
Heritage Area Report		
Heritage Area Spreadsheet		
Heritage items folder (electronic)		
HPT website		
HPT files		
Conservation Plan		
Searched Heritage Library (CAB 2)		

#### Background research

*Insert any relevant background information into this section. This may include:*

- *Additional plans, such as those for alterations*
- *Chunks of text from other sources such as Cyclopedia of NZ, Papers Past*
- *Additional images*