



# Stratford Mountain House

Pembroke Rd

1899

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<b>Use:</b>	Commercial	<b>Historic Value:</b>	4 out of 5
<b>Materials:</b>	Timber, iron roof	<b>Architectural Value:</b>	1 out of 4
<b>NZHPT Registered:</b>	Not registered	<b>Technical Value:</b>	- out of 2
<b>Legal Description:</b>	Secs 2 & 3 Blk XV Egmont SD	<b>Symbolic Value:</b>	1 out of 3
		<b>Rarity Value:</b>	- out of 2
		<b>Townscape Value:</b>	1 out of 2
		<b>Group Value:</b>	- out of 2
		<b>Overall Heritage Value:</b>	7 out of 20



Mount Taranaki has been a source of constant inspiration and awe to the people of Taranaki. The early Stratford settlers recognised this, realised the potential of the Mountain as a tourist attraction, and made large efforts to construct a suitable and easy access road. This was first meant to be Pembroke Road, but a large swamp, thought to be impossible to cross, halted construction for a number of years – with Surrey Road being the main access road during this time. The road was finally completed some time in the 1880s.

With suitable access, the number of visitors to the mountain increased rapidly, creating a need for a public shelter to be built. The first house on the Stratford side was built on the Plateau (4000ft above sea level) on 16 February 1899 by Messrs Curtis and Penn. Because the Plateau Road had not been built, materials would have been taken up by a horse-drawn sledge. Owing to limited funds, this was only a basic shack with an iron roof and canvas sides. This shelter was described as The Stratford Mountain Sanatorium, as the mountain air was seen as being good for the health.

During the next year, the canvas was replaced with corrugated iron. The success of the shelter with the continued increase in visitors saw it upgraded into a two-roomed cottage with a fenced area.

Although the Plateau provided the cottage with stunning views of both Mount Taranaki and the Taranaki province, it did not protect it against the harsh weather conditions. Storms were frequent, and the snow and wind had adverse effects on the building. Therefore, in 1908, the building was dismantled and moved down to its present site, at 3120 ft above sea level. Gradually, verandahs were added onto the building to provide extra shelter.

A telephone office was opened at the Mountain House on 4 September 1913, under the name of Potaema, meaning white cap. The office would be closed during the winter months, as very little tourists came up then. This was operated by the owner of the Mountain House at the time, or someone in the owner's family. In 1947 the Stratford Chamber of Commerce requested that the name was changed to Stratford Mountain House, a more appropriate name due to the increased number of tourists. This was approved by the NZ Geographic Board on 27 May 1947, but many locals were not happy with the change. In September 1988, after 75 years of service, the telephone office was closed, with Keith Anderson being the last telephonist.

Early owners are unknown, but from 1927-1934 Miss Hilda Haldane owned it, followed by the Carryer's, who owned it until 1939. John and Elieen Hennessy took over until 1951. They made a lot of successful changes, adding another story for bunkrooms in 1950, making the premises capable of providing casual meals and catering for large parties, and making general improvements to the building throughout the years. However, they were met with the problem of having so many bookings that they neither had sufficient accommodation or facilities, which proves how successful they were. Elieen described the Mountain House when they first moved in as being *"just a great barn with two bunkrooms containing several very crude bunks, and two small rooms at the other end. The main room had a huge open fireplace with its corrugated iron walls."* The Hennessy's also saw the introduction of electricity to the Mountain House, which often cut out due to storms. One storm in fact tore the whole roof off the bunkhouse, causing chaos.

From 1951-1959 John and Muff Hennessy owned it, followed by Snow and Lorna Mace until 1983. The Mace's built separate chalets to accommodate more affluent visitors, and in 1977, because of the large visitor numbers, they had the main building pulled down and a new complex built (the same one that stands today) so that up to 80 people could sleep there at one time. Although most of the present building is new, parts of the original structure were put back in place, mostly in the dining room. The original verandah posts can also be found supporting the roof in the reception area. The Mace's also made further extensions, such as including a boiler room and a ski-hire building.

Ben and Gladys Candy took over for two years, and were followed by Keith and Berta Anderson in 1985, who still own and run it (although sadly Keith died on 1 February 2003 in a car accident). The Anderson's came from 11 years of owning and transforming Dawson Falls Motor Lodge, and were (and are) renowned for fine hospitality, food and wines. They managed to build the staff numbers up from 2 to over 15, and have made the Stratford Mountain House into what it is today – an award winning tourist venture. Countless of thousands of visitors have been attracted to the Mountain, and enjoyed the facilities of the Mountain House, and it is sure that this legacy will continue.

## **Bibliography**

*Daily News Article, 20 Feb 1999*

*Stratford Press Article, 17 Feb 1999*