

Heritage Assessment:

Mangonui Courthouse Historic Reserve

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Department of
Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

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Kaitaia Area Office

2011

Peer Reviewed by: Maria Butcher

Acknowledgements: Maria Butcher for her assistance in editing and refining my research and proving you can teach an old dog new tricks.

Cover Image: Courthouse is the building on the left. Date of photo: 1905. From Far North Regional Museum.

1. Site Overview

The Mangonui Courthouse, built in 1893, was designed by the architect John Campbell who is well known for designing Parliament House in Wellington. The building retains almost all of its original features, including the pebble paths, retaining walls, and fences.

Land Status: Historic Reserve, Mangonui Courthouse Historic Reserve.

Administered from: Kaitaia Area Office, Kaitaia.

Location: Beach Rd Mangonui.

Annual visitor numbers: Unknown.

Heritage Status: Historic Reserve, Northland Conservancy AMHP 12.
Registered by the New Zealand Historic Places Trust (NZHPT) as a Category 1 Historic Places (register no. 78).
Scheduled by the Far North District Council in District Plan: Part 4 Appendices, Appendix 1, Schedule 1E, Site 12.

Site Area Hectares: 0.0633 (SO 54785).

AMIS No: 100055961

AMIS Category: Historic/Building/ Government

Land Unit No: O04 024.

Functional Location Number: DN-61-300-3049

Gazettal References: Gazetted Historic Res 11 Nov 1980, NZ Gazette 27 Nov 1980, No140, p3764. Mangonui Courthouse Preservation Society gazetted to control and manage 19 Feb 1982, NZ Gazette 11 Mar 1982, No 26, p724.

2. History Description

The first Europeans to visit and exploit the resources of the region were the whalers and in 1845 “Mangonui was host to the greatest number of whalers in the country, with reports of 40-50 in the harbour simultaneously”.¹ They were followed by timber and flax millers, kauri gum diggers and farmers. Mangonui continued to grow on the backs of these industries and in 1887 became the administrative centre of the Mangonui County.² Mangonui was also the seat of the resident magistrate, who oversaw the justice system for much of the wider region.³ This was convenient, as the town had a longstanding reputation for lawlessness, due in part to visiting whalers.⁴

The first Magistrate, William Bertram White (1821-1910), was appointed in 1848. He used his own office for the first 2 years until an official building was erected

¹ N Clarke –McKenna 2004 (reprint), *Mangonui Gateway to the Far North*. self published. p 4.

² N. Clarke McKenna. 2004. p 49

³ M.Jones. 2002. Mangonui Courthouse (Former)
www.historic.org.nz/TheRegister/TheRegisterSearch

⁴ M.Jones. 2002. Mangonui Courthouse (Former)
www.historic.org.nz/TheRegister/TheRegisterSearch

on the current site.⁵ This new building also served as a custom house and bond store. By 1889, this building was in “a state of decay”, according to Justice of the Peace Mr Robert Miles. An Inspector from the Public Buildings Office recommended the construction of “one of the smaller class of courthouse with a small room for a customhouse office”.⁶

The impressive new courthouse was opened in 1893, replacing the earlier structure.⁷ It was situated near the post office and the wharf, the main point of arrival to and departure from the town.⁸ The plans for the single story building drew upon an earlier Public Works Department designs. The courthouse was constructed by local builder George Garton who was also responsible for other public buildings in the area.⁹

Many people of fame and notoriety have been associated with the courthouse. For instance, Edwin Marsh Williams (1818 - ?), one of the translators of the Treaty of Waitangi, oversaw the courthouse from 1873-1883. He later went on to become a judge of the Native Land Courts.¹⁰

Despite having an impressive range of facilities, Mangonui declined as roading improved, opening up new opportunities in the wider region. In 1918 Kaitaia became the headquarters of the Mangonui County, and thirty years later court sittings were also transferred to Kaitaia.¹¹ The legacy of this prosperous period has left us with a town with a large number of historic buildings including the Mangonui Courthouse.

G. Bowron describes the more recent history of the courthouse:

*The courthouse was used by the Police Department until 1975 when it was declared surplus by the Justice Department. The following year the courthouse was transferred from the Police to the Ministry of Works. At this stage the Mangonui Courthouse Preservation Society was formed in the interest of keeping the courthouse intact. They were instrumental in getting the building declared as a reserve for historic purposes in 1980 and later in 1982 were gazetted to control and manage the reserve.*¹²

The Mangonui Courthouse Preservation Society continues to control and manage the reserve.

⁵ G Bowron 1993 *Mangonui Courthouse Cyclical Maintenance Plan*. New Zealand Historic Places Trust. Wellington. p 4

⁶ G Bowron 1993 p.4

⁷ M. Jones 2002 p.2

⁸ ibid

⁹ ibid

¹⁰ G.Bowron. 1993.p4

¹¹ N. Clarke McKenna .2004, p49

¹² G Bowron 1993 p4



Figure 1: The Mangonui Courthouse in 2010 (photo credit: Carolyn Smith).

3. Fabric Description

The former Mangonui Courthouse is a well preserved late 19th century judicial building. Apart from some fittings missing from inside, the courthouse essentially remains as it was in 1893. It still has the judge's bench, the dock and a table made by prisoners.¹³ A detailed description of the courthouse is provided in Appendix B.

Archaeologist James Robinson describes the building as follows:

It is a simple but handsome building constructed entirely of kauri. More reminiscent from the outside of a domestic house than a public building. However the courtroom which takes up over half the interior, forms a surprisingly impressive space in such a small structure. Again simple in design, it is relieved from its severity by the cove ceiling, the warmth of the broad unpainted kauri boards and the interesting detail on the ventilator grills, it must have been less intimidating to stand trial there than in the majority of courts.¹⁴

¹³ M. Jones 2002.p3

¹⁴ J Robinson 2004 Mangonui Courthouse Excavation, Internal Report. Department of Conservation. Northland

The Mangonui Courthouse was designed by John Campbell (1857-1942),¹⁵ and contains many key elements of Campbell's designs for small wooden public buildings, mainly courthouses, post offices and custom-houses. Some of these elements include the use of dark contrasting coverboards applied over weather board surfaces to create panels and emphasize key elements. Another common feature was the shaping and division of windows, the upper sash divided into more and smaller panes than the lower sashes. He liked to enrich and dignify gable ends. The front gable end of the Mangonui Courthouse building uses such embellishments as eave brackets, a small wooden shingle roof over the window, a deep finial on the apex of the eave flanked on either side by vertical slats.

An archaeological excavation carried out in 1993 revealed that the courthouse surroundings were surprisingly intact.¹⁶ The excavation unearthed a number of features including substantial stone retaining walls, paths surfaced with shell and water rolled pebbles and the foundations of an outbuilding.¹⁷ Two early ceramic inkwells were amongst artefacts found during the excavation.¹⁸

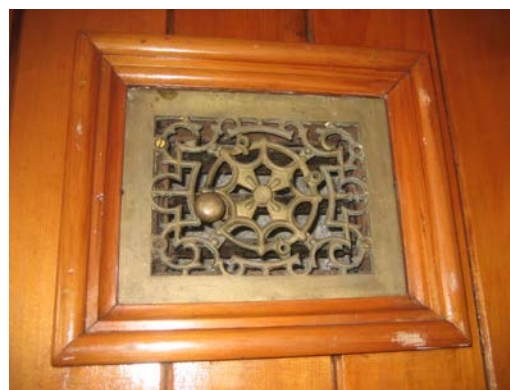


Figure 2: Kauri interior with curved ceiling and elaborate fretwork air vents (now used for light fittings) (left); **Figure 3:** detail of brass air vents on wall (above) (photo credits: Carolyn Smith).

¹⁵ L.E.Martin 2004. *Built for Us, The Works of Government and Colonial Architects, 1860s-1960s*. University of Otago Press. p 44

¹⁶ J. Robinson. 2004. p 22

¹⁷ J Robinson. 2004 . p 20

¹⁸ J Robinson. 2004. p 22

4. National Context

The Mangonui Courthouse is the only building in the Far North known to be designed by John Campbell (1857-1942).¹⁹ In 1890 he was appointed Government Architect until his retirement in 1922. Campbell is most well known for his design of Parliament House in Wellington (1912). For these reasons alone the Mangonui Courthouse building is unique, and it also plays an important part in the historic fabric of the Mangonui Village.

In Northland there are two other former courthouses registered with the New Zealand Historic Places Trust, Rawene (Cat II) now a Far North District Council Service Centre and Library and the Former Kawakawa Courthouse (Cat II) which is now a Police Station.

M. Jones provides some detail regarding the wider political context:

*The building was constructed as the Minister of Public Works, Richard Seddon (1845-1906), was in the process of reorganising the governments Public Works Department as a prelude to establishing a programme of nationwide works. The courthouse was part of the last generation of public structures built exclusively under the private contract system, with increasing numbers of buildings from the mid 1890s being constructed by co-operative labour schemes that were directly administered by the state.*²⁰

This site represents the following site types from AMIS: Government Service (Justice).

5. Cultural Connections

In the late 1970's, when the Police had no further use for the building, there was a possibility that it might be put up for removal. A local resident, Lieutenant-Commander E. A. Briggs R.N.Z.N (Rtd) began drumming up support for preserving the building. As a consequence of this the Mangonui Courthouse Preservation Society was formed. In 1982 they were gazetted to control and manage the building.²¹

¹⁹ L E Martin 2004, p 44

²⁰ M Jones. 2002, p 2

²¹ N. Clarke McKenna 2004. p 99

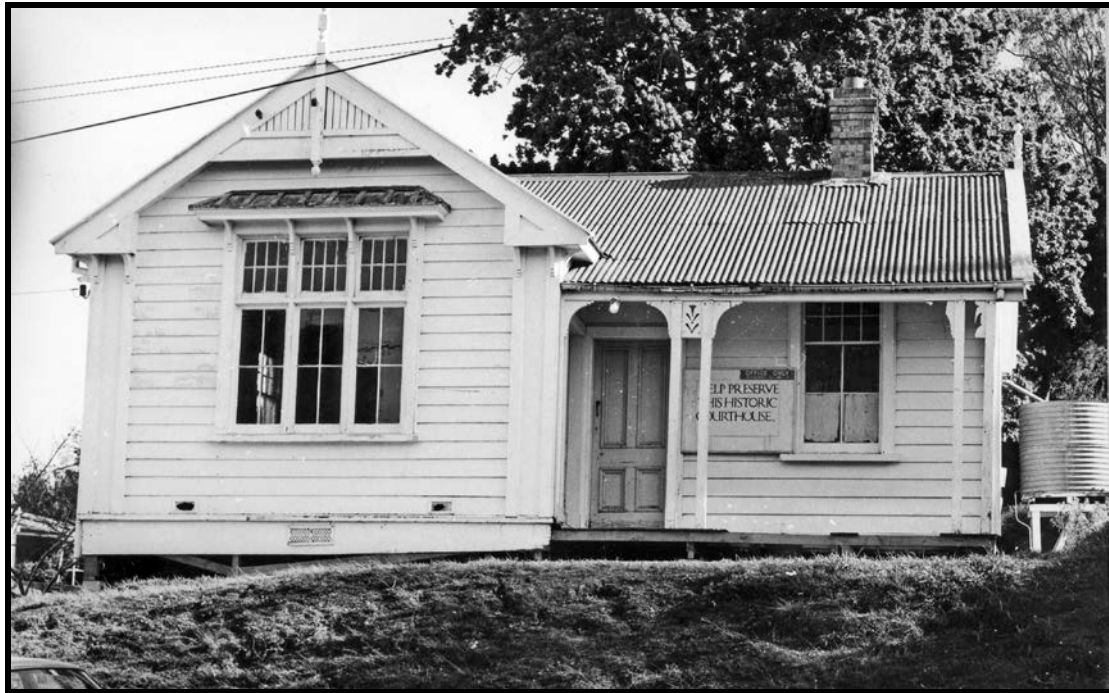


Figure 4: Photograph taken in 1978 during repiling, note sign on building publicising the need to help preserve the building. (Photo courtesy of the Far North Regional Museum)

The courthouse was and still is the starting point for the Mangonui Heritage Trail. Between 1982 and 2000 the courthouse has been available for hire to community groups. Many groups held their monthly meetings there. The courthouse has been used for weddings, children's and adult drama productions, art exhibitions, religious gatherings, weekly law clinics, and visits by the plunket nurses and doctors from Kaitaia. Over a period of nearly twenty years a wide variety of members of the community used or had dealings with the building.

This small venue was perfectly suited to such events, but unfortunately the irregular income from this was insufficient to cover the outgoings related to the upkeep of the building. Furthermore it did not fulfil the Preservation Society's desire to have the building open regularly for locals and visitors to enjoy.

In 2000 the Courthouse Preservation Society was approached by an art co-operative who wanted to lease the building for a fixed monthly rental and to give the Preservation Society a share of the profits. The building was to be open 6 days a week to the public. The Preservation Society accepted this. This arrangement still allows the building to be viewed by the public, provides an income for its upkeep, an income for the artists in the co-operative and the community still feels a sense of ownership.

6. Historic Significance

The history of Mangonui Courthouse is significant due to its associations with important people, and the pivotal role it played in the community. The building

represents a time when Mangonui was an important regional centre.²² The location of the courthouse – on a hill overlooking the wharf and main street – is indicative of its importance to the town.

6. Fabric Significance

The courthouse is nationally significant in its own right, as an unusually intact example of a small court building.²³ It predates widespread government construction from the latter 1890s. The courthouse may be unique in New Zealand in having intact surrounds, the design of which dates back to the 19th century.²⁴

Furthermore, the courthouse is part of a historic urban landscape, along with the old Post Office (1904),²⁵ the Mangonui Hotel (1905-06),²⁶ the Wharf Store (circa 1890),²⁷ and the Four Square store (1907),²⁸ across the road. These buildings are in the same immediate vicinity; and collectively their historic significance is very high.



Figure 5: Courthouse in foreground on right hand side; in the background is the Post Office which is still standing today; the building on the left is currently the Four Square store (post 1907) (Photo credit Far North Regional Museum)

²² *ibid*

²³ *ibid*

²⁴ J Robinson 2001 Mangonui Courthouse Historic Reserve AMHP 12 Internal report Department of Conservation . Northland

²⁵ N Clarke McKenna 2004, p36

²⁶ N Clarke McKenna 2004, p72

²⁷ N Clarke McKenna 2004, p150

²⁸ N Clarke McKenna 2004, p54

7. Management Recommendations

The current management of the building is working very well. The use of the courthouse as a co-operative gallery is a good example of re-use of a historic building. The status quo should be maintained.

1. Continue to maintain the historic fabric of the courthouse and its surrounds according to best practice.
2. Maintain and strengthen the relationship with the Mangonui Courthouse Preservation Society and the wider community.
3. Maintain its public function/ accessibility within the limits defined in point 1.
4. This is the only intact actively managed historic building in the Conservancy²⁹ and this provides opportunities to interpret the building, property, and town and to advocate broader conservation goals.

9. Management History

1892: New Courthouse building designed.

1893: Courthouse constructed.

1948: Building ceases being used as a courthouse.

1949: Building is used as a Police Station until 1975.

1976: Transferred to Ministry of Works.

1980: Land and building gazetted as a Historic Reserve.

1982: Mangonui Courthouse Preservation Society gazetted to “control and manage reserve.”

1987: Department of Conservation is created and take over responsibility of reserve.

10. Management Documentation

Robinson, J. 2004. Mangonui Courthouse Excavation. Unpublished Report for DOC Northland Conservancy.

Robinson, J. 2000. Mangonui Courthouse Historic Reserve AMHP 12. Internal File Note, DOC Northland Conservancy.

Bowron, G. 1992. Mangonui Courthouse Cyclical Maintenance Plan. NZHPT Report.

Old Mangonui Courthouse Specifications for Repairs. 1994. Prepared by Works Consultancy Services Ltd.

²⁹ J. Robinson, 2001. Section 12

Department of Conservation internal file: DOCDM File, PAR-01-06-03

Department of Conservation internal file: OLD DOC File, O04-024

11. Sources

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Stacpoole, John. 1976. *Colonial Architecture in New Zealand*. AH & AW Reed. Wellington.

Department of Conservation Internal Files:

Lands and Survey Department: 8/4/36, 8/5/386 currently held at DOC Whangarei

DOC file PAR-01-06-03 held at Kaitaia Area Office

DOC File, O04-024 held at Kaitaia Area Office

12. Appendices:

Appendix A: Timeline of important events

- Pre 1892:** A new courthouse building was designed by architect John Campbell (1857-1942).
- 1893:** The courthouse was built by Mr George Garton of Russell, Bay of Islands for the sum of £264 17s 6p.
- 1948:** The building ceases being used as a courthouse and court sittings are transferred to Kaitaia.
- 1949:** The courthouse is used by NZ Police as a Police Station until 1975.
- 1975:** The Courthouse is declared surplus by the Justice Department and transferred to the Ministry of Works.
- 1976:** Transferred to Lands and Survey Department.
- 1977:** Mangonui Courthouse Preservation Society formed.
- 1978:** Building re-roofed and repiled
- 1980:** Land and building gazetted as a Historic Reserve .
- 1982:** Mangonui Courthouse Preservation Society is gazetted to “control and manage” the reserve.
- 1983:** The out house is considered a fire hazard and is demolished.
- 1984:** A courthouse management plan is produced.
- 1993:** An archaeological excavation is carried out at the rear of the building where it is planned to build an annex. This excavation discovers a stone retaining wall and a pebble and shell covered yard that had originally surrounded the courthouse. These features had been buried under a landslide of soil which possibly came from building and subdivision work on the hillside behind the courthouse.
- 1994:** The annex is built behind the courthouse, this building is for storage and to provide toilet and washing facilities which cannot be provided in the courthouse. The annex is connected to the courthouse by a wooden ramp.
- 1994:** Specifications for repairs to the courthouse are prepared by Works Consultancy. The repairs are carried out in Aug 1994.
- 1995:** 10 cubic meters of soil is removed from the southern and western sides of the building to reveal more of the stone wall and courtyard.
- 1996:** All the remaining landslide material is removed and a route for a water supply to run a fire sprinkler system is investigated.
- 1997:** A fire sprinkler system is installed in the courthouse. The ramp between the courthouse and the annex is removed (the newly exposed courtyard can be used to gain access from the courthouse to the annex). Power is run to the annex and the sewer line is relocated to run down the western side of the building. Previously it had been slung under the ramp and the courthouse.

Appendix B: Detailed Fabric Description

The building is simple in its execution, timber framed and clad in flat weatherboards. All timber work including the joinery is NZ Kauri. The interior ceiling is wide Kauri boards covered with moulded battens on the joins. The interior walls up to approx 1 meter above the floor are covered with 300mm wide vertical boards with moulded battens over the joins. The upper part of the walls is covered with vertical 150mm wide tongue and groove boards.

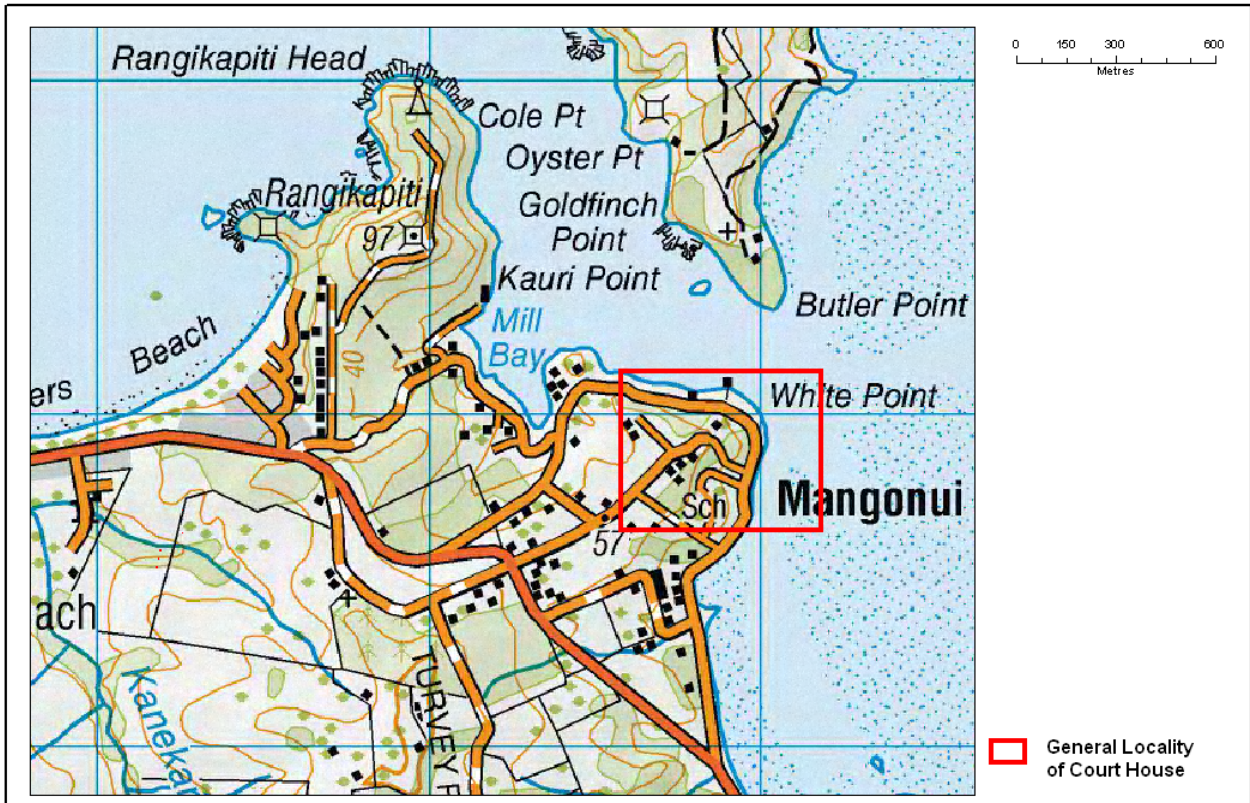
The two different styles of lining are separated by a horizontal dado. All of the interior timber has a varnished finish which gives the building interior a warm feeling one would not expect in public building, this is complimented by some delicate fretwork around the ventilator grilles on the ceilings and walls.

In its present form the court house comprises two rectangles, the larger one (5.100 x 7.950m) houses the courtroom , the other smaller one (4.600 x 6.430m) houses two equal sized rooms, one being the magistrates chamber and the other the clerk of the courts office. There is one set of back to back fire places, one fireplace in the magistrates chambers and the other in the court clerks office. A gable roof pitched at an angle of approximately 28 degrees runs lengthwise above the courtroom in a north south direction. A secondary gable roof over the magistrates chamber and office runs at right angles to the main roof.

The northern elevation has 3 x 4 light fixed sash windows, above these are 3 x 8 light tilting sash windows. Also in this elevation is one 4 panel exterior door (under the veranda) and one double hung sash window, one sash being a 4 light and the other an 8 light. The eastern elevation has two double hung sash windows with a pane/light configuration as the double hung sash on the northern wall. The southern elevation has one 3 x 4 light fixed sash window , above this are 3 x 8 light tilting sash windows and one 4 panel exterior door. The western elevation has 2 x double hung sash windows, one sash being a 4 light and the other an 8 light. The western elevation also has one 4 panel exterior door (under the veranda).



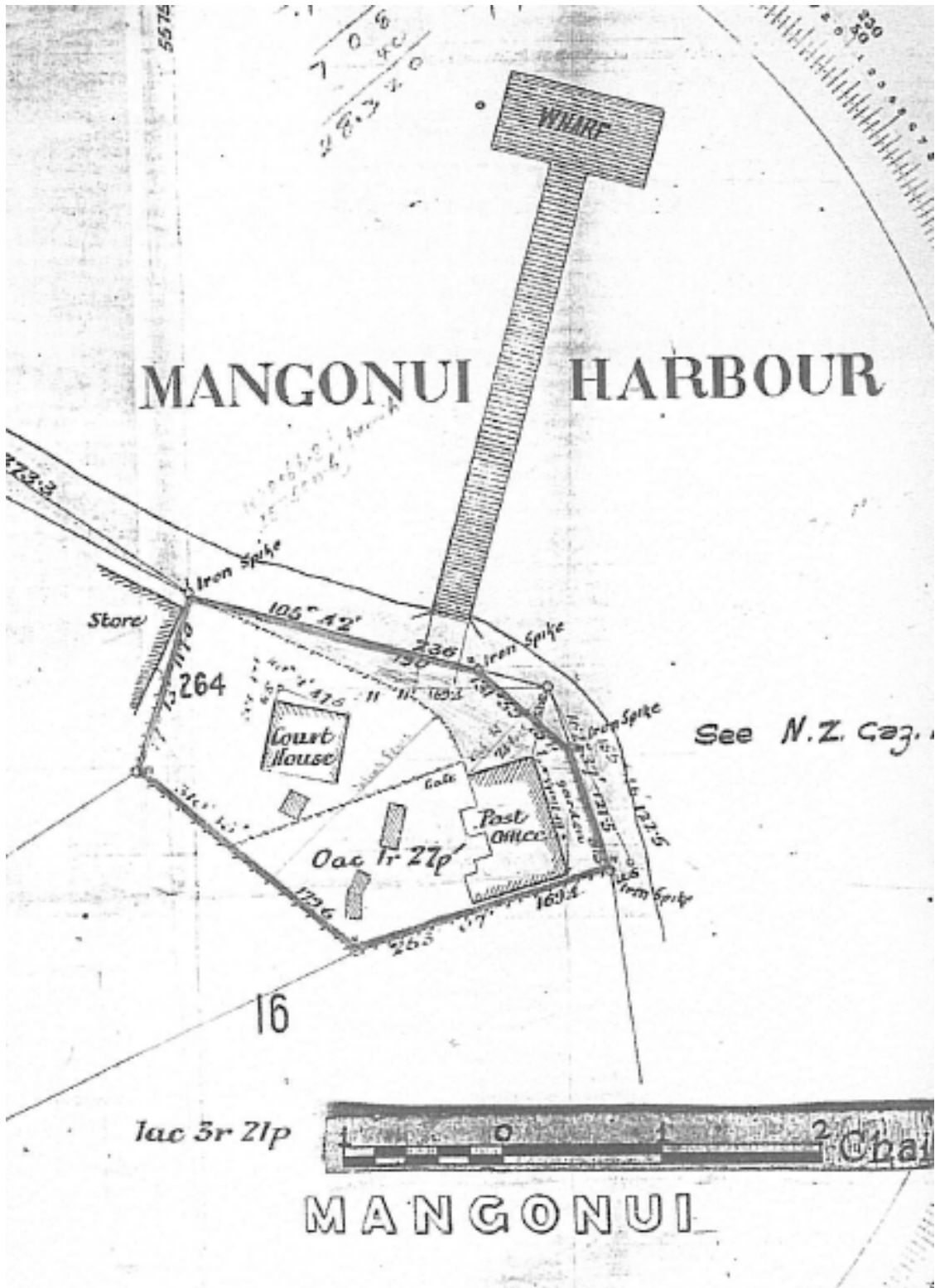
Technical drawing of the northern perspective of the Courthouse by Historic Architect Dave Pearson. Source: Robinson, J. 2004.



Location of Mangonui Township, Northland



Location of Mangonui Courthouse Historic Reserve



Survey Ordinance Plan 13093 drawn in 1904.