

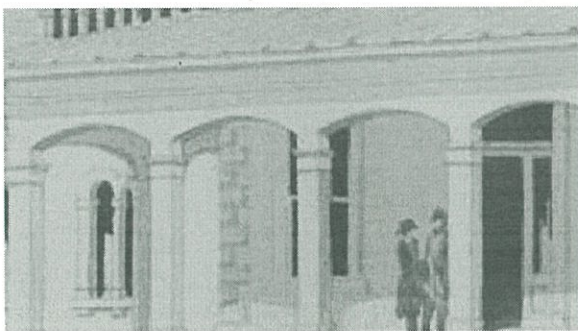
Tales From Te Papa

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The history of Te Papa

As at date of publication
Archive



Our history

Te Papa's first predecessor was the Colonial Museum, which opened in a small wooden building in 1865. Here is a brief description of how the museum evolved over the years.

1865 to 1930s - humble beginnings

The tiny Colonial Museum opened behind Parliament Buildings shortly after Parliament moved to Wellington in 1865. Sir James Hector led the Museum until 1903, when Augustus Hamilton became Director. In 1907, the Museum became known as the Dominion Museum.

The idea of developing a public art gallery in Wellington was gathering support around this time. In 1913, the Science and Art Act provided for the establishment of the National Art Gallery in the building. But not until 1930 did the idea start to become a reality under the National Gallery and Dominion Museum Act.

1930s to 1970s - Buckle Street building

In 1936, a new building to house the Dominion Museum and new National Art Gallery opened in Buckle Street, Wellington. It incorporated the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts. They sold their land and donated the proceeds to the new organisation.

In 1972, the Dominion Museum became the National Museum.

1980s - a need for change

The Buckle Street building was never actually completed and by the 1980s was full to bursting. The National Art Gallery was particularly concerned about its inadequacies.

The way the National Museum functioned was also in need of review. The Museum had been much loved for many years but no longer represented its increasingly diverse community. Society had changed, and so had views about New Zealand's history and identity.

In 1988, the Government established a Project Development Board to set the scene for a new national museum. This Board consulted people nationwide, including iwi (tribal groups), about their visions for the museum. The goals for the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (Te Papa) emerged.

1990s - Te Papa takes shape

In 1992, the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Act was passed. Te Papa would

- unite the National Museum and National Art Gallery as one entity
- unite the collections of the two institutions so that New Zealand's stories could be told in an interdisciplinary way
- be a partnership between Tangata Whenua (Maori, the indigenous people of New Zealand) and Tangata Tiriti (people in New Zealand by right of the Treaty of Waitangi)
- speak with authority
- represent and appeal to New Zealand's increasingly diverse society
- be a place for discussion, debate, involvement, and celebration
- link the past, present, and future.

1998 - Te Papa opens

On 14 February 1998, Te Papa opened in Cable Street, Wellington - on time and within budget. Construction had taken four years.

Since Te Papa opened, more than 15 million people have visited the Museum. Our narrative-based, interdisciplinary, and interactive approach has attracted international attention, as has our commitment to biculturalism.

Our challenge is ongoing - to remain true to the community and relevant in an ever-changing world.

[For more information on Te Papa, visit the official site here.](#)
