



History and Features of the Commissariat Store



RHSQ

The Royal Historical Society of Queensland

115 William Street Brisbane

Commissariat Store Museum: 10am to 4pm Tuesday to Friday

Phone: (07) 3221 4198

info@queenslandhistory.org.au

History and Features of the Commissariat Store

During the early years of the Moreton Bay Penal Settlement, the Commissariat Store acted as the receiving and distributing depot for the burgeoning colony's food and equipment. The officer in charge was paid the second highest wage in the colony, next to the Commandant.

History and Use of Building

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| 1829 | Construction of the building, comprised of two storeys, was completed. The lower floor was used as a Colonial/Government Store from 1829-1961. |
| 1848 | Land sales office |
| 1850s | Influx of free settlers to Moreton Bay. The second floor was used as temporary accommodation for immigrants unable to be housed elsewhere. A doorway was cut through the western wall to allow the immigrants access to the building from Miller Park and so avoid the ground floor which was being used as a store. As there were no cooking facilities in the building, the kitchen was in the yard. |
| 1860s | The second floor was converted to married and single quarters for the constabulary, with partitions, 18 windows and 6 doors fitted. |
| 1870s | Building reverted to immigrant accommodation. |
| 1880s | Accommodation for Justices visiting St Helena Island and the Dunwich Benevolent Society. In 1886, an annex was built at a right angle to the main building to house a stationery store. The annex was demolished in 1977. |
| 1898 | With the advent of Federation, the building was renamed the Government Store – evidence of this is apparent above the William Street and Miller Park entrances. |
| 1909 | Two lifts were installed. These were hand hoisted by ropes over pulleys. |
| 1913 | The top floor was added to allow access to William Street and to provide extra office space. |
| 1914 | First electric lift installed. |
| 1923 | Building became the State Store. |
| 1961 | State stores moved out of the building. |
| 1962-1968 | Ground floor used as storage for Queensland State Archives. This space was then used by the State Library and the Law Reform Commission, as well as the State Irrigation Commission, the Justice Department and as storage space for the Department of Stores. |
| 1976 | The Law Reform Commission, the only remaining government organisation in residence, vacated the building. |
| 1979-1982 | Building restored. However the major alterations were not aligned to current methods of conservation. |
| 1981 | Building leased to the Royal Historical Society of Queensland for \$1.00 annually, if demanded. |
| 1981-Now | Home of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland. |
| 1999-2001 | Major refurbishment of the building funded by a Centenary of Federation grant |

Planning and Construction

The Commissariat Store is the oldest occupied building in Queensland, having been in almost continuous use since its completion in 1829.

Acting Civil Engineer, William Dumaresq, drew up plans for the Commissariat Store. In April 1828 the New South Wales Colonial Secretary, Alexander Macleay, sent Dumaresq's plans to Captain Patrick Logan, the Commandant of the Moreton Bay Penal Settlement.

The supervisor of the construction of the Commissariat Store was a career soldier, Lieutenant Thomas Bainbrigge. The supervisor of the gaol gang working on the site was Peter Spicer. He reported that, on 9 July 1828, sixteen men in the gaol gang started work on the Commissariat Store foundations. Preparation for the retaining wall and the foundations of the Commissariat Store took almost four months to complete. Convicts had to cut into the high phyllite rock bank of William Street, involving the removal of a large amount of rock to allow for construction of a porphyry retaining wall and to level the site for the building. Digging was a punishment for the 'worst description of men'. The convicts in the gaol gang were always shackled and worked from sunrise to sunset. Since the convict era the building has been used as a land sales office, a migrant depot, a police barracks and State Stores. Occupants since 1962 include Queensland State Archives, Irrigation and Water Supply Commission, Department of Justice, State Library and Law Reform Commission.

The original plans for the Commissariat Store cannot be located. Conservation commenced in 1999, based on drawings made by Andrew Petrie in 1838 and these plans are held in the Queensland State Archives. The building was re-opened on 28 April 2001.

The building has been conserved, where possible, to the original Georgian architecture, e.g. the central staircase giving symmetry. All modern fabric added in this conservation has been painted grey for ease of identification.

Due to damage sustained from a partial collapse of the William Street frontage on 13 January 2011, the Commissariat Store closed. A huge effort on the part of the Queensland Government has resulted in great progress being made to get the Commissariat Store site operational again.

Walls

Most of the blocks in the building are original. The tuff (sometimes referred to as porphyry) blocks were quarried at Kangaroo Point. Tuff blocks were hard and laid with the natural iron stain to the exterior, providing a durable surface.

Lime for mortar for the retaining wall was obtained by crushing and burning oyster shells from Amity (Stradbroke Island); lime for mortar for the building came from the newly erected lime kiln at Limestone Hill near Ipswich.

Sandstone for footings, base course, quoins and lintels was obtained from a quarry 2 miles (3.2km) from Oxley Creek. All the sandstone used in the 1970s restoration is from Helidon, 107km west of Brisbane.

Timber

The eight timber bearers that support the first floor are 14" x 10" (350mm x 250mm) grey ironbark. All are original except the one on the western side closest to Miller Park. The timber was hand hewn and dressed with adzes. The distinctive adze marks can still be seen.

Windows

The bars, except for those above the front door, are original 1829 fabric. The hardwoodframed windows were added in 1860.