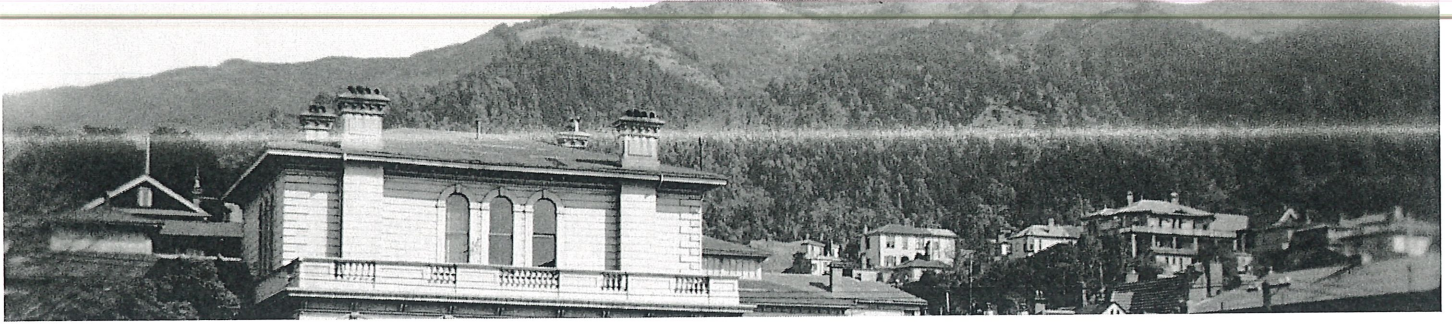




MUSEUM OF
NEW ZEALAND
TE PAPA
TONGAREWA

1865
1992

Te Papa, n.d.[c]



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Our history

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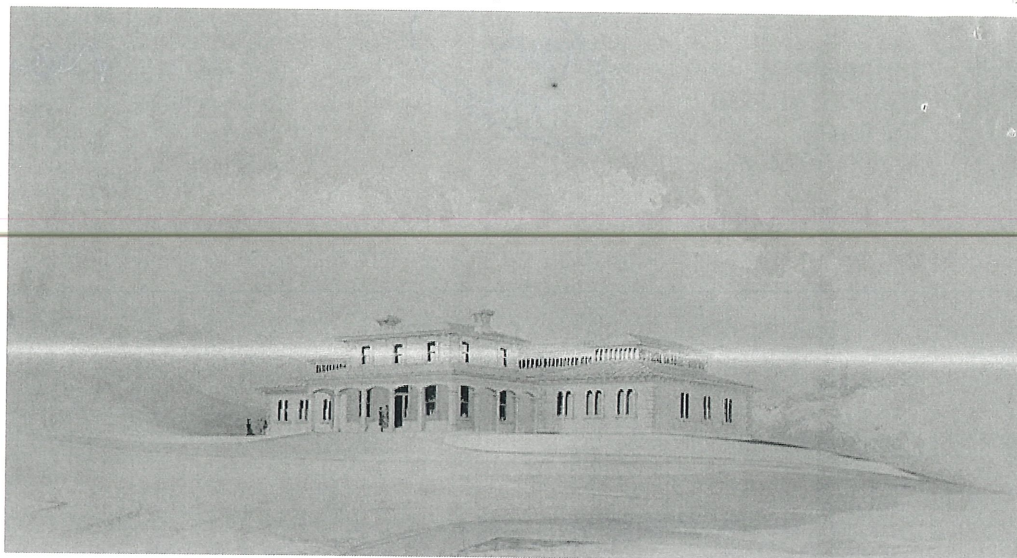
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Te Papa's history

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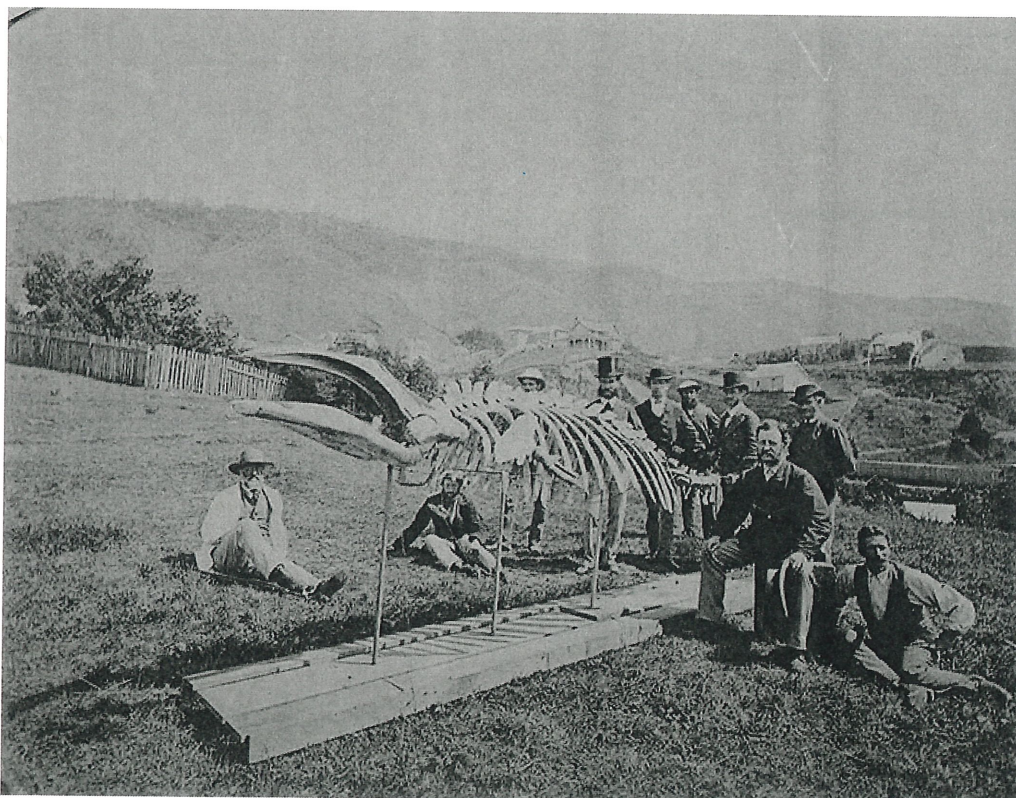


Colonial Museum, Wellington, 1865, New Zealand, by George O'Brien. Acquisition history unknown. Te Papa (1992-0035-2275)

1865–1900s: Science and curiosities

The tiny Colonial Museum, Te Papa's predecessor, opened behind Parliament's buildings shortly after Parliament moved to Wellington in 1865.

The museum's first director, Sir James Hector, prioritised scientific collections but also acquired a range of other items, often by donation. These included prints and paintings, ethnographic 'curiosities', and items of antiquity.



Group with mounted skeleton, including James Hector, 1874, Wellington, by William Travers. Purchased 2001 with New Zealand Lottery Grants Board funds. Te Papa (O.030607)

1900s–1930s: National focus

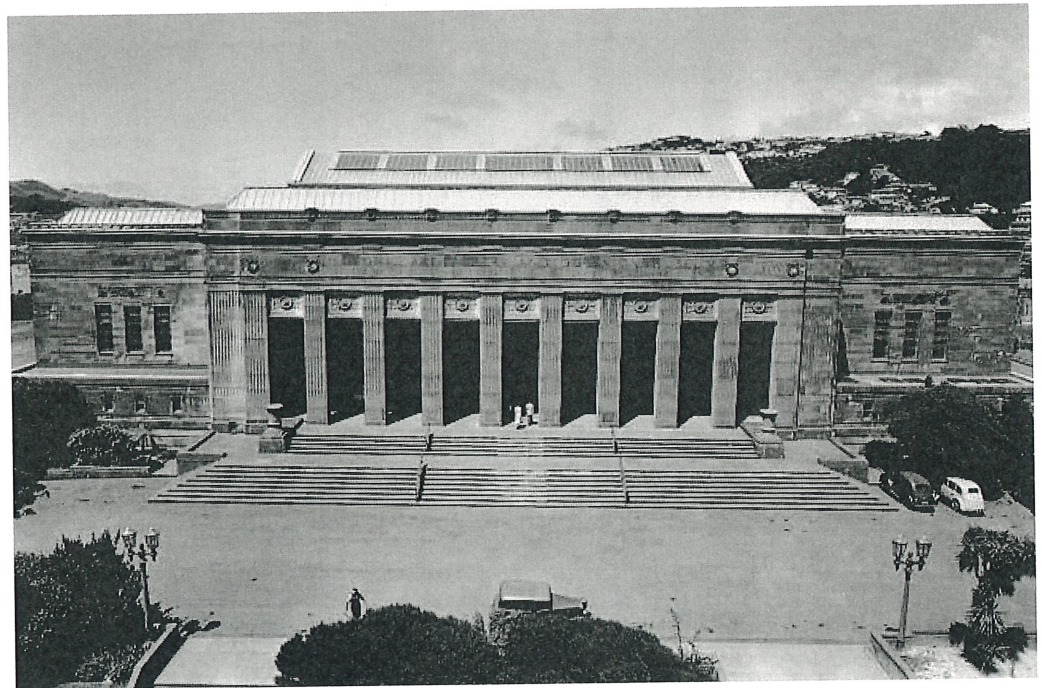
In 1907, the Colonial Museum was renamed the Dominion Museum and took on a broader national focus.

The idea of developing a public art gallery in Wellington was gathering support, and the Science and Art Act of 1913 paved the way for a national art gallery in the same building. However, it was only in 1930 that this idea started to become a reality, under the National Gallery and Dominion Museum Act.

1930s–1970s: Sharing with the National Art Gallery

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

In 1972, the Dominion Museum became the National Museum.



Dominion Museum building, 1955, by Charles Hale. © Te Papa

1980s: Need for change

By the 1980s, the Buckle Street building was full to bursting. The museum, although much loved by visitors, no longer represented its increasingly diverse community.

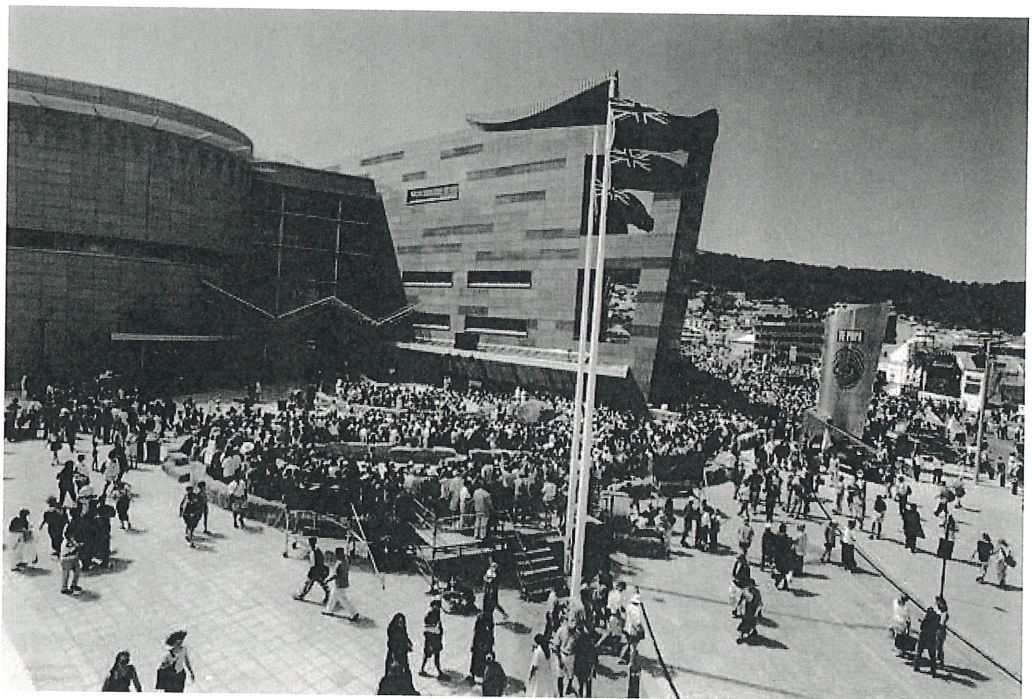
In 1988, the government established the Project Development Board to canvass opinion and set the scene for a new national museum.

1992: Diversity and new goals

The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Act 1992 demonstrated a shift to represent New Zealand's culturally diverse society and reach a broader audience. Emphasis was placed on collections and the nation's access to them.

Under the Act, 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 (Māori, 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.



Te Papa opening day, 1998. Photograph by Michael Hall. Te Papa

In 1994, construction of the new museum began.

[Our building](#)

1998: Te Papa opens

On 14 February 1998, Te Papa (housing the national art collection among its taonga) opened on Cable Street, Wellington – on time and within budget.

Since then, millions of people have visited Te Papa. Our narrative-based, interdisciplinary, and interactive approach has attracted international attention, as has our commitment to biculturalism.



Cake celebrating 25 million visitors to Te Papa, 2015. Te Papa

Visitor milestones

- 2001 – 5 million
- 2004 – 10 million
- 2008 – 15 million
- 2012 – 20 million
- 2015 – 25 million

The history of Te Papa's collections

Head to Collections Online to read more about our five major collection areas:

- [Art](#)
- [History](#)
- [Taonga Māori](#)
- [Pacific Cultures](#)
- [Natural History](#)

The meaning of Te Papa Tongarewa

Our Māori name, 'Te Papa Tongarewa', translates literally to 'container of treasures'. A fuller interpretation is 'our container of treasured things and people that spring from mother earth here in New Zealand'.

The name is made up of two classical expressions used in Māori poetry and song:

Papa

'Papa' can be used to describe:

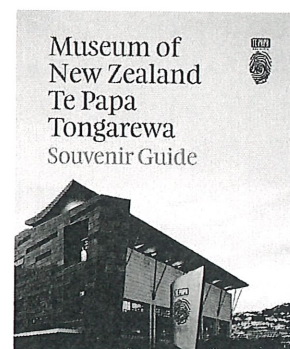
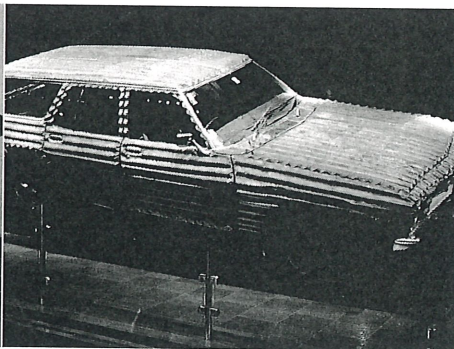
- Papatūānuku (earth mother) – including New Zealand, where the museum is located
- a papahou (carved Māori treasure box) and also the beloved homeland – te papa kāinga.

Tongarewa

'Tongarewa' refers to:

- a type of greenstone, such as the mauri (life force) stone on Te Marae
- any other kind of treasure, such as a well-loved chiefly person.

You might also like



Our building

Get the facts about our museum's design, architecture, and symbolism.

Past exhibitions

Look at exhibitions presented at Te Papa, going back to 1998.

Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Souvenir Guide

Haere mai and welcome to Te Papa, New Zealand's national museum.