



Pioneer Hall Timeline

Pioneer Hall was built to protect Timaru's history. 60 Years later, the building has become part of it.



Timaru's first library opened in 1862, and the Mechanics' Institute developed this tradition of learning through books, newspapers, lectures and exhibitions. As Timaru's public library evolved, objects of historical interest were also being collected and preserved for a future museum. From Thomas Burnett's Perth Street gift and the Historical Society's first museum rooms in 1952, the story eventually led to the purpose-built Pioneer Hall in 1966. The South Canterbury Historical Society operated the Museum until 1988, when a deed transferred the collections and museum operation to Council, making it a fully Council-run service.

1870s–1939:	Timaru starts collecting its history, with early museum material eventually squeezed into the public library before lack of space sends much of it back into storage.	1988–2000:	The museum becomes a Council service when the Historical Society transfers the collections and museum operation to Council, professional museum staff arrive, and a three-level collection wing is added in 1999–2000 as the collection continues to grow.
1941:	T. D. Burnett gives the museum a home by leaving his Perth Street property, including two houses, to Timaru Borough Council so it can be used to preserve and share local history; he wants the site called Pioneer Hill and any new museum built there called Pioneer Hall.	2000–2014:	The building starts showing its age as changing expectations around conservation, heat, light, accessibility, storage and exhibition design expose the limits of a museum designed in the 1960s.
1941–1952:	The South Canterbury Historical Society gets to work, gathering objects, photographs, documents and stories and working with Council to turn Burnett's bequest into a public museum.	2014–2023:	Council asks what comes next, with Timaru District Council and the Museum investigating options for Pioneer Hall and ultimately planning a new public museum downtown while keeping Perth Street as an important base for collections, archives, research and behind-the-scenes work.
1952:	Timaru gets its first public museum when the Historical Society opens in the Corrierrack house on the Perth Street property, but the collections soon prove that a few rooms in an old house are not enough.	2024–2026:	The old museum becomes heritage itself as Te Kura Marumaru takes shape and Pioneer Hall starts to be seen not simply as an ageing museum, but as a distinctive, much-loved piece of Timaru's built history.
1952–1964:	14 Years of determination follow as the Historical Society collects, plans and fundraises for a proper museum, helped by community donors, South Canterbury Centennial funding and Council support.	26 Oct 2026:	An era ends when Pioneer Hall closes as South Canterbury's public-facing museum after almost 60 years, with a Labour Weekend celebration inviting the community back to mark the moment.
1964–1966:	Timaru builds something futuristic for its past when architect Ronald Lindsay Dohig designs a striking octagonal museum with flexible displays, a mezzanine, glazing and a central lantern, including lighting intended to make its huge roof appear to float at night.	2027:	The story keeps going as Te Kura Marumaru becomes the new public home for South Canterbury's stories, while the Perth Street site continues helping Council and the Museum care for the collections and archives that Pioneer Hall was created to protect.
1965:	The dream becomes a building as Fletcher Construction begins turning Dohig's plans into Pioneer Hall, while W. H. Hall OBE JP, the Historical Society building committee's 88-year-old chairman, drives fundraising and J. B. Hamilton leads the Society as president.		
10 Dec 1966:	Pioneer Hall opens before about 250 people, with Mayor D. R. Dowell officially opening the approximately £43,000 museum and predicting that its unusual design will become a Timaru landmark.		
1966–1988:	Volunteers and Council keep it running as the South Canterbury Historical Society operates the Museum, Timaru City Council supports staffing and operations, and generations of visitors begin making their own memories there.		

From Wuhoo Timaru, a huge thank you to everyone who has helped keep South Canterbury's stories safe. Pioneer Hall exists because generations of people chose to care. Burnett gave the place, the Historical Society drove the dream, donors and Centennial funding helped build it, Council and ratepayers sustained it, and museum staff and volunteers have cared for, researched and added to the collections ever since.

Museums matter because they help us look to the past, understand the present, and make wiser choices for the future. So thank you to everyone who has helped build, fund, staff, maintain, donate to, research, visit and support our museum over the past 60 years. What you have helped collect, protect and share is part of our shared story, and it belongs to all of us.



Roselyn Fauth. Wuhoo Timaru. 2026

Wuhoo Timaru



Colourful Facts: Pioneer Hall



WuhooTimaru.co.nz

This weekend, South Cantabrians can walk through Pioneer Hall as a public museum for the last time... but how many of us know why it was called Pioneer Hall in the first place?

The answer takes us back to 1941. Thomas. D. Burnett owned the land on Perth Street where the museum now stands. When he died, he left the property to Timaru Borough Council so it could be used to help preserve and share local history. Burnett wanted the rise to be known as Pioneer Hill, and any new museum building erected there to be called Pioneer Hall.

That same year, the South Canterbury Historical Society, a group of volunteers, formed and began the work of gathering, researching and caring for South Canterbury's history.

When the Society opened the first public museum in rooms of the Corrierrack house on the Perth Street property 1952, it became very popular, and became quickly obvious that South Canterbury's growing collections needed something much bigger.

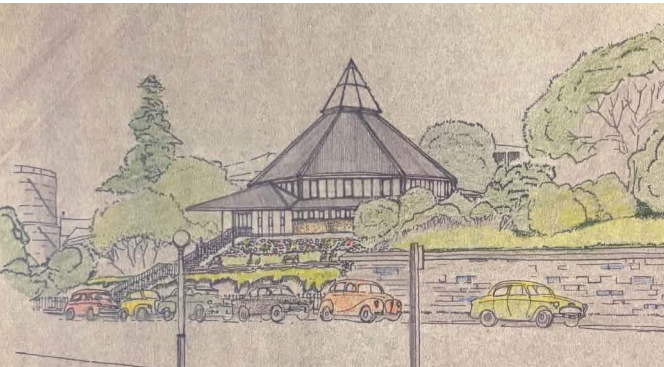
So the Historical Society got to work. For about fourteen years its members fundraised, collected, planned and persuaded. South Canterbury Centennial money helped, along with donors and community support. W. H. Hall, the 88-year-old chairman of the Society's building committee, played a major role in the fundraising effort, while J. B. Hamilton served as Society president.

Then architect Ronald Lindsay Dohig gave Timaru something wonderfully modern. Instead of making history look old, he designed an octagonal museum with flexible display spaces, a mezzanine, grey glass, a glazed central lantern and a huge roof intended to appear to float when illuminated at night.

Fletcher Construction built it. On 10 December 1966, around 250 people gathered as Mayor D. R. Dowell officially opened the approximately £43,000 Pioneer Hall. Dowell predicted its design would make it a landmark in the city. He was right.

For the next two decades the Historical Society continued to operate the Museum, with Timaru City Council supporting staffing and operations. In 1988 the collections and museum operation transferred to Council, beginning a new era of professional museum management.

As the collections grew, the building changed too. A three-level collection wing opened in 2000. Windows were altered, insulation improved and spaces adapted as museum standards changed. And that is the interesting thing about



Section of the the proposed plan of South Canterbury Museum by Architect Ronald Dohig, 1956. South Canterbury Museum 86/1

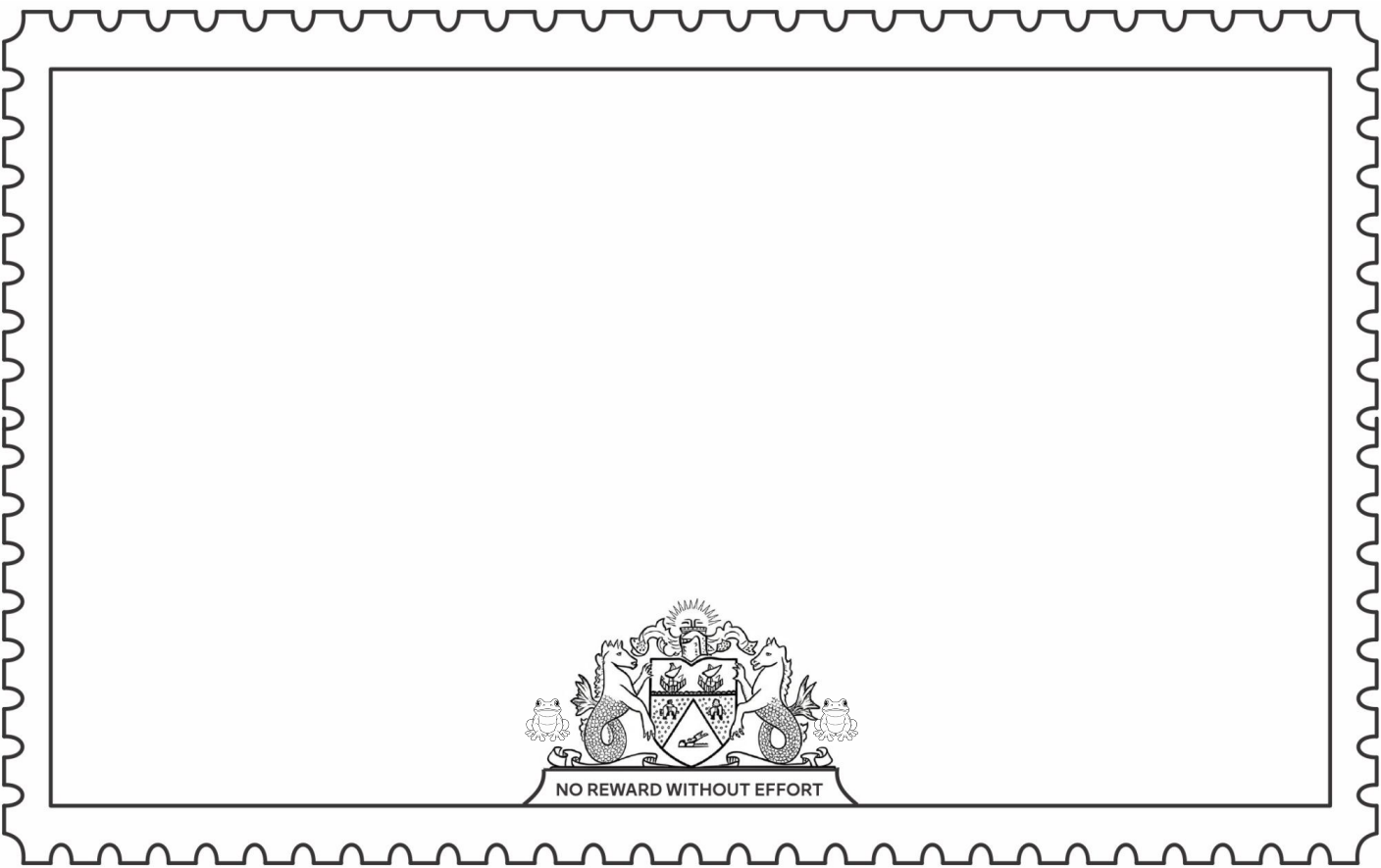
Pioneer Hall. In 1966 it represented the future. Its open plan, moveable displays, glazing and bold roof were modern ideas. Sixty years later, some of those same features help explain why it no longer works as well as a twenty-first-century public museum, where accessibility, conservation, environmental control and flexible exhibition spaces matter in different ways. That does not make Pioneer Hall a failure... it means the building has lasted long enough to become evidence itself.

So this weekend, look up. Count its eight sides. Find the plaques. Look for the glazed lantern. Notice the great roof sitting above Perth Street. Pioneer Hall was built to protect Timaru's history. 60 Years later, the building itself has become part of it.



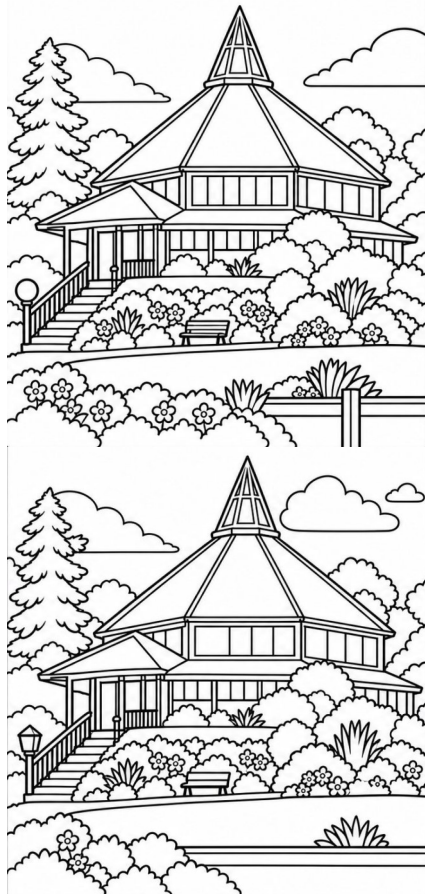
The Museum's 182-year journey has been driven by the passion and generosity of volunteers, philanthropists and communities. In 2026, this legacy finds new expression in the new museum project.



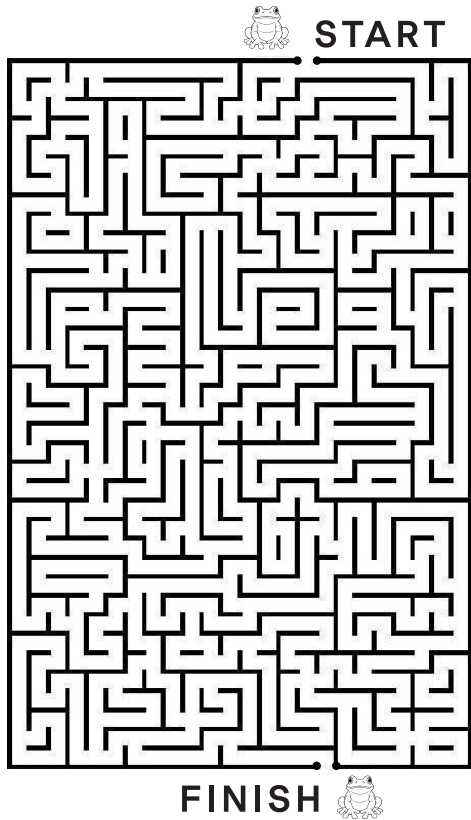


Design your own stamp. Make it easy to recognise and worth keeping. The world's first adhesive postage stamp appeared in Britain in 1840. New Zealand followed in 1855. A stamp showed you had paid to send a letter or parcel: moisten the gummed back, stick it on, and off it went. Timaru's first post office operated in lower George Street, and from 1858 mail travelled between Timaru and Christchurch on horseback. Later, special stamps marked famous people, events and anniversaries. Some stamps were saved rather than posted, and rare ones became valuable collector's items.

Horse-drawn coaches carried letters, news and business correspondence between towns. In 1959, people re-enacted how mail was carried through South Canterbury by horse-drawn coach 100 years earlier, in 1859.



SOLVE THE MAZE



FIND THE GOLDEN FROG

Can you find the path to the Golden Frog? How many frogs can you find on our activity sheet?



EYE SPY

Slow down and take a closer look to find a 'WuHoo'... How many signs and interesting things can you find outside Pioneer Hall? Why are they there? What do they tell us?

Next time you are out, see if you can find some free fun by looking for foundation stones, plaques, carved dates or even names hidden in grilles and stonework.

People have marked important buildings for more than 4,000 years, sometimes placing inscriptions, coins, pottery, tools or other objects beneath foundations or into the building itself.

By Victorian and Edwardian times, foundation-stone ceremonies could include flags, music, prayers, speeches and crowds. A special guest might use a silver trowel, tap and level the stone, then declare it "well and truly laid", with coins, newspapers or documents sealed underneath.

At Pioneer Hall, see if you can find the plaques that record its opening. Then imagine standing there in 1966 with members of the South Canterbury Historical Society, the architect, builders and all the people who had planned, fundraised and worked towards the new museum. After years of effort, they were finally able to open the doors and welcome the public in.



WORDFIND

Answer the questions to reveal the words hidden in the word find.

Z	L	B	V	C	S	T	O	R	I	E	S	O	T	O	H	P	Z
I	O	Y	R	Z	S	F	N	Y	E	X	P	L	O	R	E	K	
O	Q	A	Q	N	O	I	T	C	E	L	L	O	C	V	B	T	B
R	T	H	O	P	Q	A	N	C	Y	J	Y	R	O	A	M	B	E
D	I	T	F	E	G	L	K	G	A	X	H	W	M	F	U	N	B
E	M	U	T	O	L	P	I	O	N	E	E	R	E	L	U	A	X
Z	A	I	R	E	V	O	C	S	I	D	J	B	A	M	O	W	W
S	R	E	E	T	N	U	L	O	V	V	N	G	N	K	Q	O	O
Q	U	C	B	K	A	A	J	E	S	B	D	S	I	K	C	B	K
C	M	C	O	M	M	U	N	I	T	Y	G	R	N	Z	L	J	F
M	S	G	T	T	M	U	E	S	U	M	E	S	G	P	I	E	O
Q	H	T	S	T	L	Y	Z	U	X	C	N	E	F	E	B	C	Z
L	E	G	A	T	I	R	E	H	A	M	J	I	U	R	R	T	L
R	C	P	P	M	S	D	N	L	H	C	R	R	L	T	A	S	N
T	X	Q	W	U	P	G	P	G	Q	B	V	O	C	H	R	D	D
O	X	C	F	R	E	E	M	G	C	O	E	M	W	T	Y	N	Q
R	Y	R	O	T	S	I	H	H	L	T	U	E	C	D	I	O	C
O	E	P	X	Y	B	M	U	H	G	I	J	M	K	F	A	L	D

1. PERTH, 2. PIONEER, 3. MUSEUM, 4. TIMARU, 5. FREE, 6. FUN, 7. MEANINGFUL, 8. HISTORY, 9. STORIES, 10. OBJECTS, 11. PHOTOS, 12. MEMORIES, 13. HERITAGE, 14. COMMUNITY, 15. VOLUNTEERS, 16. COLLECTION, 17. DISCOVERY, 18. EXPLORE, 19. STAMP, 20. LIBRARY.

- The street Pioneer Hall stands on? P
- The name of this historic building? P
- A place that keeps and shares objects and stories from the past? M
- The town this museum belongs to? T
- Something everyone can enjoy without paying? F
- Something enjoyable to do? F
- Something with purpose that helps connect us with people and place? M
- The story of what happened in the past? H
- What people tell and share about the past? S
- Things museums collect and care for? O
- Pictures that help us see the past? P
- Things we remember from our lives? M
- The history, places and traditions we inherit and care for? H
- The people who live, work and belong in a place? C
- People who give their time to help? V
- A group of objects cared for by a museum? C
- To find out something new? D
- To look around and learn more? E
- A tiny piece of postal history featured on this activity sheet? S
- Timaru's first one opened in 1862? L