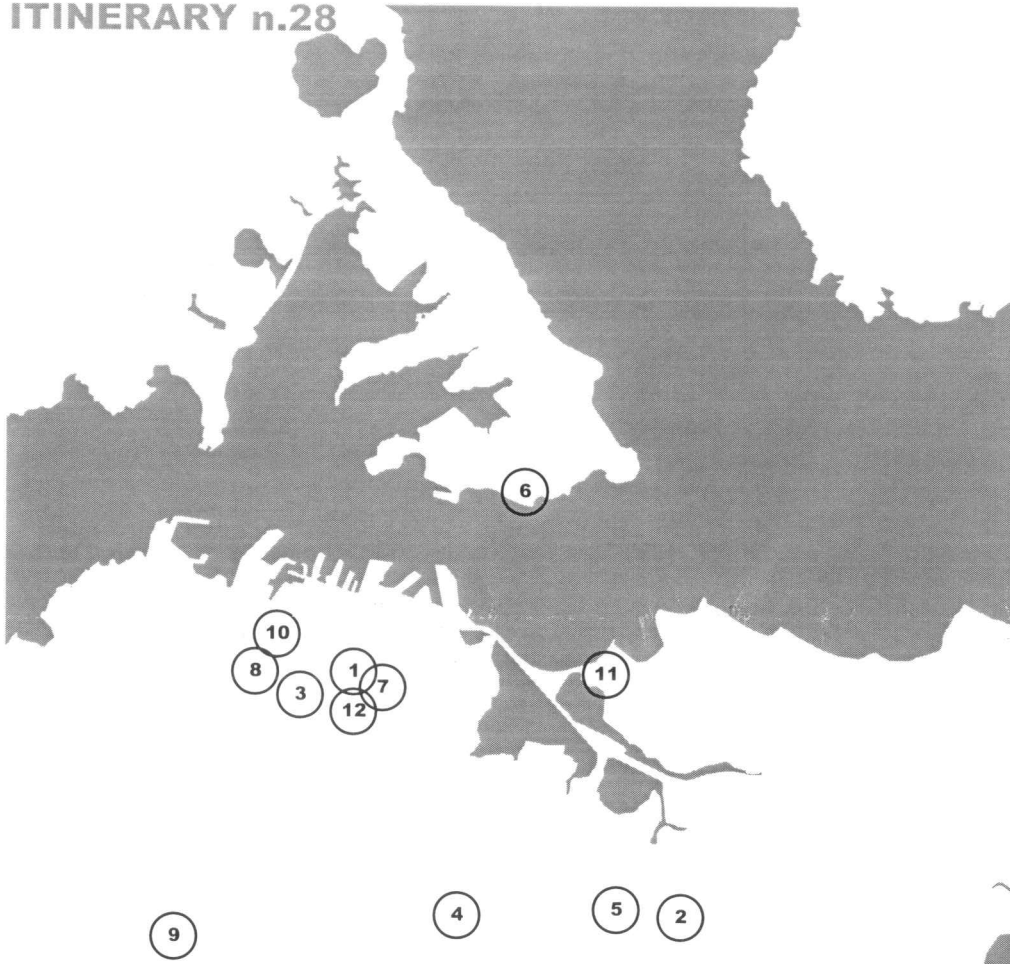


## ITINERARY n.28



## Roy Lippincott in Auckland

We tend to think of the 1940s as the period when New Zealand architecture was influenced by émigrés bringing new ideas from the northern hemisphere. It was around this time that architects such as Frederick Newman, Ernst Plischke, and Henry Kulka busied themselves acclimatising the modernism they had carried from Europe. Roy Lippincott, however, had arrived in Auckland almost a generation earlier, providing a connection not to European but American sources of architectural innovation. The ideas he carried had been developed in turn-of-the-century Chicago, an architectural laboratory that had produced two of modern architecture's most important new building types: the skyscraper and the prairie house.

Lippincott spent the early years of his career at Chicago's Steinway Hall, a design hothouse where he worked with architects including Marion Mahony and Walter Burley Griffin. Both of these two had in turn worked with Frank Lloyd Wright, whose professional lineage extended back through Louis Sullivan to tall-building pioneer William Le Baron Jenney. Lippincott's Chicago School training included completing projects that Wright left behind when he left Chicago for Europe in 1909.

We must be careful, however, not to overstate the importance of such links. The Griffins, like Wright protégés in many other parts of the world (Neutra and Schindler in Los Angeles, Raymond in Tokyo), sought not to be imitators of their mentor. Some would argue the Griffins and Lippincott moved in the wrong direction when they sought to escape Wright. Lippincott often employed cosmetic Wright mannerisms, particularly in his domestic designs, but they only hint at the freedom and fluidity that characterised Wright's work. Lippincott's designs were far more conventional – it is perhaps surprising to realise that Lippincott's houses weren't significantly more progressive than New Zealand's other key pre-WW2 Wright-influenced architect, Louis Hay, although Hay's only contact with Wright's work was through books.

Much of Lippincott's originality lay in his use of ornament. This included elements derived from Maori motifs as well as local flora and fauna, a localisation and a break with classical models that formed key steps in the gradual shedding of Beaux Art eclecticism. Lippincott's work was historicist, but it was so in an adventurous way; this was a time when the most innovative that most local architects could be was to employ a stripped Classical style.

Lippincott left New Zealand before fully formed modernism began to filter through into the architectural mainstream. His departure was unintentional; he left on a family trip to Europe in 1939, but the trip was interrupted by the outbreak of war, and the family decided to remain in the US. His career there was relatively unremarkable, which begs the intriguing question of what might have happened had he stayed in New Zealand. With an accomplished record in institutional scale buildings and strong connections to Fletcher Construction, which was rapidly becoming a major local force, the post-war boom would have brought interesting opportunities; he may well have been able to develop his quirky proto-modernism to create a unique brand of modern architecture.

As it was, Lippincott's local legacy included passing the architectural baton to members of his staff, including 1930s maestro Horace Massey, Ray Thorpe and Ralph Pickmere (who formed the influential 1960s firm Thorpe, Cutter, Pickmere, Douglas & Partners), and Lewis Walker (who founded the firm that eventually became 1980s high-flyer Walker Co-Partnership). Lippincott came to New Zealand as the result of a competition win; at a time when local architectural competitions seem such troubled processes, it is important to remember that they can have impacts that far exceed the projects at hand. *Andrew Barrie*

## Biography:

Roy Alstan Lippincott (1885-1969) was born in Pennsylvania, attending high school in Chicago before completing an architecture degree at Cornell University, NY, in 1909. He worked for several "Chicago School" architects including Hermann von Holst and Marion Mahony and Walter Burley Griffin. He worked on a number of projects abandoned by Frank Lloyd Wright when he fled to Europe in 1909, including the Robie House for which he acted as site architect. In 1912, the Griffins won the design competition for Canberra, Australia's Federal Capital, and offered Lippincott a junior partnership soon afterwards. In 1914 Lippincott married Genevieve, Griffin's sister, and the two couples moved to Sydney before relocating to Melbourne a year later. In 1921 Lippincott and Edward F. Billson won the design competition for the Auckland University College Arts Building. Lippincott and Billson established a partnership to complete the project, and Lippincott moved to Auckland shortly afterwards. He became an Associate of the NZIA in 1922 and a Fellow in 1924, and was involved at both local and national level. The Lippincott family later settled in California, with Lippincott becoming a partner in the L.A. firm, Kaufmann, Lippincott and Eggers. He eventually retired in 1958, seeing out his years in Santa Barbara.

1

1921-26

University Arts Building  
22 Princes Street  
Auckland City

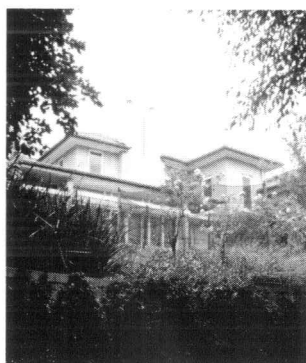


Lippincott and Billson were awarded the commission after a two-stage competition. Their design was controversial at the time, being described as "freak architecture." But like most reviled competition schemes it is now a local icon, being particularly loved for its incorporation of local elements such as native birds and plants into the decorative scheme. Facilities for the Students Association, a low block adjoining the rear of the building were designed later but built concurrently with the main block. Now a Category 1 Historic Place, the building was renovated by JASMaD in 1987. See *NZIA Journal* Dec 1934 and *Architecture NZ* July/Aug 1989.

2

1927

Lippincott House  
701 Remuera Road  
Remuera

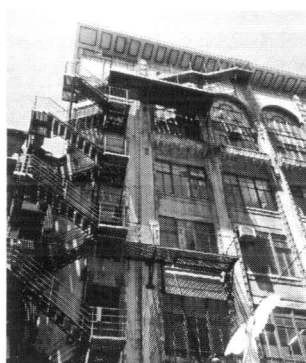


Standing on the slopes of what is known as Barry's Hill, the house Lippincott designed for his own family has panoramic views over Remuera to the city beyond. The rather "upright and drawn in" exterior was composed with textured stucco walls, relatively small windows, and a tiled roof. The interior had a more Wrightian feel, with timber trim and curtains as dividers. The house has been substantially extended, and the front part of the formerly large site subdivided. See *NZ Homes & Gardens* August 1933. The Swan House, built to a Lippincott design on the adjacent site at 699 Remuera Road in 1935, has been removed.

3

1927-29

Smith & Caughey's  
Department Store Extension  
Cnr Wellesley & Elliot Streets  
Auckland City



Unlike the mixed-up Gothic-Wrightian language of the Arts Building, Lippincott's store demonstrates the influence of Sullivan in a relatively pure form. The decorative detail shows some originality, being neither as "naturalistic" as Sullivan nor as abstract as Wright – it might be described as early Art Deco. The top floor, which lightens the otherwise monolithic mass of the building, was added later. The building is NZHPT Category 1 listed. Lippincott remodelled the store's Queen Street façade in 1940, and also designed alterations to Smith & Caughey's Newmarket Branch in 1927.

4

1927

Smeeton House  
229 Remuera Road  
Remuera



Although many of Lippincott's houses appear Wrightian in their massing and detailing, most demonstrate few other prairie house features; for example, spaces rarely interpenetrate, and chimney masses are not used to define a central core. This house follows this pattern – apart from its compact cruciform plan, this cedar shingle clad house is in many ways conventional. It does, however, include spaces on different levels connected with short flights of stairs. The house's distinctive roof form – raked fascias carried partially around the gable ends – can be traced not to Wright but to Griffin. Best viewed from Mt Hobson Domain.

5

1927

Fletcher House  
21 Upland Road  
Remuera



Fletcher Construction was the contractor for the University Arts Building, the success of that project leading to this commission from Sir James Fletcher. With an almost symmetrical composition, this was Lippincott's most formally rigorous house. Built in brick, the house is composed as spaces gathered around a central entrance hall and stair, with living spaces at ground level and bedrooms above. Lippincott produced other designs with or for Fletcher Construction, including the Massey University buildings, an un-built hospital in Whitaker Place, and an un-built office building in Wellington.

6

1928

Alison Clock  
Marine Square  
Devonport



Located at the entrance to the Devonport wharf, this clock was erected to commemorate Ewen Alison, the founder of the Devonport Steam Ferry Company and a prominent local politician. Alison was MP for Waitemata and served as Mayor of Takapuna and of Devonport. He oversaw the provision of the area's first water supply system, and was also responsible for the establishing the foreshore reserves and the acquisition of Rangitoto as a public reserve. The Alison Clock was the first of a number of public clocks installed at strategic points in Devonport, these synchronised timepieces being entirely appropriate for "... a community that lives by catching boats and buses". NZHPT Category 2 listed.

7

1928-31

University Caretaker's Cottage  
Symonds Street  
Auckland



Lippincott's original proposal for this building continued the themes of the Student Association Building, but it was finally built in a simple cottage style. It is now tucked in behind KRTA's Thomas Building (1968), the Cottage's eastern end having to be shaved off when the Thomas Building was constructed. In addition to Arts, Biology, and this building, Lippincott also designed the north-west wing of Choral Hall for the University, added in 1925. (NZHPT Category 1). Taking a sympathetic approach to the existing building, it was the only project on which Lippincott produced a neo-classical design. See *NZIA Journal*, September 1955.

8

1930

Berlei Factory & Office Building  
93 Wellesley Street West  
Auckland City

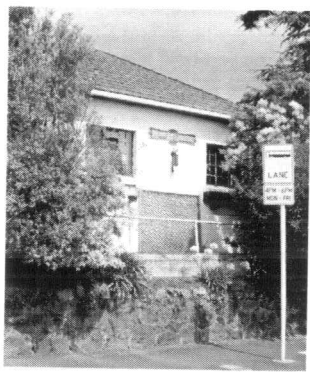


Built as a factory for a women's wear manufacturer, this building employs concrete structural frame, with large windows to bring daylight onto the factory floor. Designed in a spare Art Deco style, Lippincott adopted a more linear Wrightian mode in the ornamentation. As with many Lippincott buildings, the entrance has provided a particular focus for design and decoration. Having been employed for a variety of uses including offices, the building is now the Rainbow Hotel, best known as the scene of an alleged kidnapping of a Korean man in 2007. The building is NZHPT Category 2 listed.

9

ca. 1930

Mont le Grand Flats  
486 Dominion Road  
Balmoral



Located on a prominent corner site, this rather squat block of four rental flats was built for Mr Harold Perkins, who had also commissioned a house from Lippincott on Paratai Drive. Presumably in a drive to keep costs down, most of the key features of Lippincott's domestic work – overhanging eaves, raked fascias, and large areas of glazing – are absent from this design. This starkness is exaggerated by the building's current disheveled state. The key Lippincott touches are the textured finish to the exterior plasterwork, the iron external lights and the Wright-influenced stained glass in the doors (though these remain in only one door).

10

1934-35

Farmers Trading Co. Tearoom  
Hobson Street  
Auckland City

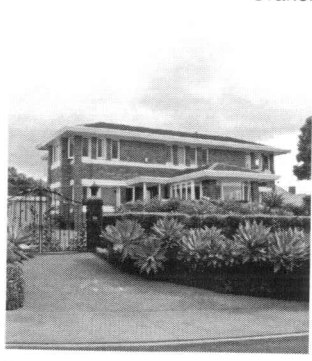


From our 21st century perspective, it's hard to imagine Farmers as a trendsetting retailer, but this project reinforced the store's then fashionable image. The Tearooms key feature is an almost elliptical vaulted ceiling, a type of space Lippincott had used in other projects including the Massey University Refectory main hall. The custom-designed light fittings and highly geometric decoration resembles that used in the Arts Building, although it's a more standard Art Deco vocabulary. Since the building was converted to a Heritage Hotel the Tearoom is used as an event space. The building's façade was remodelled in 1937, with a vertical emphasis given by pilasters carried (as at Smith & Caughey's) above the parapet line.

11

1935-36

Scott House  
48 Paratai Drive  
Orakei



Described by Peter Shaw as "distinctly Wrightian", this house sets aside the abstract approach which characterised most of Lippincott's work in the 1930's. This was appreciated by *Home & Building*, which described the house as "modern, up to the minute in every line and detail, it yet carries an atmosphere of comfort, warmth and gracious living that is conspicuously absent from most of the so-called 'modern' work. Unlike these latter, it will never date." See *Home & Building* August 1938. Lippincott also designed the Spanish Mission-Moderne Perkins House at 16 Paratai Drive in 1937. See *Home & Building* Nov. 1986.

12

1937-39

University Biology Building  
Symonds Street  
Auckland City



Reflecting the economic decline that took place in the time since Lippincott's first University buildings were created, this project is far more restrained. Employing plaster rather than stone facings, Lippincott does however continue many of the motifs from the Arts and Student Association Buildings – repetitive glazing modules separated by buttresses, faceted angular pilasters, geometric glazing designs and arched window heads. Within the concrete frame, internal partitions were constructed in timber to allow for changes in use. The steel-clad top storey is a later addition. See *Home & Building* May 1939.

**Elsewhere:**

1936-37  
St Peter's Preparatory School  
1716 Cambridge Road  
Cambridge

St Peter's School was established by English-born textile baron Arthur Broadhurst as a preparatory boarding school for boys. Lippincott's first designs in sleek Art Deco were rejected in favor of rustic or Georgian styles. The main building was completed in 1936 for the first intake of 36 boys, and Lippincott also completed a Chapel, Gate House, Bursar's House, and Tutors' House on the site. In the 1970s the school expanded into a secondary school for boys, and in 1987 became a co-ed day and boarding school. See *Building Today* April/June 1937.



1929-31  
Massey University Science Building, Refectory & Dairy Research Building  
Tennent Drive, Fitzherbert  
Palmerston North

Massey University was established in 1928, having been championed by Minister of Education George Fowlds, who had been President of the Auckland University College Council when Lippincott was producing his designs there. Lippincott prepared a masterplan for the whole Massey site (although this was not followed with later developments), and its first three new buildings. The first completed building was the Dairy Research Building (1928), located on Dairy Farm Road in what is now AgResearch's Grasslands campus. Work began on the main teaching block and Refectory in the following year. All three buildings are notable for the use of stylized Maori motifs on their exteriors. The buildings are NZHPT Category 1 listed. See *NZIA Journal* April 1967.



**Other Addresses:**

Thorburn Residence  
Alterations (1925)  
19 Burwood Crescent  
Remuera

This two-storey wood and tile home was built in 1918, with Lippincott making an addition in the 1920s. It was bought and demolished in 2006 by Terry Jarvis, now best known for buying and relocating Sir Ed's house. No new house has yet been built.

Seabrooke House (1926)  
20 Dudley Road  
Mission Bay  
Moved off site to Chapmans Road, Pukekawa

Payk House (1928)  
109 St Stephens Ave  
Parnell  
Lippincott does English cottage. That's John's Key's house next door.

Laidlaw House (c. 1934)  
59 Marine Parade  
Herne Bay



**Sources:**

The photographs are by Andrew Barrie. Many thanks to the University of Auckland's Architecture Archive for their help. Much of the surviving archival material was gathered by former School of Architecture lecturer, Vince Terrini.

The best single source on Lippincott is M. Alec Bruce's 1984 BArch Thesis, "Roy Alstan Lippincott: an American connection", held at the University of Auckland School of Architecture & Planning Library. An exhibition focused on the Arts Building was held at the Auckland Museum in 2004. A catalogue, entitled *Roy Lippincott: The Architect of the Tower* was published by AGM, including texts by Jane Wild, Don Basset, Douglas Lloyd Jenkins, Louis Le Vaillant, and Christopher Vernon. It was also published as part of *Architecture NZ* March/April 2004. See Ian Lochhead's review: 'Roy Lippincott at Auckland Museum' in *Architecture NZ*, Jul./Aug. 2004. Also worth checking is Keith Sinclair, *A History of the University of Auckland, 1883-1983* (AUP, Auckland, 1983). Lippincott published several texts, including "Art and Economics in Town Planning" *NZIA Jnl* May & July 1924, "Aesthetics of a City" in *NZIA Jnl* Nov. 1925.