

# Massey University Main Building

Massey University Campus, Tennent Drive, Palmerston North

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NZHPT Registration Number: 184  
NZHPT Registration Type: Historic Place – Category I  
NZHPT Registration Date: 28/06/90  
City/District Council: Palmerston North City Council  
District Plan Status: Category 1

Other Names: Main Science Building



## Brief History

Massey Agricultural College was established in 1927 by the amalgamation of the agricultural departments of the Auckland and Victoria University Colleges. Massey was the second agricultural college to be established in New Zealand after Lincoln University, which began in 1878 as a School of Agriculture. Planning began immediately for a purpose-built college, and in the meantime the existing houses on the site were utilised, including the Batchelar Homestead. Auckland based-architect Roy Alstan Lippincott (1885-1969) was commissioned for the design of three essential founding buildings for the new college; a dairy factory, refectory, and main science building. (see Old Dairy Factory and Massey Refectory). The Main Building plans are dated 10 June 1929.

Born and educated in the United States, Lippincott had been involved with the 'Chicago School' of architects influenced by Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright. Lippincott worked in Australia where he held a junior partnership in the firm of Walter Burley Griffin who won the competition for the design of Canberra. In 1921 Lippincott established a partnership with draughtsman Edward F. Billson and moved to Auckland where his work included the design of Smith and Caughey's Department Store Building (1927-29) and a number of buildings for Auckland University, such as the Arts Building (1921) among others. Lippincott visited universities in Canada and the United States in 1927 to gather information for the Massey Agricultural College project. The Dairy Factory Building (1929) was the first to be completed and Fletcher Construction began work on the Main Building and Refectory in that year. The 'Main Science Building' was officially opened by Governor General Lord Bledisloe on April 30, 1931.

Lippincott's design follows the 'form follows function' tenet of the American Chicago School of Architecture, and the abstracted decorative detail is also a mark of the style. The New Zealand Historic Places Trust file describes the design as 'essentially an American Collegiate building adapted for New Zealand conditions, utilizing indigenous motifs for decorative effect'. In 1950 the building received a major restoration and in 1980 a further restoration was undertaken by Walker, Love and Associates, who won an architectural award for the work. While the building has been altered considerably over the years, and an extra storey has been added above its east and west wings, the building retains its essential character. Notable heritage features are the north and south entrances, the wrought iron gates, the entrance doors, the bronze light fittings and the plaster relief panels. The building has historical significance in its association with the development of a scientific approach to agriculture in New Zealand, an industry which has had a key role in the New Zealand economy, and also in its 70 years of use as a tertiary teaching facility. The building has technological value for the design and construction of its concrete frame.

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*Principal Sources:*

*Palmerston North City Heritage Trail.* Palmerston North City Council, 1993.

Palmerston North Heritage Trails Working Party, *Massey History Walk*, 1994.

New Zealand Historic Places Trust, *Proposal for Classification.* Buildings Classification Committee Report, 1990.

Palmerston North City Library Photograph Collection: MA 19, 21, 22, 36, 46, 47, 48, 52, 56, 58.