

**"strident effects of instant sophistication": New Zealand Architecture in the 1890s  
held under the auspices of the Centre for Building Performance Research, Victoria University**

Date: Friday 7th December 2007

Venue: School of Architecture, Victoria University, Wellington

Convener: Christine McCarthy (christine.mccarthy@vuw.ac.nz)

Stacpoole and Beaven describe New Zealand architecture of the 1890s as "exuberant and eclectic, casting aside any earlier notions of simplicity to create strident effects of instant sophistication ...". It was a decade generally recognised in New Zealand history as an ambitious one and was a time of social and political experimentation and progress including "the entrepreneurial state ... liquor laws ... cheap land for development, [the] management of the effects of capitalism and competition ... an old age pension ... and the exclusion of aliens and undesirables." The 1890s also witnessed the diamond jubilee of Queen Victoria (1897), the formation of the Farmers' Union (1899), and wool's establishment as New Zealand's single-most important export. Sixty-five people were killed in the Brunner Mine disaster (1896), the population of the North Island exceeded that of the South Island for the first time since the 1850s, and the decade's end saw the outbreak of the Boer War (1899).

The impact of changes and reforms also produced a period of architectural experimentation. They "promoted a feeling of confidence and a renewal of building activity as the century drew to a close ... [B]oldly ornamental masonry structures of three, four, and five storeys set the new character of the cities," radically revising the predominance of small colonial timber buildings which had, since Pakeha settlement, tentatively inscribed New Zealand's urban environment. Hodgson describes the period as supporting "a virtual frenzy of stylism - a drive to design buildings in styles which were historically based, engagingly up to date, adaptations and just plain mixtures," while Stacpoole and Beaven accuse architects of "taking from each [style] what they fancied most and combining the parts into one building ... [leading] to combinations even more strange than were once practised in the Elizabethan period."

The 1890s were also the beginning of party government, and saw the presentation of 10,000 signatures in the women's franchise petition to parliament in 1891. A third petition presented more than 30,000 signatures and women finally got the vote with the passing of the Female Franchise Act (1893). Elizabeth Yates was elected as mayor of Onehunga - the first woman in the British Empire to hold such a position - and the National Council of Women was founded in 1896. New Zealand architectural history to date is yet to reveal key roles that women played in architecture which parallel these early political progressions. In government, John Ballance (1890-1893) and Richard Seddon (1893-1906) were Premiers, the Departments of Agriculture and Labour were established in 1892, and the Department of Industries and Commerce in 1894. In 1890 the Public Buildings Department became part of the Public Works Department, and John Campbell, appointed draughtsman for the PBD in 1889, became Government architect. His works from this time included Courthouses (at Mangonui, 1892); Hunterville, 1895; Hawera, 1896; Marton, 1897 and Featherston, 1897), Post Offices (Waitekauri, 1898; Naseby, 1900; Takaka, 1900), the Mt Cook Police Barracks, Wellington (with A.E. King 1892), Hokitika Customhouse (1897), and Dunedin Prison (1895-1896), which referenced Richard Norman Shaw's New Scotland Yard (1887).

Peter Shaw notes that "This was a time when governments, churches, banking organisations and commercial corporations were prepared to release large amounts of money for architectural purposes." Such public buildings included Frederick de Jersey Clere's Wellington Harbour Board Offices (1891), the now demolished Wellington Public Library (1891), designed by William Crichton (1861-1928), Clere FitzGerald and Richmond's 1893 Government Life Building, Wellington (demolished 1934), and Thomas Turnbull's Bank of New Zealand, Wellington (1899). The century's end saw Joshua Charlesworth's Wellington Town Hall (1900) and A.P. Wilson's Strand Arcade in Auckland (1900) being built. The General Assembly Library, Wellington (1898-1900) was designed by Thomas Turnbull, but, following controversy, was completed by John Campbell. In ecclesiastical architecture Francis Petre's (1847-1918) contribution to Catholic churches included St Patrick's, South Dunedin (1879-94), St Patrick's, Oamaru (1893/94-1918), Sacred Heart Church, North East Valley, Dunedin, (1892), the Basilica of the Sacred Heart, Wellington (1899-1901), and the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, Christchurch (1899-1905). In and around Oamaru, John Megget Forrester designed St Alban's vicarage and chapel, Kurow (1892) and the Papkaio Presbyterian Church (1893). St Martin's Church, Duntroon (1900) was also built. Frederick de Jersey Clere designed a range of churches at this

time, including: St Simon & St Jude's, Rongotea (1895), St Alban's, Pauatahanui (1896), St Mary's Levin (1897) and St Mary Magdalene, Ashhurst (1897). Shaw also observes that a "significant number of 'Maori' churches [were] built during the later part of the nineteenth century." These small Gothic churches, mostly (according to Shaw) the "work of Pakeha builders directed by Roman Catholic missionaries," had interiors "decorated with Maori designs," and included St Gabriel's, Pawarenga (1899), and St Winifred's, Waihi (1895).

The Pakeha government's social and political experiments had relied to some extent on Maori land loss and the Kotahitanga and Kingitangi movements spearheaded demands to stop the alienation of their land. The politics of the racial inequity necessitated complex engagements between Maori and Pakeha, and examples of New Zealand architecture at the time likewise reflected cultural exchanges. Maori architecture of the decade lies between the innovations of the Te Kooti wharehau (1870s) and the divergent architectures of the early twentieth-century Rua Kenana (Hiona 1907), Tahupotiki Wiremu Ratana and Clifton Hood (Temepara 1926) and Te Puea (Turongo, Turangawaewae Marae 1934-38). The work of Ngati Tarawhai carvers included the innovative carvings by Tene Waitere for Rauru (1898-1899) which explored asymmetry and three dimensional space, as well as his work for a Pakeha patron Charles Nelson at the Geyser Hotel. Anna Petersen's research on New Zealand interiors at the time also suggests a growing Pakeha investment in Maori architectural motifs which were exploited by Pakeha in their new yearning for a national identity distinctive from Britain, and to the support an Arts and Crafts' interest in locally inflected decorative strategies. J.H. Menzies' Rehutai, Christchurch (1894) aptly demonstrates this. Apirana Ngata, who was to become an influential politician, and advocate for Maori Arts and Crafts and architecture, became the first Maori university graduate in 1894.

New Zealand's anti-Chinese policy hardened in the 1890s. The poll tax on Chinese migrants (which was not abolished until 1944) "soared from \$10 to \$100 in 1896," the same year the Asiatic Restriction Bill was passed by the Liberals. While Chinese in Dunedin were concentrated in the so-called Devil's triangle near Rattray St, in Wellington, Frederick and Haining Streets were the focus of the Wellington Chinese community. Buildings to support these urban concentrations of people included the Chinese Presbyterian Church, Walker (now Carroll) Street, Dunedin (1897). These communities, at times more accurately described as ghettos, were significant part of New Zealand's urban environment, which was also host to other slums, most often a result of class rather than racial prejudices.

The increasing numbers of New Zealand born Pakeha had meant that by the 1880s Pakeha outnumbered migrants. This saw the growth of native associations, and the use of Maori motifs to represent New Zealand as "Maoriland" as part of a growing sense of national identity. Likewise increasing numbers of Pakeha architects were New Zealand born, John Swan (b. Thorndon), Frank Petre (b. Lower Hutt), Robert W. England (b. Lyttleton), and John Thomas Mair (b. Invercargill) being well-known examples. New Zealand architects were increasingly New Zealand trained, articulated to New Zealand architects, and those who studied overseas began to look to the United States, as well as Britain, for architectural training. Prominent architects practising at the time included Edward Bartley (1839-1919), J.A. Burnside (1856-1920), R.A. Lawson (1833-1903), J.C. Maddison (1850-1923), John Thomas Mair (1876-1959), Llewelyn Richards (1865-1945), David Ross (1927-1908), Samuel Hurst Seager (1854-1933), John Swan (1874-1936), Charles Tringham, Robert Martin Watt (1860-1907), and E.R. Wilson (1837-1925). The decade also saw the death of Benjamin Mountfort (1825-1898), Frederick Thatcher (1814-1890), Reader Wood (1821-1895), and Thomas Forrester's partner Jamaican-born John Lemon (1828-1890).

Phillipa Mein Smith notes that for Pakeha at this time "the suburban house and garden came to signify the settler contract and the family ideal of land and home ownership in the New World." Terrace housing (such as Thomas Mahoney's, Dilworth Terrace, Auckland (1899) and Lawson & Salmond's Stuart Street Terrace Dunedin, (1900)), cut across class distinctions providing housing for both inner city rich and poor, particularly in Dunedin (where the confines of the city necessitated concentrated housing), and prior to cheap public transport to the outer suburban areas. New Zealand's choice of suburban housing, the villa, was significantly influenced by housing design in the U.S., especially San Francisco. Villas were, like some earlier cottages, mass-produced housing, supported by speculative building and company catalogues which sold mass-produced components such as doors, brackets, newel posts, modillions, and other mouldings. Furniture, and internal furnishings and decor (fabrics, wallpapers, pressed metal ceilings) likewise drew on the benefits of mass-production techniques. These by-products of the Industrial Revolution, along with new technologies like photography and

architectural reprographic techniques, were not so much as new to the decade, but rather gained new significance and more prevalent use. Grander versions of the villa can be seen in architect-designed houses, as well as large country homesteads. Key houses of the period included Charles Natusch's North Island neo-Tudor houses, Samuel Seager's Daresbury Rookery, Christchurch (1898), John Megget Forrester's Weston Hall, Oamaru (1890), George Sollitt's Greenhill, Hastings (1900), Leslie Hills, Culverden (1900) and Holmeslee, Rakaia (1900). Robert W. England (1863-1908) designed Holly Lea (now McLean's Mansion) for Allan McLean, Christchurch (1899), Frederick Strouts designed extensive additions for Strowan, Papanui Rd, Christchurch (also 1899), and Burnside, near Enfield (1900), reputedly designed in Scotland, was a 750 sqm octagonally planned house for John Forrester Reid. The end of the decade anticipated a shift in working-class housing as the Prime Minister Richard Seddon returned from London and Glasgow, impressed by "new worker's houses built by local councils ... [and] determined to do something similar here."

Papers (15-20 min) which examine aspects of this period of New Zealand architectural history are called for from academics, practitioners, heritage consultants, and postgraduate students. The symposium is one of a series of annual meetings examining specific periods of New Zealand architectural history.

**Symposium fee:** The cost of the symposium (including proceedings) will be \$60, to be collected on the day of the symposium. Additional copies of proceedings will be available on the day for a cost of \$20.

**Timetable:**

Abstracts due: Friday 24th August 2007

Programme announced: Friday 31st August 2007

Full Papers due: Monday 19th November 2007

Registration due: Friday 23rd November 2007

Conference: Friday 7th December 2007