



MOUNT ALBERT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

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Ray Hancock, of Atwell's Pharmacy

If you shopped in Mt Albert between 1949 and 1984, the chances are you knew Ray Hancock. For 35 years, he worked in, managed, and then co-owned Atwell's Pharmacy at 885 New North Rd.

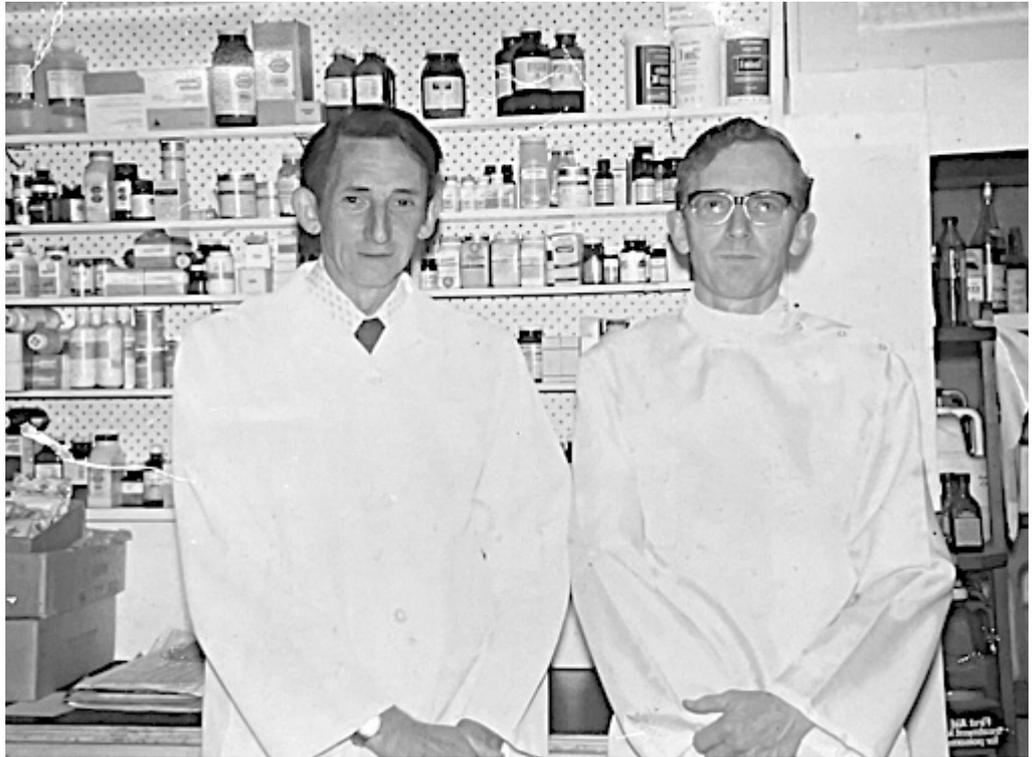
Early Life

Ray was born at 2 Watea Rd, Sandringham on 1 June 1924, the only child of loving parents, Winifred and Leslie Hancock. He attended Edendale Primary, Kowhai Intermediate and Mt Albert Grammar Schools. Ray's father was a clerk who lost his job during the Depression, and the young family were unable to stay living in their home. They moved in with Winifred's parents nearby at 51 Haverstock Rd. Ray's grandfather James Biscoe was a cabinetmaker, and Ray's lifelong love of woodworking started there.

Preston Ave



1940 Aerial Photo (annotated), Auckland Council GIS Viewer



Ray Hancock and Des Clune in Atwell's Pharmacy. Ray Hancock collection

In 1935, when Ray was 11, the Hancocks moved to a near-new house at 13 Preston Ave. Renting at first, in 1944 they purchased the house. The Crawfords lived next door at no. 15, the Chamleys at no. 17, and the Andersons at no. 19, which was the bottom of the road at that time. The McKeich family lived across the road at no. 6. At no. 3 were the Misses Sheat — Kathy Sheat taught dancing and Isabel Sheat taught music. Ray became lifelong friends with some of the boys in the street, particularly David and Holland Allely from no. 2.

This was a safe and close community. Doors were never locked, there were few cars, children played cricket on the street, and were in and out of each other's houses. Ray's Mum was known as Auntie Winnie and Mrs Crawford was Auntie Mabel. Janet von Randow (nee Anderson) recalled that when a new baby was born, the women of the street would spring into supportive action: "the blinds would go down and the casseroles would go in."

Around the corner in Allendale Rd, there was a small sawmill at no. 68, which was unusual because it was surrounded by suburban houses. During the War, American soldiers and local young men used to hang around the back of the Karitane Hospital to meet the

nurses when they came off shift. There was a manned Police Station in Richardson Rd. It was a small structure, not much bigger than an outside toilet, just opposite the end of Allendale Rd. In those days, the traffic police were not part of the regular police force, and Ray remembered Mr Ferguson, the traffic officer, who organised the traffic at Eden Park when there was a test match on.

Mt Albert Grammar School

Ray attended MAGS between 1939–42, biking there. He remembered only one boy — the son of one of the masters — driving a car to school. His teachers included Butch Brown (English master) Itchy Willmott and Herbie Towers. All pupils were issued with rough uniforms to wear to school on Wednesdays for military drill: a shirt, shorts, hat and socks without soles (designed to look the part but no risk of them wearing out). Thinking about these in retrospect made Ray chuckle. They did route marches around the block and up Kitenui Ave. The School initially had .303 rifles modified to shoot .22 bullets, but after a while they were taken away and given to the Home Guard. In early 1942, boys were asked to bring shovels to school to dig slit trenches in the school grounds in case of air raids: Ray remembered getting covered in clay.

In their spare time, Ray and his mates often cycled up the unsealed West Coast Road to the top of the Anawhata hill, where they would leave their bikes in the long grass and walk down to the Allely family's bach on the beach. They would stay a few nights then bike home again, only slowed down by the occasional puncture.

Ray enjoyed his time at MAGS. Although he played some soccer, he preferred quieter pursuits, and was given responsibility for the science laboratories. It was a natural progression for him to go on to Auckland University College in 1943, to study towards a BSc.

Becoming a Pharmacist

This was an unsettling time to be a young man in New Zealand. Ray needed a break from study, and time to work out what he really wanted to do, so after passing his first year's exams he went to work on the wharves. After a while he decided on his future path: he would become a pharmacist.

At that time, the route to becoming a professional pharmacist was to be indentured to a registered master and work full time under their supervision for four years. After two years, the apprentice would take the Pharmacy B exam, followed by the Pharmacy C exam two years later.

Ray struggled to find a master pharmacist who was willing to take on an apprentice in the middle of a war: he ended up working in Henderson. Because he had passed first year biology at university, he was permitted to sit Pharmacy B after only one year of apprenticeship, and then passed the Pharmacy C exam two years later. Frustratingly, he was required to serve the full four years of his indenture, and

so he continued receiving low pay during his first year as a professional pharmacist.

Atwell's Pharmacy

Ray started work for Bill Atwell in Mt Albert as soon as he was free of his indenture. Atwell's Pharmacy was on the left side of New North Rd heading into town, on the city side of the Carrington Rd intersection: today it houses the Mobile Computer Repair shop. There had been a chemist on that site since 1927, when 21 year old Augustus Samuel Hodgson started trading. Hodgson had struggled financially and after a poisoning scandal he was declared bankrupt: in 1930 Bill Atwell purchased the business. Atwell's was one of two chemists in the main Mt Albert Shopping area. The other, W.H. McKinney, traded from what is now 926 New North Rd from about 1915 to around 1928, when Kenneth W. White took over.

Mt Albert was a largely homogenous community in the 1950s. People would routinely consult a pharmacist rather than make an expensive visit to the doctor. Ray described his workplace as "a good family pharmacy. In those days you knew people, not only as customers, but as friends. We made a lot of friends."

Bill Atwell was a Mt Albert institution. Ray described him as a character who had his own way of doing things, and who was well liked. Bill had a range of favourite prescriptions of his own recipes that he made up and sold.

In late 1955, British pianist Winifred Atwell toured New Zealand. Cheekily, Bill wrote to the celebrity, pointing out that their surnames were spelled the same way — with a single T — and inviting her to visit when she was in Auckland to perform. She accepted the invitation, and all enjoyed her visit: she was photographed wearing a white lab coat helping Bill mix some medicine.



Winifred Atwell and Bill Atwell 1955. Ray Hancock collection

Ray started as Bill's assistant, then was made manager. Bill, a keen golfer, was happy to leave the Pharmacy in his capable hands. Ray took on his own apprentice, Des Clune from Sandringham, and later Des won a national pharmacy award, which reflected well on the Atwell's

Pharmacy team. Ray and Des became close friends, and when Bill Atwell retired, they bought the business together, leasing the shop from Bill who continued to come in and spend time with the younger men. Bill passed away in 1989.

Ray laughed about the construction of 885 New North Rd: in his words “there was bugger all holding those shops up.” While the front of the shops were on solid ground, underneath, in his time, was an empty space with a 12 foot stud, standing on 4x3s with no cross braces. The building has changed since Ray’s day: a later owner converted the upstairs storeroom, and the empty space below street level, into two flats, installing a staircase where the Pharmacy’s workroom was. This has reduced the shop’s footprint.

Atwell’s Pharmacy was the biggest dispensing business in Mt Albert, dispensing for the Karitane Hospital in McLean St, Astley House (now Everill Orr) in Allendale Rd, Warrengate Hospital in Lloyd Ave, and St Helen’s Hospital. There were fewer pre-packaged medications then, so Ray’s job included making up bulk topical medications — ointments, eyedrops etc — and mixing powders. The shop was burgled three times by people seeking morphine-type drugs.

Ray retired in 1984 when he turned 60. He was not keen on the trend for pharmacies to sell lots of extra consumer goods, and wanted to enjoy the rest of his life: “I didn’t want to be the richest man in the cemetery.” Des, aged 50, decided to retire as well, and they sold the business and both enjoyed long retirements. Des passed away in September 2021, aged 87, and Ray died on 19 January 2024, in his hundredth year.

Family Life and Interests

Work was important, but the core of Ray’s life was his family. Although they first met as pre-schoolers, he got to know his future wife Doreen McCullagh in their late teens, as members of the Waitakere Tramping Club. She was a Sandringham girl from Calgary St. They married on 4 February 1950, initially living with Ray’s parents in Preston Ave until they could move into their new house at 288 Whitney Street, Blockhouse Bay.

Ray built the family home there during 1950–52, drawing up the plans and doing about half the building work himself, a very common approach. The process of getting plans approved was much more direct and supportive than it is now. Ray drew up the plans, referring to the building regulations, then made an appointment to take them into the Council office, where they were checked over and any required changes were made. Building inspectors visited the site at key points to make sure things were all on track.

Ray and Doreen had two daughters, Christine and Susan. The family moved to a new home around the corner at 38

McFazdean Drive in 1963. Road trips and camping holidays were a regular feature of their lives, often staying with David Allely and his family. In 1979 Ray and Doreen spent a very enjoyable three months in the UK and Switzerland, leaving Des to manage the Pharmacy.

Ray and Doreen joined the Railway Enthusiasts Society with friends Brian and Rhonda Michie, and loved travelling with this group, both locally and on two overseas tours. Ray worked extensively for the RES as a volunteer, and was granted a life membership.

40 years is a long retirement, and Ray made the most of it. He was a talented woodworker and cabinetmaker, and loved DIY and gardening. An avid photographer, he amassed a huge collection of slides. Ray adored his children, grandchildren and great grandchildren, making rocking horses and furniture just for them. He was not religious, but he had his own clear philosophy of life. Keenly intelligent and knowledgeable, with a dry sense of humour and a sharp memory, he was a quiet man with a big heart.



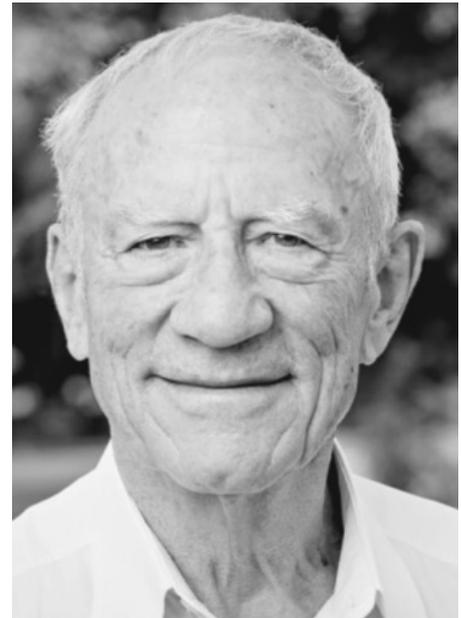
Interviewing Ray

On 21 September 2022, we interviewed Ray at his home in Murray Halberg Village, with support from his daughter Christine. This oral history took the form of a conversation, as Ray and Janet had many memories of the same people and places. Ray passed away in January 2024, and we were privileged to attend his funeral and hear more about his life and personality. We are very grateful to Ray for sharing his memories with MAHS, and to his family for permitting us to publish this article.

Lynley Stone and Janet von Randow

Sir Harold Marshall, KNZM FRSNZ FNZIA (1931–2024)

Sir Harold passed away on 31 August 2024. A video recording of his funeral, containing several remarkable tributes, is available at <https://bitly.cx/wnnZ>. We extend our condolences to the Marshall family.



Sir Harold was a 4th generation Mount Albertian. From 1873, his maternal great-grandparents, Mark and Sarah Woodward, farmed *Springleigh* bounded by today's Unitec, Woodward Rd and Oakley Creek. Harold was born and grew up in 28 Woodward Rd, and when he returned to Auckland, renovated and lived the rest of his life at 2 Springleigh Ave, in another beautiful house on the property that was built by Mark Woodward. His paternal grandfather, Rev. George Thomas Marshall, preached a sermon in the Mt Albert Methodist Church in 1881, soon after arriving from England. This church was a core part of Harold's life: he sang in its choir, met his wife Shirley Lindsay there, and co-wrote its history in 1991.

Harold attended Gladstone School, Kowhai Intermediate and Kings College, then Auckland University College (part of the University of New Zealand) before going overseas. He was an international acoustics expert, revolutionizing the design of concert halls and theatres. Back in Auckland, he was Professor of Architecture at the University of Auckland and co-founder of Marshall-Day Acoustics: he features in the 2024 documentary film *Maurice and I*.

Sir Harold was a passionate supporter of Mt Albert, co-chair of the Mount Albert Residents' Association (MARA), advocate for the district in planning hearings, and Patron of Honour the Maunga. Just 2 months before he died, he generously completed two oral history recording sessions with MAHS. During these sessions he spoke about his life, his family and his passion for Mt Albert and for the Mt Albert Methodist Church. His autobiography, *A Korowai of Love*, is a very readable book.

Mt Albert Historical Society profiled Sir Harold and the history of the Woodward's *Springleigh* farm in Issue 24 of our Newsletter, October 2013. If you would like to read this, you can find all the back issues of the Newsletter on our website under the PUBLICATIONS menu.

November 1924–January 1925:

Mt Albert 100 years ago

- 359 new dwellings were erected in 1924, compared with 300 the year before. At the end of the year, Mt Albert had more building underway than any other part of the City.
- The Edendale tram line extension was completed, bringing public transport to the new suburb.
- The Mt Albert Fire Brigade was under pressure. On Guy Fawkes night there was one major house fire, a shed was destroyed, and there were two major gorse fires in Edendale.
- Sections were being advertised for sale in Weston, Harbutt's, Martinborough, Mt Royal, Grand Vue and Lincoln Park Estates.

AUCKLAND ELECTRIC POWER BOARD.

Electricity is now available in the following streets in Mount Albert: —

New North Road; Mount Albert Road; Rob Roy Street; Lloyd Avenue; Alexandria Avenue; Victoria Road; Albert Street; Mountain Road; Allendale Road; South Side Salsbury Road to Tram Terminus; New North Road to Rob Roy Street; Mount Albert Road to Lloyd Avenue.

The North Side of New North Road from Tram Terminus to Railway Bridge will be alive at end of next week.

8/11/24.

N. M. SPEER,
Secretary.
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MAHS DATES TO REMEMBER

Sunday 6 April 2–4pm. Ferndale House. School Days: A Members' Show and Tell Event.

A group of Society Members will share stories of their time at school, either as pupils or teachers. Afternoon tea will be served. Gold coin donation appreciated. No need to RSVP.

Friday 25 April. 9am. Mt Albert War Memorial Hall. ANZAC Service. MAHS will lay a wreath.

Sunday 4 May 2–4pm. Ferndale House. Peter Janssen will speak on *Surviving historic Auckland Hotels with a focus on 19th century pubs. And do we have New Zealand's oldest hotel in our backyard?* Peter is a travel writer, the author of several books about touring and walking in New Zealand, and of *High Hopes and Big Dreams*, about small towns in their twilight years. The 4th edition of his book *New Zealand Pubs: 170 Classic Pubs to Visit* was published a few months ago. Afternoon tea will be served. Gold coin donation appreciated. No need to RSVP.