

THROUGH THE WAIKATO AND THAMES VALLEY

Rich Harvest for NZBS Mobile Unit

"MUNICIPAL bands, pipe bands, choral societies, and school choirs in the various districts we have visited so far have been permanently recorded for broadcast and historical purposes," said L. P. Fowler, officer in charge of the Mobile Recording Unit of the NZBS, when interviewed by *The Listener* in Wellington the other day.

He might have added a word about the dozens of soloists—vocalists, pianists, and others, not to mention the song of the tui, and the sounds made by a school of tame eels and trout at feeding time—all recorded through the microphones of the unit's van. For the mobile unit has secured all that and more since it was first commissioned in 1946 for the purpose of getting in touch with talent outside the cities, of reaching people in country towns and districts, and making known to New Zealanders in general how life is lived in their own country.

"Our first tour covered the Taranaki and Wanganui areas," Mr. Fowler explained, "and it was a great success. Now we have just returned from a tour of the Waikato and Thames Valley, and we have gathered much valuable material, both contemporary and historical."

The Unit's recording van arrived in Hamilton last August, and from there went to Morrinsville, Te Aroha, Thames and Coromandel. After a brief interlude spent making recordings at the Ruatoria hui, the Unit went on through Paeroa, Waihi, Huntly, Ngaruawahia, Te Awamutu, and Kawhia.

History at First Hand

"One of our main objects was to get in touch with people who could talk of the early days and give us some idea of the way their towns and districts evolved," Mr. Fowler continued, "and it was surprising how well all the different accounts we received interlocked to

form a coherent and fully authenticated picture. There was very little discrepancy between the various stories, each one checked up with the others." Many first-hand accounts of pioneering history had been obtained in this way; for instance, interesting information was obtained from a resident of Kawhia whose father had come to New Zealand in 1839. A man wounded at Rangiriri during the Maori Wars was also interviewed, and many others who remembered the events of those years.

was built up from the memories of the people who had actually lived that history."

Although they received so much accurate information, it was surprising how easily legends had grown up. They had to beware of these legends. One concerned two miners who had at one time been patients in the Coromandel hospital. According to the story they were sitting on a rock in the hospital grounds when one said to the other, "There's as much chance of finding gold in your



KAWHIA SCHOOLCHILDREN crowd round the recording van

At Te Awamutu children of men who fought at the Battle of Orakau told what they remembered of that historic struggle, and in another town a retired sea-captain spoke about his youth, spent aboard sailing ships.

"Altogether, a cross-section of the early history of every district visited

mine as there is of finding any in this rock," and he tapped the rock idly with his miner's hammer. A piece flaked off and the whole rock was found to contain a rich vein of ore. Although the two patients staked a claim, they did not receive a penny, as the rock was in the grounds of the hospital, which became the richer by several hundred pounds. But in actual fact this legendary rock was found on the roadside. The County Council sent men to blast it, but so many of the local residents turned out to gather souvenirs that the total amount of gold recovered was small. Mr. Fowler had a glance himself at the Coromandel County Council's ledgers, where the incident was historically recorded with the laconic entry of the value of the gold recovered—£10/11/3.

Country Halls

One of the problems the Unit had to face was the difficulty of finding suitable halls and pianos for recording purposes. "The country halls are not, on the whole, acoustically suitable for recording, and we had to adopt many expedients to improve them. In one case we had to borrow drapes from the local cinema, and another time a vocalist was recorded singing to the accompaniment of a piano played in the next room."

When the Unit was making recordings of men working in the Martha goldmine at Waihi, and again in the

Renown mine at Huntly, thousands of feet of wire had to be borrowed to supplement the van's five reels, before the microphones could be brought to the ends of the shafts. "But we always got the utmost co-operation from local bodies," Mr. Fowler added.

"Did you record much Maori history?"

"Wherever the local elders were willing, we transcribed numbers of very old *waiata*, *karakia*, and *patere* that are already beginning to die out with the older generations of Maoris." These songs, chants, and poems were of great importance in the history of the Maori race, and it was very satisfying to all concerned to know that they would be permanently preserved through the Mobile Unit's work.

"What immediate use will be made of this material?"

"A number of our recordings and special programmes have, of course, already been broadcast from various stations, and we are now engaged on a series of 17 half-hour programmes on towns visited in the Waikato-Thames Valley areas. These will be broadcast (from 1YA at first) some time this month."

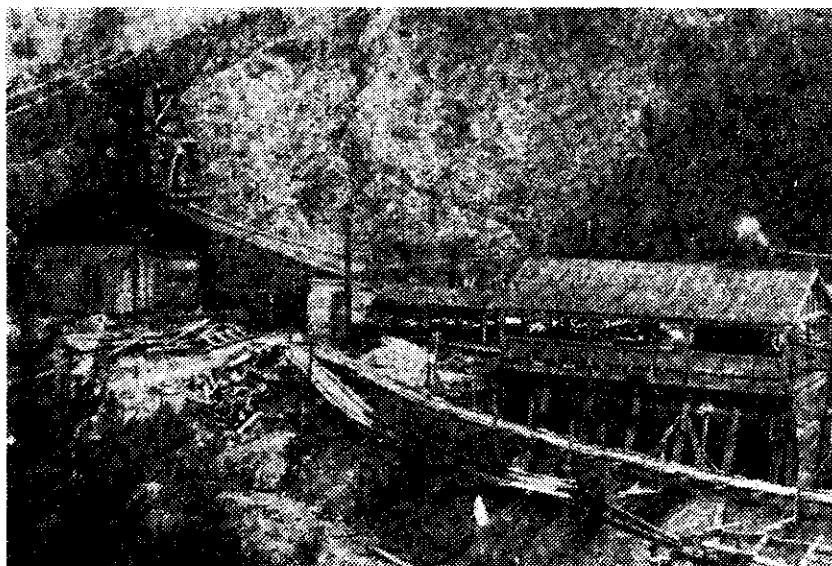
Morrinsville Programme

A typical programme was played over for *The Listener's* benefit. A few bars of music were followed by a voice: "This is the Morrinsville programme." In a brief introduction, the narrator touched on the origins of the town—Morrinsville had no romantic background of Maori wars or goldmining, but was just a typical little town that had grown up around the farming industry.

Music by the local band followed, and then an interview with one of the oldest inhabitants, who described her memories of the early days when supplies were brought up the river by Maoris in their canoes, and how her father had gone into the bush to split timber to build his first home. So it went on, other pioneers took up the tale, with interludes by the band and the choral society, until the whole picture of Morrinsville's early days was deftly sketched in.

Field work was only half of the Mobile Unit's job, Mr. Fowler explained. After the recordings were made they were returned to the Unit's office, where the major part of the work was done. Every record was catalogued; every person, place and event in any of the historical recordings was indexed and cross-referenced. If, for instance, there were three or four eye-witnesses of the great Huntly mine explosion in 1913, their accounts would all be indexed in a way that would enable them to be traced easily. In the same way there were dozens of references to famous men and places of the Maori wars, the early political days, and so on. Gradually the Unit was building up a library of first-hand historical material.

"To-night," Mr. Fowler said, "I am catching the boat to the South, where the Unit will be making recordings during Otago's Centennial celebrations. The van will follow later. You see, before the van goes into the field it usually has a schedule worked out for up to two months ahead, with appointments covering almost every day in the tour. That's part of my job. I arrange the dates and the technicians see that they are fulfilled. But they take such meticulous care of their equipment that we have not yet had to cancel an appointment. I hope that record holds good while we are in Otago."



NUMBER 7 SHAFT, Martha Mine—"Thousands of feet of wire had to be borrowed to supplement the van's five reels"