

WHERE NEW ZEALAND FILMS ARE MADE

No Hollywood Glamour But Plenty of Hard Work at Miramar Studios

NO one will ever know exactly how the idea of motion pictures was born. Reposing in vaults in patent offices throughout the world are manuscripts which mark the stages of the camera development, involving photography, electricity, and many other discoveries. But the dry legal documents can tell an interesting story. There are such landmarks as the experiment of Leland Stanford, a Californian sportsman who, wishing to investigate the gait of horses, had a series of photographs made of a horse in motion. That was in 1872. Edison became interested in the contemporary experiments, brought his genius to the task of putting film on to a strip. In the 1890's came many inventions, the kinetoscope, the theatrograph, the vitascope, and the eidoloscope. From them grew the modern, highly precise movie camera and projector.

Minus Chorus Girls

Behind the technical facts of discovery however is an even more absorbing story—the place occupied by films in modern life. To many people their influence is enormous. No kings have received fuller chronicling than the glamour stars of Hollywood, whose every action, from divorces to alcoholisms, is put into print and fed to the masses. No Hollywoods, or even Elstrees, nestle among the ferns and bracken of this country, and you'll probably have to wait years to see an Ann Sheridan going

for a swim in Oriental Bay in front of a battery of press cameras, or a Greta Garbo wanting to be alone at a Riccarton race meeting. But New Zealand has her own film studios: and their main job is to tell the world about New Zealand.

The other day *The Listener* visited the Government Film Studios at Miramar. People with visions of Hollywoodian brilliance would, of course, suffer sad disappointment at the studios. No barrage of executives is directed against the visitor, no cigar-smoking director yells instructions, and no chorus girls hover on the outskirts. Instead the studios go on working quietly, putting on celluloid the story of New Zealand, its industries, its people, its history.

Treating the Film

Without the magic strip of celluloid nothing would be possible, and so our first visit was to the laboratories. In rooms which are a cross between a cell and an operating room, austere in design, painted in coldly impersonal white and grey, film is developed, printed, dried, edited, cut, spliced, torn apart and stuck together again. The processes through which it passes are many. For example, in the editing of the film, care must be taken that pieces cut out leave no bad joins or misfits when the film is given continuity again. Sound and sight must be meticulously synchronised, for each is recorded on a separate piece of film. If part of the sound-track is to be cut, the film carrying the track is run through a machine which reproduces the sound alone.

Photographers who have struggled to master the elements of light and shade, stops and speeds, exposures and shutters will understand how much care must be taken in producing a finished hundred feet of film.



The young pioneers (played by Bob Pollard and Una Weller) in their bush home: Another scene from the N.Z. Centennial Film



FROM THE CENTENNIAL FILM: Governor Hobson (Brian O'Brien) speaks prior to signing the Treaty of Waitangi. On his right: Mr. Busby (Vivien Rhind) and Mr. Williams (Jasper Baldwin). On his left: Captain Nias (Russell Reid) and Bishop Pompallier (D. Priestley)

"Skills" for the Exhibition

Beside motion pictures, the studio produces fine "still" pictures—many of which have gone into Government exhibits at the Exhibition. In the enlarging room, we were shown how a photograph eight inches long can be enlarged to 12 feet. The picture demonstrated was one of Mount Egmont from the surrounding bush, and every blade of grass was there!

So on to the real core of the picture-making—the set. No shooting was in progress when we arrived, and the great lamps stood ranged against one wall, while in the centre of the set stood the scenery on which, some time before, the Treaty of Waitangi was signed for a second time—on this occasion to provide one of the many scenes for the New Zealand Centennial film which has just been completed at the studios. Work on this film, which will be released soon, has been in progress for a considerable time and the main events of our first hundred years are all chronicled. The story is naturally one of early pioneering, and follows for a time the fortunes of a typical young couple, arriving from the Homeland in the early days. All outside scenes were shot by mobile units, which travel through the country.

It Was Hot!

Howard Bridgman, director of the film and the studios' chief cameraman, explained to us some of the intricacies of titling film, on which he was busy at the time. Making the Centennial production had been hard work, and actors and technicians had been working to the early hours of the morning to finish it. "We had about 60,000 candle-power on the other night," said Mr. Bridgman, indicating the batteries of lights. "It was hot."

The Art Department

Next came a call at the art department where almost anything, from the proverbial needle to an anchor, can be

made. Here a second Mr. Bridgman (whose other name is George), explained some of the work done by his department. First, scenery and properties required in films are made; then displays, dioramas, and working models are supplied to various Government departments (many of these models and displays are now at the Exhibition). "We tackle anything that comes along," said George Bridgman, and that seems to be the watch-word in his department, for which nothing is too ambitious or too difficult to undertake. Recently a model of Rotorua, with five different geysers individually playing, boiling water, boiling mud pools, lake and Maori Pa, and clouds sailing across the sky, was sent to the San Francisco Exhibition. Other complicated models were sent to New York.

Art work is also executed in various forms—commercial art, poster work, fine art (Marcus King looks after this part of the business), black-and-white work, and newspaper work. Woodwork plays a large part, of course, in the displays, and as we left, Mr. Bridgman pointed to a piece of apparatus which, when completed, will blow grain into the air continuously, demonstrating the way in which seeds are thrown out to take root.

We watched the steady hand of a skilled draughtsman drawing film titles, and then visited the places where the large photographic studies are expertly coloured.

Last came a visit to the small theatre adjoining the set, where we saw two of the latest productions—one showing part of the work of the Post and Telegraph Department, the other the dangers of forest fires.

A. Mackenzie, the acting manager of the studios, described some of the hard work which goes into the making of the films, and C. Morton elaborated. "We'll be here till four this morning by the look of things," he said. We did not wait.