

# HISTORY FROM AN ALBUM

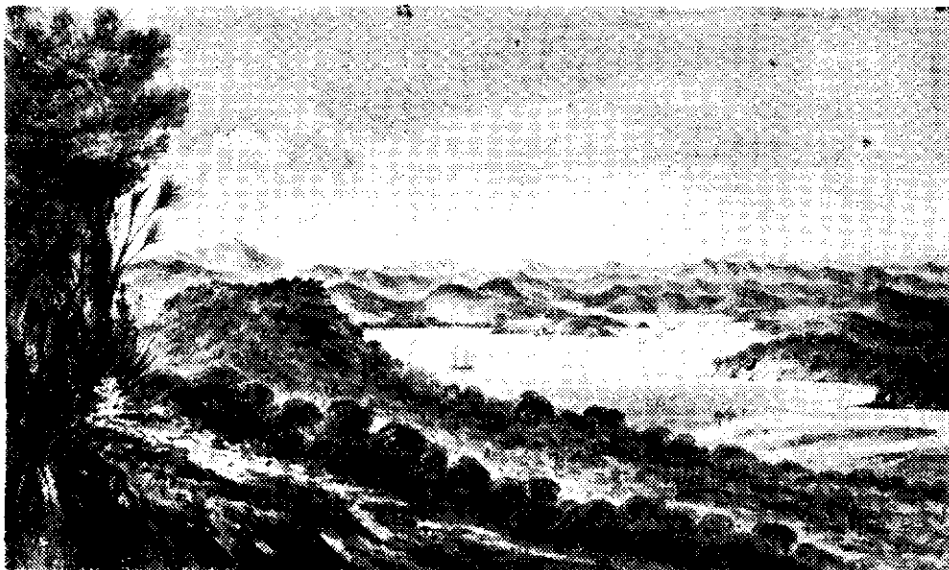
## *The Hobson Collection Throws Light On New Zealand's Past*

A YEAR or two before the Centennial, James Thorn, M.P., chairman of the National Historical Committee, made an appeal in England for any journals, letters, photographs or pictures of the early days of New Zealand settlement that descendants or relatives of early settlers might still be harbouring. Among the prizes that were sent out in response to this special appeal was the Hobson Album, sent by Lieutenant-Colonel R. M. Rendel, great-grandson of Captain Hobson.

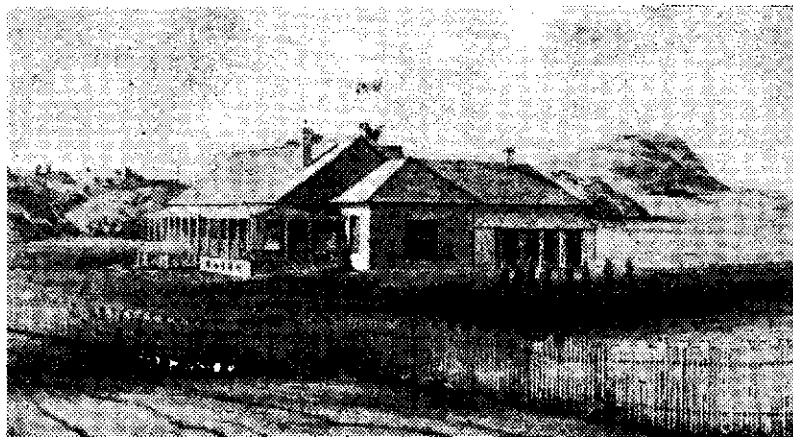
After Captain Hobson's premature death in September, 1842, Mrs. Hobson left for England, and before her departure, her friends joined to make up an album as a reminder of her stay in New Zealand. All who could, contributed sketches in water colour, sepia, or pen and ink, while some collected and translated Maori poems, proverbs and songs.

Naturally the artistic merits of the sketches vary considerably. Very few of them are signed or even initialled. The very great interest of the album lies in the fact that it was compiled before Mrs. Hobson took her leave of the colony, so that, with the possible exception of one or two sketches that were later sent to England and added, all the pictures show New Zealand of 1840, 1841 and 1842. There are a number of sketches of early Auckland, which in 1843 became the capital city and seat of the Government, and of Russell, where Mrs. Hobson aroused the envy of other settlers with her cows. In fact, a cynical commentator suggested "that the loss of one of them falling over the steep bank down to the beach was a sufficient reason why the seat of government should be removed from Russell to Auckland."

The picture of the first government house in Auckland (reproduced on this page) revives memories of the bickering and the mud-slinging that accompanied the founding of Auckland as the capital of New Zealand. The house, which was especially sent out from England, weighed 250 tons, cost £2,000, and was fitted throughout with marble chimney pieces. It was, moreover, the counterpart of the house built for Napoleon at St. Helena, only it was larger and more convenient.



*THIS WATER COLOUR from the Hobson Album shows Russell, the first seat of Government*



*GOVERNMENT HOUSE, Auckland, in the 'forties*

If Hobson failed in some ways, no one can doubt his personal integrity nor his good intentions. In particular, he strove to be on good terms with the Maori people, and the pictures and writings relating to the Maoris are of outstanding interest. There are illustrations of the swing game and of poi dances, of the Maori method of digging in a sitting posture, and of Maori canoes on Lake Rotorua. There is an

excellent sketch of the strongly fortified "pa" on Lake Okataina, this and others showing how far inland some of the travellers ventured. There is a sketch, too, of the Maori lad Maketu, who gained the distinction of being the first man in New Zealand to be tried by English Criminal Law and condemned to death and executed. Maketu, a "rangitira" of the Ngapuhi tribe, had brutally murdered a widow, her servant

and two children, and his trial aroused a good deal of alarm: it was feared that the Maoris would resent, not the punishment of the murderer, but the indignity of the imprisonment and the delays and publicity of an English trial. Maketu was allowed to escape as a way out of the difficulty, but he was brought back by his own people and duly executed. The album contains his last speech:

"I say that it is true, that it is right that I should die. It is my own doing, and for my sins I am going to the place that is burning with everlasting fire."

Other items are more pleasant. There is "a small word, the name of a boundary on one of the land claims, Tetutukitangaongatuonakamarangi," which must have tickled the fancy of one of the contributors to the book. There are a number of songs in Maori with the translations alongside. There is the song of the woman bearing food:

*"What shall be our food?  
Shellfish, fern root, the aka of the dry land  
This is the food that will keep a man in health  
The tongue grows rough with licking,  
As it were a dog's tongue, au."*

(In dry country, where no water was to be had, the thirsty Maori would cut the aka vine and drink the juice.)

There are hakas and songs, and one or two proverbs such as "Once a man but twice a child," and "Deep throat, shallow sinews," which is, perhaps, the Maori equivalent of the English "Noisy brooks are shallow."

### Letter to the Queen

A revealing indication of the esteem in which Hobson was held is the letter to Queen Victoria from Te Whero Whero, chief of the Waikato tribe.

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*MAORI CANOES and a pa on Lake Rotorua*