



## Memories of the Pioneers

"THE great muddy roadstead was at that time, and for many years afterwards, crowded with shipping. There was the tri-weekly passenger service to Helensville by such vessels, among many others, as the Gosford, Aotea, and Awaroa. Then great ocean-going ships put in, carrying away cargoes of timber and gum and flax fibre. Launches chugged and grunted day and night, and the yellow waters were alive with rowing boats of every size and colour . . . How empty it is now, that turbid stretch of water, flowing sluggishly beneath the bridge that robbed it of its glory of transportation. Old timers still maintain that its importance will return: a younger generation pokes a saucy tongue—and runs for a bus, or fills up with petrol. And a still younger gazes arrogantly down from the skies. . ."

This picture of two ages in the history of the Wairoa River (once considered New Zealand's finest navigable waterway) comes from Jean Boswell's *Dim Horizons*, a book to which listeners will be introduced by the author herself in readings starting in the Commercial stations' *Women's Hour* during the coming weeks.

Jean Boswell (left), wife of the late C. W. Boswell, New Zealand's first Ambassador to Moscow, was born Jean Smith, in Mangawhare a suburb of Dargaville on the Northern Wairoa river. She was her mother's ninth child—the third by a second marriage—in a family that was to grow to ten. Considering woman's lot from this aspect of large families little Jean once asked her mother why she didn't "tell Dad to keep a couple of concubines." Tracking down her daughter's unexpected knowledge of concubines to the Bible Mrs Smith replaced it with a New Testament on the kerosene box that served as the girls' bedside table.

Mr Smith was an ironfounder by trade, but like many of the early pioneers

was able to work well at whatever was available. Roadmaking one day on the Kaiti-Dargaville road, a chance encounter with a government official led him to take up a bush section in a settlement later known as Katui.

At first the dwellings of the Katui settlers were Maori whares made with fronds of the nikau palm and saplings. There were no windows, what light there was came through the thatch roof and the sacking door, and down the punga chimney. Such a whare was home for the Smiths until at last their house was finished, a house laboriously built of pit-sawn timber felled in the bush nearby.

"There it stood, the dream of years! Just a little butterbox of a cottage, creamy-yellow as only new kauri palings can be, looking strangely alien amid its wild surroundings, the half-burnt blackened logs seeming to crowd it resentfully, while the gaunt scarred standing trunks—those that had denied the flames their full savour—appeared to point their naked arms menacingly at the foreign invader. And, beyond all, glowered the dense sombre forest. . ."

This remained their home for ten years, then came another house that had French windows to every room and a veranda round three sides. And though she lived in that home, too, says Mrs Boswell, "My real home was that little box of a cottage on the hillside . . ."

It is to the memories of those days in the first home that the author of *Dim Horizons* returns, to the hardships of the first years spent in the bush; a way of life that, though seeming remote today, is still real in memory to many New Zealanders.

The eight extracts from *Dim Horizons* read by the author started from 4ZA and 2XA on May 13; and will begin from 2XP on May 27, 4ZE, May 29, 2ZA, June 17, and from other Commercial stations later in the year.

## JOURNEY FOR FOUR

ONE of the most remarkable true adventures involving children in New Zealand was the journey made just over a century ago by the four small children of a settler named Bevan. Their story, written into a series of six talks by Celia Manson, and now being heard from 4ZA, will start also from 3XC, 2XN and 2XA in the week beginning May 27. With the first talk, *The Bevan Children* recreates the harsh world of the early eighteen-forties, when the Wellington settlement was "a strung out huddle of queer little wooden buildings along the beach," when the two great chiefs Te Rangihaeata and Te Rauparaha, of the Ngati Toa, held the province in terror of their names, and people would rather crowd together and pool their worries than wander abroad unnecessarily.

But the Bevan children's journey was a necessary one, for the three boys and their sister, all under the age of ten, had one over-riding aim—to rejoin their father at the new home he was making for them near the Waikawa River in the Manawatu. Bevan arrived in New Zealand minus his wife and one child, both of whom died in the miserable voyage out in the emigrant ship Lady Nugent. Further misfortune greeted him in Wellington when the farm he had bought in England from the New Zealand Company proved non-existent, his

savings gone and nothing to show for it. However, says Mrs Manson, these weren't the sort of people to sit down and bemoan their hard lot.

"Bevan Senior had been a ropemaker by trade in England, and to be on the safe side had brought out all the equipment needed for starting up a rope walk. . . At Te Aro, in the swamps around the lagoon that is now the Basin Reserve sports ground, there was all the flax growing that he needed to start making rope."

So while their father got his business going the children lived in the emigrant barracks with their aunt and uncle, who had also arrived on the Lady Nugent.

Then came 1843, the Wairau massacre, and the resulting troubles in the Wellington Province, when the chiefs of the Ngati Toa returned from the south. The Maoris of the Te Aro pa, who were organising Bevan's supply of flax, were affected by the situation, and the supply was cut off. Bevan knew, however, that there were rich flax swamps up the coast on the shores of the rivers and streams of the Manawatu. He decided to transfer the business to Waikawa, near Otaki, leaving the children with their aunt in Wellington until he should send for them.

Meanwhile the troubles between Maori and Pakeha grew worse. Raiding



CELIA MANSON

parties made sorties from the coast inland to outlying farms in the Hutt and other areas. Captain (later Sir George) Grey, as Governor, extended the military outposts up the coasts in preparation for the trouble to come.

Then finally the message came from Waikawa for the children to join their father, a message conveyed by the skipper of the little schooner Fidele, which was to take them home. That night when the schooner sailed the

children must have thought they were nearly home, but a storm forced the Fidele back to harbour, a storm so wild that (as Thomas, the eldest boy, told Elsdon Best years afterwards) nothing on earth would have got them on board again.

The next messenger was Ropina, a Maori who was not only a friend of their father, but related to the hostile chiefs of the Ngati Toa. This relationship was to ensure the children's safe conduct on a journey of sixty miles through hostile country, hostile not only because of the aroused Maoris, but because of the dark forest, the rivers and not least, exhaustion, which, though meaning nothing to the powerful Ropina, would be more than daunting to four young children. And so the strange group set out, past the barracks and the redoubt at Thorndon, out along the Hutt Road and into the hills at Kaiwarra, where the forest track began.

The first talk in *The Bevan Children* takes the story thus far, and the others trace the journey up the coast to Waikawa, tell of the people met, and the pas and the homesteads visited, giving all the while a picture of how the children's new world looked in those vastly different days of 1846.

*The Bevan Children* will start from 2XP and 2XG in June, 1XN in July, and from other stations later in the year.

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