

The AUNT DAISY story

AN American newspaper, the *New York Post*, once labelled Aunt Daisy the Dynamo from Down Under. When she set to work on a project things usually happened. She had decided that Wellington should adopt "that fine American custom," the sunrise service at Easter. No one who knew her was surprised, therefore, when men were seen to be at work erecting a huge, white, floodlit cross on Mount Victoria.

"It was a heavy timber cross," she says, "and had to be stuck in concrete because of our winds. But when the day came, the weather, in fact, was calm and perfect." Outlined in electric lamps as well as floodlit, the cross shone from the summit of Mount Victoria for a week before Easter, reminding citizens that it was Holy Week.

The cross Aunt Daisy had seen at Honolulu's Punchbowl was surrounded by a white-robed choir in cruciform formation, and a band playing Easter hymns. She set about providing Wellington with the same setting.

Her school friend of New Plymouth days, the musician Harold Temple White, organised a choir which, though not white-robed, was able and big. The senior band of the Boys' Institute provided the music.

On Easter morning a few special buses ran, but most people attending the service simply trudged, sometimes long distances, starting out in the dark. The service began at 6.15, and by that time a large congregation crowded the western slopes of the hill.

"It was just a short service, conducted by the Rev. Percy Paris," says Aunt Daisy. "And there was a wonderful coincidence. We had the hymn 'Jesus Christ is Risen Today,' and just as we reached the line, 'Now above the sky He's King,' the sun came up over the horizon. It was a wonderful experience."

The following year a similar service was held. A Wellington paper reported the scene as one of peace and splendour. "Yet," it continued, "on a crag near the great white cross, several khaki-clad figures, standing guard over a military reserve, provided a grim reminder of the less peaceful times upon which this Easter has dawned." The

(8) THE DYNAMO FROM DOWN UNDER



sunrise service itself was to become a casualty of war. After 1940 it was discontinued for the duration. Revived again in 1945, it attracted some 5000 people to worship, but the following year power cuts forbade the lighting of the cross and no service has been held since.

WHILE her children joined the armed forces, Aunt Daisy fought World War II on the home front. The country's record apple crop of 1940 was threatened because ships were not available for its export. Commercial radio was asked to sell the crop at home. "We organised a National Apple Pie competition, with a £100 prize," says Aunt Daisy. "Literally hundreds of apple pies were sent in, and three

professional cooks were engaged by each ZB station for judging."

The final of this contest took place at the Centennial Exhibition, amid blazing publicity and the roar of a full-throated crowd. "My most thrilling moment was driving to the Exhibition," says Aunt Daisy. "I rode in the leading car with one of the candidates. There was a traffic cop in front with his siren going as we passed through the crowds lining the principal streets."

"I think there was a little fuss afterwards about having the siren—but, oh, well—it was for the Exhibition, and a great ZB show, and nothing happened about it."

The watching crowd was entertained by musical items while the baking took place. The Christchurch lady won, but all four finalists were presented with the gas stove in which they had cooked their apple pies, and a wonderful time, says Aunt Daisy, was had by all.

SOON afterwards, the

Government realised that the voice women listened to with such respect had a propaganda value. Aunt Daisy was asked to venture into what was traditionally a man's world and see how suitable it was for women. "I was sent round all the Navy and Army and Air Force stations," she says, "to see how the girls in the Services lived. They had a good training and it was hard work, but they were extremely happy."

EASTER Sunrise Service on Mt Victoria

★LISTENING to the band at the Kaiser Shipyards luncheon, playing "Daisy Bell"★

Some of them had never attended a church service until they joined up. It was a wonderful thing for all those girls, and after my visits I could come back and tell the mothers on the air how well their daughters were looked after."

These tours were possible because throughout the war she had to prepare her Morning Sessions in advance, and sometimes had as much as three weeks in hand. In wartime, all broadcasts had to be censored in advance. "Of course, with my programme, it's impossible to write it out," says Aunt Daisy, "and so I used to record it and the censors would run over the recordings." She is proud that no single item of the slightest possible use to the enemy was ever discovered in one of her programmes.

Aunt Daisy's personal war effort culminated in a semi-official goodwill mission to the United States. New Zealand was then the principal American base in the South Pacific. A tide of gum-chomping GIs, around three-quarters of a million of them, washed across the North Island, leaving in its wake a huge excess of florists' shops, a tribe of newly-rich taxi drivers, and the unmistakable accents of Iowa and Texas and Tennessee. The cry of the Kiwi abroad was said to be the age-old one of "Loot, loot!" At home it began to sound like "anygumchum?" In the South Island, which remained largely untouched, cynical remnants of the aboriginal culture took to calling the North Island the 49th State, or Little America. Certainly, New Zealand learned a good deal of the American Way of Life. The time had come for cultural interchange—Americans should learn something of their country's South

