

WHEN FROGS OBLIGED...



HOWARD MILHOLLAND
... Was in on the ground floor in 1924.

EARLY radio days in the United States, the difficulties in achieving suitable sound effects and the worry over arranging programmes—all these things were discussed by Howard Milholland, entertainer, teller of tales, singer and actor, in an exclusive interview with the "Record's" Christchurch reporter last week.

In 1924 Howard was manager of KGO, Oakland, California. In 1929 that station was taken over by the National Broadcasting Company, and the Oakland executive went along as programme manager for the Pacific Division and stayed with the concern until 1933.

That's all by the way. Here's some of what Howard remembers of the pioneering days:—

"In the early days of radio I found myself chief announcer, manager, programme man, and even janitor, working at least 14 hours a day. Was it tough going? Naturally, in the pioneering days of daily broadcasts we were hard put to it to think out new stunts. But I found that my training for the concert stage stood me in good stead.

MY father was a minister, so here you see in front of you a living example of a parson's son gone wrong! I took to that awful place—the stage!

"Actually, that early stage experience came in very handy. Often, on the air, when somebody programmed failed to turn up, I had to put on a whole show on my own. Minstrel work was particularly suited to this kind of thing and by changing the pitch of my voice I was able to be interlocutor, end-men, and all the rest of it.

"Greatest bugbear of radio in earlier days was achieving suitable sound effects. Once we put on 'The Cricket on the Hearth.' For days we experimented, trying to get

Howard Milholland Recalls the Early Days of Radio in U.S.A.

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By

ERIC BAKER

a sound exactly like a cricket. We got it eventually, and do you know how? We found that a long fingernail, plucking a piano string—not on the sounding part, but near the peg—did the trick.

"Doing a thriller, 'The Black Swamp,' we were at our wits' end for an imitation of the croaking of frogs. The studio was on low flats, with water a quarter of a mile away. The night before we gave the first episode it rained heavily, and frogs from the water came on to dry land in millions. All we had to do was hang a microphone out of a window. You smile? It's a fact. A man in Alaska wrote to us asking how we got that realistic effect. But, in my experience, the best possible sound effect comes from the real thing.

I KNEW a man in U.S. who did a broadcast session which he called 'Cross-cuts From the Log of the Day,' and, curiously enough, his name was Cross. As his theme, or background, he had a couple of negroes in the studio sawing up logs with a cross-cut saw. Those niggers got through a ton or two of logs in a year. There were also about 25 chattering and singing birds in the studio, also for outdoor effect."

THE popular American entertainer whose reminiscences provide the material for this article, claims he is a "parson's son gone wrong"—but Providence surely smiled on him the night his studio broadcast "The Black Swamp."

TO-DAY, Mr. Milholland confessed, he did not like broadcasting half as much as legitimate stage work. "I really enjoy a flesh-and-blood audience," he said. "On the radio you do your level best and you haven't the faintest idea how you are getting on. But when your audience is in front of you you can register every effect and play upon the emotions of the crowd.

"Although I have a school of radio in the States, where I teach students how to become radio artists, I love meeting people—hence my world tour. And this is the first time I have been in charming New Zealand. Our reception here has been very warm, and I particularly like Christchurch, for its climate is something like San Francisco."

Knowing something of the rigours of the concert stage, the reporter asked Mr. Milholland about his personal habits. The reply was that he didn't drink and didn't smoke, not for any reasons which could be set upon moral grounds, but simply because he did not care for either habit. "But, when I was a kid, I often got behind the haystack and took a whiff of corn-silk done up in newspaper," he said. "And so I got a good taste of printer's ink!"