

75th An of Broadcasting in NZ

2YB kept the home fires burning

By NEIL HOLDOM

PICTURE a South Island home in the early 1920s, a family huddled in their living room waiting expectantly in front of the fire, with the crackle of static in their ears.

Then, for the first time in their lives, they hear a transmitted voice break through the static, followed by music, miraculously coming from a small box made of metal, glass and wood.

The first official radio broadcast in New Zealand was made 75 years ago but, like so many other things, it would be years before the people of Taranaki could hear for themselves what the wireless was all about.

It has been 100 years since New Zealander Sir Ernest Rutherford first proved that hertzian waves (radio) could be transmitted from one point to another through the air, but it would be another 25 years before the first official radio broadcast was made in New Zealand.

On November 17, 1921, Dunedin's Professor Robert Jack broadcast New Zealand's first official radio concert. He played a recording of the Victorian popular song, *Come Into The Garden, Maude*.

Within the next five years radio stations were established in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin.

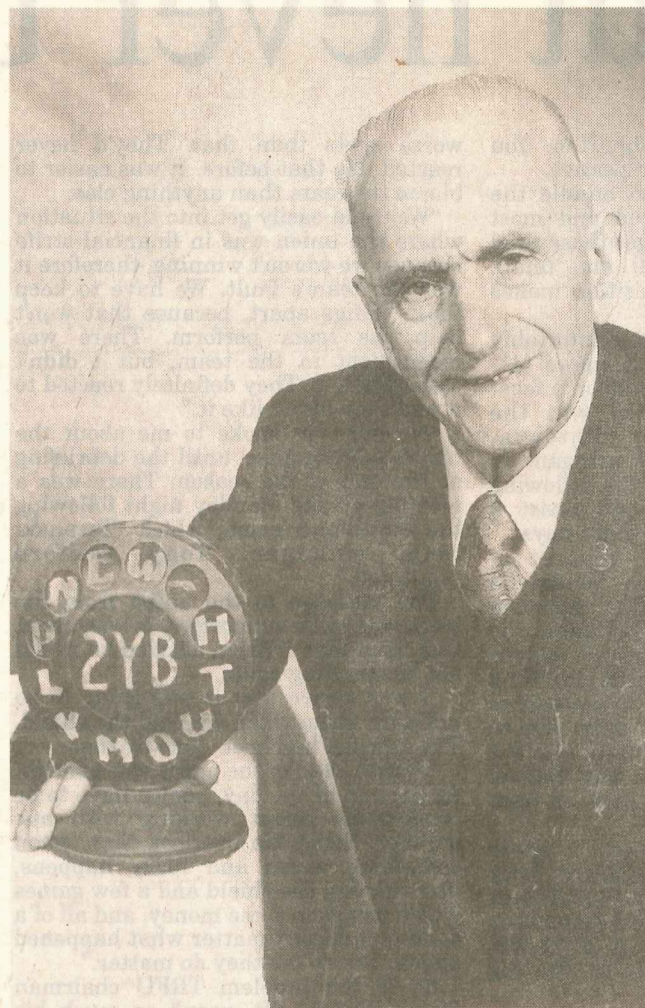
Reception was good within the cities but poor in the provinces. Taranaki's listeners could not receive a clear signal from either Wellington or Auckland, and the locals were determined to have their own station.

In 1928 a group of volunteers, led by businessman Ted Payne, formed the North Taranaki Radio Society. Their main ambition was to bring radio to the people of Taranaki.

By 1929 the NTRS had struck a deal with the government of the day and borrowed equipment and operators from the New Zealand Radio and Broadcasting Company.

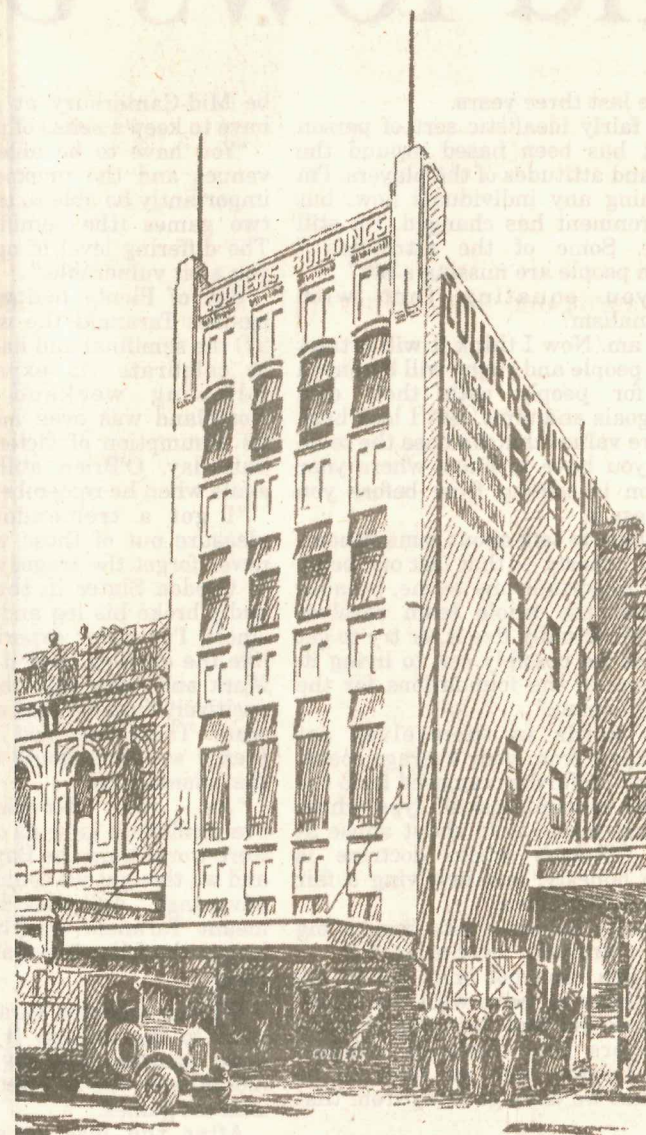
Through the efforts of volunteers the NTRS was able to gather enough resources to provide Taranaki listeners with good-quality wireless reception, even for small crystal radios.

On Saturday, April 27, 1929,



ABOVE: Ted Payne, pictured on the 50th anniversary of Station 2YB in 1971, was a key figure in the North Taranaki Radio Society that brought the wireless to New Plymouth.

RIGHT: New Plymouth's Colliers Building, as pictured in the Taranaki Daily News in 1929, was the original home of radio in Taranaki.



Taranaki's first-ever radio announcer, John Ball, made his opening broadcast:

"Good morning everybody. This is station 2YB, New Plymouth, operated by the North Taranaki Radio Society broadcasting from Colliers' Music House."

The then Taranaki Daily News produced a full-page feature detailing the opening of the New Plymouth station, and predicted great things for the humble wireless.

"This development of the science

and art of wireless, side by side, has resulted in an awakening in the public of an almost universal wireless sense, and in both town and country the time is not far distant when there will be few homes which do not possess a wireless receiving set."

Once again the local paper got it right. Radio in Taranaki became, and remains, an integral part of people's everyday lives, but in 1929 that was by no means a certainty.

During his opening address Mr

Ball predicted that 2YB would only be a temporary station until a more reliable relay system could be set up from the YA network, which was made up of New Zealand's four main radio stations.

Radio was still in its infancy in New Zealand and advertisements were not permitted. The lack of advertising meant income was hard to come by, and after only one year of broadcasting Station 2YB was beginning to struggle.

While the major stations in New

Zealand were financially supported by the radio receiving licence fee, 2YB was not. The New Plymouth station relied entirely on donations and volunteers to keep afloat.

In 1930, with funds running low, 2YB made a public appeal for assistance and the overwhelming support from New Plymouth's people guaranteed a bright future for the station. By 1932 2YB had enough money to move premises from the Collier's Building to King Street's Victoria Building, where it remained until 1952.

For 22 years 2YB operated as an amateur station. During that time hundreds of local artists appeared live, while Mr Payne (known as Uncle Ted) worked tirelessly in the background to keep things running smoothly. Mr Payne died in 1988.

The year 1952 heralded the end of the amateur era and 2YB went off the air. In its place came the commercial station 2XP. With a new name came a new premises, and the station moved to a lower Brougham St site on the top floor of Bennett & Sutton Ltd.

The new station ran advertising and extended its hours. Within a short time 2XP had established its identity with a name that many people will recognise — Radio Taranaki.

In 1966 Radio Taranaki moved across the road into a brand-new \$300,000 building, now known as Broadcasting House. Radio Taranaki no longer exists. The new deregulated market has resulted in a central programming system which delivers Newstalk ZB.

In 75 years *Come Into The Garden, Maude* has changed to *How Bizarre*, the crackle has gone with the clarity of FM, and stereo has replaced the monaural sounds of yesteryear.

No longer are listeners confined to a single station, and now they can ring up and request their favourite songs — whether on vinyl, cassette or compact disc.

Perhaps radio has lost the personal touch of the early pioneers and live performances, but with change has come freedom of choice and expression and unlike the song . . . video has not killed the radio star.