

Manaiia's Fire Loss

Major fires in cities or towns usually cause considerable loss and disruption of business to individuals, but when the victim is the public of the community the blow is doubly unfortunate. There will therefore be provincial-wide sympathy with the people of Manaiia and district in the serious damage to their town hall on Saturday morning.

Nowhere else in New Zealand are there as many important business and social centres in a comparatively small area as in the closely settled rural district of Taranaki. This is due partly to the development of successive rural settlements as settlers penetrated the bush southwards from New Plymouth after the first landing in 1841, and partly to the retention of these settlements as virgic centres of shopping and social activity as population around them increased.

Manaiia is a typical case. Although only a few miles distant from Hawera it continues to flourish as the focal point of probably the richest dairying land in the world. The town hall, as the headquarters of the town board and the location of the cinema and local cultural activities, was the embodiment of community interest, and the seriousness of Saturday's fire loss can be readily appreciated. That the damage was not greater was due to the system of co-operation of neighbouring fire brigades under which the Hawera brigade was quickly on the scene.

The loss is accentuated by the present high cost of replacement of buildings and equipment, which is often considerably in excess of the insurances held. It will be the wish of people throughout the province that the building can be restored without undue delay and too heavy a financial burden to the residents of the community.

Random Opinions

Liberalism

The essence of liberalism is an attempt to secure a social order not based on irrational dogma.—Bertrand Russell.

Land Of Domesticity

England is a domestic country. There the home is revered, the hearth sacred.—Disraeli.

News Of The Day

Bus Stop Shelter

A 16-foot bus stop shelter was put in place in Currie Street, New Plymouth, on Saturday. Of a design sent by a city councillor, Mr. A. G. Honnor, overseas, it consists of four-foot sections, built of angle-iron and wood. The shelter backs the roadway, but a broad panel of glass enables passengers to watch for their bus. Provision has been made for further sections if the shelter proves satisfactory.

Motor-Cycle Recovered.

A motor-cycle removed from New Plymouth on Thursday was recovered by the police at Te Kuiti on Saturday. An arrest has been made. The machine was owned by Mr. G. L. Pease, New Plymouth.

Mr. L. Russell, Popular Bowling Secretary, Resigns

After having been secretary of the Taranaki Bowling Centre for 13 years, Mr. L. Russell, Vogelton, resigned from this position at the centre's annual meeting at Stratford on Saturday.

Tribute to the work he has done for bowling was paid by the immediate past president, Mr. H. W. Bocock, who retired himself after his two-year term, and the newly-elected president, Mr. A. W. Godwin. Mr. R. E. Greiner's motion that some form of tangible recognition be given to Mr. Russell was approved by acclamation.

Two outstanding services by Mr.

MANAIA TOWN HALL. BADLY DAMAGED BY EARLY MORNING FIRE

THE Manaiia Town Hall was heavily damaged by fire early on Saturday. The Manaiia volunteer and Hawera fire brigades had the flames beaten within half an hour of the alarm sounding, but not before the rear wall had been almost completely burned down, part of the roof had fallen in, side walls been badly damaged and the stage totally destroyed.

An administrative block at the front of the building escaped bad damage, although windows were shattered and paint was charred. The adjacent supper rooms and kitchen also escaped lightly.

The Manaiia post office received the alarm shortly before 6 a.m. from Arthur Davis, son of Mrs. L. M. Davis, who lives behind the hall in another street. Within seven minutes the Manaiia brigade was laying hoses at the scene. Those who witnessed the fire at this time believed the brigade had no chance of checking the blaze.

Only a handful of people besides the brigadesmen were there. Eye-witnesses described the scene as terrifying.

The Hawera brigade was called under a newly operative scheme for co-operation between brigades, and arrived within a short time with five men. In the meantime leads from the adjacent swimming pool had been taken in from two pumps operated by the Manaiia brigade, and another laid on from the main. About 1500 feet of hose were laid, and 20,000 gallons or more of water pumped from the baths before the fire came under control.

The flames apparently built up to great force inside the hall before bursting through the roof. Above the stage, which was the seat of the blaze, the roof had crashed in. Little was left of the rear wall of the stage, and side walls were badly damaged.

Seats in the body of the hall were charred and blackened. Paint on the recently redecorated interior walls was burned and blistered, and the floor was deep in charcoal that had rained down from the ceiling.

Gaining a hold in the ceiling timbers, the flames had swept to the front of the building. The heat penetrated from the walls and ceiling into the supper rooms and kitchen, but damage here was confined to blackened paint.

Equipment Stored

The administrative block in the front of the building included the Manaiia Town Board's offices and a film projection room. Sports equipment of many kinds was stored in the hall.

The brigades' work was widely commended. Praise for the orderly behaviour of the people who watched the fire was voiced by Constable J. Tocker, Manaiia. He said that there had been no interference with the work of the brigade.

The damaged hall was a major attraction to sightseers yesterday. All afternoon cars lined the main street, and the public moved in a steady, orderly procession in and out of the building.

Prompt Action By Citizens

A quickly constituted committee revealed to a meeting attended by about 200 at the Manaiia memorial baths yesterday that it had wasted no time in exploring all possible avenues preparatory to the restoration of the town hall. A canvass of the local town and country districts on Friday is hoped to raise £6000.

For the committee Mr. R. L. Bennett outlined the steps taken and the proposals whereby it is hoped to raise the necessary finance. Plans have already been prepared and were accepted by the meeting as the best scheme for the restoration of the hall.

Support from the Minister of Internal Affairs, Mr. W. A. Bodkin, Cabinet members of Parliament, local authorities and sports bodies had been solicited and promised, said Mr. Bennett. The commissioners of the town had been sitting in meeting "almost while the hall was still burning," and the question of support had been "chased down to Wellington and all round Taranaki."

Deputation to Minister

A deputation had that morning waited on Mr. Bodkin at New Plymouth with plans for the new hall and proposals as to how it was to be got. The promptitude of preparations had astounded those with whom it had been placed, said Mr. Bennett.

Means of obtaining the money under the war memorial subsidies scheme were proposed to the minister, who promised every support through every channel available and suggested alternatives. The subject was promised top priority at today's Cabinet meeting, and the aid of Messrs. E. P. Adern and W. A. Sheat, and later Mr. E. B. Corbett will be sought if today's bid fails.

Once again, said Mr. Bennett, the Manaiia town and district might be called on to make a solo effort. A committee, which would be provisionally constituted as a war memorial committee to seek a subsidy, and comprising members of the town board and Waita West County Council, members of the Maori race, sports bodies and churches, had been set up and was now operating.

£30,000 to Rebuild

If the money was to be eligible for subsidy it would have to be banked by Monday week. Any suggestion that the hall should be entirely rebuilt was ruled out by cost and time lapse, said Mr. Bennett. To rebuild would cost £30,000 to £50,000 and would mean that the burden would have to fall on the townspeople through a special rate.

It was thought that there was enough solid material left in the old hall to form a basis for the alteration and improvements planned, and although it was realised that the approach had to be made at a poor time it must be realised that in this way the hall would be available not in five or 10 years but as soon as the money, materials and labour were available. The hall would then fulfill all the uses of the old one and do that job better, he said.

The new hall would include tiered seating from a main entrance carried straight through on to the present dance floor. This would rise up to the present gallery, and would mean that non-dancers would be clear of the floor and yet in full view of it. The stage would be taken back to make the same amount of floor available, and the stage and screen facilities would be improved. The projection box would be taken upstairs and the supper, kitchen and convenience rooms improved.

A rough estimate of the cost of this work was £15,000 plus furnishings, he said.

Not a War Memorial

Mr. Bennett stressed that the appeal must not be sentimentally regarded as for a war memorial, as this was not correct yet. It was a straight-out canvas for funds to provide a very real necessity in the town.

The remainder of the meeting was taken up in the supplication of services as canvassers and the allotment of areas to work. Support for the scheme as outlined was decided on by the executive of the Manaiia and District R.S.A., the county council and sports bodies.

Total insurance on the hall and its contents could not be ascertained yesterday, although it is understood that an assessor was yesterday at work in the gutted hall. Insurances on the building itself totalled £15,600, but there were others on the contents. No estimate of what amount would be recoverable was available last night.

Bowling Umpires' Association Planned

A Taranaki Bowling Umpires' Association will be formed, following a decision made at the Taranaki Bowling Centre's annual meeting at Stratford on Saturday.

Taranaki conducted the second largest bowling tournament in New Zealand, said Mr. R. C. Boulton, and that called for Taranaki to keep in line with other districts where umpires' associations were doing the sport much good and giving the players great help.

Several Sports Bodies Affected By Manaiia Fire

Valuable equipment destroyed.

Many organisations are without accommodation as a result of the fire in the Manaiia town hall. Several lost valuable equipment in the blaze. For more than 45 years the hall had played a major part in the community life of the town, catering for several sporting and cultural activities as well as providing a picture theatre and dance hall.

Among the heaviest losers was the Manaiia Boxing Club. Stored in the hall it had more than £75 worth of gear, which is a total loss. The club had opened negotiations to get the gear replaced.

Record Of Names On R.S.A. Honours Board May Be Lost

About one week ago the Manaiia and District Returned Services Association decided to insure the honours board erected in the town hall to commemorate the men of the district who served in the Second World War. This was done, but the board was a loss in the fire that partially destroyed the hall on Saturday morning.

The R.S.A. is now concerned that with the loss of the board may have gone all the records of the names on it, the only hope that the names may still be in list form lies with the man who printed the board and he is not known to R.S.A. members interviewed yesterday. No time will be lost in attempting to trace him.

insured, but at the time of the fire the assessor had not called. The club will therefore have to stand the full financial shock itself.

With a tournament due on July 18 this places the club in a serious predicament. Help has been forthcoming, however, for as soon as the Hawera Boxing Club heard of the loss the use of the Hawera gymnasium, all the club's gear and any necessary assistance was immediately offered.

The Manaiia Table Tennis Club also suffered heavily. Six tables, as well as many nets, bats and balls, were lost. Providing suitable accommodation is found for its annual championships, the club can count on the loan of tables and other gear from Hawera clubs and the South Taranaki Table Tennis Association.

The Manaiia Badminton Club's net and net supports were destroyed, but the club, because of the small amount of gear needed for badminton, escaped more lightly than other organisations.

Many other organisations used the hall, but none, as far as is known, had gear stored there.

The burned equipment was stored on the stage, the seat of the fire, and was probably destroyed long before the arrival of the fire brigades.

The hall had served the Manaiia community since its erection in 1906. Its predecessor was destroyed by fire in December, 1904.

Mission Completed

"A magnificent example of co-operative effort. A fine effort of which residents can justly be proud and one which shows marked courage and confidence. A fitting memorial to the fallen of the Second World War."

These were some of the glowing tributes paid to those responsible for the erection of the new war memorial hall at Brixton, which was officially opened by the Minister of Internal Affairs, Mr. W. A. Bodkin, yesterday.

About 500 packed the hall to overflowing for the ceremony, which included the unveiling of a memorial plaque inside the hall and a special dedication service. Money and hundreds of working hours were provided by residents of the district, who number only about 40, to complete the hall. Yesterday they all proudly attended the first official function in the hall, which is the only one in the district.

"I wish to congratulate all those who have assisted in the completion of this