

# Salvation Army's Stormy Start in New Plymouth

# Blood And Fire—Eggs And Water

With the Salvation Army at present attempting to raise \$1.2 million nationally to finance its community work, it is interesting to look back on the establishment of the "Salles" in New Plymouth and to marvel that they weathered the storm.

Records show that the corps pair of Army lassies with a hose as they marched at the head of the band. At the worst, they could be attacked — and sometimes were. There was a time when the Corps ignored a friendly New Plymouth while 400 military recruits were in town from their camp at Waitara. The troops charged, knocked the Salvationists about a bit and finally disappeared with their instruments. When the Corps returned to their hall they found the soldiers in occupation, holding what was described as "apparently a burlesque service." For a time there was chaos, but eventually the Salvationists regained their hall and their instruments, the latter very much the worse for wear. Yes, life was hard. "But," recalled one of those early members many years later, "we converted many drunkards."

But there was a need for the Salvation Army in New Plymouth and it did not take long for more level headed people of the town to recognise it. It soon became evident that this small, but steadily growing organisation upon which they had heaped such scorn and abuse was in fact the one and only helping hand which was ever held out to those most devoid of hope. Perhaps the Army's finest hour came, not unaturally, at the height of the Great Depression. For 18 months in 1933-34 the Army turned a dilapidated boarding house in Silver Street into a welfare centre, naming it "Welcome Lodge." Many hundreds of people hard pressed by the time sought and found relief there. It mattered not if they had sought solace in drink or if they had a term of imprisonment behind them. They were welcomed.

Up to 30 people a night were accommodated. Food was donated or offered at cost and there were many offers of assistance to run the lodge. LIVING SYMBOL Undoubtedly for most New Plymouth people, until his death in December 1953, the living symbol of the Salvation Army was the extraordinary Envoy Stephen Buick. The memory of him is such that no account of the Army's history — not even the briefest — would be complete without a mention of his amazing record. Indeed, Stephen Buick could be held up as the embodiment of the Salvation Army the world over.

Born in 1857 in South Australia, one of 16 children born to a pioneering couple, he knew the hard life right from the beginning. He knew what it was to be hungry, to have to play his part in supplementing the family diet with shellfish and pelican eggs. As a young man he knew temptation too, and became a drinker and a gambler. But one day a copy of the War Cry found its way into his hands, and from that moment Stephen Buick became a changed man. He went to Adelaide to become the "king" of all War

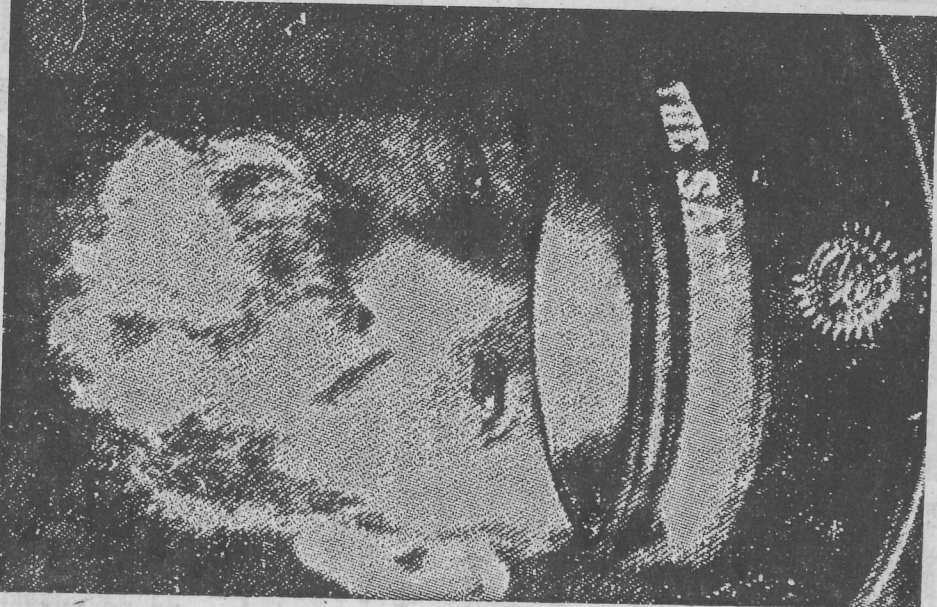
City sellers and eventually found his way to New Zealand. In 1886 he arrived in New Plymouth to begin his extraordinary 67 years of service to the Army in North Taranaki. He built himself a four-bunk house and made it "open and - out from the streets. 40 MILES But his ministry extended far beyond the streets of New Plymouth. He counted it nothing to walk 40 miles in a day, or in late years to take a bus — and be let out somewhere along the way — perhaps at Warua, or Brixton, Rahoju or Stratford — to start a walking tour of the backblocks areas with his bag of War Cries. In fact, at the age of 94 he was still able to walk 15 miles a day. His raucous but cherry voice was known from Whangamona to Opunake.

Eventually, as the mud tracks improved and became roads, he became the owner of a Model T Ford which became almost as legendary as his own. It was still chugging its way happily around the country until 1947 when an accident finally brought it to an untimely end. Next day, unperurbed, Stephen Buick was back tramping the roads — at the age of 89. Apart from his evening feasts, Envoy Buick could have had some sort of world record for selling the War Cry. Until

he was 90, he used to sell 70 dozen copies a week; but then he "ceased off" to the modest number of 23 dozen a week. It seemed to most people — and to Stephen Buick himself — that he was going to be here for all times. At the age of 95 he went into hospital seriously ill but recovered and was transferred to the Rangimarie Home. Shortly after his instalment there he was back out on the streets again, a spruced, touselled and faded man, but still the same Stephen Buick.

But his health was gone and Envoy Stephen Buick faded quietly away on December 1, 1953, at the age of 96. In 1954 the Salvation Army celebrated its Golden Jubilee in New Plymouth. Its services to the community were widely acknowledged. In one tribute it was stated: "The Salvation Army has earned respect and esteem wherever it has been established, and among people of all classes and creeds. For in addition to its great efforts in the cause of religion the Army has become the most constant, efficient and successful organisation for the relief and succour of those for whom there seemed little hope of taking a proper share in the social life of the community."

The needs and social ailments to which the Army so readily responds are greater now than they ever were, and for this reason next Saturday's appeal is probably one of the most important that they have ever made. The local Appeal Chairman, Mr Alex Brodie, says that the Salvation Army could well be compared with an iceberg. "It sounds anomalous," he said, "to compare such a warm hearted organisation with an iceberg, but it is easily explained. An iceberg is nine-tenths out of sight, just like the work of the Salvation



Envoy Stephen Buick, 1857-1953, Taranaki's best known Salvation Army figure.

Army. We are all pretty well on Friday, March 29, aware of their involvement with the unfortunate and the dreags of society, but what we see and admire is only the 'tip of the iceberg.' Believe me, their appeal deserves your most generous support." Besides a collection of the Salvation Army appeal envelopes on Saturday, March 30, there will be a bring and buy in the Moller Motor show-rooms on the Devon Street flat work. / The Taranaki target of \$33,500 is a part of a \$1,200,000 national requirement to maintain the Social Service activity and to move ahead with capital projects, which include a modern treatment centre for alcoholics, new homes for the aged, pensioner flats, upgrading of hospital facilities for unmarried mothers, upgrading of childrens' homes and youth