

MEMORIES ON A 90th BIRTHDAY

This weekend the Salvation Army celebrates 90 years of service in New Plymouth — a period of service which began in an atmosphere of unbelievable hardship and resentment and which really only levelled off to public acceptance when the tough days of the Depression came along.

Even before the Salvation Army appeared in New Plymouth for the first time on March 1, 1884, the papers and the public had a lot to say about the "threat" which they believed the Army posed. There was a general fear of the influences which a drum banging organisation led by a self styled "general" might have on trade and other aspects of daily life.

So deep did the currents of fear run that not surprisingly, the lives of the first Army personnel in New Plymouth were made most difficult. When they were not being pelted and ridiculed by the crowd, the law was always not very far from the scene, waiting to play its

part in the persecution. The first to run foul of the law was Captain Charles Robinson who was arrested and hauled into court for disturbing the peace and contravening other town bylaws, notwithstanding the fact that it was Christmas week. In 1885 Lieutenant Kemp also had a brush with the law. Unlike the Robinson incident in which a fine was imposed, Kemp's followers had their musical instruments confiscated. Kemp himself was heavily fined and moved to Hokitika.

As seemed always to be the case with the Army, it took disaster to enable the public to see for themselves what the Salvation Army meant and to learn that



Brougham Streets and Powderham Street. It was the Army who came forward and arranged the storage of goods salvaged from the fire. Despite the inaugural problems, the Salvation Army got away to a fine

Ly came into its own and finally succeeded in blowing away the persistent cobwebs of distrust and dislike which had lingered on from the 1880's. The major project was to take over an old private hotel in Silver Street (where the Atkinson building

now stands) and to turn it into the "Welcome Lodge" with the aid of a lot of hard work and materials donated by local firms.

Here anyone out of work and without the price of a bed could find temporary accommodation. But it was more than just a boarding house. In the back yard an out-of-work cobbler mended donated shoes, literally by the ton. These, along with donated clothing, were loaded onto the Army's ancient truck at regular intervals and taken north for distribution to needy families in the King Country.

On the return journey the truck brought back vegetables to feed the hungry in New Plymouth and old clothing for repair and renovation. The well known Stephen Butch was the man in charge at the King Country end at the time. The Lodge also kept up a massive soup distribution scheme, not only ladling out soup on the spot, but also carting gallons of the food to the suburbs.

There was also a delivery service. Any local firm which had a parcel to deliver would phone the Lodge. There was always a queue of out-of-work people waiting and the delivery job would be passed over to the first in line. Payment was a flat rate of sixpence of which the Army retained one penny.

The Corps Cadet group in 1911. Back row (left to right): John Smith, Miss Smith, Adjutant Norman Adams, Mrs Adams, Gladys Bacock, Bert Bracegrille, Alex Silflet. Front row: May Harvey, May Hawes, Alice Hamilton, Jessie Busby, Hilda Bennett, Eileen Roche and Violet Davidson.

Although the Army is centered right in the middle of the city, outposts have often been opened up to meet a need and maintained for as long as the need is there. For example, there was an outpost at Bell Block before the turn of the century and between about 1890 and 1903 the Army worked among the Maoris at Rahoiti quite extensively. In later years there was an outpost set up at the old Bell Block Airport immediately after the last war in operation.

In more recent years outposts have operated in the suburbs — at Merrifields, Ngamoiti and Veale Road — but these have been closed down now that buses are available to take the children to Sunday School in town.

And what of the Salvation Army today? Their role in the community is basically what it was 90 years ago, but has been subject to massive expansion to keep pace with the changing times.



A 1910 Bible Class. From left, back row: May Harvey, Eileen Roche. ---; front row: Clarice Sturmev, ---, Mrs Wellington, ---, Daisy Allen.

their purpose was more than simply banging on drums on street corners. Two years after their arrival, a major fire in New Plymouth destroyed the whole block of shops between Currie and

start in New Plymouth. Headquarters were first set up in the famous old "Iron store," where the ANZ Bank now stands. Full meetings were conducted by Lieutenant Newbold who had pioneered the work in many places, and it is recorded that within six weeks there were 60 Salvationists on the rolls and the premises were becoming too cramped for comfort.

Operations moved to the Empire Theatre (on Millers site) until the late 1890's when work began on building a wooden Citadel on the present Salvation Army site or Brougham Street.

During their 90 years in New Plymouth, wartime has brought the Salvation Army much more to the public notice. During the First World War the Army carried on for keeping the soldiers overseas supplied with headed writing paper and envelopes. These, it is recalled, were printed by McLeod and Slade (now Masterprint) who treated the Army very generously when it came to charging for their work.

Some of the Army's older members who are still living can recall that the ladies of the Home League spent two nights a week with skeins of wool supplied by the Army, knitting thousands of pink wool singlets and other woolen items for the troops. In the last war the Salvation Army ladies were again to the fore in knitting and packing many hundreds of food parcels.

However, it was during the Depression of the Thirties that the Army real-