

## LITTLE ST JOHN'S

The site for the new Presbyterian church was arrived at by a series of transactions, starting with two acres of flat land bought from the Hawkens and donated by the Duirs family to effect the trade. The central site was bought from Mr E Widner by exchange of the two-acre property in the township.

The start of fund-raising for building was by way of a sale of work by members of the community, in 1911. The sum of thirty three pounds was placed in trust and later supplemented with a further donation by the Duirs of one thousand pounds when an action committee, chaired by the Rev. E Evans decided to proceed with the project in 1924.

Enough bricks to complete the building were left over from the Hawera Hospital project. They were railed to the Mokoia station, loaded onto wagons, and then unloaded again at the site, all by voluntary labour. The builder who had built the hospital set to work on the church, again with voluntary labour from the Presbyterian community. His fee was covered by the Duirs family.

Mr John Hicks donated the communion table and chair, Mr and Mrs DS Richardson and the Lander family donated the organ. Mr J Young of Palmerston North supplied other materials at cost and several local members provided transport. The balance of costs came to fifteen hundred and fifty pounds, leaving the committee debt free. And the little church remained free of debt throughout its life; a local



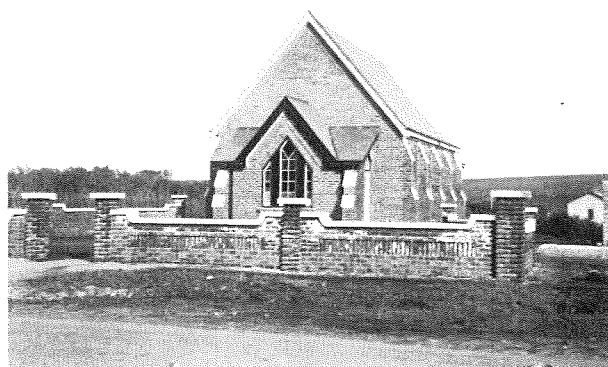
The late Mr. John Hicks.

family picking up every bill as it arrived.

The early services were conducted by the Rev. W Loan. They had been held in the schoolroom for a year, until the hall was built in 1911, and continued in the hall until the church was opened on June 16th 1926. Mr JG Duirs officially opened the door of the new church to its congregation.

For the first five years the services were held under the guidance of the Normanby Home Mission until taken over by St Johns Hawera management as a branch of that church. The congregation enjoyed the loyal services of the Rev. RE Evans for eight years, until 1931, the Rev. HB Gray and later by the Rev. JG Irvine. Thereafter it was placed on the schedule for ministers from St John's in Hawera. Sometimes a racing circuit was needed to start services on time. By contrast, Laurie Taylor walked all the way from Hawera to conduct bible classes on a regular basis. The organ was played by Mrs Lander and then by Mr Richardson.

There was a time when the congregation gave the appearance of a rollicking charismatic church, rather than the generally conservative nature of Presbyterianism. The



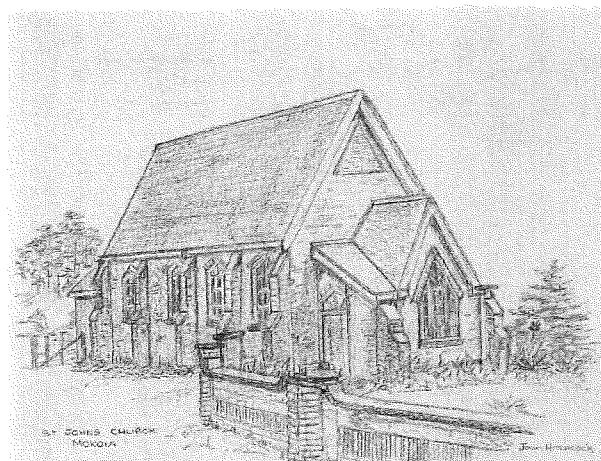
Reverend Don Barker was largely responsible for this interlude; contrasting with the gentle touch of the Reverend John Allen.

Bill Smith, who was a roadman for the council, used to care for the surrounds and mow the lawns, for many years. Stuart Lander took on this responsibility about 1950, and it remained in the Lander family from that time, with Arnold taking the baton from his father.

Many good marriages were made within the walls of the church: couples like Richie and Ethel Harvie; Jean and Charlie Salt and Stuart and Flossie Lander; and later, Delcie and Chris Eccleshall, and their daughter, Irene, who became Mrs Miles. And baptisms too, many of them coming from the Lander clan. There were families who lived on the periphery of the district, who, but for the magnetism of the little church, may have been lost to Mokoia, to the gain of neighbouring communities.

The organ has always been part of the soul of many churches. This was true of the Mokoia Presbyterian fraternity and in this respect the later years were brightened by the music of Mrs Sutherland, and then Delcie Eccleshall up to the time of the last service held at Mokoia, in 1988.

The building has now become a family home of rare character, still smiling warmly at passers by; its red brick structure blending with the school across the road in a message of permanence and dependability.



Sketch of St John's Church by Joan Hitchcock (Deroy) former Mokoia resident.