

NEW PLYMOUTH LITTLE THEATRE PLAYERS.

These recollections about the earliest days of the New Plymouth Little Theatre Players are from two of the founding members of the group, Mrs Ruth Martin and her younger sister Mrs Amy Dinniss, both nee Gentles.

Late in 1932 or early in 1933 the then secretary or director of the Y.W.C.A. in New Plymouth, Miss Mary Greenwell, promoted the idea of a play-reading circle. In the economic circumstances of the time there was a dearth of entertainment for young people, and a handful of them showed enough interest to set up such a group.

Two of the first decisions were that the group was intended for young people so no "marrieds" were admitted, and that, because of the necessity for both young women and young men in play-reading, the group would not be an official YWCA activity. Nevertheless, close association with the "Y" was maintained, and indeed the first play-reading meetings were held in the lounge of the Clarke Memorial Hostel, local headquarters of the YWCA.

Perhaps with a surfeit of confidence, the group soon decided to attempt a production, and on July 25, 1933, they staged two one-act plays in the then fairly new YWCA Hall in Powderham Street. The hall was full, thanks largely to the loyalty of the players' families and friends. In the event, the production was so successful that the group never did return to the YWCA Hall -- it was too small. Productions over the next two or three years were staged in St Mary's Hall, and the reading meetings of the group were held in one of the smaller rooms in the St Mary's Hall complex.

Incidentally, the name "New Plymouth Little Theatre Players" was conjured up when a formal identity seemed necessary for that first production.

Those first plays were produced by Mac Robertson, a local resident with some overseas experience, and the producer for the next three years at least was John Ledgerwood, local director of the newly established New Plymouth YMCA.

In those early years the source of multiple copies of plays was the British Drama League.

In those first years expenses were small, which was as well, since wages were almost too small to be counted. There is a vague recollection of contributing sixpence per member present at each meeting; there is certainly no memory of an annual subscription as such.

The enclosed programmes and newspaper clips referring to the first few productions come from the "archives" of Amy Dinniss.

The early productions were:

July 25, 1933 - "Molly and the Milliner"

"Poached Eggs and Pearls"

November 16, 1933 - "Suppressed Desires"

"The Stocking"

"No Servants"

July 18/19 1934 - "Dearest Mama"

"Shanghai"

"The Mere Man"

1935 - "The Roundabout". This was the group's first three-act effort.

written by the
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