



WAIOTAH  
VALLEY  
SCHOOL

GOLDEN  
JUBILEE

1916 1966

MAY 13TH, 14TH, 15TH.

Souvenir Booklet

745. A8

LC

WHAKATANE MUSEUM  
P.O. BOX 203  
WHAKATANE

## Memories of Trials in the Thirties

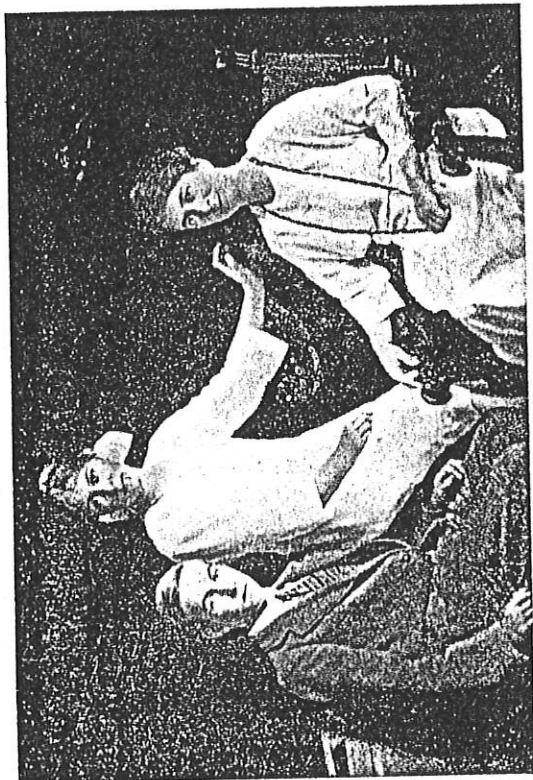
Even in the early 1930's living in the upper Waitotahi Valley could be adventurous; not to say dangerous. We were farming where Mr Rex Jones now lives, and at the time the road was narrow, unmetalled and, during wet weather almost impassable.

I was teaching at the Waitotahi School for a few months prior to the appointment of Mr Grant, and learned from personal experience the hazards of backblocks roads.

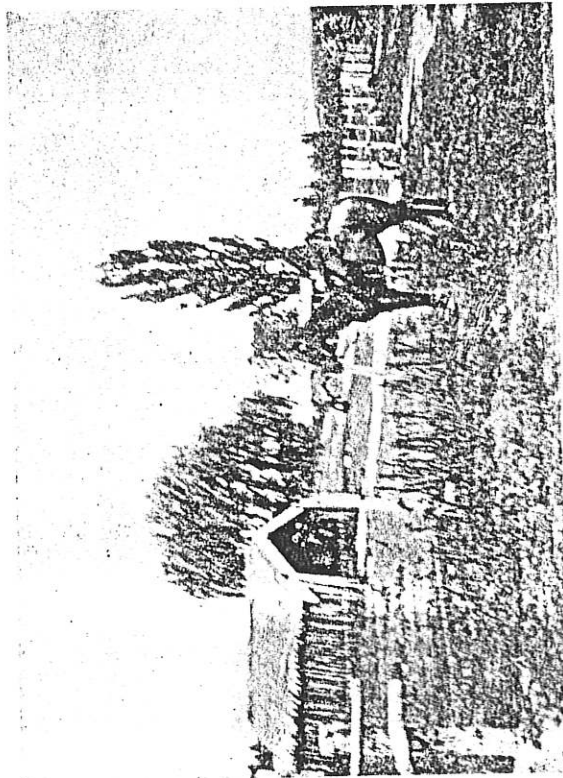
One week we had a terrific downpour of rain and the river and creeks were in high flood. To get to school on Monday morning was quite impossible, but on Monday afternoon we decided to ride across the river and try to get transport to Opotiki. The men crossed the river first with our necessary clothes etc. and returned to get me and my sister, who had spent the week with us.

"My golly, missus, I think that river's too deep for you", was our farm-hand's comment. However we mounted the strongest farm hacks, and got to the river, which looked mighty frightening. In we went, Billy in front with our very small son in his arms, Vic next with our visitor mounted behind him, and me bringing up the rear. The horses had to swim some distance, and several times were nearly torpedoed by rushing timber. We were extremely thankful to reach firm ground on the other side of the river, but our trials were by no means over. There were two dangerously swift creeks still to be crossed and a huge slip in the narrow gorge, where we had to dismount and lead our horses, flounder knee deep through thick yellow mud, and remount on the other side of the slip. The three-mile journey took us more than three hours.

Imagine our relief on meeting Mr Upton, the county engineer, who had come to inspect the damage to the roads. He immediately turned and drove us to Opotiki, where we were thankful for hot baths, dry clothes and a rest. For the remainder of the week, until our road was reopened, I was lucky enough to be taken to and from school by the two carpenters who were enlarging the Waitotahi School, to accommodate the sixty-odd children who were on the roll at that time. I still remember, with grateful thanks, the work done by Mr Upton to keep the road open, also by Jim McCormack, who did a Trojan job of road-mending over an extensive stretch of road, with a pick and shovel as practical as only tools. Much later the job was taken over by Council engineer.



Mrs Gaukrodger, Harold and Kathleen.



Te Kooti's poplar trees at the Tamatea Pa, taken in 1904. About 1880 Te Kooti visited the pa, carrying a poplar sapling as a riding whip. He said, "I have given up the ways of war, and would lead my people in the paths of peace," planting the sapling as a symbol. All the poplars in the valley have been grown from this tree.

## Waiootahi Valley School Beginnings

The lack of a school in the valley caused a great deal of hardship for the children. Those in Gabriel's Gully had to cross a practically liquid swamp, jumping from tussock to tussock, and one old settler recalled bitterly the strain on small arms, when his older sisters jumped him across the watery gaps between tussocks. Children in the lower part of the valley, or at Ohiwa, had a journey of at least five miles to Paerata, crossing by the lower bridge, for the one at the hall was not opened till 1913; and to Kutarere almost as much, for the road followed the river to join Toone's road near Mr L. Drury's house, a weary trip either on foot or riding.

So in 1915 the need for a school was desperate, and repeated applications to the Education Board at last brought a sympathetic hearing, and a teacher was appointed in 1916. A large room in the house now owned and occupied by Mr Neil Looney was used at first, until one room, half of the present main building, was built in 1917, with porch and shelter shed at a cost of about £350. It was a centre of social activities for some years, church services, dances and efforts to raise funds for Red Cross during the 1914-18 War, and for building the Settlers' Hall, were held at the school. In the late twenties, with a roll of 56, another room was added. The bare windswept knoll was very difficult to beautify; nothing would grow until in Mr F. Grant's time wattles were planted as a windbreak, and other trees and shrubs were able to take root.

With Miss G. Jurd's skilled care a lovely garden flourished and succeeding teachers carried on the good work. Suitable land was acquired and a teacher's residence was built in 1940. Throughout the years school committees, Parent-Teacher Association and settlers have worked hard to raise money and improve the surroundings, and the once bare hill now carries a three-roomed school, with learners' bath, good playing fields, gardens and lawn. Money has been raised for teaching aids such as a sound system, film strip and movie projector, typewriter and duplicator, and a good library. Buses now bring pupils from Ohiwa and the Kahikatea, and the lower valley — an extension of the upper Waiootahi Valley road enabling the children from the Kahikatea to travel all the way by bus, instead of a two-mile walk morning and night. The district can be proud of its efforts.



## A Letter From First Day Pupil

Frequent mention was made by old pupils and parents at the Jubilee celebrations of Mrs Gaukrodger, the first teacher appointed in 1916, who taught pupils of all ages in the single room of a farm-house before the Waitotahi Valley school was built, and for some time afterwards. Conditions were primitive at the little one-room school then, and teaching all classes from primers to semi-adults was not easy — all the more credit to one who carried on for so long a time, and is well remembered by her pupils. Mrs Gaukrodger afterwards taught at Auckland Grammar School for a time, and at Papatoetoe, then returned to England.

In a recent letter, her son, Mr Harold Gaukrodger regrets missing the Jubilee celebrations — he was probably the first pupil from Waitotahi Valley school to go on to Auckland Grammar, and tells of his mother and sister's life in England. Miss Kathleen Gaukrodger is now Secretary of a Girls' Secondary School at Newton Abbot, Devon. Mr Gaukrodger says: "I will never forget the trips up and down in the Ngatiawa from Ohiwa, and remember Ohiwa well, as we lived there for a while in the old store and father was the N.S.Co.'s agent. I can still remember the old suppliers' names of the Cheese Factory at Waitotahi. Mr Workman was manager and father was secretary. It goes this way — Drury, Looney, Wilkins, Moody, Wright, Toone, Rowe, Du Pontet, Bennett, Jurd — probably many of the descendants of those families are still in the district. I have only been through Opotiki a couple of times in the last few years. About the only people I have ever met since from the district are Trissie Jurd and Rosie Vanstone.

## Memories

During the serious infantile paralysis epidemic about 1925, when the schools were closed for some weeks, first assistant to be appointed, Miss Eileen Kennedy, prepared lessons for all her pupils, leaving them at stated times, so that the children would not congregate, in special places on roadside banks for each family. Neat little packets were made for each pupil, and the work was collected and corrected regularly. Miss Kennedy must have worked hard and walked many miles each week to keep up the lessons.

M. A. P. A. N.E.

## Roll of Honour

3037 Pte. Robert Ian Goldsmith. M.I.D. Killed in Action Western Desert 21/7/42. 18th Auckland Rifle Battalion, 1st Echelon. Aged 26.

Fleet Air Arm—1939-45. Pilot Officer A. H. P. Archibald. Killed on Active Service. Buried in Fogo Church Cemetery, Scotland.

## A Tribute

In thinking about the Jubilee, memories of three men came to mind, whose work was of untold benefit to the school.

Firstly, Bert Rau, a committee member and Chairman for many years, a man with a love of children and great community spirit. If we met him on our way to school, he always had a word for us, and indeed, we looked for him. At school picnics he was always to the fore, organising races, or boiling the billy.

Jerry Jessop served on the committee, also with a marked degree of success. He also was loved by children, and his dealings were always touched with humour and friendliness towards his fellows. The welfare of the teachers and children were put first.

A well-loved teacher and friend was Ces. Sergeant, a man with a wonderful sense of humour, a man who always treated pupils fairly. Rarely was there any need for punishment, and all pupils loved and respected him. I found him extremely helpful as a young teacher. Inexperience brought mistakes, but never a direct rebuke. One's mistakes were pointed out so tactfully. His dramatic reading of stories after lunch were eagerly awaited by the children, and if the lower classes were busy and quiet, I loved to open the class-room door and enjoy the reading also.

These were three people who loved and understood children. They realised their obligations to the school and district as a whole. Their race is run, but school and community are richer for their having passed through on life's journey.

W. J. MERRIE (Du Pontet.)

## Request For School at Ohiwa

Copy of letter written by Mr Frank Ducker, in relation to a school at Ohiwa. Some words are missing, owing, apparently, to damage by fire. The letter was loaned by the Education Board.

"Mr R. Stewart,  
School Inspector,

Dear Sir,

I am forwarding a map and locality plan of Ohiwa, on the margin of which are particulars and positions of settlers interested in getting a school. All the parents from Nos. 1 to 6 are unanimous in having the school at a site marked 0, in sand near pohutukawas. It is dry, central, and belongs, I believe, to the Marine Reserve as Stock Reserve.

At present there is an empty house (new) . . . room about 24 ft. x 12 ft., well lighted . . . lean-to at the back, containing a range. Marked S. Mr Moir's and Holloway's children could cross by boat, the channel is . . . at low tide. All other children could ride. I think this could be obtained for a school. The owner, Mr Millet, of . . . asks 4/- a week rent, one acre in area. Mr Rawlinson, mentioned in your last visit . . . has written saying he will be . . . of the month, he will probably take up land and reside here permanently. He has seven children, all of school age, except the two youngest. You will see by the plan it is out of the question for Ohiwa residents to send their children to Waitohi and Kutarere school, especially for very young children.

Mrs Ducker, nee Lily A. Nyes, certified teacher E4, 1895, will accept the position of temporary teacher any time after the end of the year 1906, providing you cannot obtain a teacher for the proposed school.

The plan will show, and I trust you will impress it on the Education Board, that Ohiwa Harbour will probably be the port of Opotiki before long, in which case there is certain to be an influx of population.

Yours faithfully,  
Frank Ducker."

## Waitohi Valley School Jubilee

1916 - 1966

### — P R O G R A M M E —

MAY 13th:

7.30 p.m.: Get-together Social at Waitohi Settlers Hall.

MAY 14th:

10.00 a.m.: Welcome to Teachers, Roll Call, Group Photographs, Entertainment by Maori Youth Group.

7.00 p.m.: Banquet at Pakowhai Hall, 270 guests seated, Guests of Honour, Hon. Percy Allen and Mrs Allen, Mr Chatfield, Mayor of Opotiki, and Mrs Chatfield.

MAY 15th (SUNDAY):

At School. Open-air Church Service. Minister, Rev. Ian Grant.

## The First Waitohi School

A one-roomed school was built on Paerata Ridge in 1895, and was named Waitohi. It was badly needed being the first school in the county west of Opotiki town, and served a large district, beginning with a roll of 40, pupils coming from as far as Ohiwa and the Waitohi Valley, on horseback or on foot. Gabriel's Gully children had to cross the undrained swamp. The first teacher was Mr William Chappell, member of a well-known Bay family. Mr Alec De Montalk had his first sole charge position there — he was the youngest member of a large family well-known in educational circles in New Zealand. Later he returned to Opotiki as head of the high school, leaving it for a position in Suva. When the Waitohi Valley School was opened, the name of the ridge school was changed to Paerata, and the school finally closed for lack of pupils, a school bus being later provided to take pupils to Opotiki Primary School.

## Early Days at Waiootahi Valley School

"I am now head of Aramoho School, Wanganui, 560 children, a slight change from early days at Waiootahi Valley. You'll note, however, that the figures 56 still seem to have significance in my school life.

"I too, have noted the looks of suspicion and disbelief on the faces of young teachers here, when I mention that oversize sole charge. I do remember too, the one room sitting alone on the hill, where the sand blew round in circles. The single iron bar across the top inside the building, was about all that held it together, and in a strong wind the walls appeared to go in and out like a concertina. I took over the school in September 1927, with a roll of about 25. In 1928 the roll rose to the low thirties, and finally in early 29 the roll reached 50. In those days it was necessary to keep an average roll of 35 for two terms before an assistant was appointed. Hence the roll of 56 before an assistant was finally appointed towards the end of that year.

"I remember too, the committee's struggle to get a two-roomed building, and for that final term of 1929, the assistant and I taught, both in the same room, another experience which would bring howls of protest these days. Finally the Health Department was approached, and the Health Officer from Gisborne threatened to close down the school unless a new building was forthcoming. This I never saw, as I moved to Te Awamutu at the beginning of 1930.

"Detailed experiences I find hard to pin down at this long distance in time, but my memories of Waiootahi are certainly very pleasant ones. I still have two snaps, one of the old building itself, and one of a few of the pupils, which I will enclose with this letter. I would like them back though, when you have finished with them. Should any worthwhile memories for the booklet occur to me, I shall forward them — but perhaps the few facts I have given may make a paragraph.

"I do remember the dances we used to run for school funds in the old hall; they were always crowded. The only single incident that comes to mind is when the school doctor came to give injections, possibly diphtheria, I think, and Jack Papuni disappeared into the ti-tree and could not be found.

"Give my regards to any who may remember me — the Rau's, the Papuni's, and also of course, Bill and Marguerite. Kind regards to yourself, and good luck to Jubilee preparations. I shall certainly make an effort to be there."

Yours faithfully,

J. D. JOLL ( k ).

## Early Schools In the District

Tom Bell, who was licensee of the Ohiwa Hotel in the late seventies, tells in the "Crusoes of Sunday Island" by Elsie K. Morton, how on a visit to Auckland, with strict instructions from his wife to bring back someone to teach the children, he met in Queen Street, Sergeant Thomas Avent, whom he had befriended during his stay at Ohiwa after Avent had been blinded in the Maori War, and had procured for him the job as teacher of the little school there. This appears to have been the first school in the area, apart from Opotiki, which school began in the seventies also. Old residents near Ohiwa remembered Mr Avent, who had been a sergeant in the militia. He returned to Sunday Island with Mr Bell, and remained there to teach the Bell children for some years.

## School At Ohiwa

About 1906 the growing number of children of both races in the near neighbourhood made the provision of a school a necessity, and after some correspondence Mrs Frank Ducker was appointed as teacher, her own large family swelling the roll. This school took some of the children from the Paerata school. Later a young couple called Graham followed as teachers, and finally the school closed.

Mrs John Gordon and her daughter had an aided school at Waiwhero for some time, and in 1914, with more children in the district, Miss M. E. Young was appointed as teacher at a school held in a one-roomed whare on Ruakaka Station. Many and varied were her experiences, and Miss Young, now Mrs Purvis, wrote to congratulate Waiootahi Valley School on its jubilee, and recalled many amusing experiences at Ruakaka. One day a Maori boy brought a bag of eels and asked permission to leave them in the fireplace. Later she noticed unusual expressions on the faces of the class, and looked down to see a mass of wriggling eels about her feet — she had thought the eels were dead. Another day, after the older boys had been to a circus in Opotiki, she was very startled to see all the school children's ponies at full gallop on the rough track, all riders facing the ponies' track. Fortunately there were no mishaps.

## Do You Remember ?

Mr Grant and his tuning fork, and singing "Come to the Fair," "Old Uncle Cobley" and "My Old Kentucky Home".

Dead birds in the tank being fished out by the big boys.

Cocoa on cold winter days, made in the big billy on the stove, and dispensed by Maria Martin and Marguerite Du Pontet.

Willow cricket bats made by the Rau boys and wielded with good effect by the same boys and George Carter and Bill McKinnon.

Doris Looney starting school as a five-year-old, riding a pony with special stirrups on the saddle.

Basketball matches, always attended by the Bill Jeffery's, when three boys were allowed in the team. Jack Papuni (young Jack) was a cracker centre.

Jack Joll arriving on his motor bike.

The curtain dividing his school into junior and senior.

Mr Grant teaching the secrets of osmosis and the names of pasture grasses he grew and labelled in the school plots where the schoolhouse now stands.

Surreptitious slides on the step rail at the school entrance when no teacher was looking. The boot scraper — it's still the same one in the same place.

Playing King-a-seeny on cold days, the whole school except the primers.

The skill of the Maori children with their whips and tops.  
—J.M.

The Napier earthquake, and Mr Grant's efforts to get us all outside quickly, and the sight of the school rocking on its blocks.

Basketball matches, with a tall boy playing in a waistcoat, and almost able to drop the ball into the goal.

Mrs Wilson sending us to find our own switches for her to use to punish us for some now forgotten crime

— B.



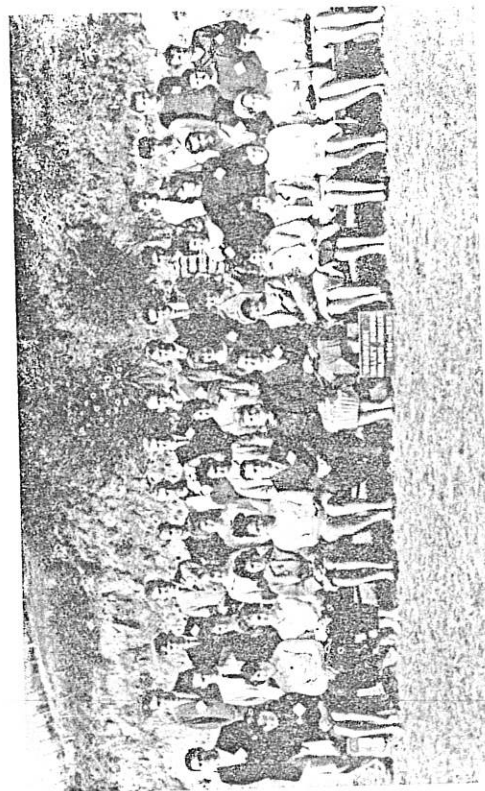
The Jubilee Committee.



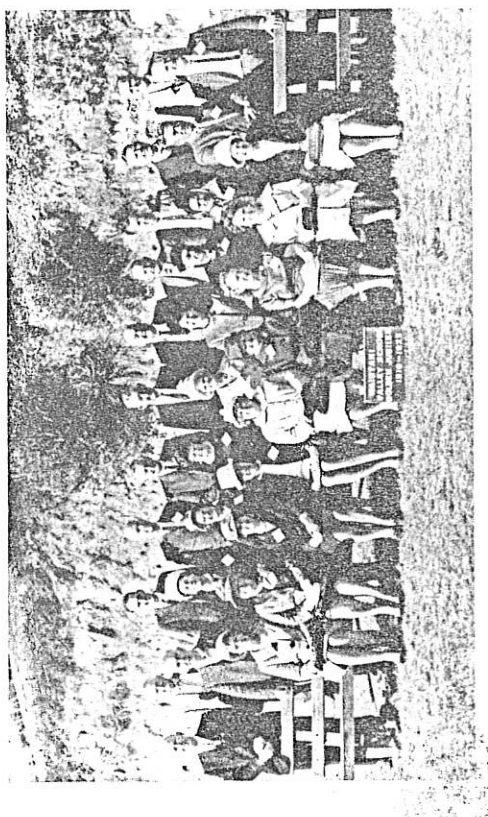
Past and Present Teachers at the Jubilee.



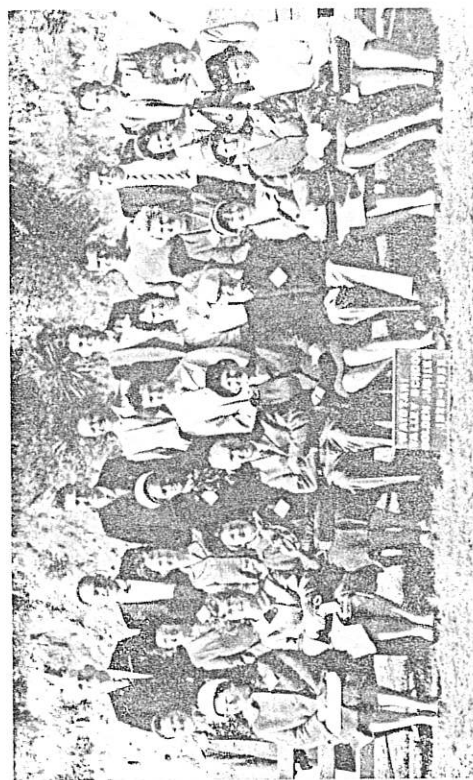
1936 - 45.



1946 - 55.



Pupils and Teachers, 1916 - 25.

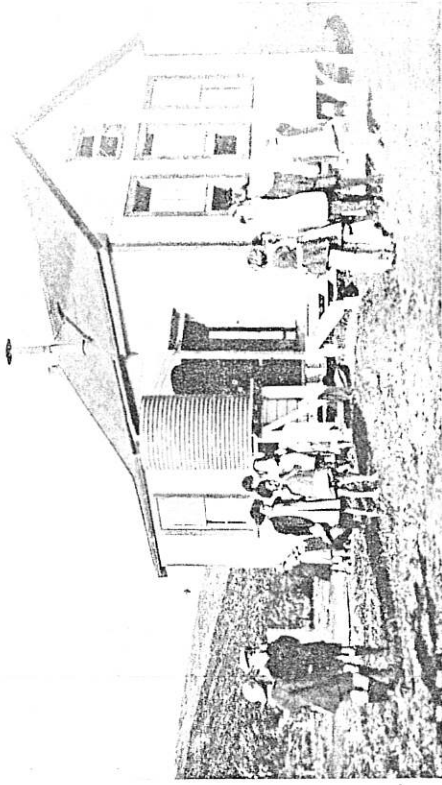


1926 - 35.

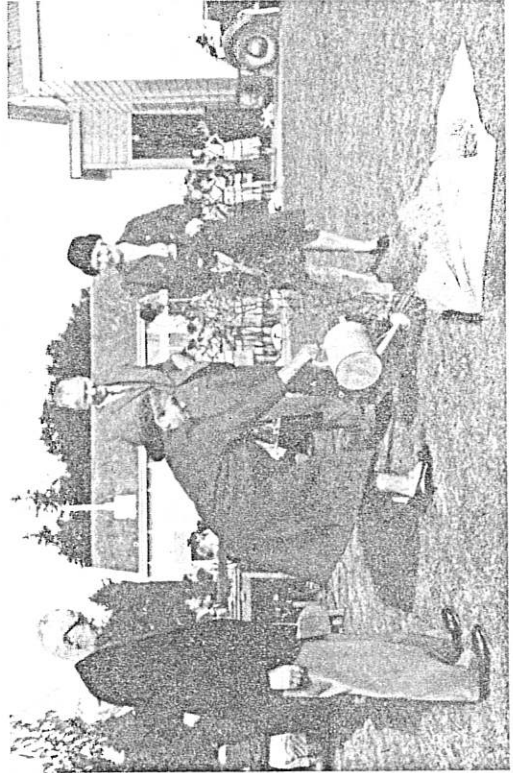




1956 - 66.



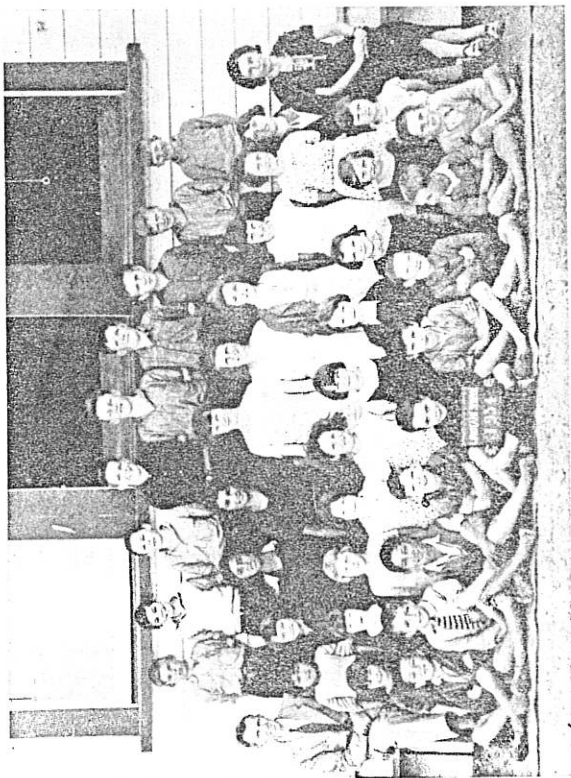
The School in 1926.



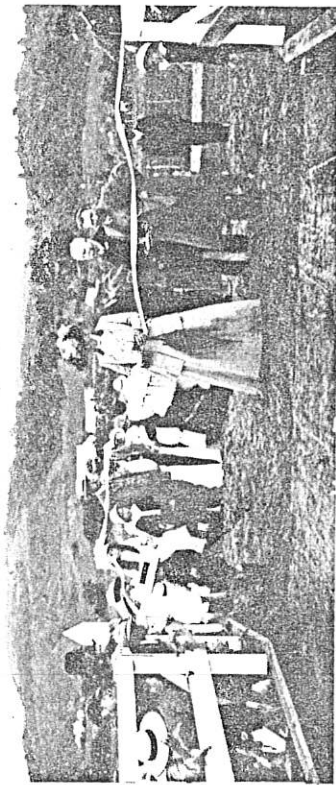
Mr J. D. Joff, Mrs Amoamo, Mr F. K. Grant and Mrs V. Wilson planting the Golden Kowhai commemorative tree.



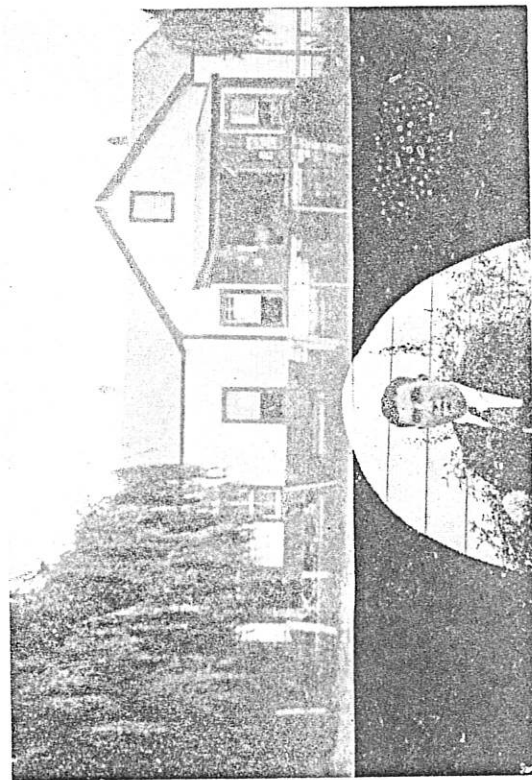
Pupils, 1926.



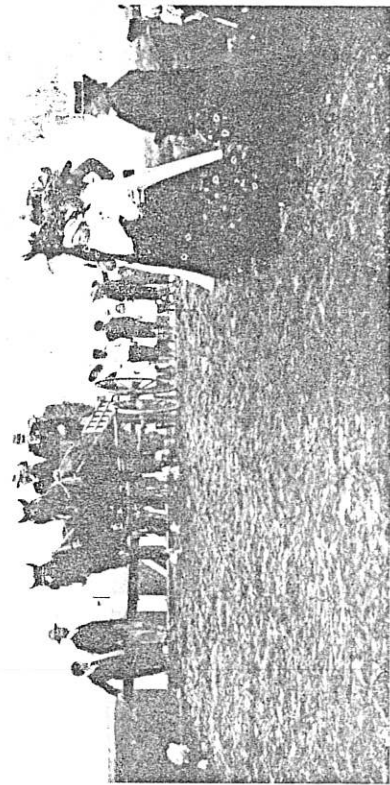
Mr Grant and Miss Doris Payne and Pupils, 1934.



Mrs F. P. Drury cutting the ribbon at the opening of the Waiotahi Bridge near present hall in 1913. Mr F. P. Drury and Hon. J. B. Gow are standing beside Mrs Drury.



The Waiotahi Cheese Factory about 1916 with Mr Ted Workman, manager, inset.



The first vehicle across the bridge. Mr Henry Elliott, then Mayor of Opotiki, is driving, with Mr F. P. Drury beside him.