

New Zealand Mayoresses At Historic Tea-Party At Government House

Some 30 mayoresses of the Dominion's main cities and towns were among the 200 guests at an historic reception at Government House, Wellington, which marked the conclusion of an historic task—the preparation of a set of dining-chairs for use during the Royal visit to New Zealand. Practically all the guests who had accepted Her Excellency Lady Freyberg's gracious invitation had helped with the tapestry on the chairs which bear parts of the coats of arms, shields or seals used by the 38 main cities and towns. Many had, of course, travelled long distances from places as far distant as Auckland and Bluff to represent groups of workers who had responded magnificently to Lady Freyberg's suggestion that the women of the Dominion should combine in this very personal gesture to His late Majesty King George VI, Queen Elizabeth and Princess Margaret when their visit to New Zealand was planned.

"It was a bitter disappointment to us all that the visit so eagerly and lovingly prepared for did not take place," said Her Excellency in welcoming the guests and thanking them for their wonderful co-operation in the project. "We hope that the skill and industry shown by the women in making these beautiful tapestries," she added, "will be of interest to Queen Elizabeth II when, in 1954, she will be the first reigning sovereign to visit this Dominion."

Lady Freyberg's remark that she was thrilled with the wonderful co-operation shown throughout the Dominion and delighted with the large number who had accepted her invitation was echoed by many of the women who thronged the ball-room, where the chairs were arranged in spectacular, tiered formation and flood-lit. "It is really thrilling to see them all completed. I had no idea that they would look so wonderful," was a remark heard on all sides.

Later, when the guests came back from tea in the dining-room, the chairs had been ranged round the ball-room where they could easily be examined in detail and there was much friendly comparing of notes by the women who had helped to embroider them, not to mention trial "sittings" to test their comfort.

Adorning the back of the chair from WELLINGTON is the shield from the city's new coat of arms, registered only last year at the College of Heralds, London, where it was found that the former one—designed in 1878 to be the council's official seal—was not heraldically correct. The college designed the new one on lines as similar as possible to the old. In addition to a ship, fleece and wheat, representing trade, commerce and exports, there are five roundels incorporated from the Duke of Wellington's own coat of arms. The Mayoress, Mrs. R. L. Macalister, attended the

party, as did the 20 workers responsible for the capital's chair-cover. Convener of the group was Mrs. A. L. B. Nairn, who undertook this task as well as her general supervision of the tapestry all over the Dominion.

"Three groups of women did the tapestry work for the AUCKLAND chair," said the Mayoress, Lady Allum. Members of the North Auckland and of the South Auckland Federations of Women's Institutes embroidered the seat, and the arms and back were worked by members of the arts and crafts circle of the Lyceum Club. A large number of the workers travelled to the capital for the party with Lady Allum who,

to come in and add a stitch or two," she added, "and about 150 took the opportunity of sharing in the work—quite a number of men among them."

A returned serviceman, S. Gamble, who was at Government House with his wife, was one of the chief embroiderers of the OAMARU chair. He has been interested in embroidery since he was a lad and has quite a collection of needlework pictures in his home at Waikouaiti. The Mayoress, Mrs. M. F. Cooney, and six other Oamaruvians travelled to Wellington for the function.

Representing the Mayoress of DUNEDIN, Mrs. L. Wright, at the reception was Mrs. Hugh Speight,

Four women received special mention from Lady Freyberg when she was thanking the guests for their co-operation.

Miss Dorothy Wills, an architect in the Ministry of Works, had with undaunted energy collected the coats of arms and emblems which were adapted for the designs on the chair-backs and had assembled the materials which were required for the embroideries. She was assisted by Miss Margaret Nairn who drew the charts for the designs and who has since left to study at the Royal School of Needlework in London. Long hours of work over week-ends and in holidays had been undertaken by Miss Hilary Newton, of the Correspondence School staff, who had painted the designs on the 76 canvases which were needed. Finally, "that brilliant tapestry worker," Mrs. A. L. B. Nairn, had not only supervised working parties at Government House to prepare the canvases before they were sent to the various mayoresses with sample stitches worked for their guidance, but had voluntarily undertaken a round of visits to nearly all centres offering advice, encouragement and practical help. She had also steamed and stretched all the canvases for the upholsterers.

on behalf of the guests, thanked Her Excellency for the opportunity of playing a part in this memorable national project.

Working parties met regularly in the NAPIER Council Chambers under constant supervision of the Mayoress, Mrs. E. R. Spriggs, until the tapestry was almost completed, she told us. "On the last day we issued an open invitation to members of the public

who told us that the large number of tapestry workers in Dunedin also included two men. An ex-Merchant Navy officer, Irvine Hastie, who is an amputee, did some of the work at his home in Mornington, and his wife also assisted. Ken Ramsay also did part of the embroidery. The women workers included members of the Otago Women's Club, Women's Division of Federated Farmers, the Dominion Federation of Towns-



THE BRAND-NEW COAT OF ARMS acquired by Napier since it attained the status of city two years ago was used in the design on tapestry embroidered under supervision of the Mayoress, Mrs. E. R. Spriggs. She appears on right with Mrs. A. Kirkpatrick, Deputy-Mayoress of Hastings.

women's Guilds and the Dunedin Travel Club. The last-named also completed the Queenstown chair-cover, the medallion of which had been worked by a Queenstown man, Donald Grant.

Members of the League of Mothers, the Taranaki Women's Club, Women's Institutes and the W.D.F.F. were among those who worked the tapestry for NEW PLYMOUTH. Mrs. E. R. C. Gilmour, the Mayoress, was accompanied at the reception by five representatives of the group, including the convener, Mrs. J. L. Svendsen, whose school-girl daughter Anne had embroidered some of the canvas.

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"A number of patients in Waikato Hospital assisted with embroidering the HAMILTON chair-cover," related the Deputy-Mayoress of Hamilton, Mrs. A. L. Fow.

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The historic and sacred rock, Pohaturua, venerated by the Maori people for the past 600 years, is the crest on the symbolic shield from WHAKATANE. From the Mayoress, Mrs. S. S. Shapley, who was accompanied by three members of the tapestry group, we learned a little of the history of this rock which stands at the entrance to the business area of the township. In ancient times Pohaturua was used solely for the performance of sacred ceremonies by Maori priests, a custom commenced from the arrival of the Mataatua canoe,

of the settlement. The embroidery, which was shared by many sections of the community, said the Deputy-Mayoress, Mrs. R. E. Jack, was passed from hand to hand on frames lent by Wanganui Girls' College.

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In CHRISTCHURCH a number of willing workers had co-operated to complete the city's chair, said the Mayoress, Mrs. R. M. Macfarlane. "We were fortunate," she added, "to have the help of a very skilful needlewoman, Mrs. Walker, Rangiora, whose work won recognition at a Festival of Britain exhibition."

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A great deal of the fine embroidery in the PALMERSTON NORTH tapestry is the splendid work of Miss Linda Monro, who is confined to her chair with arthritis, we were told by Mrs. G. Tremaine, Mayoress of Palmerston North. From this city came eight of the working party.

Maori and pakeha women's organisations combined to make the tapestry for the DANNEVIRKE chair. The shield depicted is an interesting reminder of the origin of the town which was at first a Danish settlement with a name meaning Danish fort. The fort is shown on the shield with the date, 1892. The Mayoress, Mrs. E. Gibbard, and four of her helpers came down to Wellington for the party.

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The seal of the Borough of WHANGAREI, which was incorporated in 1896, was made from a design submitted by the first Mayor, the late J. M. Killen. It shows a luscious bunch of grapes, for the district in those days had many vineyards which are recalled to-day by the names Vinetown and Vine Street. The old seal makes an attractive design on the chair sent from this Northland town.

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There was nothing dramatic about the working of the LEVIN tapestry, we learned from the Mayoress, Mrs. A. W. Parton, who was present with five of the principal workers. "The women enjoyed doing the embroidery," they said, voicing a sentiment which was repeated whenever we asked for comment on the project.

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Mount Egmont dominates the design in the shield of STRATFORD, from which had come Mrs. N. H. Moss, the Mayoress, and five of the residents who worked on the tapestry. The greater part of the cover was embroidered by members of the Stratford Women's Club, though other organisations were represented in the working party.

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On the HAWERA shield, also, Mount Egmont is prominent. The Mayoress of Hawera, Mrs. L. H. Clapham, was accompanied at the reception by 14 of her helpers.

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The original name of WANGANUI, known as Petre till 1854, is commemorated on the chair-back worked by the women of that city. The shield actually belongs to the family of Lord Petre, one of the founders

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GISBORNE was fortunate in having as Mayoress, Mrs. H. H. Barker, an expert needlewoman who has judged at many shows and competitions, and who was therefore specially competent to supervise the embroidering of that centre's chair. The seat, she related, was made by countrywomen and townswomen undertook the back with its shield showing Captain Cook's ship, the Endeavour. Gisborne has special link with Cook who made his first landing in New Zealand there.

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In FEILDING, too, the women were organised into town and country groups by the Mayoress, Mrs. C. B. McClure. There, also, the townswomen embroidered the back of the chair.

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Mrs. F. G. Briggs, Mayoress of LYTTTELTON, was accompanied by several of the other Lyttelton residents who had embroidered the chair-cover. Most of the tapestry had been done at night, we were told, as some of the workers were business women and others were women with young families. The seal for Lyttelton, specially made in England and adopted in 1862, was used for the design.

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To represent HASTINGS, the Deputy-Mayoress, Mrs. A. Kirkpatrick, attended the reception as the Mayoress, Mrs. R. D. Brown, sailed for England early in May. "Among those who worked the tapestry for the Hastings chair-cover was an 85-year-old lady, Miss A. Masters," said Mrs. Kirkpatrick. The Hastings shield features the sheep, farm implements, fruit, wheat and milk-cans of a country community.

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From NELSON, which since 1874 has used Lord Nelson's ship, the Victory, as its seal, came the Mayoress, Mrs. J. A. Harley, who spent four days in the capital. Two women did the tapestry work for the Nelson chair, Mrs. W. A. Kenning and Mrs. F. Reeves, both of whom attended the reception.

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Deputising for the Mayoress, Mrs. C. V. Chamberlain, Mrs. D. V. Thomas was one of a party of three who had travelled from WAIROA to