

*John Bell Richardson*  
*A Minister of the*  
*Methodist Church of New Zealand*

**PRESIDENT OF CONFERENCE 1881**



John Bell Richardson.

**A Memorial Marking the Eightieth  
Anniversary of His Death**

**Compiled by C. T. J. LUXTON, 1961**

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## FOREWORD

My interest in the late Rev. J. B. Richardson was stimulated when as a child I first heard from my grandmother the story of his tragic death. His ministry touched three generations of our family by whom he was held in high regard. My great-grandfather was a local preacher and was in close association with Mr. Richardson during his Kaiapoi pastorate. As a girl my grandmother had a deep affection for the minister and his bride. The early friendship was renewed when Mr. Richardson was appointed to St. Albans Circuit, and in 1880 he officiated at my grandmother's wedding. The following year he baptized the infant girl who became my mother. Within a few weeks of that service the beloved minister lost his life.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincere thanks are expressed to members of the Richardson family who graciously made available for my perusal preserved letters of J. B. Richardson, his diary and records of 1865, also the diary of Mary Ann Hay written during her voyage to New Zealand in 1868. In particular I make mention of the late Mrs. H. G. Winstone, youngest daughter of J. B. Richardson, and his grandchildren Dr. H. L. Richardson of London and Mrs. A. MacClement.

Also I thank Mr. R. Inrocchi of Dunedin, sometime of Fortrose, for details from his comprehensive records of the wreck of the *s.s. Tararua*, and Mr. Lobbe of the Wyndham district through whose kindness during the Church Conference in Invercargill in 1960 I was able to visit the scene of the Tararua disaster.

C.T.J.I.

## John Bell Richardson

### ENGLISH BACKGROUND

The Richardsons were an old Yorkshire family whose ancestry is traceable for some three hundred years.

**LUKE RICHARDSON**, son of Luke, son of Thomas, was born at Barmby Moor, near Pocklington in 1773. While in his late teens he became a Methodist. He married Ann Cook in about 1803. There is a tradition that Ann was converted to Methodism while still a young woman and in consequence was turned out of the house by her father. She found refuge with an Anglican clergyman, became a governess and later married Luke Richardson. They had a family of six girls and four boys.

Luke was a man of some education and combined the callings of farmer and school teacher. He ultimately became the proprietor of a boarding school for 'sons of gentlemen.' Known as Northgate House, the school appears in the list of Academies of Market Weighton in 1823. It acquired an excellent reputation and pupils came there from all over Yorkshire. Ann ably assisted her husband in the school, and in due course their children also became teachers in the establishment. Though originally for boys only, Luke and Ann included their daughters in the classes, and admitted other girls also, the school thus becoming one of the few co-educational schools of those times. Luke died in 1852 but the school continued under the direction of members of his family until it was closed in 1880.

In the Wesleyan Methodist Magazine of 1852 there appeared an obituary notice which stated concerning Luke Richardson—'for sixty two years he had been a Methodist, and during the greater part of that time a diligent and faithful Class Leader and Local Preacher.'

**HENRY RICHARDSON**, Luke's second son was born at Market Weighton in 1809. He was educated in his father's school and at quite an early age began to assist with the teaching. About the age of seventeen he was soundly converted and soon afterwards became a local preacher. He prepared himself as a candidate for the Methodist ministry and was appointed to his first circuit at the age of 23.

Four years later he married Jane Elizabeth Bell, of Portington Hall, Eastington, East Yorkshire. The Bells were an old landed family. They had been personal friends of John Wesley who sometimes stayed at Portington Hall. In his later years when he became too old to ride his horse the Bells provided horses for his carriage whenever he was in East Yorkshire. They also built a Methodist Chapel on their estate, though they did not relinquish allegiance to the Anglican Church. Later generations of the Bell family have cherished a walking stick that belonged to John Wesley.



Rev. Henry Richardson



Portington Hall. Home of Jane Elizabeth Bell. John Wesley periodically visited here.  
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Jane Elizabeth was described as "very bright and amusing, a great reader, a good talker, of good judgment and common sense. She made the best of life's ills through the many changes in a minister's life." And 'many changes' was an accurate description of her lot, for she followed her husband through no less than twenty circuits. Only once did the Rev. Henry remain three years in a circuit, moving on regularly every two years 'because Mr. Wesley thought that was the best length of stay.' During those unsettled years Jane Elizabeth bore Henry nine children, four daughters and five sons.

After forty-four years in the itinerant work he became a supernumerary and died in 1884 in the fifty-first year of his ministry. He was described as a "tall and handsome man, vigorous and punctual. As a preacher he was strongly evangelical, earnest and practical, judicious and conscientious, greatly loved by his brethren."

**JOHN BELL RICHARDSON** was the eldest son of the Rev. Henry and Jane Elizabeth. He was born on January 18th, 1840, at Sneinton, Nottingham.

All Methodist ministers faced the difficulty of the education of their families because of the itinerant system, and when John Bell Richardson was nine years of age he was sent to Woodhouse Grove School near Leeds, a school for the sons of Methodist ministers.

Woodhouse Grove School provided a good all-round education, with emphasis on the classics. The background of instruction was Latin which the boys began immediately they entered the school. Greek was taken in the middle school. Woodhouse Grove was in advance of the public schools of the time in that science was one of the subjects taught, and one room was set up as a science lecture room. Gymnastics and athletics were also included in the curriculum.

The scholars were all sons of ministers. None of the boys came from what could be called well-to-do homes and they all knew that their parents had to make sacrifices to give them their education. The boys usually entered Woodhouse Grove at nine years of age and remained until they were fifteen years old.

John Bell Richardson was at the school from 1849 to 1855. During that time others of his brothers came to the school also. The school roll records that there was a Richardson on the roll without intermission for the twenty years from 1849 to 1869 when John's youngest brother left the school.

A sudden illness interrupted John's schooling towards the end of his course. The illness, a form of fever accompanied by depression recurred from time to time throughout his life. It was probably brought on by a shock sustained when he dived through broken ice and swam round beneath the ice to locate and rescue one of his brothers who had fallen through the ice while skating.

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John had been a good scholar and was consistently at the top of his class. Years later he wrote to his youngest brother then at Woodhouse Grove School and encouraged him in his studies, urging him to be a better scholar than he himself had been, stating that after his illness he 'gained only third place, never being able 'to recover his former place in the class.'

About this time he entered into a deepened spiritual experience. Though he had never 'deserted Christ' he had passed through a time of questioning and spiritual unrest, but following his illness he became soundly converted and sought ways of serving his Lord.

On leaving the school John found employment with a candle maker, at Yarm. The task involved the cutting up of tallow, melting it, dipping wicks, and as they dried dipping again until the candles attained the required size. Many of the candles were of the larger sizes as used in churches, candles being the normal means of lighting at that time. During this period John was associated with the Chapel in Yarm, which was perhaps the oldest of the picturesque octagonal Wesleyan Chapels.

Anxious that his sons should be established in a more settled way of life than he himself had led, the Rev. Henry Richardson gained employment for both John and his brother Henry Luke with a well-established drapery firm. Henry Luke continued in this employment, but John Bell was not happy in that occupation. He desired an occupation that would enable him to fit himself for some specific form of Christian service. To that end he secured himself a position with a druggist and then proceeded to study pharmacy.

He made rapid progress and soon he was not only mixing drugs but was also assisting at the retail counter on market days. On reaching the age of 21 he was appointed dispenser at the County Hospital, and continued as head of the wholesale department of his firm. His salary was then increased from £20 to £25 per annum. He was delighted with his progress, but feared lest Jove of money should become his besetting sin, and sought to counter that by a 'large hearted liberality.'

He had begun preaching at the age of seventeen and he exercised his gifts with acceptance in many chapels. In 1862 he was preaching in and around Lincoln, sometimes taking three services on a Sunday and walking many miles to the several appointments. His spare time was given to sermon preparation in which he received the encouragement of his father who helped him with gifts of books as the nucleus of a theological library.

Though his employment offered splendid prospects John Bell felt increasingly drawn toward the ministry. At last the sense of call was so insistent that he could no longer refuse it, and having gained his father's assent he offered himself as a candidate for the ministry. He passed with credit all the tests and usual examinations, was accepted for

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training and was designated for Richmond College. He had offered for the 'general work' of the ministry, which implied his willingness to serve either at home or overseas according to the needs of the church.

Just at that time the Missionary Society made an appeal for men to fill vacancies in several overseas countries, particularly were men needed in 'British America, and the Antipodes.' The Principal of Richmond College placed the needs of the Missionary Society before his students, and suggested to Richardson that his training had equipped him for a sphere of service in the colonies. After carefully weighing the respective choices John Bell offered for service in New Zealand, frankly admitting that climatic conditions weighed largely in his ultimate offer. This offer for service overseas meant that he would have to relinquish his hopes of a college course of training, but during the remaining months of the year, 1864, he equipped himself with books and furthered his studies.

During that year he met a young woman who was destined to play an important part in his life, but at the time they became hardly more than casually acquainted. Nevertheless he carried her image and memory with him when he sailed for New Zealand at the end of the year.

Three other young Yorkshiremen had also offered for service in New Zealand — George B. Quilty, George S. Harper and William Lee. Their passages were booked on the ship '*Rachel*' to sail from Gravesend on December 2nd, 1864.

The Rev. Henry Richardson accompanied his son as far as London. The train journey was passed almost in silence. Each was busy with his own thoughts. There was a deep bond of sympathy and respect between the two, and each was wondering whether they would again meet in this life.

## VOYAGE AND ARRIVAL

The first week or so at sea was for John Bell Richardson a most miserable experience. He was a poor sailor, and on this occasion as on every subsequent sea voyage he suffered considerably from sea-sickness.

One who travelled with him on the voyage of the '*Rachel*' wrote concerning him —

"It was not until we had been some weeks at sea that his character began to unfold itself and win us. When health and strength returned and he began to mingle with the new life into which he had entered, we found our party enriched with a character of rare excellence. We recall his deep voice as he sang in the ship's choir, his tender solemn prayer by the side of a dying passenger, his wistful reproof that left the transgressor his friend. We think of his retiring and prayerful habits, of his reverent earnest supplications, of his thoughtful and faithful sermons, of his manliness and consistency in everything. His Christian

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character won the respect of all and none more than the Captain of the ship. The Captain was a Scotsman and held high Calvinistic opinions. He was fond of theological disputes and one evening started a discussion on predestination. In the course of the controversy that followed he somewhat broadly charged the origin of evil upon God. John Bell started to his feet, fixed his eye on the captain and in a voice trembling with emotion he exclaimed 'This is blasphemy'. Nothing impressed us more during our acquaintance than his manliness, thoroughness, humility and consistency."

The "*Rachel*" arrived in Lyttelton, New Zealand, on Monday, March 25th, 1865, after a voyage of 115 days.

The four young ministers were met by the Chairman of the Canterbury District, the Rev. James Buller. They remained a few days in Christchurch and learned concerning their appointments and the nature of their work in the new land.

They had come to New Zealand in response to the appeal of the Wesleyan Missionary Society, and were designated Ministers of the Gospel in association with the Australasian Wesleyan Methodist Conference. They were under the direction of the Chairman of the District who in turn was responsible to the Conference which met annually in Australia. Although they had offered as 'missionaries' their work was to be amongst the European settlers. The missionary work was in a state of transition, for the Maori wars had curtailed mission work amongst the Maoris, and some of the former missionaries were now engaged wholly in work amongst the settlers in the growing towns or in the pioneer farming areas.

The Rev. Messrs. Harper, Lee and Quilty went to their respective appointments within a few days, but Richardson remained with the Chairman for several weeks.

Two years earlier the Rev. James Buller had made an extensive visit throughout southern Canterbury, and as a result of conferring with numbers of Methodists in the various settlements he had agreed to form a new circuit as soon as a minister was available. Mr. Buller chose John Bell Richardson for the new appointment.

## TIMARU CIRCUIT

Richardson embarked on the steamer '*Geelong*' for the short voyage from Lyttelton to Timaru. It was a stormy and rough passage and he again experienced all the discomforts of seasickness.

On Sunday, April 23rd, 1865, he disembarked and was taken ashore through the surf to land on the beach of Caroline Bay. He immediately sought lodgings and a place in which to conduct worship.



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Lodgings had been arranged with a Methodist couple but no arrangements had been made about a place of worship. With the consent of his host he arranged a prayer meeting to be held in their house that evening. There were twenty-one present.

The following morning he set about putting his possessions in order, with care unpacking his case of books and his equally valuable medicine chest. He had been particularly concerned about the books, for the case containing them had fallen into the sea at Lyttelton when a rope broke during the unloading of the cargo. It had reposed for some time on the harbour-bed before being raised, and there had been no opportunity of unpacking it. A month had passed and he feared that the books might have suffered extensive damage. His precaution in having had them sealed in a zinc-lined case now proved its worth, for the books showed remarkably little effect of having been submerged.

His next concern was to secure a place of worship. The only Hall had been taken over by a Presbyterian Minister who had arrived six weeks earlier. However he succeeded in gaining the use of the Hall for the following Sunday evening and later arranged for the use of the school for services morning and evening on Sundays, and for prayer meetings to be held at his lodgings.

Within a few days he was receiving donations and promises of gifts towards a 'chapel fund.' A committee was set up and plans prepared for a chapel. Tenders were called and at the end of June a contract was let for the building of the first Methodist Church in Timaru.

Richardson quickly made the acquaintance of the towns-people and walked many miles into the surrounding country to visit farmers in the neighbourhood. The town had a population of about fifteen hundred persons. Ten days after his arrival he borrowed a horse and rode twenty-eight miles across country to Waimate and conducted his first service there. Such roads as there were, were little more than bullock-tracks and a direct course across the sheep-runs shortened the distance for him. Unaccustomed to such riding he found that first ride a painful experience, but much riding was involved and he soon became an able horseman.

The need for a circuit horse brought him his first experience of horse dealing. He bought a quiet old mare, quite suitable to his requirements, but as soon as she was ridden she developed saddle sores. Despite his frequent recourse to his stock of drugs he was not successful as a horse doctor and the mare spent more time resting and recovering than she did in serving her master.

Sometimes he travelled part way to a preaching appointment with a local preacher who was going to another preaching place per buggy. Richardson would hitch his horse in tandem until the first preaching place was reached, then ride on, often having to swim the horse across a river, sometimes being able to cross by boat himself, but

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frequently having to swim with his horse. On the return trip he would meet the local preacher and transfer to the buggy, setting his horse free to find its way home the twenty miles or more.

They were busy days for the young minister. He visited far and wide and conducted services in homes, schools, stores, and shearing sheds. He appointed class leaders and organized congregations, and laid foundations for a lasting -work throughout the wide circuit.

Wherever he went he found a welcome from both young and old. He shared the lot of the settler, frequently giving a helping hand as he paused at a lonely farm, loading or unloading timber or stores, helping with fencing, even trying his hand at driving bullocks. In addition to ministering to the spiritual needs of his people he also ministered to their physical needs, prescribing for their bodily ailments and unstintingly using the contents of his generous medicine chest.

Though there was much to give encouragement John Bell had his moments of gloom and despondency, partly the result of the arduous work, partly the recurring effects of his illness, but partly also the result of a sense of loneliness. He had no opportunities of fellowship with brother ministers, his nearest ministerial neighbour being some fifty miles away. A visit from a Maori minister, the Rev. Te Kote, who was travelling to various Maori settlements was for Richardson a rich spiritual experience. His landlady kindly gave hospitality to Te Kote and the two ministers formed a bond of friendship that was to endure throughout the succeeding years.

An entry in his diary reveals something of his loneliness. "Think if I had a friend I should do better, an intimacy of that kind might be advantageous to me. The Lord direct me."

Three months later there was another note entered in the diary— "Had home letters. Mother is commending highly a certain Miss M. A. Hay. Such a hint is like yeast in my mind. May I not 'Full direction need'."

Miss M. A. Hay was the young woman whom John Bell had met not many months before he had left England the previous year. Now it seems that John's sister, a school teacher, had also met Mary Ann Hay and had introduced her to John's parents and other members of the family. Before long John was writing to Mary Ann, requesting that they might enter into a correspondence, and though he stated that he would like to ask her to become his wife he felt he had no right to do so, so asked only that she might write to him with a view to marriage. In the correspondence that followed over the two succeeding years he described to her fully the kind of life she would lead should she come to New Zealand to be a minister's wife, describing also the people and their living conditions, the houses, the stores and the towns.



Mary Ann Hay. About 1866

The letting of a contract to build the church had an unexpected repercussion. His landlord was a builder and had expected to get the contract to build the church. A lower tender from another Methodist builder was accepted, and Richardson received sudden notice to seek accommodation elsewhere.

Without difficulty Richardson secured other accommodation— with the builder whose tender had been accepted. A room was added to the builder's house for the minister's use, and though the accommodation was not as spacious nor as comfortable as that which he formerly had he remained there for the remainder of his stay in the circuit.

He described his new apartment in a letter to his youngest brother. The room, twelve feet by ten feet, served as bedroom and study. It was of lean-to construction at the back of the house. The ceiling was of coarse canvass, papered to keep out the draughts. There was a carpet on the floor, but except for a lightly constructed bed and a table there were no furnishings. To these he added his clothes chest and the two packing cases he had brought from England, his portable book case and his medicine chest. His top hat in its case, a blackthorn walking stick and an umbrella reposed in one corner, reminding him of a way of life left far behind. His saddle and riding

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equipment, plus a bag of oats for his mare, 'Snip', also had to be stored in his room. This not very regal accommodation cost him thirty-five shillings per week.

He did not complain. He knew that many of his people were living in similar and even less elaborate homes. Frequently as he journeyed he enjoyed hospitality in the 'mud-hut' type of house where lived hard-working pioneers who had left good homes in England and now were cheerfully living in comparatively primitive conditions until such time as a more substantial house could be built.

There was a delay in the building of the church, firstly because of uncertainty as to the most suitable site, and then because it was decided to add a porch and a belfry. On October 22nd the little church, 25ft. by 20ft. was opened. The Rev. Wm. Cannell came from Oamaru for the occasion, Richardson having exchanged pulpits for the day. On the Monday evening there were special celebrations and a 'tea meeting', in which Richardson was able to participate having ridden the 58 miles during the day in order to be present.

Having served two years at Timaru, Richardson received notification that he was to be transferred to Christchurch, and that one of his colleagues who had come to New Zealand with him was to be his successor at Timaru. However, the young man resigned from the ministry and left the colony; there was no other to take his place, so Richardson was requested to remain at Timaru for a further year.

The extra year enabled him to consolidate his work and to complete the building of churches in other places. A church was built at Waimate, another commenced at Geraldine, and the church in Timaru was enlarged, to give approximately double the seating capacity of the original building. The church was reopened on Sunday, March 28th, 1868, and that was Richardson's last Sunday in the Circuit.

The Geraldine church was opened three weeks later.

## **KAIAPOI CIRCUIT**

The Conference of 1868 constituted Kaiapoi as a new Circuit, and the Rev. J. B. Richardson was appointed as its first resident minister.

On April 29th, 1868, John Bell Richardson was ordained in Christchurch by Thomas Buddle, Chairman of the District, assisted by Revs. John Aldred and Alexander Reid. It was normal in those days to ordain ministers at a District Meeting, the cost of travelling to the Conference in Australia precluding the attendance of ordinands at Conference.

Richardson was to have conducted his first service at Kaiapoi on Good Friday, but through inability to get a coach connection from Christchurch he did not arrive until after the service was concluded. William Keall, a local preacher, had conducted the service and on Richardson's arrival immediately escorted him to Mandeville for the

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church Anniversary and tea meeting. The two men became fast friends, and they had much in common for Keall had been a candidate for the ministry in England before deciding to come to New Zealand.

With his usual zeal Richardson entered upon the many tasks of his new charge, and quickly laid the foundations for extensive development work. There were five preaching places, but he soon added to these and eventually he had twelve preaching places— Kaiapoi, Woodend, Rangiora, Rangiora Bush, Southbrook, Mandeville (also known as Ohoka) , Mandeville Plains, Raithby, Ashley Downs, Fernside, Eyreton and Frieston. He was fortunate in having a number of local preachers to help him with this extensive work.

While concerning himself faithfully with his circuit work he was also carefully preparing for the coming of his bride, for Mary Ann Hay had consented to come to New Zealand to marry him and to share his lot. Soon after his arrival in Kaiapoi a parsonage was purchased, a plain unadorned building costing £300.

Mary Ann Hay was the daughter of David Hay of Yarbrough Grange, near Louth, Lincolnshire. Like the Bells of Portington Hall they were landed gentry, and had concerned themselves in the building of Methodist Chapels and in the extending of Wesleyan activities. However, it appears that her parents were not pleased at the prospects of their daughter leaving them for so far distant a land, and they did not proffer any help that she might go to her intended husband. Therefore the Rev. Henry Richardson offered to assist her financially, but eventually her passage to New Zealand was paid by the Wesleyan Missionary Society, as also was the fare for a Miss Ingamells who was betrothed to the Rev. G. S. Harper and was to travel with Mary Ann to New Zealand.

In those days the booking of a passage provided only for a bare cabin, and all furnishings, comforts, and a considerable portion of the necessary rations had to be found by the traveller. Warned of all these things the two young women had been able to provide adequately for the long and arduous journey.

The young women travelled on the ship '*Ballarat*'. Mary Ann kept a diary which reveals the difficulties and trials of the voyage. The ship suffered a severe buffeting by storms during which cabins and saloon were flooded, sails blown out, and much superficial damage sustained by the ship. After a voyage of 130 days the '*Ballarat*' reached the port of Nelson. The young women were received by the Rev. J. Crump, the Methodist minister, but neither of the bridegrooms were there to meet their brides.

Although John Bell Richardson knew of the approximate date of Miss Mary Ann Hay's departure from England he did not know what ship she was sailing on, nor the place or date of arrival in New Zealand. He scanned the shipping news in the papers and waited for reliable information. At the end of June came word that Mary Ann was

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on the *'Ballarat'*, the port of arrival being Nelson. To reach Nelson posed a problem, for there was no regular shipping between Lyttelton and Nelson, nor for that matter did Richardson have the money necessary for that trip. He sold his horse, and secured a passage on a vessel which conveniently was going to Nelson and should arrive in time to enable him to meet the *'Ballarat'* when it made port. But the sailing time of the *'Otago'* was delayed.

Mary Ann's diary records on August 20th, 1868 —

"This morning I had the happiness of seeing Mr. Richardson again, he came in by the Otago last night, he was very seasick in coming, consequently looked poorly and certainly older than when I saw him last. We met like old and dear friends and neither seemed or were strangers to the other."



**J. B. Richardson and his bride Mary Ann Hay.**

She noted also that on the Sunday she 'had the pleasure of hearing Mr. Richardson preach twice.' She was very circumspect in thus addressing him as Mr. Richardson, but an earlier entry in the diary was to the effect that she was 'knitting sox for dear John.'

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On August 27th the young couple were married at the Methodist Parsonage by the Rev. John Crump. Among the few friends present was William Lee who had made the two-day journey from Blenheim to be in attendance at his old companion's wedding.

With no shipping due for some weeks the young couple planned a leisurely honeymoon, but the unexpected arrival of a ship presented the opportunity of starting for 'home' about two weeks earlier than had been expected. They sailed first for Wellington and a few days later for Lyttelton. It was a very rough voyage, and took fifteen hours longer than usual. The bride was a seasoned traveller and stood the journey well, but the bridegroom was again laid low in the miseries of sea sickness.

On arrival at Kaiapoi the bride and groom found a warm welcome awaiting them. Many gifts and tokens of goodwill were offered, and these together with the carefully selected things that Mary Ann had brought from England, including her sewing machine and a harmonium, soon transformed the plain little house into a comfortable dwelling place.

Mrs. Richardson immediately interested herself in the activities of the circuit, and was soon participating in what was to be a frequent task in the following years, preparation for a 'sale of work'.

Within a short time the work had developed to such an extent that the appointment of a second minister was asked for. William Keall had been assisting as a local preacher while at the same time preparing himself as a candidate for the ministry under Richardson's guidance. He was successful in his candidature and was appointed as Richardson's assistant to reside at Rangiora.

At that time there was no Theological College in New Zealand, and students for the ministry were trained by senior ministers with whom they worked as assistants. Although Richardson had been ordained only the previous year he now found himself launched on what was to be a continuing course for some years, the training of men for the ministry. He was well fitted for this work. With a background of a classical education, and a knowledge of Latin, Greek and Hebrew, and a good grounding in theology he was one of the examiners of candidates and probationers. He was a strong advocate for the establishing of a Theological College and this was attained in part when Three Kings College took over the training of students some eight years later.

Although the work was apparently flourishing there developed a difference of opinion between the minister and some of the officials. When an invitation was extended for him to continue for a second year in the circuit there was a divided vote. The majority desired his continuing for the extended time but one of the circuit officials resigned from office.

As often as was convenient Mrs. Richardson accompanied her husband as he went visiting, travelling being by horse and trap. On several occasions they had exciting

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episodes on the road, and on one occasion were fortunate in escaping injury when the horse took fright just as they were mounting into the trap, it bolted, and the trap was smashed when it crashed into a valley.

A great sadness came to the young couple when their first child was stillborn. Their sorrow drew them even closer together, and they filled their lives with even more intense activity for their beloved church.

The financing of building programmes presented difficulties, the balancing of the budget was a constant problem faced by the Quarterly Meeting, and the minister again and again was to the fore in easing the financial burden, heading a subscription list with a generous donation.

A school room was built at Woodend, and a church at Ashley Downs.

After two years of conscientious work Richardson was notified that Conference was transferring him to Blenheim. There was a public farewell in March 1870 at which the mayor of the town thanked him for his services to the community, and on behalf of the church members and well-wishers presented Mr. and Mrs. Richardson with a silver tea and coffee service.

## **BLENHEIM CIRCUIT**

In his two previous appointments Richardson had been the first resident minister, but Blenheim was a well established Circuit, and had had three previous ministers. The circuit had previously been known as Marlborough Circuit, but the name was changed to Blenheim Circuit in the year of Richardson's appointment.

The work was in good heart. A church which had been built five years previously had already been enlarged. Unfortunately it was in an area which was subject to flooding whenever heavy rains or melting snow caused the converging rivers to overflow. Floods had been so frequent that the settlement had been called 'the Beaver' A house which had been purchased for a parsonage a few months earlier was also found to be subject to flooding, but not to the same extent as was the church.

The whole of the Marlborough Province was under Richardson's pastoral care and he travelled long distances to visit settlers and to conduct services of worship. He preached in saw-mills, in bush camps in miners' camps, in gold-fossickers tent-towns, in railway construction camps, and in little settlements scattered around the Marlborough Sounds.

The arrival of a daughter, Jane Elizabeth, brought great joy to Mr. and Mrs. Richardson, also years of concern, for Jane was a victim of severe asthmatic attacks and though she sought health in various parts of New Zealand and in Australia she found no relief and died at the age of twenty-three.



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A second daughter, Marian, was also born in Blenheim a bright happy and healthy little girl. J. B. Richardson was a favourite of children everywhere and he found particular delight in his own children.

A local youth, Thomas G. Hammond, came under his influence and responded to his suggestion that he study to fit himself for the work of a local preacher and perhaps for the ministry. Hammond proved an apt student and was welcomed for his services as a local preacher.

In 1872 a new site was secured for the church which was then moved to a place free from floods. Some years later however the site was required by the Government as being the most suitable for a railway station, and once again the church had to be moved.

A church was built at Picton and concerning it he wrote to his parents—

"Our little chapel at Picton is now finished as far as we have funds to finish it. I was encouraged by a better congregation than heretofore and I think we have about secured a foothold there now. I have been at a very great deal of trouble, and I may say expense as well over it. Several forty-mile rides it has cost me. The man who volunteered to draw the plans for it did so in a very rough style, the specifications too were vague and loose ... I did not like his design at all so became architect myself. I drew a simple plan and got a builder, a member here, to go over the specifications with me. Bought the timber myself at the mill and succeeded in getting it nearly all 'drayed' to Picton gratis, piles were given and 'shingles' instead of slates for the roof drayed in gratis also. Let the work by tender and overlooked it myself. The result is that I have got a building . . . with a porch added and two coats of paint on, and the total cost not quite £65. We are now busy about the Spring Creek Chapel which will be on the same design but with one or two improvements."

The Spring Creek Chapel was the least successful of his building schemes. With the knowledge that he would be removing from Blenheim within a few months he hurried on the building of the church. In his desire to see it opened before he left the circuit he unfortunately permitted the use of unseasoned timber. He was able to officiate at the opening service of the church before he transferred but within a short time the building began to deteriorate. The unseasoned timber shrank and warped and permitted wind and rain to penetrate within. The church was a very uncomfortable place when winter came. Before many years it was in need of restoration and was eventually demolished.

## **HUTT CIRCUIT**

In March 1873 the Richardsons transferred to the North Island and took up residence at Hutt—later known as Lower Hutt. Until the previous year it had been part of the

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Wellington Circuit. The Circuit comprised Hutt, Wainui-o-mata, Stokes Valley and Taita.

Before long Richardson added additional preaching places to the circuit plan, Hokokuri, Belmont and Silverstream. The largest settlement was at Wainui-o-mata, and a service was held there every Sunday morning, involving the preacher in a long early morning ride, unless he crossed the hills the previous evening and spent the night in the settlement.

The many churches around Wellington also frequently requested that Richardson conduct a service and he preached in the churches in Manners Street, Adelaide Road, at Thorndon and at Johnsonville.

A son joined the family in 1874 and in honour of his grandfathers in England he was given the names Henry Hay.

In addition to his circuit work Richardson also took his share of Connexional activities and responsibilities. Except in his first circuit prior to ordination he was superintendent minister in all the circuits to which he was appointed. He attended the annual District Meetings, and in 1874 attended the first Annual Conference held in New Zealand. From that time on he was a regular official of the Conference. In all matters of administration and finance he was listened to with respect by his brother ministers. For eight years he was District Representative to Conference, was corresponding secretary on two occasions, was secretary and convenor of the Committee of Privileges, acted as assistant secretary of Conference, and regularly sat on the Board of Examiners.

His young friend T. G. Hammond came to reside with him while preparing himself under Richardson's tuition as a candidate for the ministry. Hammond was received as a probationer in 1874 and went on to become a noted leader in the Maori work of the church.

Another noted minister of later days was the Rev. Samuel Lawry. The young Samuel left his father's farm and came to study for some months with Richardson that he might also prepare himself as a candidate. He was successful and went on to become a student in Three Kings College and a leading minister of the church.

Attendance at worship increased and the Hutt Church was unable to accommodate the growing congregation. In 1875 a new church was built with a seating capacity of 230 persons.

## **GREYTOWN CIRCUIT**

In 1876 the Richardson family moved to the Wairarapa and took up residence in the parsonage at Greytown, then the largest township in the district.

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The Circuit included Masterton, Featherston, Carterton and a number of outlying settlements to which the minister or local preacher journeyed through bush tracks and across rivers, the latter being oft-times in flood.

In all his circuits Richardson had taken an active interest in the work amongst the children, but here he found that he had to take personal responsibility and leadership as there was a lack of youth leaders. He was of necessity the Sunday School Superintendent at Masterton, and it became a successful and growing cause. He also fostered the Band of Hope movement amongst the young people of the district and gave a strong lead in the Temperance movement.

Two more sons were born to the Richardsons while in Greytown, firstly William Reid, and eighteen months later John Herbert. In the third year of their stay in Greytown a diphtheria epidemic broke out and swept through the district. While they ministered to others in distress and bereavement the children of the parsonage also fell victim of the dread illness. Between one Sunday and the next the two small sons died, and the eldest son was seriously ill for a prolonged period.

Richardson's old friend the Rev. Te Kote was a frequent visitor at Greytown and was a favourite with the family. With him Richardson visited Maori settlements and gained an insight into the work being done for the church by Te Kote and his colleagues.

Other young men came to study under Richardson and John Dellow and William Slade profited from their period of preparation under his guidance before going on to Three Kings College and to serve their church with distinction.

Under the scheme of Annual Conferences in New Zealand and Triennial General Conferences in Australia Richardson found himself obliged as an official of the Conference to undertake sea voyages in order to be present at the Conferences. In 1878 he attended the Triennial Conference in Sydney, and again reported that it was a stormy passage across the Tasman on the return voyage. The following year he had a similar stormy sea voyage from Wellington to Auckland to attend the Conference there.

Although Greytown was the centre of the circuit Richardson was convinced that in the course of time Masterton would become the larger township and he planned accordingly. The congregation in Masterton was not large, but was growing in membership and therefore he planned to build a new church large enough for future needs. The church was opened in 1878, at a cost of £680, with a seating capacity of 225 people.

## **ST. ALBANS CIRCUIT**

Having served three years at Greytown the Richardsons prepared for removal again in 1879. The Conference appointed him to St. Albans, Christchurch, a suburban church

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of the growing city. The Richardsons were happy to be back in the South Island again, and the change from country appointments to a suburban church was also appreciated.

St. Albans was an important appointment. It carried with it certain opportunities of leadership and responsibility in both the church life and the civic life of the city, and almost invariably the minister there found himself raised to the position of President of the Conference.

As usual J. B. Richardson faced up to his responsibilities with zeal and diligence. Besides St. Albans, the Papanui church and Frieston were also part of his charge, and there were frequent calls to preach in the city and to visit country preaching places.

Mrs. Richardson found new interests and revived old ones in the new surroundings, finding that the city offered certain opportunities that had not been available in the smaller country places. She was able to cultivate her love of music—in which her husband also shared. The old harmonium had been replaced by an American organ some years previously. Spacious grounds gave her opportunity to grow flowers, and the acquisition of a maid to assist in the house gave her additional time to cultivate her talents and to enjoy her family. Her husband also laid out a croquet lawn, and they spent their leisure moments enjoying the game with their children.



**The Methodist Parsonage, St. Albans 1881.**

Two more daughters were born to them while at St. Albans. Ethel Sarah lived only seven months and died towards the end of 1879. Hannah Gertrude was born at the beginning of 1881.

Though he never refused responsibilities placed upon him by the Church he was never one to seek office, and when he learned that some of his brethren were proposing to have him elected as President at the next Conference he recoiled from the possibility,

and it was a genuine humility which caused him to absent himself from that conference, the only time he had absented himself since his arrival in New Zealand.

Writing to his parents he revealed something of his inner feelings.

"I am not going to Conference. By touting for parties NOT to vote for me I thought to get out of having a majority as District Representative. Not so however, and I was declared elected. I thanked the brethren and begged off. They let me off and Bro. Cannell was elected. Yesterday when at the Chairman's he told me that he had 'bit his lip' when he discovered what a mistake they had made in letting me off so easily, and that I had stolen a march on them. The meaning of it was that he was planning me to be the President of Conference. And he was not the only one with that notion. It was the fear of being elected to that honour and responsibility which had a good deal to do with my not wishing to go. Moreover, I have been at every Conference yet, and not to enjoy myself merely, but in an official capacity, and was getting tired of it ... I have looked further into things and almost concluded that I am out of the frying pan into the fire. Thus I may be elected next year, and if so I shall have a more difficult and a more important Conference to rule. It will be larger and will have more business as it just precedes the General Conference. Further the President of the Annual is ex-officio a member of the General Conference, and so I might be committed in spite of myself to another journey to Australia, and a longer one this time as the next General Conference is to be in South Australia, in Adelaide. But my hope is ... that I might escape the burden of responsibilities."

By not attending Conference he probably did thus avoid being elected President, and the honour went to his good friend William Lee. But he did not escape responsibilities altogether. He was elected Chairman of the Canterbury District, was continued as Treasurer of the Contingent Fund, and was one of two ministers elected together with eight laymen to establish a Connexional Fire Insurance Company and to be the Provisional Board of Directors of that Company.

## **PRESIDENT OF CONFERENCE**

The Conference of 1881 was held in Nelson. It opened on Friday, January 21st, in the Provincial Hall.

The Rev. William Lee, as President, presided at the opening meeting and called for the nomination of his successor in office. The conference report states that 'In the election of the President unusual unanimity was displayed'. The Rev. J. B. Richardson was elected with an overwhelming majority.

In his Presidential address Mr. Richardson reviewed the ministerial problems of the day; he appealed to his colleagues not to allow debts to accumulate; he mentioned the current discussion on the extension of the term of ministerial appointment, and

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revealed that whereas somewhere seeking a longer term others were seeking a change before they had completed the three-year term of appointment, and he appealed to these to continue for the full term. His closing words were

'God blessed Spurgeon, Dale, Somerville, Aitken, not because they were Baptist, Congregationist, Presbyterian or Episcopalian, but because they were living in close fellowship with the Head of the Church. If in like manner the Methodist Church of today so lived, God would bless every member of it. In this way especially power would come to the ministry. He prayed that the securing of this power might be their highest ambition, their devout wish and their unceasing prayer.'

On the second morning of the Conference he presided at a special meeting held at 6 a.m. when three-quarters of the Conference members were present to discuss the proposal that there be an autonomous Conference of the New Zealand Methodist Church.

Throughout the Conference he conducted affairs with dignity, efficiency and confidence.

He returned to his circuit and engaged in his usual duties, plus those that now came to him as President. A very successful Church anniversary was held on April 11th, at which his people expressed their joy at his being elevated to the office of President, and their good wishes for his forthcoming visit to the Australasian General Conference. One of his leading laymen, Mr. Eitenton Mitchell was to be a lay representative at the Conference and he also received the felicitations of church members and friends.

Passages were booked on the *s.s. Tararua* for the President, for the Rev. John Armitage editor of the church paper *The New Zealand Wesleyan*, for Mr. Mitchell and for Mr. Ebenezer Connal of the Durham St. Church, who was also a lay representative.

A number of others were expected to join the *Tararua* at Wellington and would be good companions on the voyage, but for various reasons they failed to join the vessel. The Rev. Alexander Reid purposed to accompany them to Australia and then to proceed to England to attend the British Methodist Conference, but opportunity offered for a berth on a ship travelling direct to England so he cancelled his booking on the *s.s. Tararua*.

Revs. William Lee and W. J. Williams missed the boat connection in Wellington and had to make other arrangements to get to Conference. They had been driving together from the Wairarapa, and while negotiating the tortuous road' over the Rimutaka Ranges they were caught in a fierce wind which swept down one of the valleys and blew their trap off the road,

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A group of friends assembled on the wharf at Lyttelton to bid farewell to the Methodist Group when they embarked on the *Tararua* on April 26th, to sail at 5 p.m.

Besides the New Zealand group there was also the Rev. W. J. Waterhouse, a veteran missionary who had served in Fiji for 39 years and was a supernumerary usually resident in Australia. He had visited New Zealand to see a son who had been ill and who was now accompanying his father back to Australia. The Captain joined the group for he too was a Methodist.

At the parsonage in St. Albans Mrs. Richardson gathered her children, Jane, Marian, Henry, and the baby Hannah Gertrude, and committed her husband to God in prayer. The night was disturbed by Marian who woke from a dream with a cry, stating she had seen her father struggling in the water with a suitcase.

The *s.s. Tararua* was a vessel of some 850 tons. The Captain, George Francis Garrard was the youngest captain ever to have had charge of a passenger liner in New Zealand waters. He had just been placed in charge of the vessel, the previous captain having been removed owing to a robbery having taken place on board during the previous voyage.

Additional passengers and cargo were taken on board at Port Chalmers, and the ship cleared from there on April 28th, having on board cargo, specie, and 112 passengers and a crew of 39.



**An artist's impression of the wrecked s.s. Tararua.  
Inset. Captain G. F. Garrard.**

The *Tararua* headed into a dark night and a stormy sea, which became a beam sea as the vessel journeyed southward, uncomfortable travelling for all on board. There was a thick land haze when at 4 a.m. the captain decided that the vessel had steered far enough south to clear Waipapapa Point, the southernmost point of land, and he changed course for the Bluff Harbour, the ship riding more easily in what was now a following sea.

About an hour later the ship shuddered and lurched—she had struck a reef. The engines were reversed but were stopped immediately for the impact had unshipped the rudder and had broken the propellor. Ten minutes later the ship was filling with water. It was aground on a reef of rocks, about three-quarters of a mile from shore. There seemed no immediate danger though there was a heavy sea running.

As soon as possible with the breaking of day a boat was launched under the charge of the second mate, and four seamen and a passenger rowed towards the shore to seek a possible landing place on the beach. So heavy was the surf however that they dare not venture into it. The passenger, George Lawrence, took advantage of a lull between the waves and dived overboard. Though battered he managed to reach the shore, he waved, and then made his way over the sandhills. He reached a house and gave news of the wreck. A shepherd was despatched on horseback to carry the news to Wyndham thirty-five miles inland, from which place aid could be summoned and the ship-ping company notified. The rider paused at Fortrose and the settlers there set out with food and blankets to succour any who might reach the shore.

On board the *Tararua* the captain ordered that food be prepared for all, and endeavours were made to get a line ashore. Other boats were lowered, some were capsized by the sea. One boat succeeded in placing a man on the rocks but he could not reach the shore and had to be rescued again. One boat could neither reach the shore nor return alongside the ship again, so put out to sea, and the seven men on board were rescued the following day. The rising sea drove the ship nearer to the shore. A huge wave swept twenty men overboard, only one of whom, the ships cook, reached the shore. The afterpart of the ship began to break up and the passengers gathered in the forepart and as darkness began to fall they climbed into the rigging. In the early hours of the following morning the first of the rescue ships arrived, but could do nothing. Soon afterwards the *Tararua* broke up completely. With the dawn there was only wreckage, and the ships engines standing on the reef, swept by the pounding waves.

Besides the seven who had been picked up at sea only thirteen others survived. They had either swum ashore, or had been washed ashore. Of the 151 persons on board only eight passengers and twelve of the crew survived. None of the women or children were saved.



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When the story was being recounted by the survivors, the chief cook Antonio Michaeloff stated that the ministers were amongst the twenty who had been swept overboard on the afternoon of April 29th.

Police and helpers searched the beach for miles along the coast and a patrol was maintained for three months. In all 'only sixty-five bodies were recovered, many of them being unidentifiable. No sign was ever found of the Rev. J. B. Richardson or his companions.

Most of the bodies were buried just over the sandhills from the scene of the wreck.

The Rev. P. W. Fairclough, Methodist Minister from Invercargill, assisted at the burial service—the captain who was also lost was a relation of his by marriage.

The burial ground became known as the 'Tararua Acre' The area was enclosed with a picket fence and for many years it was cared for and maintained by men who served as light-house keepers at the lighthouse which was erected adjacent to the reef shortly afterwards.



“Tararua Acre”

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Within the enclosure at Tararua Acre a few memorial stones were erected by relatives of those whose bodies had been identified. The school children of the district subscribed for a general memorial but the stone was lost when the small vessel on which it was being transported sank outside Bluff Harbour.

The school children aided by others, immediately provided another stone, and the memorial reads as follows —

ERECTED  
BY THE CHILDREN OF FORTROSE SCHOOL  
ASSISTED BY OTHER DISTRICT SCHOOLS  
IN MEMORY OF  
THOSE WHO PERISHED IN THE WRECK  
OF THE S.S. TARARUA  
29th APRIL 1881

Thus did the Rev. John Bell Richardson, President of the Conference of the Methodist Church of New Zealand meet his untimely end.

Ordained 29th April 1868  
Died 29th April 1881

The Methodist Church of New Zealand mourned the loss of the President and his colleagues who died while in the service of the church. Messages of sympathy were received from the Methodist Church around the world, from the Australasian Conference, the British Conference, the Irish Conference, and from leaders of other denominations in Australia and New Zealand.

The people of the Church rallied to the aid of the bereaved families. While Mrs. Richardson and her family mourned their loss they took comfort and strength from the tributes that came from a multitude of sympathetic friends.

Among the many tributes were the following —

From Marlborough.

"He possessed many of the constituents of a true friendship in most remarkable profusion. The power to enter into the cares and anxieties of others; the deep sympathy with sorrow; the ability to give grave counsel in kindest manner; the faithful pointing of the path 'of duty—these were things in which he excelled above many."

From Wairarapa.

"With thoughtful philosophic cast of mind combined with modesty of spirit and nobility of character he gained and retained the esteem and affection of the congregation to whom he ministered 'the Word of Life'. All measures which

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related to or were likely to produce the well-being of his fellow creatures were dear to his noble and generous heart. From his soul he loathed affectation, false appearance or anything mean or narrow. And yet so full was he of his Master's spirit that he honestly endeavoured to bring all classes within the attractive influence of the Cross of Christ. The memory of John Bell Richardson will be held in living and reverent esteem, not only by members of Christ's Church to which he belonged, but also by all sections of the community where he had been known."

The Tribute in the Minutes of Conference of the Australasian Wesleyan Methodist Church —

"He laboured with great acceptance. By his unwearied and faithful pastoral visitation he endeared himself to the hearts of his people, and by his preaching was eminently successful in building up the Church of Christ. While he was deservedly loved by his people, he was also held in highest respect and affection by his brethren, as is evident by their electing him to the office of President in 1881 by a practically unanimous vote. He was a man of scholarly attainments, sound judgment, large benevolence and deep piety. By the untimely wreck of the *s.s. Tararua* on board which vessel our beloved brother was proceeding as a representative to the General Conference in Adelaide, he lost his life and the New Zealand Conference one of its eminent and useful ministers."

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