

## PHOTOGRAPHY AS AN AID IN THE MUSEUM

*Presented by John Le Cren, former Staff Photographer, New Zealand Railways*

John Le Cren worked for 38 years in New Zealand Railways Photographic Library. In his prepared notes, reproduced below, he backgrounded the role of the Photographic Library and cited specific examples of how photographs assisted the Railways in various aspects of its business. Throughout the session, John illustrated his talk with examples of some of the photographs referred to. He also cited other examples where photographs had been used in claims against manufacturers, as evidence in Court after accidents and to assist in planning new civil works such as new tunnels and rail yards.

### Introduction

In July 1966 the *Evening Post* newspaper published, across ten columns, a photograph of Railways Cook Strait Ferry, *Aramoana*, clearing Wellington Harbour into the teeth of a southerly gale. "If you are not a good sailor," said the caption, "Don't look at this picture." It showed the ferry deep down by the bow into a giant swell, decks angled steeply, with the stern well out of the water. Surf foamed down from propellers revolving in mid-air and the twin tank rudders were also clearly to be seen. A *Post* photographer had used a 600mm lens on his 35mm camera from Fort Dorset to gain an impressive set of pictures, one which was published and several others donated to Railways where they were filed in the photo library. So impressed was the department with these scenes of their first Cook Strait Ferry, the illustration became top promotion,

Sir Alan Gandell, General Manager of Railways asked me to prepare quite a number of [prints of the] one that was selected. The prints were to be small enough to pack into a brief case for world-wide distribution. He was off to find another shipbuilder to build the second ferry of the fleet which in turn became the *Aranui*. On his return, he told us "The Japanese refused to believe the picture was real. They thought it was faked. And they have typhoon seas." He also gave the views of the shipbuilders in Europe and the U.K. who had viewed [the picture] or been given a copy. Denny Brown shipbuilders of Dumbarton were delighted to receive a copy of the sturdy ship they had built and see how it coped with enormous seas far across the world. So too were the English Electric Company which built the six traction motors in the *Aramoana*, as well

as three alternator engines. They too were to power the new ship *Aranui* and a copy of their first N.Z. Railways ship was proudly displayed in the office of the Chief Executive.

As I explain, elsewhere in this talk, Railways' staff photographers built up considerable experience in making pictures of cracks, breaks, and damage to expensive engine components under guarantee from overseas makers. In the course of several years, five main engine crankshafts of *Aramoana's* 1745 h.p. twelve cylinder diesel engines were cracked or broken. Each one was photographed, the breaks on all occurring on the centre main bearing journal. The sixth was removed from its engine as a precaution, and all were replaced with later model, counter-balanced crankshafts, as were fitted to the *Aranui*. Many tests were carried out in the engine rooms of *Aramoana* in order to prepare a claim against the manufacturers for replacement under the terms of guarantee. Engineers waited several months for a suitable big southerly storm to test the electric governors which effectively control speed up and spin of ship propellers when they are raised above the water. Many other examinations were made of crankcases, engine mounts etc. to determine whether distortion was to blame. No other cause, except weakness in the crankshaft, being found, Railways put their claim to English Electric.

The response was to be shown the Evening Post photograph. "What did you expect?" Not one penny piece was ever received for those broken crankshafts.

It was often asked why such a comprehensive library of photographs, negatives and written information concerning a great many occasions and property in the affairs of New Zealand Railways, from topics which were current at the time to events reaching far back in time, to well beyond the turn of the century, was held and staffed by the Publicity and Advertising Branch of the Railways Head Office, and what part this material played in the promotion of transport systems operated by the Department.

The very interesting contents of that photo library and some of the uses it was put to is the subject I am talking about.

I must first point out that the Publicity and Advertising Branch is now closed and the photo library has been located in the care of the National Archives in Wellington, where it is freely accessible to the public for viewing, researching or purchasing prints from negatives filed there.

### **Photo Library Wins a Compensation Claim**

During the fifties, a shipment of twin-car railcars from the Drury Car Company of Lancashire arrived in Wellington as deck cargo. The bodies of the cars were too long for the holds of the ship. The end cab windows of the consignment had

been protected by traditional timber boxing, but not the windows along the sides. Heavy seas had broken through these side windows and raged up and down the interiors of several cars, resulting in extensive damage.

Shipping agents refuted a claim against them by New Zealand Railways for the damages, pointing out that all previous consignments of passenger rolling stock had been given end windows only protection against the actions of steel slings during lifting by dock cranes at either end of the voyage.

"Not so," Railways claimed, "All previous cars, multiple electric unit bodies had timber protection on all windows for sea voyage."

Electric multiple units had been shipped to New Zealand from the U.K. in 1938 and early in the 1950's. Staff searched the records of letters and accounts for details of the timber protection. None could be found. Possibly arrangements had been made verbally at the time of shipment by engineers when the cars were loaded. It was not the sort of statement needed to win a compensation claim.

Normal procedure included photographic coverage by staff of the Publicity and Advertising Branch of all cargoes of new locomotives or rolling stock. A search of the library confirmed this, but it transpired all the timber side boxing was removed aboard the ship before the floating crane *Hikitea* drew alongside the vessel. Luck changed when it was found that one of the photographers had climbed a wharf crane ladder for a vantage view which showed several multiple units as they sat, welded tightly to the deck of the ship *Huntington*. All had the entire window areas protected by timber boxing.

Fully repaired, these railcar twin-car sets entered service. Often known by the public as Fiat railcars because of their Italian engines.

### **Centenary of Driving First Spike on the North Island Main Trunk**

During the planning of the programme for an official celebration of the driving of the first spike on the North Island Main Trunk Railway, on land beside the Puhunui Stream near Te Awamutu, the photo library produced a copy of an official group taken one hundred years before, at the original ceremony. The illustration (reference no. E-4596) enabled Railways staff to identify the various speakers while in other libraries searches were carried out for the reported, newspaper published speeches made by these people. The exciting archival photograph became a central key to the celebration. Tailored costumes and top hats were produced akin to the personalities, while Waikato Maori elders offered the original cloak worn during the freeing of the land for the entry of the railway. A visit to Te Awamutu met with enthusiastic amateur actors from a Te Awamutu College and the wheelbarrow shown in the historical scene was tracked down in an Otorohanga Historical Society museum where it had been

preserved for a hundred years. The newspapers' speeches were transcribed and became lines which were well rehearsed by the Te Awamutu College group of actors.

The day of the centennial celebration began with the re-enactment ceremony beside the Puhunui Stream, south of Te Awamutu. Restored Ka and Ja steam locomotives were on the site with a train of vintage museum carriages. It was a most successful day for all the parties concerned.