

2. Bands.

As to how a scratch band could be got together for even a relatively small occasion, we have an instance which can be dated fairly precisely to the opening weeks of 1868. The Thames Star of August 15, 1908, had some reminiscences.

Early in the New Year of 1868, only a few days after a meeting at the end of December, 1867, miners decided and then set to making a two mile road from the bottom of the Moanataiari to Punga Flat, and 530 men finished it in less than a week. A few weeks later there was an engine weighing some tons to take to the summit, going up around 1200 feet in the 2 miles.

500 hundred miners had the horses unharnessed, and they "fairly walked away with the engine, while, "during part of the way up the hill a musical trio seated on top of the engine, with accordeon, tambourine and cornet, made the scene lively, and one not easily forgotten."

(The accordeon was a very popular instrument.)

By 1868 it was becoming evident that Thames would be more than a mining camp with temporary premises and many tents, even the business places including "cloth houses" of canvas stretched over frames, and would have some permanence. The first part of 1868 saw a rapid transformation. "Hammers driving nails and saws cutting timber were going night and day," wrote William Nicholl.

Early in 1868 Captain John Butt of the temporary Shortland hotel decided to build not only permanent premises, but also the first Thames theatre, "Butt's American Theatre, which according to "Thames 1867-1917" was 75 feet by 31, able to hold 600 people. In April, 1868, "Johnny Hall" (Woolloxall) and "his pretty and clever little wife," put on the first professional dramatic performances for "the Thames," at Butt's new American Theatre, where they drew packed houses." An orchestra of some kind was naturally a sine qua non.

By August, 1868, the population of Thames was estimated at around 18,000. ("The Thames Miner's Guide," Edward Clarke, 1868.) (This was bigger than Auckland with around 12,000.) He referred to the new township, Grahamstown, which had recently been laid out to the north. (A map of the town lots laid out by Robert Graham and his surveyors survived, advertising the auction of said lots on May 16, 1868.)

In mid 1868 the scene at Shortland was very animated, as shown in a painting made at that time, showing a lively scene at Shortland wharf, with steamers and other vessels, crowds, horses being unloaded, and so on. Some kind of band music would be quite in order for such a scene.

The opening of the Thames goldfield on August 1, 1867, had its anniversary celebrated with a race meeting on a new course at Tararu in August 1868, with 2,000 making a big crowd, as recorded by the Thames Advertiser. Such a function would not be complete without music.

During the latter part of 1868 Grahamstown, nearer the gold mines than Shortland, went ahead rapidly, including a hotel "removed from Bayswater and floated on a barge to Thames." (North Shore Times Advertiser, Tues., May 17, 1977.) It is visible in a late 1868 photograph of Thames, the northern part. It had been called the Hylton at North Shore, Auckland, and at Thames was called successively Wharf, Park and Lady Bowen, and is now a doctor's residence.

"The Thames Journals of Vicesimus Lush," give first a likely venue for band or outdoor orchestral music, and then a definite reference to a band.

For December 24, 1868, his Journal records, "A large number of men began to form a circus close to my house for the Xmas sports which last three days - Saturday, Monday and Tuesday."

"Xmas Day...was surprised to see a large gathering of natives, Taipari having invited near 400 to a Christmas dinner. Just behind Mr. Mackay's house Taipari had had a huge marquee put up and long tables erected and there the natives were assembled enjoying a thoroughly English Xmas dinner: Turkeys, Roast beef, Puddings, and as far as I could see they all had silver (plated?) forks and glass tumblers...the (rich) Chief had engaged a BAND of musicians (Europeans) who kept playing all dinner time, to the gratification of the feeding Maoris."