



Queen Street Masterton, December 1922, showing how quickly the double-decker sheep transport lorry evolved.

## Transport revolution of livestock began in Wairarapa

THERE are three major milestones that point the way New Zealand's meat industry became the country's biggest single export income earner.

The first was in 1882 when the ship Dunedin left Port Chalmers bound for England with a cargo of refrigerated sheep carcasses. There's a monument in the Otago hills to that event.

The second event came when the livestock transport revolution kicked into gear; the third in 1949 with aerial top dressing.

Both of these latter two very significant developments began right here in the Wairarapa.

There are no monuments! Aerial top dressing has been well documented already.

As for the transport revolution - "Well, you might exclaim, "it would have required no great leap of the imagination to put sheep onto motor lorries!" and you'd be right.

In Wairarapa this could have happened (and very

possibly did) at any time after Fly and Young's original Dennis motor lorry arrived in 1913 or, about the same year, after Frank Gray took delivery of his first motor lorry.

Carrying sheep was, after all, a fairly logical step that could have just as easily happened here as anywhere else in either Australia or New Zealand.

Making lorry transport economical was the key. And in this regard the double-decker sheep crate whose time just had to come.

Wairarapa was its place, and June, 1922, its time.

As luck would have it, though, not only did Hazel Laing of Riversdale station have the presence of mind to whip out the old box brownie to record the event, she also paid history a great service when she grouped the children around to be included in one of the three photographs she took that day.

Not only that, in her family album under the mounted snapshot she recorded the

then ages of the children!

Gerry Laing delivered the all important message: "1922, June. It says that the twins were then 15 months old - they were born in March 1921."

Whew! That telephone call brought to an end hours of tramping down columns of ancient newsprint as I had tried to verify what I had already heard from another source entirely. You see, there were actually three claimants to having developed/invented/built sheep transporting's first multi-decker.

Let's get rid of the first one. In 1988 Hastings' Frank Powdrell claimed in a story in the Hawke's Bay Herald Tribune to have established the country's first livestock transporting company in 1929.

Mr Powdrell claimed to have invented the triple-decker.

Hogwash!

By then we had already long established carting firms carrying livestock from at least as far back as the

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early 20's. As to the multi-deck claim, well - we were also doing that in Wairarapa in the early 1920's.

Just how early in the 20's was a matter of some doubt. Every time you read anything about these early livestock carting pioneers, you seemed to get a different date - anywhere from 1921 to 1924.

Two years ago I had met Masterton's Allan Gray. At the time he admitted that he was a "little hazy about the actual date, but I think it must have been 1921," he had said.

At the time I had been impressed with Allan's deep knowledge of the local transport industry.

Allan had said that the first wire netting crate had only lasted the one season. It had proved unstable (it was held on to the truck tray with leather straps!) and it had been a bit of a hassle to get out to a job and spend an hour or two assembling the thing.

Then along came East Taratahi's Joan Snow. She

was the daughter of early 20's carrier Cecil Woodley. She was looking for a photograph that had appeared in the Times-Age in 1975. In that story Mr Woodley was reported as claiming to have invented the double-decker.

I had read the story. It said "about 1923". Well, from what I already knew, there didn't seem much chance. I went to see Mrs Snow.

That's when she turned up this amazing photo of four double deckers parked in what could have been Masterton's Queen Street.

One of those was Frank Gray's wire netting crated 1920 Conner. The other three were wooden double deckers, including Cecil Woodley's.

I began to get a wee bit excited. You see, what we were looking at was the virtual evolution of the double-decker: from first conception in three stages to what was clearly recognisable as a 1950's type crate!

If Allan Gray was right, and the wire netting original had only lasted for the one season, then that development had been very, very quick indeed.

In the meantime I was shown a photograph that hangs on the plant manager's wall out at Waingawa. That shows five trucks, one of which is Frank Gray's Commer - they are all single deckers and the picture carries a note that says it was taken in 1923.

The figures were beginning not to add up.

First I checked the Times-Age library. There in the Wairarapa Age of December 11, 1923 under the heading: Transport of Lambs. A Practical Scheme Proves Successful, was the following report: "The experiment of transporting fat lambs by motor lorry, made by Wairarapa Carriers' Association last year..."

Last year!

The report went on: "Last year the experiment was made on two lines from Glendonald... it went on to describe what the Wain-

gawa picture said was the experiment of 1923!

"Yesterday," the Age went on, "Eight lorries brought 1000 lambs from Mr W Jury's Moiki... 1000 lambs divided by eight lorries equals 125 each - they had to be double deckers!"

Armed with an enlarged copy of the Woodley photo and this new dating information I went back to Allan Gray.

What happened was simply fantastic. Memories flooded out like water out of the Kourarau spillway.

"That's Wally Kilminster standing beside his old Thorneycroft! The Moiki you say? I remember that day only too well. It took us from seven in the morning until seven at night - most of the time was spent in digging Wally's Thorney out of the mud!"

"We were only 100 yards from the Moiki woolshed and sheepyards. We eventually had to let the lambs go, hook up all of the other trucks in a line, slip a log-skidding plate under Wally's front wheels and pull him out of there!"

I showed Allan the Waingawa picture and asked him to identify the drivers and makes of trucks. He did that all right!

"1922, you say? Hmm! That would be right. We already had our double-decker then."

Great stuff! As we chatted Allan's 86 year old face wrinkled in smiles. In memory he was back there - writing history with the truckies of yesteryear.

Allan was a lad of 19 when he took part in some of these early developments. His dad Frank and most of his contemporaries were horse men who had made the postwar transition to benzine-eating lorries.

Allan, though, was the first true "trucker" generation - brought up on the machines, with a natural feeling for them and a love of putting them through impossible obstacles of mud, sand, rain and mechanical breakdowns. And all at a top speed

of 15 miles per hour!

Over the next few days I was to make something of a nuisance of myself, as with each new piece of memory, I either phoned or dropped in.

Each visit was its own reward.

In the meantime I'd called to see Joan Snow again. The family had had the greatest of good sense to tape Cecil Woodley before he died in 1977.

I listened carefully to what he said. Nowhere did he make any claim that was at loggerheads with what I was finding out from Allan Gray.

In fact he backed what Allan was saying to the hilt. The claims were not mutually exclusive.

You see, Cecil Woodley only claimed to have thought of and built the first WOODEN double-decker!

And, there, in the photo taken in Queen Street, Masterton, was his crate carrying 1922 British Leyland parked directly behind Allan Gray and his wire netting Commer. Remember the wire version only lasted the one season.

And when did Woodley claim to have built his crate? The year he took delivery of his Leyland. The year before he was married. The year before he moved to Featherston. The year he painted it up and took it to the Carterton show. And that year was 1922!

After that tape recording; after the files of the Wairarapa Age; after Allan Gray turning up the Hazel Laing photograph - well you can understand how much I

appreciated Gerry Laing's phone call!

On a tip from Podge Pinfold of Pinfolds Transport, I got in touch with Masterton photographic historian Ralph Hopkins.

Ralph did more than confirm opinions that the Woodley photograph had been taken in Queen Street.

He walked me to possibly the very spot the photographer had stood his tripod!

"That's where the Prince of Wales Hotel stood," he ventured.

"And see that building there, well it's still standing, see?"

Allan Gray had said that his truck was standing outside Wilton's Central Garage "that used to be known as the Prince of Wales stables and was straight across the street from the Central Hotel."

I called to see Wally Kilminster's daughter Mavis Skeet.

Again the memories flooded out as she exclaimed: "Oh look! There's Dad!"

And when did Wally take delivery of his Thorney?

"Well I was six years old when he bought the business."

There were two lorries and a service car - that Thorneycroft was one of them!" Mavis said.

And the year, yep you guessed it - 1922.

Isn't human memory a wonderful thing? Aren't people just great the way they respond to a plea for help?

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Wairarapa's first triple-decker pictured outside the then Thomas Borwick and Co's Waingawa works in 1931.

## PHOTO FEATURE

RECENTLY returned from the U.S.A and Canada, Executive Officer Kerry Arnold took these pictures in and around Washington D.C

and Canada. These are just a selection of many. We hope to have more in the next months issue.



1. Is it a circus? No, it's a high quality "Tourmobile" trailing unit which plies up and down the Mall in Washington D.C.



2. This 48 foot semi belonging to North American Van Lines was parked just outside the gates of the White House.

### Transport revolution

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And where would our understanding and appreciation of our history of our history be if it wasn't for people who kept and annotated their family photos?

And does the Carterton show appearance go some way to explaining how quickly the idea caught on?

O.K, so we've rewritten the history books. And along the way we've stirred some precious memories. I hope you all feel as good about that as I do, as Allan Gray does, as Joan Snow does.

It's important. And it's important to get it right!



3. The Tri-Axle "B" Train (possibly overloaded?) still at the weighpit area after some hours. There was no sign of the driver.



4. This 6 axle semi Chipliner is a little different. The first axle on the trailer is steerable and also lifts to aid manoeuvrability.

Below:

5. A 48 foot semi. This was delivering grapes winery in Kelowna, B.C. Columbia, just 24 hours they were picked in Canada.

