



ESKDALE HALL . . . 100 years old.

Nostalgia night at Eskdale Hall

There was no free bus ride to and from the dance venue that night, nor were the Napier Frivolity Minstrels about to play a famous tune.

Neither was necessary. Nostalgia had gripped the 150 or so people crowded into the Eskdale Hall to remember the good times had there and celebrate its hundred years of standing.

On May 31, 1986 the heads were greyer, the faces more lined but the memories of the hall in its heyday were rekindled in right Eskdale community fashion.

A year previously the late Mr Albert Goldsack had toyed with the idea of celebrating the building of what is the fourth oldest standing hall in New Zealand.

Shortly afterwards a hall centennial committee was set up to plan celebrations and began work on a facelift for the building.

Committee president, Mr Peter Payne, likened the rallying together of residents for the preparations to the community spirit invoked when it was built in 1886.

"It was the centre of everyone's lives then and in the years to come," he said.

"There were no videos or going into town for entertainment in

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those days. In fact I think the pride of the hall has been found again."

In 1885 a meeting of the Eskdale residents was called in the woolshed of Mr James Marshall. A decision to build the hall on Mr Marshall's property along the Napier-Taupo Road was reached and tenders called.

Subscriptions were collected from those families involved, whose names still feature on hall committees today.

All those at the centennial celebrations could remember some part of the countless uses the hall had been put to over the last century.

Among them was the regular performances of the Napier Frivolity Minstrels who staged their first performance ever in the hall 90 years ago.

Napier people would board free buses to dances in the hall during the 1930s and 40s. Favourites were the bachelor and spinster balls as well as the fancy dress balls for pupils of the Eskdale School.

Then the hall floor was meticulously prepared for dancing by whittling a candle all over it with helpers wrapping themselves up in sacks to be dragged around

for the making of an ice rink effect.

Children were often taken to dances, and were put into makeshift beds in cars and canopied trucks.

The hall was the scene of many welcomes and farewells during the years of the two world wars. In the 1920s the district's population swelled and several wedding receptions were held in the hall.

Every year until well into the 1930s the Country Women's Institute held a soap-making competition on the premises. Many holiday makers slept there during last year's flooding in the Eskdale area.

Today the hall is used for showing movies, indoor bowls, parties, scout meetings but no longer as the local library.

Those at the centennial celebrations included 30 France House old boys and their wives from as far as Invercargill. While at the home for young and orphaned boys, the Eskdale Hall occasions were the best entertainment source available.

Centennial celebrations included a dine and dance as well as a church service the following morning and lunch afterwards.

Eskdale Primary School pupils helped with the hall preparations by decorating, looking on the exercise as a history lesson.