Ponsonby Boys Brass Band 1916-1968

Gavin Holman, 28 April 2020

The Ponsonby Boys' Drum and Fife Band was founded at Auckland, New Zealand, in February 1910 as part of the Ponsonby Boy Scouts Association. Dr Thomson W. Leys was a major sponsor of the band(s) and built the Leys Institute. He was the Chancellor of Auckland University College and financially supported the Boys' Brigade, the Ponsonby Boys' Band and the Boy Scouts. He was editor/co-owner of the Auckland Star and the first President of the Leys Institute.

Ponsonby Drum & Fife Band
The Leys Institute, St Mary’s Road, Auckland
February 1912

The half-yearly meeting in connection with the Ponsonby Boys' Drum and Fife Band was held at the Leys institute last evening. Mr. W. Leys was in the chair, and there was a good attendance, about 50 members of the band being present, in addition to a number of parents and others interested.
December 1916

In late 1916, the Ponsonby Boys' Brass Band was formed, by 'friends who love boys'. Its lofty goal was to work for the boys' 'musical betterment', and its motto was: 'We exalt our Masters, Pupils and our Glorious Empire; our work and profit are centred on one example.'

Auckland Star 9 December 1916

"A public meeting of residents of Ponsonby was held at the Leys Institute last night for the purpose of electing officers and committee for the recently formed Ponsonby Boys' Brass Band. In opening the meeting, Mr C. Hoffman explained that the band was formed last October, and a provisional committee set up. Mr A. Norris was bandmaster, and started with three boys. Now they had fifteen members. The committee considered the time had now arrived when the brass band should be put on a sound financial basis. They would require assistance from the public. They were prepared to train boys who would come to the conductor. One aim was to keep lads from wandering aimlessly round the streets at nights.

"Mr T.W. Leys was then asked to preside. He said the object of the meeting was to put the band on a proper footing. The first business would be to decide the name of the band and elect officers and committee. That did not necessarily mean letting the provisional committee drop out. It would also be necessary to elect trustees. The secretary (Mr Foster) said Mr Norris had seven boys of his own and, starting with these, originated the idea of forming a brass band. Owing to the war members of the adult bands were enlisting, and it was felt that it would be well to train boys to fill the vacancies. As funds were needed to purchase instruments and music, it was decided to call a public meeting to enlist public sympathy with the objects of the movement. All services, including the bandmaster, were purely honorary. They had the opportunity of purchasing a set of instruments at very reasonable terms, and money was required to secure
them. Motions were then adopted, “That it is desirable to form a boys’ brass band,” also that it be called Ponsonby Boys’ Brass Band.

"The following officials were next elected: Trustees: Messrs T. Vivian, P. Hunt, C. Hoffman, and W. McMath; bandmaster: Mr A. Norris; secretary: Mr T. Foster; and treasurer, Mr R. Francis; committee: Messrs T. Vivian, J.L. Francis, S. Hunt, P.T. Bint, A. Norris, T. Foster, A. Barton, C. Hoffman, G. Stewart and W. McMath: five to form a quorum. The committee was empowered to elect a chairman and draft rules for the guidance of the band. A vote of thanks was accorded the chairman for presiding."

In the early 1920’s the band carried out several tours around New Zealand, lasting two or three weeks, performing in various towns and cities.
Ponsonby Boys’ Brass Band
(Incorporated)

TOWN VISITED.

Arrival and Departure.

Jan. 1.
2. Pukekohe
2 p.m. 9.9 M
3. Hamilton
12.15 6.20 T
4. Te Kuiti
1st Hour
5. Taumarunui
2.35 7.10 W
6. Ohakune
11.32 7.5 T
7. Palmerston
9.50 10.20 F
8. Napier
2.8 9.28 M
9. Hastings
10.7 9.19 T
10. Waiapu
10.23 9.28 W
11. Greymouth
11.25 4.5
12. Wairarapa
5.15 9.6 T
13. Woodville
9.51 2.15
14. Palmerston
3.20 3.57
15. Pahiatua
4.22 7.41 F
16. Taipa
12.38 5.30
17. Ohakune
8.35 5.8 S
18. Auckland
2.55

This Band was started five years ago for the musical betterment of the district boys, they receive TUITION,
INSTRUMENTS, and UNIFORM FREE.

The Band is administered by a Committee of ten members, and financially supported by FRIENDS WHO
LOVE BOYS.

President: T. W. Leys, Esq.; Conductor: Fred. Law; Committee: A. Brown (Secretary), R. Brown, T. Foster,
R. Francis, Dr. Lapaika, W. McMath (Chairman), J. MacPhee, W. Saxon, W. Skinner, Tom Vivian (Manager).


BAND TOURING BOYS (left to right): Top Row: J. Saxon, Gisby, Taylor, Young (drum major), A. Hoffman,
R. Saxon, Middleton, Badin.


Third Row: Knight, Francis, G. Sinton, Conductor, Gussie, Hills, Allen.


Absent: Stephens, Topp, Webb.

Photos, 1/- each.

This Band was started six years ago for the musical betterment of the district boys; we have a membership of seventy, all of
whom are as keen as mustard on music; they receive TUITION, INSTRUMENTS, and UNIFORM FREE.

The Band is administered by a Committee of ten members, and financially supported by FRIENDS WHO
LOVE BOYS.

President: Dr. T. W. Leys; Conductor, Fred Law; Committee: J. Anson, A. Brown (Secretary), R. Brown, T. Foster,
R. Francis (Chairman), W. Jackson, B. Law, W. Saxon, W. Skinner, T. Vivian (Manager).

Touring Officials: Messrs. Anson, R. Brown, Francis, Jackson, B. Law.

BAND BOYS are equipped with a fully instrumented set of Benson’s A Grade Silver
Instruments, valued over £1,000.

Top Row (right to left) — Stephens, Stephenson, Ward, Young (drum-major),
Middleton, Law.

Second Row — Madden, J. Saxon, Hills, Dudge, Gisby, Francis, Brewer, R. Saxon.


Fourth Row — Derrick, Badin, E. Webb, Conductor, Crawford, Charlton, Knight.


Absent — Smith.
January 1923

Members of the Ponsonby Boys' Band, who are at present visiting Wellington in continuation of their tour throughout New Zealand, will give a sacred concert at the Basin Reserve at 3 o'clock tomorrow. The opportunity of hearing these boys is one that should not be missed, as the organisation is probably one of the best of its kind that has yet visited Wellington, The boys, who are leaving on Monday morning for Masterton, Pahiatua, and Palmerston North, desire to extend their thanks to the members of the Rotary Club and the Commercial Travellers' Club for their assistance during their visit to the city.

April 1923


PONSONBY BOYS' BRASS BAND'S TOUR:

This was supported by the Auckland, Wellington, and Christchurch Rotary Clubs. Anything that is written or said about the Ponsonby Boys' Brass Band that did not include special mention of Tom Vivian would be a very poor article. Tom Vivian is no longer young; on the other hand, he will never grow old. When his day comes, be it this year, next year, ten, twenty or thirty years hence, Tom will still be young in mind and heart because he lives with and for the boys, especially the boys of his Band, the Ponsonby Boys' Brass Band.

It was Tom (he is not a Rotarian, but has the Rotary spirit) who conceived the idea of taking the band through New Zealand with the aim and object of
demonstrating what could be, and what has been done by music to hold the 
boys together, to brighten their lives and the lives of others.

There are seventy members of the band and over a hundred on the waiting list 
for admission. Of this seventy, thirty were selected to form the touring party. 
To transport thirty boys, plus their management, etc., from Auckland to 
Dunedin - a distance of about 900 miles by steam and rail, was no small 
undertaking; and to arrange a program at this particular season of the year - 
Christmas and New Year (the only available time for these boys, who are 
workingmen’s sons) that would not clash with other features, was a 
troublesome job. So Tom called on the secretary of the Auckland Rotary Club; 
the matter was brought before the directors, and permission was given to the 
secretary to go ahead and give the band the support of the Rotary Club, at the 
same time advising the Wellington and Christchurch clubs in the activity. 
When the idea behind the tour was fully explained they answered the call in 
fine style.

The result to date can only be described as a triumphal march through the 
country. Enthusiasm was intense - everywhere the Mayors and other town 
authorities vied with each other to help the boys, and the boys themselves were 
simply splendid, proud of their uniforms, proud of their silver instruments 
(the best that money could buy, costing nearly $5,000), each boy entering into 
friendly competition with the other, every boy a well-trained, keen musician. 
Much good has been done. The program was carried through. It was a 19-day 
trip, out of which fully nine days were spent in travel, and thirty-four 
scheduled concerts - as well as many extra concerts - were given.

It is with much pleasure that I can report Rotary's help in this Boys' Work 
movement, and with every confidence I can say that enormous good will result 
from it. Among the boys, friendships have been formed that will last a lifetime. 
An idle, careless boy cannot be a good musician, cannot he a member of the 
Ponsonby Boys' Brass Band; it means study and hard work to get there, to 
wear that coveted uniform, to hold and to own for a term one of those coveted 
instruments. To receive the word of praise from Conductor Fred Lawn, to raise 
the sparkle of joy in Tom's eye, to hear his "Boy, I'm proud of you" - these 
cannot be had for the asking, they have to be won. There is no time left for 
roaming the streets - it is "get home quick after work, clean up: band practice 
tonight !"

This is not a money-making organization. The boys are ever ready to play free 
for any charity, to go to any public institution such as the hospitals, Blind 
Institute, orphan homes, or elsewhere any evening, Saturday afternoons, or 
Sundays. Their music has inspired them with our Rotary motto, "Service 
Above Self."

The band also toured in 1925-1926.

December 1932

Y.A.L. Bandsmen Reach New Zealand - Auckland, December 20 1932

The Young Atarrana League bandsmen arrived today by the Marama. The lads were played ashore by the Ponsonby boys' band. The two bands then marched to the Town Hall, where the visitors were accorded a civic reception. A round of outings has been arranged.
In 1937, the Auckland Star got a bit carried away in describing the band as the first to form in New Zealand.

*Auckland Star 2 October 1937*

"The twenty-first anniversary of the Ponsonby Boys' Brass Band will be celebrated with a children's fancy dress carnival in the Band Hall, Jervois Road, Ponsonby, next Thursday night.

"The first boys band to be formed in New Zealand, the Ponsonby Band was organised in October 1916, by a committee consisting of Messrs T Foster, C Hoffman, A Norris (bandmaster) and R Francis. Mr Francis is the present chairman of the committee. Over 600 boys have received their training in the band, and many of them are earning their living through their musical ability. From the date of its inception the band has given many performances at public hospitals and institutions, not only in Auckland, but throughout New Zealand. During the war it turned out to play the reinforcements away, and for 13 years, it acted as senior cadet band of Auckland."

![Ponsonby Boys' Brass Band – 1957](image)

The band incorporated at some point before the 1940’s, changed the name to the Ponsonby and Districts Silver Band Inc c. 1967, but disbanded in 1968 due to lack of members. Remaining equipment was given to the Boystown Police and Citizens Club which was at that time forming a new band. A foundation member of the Boys' Band, R. H. Francis, whose father founded the band, was present when the keys, instruments, uniforms and furniture were handed over.

In 1984, at a function to open refurbished meeting room at the Leys Institute, the Mayor of Auckland at the time, Catherine Tizard, made reference to the band, and how "a
revival of the Ponsonby Boys' Brass Band could be a way to keep young people off the streets,” echoing what C. Hoffman had said in a different society 68 years before.

For more information on the band, see various articles in the New Zealand press, available via Papers Past - https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/