



DRIVER MAKES HIS LAST TRIP

Gave 22 years in service to children

After 22 years, 200,000 miles and thousands of children, Mr Tom Wyeth drove the school bus away from the Woodlands School for the last time this afternoon. During those years he got to know every child in the district. He saw romances blossom in his old bus, and when the boys and girls grew up and got married, he carried their children to school, too.

There were a hundred memories for every mile as he drove along his route this morning, picking up the waiting children at the farm gates. When he got to the school and the children tumbled out, waiting to greet him were four people he carried as six-year-olds on the first day he started his run.

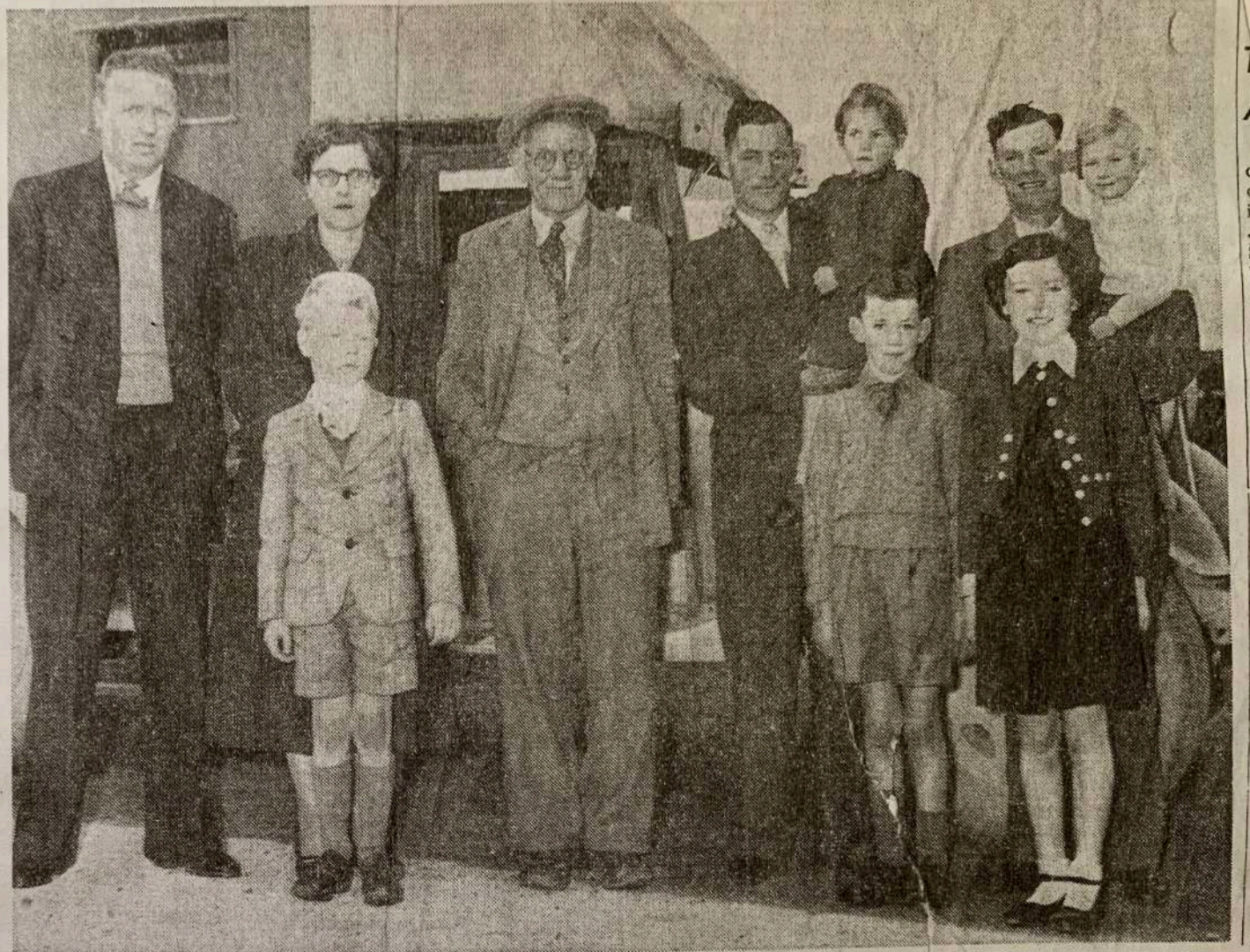
They had been there at the start, and because of their affection for "Tom," they wanted to be there at the end. Their children had come in on the bus, sitting in the same seats as their parents did in the third school term of 1936.

Missed one day

As Mr Wyeth says, both he and his bus were new when he started the run. The bus has never missed one day, and Mr Wyeth has missed only one.

He drove it once when he had the measles. One Friday morning, a long time ago, he did not feel well and when he got home from his run he found he had the measles.

He wrapped himself up in a heavy coat and scarves in the afternoon, and drove the children home again. No one ever knew, and the spots were gone by Monday.



ABOVE: Four former pupils, carried by Mr Tom Wyeth, when he first started his bus service to the Woodlands school in 1936, were on hand to meet him at the school when he made his final run today. Mr Wyeth carried their children to school, too. On the left is Mr and Mrs S. W. Ballantyne and their son, Murray. Mrs Ballantyne was formerly Dorothy Belcher, and first met her husband as a schoolchild on the bus. Next in line are Mr Wyeth, Mr I. S. Paul holding his daughter Valerie and Mr W. K. Robertson and his three children, Hugh, Anne and Elva.

BELOW: Surrounded by children as he has been for the last 22 years, Mr Wyeth arrives at the Woodlands school this morning. The number of children who have daily passed in and out of his bus is estimated to be in the vicinity of 400,000.

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At the outset he made three resolutions. He would never speed, never take a drink while driving and never swear. He broke these rules only once, and that was when a sheep jumped out of his bus and he ran over it. It was the only time he ever swore.

In the early days, to keep the children quiet, Mr Wyeth used to run a competition to see how many rabbits they could count.

"The rabbits are all gone and now we count kids," he said.

Face value

He remembers once letting a child out of his bus and the boy's father said: "Did you thank Mr Wyeth?"

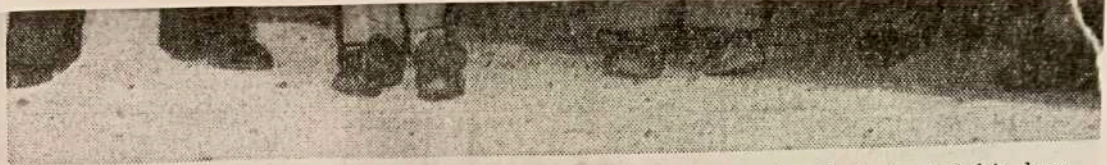
"No," said the boy "I thanked him yesterday and he said 'don't mention it.'"

When the children grew up he lost contact with many of them. As far as the girls were concerned it was the lipstick and makeup that fooled him. But once they mentioned their name, of course he knew them.

There was not much that went on in the district that he did not know about. As the bus bowled along the children used to tell him about everything that went on in their homes, joys and sorrows. In any event, it wasn't like confiding to a stranger, for he knew their parents so well.

When Mr Wyeth started out, 32 children were being conveyed on the Mabel Bush run. Today there are 74. In 1946 he started the service along Flemington Road for seven children, and today there are 27. The number of children on the Mabel Bush route outgrew the capacity of his bus, and consequently he had to stop running along Flemington Road in 1955 and return solely to the Mabel Bush service.

In a fortnight there will be a new operator, Mr Alan Calder, and a new bus. But country districts being what they are, folk are likely to remember Mr Wyeth for a long time.



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Tom Wyeth's School Bus - Second Run (at Waihopai Downs Rd Corner) 1949

Back Row ① David Knight ② Mabin Calder ③ Margaret Calder ④ Peter Knight ⑤ Jenny Griffin
⑥ Gabriel O'Meara

Middle Row ① Iona Clark ② Terroll Calder ③ Althea McKenzie ④ Rowena Tukes

Front Row ① John Caird ② Ainsley Tukes ③ Jeanette Campbell ④ Shirley Milliken







T.V.N2. interview Mr A Calder
about his bus on its last
run after 29 YRS 11 MONTHS
service.

