

# NATIONAL CONFERENCE OPENS HERE

The Mayor (Mr J. Watson) officially opened the New Zealand Kindergarten Union conference in Westport last night.

28 SEP 1966

Mr Watson welcomed the 130 delegates from all over New Zealand present for the opening ceremony in the Holland Hall and hoped they would have a pleasant stay in Westport.

The retiring president of the union, Mrs H. Downer, of Rotorua, said that visiting delegates would have realised, even though they had been in Westport a short time, the reason for its reputation for hospitality.

Mrs Downer thanked the Westport Free Kindergarten Association for its "courage" in inviting them to have the conference at Westport.

"It is the first occasion on which an association with only one kindergarten has had the courage to invite the union to have a conference in its town," she said. She thanked the Westport committee for the arrangements and trouble they had gone to to make it a success.

Although the Minister of Education (Mr A. E. Kin-sella), the director of the Education Department (Mr K. J. Sheen) and the Member for the district (Mr W. E. Rowling) had not been able to attend, Mr Rowling had, in a telegram, wished them a successful conference.

## PROUD TRADITION

"This kindergarten movement, which we all serve, is one that has proud traditions. It has had a long history.

"In 1889 the first kindergarten was established in New Zealand. Through the years people everywhere, realising the value of pre-school education more particularly in the last 10 or 12 years, when they have understood fully that education begins at birth, the movement has expanded and grown to a point where, at the end of the union's financial year last June, there were 252 recognised kindergartens. Since then three more have achieved recognition," the president said.

"Tonight 64 associations are represented controlling 255 kindergartens. It is wonderful when you think that in order to establish each one people had to show that they were willing to help themselves before any Government assistance was given of any kind.

"Some idea of the tremendous zeal in the hearts of those who established the movement in their communities can be got when it is realised that they have had to find one third of the cost of a building which can cost up to £7500.

"Government assistance, channelled through the Education Department, was very much appreciated. Even when requests by the union were impossible to fulfill, the department genuinely regretted not being able to do so. "We could not live without the department's assistance," she said.

"We are also greatly indebted to the people in communities where we work. Even though they sometimes get impatient with constant appeals for assistance it is money well invested because these little people that we are serving are our future citizens. No money spent on them is ever wasted.

"If there is anyone in Westport who feels that when the kindergarten asks for assistance, it is always asking, remember the cause—it is one well worth supporting."

The president of the Westport Association (Mrs K. Williams) extended a welcome to visitors. She hoped that they would have a pleasant stay in Westport.

"If we did not have such a valuable working committee, and our Mothers' Club, we would never have been able to hold such an important meeting," she said.

Mr Watson told visitors that they had come to the land of sunshine. Although much of New Zealand had seen little sunshine over the winter months, the West Coast had been basking in it.

## "WONDERFUL THING"

He reminded the gathering that 140 years ago the first kindergarten was established in Germany. He outlined the basic facts which led to the establishment of the movement and said it was a rather wonderful thing.

"If children could be introduced to pre-school training they could develop a very important thing, a sense of reliance on their own initiative, a sense of independence.

They would also get the opportunity of becoming friends with those attending the school with them.

"Kindergarten prepared them for primary school and their entry into life.

"I'm glad to see that the Westport Association has had confidence in themselves to invite you here. It is a wonderful effort on their part and I, as Mayor of the town, feel proud of them," he added.