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## Chapter V

### A Pioneering Spirit: Family structures in rural New Zealand 1919-1939

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#### Introduction

“You might make a few staples, Minnie in your spare time to-day, and if the boy is not busy he can help fasten up those wires across the gap to keep the cattle back. You will find a piece of wire up in the storeroom thatch. I’ll be away all day sawing off birch lengths for posts. I’ll take a snack in my pocket.”

George Duggan, sinewy, tanned, rather dull, plodding toiler of his rough lands, worked hard himself and expected every one who came near to do the same. He turned now, as if no answer was needed from his wife, drove in another cow, seized the bucket, milked steadily, silently as was customary in that yard, so as to waste no time.

Minnie and the thin farm lad behind her, milked cows as continuously and swiftly. The fall in the price of dairy produce had put the machines out of action. “Benzine, wear and tear of machinery cost money,” George said. Why use it? He preferred the quiet and rest to his legs while hand-milking . . . besides Minnie had not given a hand then; now her extra help and comradeship made a difference in the shed. It made her understand that the income was not elastic . . .

Minnie could not take things like George; she was sensitive and looked into the future and often rebelled. The persistent unsupplied needs of her household made her urge for more cash above the cost of essentials, *not realising that a happy home in a shanty would never be experienced on a dairy farm with mother a principal in the cowyard.* [my italics]

Minnie was anxious this morning. Her busy hands did not prevent her mind being active. Presently the children will have finished their breakfast and go off to school. It was nearly half-past seven, and they had to walk three miles, so never helped with the work. She had set the alarm; Myra always wakened. She was ten now, and so capable, even if one had to be easy about her distressing habit of bullying. She would bring the baby up in the barrow before leaving, see the door were shut, that each child took a coat and handkerchief [sic] or clean piece of rag. Minnie always cut the lunches at night. Many tender thoughts for her children in their absence were wrapped with each lunch.<sup>1</sup>

The *New Zealand Farmer* featured this story under the heading ‘The price of progress. Women and children at the cow bails. A serious national problem’.<sup>2</sup> New Zealanders believed implicitly in the superiority of rural living and a challenge to this image aroused national concern. The ideal society seemed under threat, and such stories challenged the rural myth at the heart of New Zealand society. This mainstream journal attempted to raise interest in this problem, as well as addressing public concern over the situation of farming families. Middle class values clashed with the reality of the struggling farmer’s life.

Rural society and family structure were distinct from urban New Zealand. The rural economy decisively shaped rural society, so the chapter will explore the historical and economic background of rural life in the interwar period. Some major themes emerge in this story about women workers. Older norms of family life lingered in the countryside, and provided a visible contradiction of new familial ideas. Firstly, the family acted as a unit of

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<sup>1</sup> Dora Dillon, ‘Women Workers’, *The New Zealand Farmer Stock and Station Journal*, 1 November 1927, p.1417.

<sup>2</sup> The paper presented a man’s and a woman’s viewpoint, and both opposed women helping on the farm, *NZF*, 1 November 1927, p.1417.

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economic production, rather than consumption. Secondly, women's work on farms conflicted with the feminine ideal of the 'non-working' wife who took care of the home. This extract clearly emphasises that 'woman as worker' destroyed 'woman as housewife and mother'. Thirdly, this form of household structure also upset the role of children as dependants. Commentators thought that children became 'neglected'; certainly they were often overworked. Finally, although rather sentimental, this story does reflect the sometimes harsh and unremitting drudgery of the small marginal farm, particularly the dairy farm. One should not over-romanticise the life of the yeoman farmer and his family. The New Zealand dream of the family farm continued to attract adherents, but they sometimes paid a high price for their dream. Inchoate longings kept men and women at back-breaking labour without obtaining the hoped-for prosperity. Such labour affected the health and welfare of family members, especially women, who had to cope with child-bearing and child-raising as well as farm work. The author of 'Woman Workers' emphasises the difficulties of this situation, without suggesting any solution to the problem. In the end any viable solution would be ideologically unacceptable: to sell up and leave farming to wealthier and more capitalised farmers. Of course some farming families prospered, through the hard twenties and the even more difficult thirties, but this story gives shape to the discussion of family life in rural New Zealand.

Considerable variation in rural family life existed so evidence about family structure has been divided into sections: firstly general household structures will be explored, before examining farming and non-farming families. Family dynamics varied between small dairy or mixed farms, and middle sized to larger farms. Non-farming families followed urban classifications more closely but the availability of land in the country meant they were not totally reliant on wage labour. Labourer's wives, as well as farmer's wives, might supplement their husband's income by selling produce.<sup>3</sup> The essentially artificial division between home and work, public and private, worked less well in the countryside. Even in prosperous farming families home and work could not be separated because the home (farm) was also a business. The slogan for the countryside could be 'home is business and business is home'. This lack of a clear distinction between home and work had important consequences for household structure, husband/wife relationships and household roles. Town and country often followed divergent paths. Lack of amenities, such as electricity, also affected many country families until the 1930s and sometimes beyond. Rural families continued to face heavier workloads than urban families, and maintained a different relationship to work. Women and children, as well as men were workers.<sup>4</sup>

Diversity marked rural society, so it is necessary to examine briefly the economic and social structures of the countryside. Regional variation existed because the variety of rural

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<sup>3</sup> Mrs Robinson, the wife of a labourer, supplemented her husband's income with money from selling butter. E.Robinson, 10.6.96, p.4. The family lived in the small rural settlement of Fairview but his father worked in Timaru. The family kept cows and made butter, even after they moved to Timaru.

<sup>4</sup> Chapter VI will examine how country life affected children, and children's relationships with their parents.

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livelihoods shaped the nature of rural society. Thus a report on the health of rural school children in 1930 distinguished between children of coal miners, timber mill workers and farmers (and these are by no means the only categories in rural society). The investigators divided farming areas into 'thriving farm communities', 'remote farming areas' and 'share milking districts'.<sup>5</sup> The all-inclusive status category 'farmer' contained a wide variety of economic experience. On larger and more viable farms farmers did not rely on family labour and their families enjoyed a relatively comfortable existence compared to small farmers. The latter group relied heavily on family labour, and hard work and poor resources strained family life. A large number of rural families worked in rural industries or the service sector, rather than in agricultural labour.

### I

Rural social structures in New Zealand followed new world rather than old world patterns. Tom Brooking, a New Zealand rural historian, provides the most useful analysis of rural New Zealand and England in this period, and much of the material in this section relies upon his doctoral thesis 'Agrarian Businessmen Organise'. Huge differences existed between rural New Zealand and England, making comparisons with England difficult.<sup>6</sup> The rural and urban sectors of English society remained more separate than in New Zealand, where recent colonisation, combined with increasingly rapid urbanisation, hindered the development of a distinctive rural social structure.<sup>7</sup> New Zealanders wanted to avoid any replication of the rigid hierarchies of the English countryside within their own country. Despite egalitarian ideals social hierarchies emerged, but without the elaborate rules and expectations of deference that marked rural England. Even the big pastoralists never became a gentry.<sup>8</sup> Organisations such as the Sheep Owners' Federation held some political power but the New Zealand rural elite, unlike their counterparts in England, never dominated the countryside.<sup>9</sup> In this period the number of small-scale family farms increased. The census in 1926 showed that 61.58 per cent of New Zealand farmers did not hire labour, and only 39.7 per cent. of the rural male workforce were labourers.<sup>10</sup> In 1930 68.5 per cent. of the agricultural labour force

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<sup>5</sup> H 35/891 1 35/78 Report on Rural School Children.

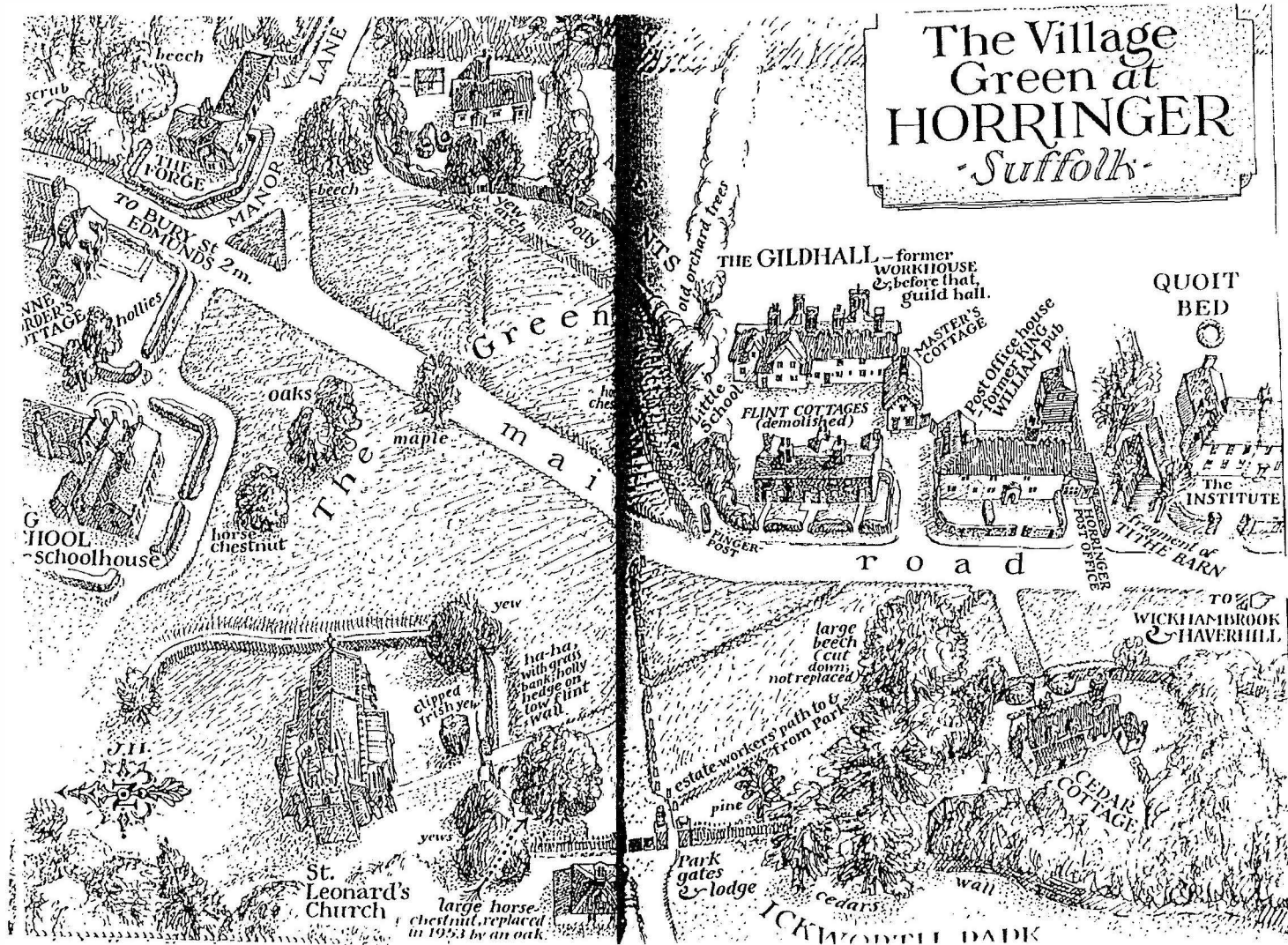
<sup>6</sup> English farmers were by no means a homogenous group and considerable regional specialisation existed. Incomes ranged from near-gentry level to approximating that of agricultural labourers, only separated by capital tied up in the farm. Small subsistence farmers were more common in Scotland and Wales. T. Brooking, 'Agrarian Businessmen Organise A comparative study of the origins and early phase of development of the National Farmers' Union of England and Wales and the New Zealand Farmers' Union, ca. 1880-1929,' PhD Thesis, Department of History, University of Otago, Dunedin, 1977, p.53.

<sup>7</sup> Brooking, 'Agrarian Businessmen Organise', p.59.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*, p.51.

<sup>9</sup> Farmers seldom rented their land to tenant farmers and few gentlemen farmers existed. Brooking, 'Economic Transformation', in Oliver & Williams, *Oxford History of New Zealand*, p.230. See also Jim McAloon's article 'The Colonial Wealthy in Canterbury and Otago: No Idle Rich', in *NZJH*, Vol. 30, No.1 April 1996. Even though Stevan Eldred-Grigg would argue that there were a Southern gentry the evidence does not seem to support this. There were, however, a rural elite, but the two terms are not synonymous.

<sup>10</sup> Brooking, 'Agrarian Businessmen Organise', Table 2.4, p.48b



An English rural scene, a much more ordered world, dominated by the estate of Ickworth Park. The village of Horringer, in Suffolk, as remembered by Zoe Ward in *Curtsey to a Lady*.



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in England were labourers and only 23.5 per cent. were farmers.<sup>11</sup> In rural New Zealand the social structure bulged in the middle and looked very different from the classic pyramid of rural England.<sup>12</sup>

Fred Pawsey's description of interwar Suffolk reveals the extent of deference in the English countryside. His parents encouraged him to sit a scholarship for grammar school because they 'realised that education was the break away from the feudal system - almost - that dominated in our village life'. A strict hierarchy prevailed in their village. 'There was obviously the farm working which was the great majority, then there were the farmers and then above them were people like the squire, the teacher and the parson, and my great-grandparents told us that when they were children they had to curtsy to the parson and the squire and the school teacher'.<sup>13</sup> The gentry expected and received deference: George Sainsbury, the son of a butler in a large country house, recalled, 'I can remember her ladyship coming up into the village and getting out of the Rolls Royce and people would be going in and out, workers and that, and they'd all bow or curtsy to her.'<sup>14</sup> Social hierarchies meant that the better-off maintained a much greater social control over English families. Zoe Ward recalled in her autobiography that 'Men who did not go to church were liable to face the sack when they turned up for work on Monday morning'<sup>15</sup>. Some regional variation existed in Britain and small tenant farms were more common in Scotland and Wales. Mary McGonegal who lived in County Donegal in Ireland recalled that their county had 'little farms sort of dotted about'.<sup>16</sup>

Local tradition, isolation, social hierarchies and poverty meant that rural and urban remained far more separate in Britain than in New Zealand.<sup>17</sup> New Zealand rural society had a fairly mixed and generally a fairly egalitarian character. In contrast to English practice, no

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<sup>11</sup> *ibid*, Table 2.2, p.44.

<sup>12</sup> See diagram, *ibid*, facing p.46.

<sup>13</sup> Fred Pawsey, 12.2.96, p.4. Fred came from a long line of rural labourers. His great-grandfather was a horse man, his grandmothers and mother all went into service. He was born in 1919, his father had originally been a farm labourer, but through hard work became a market gardener with a seven acre farm. Fred won a scholarship to grammar school, entered the airforce, then trained as a teacher after World War Two. He now lives in Cavendish, Suffolk.

<sup>14</sup> George Sainsbury, p.32 of transcript, courtesy of Paul Thompson's archive at Oxford. George was born in 1929, his father worked as a butler, and his mother had been a nanny. They lived in a small house attached to a large estate in the village of Hoffield in Kent. His father later bought a village store and George went into business with him.

<sup>15</sup> Z. Ward, *Curtsey to the Lady A Horringer Childhood*, Terence Dalton Ltd., Lavenham, Suffolk, 1985, p.14.

<sup>16</sup> Mary McGonegal, was the daughter of a small farmer, and her grandparents had been small farmers and fisherfolk. She was born in 1916 but her mother died eighteen months later and an aunt and uncle brought her up, although she was never legally adopted. Another aunt brought up her brother. Her description of social class seems more similar to New Zealand. Everyone was the same except that they looked up to the doctor, lawyer, teacher, shop keeper and priest. Mary Walsh, Courtesy of Paul Thompson's archive, Oxford.

<sup>17</sup> Rural Britain was not of course an unchanging environment: events such as the enclosures of the nineteenth century had shaped the villages of the twentieth century. S.Wright, 'Image & Analysis: new directions in community studies', in B. Short (ed.), *The English Rural Community Image and Analysis*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992, p. 203.

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tradition existed of the farm or inheritance going to the eldest son.<sup>18</sup> Estates were often divided equally between children, a tradition that helped to ensure the continuance of this egalitarian tradition. Sons might buy into their parents' farm, or land would be shared between brothers. Mary Trembath, the daughter of dairy farmers, explained that 'each boy goes out into the world and starts off himself'. Some boys went 'lorry driving, some go farming, work for farmers and become farmers, in New Zealand they don't leave anything to any one person, there's nobody steps in and takes the farm - unless they're the only child.'<sup>19</sup> Certainly these interviews reflect this claim. For example, Kevin McNeil, the youngest son, took over the farm because he showed the most inclination towards farming.

### II

#### *The Rural Economy*

Despite increasing urbanisation, rural people made up almost half the population (552,344 in 1926) in the interwar years. In 1926 almost 33 per cent. of the rural population lived in rural boroughs, small towns or townships, while the rest were scattered round the countryside.<sup>20</sup> Farming patterns varied between the North and South Islands. South Island farms tended to be larger and retain a more mixed character with sheep and cropping predominating. Dairy farming proliferated in the North Island, and helped to promote the island's growing economic dominance.<sup>21</sup> The number of dairy farms increased more than five times in the period 1906-1921, dramatically changing the shape of rural New Zealand, and affecting employment patterns. Rural industries expanded, but agricultural employment contracted because of increasing mechanisation.<sup>22</sup>

The New Zealand economy depended on primary production. In 1929 primary

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<sup>18</sup> Toynbee discusses one man who worked on the farm, went droving and returned home 'to what would eventually become his inheritance as the eldest son'. C. Toynbee, *Her Work and His, Family, Kin and Community in New Zealand 1900-1930*, Victoria University Press, Wellington, 1995, p.57. Though this may have happened occasionally, inheritance by the eldest son does not seem to have been the general pattern in New Zealand. For instance if one looks at the Rutherford family, the great farms were divided up amongst the children (barring personal disputes between fathers and children). Olive Buchanan (Olive Rutherford) had been left two farms, one a high country sheep station, by her father, and her husband had another farm. On her death she divided that (husband's) farm up between her two daughters of that second marriage. See Nan Buchanan abstracts. For a discussion of the Rutherfords see J. Holm, *Nothing but Grass and Wind The Rutherfords of Canterbury*, Hazard Press, Christchurch, 1992.

<sup>19</sup> M. Trembath, 2.1.97, p. 9. Mary was born in Paeroa, Hauraki Plains in 1912. Her father trained as a farrier, her mother was a lady's companion, but they eventually acquired land during the first world war, and broke in a pioneer farm in the 1920s. They milked thirty cows by hand. Mary worked on the farm until her marriage to a Bill Norton in 1934.

<sup>20</sup> NZOYB, 1929, pp.98-105.

<sup>21</sup> Brooking, 'Economic Transformation', in Oliver and Williams (eds.), *The Oxford History of New Zealand*, p.231.

<sup>22</sup> The growth of dairying, as well as the rise of refrigeration, affected rural employment patterns, as rural industries began to flourish. The number of employees involved in meat freezing and preserving increased by 102.8% between 1906 and 1921, and the number in butter, cheese, and condensed milk manufacture grew by 87.7%. These industries largely employed men. In 1919-1920 meat preserving and freezing employed 8,448 (and was the biggest single male manufacturing employer) of whom only 114 were women, while dairy manufacturing employed 3,198 men and 154 women. NZOYB, 1921-22, pp.381-382.

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production made up 68% of total productive output in New Zealand.<sup>23</sup> Wool and frozen meat formed the major proportion of exports in 1920, being worth £11,863,827 and 11,673,696 respectively.<sup>24</sup> Wool remained important but gradually dairying and frozen meat dominated New Zealand's exports and economy.<sup>25</sup> Brooking has described the period from the 1890s to 1920 as being a golden age for New Zealand farmers.<sup>26</sup>

Much of this production came from small farms, and New Zealanders valued and aspired to the ideal of the independent yeoman. A letter to the *New Zealand Farmer* in 1919 heralded a break up of large estates in Britain, hoping it would promote the rise of the yeoman farmer there. '[A] nation of yeomanry is by far the strongest nation, and the most contented.'<sup>27</sup> The Liberal government,<sup>28</sup> 1891-1912, promoted the expansion of this type of farming by opening up new areas of settlement, although contrary to popular mythology this occurred largely at the expense of the indigenous Maori rather than the great estate owners.<sup>29</sup> The numbers of small farms rapidly increased as the government made cheap credit available. Government assistance for returned servicemen continued this trend but unfortunately promoted an increase in small marginal farms, often in poor areas.<sup>30</sup> Yet in both New Zealand and Australia, as early as the 1870s, farming required a high level of capitalisation since markets were highly commercialised and subject to international forces. The New Zealand farmer produced for an international market, especially after the development of refrigeration during the 1880s made the export of meat and butter possible.<sup>31</sup> The undercapitalised farmer faced an uncertain future. At the beginning of the interwar period farmers enjoyed prosperity but ominous signs had already emerged.

The twenties and thirties were an unsettled period for farming and country districts. In 1921 a depression hit rural New Zealand as peacetime conditions of trade ended high prices and the guaranteed market for primary produce.<sup>32</sup> Heavily mortgaged farmers were affected, but returned servicemen suffered the most since they had often been put on poor and

<sup>23</sup> Brooking, 'Agrarian Businessmen Organise,' p.12.

<sup>24</sup> *NZOYB*, 1921-22, p.11.

<sup>25</sup> Brooking, 'Agrarian Businessmen Organise', p.11.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid*, p.11.

<sup>27</sup> Derwentwater, 'Our Round Table', *NZF*, 1 October, 1919, p.1424.

<sup>28</sup> See T. Brooking, *Lands for the People? The Highland Clearances and the Colonisation of New Zealand A Biography of John McKenzie*, Otago University Press, Dunedin, 1996, for a comprehensive assessment of the Liberals' land policies.

<sup>29</sup> See Brooking, 'Agrarian Businessmen Organise', Len Richardson, 'Parties and Political Change', in Oliver and Williams (eds.), *The Oxford History of New Zealand*, p.204.

<sup>30</sup> Land prices rose dangerously in this period. A writer in 1919 bemoaned the presence of parasitical land speculators. 'There are quite a number of these gentlemen who are taking advantage of the soldiers and asking them in many cases £10 an acre more than they would pay for the same land.' Derwentwater, 'Our Round Table', *NZF*, 1 October 1919, p.1424. Two families in this study, the Bevans and the Ryans, were part of this scheme. The Bevans farmed in mid-Canterbury, and the Ryans in the central North Island. Both families struggled, particularly the Ryans who had to clear the bush before establishing a dairy farm. Mr Ryan had been a labourer before taking up farming, but Mr Bevan had a farming background.

<sup>31</sup> Brooking, 'Economic Transformation', in Oliver and Williams (eds.), *Oxford History of New Zealand*, p.226.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid*, p.226.

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underdeveloped land, with insufficient capital. Both the general population and the government thought that farming should be the returned serviceman's reward but the belief that 'our country is an agricultural country and the more people that settle on the land the better it will be for everybody' ignored the realities of modern farming.<sup>33</sup> Bankruptcies increased from 19 in 1920 to 200 in 1922<sup>34</sup>, and some farmers were forced off the land'.<sup>35</sup> The Great Depression destroyed an already fragile balance and as prices for primary produce fell sharply farmer's incomes diminished rapidly.<sup>36</sup>

Farmer bankruptcy created a sorrowful resonance that extended well beyond rural areas. The loss of a farm betrayed a dream central to the New Zealand ethos. Stories about hard-working farmers who lost their farms 'through no fault of their own' revealed to a horrified population the falsity of the notion that the migrant could work hard and get ahead. Hard work did not guarantee prosperity. Even the largely urban Labour Party supported assistance to farmers. To farm meant freedom, independence and the realisation of the Arcadian dream. The loss of a farm had deep personal consequences, as Danbom emphasised in his study of rural America. 'It is unfortunate when anyone loses a job or a business. But the farm is also a home, often put together painstakingly over several generations. Thus losing one's farm is losing one's home, and its loss frequently represents a betrayal not only of one's children but of one's parents and grandparents as well.'<sup>37</sup>

Four farming families in this study lost their farms, which had a huge impact on family life, and the local community. Somerset commented that the 'structure of the rural community shows that there is an interdependence of its parts as real as that of a city.'<sup>38</sup> The following two extracts reveal community concern over the loss of a farm. Mr Partridge had carefully built up a farm and by the late 1920 had over 70 cows, which he milked by machine:

By 1934 he'd evidently fallen behind with payments on the farm or perhaps the leasehold land, certainly on the farm. There was something called the mortgagee's relief commission where farmers who'd got into financial difficulties during the depression years could go, and relief would be arranged, debts would be wiped off and that sort of thing. But my father would have none of that because - it was often elderly people's savings that were wiped off or young people. The local baker for instance was a young

<sup>33</sup> Derwentwater, Wellington, 'Our Round Table, October 1919, *NZF*, p.1424.

<sup>34</sup> New Zealand farmers shared these financial woes with farmers in the U.S., and England. Brooking shows that while bankruptcies had decreased in New Zealand by 1928 the situation in England was gradually worsening. Brooking, 'Agrarian Businessmen Organise,' p.18. Frances Donaldson, in her autobiography, discusses the depressed state of agriculture in England during this period. 'It was one of the ugliest aspects of England between the wars, this ruthless neglect of the countryside by a country-loving nation.' F.Donaldson, *Child of the Twenties*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1986, pp.145-146.

<sup>35</sup> Brooking, 'Economic Transformation', in Oliver and Williams (eds.), *The Oxford History of New Zealand*, p.227.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid*

<sup>37</sup> David Danbom, *Born in the Country: A History of Rural America*, The John Hopkins Memorial Press, Baltimore & London, 1995, p.263.

<sup>38</sup> H.C.D. Somerset, *Littledene A New Zealand Rural Community*, N.Z.C.E.R., Whitcombe & Tombs Ltd, New Zealand, 1938, p.67.

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man with a young family and his debts were being wiped off by the mortgagee's commission, so my dad would have nothing of it, nothing to do with it. So we just packed up and left it and we went onto another leasehold farm. But the district that we left evidently was very upset about it because that house was never really lived in again and yet it was quite a nice two-storeyed kauri house.<sup>39</sup>

This loss affected families deeply though it is harder to ascertain the effects of bankruptcy on men. Rural society was heavily patriarchal and women appear to have had little input into financial decisions. Land formed a central part of male self-esteem, and these accounts reveal that men made decisions based on a sense of male pride and honour, rather than accepting advice or assistance. These men typify the independent yeoman, the proud pioneer of the New Zealand dream.<sup>40</sup> Wives were equally devastated by the loss of a home and a dream, without being able to influence their husband's decisions. They must have felt powerless. Marjorie Walker recalled the devastation that her mother experienced:

My mother never really got over it, it was dreadful for her. I don't know much how Dad felt about it. I'm sure that had he been willing to take some advice from some of his neighbours that he might have been able to stay. I wasn't told very much about what was happening but I remember being sent to bed in very good time because some of the neighbouring farmers, influential men, I realise now, were coming to see Dad. I have a strong memory of them saying "But Jack", and Dad saying "I've given my word". He was a proud man, too proud really, once he'd accepted it he wasn't prepared to have any representations made for him, it would have hurt his pride severely. *And do you know how your mother felt about that?* Oh yes I do. She felt resentful, very sad, very miserable. She found it very difficult to meet her friends for a long time after that, she became something of a recluse, not completely, and she didn't like living in the old house<sup>41</sup> we went to, she felt a deep sense of shame, she didn't really want people to visit her there for a long time.<sup>42</sup>

### III

#### *Rural society*

Family structure in rural areas differed quite markedly from the towns in the interwar years. Men dominated rural society. Fewer rural women ran households: in the thirteen urban areas women headed 18.83 per cent. of households compared with 10.26 per cent. for the rest of the country.<sup>43</sup> Rural households in the early 1920s had a greater ratio of children to adults than urban areas. There were proportionately the same number of breadwinners in urban and rural

<sup>39</sup> Edna Partridge, 19.10.94, p.2.

<sup>40</sup> Both men evidently retained the respect of neighbours and friends. A neighbour gave the Walkers employment and a house to live in, and the community supported Mr Walker when he became an insurance salesman.

<sup>41</sup> Their original house had been supplied with electricity, in 1925. It had an electric stove and electrically heated hot water. It was a modern house that any housewife would have been proud to work in. M.Walker, 20.10.94, p.3.

<sup>42</sup> M. Walker, 20.10.94, pp.3-4.

<sup>43</sup> NZOYB, 1921-22, p.56.



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households despite the difference in ratio of children to adults, indicating that rural children may have contributed to the family at an earlier age. In urban areas an average of 2.47 adults looked after 1.30 children while in rural areas there were 2.39 adults to 1.39 children.<sup>44</sup> The greater proportion of children in rural areas is reflected in the large number of small schools scattered throughout the country.<sup>45</sup> Even though women and children were an important part of rural communities, they were always subordinate to men.

Both Day and Toynbee argue that the traditional patriarchal model of the family still held sway in rural New Zealand during the early part of this century. Rural fertility rates remained high and farmers relied on family labour and mechanisation, rather than employing labour to run their farms.<sup>46</sup> The existence of large families retarded the development of the 'modern' family in rural areas. Small scale family farmers relied on 'slave' labour by women and children to make their farms viable: 'because penniless men were put into an occupation which demanded capital, they were forced to exploit their wives' and children's labour in farm production in a society which had already institutionalised separate spheres for men and women and dependency and schooling for children.'<sup>47</sup> Technological developments provided some relief in the twenties as electricity powered the adoption of milking machinery. Productivity and conditions improved, allowing the dairy farmer to remove some of the unrelenting labour from his family.<sup>48</sup> But the depression impacted sharply on this development.

Society regarded the labour of women and children as a step required by a pioneering farmer but assumed that as farms became more established money and mechanisation would obliterate the need for their labour.<sup>49</sup> The *New Zealand Farmer* put forward this viewpoint, commenting, 'In developing a new country, hardships are expected in the outback, but when the country becomes more prosperous, and the well-being of the community becomes endangered, it is time to remonstrate'.<sup>50</sup> However the exigencies of the New Zealand farming situation made the replacement of women difficult. This situation varied between types of farming, with dairy farmers relying most heavily on family labour.

Rural women established the Womens' Division of Federated Farmer's and the

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<sup>44</sup> NZOYB, 1921-22, p.57.

<sup>45</sup> The government in the twenties and thirties attempted to close down some small schools and consolidate others, with the assistance of the growing school bus service, but many of them lingered on. In 1916 153 schools in Otago were sole charge schools with under thirty-five pupils, sixty-eight schools had between thirty-six and 120 pupils but only thirty-five had between 121 and 700 pupils. R. Goodyear, 'Has the Bell Rung Yet? Children and Schooling in Otago 1900-1920', *History of Education Review*, Vol. 24, no.1, 1995, p.32.

<sup>46</sup> Brooking, 'Economic Transformation', in Oliver & Williams (ed.), *The Oxford History of New Zealand*, p.229.

<sup>47</sup> Lake, quoted in Toynbee, *Her Work and His*, p.91

<sup>48</sup> Delyn Day, 'The Politics of Knitting: A Study of the New Zealand Women's Institutes and the Women's Division of the New Zealand Farmer's Union 1920-1940', Post graduate diploma in history, University Of Otago, Dunedin, 1991', p.22.

<sup>49</sup> *ibid*

<sup>50</sup> 'Should Women Milk? A Woman's Viewpoint.' *NZF*, 1 November 1927, p.1417.

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Country Women's Institute in the 1920s in order to support and improve the position of women in the country and to revitalise country life.<sup>51</sup> Although the myth of rural Arcadia remained strong in the 1920s and 1930s, farmers and their wives were concerned about urban drift. They wanted to acquire urban facilities in the countryside, and to promote domestic service in the country.<sup>52</sup> Correspondents to the *New Zealand Farmer* debated why servants preferred to work in towns, and most concluded that country life promised hard work and fewer amusements. These letters give an insight into the experience of country life. One writer commented:

In the country one has to get up at such an early hour in the morning, and continues working practically all the day. When night comes, and all the work is over, what is there to amuse? Think of all the amusements in town. There is somewhere to go every night . . . In the town the work is the same all year round; but in the country there is always extra work at harvesting. The very dry weather makes a difference in the country. The water is not laid on, as it is in town. The tanks soon get dry, and then it has to be carried from a well, creek, or river. The country has not got half the conveniences a town has. If one runs short of anything that is really necessary there are no shops near by to purchase it.<sup>53</sup>

Women's lives were undoubtedly harder in country areas. In general, rural accommodation was inferior to accommodation in towns and cities, and had fewer conveniences. In the 1920s towns had electricity and all the urban interviewees enjoyed the convenience of electric light and some appliances, the most common being an electric iron. Poorer town houses might have an outside toilet and no bathroom but increasingly urban houses were being built or renovated with these conveniences. Rural areas received electricity later and although by 1935 80 per cent. of dairy farms had electricity, rural families lagged well behind urban families when it came to acquiring domestic appliances.<sup>54</sup> The Labour government became concerned with the problem of country housing in the 1940s, and ordered a survey of rural housing. Dorothy Johnson, a rural sociologist, found that in her sample area most women were dissatisfied with their housing. By this time most country districts had electricity and all the women surveyed had an electric iron, most a vacuum cleaner, wringer, telephone and wireless but few had (or thought they needed) an electric washing machine, sewing machine or refrigerator.<sup>55</sup> The following tables show the results of her small survey.

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<sup>51</sup> See Day, 'The Politics of Knitting'.

<sup>52</sup> *ibid*, p.31.

<sup>53</sup> Cupid's messenger, Arapito, 'Our Round Table', *NZF*, August 1, 1919, p.112.

<sup>54</sup> Day, 'The Politics of Knitting', p.25. Somerset observed that few small farmers or labourers had bathrooms or hot water tanks. Somerset, *Littledene*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>55</sup> D. Johnson Papers, 6/1/b, Rural Housing Survey 1947.

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**Table 7**  
**Rural Sanitation: Methven Survey**

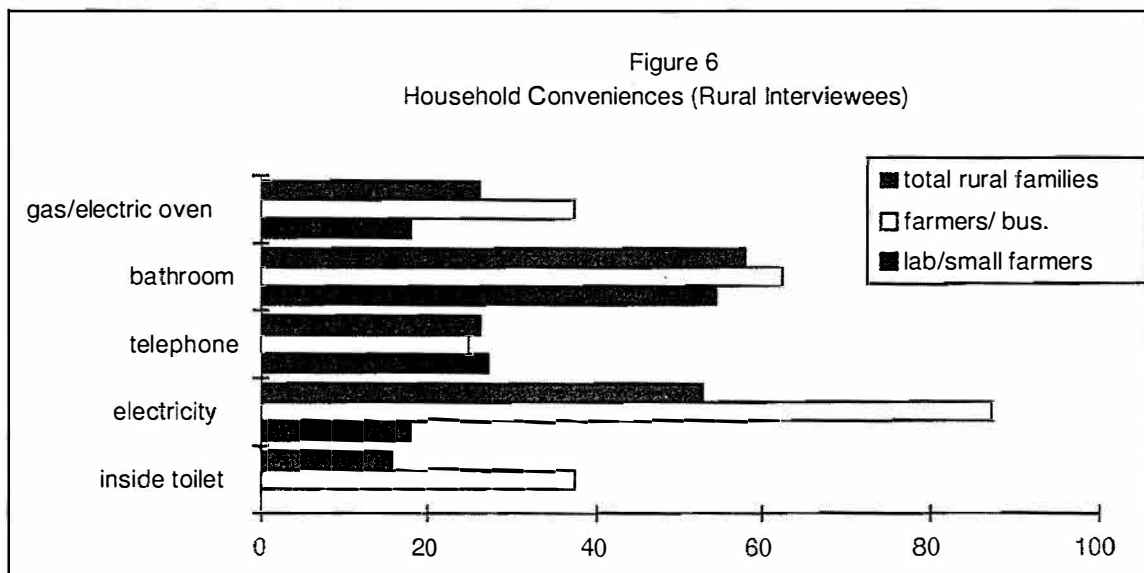
7	Had WC flush to town drainage
7	WC flush to septic tank
1	WC flush to other drainage
2	Chemical lav
1	Earth closet pan type
4	Earth closet pit type.

**Table 8**  
**Equipment in Houses**

Methven Survey (22 schedules)

Appliance	No. possessing appliance	Percentage
Elec. Iron	22	100%
Elec. Vacuum cleaner	17	77%
Elec. washing machine	7	32%
Elec. refrig.	6	27%
Elec. sewing machine	4	18%
Elec. mixer & beater	3	14%
Non elec. iron	1	4%
Non elec. sewing machine	18	82%
Wringer	16	73%
carpet sweeper	13	59%
Telephone	17	77%
Wireless	21	95%

Electricity transformed farm work and made housework easier, but in the 1920s most rural people did not have access to electricity, which contributed to a woman’s workload. The following graph shows access to household conveniences among rural interviewees. Not surprisingly, medium to large farmers, and rural business families, enjoyed better housing conditions than small farmers or rural labourers.<sup>56</sup>



<sup>56</sup>The higher percentage of telephones among rural labourers occurred because some farmers installed telephones at their farm managers’, or workers’ homes, for ease of contact with employees.

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This distinct lack of conveniences in the countryside reveals a growing gap between rural and urban areas. Many rural areas seemed ‘backward’ in contrast with the towns.

Rural people still believed firmly in the moral and physical superiority of country living, but experienced a greater need to defend it against the insidious leaching of the town. A letter to the *New Zealand Farmer* asserted the value of the rural contribution to New Zealand, saying, ‘Look, cousins, some of our best statesmen and leaders were country bred and born. And what have they done? Made our Empire what it is today. Our present premier was only an ordinary farmer, just the same as we are.’<sup>57</sup> These factors remained in the background of society in the interwar years as country and town asserted themselves against each other.

Intellectuals in this period became interested in the countryside. They responded to American ideas and initiatives and began to study rural life. The Department of Agriculture appointed Dorothy Johnson as a rural sociologist in 1945. Somerset published his well-known study of Littledene in 1938. James Shelley wrote an appreciative forward, lauding the book as an important contribution to knowledge about New Zealand.<sup>58</sup> While the book provides a useful insight into rural life in the period, Somerset reveals a certain condescension to its subject. For example, he condemns rural society as devoid of culture and intellectual endeavours. ‘The toil and moil of the farm leaves little time for aesthetic appreciation of arts divorced from the daily round. So the farmer breeds a pedigree cow or pig; his wife gets her modicum of self-expression from her cooking.’<sup>59</sup> He seems to have had little real sympathy with the rural life, unlike his wife Gwen (from a farming background herself) who writes with more understanding.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless his description of a farming area is worth repeating here briefly.

Somerset described Littledene as a ‘typical New Zealand rural community’. Littledene, is in fact, Oxford, a North Canterbury town, close to Christchurch. In the 1930s Littledene had 1,800 inhabitants within a 350 square mile radius,<sup>61</sup> and consisted of 350 farm holdings, and a small township. These inhabitants earned their living from cropping, sheep farming and dairying, plus a number of small businesses and a few professions such as doctors and lawyers.<sup>62</sup> An average number of 4.3 persons lived in wooden bungalows of four or five rooms. Families lived in the kitchen but kept a formal front parlour for guests (a pattern also typical of urban New Zealand, and originating in England).<sup>63</sup> Burnett observed

<sup>57</sup> Farmer’s daughter, Feilding, ‘Our Round Table’, *NZ Farmer*, Oct 1 1919, p.1424.

<sup>58</sup> J. Shelley, ‘Foreword’, Somerset, *Littledene*.

<sup>59</sup> Somerset, *Littledene*, p.24.

<sup>60</sup> See Gwen Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, New Zealand Playcentre Federation, Auckland, 1988.

<sup>61</sup> Somerset, *Littledene*, p.1.

<sup>62</sup> The township had ‘a motor garage, 2 hotels, 3 boarding houses, 3 blacksmiths, 2 threshing mills, 2 carriers, 3 builders, 1 painter and paper hanger, 2 grocers, 2 drapers, 2 bootmakers, 1 tailor, 2 hairdressers, 1 stationer, 2 butchers, 1 milkman and 3 stock agents’. Somerset, *Littledene*, p.12.

<sup>63</sup> Jack Ford recalled, ‘oh you never went in there [the parlour], the door was locked almost, you only went in

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that women sacrificed convenience ‘to devote a room to this non-rational use of space, for the ‘parlour’ clearly had a social and psychological importance in announcing the status and aspiration of the occupants.’<sup>64</sup> Work and the work ethic dominated the countryside in Littledeane. Somerset observed in a sarcastic manner that farmers believed, despite increasing evidence to the contrary, that hard work could solve any financial problems.<sup>65</sup> Dairy farmers (in our sample, the Partridges, Trembaths, Bevans, and Ryans) and some farm labourers (the Gillespies, and Jones’s) worked the hardest. Sheep farmers and some mixed farmers (the Chapmans, Walkers, and Brosnihans) had more leisure than those on dairy farms. Although most families had little time for leisure Somerset lists an impressive number of societies and social events (see chapter IX).<sup>66</sup> Mutual aid, and self-help were important parts of rural life

Rural areas had distinctive qualities that differentiated rural life from city life. It would be wrong, however, to consider farms or rural areas such as Littledeane as purely self-contained entities.<sup>67</sup> Somerset’s description of Littledeane shows that most rural communities consisted of scattered farms situated close to a township or small town that supplied basic farming needs, and might have a small farm-related industry (especially around dairying areas). As stressed in the previous section, farmers and rural workers were partly dependent on international markets. The fortunes of urban New Zealanders, in turn, largely rested on rural prosperity. Rural New Zealanders did not live completely separately from urban New Zealanders. Perhaps inevitably in a period of urban drift, many of the families in this study had relatives in towns (see chapter IX). Moreover, many rural families had access to a large town or city to buy products unobtainable in rural towns. Such visits might be rare, but they meant that few rural areas were completely self-contained or unaware of urban developments. Truly remote rural areas did exist but these were fewer in number. Occupation, economics, conservatism, and isolation from cities, shaped country life, and provide the context for exploring the family relationships depicted in this chapter.

### *Family background*

The rural families in this study came from a variety of social backgrounds and incomes. Eleven men were farmers, one had a threshing mill business, two worked on the railways, two had shops and two were labourers. A considerable disparity of income existed between farmers and labourers, although part-time farmers might be included somewhere in the

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there on Sunday nights’. Jack Ford, 4.10.94, p.5. Davin commented that in London ‘the home with a parlour, every effort was made to preserve it from daily use and keep it as a sanctum of respectability and tidiness’. Davin, *Growing Up Poor*, p.51. See Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman’s Place*, p.129.

<sup>64</sup>Burnett, *Destiny Obscure: Autobiographies of Childhood, Education and Family from the 1820s to the 1920s*, Middlesex, England, Allen Lane, 1982, p.230.

<sup>65</sup> Somerset, *Littledeane*, p.28.

<sup>66</sup> *ibid*, pp.99-100.

<sup>67</sup> Susan Wright explains that this was a criticism applied to many early community studies of rural areas in Britain. Wright, ‘Image & Analysis: new directions in community studies’, in Short (ed.), *The English Rural Community Image and Analysis*, p.203.



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middle. In 1926 farmers who could afford to employ labour had considerably higher incomes than non-employing farmers, and labourers earned the least. Sheep farmers (employers) earned on average over £364 per year, while cattle, dairy, mixed farmers and market gardeners earned between £250 and £275 (disregarding the capital value of assets). Based on average incomes recorded in the census, most rural farming families would have earned between £185 and £250 per year and labouring families less than £150 per year.<sup>68</sup> Census information indicates that farmers were beginning to slip behind urban incomes. Rural men earned on average £185, urban men £225, and even farmers earned 35% under the national norm.<sup>69</sup>

Both labouring and farming families worked hard to obtain a living, and maintained a level of self sufficiency greater than in the towns. Many of the mixed and all the dairying families relied to a large extent on family labour especially when times were hard. Mr Partridge had been able to employ a man on the farm but rising costs and lower prices meant that he fired him when Edna turned fourteen, and she took over the milking.<sup>70</sup> Family labour could be required in other rural jobs as well. Men and their families often formed a whole in a way quite unlike most urban employment (the exception being small businesses such as grocers' shops). A farm manager's wife assisted her husband and cooked for any full time or casual employees, as well as for the family. Children provided extra labour if required. Mrs Gillespie, the wife of a shepherd in the remote Hakataramea Valley, ran the small postal bureau, for which she was paid about £2 a year.<sup>71</sup> Many rural women made vital contributions to the family economy. They ran small dairies and made butter, and often sold eggs as well. From an early age children were taught to do a few jobs around the farm, and by the time they were ten or eleven girls and boys might make a considerable contribution to labour. Rural family structure remained divergent from the prevailing ideology.

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<sup>68</sup> Farmers on their own account (not employers of labour) received between £195 and £205 per annum and labourers between £95 and £195. Seventy per cent. of labourers earned under £155 per year. Brooking, 'Agrarian Businessmen Organise', p.50.

<sup>69</sup> Brooking, 'Agrarian Businessmen Organise', p.51.

<sup>70</sup> E. Partridge, 19.10.94, p.8.

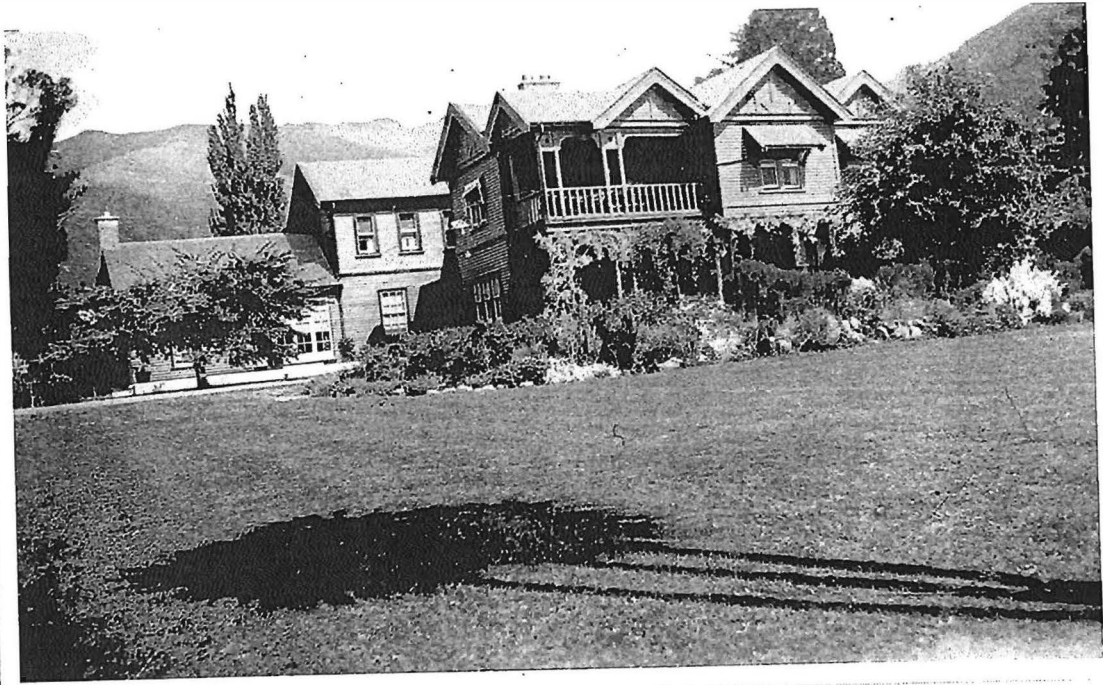
<sup>71</sup> B. Gillespie, 7.12.94, p.2.



The prosperous Buchanans dressed for a wedding. Notice the formal, stylish dress they both wear. Olive and Jack Buchanan at Ag and Gerald's wedding, in the early 1920s. Courtesy of Nan Buchanan.



The Jones family, Mr Jones is on the left, the three girls, Millie, Jean and Rosie are seated, and Mrs Jones is seated next to her husband. The other two people are an elderly uncle and aunt, who had a shop at North Beach in Christchurch. Courtesy of Millie Jones.



Kinloch, The Buchanans House, c. 1920s. The house had a large billiard room, a nursery, a drawing room, dining room, kitchen, laundry. Upstairs there were six bedrooms, one bathroom and two bedrooms for staff, and another bedroom and another bathroom for the staff. Courtesy of Nan Buchanan.



The Gillespies' house, which was for the head shepherd, had three bedrooms, a sitting room, kitchen, wash house, and a bathroom. It was extremely cold in the harsh winters, note the outside toilet to the left, a feature of most rural house in the twenties and thirties. Courtesy of Bill Gillespie.

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**Table 9: Rural Families, Social Hierarchy****Large farms**

**Buchanan:** Gentleman farmer, stud farm, 2000 acre mixed farm, high country sheep station (belonging to Olive), leasehold, 6040 acres, annual rental £113.

**Medium to large**

**Chapman** mixed farm 1200 acres.

**Medium**

**Brosnihan** 400 acres mixed farm.

**Walker** 670 acres, mixed cropping and livestock, lost farm in Depression - father laboured then became insurance agent.

**E.G.** West Canterbury area. Medium sized farm with sheep and some timber.

**McNeil** 525 acres, sheep and cropping.

**Rural business**

**Denniston** threshing mill owner.

**Golding** hardware store.

**Small Farms- marginal farms (part-time work)**

**Partridge** 30-40 acres, mainly dairying, later leased more land and milked 70 cows by machine. Lost farm.

**Ford** farm labourer, manager, then bought 120 acres, mixed farming - cropping, sheep, few cows.

**Ryan** 66 acres dairy farm, roading work (had to break in land).

**Bevan** 40-50 acres, dairying.

**Jones** small cropping farm, lost farm.

**Trembath** small farm with 30 cows, (had to break in land).

**Skilled manual**

**Gillespie** shepherd then farm manager.

**Keehan** drover, in mid thirties got a dairy farm which he lost in 1938.

**Jones** ploughman, manager.

**Evans** farm manager, carpenter, steam-roller driver.

**Unskilled manual**

**Moss** railway worker.

**Benson** dredges mining labourer.

## IV

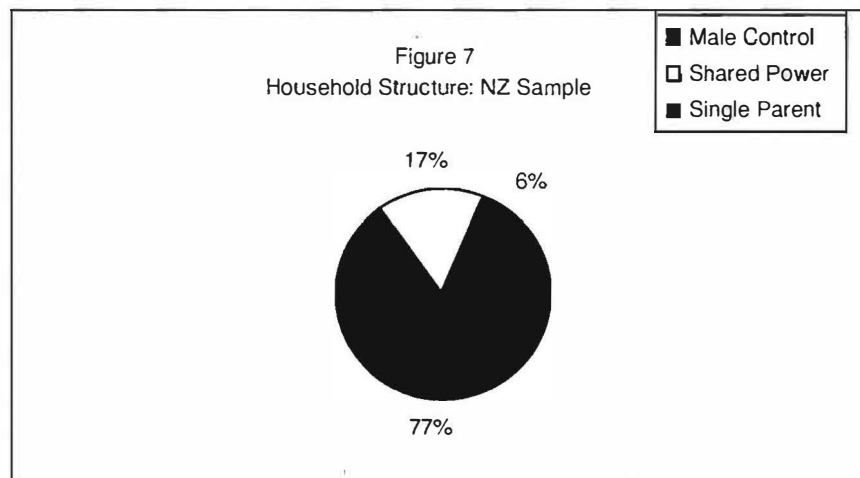
*Household Structures and husband-wife relationships*

The pre-industrial family household was a unit of production in which all families contributed their labour . . . In this situation there was no clear physical separation between domestic work and economic production. Women could conveniently attend to household matters, gardening and animals, as they kept an eye on their children and fed their babies. In fact, much of the routine work of the house and caring for children could be delegated to other children, specifically daughters. There was a division of labour in the household, by both gender and generation. Men tended to labour outside.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>72</sup> Toynbee, *Her Work and His*, p.42.

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Many of the small farming families in this period could partially fulfil this description of pre-industrial society. Rural families were seen as complementary partnerships and, as previously indicated, they functioned differently from urban families. The importance of women and children's labour meant that the traditional or patriarchal household remained stronger in the countryside than in the towns, even in non-farming households. Although women played an important part in running the household they had less financial power. A strong belief in male control existed, which lasted well beyond the interwar period.<sup>73</sup> One correspondent to the *New Zealand Farmer* declared that 'Every man is supposed to be the head of his house - some are. He [the farmer] considers himself a perfectly good He-man capable of running his own business. That being the case, he should be ashamed to drag his family in to do what is obviously his own job.'<sup>74</sup> Most of the interviewees in this study described their father as head of the household. The following graph depicts their view of family relationships.



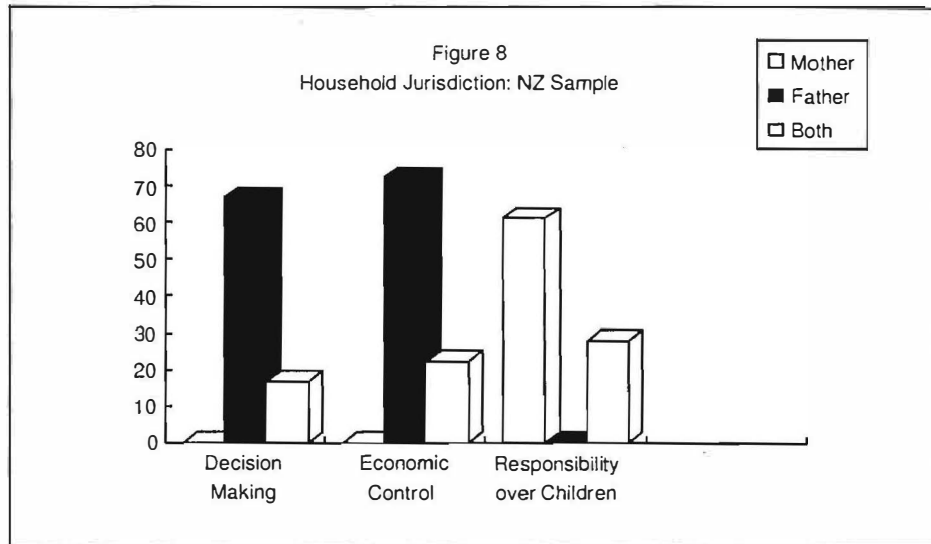
In total only three children in this study (16.7%) recalled their parents in an equal partnership. Two of these were on small farms and the other was a small business family. Men made the major financial decisions and women had little say in how money was spent. Although urban women largely remained subordinate, they seemed to have more control over finances and family life than country women. Rural men made major decisions, controlled finances, and also had slightly more influence over their children.

<sup>73</sup> A column in the *New Zealand Women's Weekly* in the 1950s stated that 'the home should be headed by husband and wife, with the husband as slightly senior partner'. M. Millar, *NZWW*, quoted in S.Parkes, 'A Golden Decade?: Farm Women in the 1950s', in B.Brookes, C.Macdonald & M.Tennant (eds.), *Women in History 2*, Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 1992, p.207. Most of the interviewees in Sally Parker's study of farm women in the 1950s agreed with this viewpoint.

<sup>74</sup> 'Should Women Milk? A Man's Point of View', *NZ Farmer*, 1 November, 1927, p.1417.



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Separate spheres existed to some extent on farms, but private and public worlds could not be easily differentiated. Children had more contact with their fathers, but families had less leisure together (see Chapter VIII). Mothers remained extremely important figures for children, but fathers also emerged as significant, though not always beneficent, figures in these narratives. Women still took the major part in bringing up the children but lacked the autonomy that urban mothers enjoyed (see chapter III). Non-farming rural families, in contrast, followed urban patterns more closely. In the following case studies rural household structure and parents' relationships emerge as complex. This complexity will be shown by an examination of the experiences of a 'patriarchal' farming household, a shared power household, then a non-farming family. Rural families followed traditional values with the male as patriarch or breadwinner, but women and children were not merely economic dependants. They were a valuable part of the rural economy. These factors shaped relationships and meant that the urban ideology of the family could not be fully established in the countryside.

### *Farming families:*

#### *Traditional/patriarchal family*

Some writers have implied that family relationships are more equal where both men and women work in a family economy. Day, for example, suggests that increasing mechanisation on farms relegated women to a separate sphere, and that they lost status and power with the family as a result.<sup>75</sup> Raewyn Dalziel, a feminist historian, argued convincingly that New Zealand women were partly given the vote in recognition of their important role in the colony.<sup>76</sup> Certainly women gained respectability and a position in the community through their role as housewife and helpmeet. Their economic value may have helped to modify

<sup>75</sup> Day, 'The Politics of Knitting' p.20.

<sup>76</sup> R. Dalziel, 'The Colonial Helpmeet: Women's Role and the Vote in Nineteenth Century New Zealand,' *NZJH*, Vol. 11, 1977. New Zealand women were granted suffrage in 1893.

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power relationships within a family. Appreciation for the 'colonial helpmeet' did not erode inequality, however, and despite women's contribution to the family economy, most farming families appear to have been dominated by men. Society never regarded women's work in the house, or on the farm, as proper (paid) work, a viewpoint that reinforced its subordinate nature.

Most country people believed in male authority, over farm, or business, and over wife and children. Men ran the family finances and made the major decisions, especially about business, while women managed the household budget on an allowance for housekeeping. Men maintained greater control over children's lives in the countryside, and interfered in areas that in town were considered women's domain. Practice, of course, could be different from the ideal, and it was here that such concepts would be challenged or modified. Interviewees talked about their father as dominant but their evidence showed the importance of their mothers as well. In general though, the overwhelming impression gained from the interviews is that with a few exceptions men reigned in the countryside, despite women's contribution to the economy.

Country women contributed to the family income more directly than women in town, but society still regarded the husband as the breadwinners. One man claimed

All fathers were head of the household, didn't matter where they were, all families, they were looked upon to earn enough money to keep a house together. That was their job, that was their job in life, more so than the mothers. . . [The] mother's job was certainly in the house cooking, and baking and sewing, and that sort of thing, none of the mothers worked other than in their own homes.<sup>77</sup>

The assumption that women did not work dominated opinions to such an extent that contradictory information could exist without threatening this concept. Jack Ford, who made the above comment, went on to say that when his father finally went farming:

There was quite a lot of work for the mother of the house, she had to do the butter and make it, and we as kids used to have to churn the butter before we went to school, and there were fowls to feed and beds to be made, and roast dinners to be cooked. There'd be odd men coming to do work on the farm and you had to always supply meals for them as well, that was the accepted thing - if you had somebody come to harvest well you had to provide meals for them. So it was a busy time for housewives, very busy. Of course remembering they only had an old coal range, they didn't have a washing machine, and they washed the dishes in a big basin, there was not even a sink in those days and after you finished washing the dishes you took the basin outside and threw the water under the hedge . . . so that was all very time consuming, you know there was nothing push-button except the electricity lights when they came.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>Jack Ford, 7.4.95, p.24.

<sup>78</sup> *ibid.*

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Households were organised around divisions of labour and based on the concept that men were the most important members. An advertisement in 1945 urged women to give their husbands a cup of steaming cocoa because ‘Tired fathers! They need a bit of help too!’<sup>79</sup> The farm family, although a community entity, did not have the same meaning to all its members. Gender, family position and age, determined place and experience. Social organisation of space shows how family life was experienced in a visual way.<sup>80</sup> Women were associated with the laundry and the kitchen, perhaps the dairy, and garden, but their personality permeated the house. Men’s space was smaller but symbolic: in both town and country his interior space was symbolised by the chair, the paper, and perhaps the wireless. Outside he ruled, the fields, the cowsheds, the stables, were all men’s environs. The ‘father’s chair’ symbolised male power in the household, and indicated that for him home was a place of leisure. Immigrants to New Zealand brought this institution with them. Gwen Jones, in Wales, explained that her father had a special chair. ‘You weren’t allowed to sit in it. I mean to say my mother let us sit in it and she used to say your father’ll be in, in ten minutes, ‘op it. [laughs] We had to get out, shake the cushions, make it look as though nobody’s been there all day long’.<sup>81</sup> Women based routines around men’s requirements, and every man, however understanding, expected to be able to sit down at night with his paper, and perhaps a pipe. These privileges showed his status. Some men considered this adequate compensation, but others expected the household to be shaped around their desires, regardless of circumstance. Society encouraged such tendencies since women were urged to make men happy and pander to their whims.<sup>82</sup> Davidoff comments that idealism associated with the home could result in intense and oppressive relationships. ‘The fact that no other external relationships were sanctioned for its inmates, at least below the rank of master, could make men tyrants over their wives, mothers over their daughters and both over their younger children and servants’.<sup>83</sup>

The Jones were a very traditional household. Mr Jones ruled it: he made the decisions, ran the finances (though his wife took control later in life), dictated to his children, and regarded household work as being women’s sphere. To some extent he bullied his wife, who had a peace-loving and quiet nature. They had a small cropping farm near Templeton (mid-Canterbury) but Mr Jones realised that he would have to buy a better farm before he could afford to pay for his children’s education. ‘Rose was determined she was going to be a school teacher and she was going to go to university, and he could see that he just didn’t have

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<sup>79</sup> Advertisement, *Home and Country*, March 1, 1945, p.18.

<sup>80</sup> Wright, ‘Image & Analysis: new directions in community studies’, in Short (ed.), *The English Rural Community Image and Analysis*, p.211.

<sup>81</sup> Gwen Jones, 18.11.96, pp.6-7.

<sup>82</sup> See Chapter III, ‘rules for a happy marriage’.

<sup>83</sup> L. Davidoff, *Worlds Between, Historical Perspectives on Gender & Class*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1995, p.58.



Mr Jones, the boss, with his dog, Moss, seen there in a typical pose with his pipe. Courtesy of Millie Jones.

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the money and so he sold the farm'.<sup>84</sup> He decided to buy another farm but refused to take his wife's advice; the ensuing disaster obviously became a bitter memory in the family. In 1926 he planned to buy a farm in Lincoln:

Mother wanted to go out, when he was making the deal, but his brother Harry went - who was down from the North Island. Dad said "No, oh no. [He] wouldn't take a woman." Mum said "Well I know people out there I could ask". He said "This man is a Methodist lay preacher he had meals in my father's house every Sunday for a year when he used to come up" . . . "He wouldn't cheat me". It turned out he cheated him left, right, and centre. He bought the fat stock at the market the week before and Dad went out, and oh yes he swore he fattened them on the place, and apparently there was something wrong with the drainage that the land went sour and you could not fatten stock on the place. So Dad refused to take delivery. . . Uncle Harry had gone back to the North Island and he wouldn't come back for the court case and Dad lost it, and lost all his money.<sup>85</sup>

He became unemployed for a while and took odd jobs before getting a job on his brother's farm as a teamster, at £2.10 a week. A lack of equality typified their relationship. Both parents worked hard, but Mrs Jones had to deal with both inside and outside work. 'She could work, she used to chop all the wood, and she worked like a slave on both farms and she cooked for shearers and harvesters.'<sup>86</sup> Mr Jones left all indoor work to her, despite her heavy workload, and expected his needs to be fulfilled on demand. He liked tea to be ready at a certain time every day and made himself very unpleasant if the food was delayed. He would 'yell and swear and curse and carry on if things didn't suit him, very quick, very impatient man.' Mrs Jones worked out strategies to keep the peace and the family entered into a conspiracy to keep him happy.

He'd come stamping in for his dinner and if things weren't just cooked Mum would say, "Put a cloth on the table, put the knives and forks - you know - knives and forks and spoons, everything down, and put the kettle [on], make him a cup of tea". We'd do that and he'd sit and drink his cup of tea and he'd never notice that the dinner wasn't ready, but Mum was so quiet and so gentle she never answered him back.<sup>87</sup>

The husband's control was not as absolute as may appear in these extracts. Mrs Jones did not always obey her husband but she usually did so quietly without him knowing. This view of a traditional rural family does show, however, the extent of male power and female subordination. Work on the farm did not necessarily give women greater equality because they were still subject to their husband.

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<sup>84</sup> M. Jones, 6.9.96, p.2.

<sup>85</sup> *ibid*, p.3.

<sup>86</sup> *ibid.*, pp.3, 7.

<sup>87</sup>*ibid*, 10.9.96, p.11.



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Men retained firm control over the farm's finances. In farming families, finances were usually arranged through a cheque account or the mortgage company. If there was a cheque account it belonged to the husband and he paid the bills, banked the money and drew out any money that might be needed for cash. Women must have welcomed the chance to make some money from selling eggs or butter. Farmers, however, did not totally function on a cash economy, which must have reduced some of the financial imbalance between husband and wife. Farms often provided many of the necessities, particularly food, that families needed. In contrast non-farming families followed urban patterns, the man might hand over his pay packet, or a portion of his pay packet, to his wife for her to pay the bills and buy food.<sup>88</sup> As in urban families, money caused conflict. The split between men's control and women's spending meant that each partner had a different approach to finance (as the quote at the beginning of the chapter illustrates). Conflict between need and resources emerged. Jack Ford recalled his parents arguing about money; 'there was never quite enough and probably Mum spent too much or they didn't have enough money for lots of things'.<sup>89</sup>

In traditional households women put their husbands', then their children's needs before their own. They played a vital but subordinate role within the house. The extent to which this was oppressive depended largely on personality. As in urban families, traditional household roles dominated but could be negotiated by partners. Some men allowed their wives greater input into decisions, and a greater mutual respect existed between partners. Women, as well as men, maintained these hierarchies, and there is little indication that they seriously challenged male power. Conflict emerged when men failed to provide for their families, or when they became too domineering. Children were quick to note and resent an unfair division of labour, or the father who did too little or who seemed too demanding. Neighbours also observed and passed judgement on families. However, the farming man, even though he might be out from dawn to dusk, remained a stronger presence in the house than the man in the city or the labouring man in the countryside.

### *The Colonial helpmeet/ Shared power family*

#### *Life on a dairy farm*

Certain similarities emerged in most of the small farming families. Family size tended to be larger, and all members of the family had to 'do their bit', the work depending on their age. The amount of work on a farm was considerable and men and women worked very hard. Certainly the importance of women's work on a dairy farm made greater equality possible, though not necessarily obtainable.

In two dairying families daughters recalled their parents as being equals in the household. Yet, even so, men continued to control finances. The Partridges and the Bevans

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<sup>88</sup> For example, Mr Evans, a steamroller driver, followed working class patterns when he gave most of his wages to his wife. He kept a small amount for tobacco and for running the car, since he had to drive a long distance to work. Joan Evans, 23.11.96, p.5.

<sup>89</sup> Jack Ford, 21.3.95, p.15.

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did not have the Johnsons' carefully articulated ideology of equality but both partners shared power within the relationship. Mrs Bevan worked on the farm, Mrs Partridge in the house and in the dairy.<sup>90</sup> This harmony depended on personality as well as response to circumstances, since Mrs Trembath also worked hard, but remained financially and practically subordinate to her husband. Mary recalled her mother saying "Well here comes Albert - that's his rocking chair under the light, he'll need the paper", and she would leave it beside him and things like that. We really knew that he was boss . . .'<sup>91</sup>

The Bevans partially fitted the picture that Dora Dillon described in 'Women Workers'. They had five children, which was an above-average-sized family.<sup>92</sup> Charles Bevan was born in 1875 and was twenty-five years older than his wife, whom he married in 1922. Charles, a returned serviceman, drew a 75 acre farm in South Canterbury, in the ballot. The government told them what and where to plant, and allocated them four pounds a week for household expenses. They had sixty cows and an orchard, bees, hens, and a vegetable garden to supplement their diet. Charles handled the business while they were on the farm but after they retired his wife took over the household accounts. Jean explained that her father was not head of the household, it appeared to be a partnership, even though the farm was in his name. 'Dad didn't give anybody the impression that he was the boss'. Both partners worked extremely hard, as they did not have electricity on the farm and had to milk sixty cows by hand. When needed, Mrs Bevan drove the tractor, and did the ploughing, as well as the milking. Work dominated over the care of children. Mrs Bevan took her infants to the cow shed while she milked, and Jean's brother nearly died on one occasion when he fell into effluent flowing beside the cow shed. Jean commented, 'each one of us as we were born, the older ones looked after the younger ones'.<sup>93</sup> Mrs Bevan found the constant round of work exhausting (complicated by her ill health) although the children helped on the farm and in the house. She eventually had a physical and nervous breakdown.

Despite their hard life both partners found satisfaction in their family, home and farm. The yeoman ideal, though taxing, provided a secure basis for family relationships. Jean described her father as 'a home person, he really liked being at home' who 'never went to the race course, never had a bet on a race, never ever had any liquor in the house, unless there was a family party'. He smoked a pipe, 'that was about the only pleasure he had, just smoking his pipe, he didn't want it, that was his life and he was happy'. They looked forward to retiring and living in comfort: 'they had enough money to buy a lovely home and buy the necessary things that Mum certainly didn't have in her early married days like washing machine and electric iron, and all those sorts of things'.<sup>94</sup> Unfortunately they both died soon afterwards

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<sup>90</sup> Certainly Mrs Partridge had helped on the farm when she only had one or two children, and helped in milking and haymaking on occasion but as her family became larger she did much less outside work.

<sup>91</sup> M.Trembath, 31.12.96, p.5.

<sup>92</sup> They had their first child in 1924 then another in 1926, 1928 (Jean), 1931 and 1938.

<sup>93</sup> J.Bevan, 10.6.96, pp.5, 2.

<sup>94</sup> *ibid*, 14.6.96, p.12.

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and only lived in that house for two or three years.

The relationships described next approximate the colonial helpmeet ideal, of wife and husband as separate but complementary. The Partridges had a small dairy farm, but for a number of years Mr Partridge worked in the mill in harvest season, carrying sacks of grain. He managed the business, but his wife shared in many of their decisions.<sup>95</sup> Husband and wife divided up household labour but regarded each other as equal. 'They both clearly saw their duties on a small farm and mother did the indoor things and got meals ready and clean clothes and father did the outside'.<sup>96</sup> She occasionally helped with milking or haymaking 'but she wasn't good at that sort of thing and he never expected her to, she would gather eggs or feed poultry which wasn't considered hard or difficult work'.<sup>97</sup> As well as 'indoor things' Mrs Partridge also sold eggs and butter, thus making a vital contribution to the family economy. She churned ten gallons of cream in a large barrel, producing 60 to 70 pounds of butter, which the family wrapped in 'printed butter paper with my mother's name on it - it was considered to be good butter. People would buy homemade butter by the name on the wrapper from the grocer's shop'. The butter helped to pay for the grocery bill. Despite the sense of equality the ritual of the father's luxuries at night continued. 'His days were so full of really hard physical work that when he came in at night he would just have his evening meal and sit down and have his one cigarette for the day and read and go over the newspaper again . . . making his cigarette was quite a little ceremony. I always wanted to do it but she [mother] would never let me do it.' The Partridges had a relatively happy relationship, based on a satisfying distribution of tasks. Edna recalled her father's devotion: 'even in his worst moods if she thought he was getting a bit too rough she would just say, just call his name and that one word he would just stop'.<sup>98</sup>

Hard work on a small farm, combined with child-bearing, affected women's health. Mrs Partridge had eight children that lived to adulthood, one baby that was stillborn, another that only lived for two days, as well as some miscarriages. After marrying at the age of 18 in 1914, she gave birth in 1915, 1917, 1921, 1923, 1926, 1928, 1931, 1933, 1935, and 1937, and finally died in 1951 at the age of 54. Edna recalled, 'I think she was six stone when she was married but she didn't look thin, she was just a dainty little person but full of life and energy. She always seemed to be dashing around with her aprons flying out behind her in my childhood memories, but she had such a big family that she became very tired in her later years.'<sup>99</sup>

Both Mrs Bevan and Mrs Partridge made an important contribution to the family

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<sup>95</sup> Edna thought her mother had ruined her father's chances. They had a chance to buy a good farm in 1940 but she refused to move from the farm they were living on (and which she had hoped they could buy), and they ended up on a smaller, poorly developed farm. E.Partridge, 19.10.94, p.3.

<sup>96</sup> E. Partridge, 7.2.95, pp.21-22.

<sup>97</sup> *ibid*, 24.1.95, p.12.

<sup>98</sup> E. Partridge, 7.2.95, p.18, 22.3.95, p.42.

<sup>99</sup> *ibid*, 19.10.94, p.2.

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economy, this combined with their large families made their lives more similar to women from earlier generations. While a significant difference did exist between their lives and those of town women, they remained aware of modern ideas.<sup>100</sup> Backblocks women such as Mrs Trembath and Mrs Ryan were more isolated.<sup>101</sup> In these two cases harmony of outlook, affection and interest ensured a mutually satisfactory relationship between husband and wife. Hard work as a wife did not always ensure equality and happiness in a household and the traditional notion of the husband as ‘boss’ dominated in country areas.

### *Non Farming families*

Non-farming rural families followed urban family structures more closely. The Goldings, who owned a business in the small rural town of Rangiora, could have conversed happily with the Wicks or the Johnsons. Mrs Golding had grown up in cosmopolitan Sydney and ‘felt very much in the wop wops living there [in Rangiora]’.<sup>102</sup> Both partners had a wide knowledge of the world and Mrs Golding, in particular, followed modern ideas about family life. For example, they chose to limit their family size, and were aware of the means of contraception (see chapter IV). They lived in a comfortable bungalow, which Mr Golding designed after observing housing in Sydney. Both believed in equality in marriage, and Mr Golding symbolised their relationship in a stained glass window in their new house: depicting a combined New Zealand silver fern and an Australian wattle.<sup>103</sup> Mrs Golding was the only rural woman, among the interviewees, who worked outside the house after she married. She could work part-time because she had only one child and marketable skills. She taught dancing, before working in a nursery school, where she earned £3.5/- for three afternoons a week. The family were reasonably comfortable except in the worst years of the depression.<sup>104</sup> They were affectionate with each other and with their daughter, which many considered unusual for country families at the time.

Their difference from many other country families can perhaps be seen in their attitude to politics. Like the Wicks, another commercial family, they held different views on a number of subjects, particularly politics. Mr Golding ‘till his dying day voted National because Sid Holland, he’d been a prime minister in the past and of course was a Member of Parliament, Sid Holland had been Dad’s boy who cleaned his windows.’<sup>105</sup> Mrs Golding

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<sup>100</sup> Mrs Partridge had advanced ideas about nutrition, especially the importance of fresh fruit and vegetables, and Mrs Bevan followed Plunket.

<sup>101</sup> Doris Gordon in her autobiography *Back-Blocks Baby Doctor* discusses the difficulty doctors faced in caring for women in remote areas. For example: ‘Dr. Hugh Douglas of Hamilton, in 1920, received a telephone message that a woman in labour forty miles away on a coastal farm had ruptured her uterus and that bits of baby and gangrenous black bowel were hanging outside’. They had to operate on the woman on her kitchen table, but the woman recovered. Doris Gordon, *Back-Blocks Baby Doctor*, Faber & Faber Ltd., London, 1955, p.175.

<sup>102</sup> A. Golding, 16.5.95, p.1.

<sup>103</sup> *ibid*, p.2.

<sup>104</sup> Annette did not know her parents’ income but her father gave her mother the generous housekeeping allowance of £5 per week. *ibid*, 16.5.95, p. 5.

<sup>105</sup> *ibid*, 18.5.95, p. 11.

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supported Labour because she thought they cared for the poor. This difference of opinion contrasts with many families where the husband's view on politics dominated the family and many wives, overtly at least, followed their husbands' views. Jack Ford, the son of a farm manager, thought that 'whatever Dad [did], well she would have to do. . . I don't know of any mothers or wives that would have gone against what their husbands were advocating, women had to do what they were told, full stop.'<sup>106</sup> These women may have been quietly subversive, however. Millie Jones explained that her mother voted secretly against her father for years. When Labour were elected in 1935 'Dad said "Oh we haven't done much good in this election have we." She said "Oh my party's done very well thank you." That was the first he knew that she always voted Labour, she'd never told him before and he was dumbfounded. She said "No I'm a working person I vote Labour"'.<sup>107</sup>

### *Labouring/working class families.*

The Bensons, the Evans and the Mosses typified the life of the family of an unskilled or semi-skilled worker in rural areas. The men moved about and tried their luck at different occupations, before eventually settling down. They received reasonable pay, but work could be irregular and lacked security. Family structures were traditional with the father considered the head of the household and in both the Benson and the Moss households fathers controlled the house in an often harsh and authoritarian manner. The idea of separate spheres firmly applied but country life meant lack of facilities and isolation, which separated the life described here from that of urban areas.

The Mosses married in c.1904 and had six children, the eldest born in 1906, the youngest (Jean), born in 1919. James Moss had worked for relatives on farms, then drove a hansom cab in Gisborne, before working as a labourer on the railways. The family settled in Nuhaka in 1924, while he worked on the railway but one year he had an accident while working. Life became extremely hard for the family since he had to take the dole, 'I think Dad used to get a day and a half work for three weeks and the fourth week he got no work. And he got seven and six for that.' He went away for a month at a time building a road way in Waikaremoana, 'it was a terrible life, they wouldn't do it now, they lived in tents on this all through the winter, it was jolly wet and cold out there, pick and shovel putting the road through to . . . build the dam at Waikaremoana'.<sup>108</sup>

Traditional family structures caused unhappiness in the Moss family. Mr Moss believed in a strict gender demarcation of roles regarding housework as women's work, even when he was unemployed. He controlled the family finances, and though he gave his wife housekeeping money, he took any extra money himself. 'He didn't seem to think that Mum needed a new dress or anything, anything like that it was money wasted.' Nuhaka did not

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<sup>106</sup> J. Ford, 7.4.95, p.24.

<sup>107</sup> Millie Jones, 17.9.96, p.23.

<sup>108</sup> J. Moss, 11.6.94, p.5.

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have a pub but he drank with friends, 'they used to make a lot of home brew in the neighbourhood and they'd all congregate around'. His children believed that he did not fulfil his role as husband and father satisfactorily since he preferred the masculine world of mateship. He 'was a very selfish man and he gave her a hard life'. . . I can remember her saying that if it wasn't for the children she would have left him but she stuck it out because she had nowhere else to go'.<sup>109</sup> When they grew older the children challenged his domination and what Jean described as his mental cruelty to his wife. 'I think that was the turning point because he used to back off then . . . he knew very well then that Mum could have lived with any one of them, she had somewhere to go'.<sup>110</sup>

### *Husband-wife relationships*

#### The First Cloud

They stood at the alter one short year  
ago;  
He vowed from the troubles of life to  
defend her—  
To have and to hold her for weal or for  
woe—  
She spoke the responses in accents  
most tender.

Tonight, in the gloom, they are sitting  
apart—  
Oh! has all her wifely devotion been  
wasted?—  
She mopes there in silence a pain at her  
heart;  
The lamps are unlighted, his supper  
untasted. . .

Tonight he has told her in language  
quite plain,  
She can't cook his meals, half as well  
as his mother.<sup>111</sup>

Marital relationships in country areas reflected older ideas strongly. Traditional ideas of male control persisted, although the old idea of women as helpmeet ensured her a respected, if secondary place in rural life. Yet rural families, in particular farming families, could not be wholly equated with the breadwinner ideal of the cities.<sup>112</sup> Power structures might be unequal but women and men were still partners in a business. The evidence here has shown that, if personality allowed, men and women could forge a strong and mutually satisfying partnership. These factors combined to produce a particular value to rural marriage, even

<sup>109</sup> J.Moss, 24.7.94, p.20. Jean's husband, Elliott Atkinson, commented at this point that Mr Moss was an 'old sod'. His own mother (see urban chapter) had a firm control over the household, and the family finances. Her position as family matriarch must have provided a sharp contrast to Mrs Moss's situation.

<sup>110</sup> *ibid*

<sup>111</sup> Pearl (North, Wairoa) *NZF*, 1 March 1928, p.352.

<sup>112</sup> Day, 'The Politics of Knitting', p.27. See Park, 'A Golden Decade?: Farm Women in the 1950s', in B.Brookes, C.Macdonald & M.Tennant (eds.), *Women in History 2*, p.207.

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among the middle classes. Women and children could not be regarded as expensive luxuries since they were essential components of the rural economy.<sup>113</sup>

Hard work and practicality, rather than romance, dominated family life in the country. Certainly Somerset thought so when he stated that the rural young married early, and 'very seldom is an engagement broken - and divorce is practically unknown. People in the country do not expect much from marriage; nothing short of extreme cruelty ever drives a woman to seek divorce.'<sup>114</sup> Mrs Moss's story shows the often desperate situation of women who lacked the power or financial independence to leave their husbands. Having 'nowhere else to go' must have described the situation of many women, urban as well as rural. This shows the deep inequality inherent in marriage during this period. Rural women, however, were often more isolated than women in towns, and so may have had less choice open to them. Farmers were also tied to their occupations, so were unlikely to desert their wives, and wives would have found it difficult to manage a farm alone. The country was a man's world. Any family conflict remained within the family, with children as support personnel. Often in any battle for control in families men ultimately lost to their wives because they had a stronger relationship with their children. For example, in the Moss family, the influence of older children changed the family dynamics and shifted power away from the husband. It is impossible to determine the extent of sexual satisfaction in rural marriage from these interviews, but Somerset thought the presence of two prostitutes revealed a certain (male) sexual dissatisfaction in Littledene.<sup>115</sup>

To some extent Somerset's observation about the quality of married life seems confirmed by the evidence of these interviews. Practicality certainly played a large part in marriage and the opportunities for romantic relationships between husband and wife were limited. Genuine affection between partners existed, although men and women seldom showed affection openly. About a third of the country marriages seemed, from children's recollections, fairly happy, a third reasonable, while just under a third were unhappy. Of course marital satisfaction depended largely on marital expectations. Most people wanted a husband or wife who would fulfil their role. In the following discussion on household roles one woman commented that a good husband kept the woodshed full. Unhappiness came when one partner or the other reneged on the unspoken bargain and did not work hard enough or give the other partner the expected respect and rewards. Wealthier families were often more fortunate since they faced fewer pressures. Financial worries and hard work strained family life.

Isolation and the conservative values of the countryside reinforced male control and

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<sup>113</sup> Children also had practical use as well as expense, although the series of depressions in the interwar years led to a decline in the rural birth rate. Somerset, *Littledene*, p.69.

<sup>114</sup> *ibid*, p.59.

<sup>115</sup> Two houses of doubtful fame existed 'with a lengthy clientele of middle-aged married men. In each case the attraction was a mentally defective local girl, one being an illegitimate living with her mother, while the other was the daughter of a labourer who connived at what was going on.' *ibid*



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women had fewer opportunities to create a separate life from their families. Women's groups recognised and tried to ameliorate this isolation and organisations such as the Country Women's Institute became very important for women and their daughters. The arrival of the motor car meant rural dwellers were able to begin to enjoy some of the leisure previously available to the privileged few, or the town dweller. Somerset ascribed the absence of excessive drinking in Littledene to the advent of leisure based around the motor car, thereby observing one of the important features of rural life in the interwar period.<sup>116</sup> The motorcar helped to mitigate rural isolation and made a huge difference to the quality of country life. It promoted family leisure, made the purchase of groceries easier, and created a sense of freedom. Jean Bevan recalled the sense of grief in her family when their motor car was repossessed. 'I remember the day they came and took the car away. My older sister had her rag doll in it, and she didn't get it out, and she was really upset for the rest of the night, and he [father] never ever had a car, not all the rest of the years after that'.<sup>117</sup>

Opportunities for male leisure were more varied and men, although they often worked very hard, were not tied to home and children as much and so were able to enjoy male company. Some husbands preferred home or farm and took little part in men's activities while others preferred male company to their home. Country society may have been more tolerant of mateship activities.

More rural fathers seemed to indulge in alcohol, though perhaps children noticed drunkenness more in the country. The extent of drinking varied from district to district; Somerset did not think drinking heavy in Littledene but in Riversdale in Southland (most of Southland was 'dry' except for a few places like Riversdale, Mandeville and Lumsden) drunkenness seemed common. Frances Denniston recalled their neighbour, Mrs Croag, 'coming to the fence, asking me to get my mother and she went in and Mr Croag, he was in the DTs with too much drink. He was going to shoot her and shoot everybody . . . So my mother rang up the garage and they come up, he was taken away to Gore [prison]'. The community frowned upon such excessive behaviour, and the Croags never came back to Riversdale.<sup>118</sup> This regional difference between Canterbury and Southland could perhaps be explained by their different ethnic and religious backgrounds. The heavy Scottish Free Church composition of Southland encouraged a rigid Puritanism, which men may have reacted against by indulging in drink.<sup>119</sup> Anglicanism dominated in Canterbury, and Anglicans in general took a more relaxed attitude to alcohol.

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<sup>116</sup> *ibid*, p.60.

<sup>117</sup> J. Bevan, 10.6.96, p.3.

<sup>118</sup> She explained that Mrs Croag came to them because they had a telephone, 'there weren't many places had the telephone on in those days, only be like the shops and the garage and one or two houses'. F.Denniston, 27.6.90, Side 6 of 8, hand-written abstract.

<sup>119</sup>The 1996 Census for example shows that Southlanders have the highest proportion of Presbyterians, the highest rates of marriage, high rates of home ownership, and one of the lowest proportions of single mothers. Puritanism still has a significant influence on the region. 'Southland', *Regional Summary*, Department of Statistics, Wellington, 1997.

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Alcohol abuse caused problems in the Ryan family, and the following account reveals the hidden impact of World War One. Thomas explained ‘one of the problems in our home and in a lot of homes no doubt at the time was the problem of drink, still is today of course. A lot of these returned men that came back they were battle scarred and shell shocked.’ His father’s drinking problem made family life unpredictable and unhappy at times:

Dad was a very good man - he had good ideals and things like that but there was an awful lot of anger in him and where the anger come from I don't really know, it probably had its roots in the war situation and in the general injustice of the world I would think. And he used to take his solace in drink occasionally. When he was at, when he drank - well he wasn't a very nice person, you know, the anger started to come out. We were frightened of him. Not that he never necessarily hurt us but it's just one of those childhood fears I guess. So there was a sort of there was a gap as it were but later when I become a man or a young man, I could relate a lot better to him, and we had some good times together.<sup>120</sup>

There must have been many other men with hidden emotional problems because of war experiences. Almost a quarter of all the fathers in this study had been in the army during World War One, and certainly one other father, Mr Johnson, suffered from depression as a result of his experiences.<sup>121</sup> An interviewee in the English sample, Madeline Smith, thought that the effects of the war, combined with poverty and disappointment, led her adoptive father to abuse his second wife. ‘I can remember my father beating up Gertie and locking her in there and taking away the key. I had to go to the lady next door, “Can you please come and get my Mum out”’.<sup>122</sup>

Jock Phillips’ arguments about mateship seem more valid in the countryside than in towns, but community sanctions over male behaviour existed. Some men, such as Jean Bevan’s father, were dedicated to home and family. The evidence in this study indicates that country men, rather than town men, went out with their mates, drank to excess, and engaged in male pursuits. Single men were more likely to enjoy these activities than married men. In part this mateship may have been influenced by men’s numerical dominance, since in many country areas men outnumbered women. Perhaps the manliness of the country, as opposed to

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<sup>120</sup> T. Ryan, 23.3.95, p.7.

<sup>121</sup> Captain Goodyear was gassed in the trenches and died from pneumonia in 1925. Mr Johnson became a pacifist afterwards and suffered from nervous problems and depression which his son deliberately attributed to the effects of war. Dr Anderson was in the Royal Medical Corps and Mr Allison in the Dental Corps. Mr Bevan and Mr Evans served in the war, and Mr Partridge and Mr Grether joined the army but did not go overseas. Mr Grether suffered a nervous breakdown shortly before he was due to go overseas and Mr Partridge had to go shearing instead. It is possible that some other fathers were in the war but this information was not recorded in the interviews.

<sup>122</sup> Madeline’s mother had an affair during the war, and gave her daughter to her childless sister (who died before the war ended) and her husband. Madeline was brought up by her grandmother until her aunt’s husband collected her. He had married Gertie just to give his adoptive daughter a mother, as he had loved his first wife deeply. M. Smith, 12.2.96, p.2. The family were extremely poor, and lived an itinerant lifestyle until he got a steady job as a traction engine driver.

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the femininity of the towns, partly caused hysteria about the rural-urban drift. Authorities may have secretly feared that being de-natured by urban living may have also involved being de-masculinised or emasculated. Certainly they were far more worried about the effects of urban living on boys than on girls.

Social class affected family structure and relationships between marriage partners in the country as well as in the towns. The wealthiest rural families enjoyed a distinctive lifestyle. The Buchanans, the most prosperous family in this study, did not have to work at all. Employees took care of farms, house and children. When their daughters were old enough to go to school they simply hired a house and minder in town, installed both daughters there, and saw them at weekends and holidays. Not surprisingly, Nan knew little about their relationship, but they seemed happy and fairly equal. Their lives were devoted to hobbies and leisure pursuits and both partners travelled extensively. Nan did not know about their financial arrangements, since they simply did not talk about money, but since both partners had substantial amounts of money one can assume that no partner financially dominated the other. When Mr Buchanan died in 1928 his widow was able to continue a fairly similar existence.<sup>123</sup> In contrast, most rural couples had few opportunities for leisure pursuits, and once children came and with extra work on the farm they had little time to spend together and maintain their relationships.

In some families, especially very traditional households, a lack of sympathy and intimacy existed between parents. Millie Jones explained that her father liked to talk with his men friends and seldom enjoyed social occasions with his wife. He despised female company and if he came into the house when she had friends there he would comment 'oh yes you women yakking your heads off'. Millie thought 'he was mean really because he wouldn't talk to her and he could have talked to her they could have had great conversations'. She thought her parents had a usual relationship for the time, 'she made us respect and we were never allowed to backtalk him, or backtalk to her either, my word, we wouldn't dare'.<sup>124</sup>

Just under a third of rural interviewees described their parents as having unhappy relationships. None recalled their fathers becoming physically violent (in front of them, anyway) to their mothers, but they did relate stories of mental cruelty and verbal intimidation, such as Mr Jones shouting and cursing at his wife if she had not prepared the meal in time. Mavis Benson recalled her father as domineering 'he was very much man of the house' and though her mother was afraid of him when he lost his temper, he never hit her. Mavis did hear about women being abused in other families 'it was a belting up with a belt, with the buckle end of the belt sometimes'.<sup>125</sup> Marital problems are complex but financial pressures, the legacy of war, and large families, must have strained parents' relationships.

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<sup>123</sup> Nan Buchanan abstracts, *passim*.

<sup>124</sup> Millie Jones, 10.9.96, p.11.

<sup>125</sup> M.Benson, 26.4.95, p.6.

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### V

#### *Household roles*

A clear separation of gender roles existed in the country. When immigrants came to New Zealand they based their knowledge of farm life and gender division on the situation in their home country. England in this period (1860s-1920s) had experienced what has been termed the 'second phase' of sexual division of labour in the English countryside. From the mid nineteenth century onwards the fairly equal division of farm labour changed and gender specialisation increased. Women concentrated on dairying and men worked in the fields. Later, increasing mechanisation developed and men took over women's roles, and women became increasingly confined to the house.<sup>126</sup> Most New Zealand family farms in the 1920s were in what would be termed the second phase of sexual division of labour but aspects of all three phases were present in New Zealand during this time. The type of farm rather than the historical period determined the sexual division of labour. Men and women had clearly appointed roles, but these often included women working on the farm, doing what some would term 'men's work'. Men, though, seldom did women's work.<sup>127</sup>

Financial circumstances dictated the extent to which women and children worked on farms. If men could afford help they employed a man on the farm and women and children were freed from farm work. Women servants might be employed to lessen the wife's load. Only the better-off could afford this luxury: the Buchanans and the prosperous Dennistons employed permanent full-time servants. Part-time and temporary servants were more common than full-time live-in servants.<sup>128</sup> Servants were usually local girls, the daughters of farmers or labourers.<sup>129</sup> During the Depression the pool of available servants increased as some girls were forced to work for nothing but their board because their parents could not afford to keep them, and women were not eligible for employment benefits.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Wright, 'Image & Analysis: new directions in community studies', in Short (ed.), *The English Rural Community Image and Analysis*, pp.207-208.

<sup>127</sup> Edna Partridge recalled her father once hemming sheets, 'but it must have been extreme urgency, my guess would be that Mum was very expectant and the sheets were required'. Edna Partridge, 24.1.95, pp.12-13. Molly Ladd Taylor noted this pattern in her study of women's letters to the US Federal Government's Children's Bureau. 'Some women had husbands who helped with child care and household tasks, although most were married to men who stayed away from what they considered women's work. (In contrast, women often helped out with "men's work" in the fields or family business.)' M. Ladd, *Mother-Work Women, Child Welfare, and the State, 1890-1930*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana & Chicago, 1994, p.18.

<sup>128</sup> The Partridges were able to employ some part-time help before the depression hit; a woman to help with the mending and a girl to help with some of the housework. E.Partridge, 24.1.95, p.10.

<sup>129</sup> Four of the New Zealand interviewees, Millie Jones, Jean Bevan, Mary Trembath and Irene Keehan worked as servants, but disliked the work. Three English interviewees were servants, Betty Stephens, Wyn Britain and Madeline Smith. Madeline became a servant because her foster parents considered it a suitable occupation for a girl.

<sup>130</sup> E.Partridge, 13.3.95, p.45.

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### *Women's work: inside*

#### *i) Childcare*

Women looked after babies and young children as the story about the Bevans indicates, but older children usually cared for younger brothers and sisters. In both farming and non-farming rural families children were often left free to supervise themselves. Once they were old enough to have learnt some responsibility they could be trusted to roam around, as long as they stayed away from creeks or ponds or other hazards.<sup>131</sup> There is little indication that women shared much child care with neighbours or husbands. Children might stay with friends, or visit neighbours, but these were casual arrangements.<sup>132</sup> Certainly sisters or neighbours would help when necessary but in general women and their families took pride in self-sufficiency. Part of women's duties were to keep children clean and looking neat, and people recalled dirty children as a sure sign of a large family and an incompetent mother. Cleanliness required a considerable amount of labour in homes with no bathrooms and no running hot water. Many children remembered bathing in a tin bath in front of the fire. Edna Partridge remembered, as a very small child, watching her father bathing in an oval galvanised bath 'he was such a tall man his feet had to be out over the end you see and Mother was scrubbing his back and then I can remember he sat on the chair and put his feet in and scrubbed his feet and legs, that was the second half of the bathing operation'.<sup>133</sup>

Household roles were similar in town and country but as indicated previously poorer facilities made work more arduous. When circumstances were favourable there is no indication that women found their work an unacceptable burden, but as the studies of Mrs Bevan and Mrs Partridge revealed, excessive work and child-bearing destroyed women's health. Although this section concentrates on household roles on farms, non-farming women also had to cope with a lack of facilities and continued to produce many more household necessities than urban women.<sup>134</sup> All rural women without servants undertook the task of home maintenance delineated in chapter III. They cooked, cleaned, and washed, bottled fruit, made jam, and usually took care of livestock, sometimes carried water, and made staples such as bread.<sup>135</sup> Farm women also had to provide food and sometimes accommodation for more

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<sup>131</sup> In her study of farm women in the 1950s, Park recorded that women worried about leaving their small children unsupervised. Park, 'A Golden Decade?: Farm Women in the 1950s', in B. Brookes, C. Macdonald & M. Tennant (eds.), *Women in History 2*.

<sup>132</sup> In many country families, especially farming families, relative's children visited from the city, and these visits were reciprocated. But one gets the impression (certainly from the point of view of country families) that most of the hospitality was on their side. Both Mary Trembath and Edna Partridge talked about relatives coming from the town, expecting to be fed and to take food home. They expected to bring home a jar of cream or fresh eggs 'and I never remember them bringing anything not even the empty jar from the last visit.' Edna Partridge, 7.2.95, p.19.

<sup>133</sup> E. Partridge, 19.10.94, p.5.

<sup>134</sup> It becomes difficult to draw a distinct line between urban and rural women, when the definition of urban included towns over 2,500 people. Many urban people experienced a semi-rural lifestyle, and might keep livestock and produce some household necessities, but one major difference is the comparison of facilities in country and town.

<sup>135</sup> See Toynbee for a discussion of women's and girl's work inside the house and around farms, Toynbee, *Her*

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than their own families, particularly in harvest time or shearing. Workers considered a ‘good feed’ as part of the job. Frances Denniston remembered some farms being notorious for the meanness of their rations, a situation that created ill-feeling and gave rise to community jokes. The owners of a farm where her father took his threshing mill, were called ‘cold meat Browns’ because workers were only given cold meat during harvest.<sup>136</sup>

Women’s work reduced the need for cash, and helped to supplement the family income. Many women made their own and their children’s clothes, although they usually bought men’s clothes. Edna Partridge recalled being so frustrated by her mother’s sewing that she took over all the family sewing when she was twelve. Her mother made pyjamas, and shirts, and she recalled her buying blue serge to make boys’ trousers. Before the Depression, any good clothes were made by a dressmaker, but afterwards they just had to make do. Most families were too proud to receive second-hand clothes. Edna explained ‘my parents although they didn’t have too much money, they were very proud - their children wouldn’t wear anybody else’s clothing and my own children didn’t either. Didn’t matter how short they were of clothing, they didn’t wear . . . hand-me-downs, within the family yes, but not other people’s cast-offs, never’.<sup>137</sup> Her mother also bought unbleached calico to make sheets, which she hemmed, then when they wore out as sheets, she dyed them and hung them in the window as curtains. ‘There were always sheets and blankets on the bed, my mother was very particular about that, a lot of children, or a lot of people just slept in grey blankets, but mother said well that she thought that wore blankets out, and it wasn’t clean. She was quite a fussy housekeeper, the sheets had to be boiled every week’.<sup>138</sup>

Women followed traditional rhythms of work as decreed in the English rhyme of washing on Monday, then ironing on Tuesday. Zoe Ward describes a very similar routine in her childhood village of Horringer, except that many women washed for the big house, Ickworth, as well.<sup>139</sup> Women found washing an onerous and exhausting task but took pride in getting clothes clean. Kevin McNeil recalled that his elder brothers tried to buy their mother a washing machine in the 1930s ‘they were just coming out new then and flatly refused’.<sup>140</sup> Mrs Trembath had to boil the copper beside the creek to do her washing. Carrying water made it especially difficult. Many country women regularly made their own soap for washing.

As children it was quite an exciting event making the soap. I can’t remember the recipe but I know it was large proportion of fat and water, caustic soda and rosin, and that mixture was boiled up in the copper that the washing was normally boiled up in. It would be stirred and it used to bubble furiously. It

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*Work and His*, pp.47-55.

<sup>136</sup> Frances Denniston, 6.4.90, side 2 of 8, hand-written abstract.

<sup>137</sup> E. Partridge, 24.1.95, p.12.

<sup>138</sup> *ibid*, 19.10.94, p.6.

<sup>139</sup> Z. Ward, *Curtsey to the Lady*, p.13.

<sup>140</sup> K. McNeil, 18.5.95, p.3.

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was always threatening to overflow and so somebody had to sit close by with the dipper full of cold water . . . some of which would be thrown into the boiling mixture and it would quell the mad activity for a few minutes and keep the thing boiling gently.

I can't remember what the test was to make sure the right consistency had been attained with the boiling but I do remember how this boiling viscous liquid used to be ladled out into either boxes lined with paper or the rectangular washtubs which were in the laundries in those days. And next day it would be set quite hard and it was a greyish bluish substance that we used to cut into useable sized chunks. It would be packed away in boxes in layers with air spaces in between as much as possible because it couldn't be used immediately. It had to be stored for some months till it dried out and hardened and it was always used for the laundry. It certainly was most effective as a cleansing agent but it was ferocious on the skin and the hands and at the end of a long wash day with hands immersed in the soapy liquid my poor hands used to be just a wrinkled mess.<sup>141</sup>

Most country families had a good, although sometimes monotonous diet. Protein featured heavily, since men did hard physical labour and people thought meat provided the most sustenance. New Zealanders had easier access to meat, and there were no prohibitions about poaching, unlike in England. Rabbits, hares and birds featured in country diets, as well as the ubiquitous mutton. Typically a farming family's diet consisted of three cooked meals a day. Men and women rose early in the morning to milk or work on the farm and had breakfast after two or three hour's work. School children had to take a cold lunch since they usually had a long distance to go to school. Edna Partridge described their substantial diet. Breakfast included porridge, bacon and eggs or fried potato with eggs, and a drink of milk or cocoa, with tea for adults. The midday meal would be a joint of meat, usually mutton, with salads in the summer and cooked vegetables in the winter. Supper consisted of cold meat, or scrambled eggs or macaroni cheese, and they always had puddings. They ate especially well in the depression because they could not sell some of their produce. When they could not even get sixpence a dozen for eggs, her father said 'well if we can't sell it the kids might as well eat it, so we had cream on everything'.<sup>142</sup> Rural labourers were not so fortunate.<sup>143</sup> Both Mavis Benson and Jean Moss could remember being very short of food when their fathers were unemployed. Nuhaka and Runanga had no local charitable aid boards, so they were forced to rely on the generosity of neighbours.

Rural interviewees described their mother's cooking with particular enthusiasm, recalling with pride that they produced much of their food on the farm, or section. Jack Ford commented that his mother 'was a good cook, we never run short of food'.<sup>144</sup> Country women

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<sup>141</sup> E.Partridge, 7.2.95, p.17.

<sup>142</sup> *ibid*, 24.1.95.p.14.

<sup>143</sup>Accounts from interviews with Gwen Jones (the daughter of a Welsh mine-worker), and Madeline Smith reveal that the children of rural labourers in Britain suffered from inadequate nutrition. Gwen Jones, for example, recalled going to bed hungry.

<sup>144</sup> Jack Ford, 4.10.94.



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were great bakers, as Somerset noted when he bemoaned the amount of labour that went into fund-raising occasions such as sale teas. ‘The burden of cooking for these afternoon teas falls heavily on the women of Littledene, who often cook for the whole day before the sale tea and spend the whole day serving it. The financial result is in no way commensurate with the great amount of effort involved.’<sup>145</sup> His comments reveal again his lack of understanding of country life as well as a puritanical intellectualism. He lamented that ‘it is a sad state of affairs when such insistent human needs, which might be satisfied by creative work, are debased into the habitual, futile and uninteresting work connected with popular ways of making money.’<sup>146</sup> Certainly rural children appreciated their mother’s efforts. For example, Mary Trembath described her mother as such a wonderful cook that they thought she could have opened a restaurant.<sup>147</sup> One has to admire her prodigious efforts, since she cooked for her own family, as well as the large numbers of relations that arrived on weekends or holidays. Her husband was of little use. She kept the kitchen door shut to keep the range hot when baking sponges, ‘and then down from the hills would come me father who had been reading a book up there and keeping the cattle from wandering too far back into the hills. He would find the house far too hot he’d opened the door, opened it wide and mum would say “But there’s something in the oven, Albert”, and he’d say “Oh but you can’t work in this heat”’.<sup>148</sup>

Many rural women made jam and preserved fruit on a large scale since they had access to greater amounts of produce than most urban women. Mrs Partridge was unusual since she encouraged her children to eat fresh fruit rather than bottle it, ‘she said the lord provided it in plenty to be eaten in plenty’.<sup>149</sup> Mary Trembath recalled her mother making jam in the copper ‘to bottle them she had to take the beer bottle put a piece of wool around it soaked in kerosene, light that and then plunge it into the water and the top piece came off. Her bottles were beer bottles cut down, and then she would paper them over with brown paper, and her jam always kept’.<sup>150</sup>

### *Women’s Work: outside*

Women also did varying amounts of outside work as described in the Partridge and Bevan case studies. Many women on farms helped with farm work, at least while their children were small, and took a direct productive role in the family economy. The work of women on small farms was extensive, exhausting and essential. Women on dairy farms regularly milked, and some like Mrs Bevan carried out extensive labour in the fields as well. They often looked after hens, ducks and pigs, and gardened. Mary Trembath explained that her mother worked

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<sup>145</sup> Somerset, *Littledene*, p.56.

<sup>146</sup> *ibid*, p.55.

<sup>147</sup> M.Trembath, 2.1.97, p.8.

<sup>148</sup> *ibid*, 31.12.96, p.3.

<sup>149</sup> E. Partridge, 24.1.95, p.11.

<sup>150</sup> M. Trembath, 31.12.96, p.3.

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on the farm, dug the garden, grew all the crops, watered them and planted 5000 onions every year, as well as parsnips and carrots.<sup>151</sup>

*Men's Work: farming*<sup>152</sup>

Golden Grain

Br-r--! The "binder" reaping—  
The farmer on the seat;  
The hungry knife is sweeping  
Rich swathes of precious wheat . . .

We stookers follow closely—  
Stooks sided east and west  
To sunshine; we jocosely  
Swap labour-light'ning jest.

Hello! The "smoko" coming---  
A heart'ning sight to me  
The binder ceases humming  
Here's mother with the tea.

Wee Girlie, curly headed,  
With cups is running first;  
"Poor Daddy! Is you dedded?"  
"Yes! nearly dear— with thirst."

The harvest "hands" are wasting  
No time in "knocking off";  
How good the tea is tasting,  
As scones and cakes we "scoff"!

Br-r!--br-r! again in motion,  
For busy days are these;  
Like waves of golden ocean,  
Wheat ripples in the breeze.<sup>153</sup>

Farmers worked in the fields and in the shed, but not in the house, whereas farmers' wives worked in the house, and sometimes on the farm as well. Necessity might require women's labour on the farm but men seldom reciprocated. In fact many farming interviewees responded with contempt to the idea that men should work in the house. Edna Partridge commented that men on farms were so fully occupied that the thought of them helping inside was ridiculous.<sup>154</sup> Country children were far more aware of their father's work than town children, so they appreciated their father's labour.<sup>155</sup>

Society admired women's housekeeping skills but men gained status for their strength and endurance. Many interviewees told stories about their father's prowess. Kevin McNeil recalled that his father had been a New Zealand champion hammer thrower and shot putter in

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<sup>151</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> See Toynbee, *Her Work and His*, pp.55-57.

<sup>153</sup> Clifford B. Holmes (Kamo), *NZF*, March 1, 1928, p.352.

<sup>154</sup> E. Partridge, 24.1.95, p.12.

<sup>155</sup> Toynbee, *Her Work and His*, p.55.