

## Chapter VI 'The Best and Sturdiest?'

whereas Gwen Jones and Madeline Smith recalled genuine hunger. Britain had greater class divisions and regional variations than New Zealand. Despite some regional variation in New Zealand, occupation, particularly in farming, affected children's experiences the most.

Country children, especially farming children, experienced a distinctive childhood. They worked harder and took part in the family economy, and farming children especially, grew up in patriarchal rather than masculinist families. In many ways their lives had much more continuity with the past than city children since their relations with parents were characterised by distance and control rather than close affection and intimacy. Parents were authoritarian rather than liberal in their attitudes to children, sacrificing children's needs to those of the entire family. These traditional attitudes to children became challenged gradually in the interwar years. New ideas about education prompted teachers to encourage their pupils towards careers that would inevitably involve an urban existence. They did not always succeed, as the story of Edna Partridge testifies, but ideas and financial troubles gradually eroded the Arcadian image of the New Zealand countryside. The next chapter reveals how an increasing concern with child labour emerged in the interwar years.

The myth about the superiority of country childhood remained, and a belief in 'God's own given sunshine and fresh air' characterised popular attitudes towards the experience of rural childhood. None of the drawbacks of country life - poverty, exhaustion of men, women and children, their often poor housing - eroded that basic belief. Nor was the myth without foundation. Rural people recalled many positive aspects of their upbringing although children in the smallest struggling farms retained an ambivalent attitude to their farming heritage. Thomas Ryan explained that none of the children in his family wanted to take over the farm because the continuous joyless struggle of their parents repelled them from the life. 'I suppose we were sick and tired of the mud and the slush - the poor climate and all that sort of thing. So you wanted your freedom, you wanted to get out, and our parents didn't stand in our way'.<sup>148</sup> Yet people universally agreed that the country was the best place to bring up children. Jack Ford explained that the town was an artificial place, 'you're getting away from the land, the very thing that keeps you alive'.<sup>149</sup> Thus myth and reality intertwined and persist today.

---

<sup>148</sup> T.Ryan, 28.3.95, p.8.

<sup>149</sup> J.Ford, 13.4.95, p.31.

---

## Chapter VII

### ‘The Only Animal Alive/ That Lives Upon Its Young’: Child Labour in New Zealand 1919-1939

---

Hugh Cunningham claims that the ‘transformation of working-class children from labourers to pupils was central to the reconstruction of childhood at the end of the nineteenth century’.<sup>1</sup> An examination of household roles and children’s labour reveals both constraints against social change and the extent to which it occurs. In the 1920s and 1930s new family ideologies gave a narrow definition of the roles that mother, father and children should play. A firm belief existed that children should be excluded from paid work, and indeed freed from most labour. Leisure, not labour, became a defining characteristic of childhood. This belief dominated society’s thinking but was not always reflected by reality. The divisions between rich and poor, male and female, and above all between town and country, emerge most clearly in relation to children’s work. Many rural and urban working-class households relied to some extent on ‘child labour’, reflecting the survival of the family economy in New Zealand.

#### I

#### *Urban Children*

##### THE MODERN GIRL

I can swing a six pound dumb-bell,  
                   I can fence and I can box,  
 I can walk among the heather  
                   And scramble over rocks,  
 I can make a score at cricket,  
                   And play hockey all day long;  
 But I cannot help my mother:  
                   I’m not really very strong.<sup>2</sup>

This section examines domestic roles and children’s work, both paid and unpaid, within the urban family. In contrast to the countryside, most urban families did not operate a family economy, but relied directly upon male wages. Children’s work remained peripheral, rather than a central part of family life. It must be noted, however, that children could help the family economy indirectly, by collecting firewood or gathering food. They did not generate

---

<sup>1</sup>Hugh Cunningham, *Children of the Poor: Representations of Childhood since the Seventeenth Century*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1991, Introduction.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Correspondence’, *The Press*, 18 August, 1926, p.11.

### Child Labour in New Zealand 1919-1939

income through such activities, but these undoubtedly made an important financial contribution to the family. Essentially, gender and social class determined both the extent and the type of work carried out by children. Gender defined family roles, establishing expectations about the child's place in the family and the type of domestic work they should perform. Girls very seldom did paid work and were more likely to be involved in unpaid work around the home or perhaps for neighbours. Boys had more scope to earn money and often more freedom from household chores. Society focused on the vexed question of child labour during this period, but as the above extract reveals, opposition depended on the type and appropriateness of the labour children did. No one disagreed with the opinion that girls should 'help their mothers' and a strong belief in the value of domestic work existed. Society feared that women's greater freedom during the interwar years would erode traditional gender relationships and damage family life. The modern girl would no longer fulfil her tasks. The joke in this poem depends on an unquestioning agreement with the values of the traditional household.

Parents in working-class and lower middle-class families needed their children's labour. Ideologies of family and childhood shaped the attitudes of middle-class parents. They had firm views about children's rights to play and to be educated. These ideas precluded the notion of children working. Middle class children had no economic role in the household, and in some families did little work around the home. In wealthier families servants carried out household chores and children had little or nothing to do. Working-class and poorer families faced a very different situation. Parents relied on children's labour and sometimes on their earnings as well, even before the child had left school. Working class children tended to leave school at an earlier age and when they started working their wages would be handed over to their parents. Usually they gave their pay directly to their mother who allocated them a small amount back for pocket money and tram fares. Their earnings tended to be subsumed into the family budget through the payment of board. According to modern definitions of childhood, these children ceased to be children when they left school, if not earlier. Working class children were aware of the contradictions. Some interviewees commented that they were not allowed to be children, and they recalled the frustration of having adult responsibilities while still being firmly under their parents' jurisdiction. Dependency ended but parental authority did not. Middle class children, in contrast, experienced a longer period of dependence and a lack of responsibility.

#### *Unpaid domestic work*

Society regarded men's domestic work as somehow undignified and parents preferred to rely on children for any extra help. Unfortunately child labour conflicted with family ideology. Authorities frowned upon excessive work by children, although they thought that domestic work might benefit girls. Indeed, concern about declining domestic skills partly

### Child Labour in New Zealand 1919-1939

prompted the move to insert domestic science into the school curriculum.<sup>3</sup> Children took part in all areas of household labour. Jobs were usually segregated by gender but parents enforced this distinction most rigidly in mixed-sex families. This is a crucial distinction, one that influenced children's upbringing immeasurably. If mothers had only boys, they carried out a far wider range of tasks than in mixed families. Older children, regardless of sex, received a disproportionate amount of work and responsibility. The nature and amount of work varied according to class, and family size, reinforcing the view that modern ideas of childhood were only really achievable in small, reasonably comfortable families. In small households children generally had fewer chores, while less gender distinction in tasks emerged compared to larger working-class families.<sup>4</sup> Toynbee comments that while parents' perceptions of 'girls' work' and 'boys' work' influenced children's behaviour, these were 'heavily influenced by particular needs of a household, rather than slavish adherence to norms associated with gender'.<sup>5</sup>

Although children might be called upon to do a wide variety of household chores, certain chores were regarded as their province. Children typically washed and dried dishes, ran errands, filled the wood box, dusted, cleaned the silver (in better-off households), tidied their rooms and helped with any livestock. They also minded younger brothers and sisters. Girls and boys often shared the dishes, and errands, but thereafter work paralleled gender divisions: girls did inside work and boys worked outside the house. Middle-class children had fewer responsibilities around the home. Chores were also age specific although the definition of a suitable age for a particular task varied according to need. Small children typically helped with light tasks and once children were ten or eleven they undertook greater household responsibilities. David Moore chopped the kindling when he was small but only did more work around the house when he was older. Household labour increased for girls in teenage years but sometimes tailed off among boys, as they started work and became 'breadwinners' themselves.

Younger children, and children in small families generally, had far less to do and they tended to enjoy a freedom from responsibility that paralleled the lives of middle-class children. Some of these children did virtually nothing at home although others carried out many of the chores listed in the previous paragraph. Most children could not escape running errands and sometimes considerable demands were made on their time. They might be sent off for extra groceries or to pick up the weekend roast from the butcher. Elliott Atkinson had to pay the grocery bill. The bill 'might have been three or four pound, that was an awful lot of money, and you always get a bag of lollies given to you . . . But of course the lollies went on the table, everybody had them'.<sup>6</sup> Some chores were done communally, which made them less

---

<sup>3</sup>See Ruth Fry, *It's different for daughters*, NZCER, Wellington, 1985.

<sup>4</sup> Claire Toynbee, *Her Work and His, Family, Kin and Community in New Zealand 1900-1930*, Victoria University Press, Wellington, 1995, p.81.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*, p.71.

<sup>6</sup> E. Atkinson, 11.6.94, p.3.

### Child Labour in New Zealand 1919-1939

burdensome. Both Steve Harris and Ivy Anderson hated collecting food from charity. Steve recalled that it took them an hour, 'my brother and I used to have to tramp down Happy Valley over the blooming hill into Island Bay, winter and summer, then get these few vegies in the sugar bag and tramp home again'.<sup>7</sup> All the Rylance children collected firewood on a Saturday, and went up to Chingford Park with a saw and an axe. They enjoyed this chore. 'My sister Ethel, she didn't do much sawing but she always told us the latest in Pollyanna stories'.<sup>8</sup>

Mothers made the heaviest demands on their oldest children, especially on daughters. Irene Rylance recalled with frustration the amount of work she carried out as a child and an adolescent. Her family said, 'oh, she will do it' and her mother gave her considerable responsibility, although she was only a year older than her second sister. 'I suppose she relied on me being the eldest'.<sup>9</sup> When Mrs Anderson became ill with malnutrition, Ivy took over some of her work when her mother was in hospital, even though she was only about eleven. Her father helped. 'When Mum was ill I used to help with the cooking, even although I was very young. I had to because I was a girl, so I had to learn how to do things. Dad could bake beautifully and Dad used to bake, where I used to cook the dinners.'<sup>10</sup>

Child-minding by older children was an important task, although experts ignored it, since it did not fit in with the prevailing ideology. Yet child minding had been important historically and commentators in England such as Seebolhm Rowntree and Maud Pember Reeves, acknowledged the labour of little mothers and sometimes little fathers. Working class children frequently took care of younger ones, either carrying them about or hauling them in home-made carts. Anna Davin noted that one school in London opened a creche to ensure attendance because girls were 'staying so much at home to look after the babies.'<sup>11</sup> Boys also took care of young children and an article on child care in the *Girls Own Paper* in 1881, talked about young nurses 'because the writer saw "almost daily such pleasant pictures of small-boy nurses in the exercise of their vocation"'.<sup>12</sup> It seems probable that the development of masculinist ideologies would have made such sights more unacceptable in the early twentieth century but boys continued to take responsibility for smaller brothers and sisters. Girls seem to have had more inclination for baby care because of gender identification with their mothers. Mada Bastings used to baby-sit a neighbour's baby for the sheer joy of minding small children.<sup>13</sup> Gwen Jones, a Welsh interviewee, described looking after her youngest

---

<sup>7</sup> S.Harris, 1.8.96, p.2.

<sup>8</sup> Irene Rylance, 17.7.96, p.4.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid*, pp.7-8.

<sup>10</sup> Ivy Anderson, 25.5.95, p.5.

<sup>11</sup> Anna Davin, *Growing Up Poor: Home, School and Street in London 1870-1914*, Rivers Oram Press, London, 1996, p.92.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid*, pp.89-90.

<sup>13</sup> Mada Bastings, 13.9.94, p.6.



John, Neil holding Robin, and Eric in 1927. Neil is holding his baby brother. although the Johnson children did not do extensive child-minding, other children looked after brothers and sisters from the age of eight or nine. Courtesy of John Johnson.



Robin Johnson hanging out the washing in the early 1940s. It would have been considered unusual for boys to do such domestic chores in the period. Courtesy of John Johnson.



John Johnson is shown here watering the garden with a hose. I have included this photo since it is one of the few photos showing children carrying out household chores. The boys did most of the garden because their father was too busy. Courtesy of John Johnson.

### Child Labour in New Zealand 1919-1939

brother. Her mother said that 'she fed him and I mothered him because my father was very ill at the time when my younger brother was born he was in bed upstairs'. She imitated older women by carrying him in a shawl. 'The very lucky ones had prams but the majority carried the baby in a shawl Welsh fashion . . . I soon got the hang of that with my brother and my mother used to say, "I know one day you are going to tread on the end of that shawl and you and the baby are going to end up on the floor"'.<sup>14</sup>

Older sons, as well as older daughters, assisted their mothers. Mrs Kemp suffered from illness after the birth of her youngest child, so Dennis took care of his younger brother and sister, and cooked the dinner (under his mother's direction). He had always helped her anyway, 'I'd been brought up to feed the baby and change the napkins.'<sup>15</sup> He found school easy but his elder brother did not 'so when it was necessary for somebody to stay at home and look after the children it was usually me who had to stay home'. Although he did not mind helping he disliked helping publicly. 'I would have kept very quiet about that, in fact I didn't even like taking my sister out for a walk in the pram, because we used to get all sorts of remarks from other boys about it.'<sup>16</sup> This responsibility ended in a disaster that affected Dennis for life. His younger brother was deaf and 'we used to worry about him when we were out with him and make sure he knew that the vehicles were coming on the road'. One day when Dennis was supposed to be looking after him 'he was killed by a train . . . at the level crossing nearby Khandallah railway station, he was the third deaf person killed at that crossing.'<sup>17</sup>

Older boys, and those in boys-only families, continued to carry out a wider range of tasks. Dennis Kemp recalled that when they got older their father gave up the heavy work of digging the garden and mowing the lawn 'and then he did nothing [around the house]'.<sup>18</sup> Boys also helped with washing as this photograph from the Johnsons shows.<sup>19</sup>

Parents expected most children to perform some household chores but their requirements varied considerably. Regardless of social class, most urban families seemed aware of the importance of at least primary school education for both boys and girls and thought children should have time to play and do their school work. Poorer children worked the hardest. Even so, only Ivy Anderson, Steve Harris and Irene Rylance had to cope with excessive household work while still at primary school. Demands on children grew with age. Although some children had to work comparatively hard, a comparison with the lives of country children is informative. Life in the country, for poor families anyway was much more demanding. Country families had fewer facilities, they got electricity later, if at all, and lacked

---

<sup>14</sup> G. Jones, 18.11.95, p.5

<sup>15</sup> D. Kemp, 29.5.94, p.7.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid*, 29.3.95, p. 21.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid*, 29.5.94, p.7.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid*, 29.3.95, p.19.

<sup>19</sup>David Moore boiled up the copper and washed clothes when his mother was ill.



### Child Labour in New Zealand 1919-1939

even such labour-saving devices as an electric kettle. The new ideology of the family was obviously making a gradual impact on most of the lives of the urban families in this study. From being a Plunket baby, to a child at a public school, scrutinised by authority, the urban child was to some extent regulated.

#### *Paid work*

By the interwar years New Zealand and British authorities frowned upon child labour. Hendrick, in his study of child labour and the School Medical Service in Britain, asserts that the 'problem' of child labour 'was relatively slow to emerge as a distinct social question', but gradually came to symbolise the failure of the working class to adapt to middle-class conventions of family life.<sup>20</sup> Authorities generally ignored labour within the home unless it conflicted with school work but took a much more censorious view of children taking part in a cash economy. Such activities seemed to threaten the very nature of the distinction between adult and child. Britain had more comprehensive legislation,<sup>21</sup> perhaps reflecting the greater importance of the family economy in New Zealand.<sup>22</sup> New Zealand legislation prohibited the employment of children during school hours, but considerable concern emerged during the twenties and thirties about the employment of children outside school hours. Trade unions supported restrictions, partly because they thought that child labour threatened the wages and conditions of adult males. Regulatory legislation appears to have been rather confused and both local and national legislation governed children's labour. Child welfare officers could use a hotch-potch of legislation which they believed gave 'ample provision for action'. In 1930 the Minister of Health, A.J. Stallworthy, defended government regulations in response to a number of condemnatory attacks on child employment in newspapers.<sup>23</sup> A number of regulations affected children's work. Section 29, Infants Act, 1908, Clause (1) regulated children's employment in street trading and in areas of public entertainment:

---

<sup>20</sup>H.Hendrick, 'Child Labour and the School Medical Service', in Roger Cooter (ed.), *In the Name of the Child. Health and Welfare, 1880-1940*, Routledge, London & New York, 1992, p.49.

<sup>21</sup>The Employment of Children Act, 1903 gave local authorities the right to make bye-laws 'prescribing for children a limited number of daily and weekly working hours, and in the age below which employment was illegal. It also permitted the prohibition of their employment in any specified occupation, and the curtailment of street trading'. Hendrick, 'Child Labour and the School Medical Service', in Cooter (ed.), *In the Name of the Child*, p.51. One historian has estimated that in Britain between 1903 and 1914 the number of wage earning children declined by 10-15 per cent., *ibid*, p.60.

<sup>22</sup>In 1916 the New Zealand government passed a law prohibiting the employment of a child under twelve years of age, and restricting hours of work for school children to after 6 pm or before 8 am on a school day. A system of exemptions existed as long as the work did not endanger a child's health. School medical officers had the power to suspend a child's employment. 'Child labour in New Zealand', *National Education*, 1 November, 1926, p.361. Anna Davin's work shows the conflicts that could arise between parents and authorities on this matter. Child employment was often a matter of necessity among the poor in London. See Davin, *Growing Up Poor*.

<sup>23</sup>'Child Labour. What the Law provides. Review by Minister', *Evening Post*, 26 August, 1930, in H 35/206/7 35/75.

### Child Labour in New Zealand 1919-1939

On the complaint of any constable or of any child Welfare Officer that any child is a neglected, indigent, or delinquent child, or is not under proper control, or is living in an environment detrimental to its physical or moral well-being, and Justice may issue his summons to any person having custody of the child requiring him to appear before a children's Court . . .<sup>24</sup>

Some Awards approved by the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act included provisions against the employment of children. For example the Dairy Employees' Award for Wellington in 1920 stated: 'Youths: Drivers shall not allow any boy or youth on their carts, or allow them to assist in the delivery of milk'. The Shops and Offices Amendment Act of 1927 tried to prohibit children being employed in the early hours of the morning, 'no boy or girl under the age of 16 years shall be employed as aforesaid before the hour of seven o'clock in the morning.' Officials used child welfare legislation to regulate employment 'where there is no definite contract of employment, however, as between a parent and child . . .'<sup>25</sup> A protective masculinism emerges in some proposals. Suggested legislation in the 1930s provided for extra protection for girls. It was proposed that boys under twelve years and girls under sixteen years should be prohibited from taking part in street trading.<sup>26</sup>

Undoubtedly a considerable amount of child labour continued, despite this legislation, though from time to time officials would prosecute offending employers. In 1930 the *Dominion* reported that two men were prosecuted and fined £1 'for employing a boy under 16 years of age to deliver milk before 7 am'. Such prosecutions were applied as a deterrent as Mr Georgeson of the Labour Department admitted. 'We have to bring these cases before the court to give publicity to them.'<sup>27</sup> There is little evidence of any consistency in the enforcement of such legislation.

Concern about child labour developed in the first years of the twentieth century, and deepened in the interwar years, largely because of the influence of school medical officers. In Britain, the first Chief Medical Officer with the Board of Education, George Newman, claimed in 1907 that employment outside school hours 'plays havoc with the health and physique of children'.<sup>28</sup> New Zealand School Medical Officers made similar assertions, and were an important force in the war against child labour. Officials believed that such work was detrimental to children's health, so their prejudices coloured their reports. Nevertheless their complaints that outside work interfered with school work were probably just.

Home and school were in clear conflict in relation to child labour. Boys and their families seem to have held very different viewpoints from officialdom. While the extra

---

<sup>24</sup> 'Child Labour', to The Secretary, Wellington Education Board, from A. G. Patterson, Director, Division of School Hygiene, 6th October 1930, H 35/206/7 35/75.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> 'Child Labour Street Trading, c.1930?', H 35/206/7 35/75.

<sup>27</sup> 'Asleep at desks. Boys on Milk Runs. Employers fined', *Dominion*, 8 November 1930, H 35/206/7 35/75.

<sup>28</sup> Hendrick, 'Child Labour and the School Medical Service', in Cooter (ed.), *In the Name of the Child*, p.52.

### Child Labour in New Zealand 1919-1939

money benefited the household, child labour must have also posed a challenge to the gender identities of adult males. Unemployed men, for example, must have found it difficult to maintain a sense of pride when children's wages were helping to support the family. Traditionally working class children contributed to the family budget, but with the Labour party and Unions pushing so strongly for a male breadwinner wage, children's labour became less acceptable. Children's paid work therefore occurred most often in struggling households.

The Great Depression of the twenties and thirties focused attention on children, and highlighted the existence of children's paid work. While New Zealand did not suffer as much as England, a much more highly industrialised nation, the depression made a huge impact on New Zealand's psyche. Most New Zealanders became aware of the consequences of the Depression. Public indignation surfaced when people realised that hunger existed in God's Own Country.<sup>29</sup> Newspapers claimed that malnutrition among children had become prevalent. One reported the Wanganui Labour parliamentary candidate's claim that eighty per cent. of New Zealand children were malnourished. The Health Department responded that school medical officers listed only 6 per cent. of children as suffering from malnutrition.<sup>30</sup> Claims of malnutrition increased in the 1930s, and were largely denied, but they had a substantial effect on the public. People reacted with dismay to this challenge to the New Zealand belief that hard work and thrift would mean a gradually improving life style. New Zealanders had always believed in the twin dreams of equality of opportunity and materialism,<sup>31</sup> and the Depression damaged both. The depression also attacked the masculinist ideologies so deeply rooted in the population. A working wife or child, according to prevailing ideology, represented a loss of respectability and was essentially a retrograde step.

It seems probable that the depression may have led to an increase in numbers of children earning money. Any estimation of numbers is difficult since periodic and casual employment by children was seldom recorded. The Otago Education Board in 1926 estimated that a total of 355 pupils in Dunedin schools were working before and after school.<sup>32</sup> An investigation into child labour among children at Mt Cook school, in Wellington, discovered that 14 out of 40 boys in Standard IV and 11 out of 42 boys in Standard V had some paid employment. Most boys (18 out of 25) sold papers, but other occupations included 'peeling potatoes by machine' (perhaps in parents' business since he only worked quarter of an hour a day), being a call boy at the opera house and delivering goods.<sup>33</sup> The youngest boy was ten, and the eldest thirteen. The amount of time spent working varied from only two hours a week

---

<sup>29</sup> Brooking, 'Economic Transformation', in Oliver & Williams (eds.), *Oxford History of New Zealand*, p.248.

<sup>30</sup> Malnutrition' - John Coull, Reform candidate to Health Department, Wellington, reply 30 October 1925, H35 20674 35/14.

<sup>31</sup> Paul M. Meuli, 'Occupational Change and Bourgeois Proliferation', MA Thesis (History), VUW, 1977, p.66, 139.

<sup>32</sup> 'Child Labour in New Zealand', *National Education*, 1 November 1926, p.359.

<sup>33</sup> Mt Cook School, (c.1926-1930), H 35/206/7 35/75.

### Child Labour in New Zealand 1919-1939

to four hours on four days of the week. Children received reasonable wages. Indeed one Otago board member commented, after working out that children received on average sixpence an hour, 'Almost as good as the Education board!'.<sup>34</sup> Wages varied from 11/- a week for a boy who sold papers 3 hours each day and four hours on Saturday to 1/6 for a morning helping on the baker's cart. One boy earned £2.10.0 a week selling three different papers. He worked every school night with a break between six and seven for tea and he worked till 10pm on Saturday nights and 11pm on Friday night. The inspectors believed this had a severe effect on his growth, commenting that he 'is anaemic and suffers from nervous twitching of the face and tendency to stutter'.<sup>35</sup>

It is difficult to estimate how typical these figures are but there were probably more children employed from Mt Cook School (on average) than elsewhere in the country. They do reveal, however, the situation in a largely working-class school. There is some evidence to suggest that greater opportunities existed in Wellington for paid employment than in other cities. Certainly the number of newspapers gave employment to children. Children hawked papers on streets as well as doing paper rounds. There were a variety of papers and children in this sample sold *Truth*, *Evening Post*, *Tit Bits*, *New Zealand Sportsman*, though not *The Dominion*. It must be noted that these hours of employment were less onerous than those recorded in a similar investigation into a share-milking district.

Reports into child labour in cities focused on boys, since few opportunities existed for girls. Gender separation is most evident in the area of paid work largely because the types of work available to children after school, milk runs, paper runs and street selling, were all done by boys. The occasional child-minding for neighbours done by girls in this period does not seem to have been paid.<sup>36</sup> Both girls and boys, however, earned money in a more irregular fashion, and made financial contributions. This includes activities that may be considered on the shady side of the law, stealing coal, firewood, or food. Some of this money or produce went to the family, but other children spent money on consumer items. Children provided their own pocket money for sweets, comics or clothes. Only a minority of school children appear to have contributed all their earnings to the family budget. This situation contrasts sharply with the experience of British working class children, supporting the supposition of greater prosperity in New Zealand. For example, one Lancashire man earned a few shillings from picking potatoes, and had a milk round, but he did not keep any of his money. 'Oh paid it in [to household], you had to cough it up'.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> Mr Smith, Otago Education Board, 'Child labour in New Zealand', *National Education*, November 1 1926, p.361

<sup>35</sup> Mt Cook School, (c.1926-1930), H 35/206/7 35/75.

<sup>36</sup> This seems to be in contrast to the situation of the poor in London where a girl's child-minding might be worth a penny or two to a mother. Davin, *Growing up Poor*, p.167.

<sup>37</sup> Mr B4B, interviewed by Lucinda Beier, p.8. Courtesy of Elizabeth Roberts. Working-class children in London gave earnings to their mothers. Children worked for neighbours, in shops and helped their mothers with home work. Edith Hogg noted 'it is one of the melancholy features of the neighbourhood to see sickly children

## Child Labour in New Zealand 1919-1939

Table 11: Urban Children: regular paid work (NZ Sample)

Name	Job	Age	Hours	Pay	Job	Hours	Pay
Dennis Kemp	caddying	(8)	weekend	5s-7/6 w	papers	3 1/2 d.	c.7/6
Elliott Atkinson	papers	9-15	Sat, eve	4s			
Steve Harris	milk run				papers		
George Goodyear	milk run	12/13	holidays	half crown	papers	holidays	half crown
Reg Williams	milk run	12	various	occasional 1s			
David Moore	milk run	11+	occasional	none	messages	holidays	?
Eric Robinson	milk run	11+	?	half crown			
Edward Twort	messages	12?	2/3 hours weekly	2/3s	collected golf balls	(local golf rink)	1/6

This evidence shows that most urban boys (in this study anyway) tried to earn extra money while still at school. No urban girls had regular paid employment during their school years. Most children started working after about the age of ten and paper runs and milk runs were more common among teenage boys. A definite class bias shows in employment. Only working-class boys undertook regular paid employment during the school term, but parents seem to have been more relaxed about holiday employment. George Goodyear and David Moore had holiday employment during high school years. Children in smaller urban areas also seemed to get paid more erratically, whereas city children received better pay. In no cases did boys regard the work as unpleasant, or exhausting. Did this paid work interfere with school work? Elliott Atkinson and Dennis Kemp worked the hardest but managed to pass their schooling. Reg Williams thought, however, that poorer children at his school suffered and came into conflict with authority because of their extra employment. The teacher hit them for inattention.<sup>38</sup>

Some adults seem to have taken clear advantage of child labour. Family friends were the worst offenders and some expected children to work for very little. Reg Williams helped deliver milk in the evenings and meat on Saturday for Dick Gibbon, who had been a scoutmaster. 'He used to toss me a shilling every now and then, that was a big amount a shilling'.<sup>39</sup>

What did children do with the money they earned? Only Elliott Atkinson actually

---

hardly more than infants staggering along in the wind and rain . . . with every muscle of their rickety bodies strained beneath the load, upon which the chance of next day's dinner depends'. Davin, *Growing up Poor*, p.192.

<sup>38</sup> Reg Williams, 14.10.94, p.11. His supposition was speculation. i.e. he assumed that their inattention was caused by extra work.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid*, 20.10.94, p.15.

### Child Labour in New Zealand 1919-1939

gave his earnings to his parents. 'At the Saturday nights we sold the - what was it then - the local sports post in Wellington and managed to get a few bob that way, and that went into the family pool. You never kept that yourself, it was all taken home and given to your parents.' He and his eldest brother were continually thinking of ways to earn money. The vendors sometimes gave them free papers to take home, 'but somehow or other my eldest brother always finished up with selling a dozen papers on the way home and that would go to buy Sunday's meat'. Their most exciting triumph occurred when Elliott was ten. They sold papers at Courtenay Place 'which was big junction for all the trams everything, it was the best stand in Wellington. This one night he [uncle] gave me a bundle of papers which was nearly as big as I was and said, "Get down and sell them." He then called a strike, and we were actually the only ones selling papers in Wellington for some considerable time that night.'<sup>40</sup> Other school children kept the money they earned, though parents then expected them to use the money to pay for their own needs, such as books, entertainment and sometimes clothes. Dennis Kemp remembered the sense of pride he felt when he bought a pair of good school shoes with the money he earned from caddying. He used his money for outings and entertainment because 'our parents stopped giving us pocket money as soon as we started earning'.<sup>41</sup> Many parents also encouraged children to bank money, encouraging values of thrift as well as hard work.

Acceptance of children's paid work reflected many of the values that parents and society considered important, a fact reinforced by some authorities. The *Press* commented 'After all, there is a great deal to be learned in the school of life by those who are capable of absorbing information'. A member of the Otago School Board pointed out that 'most of the successful men in the country were those who had been through a period of hardship in their early life.'<sup>42</sup> Money and independence were important values in New Zealand society. Attitudes to money represented a clear investment in the mythology of thrift and respectability that emerges as a theme in New Zealand middle and respectable working class life. One of the clear distinctions between the rough and respectable was how they spent money. Ideally families should save, budget carefully, not waste money on frivolity, and certainly not drink or gamble. Parents tried to inculcate these values in their children. Children's work showed the importance of money but it also gave many children a measure of control that defied adult regulation. Children earning money directly threatened the ideology of dependency so central to modern conceptions of childhood. Money gave children a measure of independence and a sense of pride. Elliott felt important when he contributed to the family income, Dennis believed he had taken the first step to independence when he bought his first pair of shoes. Middle class children and girls were barred from this sense of achievement.

---

<sup>40</sup> E. Atkinson, 11.6.94, pp.1-2.

<sup>41</sup> D. Kemp, 29.3.95, p.24, 9.7.94, p.9.

<sup>42</sup> Otago Education Board, 'Child Labour in New Zealand', *National Education*, 1 November, 1926, pp.361-362.

### Child Labour in New Zealand 1919-1939

Children also carried out a variety of other activities that earned money or that contributed to the family economy in some way. Boys were more likely to carry out these irregular jobs or activities but some girls did as well. Irene Rylance collected medicine bottles 'from old man Gallan [sp], used to make his own medicine, I think some of it was just coloured water by the way'. She did not get much for them, but the sixpence made a difference to her mother.<sup>43</sup> Many children collected bottles to trade for money. Dennis Kemp and his brother collected beer bottles at Christmas time and New Year, and once collected as many as 240 bottles, for which they received a pound.<sup>44</sup> Eric Robinson picked peas in season (in the small town of Temuka) at ninepence a kerosene tin and half a crown for a sugar bag, gathered beer and lemonade bottles in the streets, and collected copper, brass and lead from the tip, which he sold at the foundry.<sup>45</sup> Of course children could also earn money once a year through the enshrined tradition of demanding coppers on Guy Fawkes Day. Again mainly working class children engaged in this kind of activity.

Children also gathered food, to eat themselves, to take home, or to barter. Eric Robinson collected mussels and boiled them up in a tin and caught fish, presumably to take home to his parents. As a teenager he went out rabbiting, his mother cooked the rabbit and then he sold the skin, receiving half a crown for a good unspotted buck's skin.<sup>46</sup> Elliott and his brother caught herrings which they took 'down to a Chinaman in Haitaitai and trade[d] them for vegetables'. Some children's activities showed as great ingenuity but less honesty. Elliott tried to avoid paying tram fares 'you'd be on and off tram cars as quick as you could and if you weren't too quick with your change - you'd have to haul off the tram cars before you gave your change sometimes.'<sup>47</sup> Steve Harris stole fruit, sometimes from gardens, and sometimes from a fruiterer's cart. 'We were round at the back wheel climbing up the spokes half the time you would get blooming potatoes and you would have to throw them back. We were bad kids in that street'.<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> I.Rylance, 18.7.96, p.11.

<sup>44</sup> D. Kemp, 9.7.94, pp.8-9.

<sup>45</sup> E.Robinson, 10.6.96, p.3.

<sup>46</sup> *ibid*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>47</sup> E. Atkinson, 11.6.94, p.2.

<sup>48</sup> S. Harris, 1.8.96, p.7.

## Child Labour in New Zealand 1919-1939

### II

#### *The Family Working Together: Child Labour in Rural New Zealand*

No fledging feeds the father bird!

No chicken feeds the hen!

No kitten mouses for the cat!

This glory is for men.

We are the wisest, strongest race-

Loud may our praise be sung!

The only animal alive

That lives upon its young.

A.K. (Te Awamutu)<sup>49</sup>

Legislation against child labour specifically dealt with the problem of urban children. The law stated that children could not be employed during daily hours where public schools were open. Provisions against street trading also controlled where and when a child could work. Policing of legislation seems to have been fairly haphazard and largely occurred in response to media attacks on children's labour. In both town and country attacks focused on outside employers: the newspaper men, the butcher, the milkman, or theatre-owners. Children employed by family businesses in both town and country were initially exempt from attack. During the twenties, however, concern about harsh conditions for some rural children, directed attention on child labour within families. These children worked for long hours, and, in contrast to urban areas, both girls and boys took part in farm work. The investigators of course largely ignored domestic work, so girls' labour in the home as opposed to the cow sheds, went unrecorded.

Attacks on child labour stemmed out of a wider concern with child health. The link that Hendrick identified between campaigns against child labour and the rise of the school medical service emerges clearly in New Zealand. Hendrick claims that Newman, of the British School Medical Service, intended to 'consolidate the medical authority implicit in the relationship between the children's physical life and their life in the school, but also he claimed the authority in respect of defining the 'normal' developmental process'.<sup>50</sup> New Zealand school doctors also firmly asserted their power to define 'normal' childhood in New Zealand, and increasingly they regarded labour as inimitable to childhood. In the 1920s and 1930s investigations by school doctors into children's health and child labour had revealed

---

<sup>49</sup>NZF.

<sup>50</sup>Hendrick, 'Child Labour and the School Medical Service', in Cooter (ed.), *In the Name of the Child*, p.52.



### Child Labour in New Zealand 1919-1939

that the children of share milkers and small dairy farmers worked far harder than the children in any other group, in the town or the country. Doctors aroused concern about the situation of these children, thus indirectly criticising the structure of family life in the countryside.<sup>51</sup>

This minor 'moral panic' seems to have had little practical result beyond very strenuous objections to children working on farms, and a campaign in the *New Zealand Farmer*. The poem at the beginning of this section stems from this campaign, and suggests that parents who rely on children's labour are parasites.<sup>52</sup> Concern about child labour can only be understood against the background of changing ideologies of the family. Children's work provided a particularly blatant contradiction of the ideology of childhood that had developed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Hugh Cunningham has convincingly shown in *Children of the Poor* that although in the early nineteenth century authorities believed that children should work, by the twentieth century children and work became mutually exclusive concepts.<sup>53</sup>

New Zealand society and the government responded uncomfortably to any criticism of the rural lifestyle. The dairying miracle, in particular, had become an essential part of the New Zealand economy. Any legislation to inhibit women's and children's labour might threaten the efficiency of the industry. None of the reports recognised that these small farmers and share milkers could not survive otherwise. Ideology and reality reached an inescapable deadlock, and practicality seems to have won over idealism. Government efforts to electrify the countryside, however, indirectly helped to solve this problem since electricity successfully reduced the needs for family labour (see chapter V).

Officials and the media responded to the situation by blaming individuals for inefficiency or slovenliness. One report noted that official regulations revealed greater concern for care of animals than children. 'Inspectors are provided and can compel people to clean and care for cow and pig and there are certain regulations regarding the housing of their animals, but there is no way of making a man provide any conveniences or comforts for his wife and children'. They further commented that:

It is well indeed for New Zealand and her products that the awful conditions of these houses is not known abroad for no butter or cheese would be eaten. Cows are milked by children and adults who never bath, whose nails are never cleaned and whose outhouses would be condemned for animal use, but they all send cream to the factory. Thank God for the factories which are beautifully clean and for

---

<sup>51</sup>One report noted that share milkers around Opunake lived in very poor conditions and the children worked extremely hard. 'The whole family have to work very hard to make a very bare living and the homes are absolutely bare and filthy as the mothers work outside all day'. K.Fisher, Ex School Nurse, Wanganui to Dr A Paterson, Health Department, H 35/8911 35/78.

<sup>52</sup>See Chapter V. This campaign was closely tied to the campaign against women working.

<sup>53</sup> Cunningham notes that child labour came to be considered universally a disgrace, and the 1918 Education Act, by banning employment before the age of fourteen, 'represented a reaffirmation of the official view, by then half a century old, that the place for a child was in school'. See Cunningham, *Children of the Poor*, p.167.

## Child Labour in New Zealand 1919-1939

pasteurisation.<sup>54</sup>

Such comments reveal the conflict between ideology and practice but they also reveal a genuine concern for children's health since many children were overworked.

Officials attempted to remedy the situation by arousing public concern, threatening that if conditions did not improve, the law should 'secure an amendment for the protection of the children concerned'.<sup>55</sup> Doctors and education board officials espoused the same self-help philosophy usually directed at the urban poor. They ignored structural problems. A report of rural school children (1930) recommended systematic supervision of school lunches, hot drinks in cold weather, and teaching children about nutrition and vegetable gardens. They had been horrified to find that except in group D (remote farmers), between 17 and 37 per cent. of families had no vegetable gardens. They failed to realise that in many country areas women and children grew vegetables, and that an increase in vegetable growing only increased the mother's burden. Only one official recommendation related to the major problem, women's and children's labour. The report stated 'Child labour after school hours might be regulated, and condemnation of unsuitable houses could be enforced'.<sup>56</sup> No further results eventuated from the report and dairy farmers and share milkers remained an unhappy and underprivileged section of the farming community.<sup>57</sup> Concern about child labour and rural children continued to surface periodically during the interwar years. The media reported comments by doctors, and teachers in particular continued to be a vociferous minority bewailing the backwardness of rural children. Dr Dawson, a School Medical Officer, noted smugly that when he inspected one school in a share milking district:

Without any previous knowledge of their circumstances, I picked out one boy as physically and intellectually superior to the others. This boy was the son of the Manager of the Dairy Factory, and was going to bed at proper hours, and not doing any work in the milking sheds. He did a certain amount about the house on Saturday mornings.<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup>Memorandum to The Director, Division of School Hygiene from Elizabeth Gunn, Medical Inspector of Schools, 26 November, 1926, H35/891 1/78.

<sup>55</sup>The Education Board, Wellington, 3 October, 1930, for the information of the Director General of Health, H35 206/7 35/75.

<sup>56</sup>'Report on the health conditions and environment of rural school children in the South Auckland district of New Zealand', Report on Rural School Children, H35/8911 35/78.

<sup>57</sup>Labour attempted to appeal to this section of the rural community in the 1930s. The popular and indefatigable John A. Lee proselytised in dairying areas and in small towns trying to raise support by promising cheap credit and an improvement in rural conditions. E. Olssen, *John A. Lee*, University of Otago Press, Dunedin, 1977, pp. 61, 75.

<sup>58</sup>Dr Dawson, Medical Officer of Health to Director General of Health, Wellington, 22 October, 1936, H35 206/7 35/75.

### Child Labour in New Zealand 1919-1939

Gwen Somerset, herself originally a country child,<sup>59</sup> noted on her arrival in Oxford in 1921 that country children compared unfavourably with town children. 'I was confronted in my classroom with Standards Three, Two and One and by stolid, flat faces, waiting it seemed, for an intimation of just what would be my first mistake. Hefty farm lads, clumsy movements, heavy colds, even in summer, thick clumsy fingers, and colds, colds, colds everywhere.'<sup>60</sup> She missed 'the quick, alert, sometimes even cheeky reactions of the town pupils'.<sup>61</sup> Eventually she realised that the children's main problem was weariness. 'Many had begun the day at about 4.00 a.m. helping with the milking or preparing food for the workers. By 1.00 p.m. they were in need of sleep, to lie and sprawl on the forms and desks or on the few mats I was soon able to gather. And how they did sleep! And what a busy hour we enjoyed after they wakened.'<sup>62</sup> Few teachers were as sympathetic and flexible as Gwen but every country teacher knew the problem of tired and dull children. Excessive amounts of labour, early rising, and long journeys made school onerous for many country children.

Country children often found education alienating because of these factors, but a good education had become increasingly necessary in this period. Society demanded flexible and educated workers. The Christchurch Chamber of Commerce, in 1929, criticised rural schools for not promoting rural education. 'The schools are not designed to produce farmers, but seem rather to train boys for clerical positions'. Yet they noted that out of 1400 or 1500 boys in Canterbury who had finished school only 80 had gone on to the land.<sup>63</sup> Fewer opportunities existed for manual labour, particularly agricultural labour, because of increasing mechanisation, and men found it more difficult to acquire farms. A good education had become more important but child labour interfered with this process. Even if parents recognised this problem many had no other choice than to continue using their children's labour.

The survival of the yeoman ideal largely depended on the use of family labour. Child labour was most prevalent among small struggling farmers. Dairying areas were the worst offenders. School medical officers observed in 1921 that reliance on child labour had diminished compared with sixteen years ago 'when the price of butter fat was 8 1/2d per lb and the public got their butter for 1s per lb as the result of the farmers, their wives, and their children working in the cow sheds for about 3d per hour.' By 1921 the farmer 'got a good

---

<sup>59</sup>Gwen Alley grew up in Rangiora, but her family moved to Christchurch when she was in her early teens. Her father maintained a farm in Southland which her brothers often worked on in their school holidays. She trained at Christchurch Teachers' College and worked at a town school before moving to Christchurch. In her memoirs she explained that she intended to describe the childhood of her famous brother, Rewi, but she ended up giving a fascinating account of her own life.

<sup>60</sup> Gwen Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, p.141.

<sup>61</sup> *ibid*, p.146.

<sup>62</sup> *ibid*, p.142.

<sup>63</sup> 'Work for Boys', *The Press*, 8 March 1929, p.10.

### Child Labour in New Zealand 1919-1939

price for his butter-fat, and could afford to pay for labour.<sup>64</sup> Butter prices dropped sharply in 1921, however, and reliance on family labour seems to have increased. A father in a share-milking district of Opunake assured the medical officer that 'a share-milker must have a big family to work in order to make enough money to buy even a very insufficient supply of food.' The family jointly milked 50 cows by hand, and the doctor commented that one had to believe this statement 'as no human being could live from choice in such a bare hovel'.<sup>65</sup> Mechanisation made dairy farming more viable since the milking machine enabled men to manage larger herds. But many small farmers lacked the capital to invest in new equipment. Electricity also made mechanisation more viable but many country areas lacked electricity until the government's efforts resulted in the electrification of most of the countryside in the 1940s.<sup>66</sup>

The major government report into the health of rural school children in the North Island concluded that:

In the coal-mining groups 12 per cent. of the children were retarded; in the timber mill workers, 14 per cent.; among farmers in thriving areas 21 per cent.; in remote farming areas 11.5 per cent.; and among share milkers 26 per cent. The factors helping to account for retarded school progress included *work done before and after school hours, racial heredity, maternal overwork*, [my italics] migration from school to school, and shortened attendance from various causes, including sickness. Amongst the share milkers' children 24 per cent. had less than ten hours of sleep and 18 per cent. more than three hours of work. Though the children who did work before and after school did not appear unfavourably in development with others, their nervous system did not appear to be in a good state, for retardation in school work was more pronounced, and a common remark of teachers was that children showed signs of fatigue in school - indeed, in some cases actually fell asleep'.<sup>67</sup>

Eugenic influences emerge in this criticism of the conditions of some rural children, along with a subtext that implies the poverty of share milkers stemmed from internal as well as external factors. The explanation that retarded school progress occurred from 'racial

---

<sup>64</sup> 'Child Slavery An Auckland Discussion', *The Press*, 7 July 1921, p.2.

<sup>65</sup> 'Children of Share Milklers'. H35/8911 35/78. The doctor explains that the land in this district belonged to Maori 'who have nothing but the land which they are unable to sell, and consequently have no money for [?] repairs and so the houses are the poorest of four-roomed shacks with no conveniences or comforts, and no attempt whatever at paths or gardens'. Another family worked for a European owner and had much better accommodation. Such an existence offended against ideas of suitable housing.

<sup>66</sup> Milking machines were introduced in 1902, these were originally oil-fired but gradually electric machines were introduced. By 1919 there were over 7000 plants nationwide and the number was increasing by 1000 a year. Burdon notes that hydro-electric power also made possible 'an abundant supply of hot water in the milking sheds - a matter of great importance since the most painstaking attempts to manufacture a high-grade product were likely to be defeated by the unsanitary condition in which many farmers allowed their sheds to remain.' R.M. Burdon, *The New Dominion A Social and Political History of New Zealand 1918-39*, A.H. & A.W. Reed, Wellington, 1965, p.320.

<sup>67</sup> 'Rural children' *Evening Post*, 23 May 1930, in H35/8911 35/78.

### Child Labour in New Zealand 1919-1939

heredity', as well as 'overwork', is not further explained and it is not clear whether the medical officer referred to non-British stock, or 'poor' British stock. An impression develops, however, that these officials had scant understanding or sympathy with the families in their study. The medical officer commented very unfavourably on share milkers' homes. He criticised domestic inefficiency, describing thirty per cent. of the houses as dirty, and 15 per cent. as damp. 'There were also a large number showing a lack of cheerfulness, and meals were late. Only 46 per cent. seemed to enjoy adequate financial status'.<sup>68</sup> The report found that 80 per cent. of farming and share-milking mothers worked out of doors, 'mainly in milking sheds - may also be a factor in retardation, as it certainly is in regard to personal and house cleanliness and efficiency'.<sup>69</sup> Farming children 'have decidedly the hardest life. I found in almost every instance the mother and all children over seven years help with the milking'. In contrast they thought children of coalminers or saw-mill workers had more cheerful homes and enjoyed an easier existence.<sup>70</sup>

A survey of children in Mere Mere school in the North Island discovered that children carried out between 1 and 6 1/2 hours of work a day. They averaged just over four hours work a day each. For example one girl, aged 10 years and 4 months, worked from 5 am to 8.45 am, then from 4 pm to 7 pm at night. Not surprisingly she experienced fatigue.<sup>71</sup> The parallel study, in the Cook Street school in Wellington, revealed that boys at the most did three or four hours each day. Selling newspapers was not as strenuous as milking. School medical inspectors campaigned strongly against such labour. One doctor used a note from a mother to reveal parental attitudes to child labour. The mother asked the teacher not to punish her daughter for not doing her homework. 'It is impossible for her to do homework at night. She is up at 4 o'clock in the morning and does not go to bed until after 9 at night. She puts 7 hours in the cow shed besides going to school. Please do not keep her in after school hours. She goes straight into the cowshed when she comes home'.<sup>72</sup> The board planned to prosecute the case but the note and the doctor's reaction present two widely opposed viewpoints.

Prosecutions against parents for child exploitation were relatively uncommon but one case is worth examining. In 1921 the courts tried a farmer for 'Alleged Child Slavery'.<sup>73</sup> This case illustrates neatly the clash between official ideology and parental attitudes. The courts tried John William Clark, a Halswell farmer, for 'wilfully mistreating' his two

---

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> C.E.Cherry, School Nurse to Health Office, Auckland, H35/8911 35/78.

<sup>71</sup> Memo for the Director of Education, from Dr Dawson Medical Officer of Health, New Plymouth, 16 Dec 1936, H35 206/7 35/75.

<sup>72</sup> Memo for Director of Education, from A.G.Paterson, 2.12.25. H35 206/7 35/75.

<sup>73</sup> Cunningham argues that the campaign against child labour gained momentum in Britain because of the influence of the anti-slavery movement. The movement against child labour used imagery from the abolitionist movement, see Blake's famous poem, 'The Chimney Sweep' However, the term slavery was so bandied about that it ceased to have any resonance. Cunningham, *Children of the Poor*.

### Child Labour in New Zealand 1919-1939

daughters, Juanita and Maud, (aged 12 and 11) 'in a manner likely to cause them unnecessary suffering'. The press report listed Juanita's work.

She rose every morning at about 5 o'clock. She had to get a cup of tea and then milk seven or eight cows. After her mother left the house she had ten or eleven cows to milk. She would be kept milking till about 8.30 a.m., or 9 a.m. When she finished, she had to feed pigs sometimes, and also wash cans occasionally. After this she would go home for breakfast. She would then wash dishes and clean the kitchen, after which she would prepare the dinner . . . Her father sometimes carted hay; sometimes witness did. This was also the case regarding driving the horse. She also helped her father cut a gorse hedge, witness stacking the gorse as it was cut. The gorse would also cut her legs. She and her father pulled up mangels in the morning. In the afternoon she would wash up dishes and get the afternoon tea ready. She then got the cows in for milking. When the cows gave trouble, her father told her to screw the tails. He said that if she did not screw the tails enough he would give her a hiding. He never hit her with a stick. Sometimes he struck her over the hands. He would also hit her anywhere about the head and ears. . . Witness would usually finish milking about 9 p.m. After that she would have to clean cow bails and wash buckets, these taking till about 9.30 p.m. . . She once had to drive the cows from Little River to Halswell, a distance of 36 miles.<sup>74</sup>

It is noticeable that the various groups in the case took very different attitudes. The threat of court action made Clark's wife and children support him. It is difficult to estimate whether to believe their protestations since they could have been coerced into supporting Clark. A clear contrast emerges here between official attitudes and those of family and neighbours. The representative for the Society for the Protection of Women and Children thought the children were exhausted, and the judge declared 'I am certain if you kept a youth of eighteen at a job like that he would break'.<sup>75</sup> The father claimed that Juanita preferred working on the farm to housework. He also stated that Juanita had to do this work after his wife fell ill since he could not find an immediate replacement for her labour. His wife and children opposed the charges. Mrs Clark claimed that 'theirs was a case of the whole family assisting' but admitted writing to a neighbour 'Juanita has gone to Halswell, poor kid. She got an awful hammering for putting hay in the wrong paddock. When I interfered he hit me. I am too ill for that and I am going to Christchurch to see about it'. The prosecution succeeded and as the judge sentenced Clark he declared that the children had been treated 'like slaves'. The court ordered that the two daughters be removed from their home.<sup>76</sup> The *Press* publicised this case and one presumes this highly publicised prosecution must have had some impact on the community.

Several interesting features emerge from this case. Regardless of the morality of the

---

<sup>74</sup> Court News, *The Press*, 5 February 1921., p.5.

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *ibid.*, 11 February 1921, p.2.

### Child Labour in New Zealand 1919-1939

situation, a clash of values between town and country, and necessity and ideology, becomes apparent. Although the children in this case worked hard and were treated harshly their situation was hardly unique. Depictions of child labour in other areas were fairly similar and did not end in prosecution. Possibly the proximity to Christchurch made the situation visible and unpopular. School provided the arena for the clash between official attitudes and family needs. The teacher at Halswell school (called for the defence) stated that both girls had only attended 221 times out of a possible 310 and were frequently late.<sup>77</sup> Gender attitudes also emerge in this battle of values. One gains the impression that the family offended against ideas of femininity as well as against ideologies of childhood. The prosecution emphasised the hard nature of the work Juanita did: how the gorse scratched her legs, and the unsuitability of her driving cows through the countryside. If Juanita had been forced to do large amounts of housework it seems unlikely that prosecution would have resulted. It would appear that child labour in the countryside offended against gender and childhood ideologies. But authorities could do little to combat these problems. Removing children from rural families would have been an extreme and unpopular option.

The evidence suggests that during the interwar period farming children in particular worked extremely hard. Cases of 'the whole family assisting' abounded. The information in this study confirms these findings. Farming children had a much tougher life. Although none of the children in this study experienced such extreme conditions at an early age, some experienced similar hardships when they were older. This study confirms that children in dairying families worked the hardest. Evidence from children's letters in the *New Zealand Farmer* also supports this conclusion. The following table lists the variety of work carried out by children in this study though it is impossible to give precise hours of work (I have only listed significant child labour). Age made a major difference in the amount of work carried out by children and most children did not work hard till they were in their teens. For example, the Trembaths only had thirty cows so their children started milking at thirteen or fourteen rather than seven. The Partridges did not believe in children having to labour hard when they were at school. The Ryans however, made their children help from the age of seven or eight. All the farming children, and many of the non-farming children in this study had more work to do than children in towns.

---

<sup>77</sup> *ibid.*



Bill Gillespie's rabbit shooting gang up the Hakataramea valley. Courtesy of Bill Gillespie. Many country children, and children like Eric Robinson, who lived on the edge of the city, enjoyed themselves shooting rabbits, and selling the cured skins.



Millie with her mother's calf. Millie helped her mother with the milking and churning butter, but the work was not too onerous as they lived on a mixed grain and sheep farm. Even when she had left home and lived in the city she cycled home in the weekends to churn the milk for her mother, who suffered from poor health. Courtesy of Millie Jones.



## Child Labour in New Zealand 1919-1939

Table 12: Rural Children's Work (Interviewees)

Milking	Housework	Child care	Cooking	Livestock	Crops/ Garden	firewood
Trembath	Bevan	Trembath	Partridge	Trembath	Trembath	Trembath
Ryan	Jones	Bevan	Benson	Ryan	McNeil	Ryan
Partridge	Partridge	Partridge	Bevan	Partridge	Bevan	Partridge
Robinson	Benson	Benson		Robinson	Ford	Benson
Jones				McNeil		McNeil
				Jones		Bevan
				Bevan		
				Ford		

Note: Interviewees recorded their labour, other children in the family may have carried out other chores. For example Jean Bevan's older sister helped on the farm and with the milking.

Some children enjoyed helping with chores, although others found the work burdensome. Mary Trembath liked milking and viewed the cows as friends. She took a particular pride in her light 'touch' and explained that cows appreciated her milking them. A boy wrote to Uncle Ned of the *NZF*: 'I have left school and am working in a factory where they condense the milk. We are milking six cows and I like milking them'.<sup>78</sup> Irene Keehan wanted to learn how to milk for fun and her brother, in annoyance gave her a dry cow to milk. 'He said "I'll teach you to ask me to want to milk"'.<sup>79</sup> Other children hated the work. Mavis Benson and Edna Partridge both believed that they had been made to work far too hard as children. Most children, however, viewed such work with resignation because it was simply a part of their existence. They saw other children working hard on house or farm. This attitude becomes obvious in letters to the *NZF*.

Children's letters described their participation in a large number of farm activities. Although dairying children worked the hardest, each type of farming had its own form of labour. Milking required extensive family labour, and children helped with all the types of work associated with cows. One child wrote 'We are milking nineteen cows now, Dad, my brother, and I are the milkers. I milk seven.'<sup>80</sup> It seems to have been a universal job for children to help feed young animals. Joe, from Weraron, wrote: 'I am ten years old and I milk two cows and feed a calf.'<sup>81</sup> Boys drove the cows home for milking. Mary Trembath's brother had to do this chore every day, which could sometimes be a trifle hazardous. One boy wrote: 'Every morning when my brother has milked the cows, he puts them in a paddock near the road, and I get them when I come home from school. I have to drive them down a big hill, and don't they buck!'<sup>82</sup> Interviewees told stories about being trapped in a paddock with cows

<sup>78</sup> Balmagowan, Wylie's Crossing, *NZF*, 1 November 1919, p.1581.

<sup>79</sup> I. Keehan, 21.4.95, p.6.

<sup>80</sup> Fernleaf, Kinohaku, *NZF*, 1 February 1919, p.237.

<sup>81</sup> Joe, Weraron, *NZF*, *ibid*.

<sup>82</sup> Sparrow Legs, Pongoroa, *NZF*, 1 September 1926, p.1327.

### Child Labour in New Zealand 1919-1939

or bulls. Frances Denniston and her brother once cowered up a tree, waiting for their parents to return and rescue them. 'Mum and Dad were away in Gore and we were feeding the cows and this one got in, so we couldn't get down.'<sup>83</sup> Taking care of cows put her off drinking milk 'you'd feed the cow with semoly? and turnips and they'd turn round and breathe all over you.'<sup>84</sup> Children seem to have helped even when their parents could afford to employ labour. In another letter a child explained 'We are milking eight cows at present, and when the men are busy my sister and I milk them. It is lucky we are quite fond of it. On the calendar I put down how many I milk each morning and night. During February I milked 222, but during March I only milked 137.'<sup>85</sup> Parrot from Runa Runa greeted the arrival of the milking machines with delight, writing 'I am only milking one cow now and I am not sorry either. Father is to get a milking machine.'<sup>86</sup> A girl wrote of her relief when the cows dried up. 'Isn't it nice now that the cows are drying off, farmer cousins? There is no need to rise so early in the mornings, or to change and go to work again in the afternoon.'<sup>87</sup> Only one child (a boy) actually wrote about being paid for milking. 'I help to milk every night and morning, besides doing other work, and father gives me pay for it, which I put in the bank. Well uncle, I must close now because it is milking time again.'<sup>88</sup>

There were fewer opportunities to earn money in the countryside but occasionally children managed to get work during holidays. Huapai Laddie wrote 'In the last Xmas holidays I was working on a farm from the day we broke up till the day we began school again, and now I thoroughly understand grading the cream and altering the separator for skimming thick or thin.'<sup>89</sup> Edna Partridge, as well as many other children, collected birds eggs for the local council, and picked mushrooms which they sold. She explained that she hoarded the money to buy shoes for herself. She also worked one year as a teenager doing apple picking.<sup>90</sup> Sometimes children were expected to work for nothing. Bill Gillespie helped shearers one summer without being paid.<sup>91</sup> Perhaps the farmer did not pay him because he was the child of an employee. Other children kept livestock and presumably were able to sell eggs to make a small profit from their labour. One boy wrote, 'I am going in for poultry and have 50 little chicks'.<sup>92</sup>

Children on sheep farms also helped with farm work, though it seems to have been more common for boys to help. One boy wrote in 1921 that '[d]uring the lambing season I

---

<sup>83</sup> F.Denniston, Tape 6 of 8, 27.6. 90, hand-written abstract.

<sup>84</sup> *ibid*, Tape 1 of 8, 6.4.90, hand-written abstract.

<sup>85</sup> Silver Eye, Taihape, *NZF*, 1 May 1933, p.37.

<sup>86</sup> Parrot, Runa Runa, *NZF*, 1 September 1919, p.1254.

<sup>87</sup> Farmer's Lass, *NZF*, 2 August 1920, p.1137.

<sup>88</sup> Boy Blue, Otakeho, *NZF*, 1 November 1927, p.1430.

<sup>89</sup> Huapai Laddie, *NZF*, 1 October 1926, p.1452.

<sup>90</sup> Edna Partridge, pp. 24, 31, 45.

<sup>91</sup> See interviews with Bill Gillespie, 27.1.95.

<sup>92</sup> Joey the Patriot, Blenheim., *NZF*, 1. January 1919, p.112.

### Child Labour in New Zealand 1919-1939

went round the sheep every day, but now I go round twice a week only. It is a good dozen or so miles to go right round both farms . . . The lambs are growing well, but I hear the freezing works give only 5d a lb for lamb and less for big sheep'.<sup>93</sup> The following extract indicates that as well as being unfeminine, helping with this type of farm work could be viewed as dangerous for a young girl. Parents might view dairying as more suitable since it took place under the parent's supervision. Elizabeth Green's father grew timber and ran sheep. One day she decided to help with the muster. 'By the time of the 4 a.m. breakfast I had my horse all saddled up and my lunch cut along with all the others. What a to do. My father had other ideas and I was not, no not going out on the hill with the men! All the ranting and raving didn't get me anywhere.'<sup>94</sup> A twelve year old girl wrote about helping with the sheep but she shared this work with her brother. She wrote: 'my brother and I go and round the sheep when father is away.'<sup>95</sup> Children on sheep farms helped with the domestic livestock. Most farms kept one or two cows for household use and often children were expected to look after them. Elizabeth explained that Malvern was not a farming district and so while some children had to milk cows before school there was usually only one or two to milk.<sup>96</sup> For example, on a farm with 284 sheep and two cows, the two children milked a cow each.<sup>97</sup> Most children helped at harvesting time.<sup>98</sup>

Children also helped parents with horticultural work. Although such work could be labour intensive it was seasonal and so proved less of a burden than milking cows. It also escaped the notice of authorities because it could often be carried out in holidays or on weekends and did not interfere with school work as much. A child in the tobacco-growing area of Wakefield wrote: 'We have been very busy among the tobacco lately, and it is not a very nice job. We will be picking again tomorrow. I am in Standard IV at school this year'.<sup>99</sup> A nine year old described going on a hop picking holiday in Motueka.<sup>100</sup> This seems reminiscent of the great hop-picking holidays that were such an institution among the East Enders in England. May Smith, who lived at Bethnal Green in London, described the joys of hop-picking in a poem. 'Kids just love the freedom/ Scrumping apples or such'.<sup>101</sup> Children from the fruit-growing regions of Central Otago, or the Hawkes Bay described picking and grading fruit. 'We are kept busy in the fruit season, especially when the peaches are ready to pick. We pull the fruit and grade it into three grades, and then we pack them'.<sup>102</sup> The letters

---

<sup>93</sup> Rough on Rats, Kimbolton, *NZF*, 1 December 1921, p.1664.

<sup>94</sup> Elizabeth Greene, hand-written manuscript, p.16.

<sup>95</sup> Tui, Weraroa, *NZF*, 1 February 1919, p.237.

<sup>96</sup> Elizabeth Greene, hand-written manuscript, p.6.

<sup>97</sup> Pepper Pot, Tomaraia, *NZF*, 1 February 1919, p.238.

<sup>98</sup> Timothy, Amberley, *NZF*, 1 March 1919, p.375.

<sup>99</sup> Lily of the Valley, Wakefield, *NZF*, 1 May 1933, p.366.

<sup>100</sup> Harry, Motueka, *NZF*, 1 May 1919, p.662.

<sup>101</sup> Maggie Hewitt, interview with May Smith, courtesy of National Sound Archive, London.

<sup>102</sup> Cary, Te Rimu (9 years old), *NZF*, 1 June 1920, p.864.

### Child Labour in New Zealand 1919-1939

in the *NZF* reveal children's extensive knowledge of their particular farming areas which is completely different from town-children's isolation from production.

Children in country areas were expected to work. If they did not help with outside chores they assisted with housework or child-minding. Girls especially were expected to work rather than waste time reading or playing. Their letters frequently refer to child-minding or house-keeping. One girl wrote 'my hobby is minding my young sister, as I have no garden.'<sup>103</sup> Uncle Ned replied approvingly to another small girl who helped her mother with the baby and with the cows 'I am glad you are such a helpful little girl.'<sup>104</sup> Children accepted work with stoicism and even pleasure. Another girl wrote 'I have been promoted from helper in the house to housekeeper, as mother went into the Hawera hospital last Thursday. Although I find the work rather trying sometimes, I do not mind housekeeping in the least.'<sup>105</sup>

Country children acquired an extensive knowledge of farming conditions and the rhythms of work. Gwen Somerset, although she missed teaching city children, admired country children's knowledge of the natural world. She explained:

Country children were aware of signs of changes in the weather in a way that city teachers could rarely understand. They knew from their short but vital experience more than we could gather from long geography sessions. They watched birds suddenly descend into the paddocks and rapidly eat up seeds. "It's going to snow tonight," they would say and it always did snow.<sup>106</sup>

Children's work in rural areas gave them an extensive knowledge of their environs.

In the interwar years concern about the rural-urban drift roused fears that children were being put off country life because of the drudgery they endured. One writer commented that she hoped 'child labour will soon be universally a thing of the past', but that children should do some farm work. 'He must have a certain amount of exercise through the execution of a few light duties before and after school . . . We seldom find the duties allotted the little ones on the farm so excessive that the child is tired upon reaching school.' She argued that country children should still be more healthy than city children:

What about city girls and boys who are allowed out all hours of the night to picture theatres and such places of amusement? These children cannot possibly be alert and ready for lessons. The few hours' rest they have had have perhaps been troubled dreams- dreams developed upon the memory of some tragic photo play. Then, what a difference in the nourishing of the two. The farmer is naturally able to bring his family upon the very purest of foods, while in town sometimes it is quite a compliment to be

---

<sup>103</sup> Peggy, *Moonlight*, *NZF*, 1 September 1919, p.1256.

<sup>104</sup> Uncle Ned's reply to Mary, Southland, *NZF*, 1 January 1919, p.110.

<sup>105</sup> Happy Dream Girl, Okaiawaa, *NZF*, 1 September 1927, p.1174.

<sup>106</sup> Gwen Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, p.150.

## Child Labour in New Zealand 1919-1939

able to get a drop of fresh milk.<sup>107</sup>

This was an attitude shared by other writers:

I myself am a country child bred and born, and, as Derwentwater says, up early milking cows when the young child ought to be in bed. Why, I have milked cows ever since I was six years old, and have as much education as any right-thinking girl needs . . . Just think of a child lying in bed till eight o'clock on a summer's morning. Why, I'd pull everyone of them out of bed and dip them in a tub of cold water. Get up, children, and get outside in God's own given sunshine and fresh air.'<sup>108</sup>

Despite moral panics about child labour and exploitation of children in the country the myth about the superiority of country childhood remained a potent one. Indeed, child labour had some benefits. Responsibility bred self-esteem and self reliance among children. Excessive work, however, resulted in bitterness and a sense of exploitation.

A clear contrast emerges between the lives of country children and city children. Although children laboured in both town and countryside, country children undoubtedly worked much harder than their urban counterparts. Gender differentiation in tasks also emerged as being more rigid in urban areas. The work of urban girls and boys mirrored the masculinist/breadwinner model of society, whereas both girls and boys in the countryside made an economic contribution to the family. Urban children made a more indirect contribution to the family economy, and many boys used their small earnings as a means to obtain extras. Country parents followed older ideas about childhood, which is revealed in ideas about what age children should be when they began substantial chores. Many country children helped to milk cows from the age of seven or eight, an age when they would have still been considered helpless dependents in town. Seemingly immutable concepts about childhood become revealed here as being partly cultural concepts. Working-class children in towns, such as Elliott Atkinson and Dennis Kemp, and children in countryside negotiated burdens that would be considered inappropriate for their age. Country parents who relied on child labour were not so much 'the only animal alive that lived upon its young' as representatives of an older style of family life.

---

<sup>107</sup> Selma, Cabbage Bay, *NZF*, 1 October 1919, pp.1424-1425.

<sup>108</sup> Farmer's Daughter, Feilding, *NZF*, 1 October 1919, p.1424.

---



---

## Chapter VIII

### ‘Playing together’: Leisure in family life 1919-1939

---



---

There is a great need for many boys to be encouraged to join suitable social organisations, and there is a need for a part of their education at school to be devoted to the development of interests in which they may later spend their leisure time profitably and happily.<sup>1</sup>

Leisure patterns provide a subtle insight into the changing conditions of childhood and family life in the interwar years. Some generalisations can be asserted, since a rough division between town and country, and working class and middle class leisure emerges. The thesis has shown that the emotionally intense and child-centred family developed among the urban middle classes first, then spread to the respectable working class, but took far longer to develop among the urban poor and struggling farmers. The latter two groups spent much of their time working and the strict demarcation between work and leisure did not emerge as clearly in the interwar years. During the more prosperous twenties these families may have adopted some of the leisure patterns of the middle classes but hardship during the Depression eroded this development. In rural areas activities were more likely to be community based, and they revolved around adults, although children were not always excluded. Gender also shaped the experience of leisure. It will be argued that family leisure - that is father's, mother's and children's leisure - is an expression of modernity. 'Modern' families played, rather than worked together. This is true of younger children, because once children reached older age groups they tended to spend leisure time with peers rather than family. The chapter explores the type of leisure activities that the interviewees in this study recorded, in order to examine this hypothesis. First family leisure, then men's, women's and children's leisure will be examined.

Since few historians have examined leisure in New Zealand the secondary sources are not very comprehensive. Only one book specifically focuses on children's leisure. Brian Sutton Smith, inspired by the Opies' classic study of children's play in Britain, looked at children's games in New Zealand from the 1850s to the 1950s.<sup>2</sup> There have been a few studies about individual sports, with the greatest concentration on rugby.<sup>3</sup> Britain and

---

<sup>1</sup> W.B.Harris, 'The boy just left school: an enquiry into the social conditions which influence the boy of Christchurch in the first years after he leaves school,' Honours & MA Thesis, University of New Zealand, 1928, p.248.

<sup>2</sup> B.Sutton-Smith, *The Games of New Zealand Children*, University of California Press, USA, 1988. Colin McGeorge also mentions sport in his thesis 'Schools and Socialisation in New Zealand 1890-1914', PhD Thesis in Education, University of Canterbury, 1985.

<sup>3</sup> See J.Phillips, *A Man's Country The Image of the Paheka Male - A History*, Penguin, Auckland, 1987, 'Rugby, War and the Mythology of the New Zealand Male', *NZJH*, vol 18, no.2, Oct.1984, L.Richardson, 'Rugby, Race and Empire', in *Historical News*, no.47, December 1983, pp.1-6, Greg Ryan, *Forerunners of the All Blacks*,

## Chapter VIII: 'Playing Together'

Australia have a richer historiography about leisure and sport and so this chapter relies largely on theoretical observations from other countries. One dominant theme emerges through studying historical writing about leisure. A sense of regret or nostalgia emerges, an impression that richer cultural forms of leisure existed in the past. Some historians believe that commercialised leisure has replaced cultural traditions, resulting in a bland, mass-produced diet of organised entertainment. Radical historians such as Jeremy Seabrook regard the development of leisure as a kind of Roman circus for modern humanity, fulfilling the function of keeping the masses happy and dulling any desire to rebel.<sup>4</sup> Historians Stephen and Eileen Yeo argue that the commercialisation of entertainment acted as a form of cultural imperialism. 'All cultural expansion involves taking earlier ways of living, producing and enjoying, and *replacing* them [their italics]'.<sup>5</sup> It is interesting to observe a similar nostalgia emerging in oral recollections. Leisure assumes great importance in memories of the past and so becomes charged with emotions of pleasure, and sometimes regret. Richard Waterhouse, an Australian historian, provides an antidote to this nostalgia in his superb book *Private Pleasures, Public Leisure*. He argues that popular culture subverted the establishment's values, suggesting that the Australian masses were not victims of cultural imperialism but discerning consumers.<sup>6</sup>

### I

A revolution in leisure had occurred in mid nineteenth century Britain. Hugh Cunningham notes in *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution* that 'Leisure became more clearly demarcated from work, while at the same time still closely bound to it as the compensation for work'.<sup>7</sup> The development of leisure as a separate entity owed much to the development of industrial capitalism and urbanisation. Municipal authorities developed parks to recreate rural settings and encouraged the development of facilities such as libraries and public baths.<sup>8</sup>

---

Keith Sinclair, *A Destiny Apart New Zealand's Search for National Identity*, Unwin Paperbacks in Association with the Port Nicolson Press, 1986.

<sup>4</sup>Jeremy Seabrook argues that leisure is a commodity that has dominated Western society in the 1970s and 1980s and that markets have increasingly focused on leisure as way to justify over-production. Leisure has become the focus of mass consumerism. 'The search for status' through the purchase of certain consumer goods has weakened class consciousness and ensured the dominance of capitalism. J. Seabrook, *The Leisure Society*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1988, pp.24-27.

<sup>5</sup>Eileen & Stephen Yeo (eds), *Popular Culture and Class Conflict 1590-1914: Explorations in the History of Labour and Leisure*, The Harvester Press, Sussex, 1981, p.290.

<sup>6</sup>Richard Waterhouse, *Private Pleasures, Public Leisure A History of Australian Popular Culture Since 1788*, Longman, Australia, 1995, p.188.

<sup>7</sup>H.Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution c.1780-c.1880*, Croom Helm, London, 1980, p.140.see also Richard Holt, *Sport and the British A Modern History*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1990, and Waterhouse, *Private Pleasures, Public Leisure*, who provides a useful discussion of British and Australian leisure.

<sup>8</sup>Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution*, pp.151-155. These facilities did not become established in New Zealand until the 1890s and early twentieth century. In contrast to Britain, local communities in New Zealand took a much more active part in the development of facilities. Local beautification and amenity societies lobbied for libraries, museums, public baths, parks and recreation grounds and better town planning.

## Chapter VIII: 'Playing Together'

Social elites introduced these facilities; partly to improve the dire conditions of working class life, but also because they wanted to control and direct leisure towards moral ends.<sup>9</sup> Churches and voluntary organisations developed leisure facilities, hoping to encourage the working classes to improve themselves. Working men's clubs developed mid century and by 1900 over a thousand clubs had been established throughout England.<sup>10</sup> Commercial forces also encouraged the development of leisure, though often on less moral lines. By the end of the nineteenth century an influential leisure industry had developed.<sup>11</sup> All groups in society became more mobile as a result of railways; holidays and day excursions became increasingly common. Theatres, music halls, circuses, and later the cinema became popular forms of mass entertainment.<sup>12</sup> The increase in literacy, combined with cheaper production of paper, resulted in the numbers of newspapers, comics and books increasing rapidly. Reading became another important activity.

Emigrants from Britain took these expectations and patterns of leisure with them when they moved to the new world. Successive waves of immigrants and technologies would have introduced new ideas that modified existing models. Waterhouse suggests Australia developed more egalitarian leisure patterns than Britain. The urban working classes developed a popular culture that embraced 'gambling, drinking, professionalism and an acceptance of recreation as an enjoyable rather than an educational experience', but this culture also appealed to the middle classes. In turn the values of respectable culture - family life, hard work and the importance of outward appearances - influenced the working classes. He concludes 'that the cultural lines between those generally working class people who clung to the values of popular culture and those generally well-to-do people who conformed to respectable culture were less clear here than in either England or the United States'.<sup>13</sup>

It seems likely that New Zealand followed similar though not identical patterns of leisure to Australia. Respectable culture or 'wowsersism' appears to have had a deeper impact in New Zealand, perhaps reflecting the proportionally greater numbers of Presbyterians and Methodists in New Zealand. The puritan culture identified in earlier chapters emerges clearly in relation to leisure. Catholics and Anglicans, in contrast, retained a more relaxed attitude to the dual vices of drinking and gambling. Certainly most forms of gambling were outlawed in New Zealand after 1881, and New Zealanders often turned to Australia to fulfil their dreams of winning a fortune. In 1933 lotteries were illegal with five exceptions, art union sweepstakes, sweepstakes up to the value of £5, and by owners of alluvial gold, mechanical

---

E.Olssen, 'Towards a New Society', in Oliver and Williams (eds.), *Oxford History of New Zealand*, pp.253-4. Local communities wrote letters, and fundraised for playgrounds, dental clinics and various other necessary facilities.

<sup>9</sup>Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution*, p.155.

<sup>10</sup>ibid, p.183.

<sup>11</sup>Eileen & Stephen Yeo (eds), *Popular Culture and Class Conflict 1590-1914: Explorations in the History of Labour and Leisure*, The Harvester Press, Sussex, 1981, p.290.

<sup>12</sup>Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution*, pp.158-164.

<sup>13</sup>Waterhouse, *Private Pleasures, Public Leisure*, pp.84.



## Chapter VIII: 'Playing Together'

models, literature or mineral specimens. Profits were supposed to go to charity.<sup>14</sup> New Zealanders bet in huge numbers on the Australian Tattersalls lottery (a horse-racing sweepstake).<sup>15</sup>

Authorities in New Zealand and Britain developed an ambivalent attitude to leisure.<sup>16</sup> They reviled the type of popular leisure that Waterhouse discusses, one based on gambling, drinking and watching professional sport. Ministers, women's groups, teachers, and politicians, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries expressed concern about leisure activities. They feared that easier conditions in the colonies had led to moral laxity. The Reverend J. Paterson, speaking to the 1897 Young Persons Protection Bill Committee, commented 'I think one of the evils of colonial life is a love of pleasure and of attending entertainments at late hours. There is not the same home life as Home'.<sup>17</sup> Commentators believed stricter parents and more comfortable homes were the only solution to moral degeneracy.<sup>18</sup> Ministers also feared that the institution of the weekend and especially the motor car had eroded devotion to church.<sup>19</sup> A minister's widow in 1926 lamented the drift away from the church and accused modern youth of being too devoted to pleasure to attend. 'Modern girls . . . went for a picnic somewhere. God was not given a thought.'<sup>20</sup>

Women's groups feared that undesirable male leisure activities would have detrimental effects upon women and children. The temperance movement focused on the evils of drink, especially the effects of alcohol on family life. One woman wrote in 1890 'I do not hesitate to say when prohibition is in motion many other evils will cease to exist which at present fall with an unmerciful hand upon innocent women'.<sup>21</sup> Temperance supporters presented a picture of the ideal family man as an antidote to the drunken brawler.<sup>22</sup> They campaigned to ban alcohol or at least reduce the hours men spent in public bars. The nation

---

<sup>14</sup> David Grant, *On a Roll A History of Gambling & Lotteries in New Zealand*, Victoria University Press, Wellington, 1994, p.188

<sup>15</sup> Grant notes in his study of gambling in New Zealand that over £260,000 left New Zealand in the four years up to 1889. Grant, *On a Roll*, p.167.

<sup>16</sup> Cunningham suggests that 'important though the problem was perceived to be for all classes, it was essentially a limited problem. The level of civilisation of a society might be judged by its leisure, but whatever that level was, work would continue'. Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution*, p.185. See also Holt, *Sport and the British*, p. 136.

<sup>17</sup> (Evidence taken by the) Young Persons Protection Bill Committee, p.3. The Rev John Dawson also believed that young people were less moral in New Zealand, p.2.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid*, p.1, 2, 4.

<sup>19</sup> H.R. Jackson, *Churches and People in Australia and New Zealand 1860-1930*, Allen & Unwin NZ Ltd, New Zealand, 1987, pp.114.- 115.

<sup>20</sup> 'Modern Youth drift from church condemned', *The Press*, 2 December, 1926, p.2.

<sup>21</sup> H.L.N. (Helen Nicol) 'Female Suffrage and Prohibition', *Evening Star*, 13 May 1890, p.2 quoted in Macdonald, *The Vote, the Pill and the Demon Drink*, p.38. Nicol believed that 'drink was the fundamental cause of all social evil', *The Suffragists Women Who Worked for the Vote*, Bridget Williams Books, Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, 1993, p.105. See also P.Grimshaw, *Women's Suffrage in New Zealand*, Auckland University Press, Oxford University Press, 1972, 1987, pp.21-35.

<sup>22</sup> Phillips, *A Man's Country*, p.59.

## Chapter VIII: 'Playing Together'

voted and six o'clock closing became law in 1918.<sup>23</sup> Legislators hoped that early closing would encourage men to spend more time with their family. Some areas became dry but six o'clock closing had dire consequences for the nation's attitudes to alcohol. Men drank heavily with the aim of getting inebriated quickly.<sup>24</sup> Public bars remained male dominated places that respectable women dare not enter. One must not exaggerate the effects of temperance or the new atmosphere of pubs, however. Historians have discovered that liquor consumption had already begun to decline by the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>25</sup>

The eugenics movement, charged by imperial ideology, focused public attention on leisure. Governments in Britain and New Zealand worried about the declining British race. Although their concern had emerged in the early twentieth century, revelations about recruits in World War One fuelled these fears.<sup>26</sup> Imperialist ideas and rivalry also promoted the nation's obsession with the healthy body. Inter-dominion competitions gave countries the opportunity to parade their prowess. In 1930 the first Empire Games provided an opportunity for different parts of the Empire to come together and compete, but perhaps the most important international competition for New Zealanders occurred on the rugby field.<sup>27</sup> The New Zealand public followed international test matches with great enthusiasm, and when the All Blacks emerged from tours in 1905 and 1924 virtually unbeaten, the nation celebrated. The eminent New Zealand historian, Keith Sinclair, observed that 'War and sport are about the only international contests in which people from one nation can measure themselves physically and directly against others'.<sup>28</sup> Certainly, sport provided a valuable opportunity for a new nation to parade its virility and prowess.

Official concern about the future of the race, and international rivalry, had focused attention on children. As stated in earlier chapters, authorities felt particularly concerned about the effects of urbanisation.<sup>29</sup> They feared that 'a civilisation whose members lose touch with the fundamentals of life is a decadent civilisation, and doomed to destruction'. Harris,

---

<sup>23</sup>In 1911 a majority wanted New Zealand to be dry. Many hotels were closed, and the minimum drinking age set at 21. In 1919 the votes of returning troops prevented national prohibition. Olssen, 'Towards a New Society, in Oliver and Williams (eds.), *Oxford History of New Zealand*, p.263. In Australia, Victoria and New South Wales made six o'clock closing permanent in 1923. Waterhouse, *Private Pleasures, Public Leisure*, p.162.

<sup>24</sup>Phillips suggests that the combination of sex segregation and six o'clock closing perpetuated male culture in a more intense form. Phillips, *A Man's Country*, pp.77-78. Waterhouse noted that in Australia drinking rates fell after the introduction of six o'clock closing but a culture developed where 'a man stood up against the bar and drank until he became a spectacle for gods and men'. Waterhouse, p.163.

<sup>25</sup>Stevan Eldred-Grigg, *Sex & Drugs in Colonial New Zealand 1840-1915*, A.H. & A.W. Reed Ltd., Wellington, 1984, p.211. Eldred-Grigg suggests that alcohol consumption declined as water and other drinks such as tea increased in popularity, and as alternative entertainment venues became available, *ibid*, p.212.

<sup>26</sup>Medical examination discovered that only one in three men could be sent on active service overseas. J.Renfrew White, *The Growing Body: Its Nature, Needs, and Training. Being an Account of the Hygiene of Child Life with a System of Physical Education, for the use of Teachers and Health Workers*, Coulls Somerville Wilkie Ltd., Dunedin, (3rd edition) 1933, p.4.

<sup>27</sup>Holt, *Sport and the British*, Empire Games, pp.224-245, rugby & cricket, pp.226-236.

<sup>28</sup>Keith Sinclair, *A Destiny Apart NZ's Search for National Identity*, Allen & Unwin, New Zealand, 1986, p.152.

<sup>29</sup>Renfrew White, *The Growing Body*, p.10. Urban living was 'artificial'.

## Chapter VIII: 'Playing Together'

one of Shelley's students, hoped that in New Zealand many town boys 'spend some time in the country either on camping expeditions or on farms where they may spend holidays working among cattle and sheep'.<sup>30</sup> Authorities promoted healthy leisure pursuits, regarding team sports as especially useful in inculcating the values of manliness, cooperation, discipline and health. They contrasted images of the healthy sports boy or man with those of the decadent loafer.<sup>31</sup> Boy's magazines promoted sport and healthy living. Although authorities directed most attention at boys they also promoted physical activity for girls, emphasising the need to develop healthy bodies for motherhood. Sir George Newman wrote in the English Syllabus for Physical Training in Schools, in 1919, that developing children's physique 'is a matter of national importance, vital to the welfare and even to the survival of the race.'<sup>32</sup>

Teachers and politicians also feared that children, especially boys, were becoming increasingly uncontrolled as a result of laxer parental discipline. A series of moral panics developed about children<sup>33</sup> in the 1880s society expressed concern about larrikinism,<sup>34</sup> then fears emerged about juvenile delinquency in the 1920s. New Zealand's fears mirror a wider anxiety that emerged in English-speaking nations in this period.<sup>35</sup>

A combination of these fears resulted in private and public regulation of leisure. Olssen notes that a 'new spirit of organization pervaded all spheres of New Zealand life: public and private, business and leisure, family and club'.<sup>36</sup> Controlling adult leisure proved difficult so authorities focused on children, whom they hoped would prove more malleable. Compulsory schooling already regulated children's lives but increasingly authorities believed that control should be extended outside school hours.<sup>37</sup> Magistrates of the Children's court in the 1920s ordered some delinquent boys to attend evening classes. They hoped these would occupy the boys profitably as well as developing 'habits of study which may help throughout life. They sacrifice their leisure time, and discipline themselves by overcoming fatigue and attending classes regularly'.<sup>38</sup> The Calvinist work ethic reigned. Shuker notes that middle

---

<sup>30</sup>Harris, 'The boy just left school', pp.39,40.

<sup>31</sup>Two cartoons in *King and Country Call* provide an interesting contrast between the wounded soldier with his firm, manly jaw (p.60), and the weedy shirker with fag hanging out of his mouth,( p.94). Paul Baker, *King and Country Call New Zealanders, Conscription and the Great War*, Auckland University Press, Auckland, 1988.

<sup>32</sup>Renfrew White, *The Growing Body*, p.8.

<sup>33</sup>Roy Shuker, 'Moral Panics and Social Control Juvenile Delinquency in Late 19th Century New Zealand', in R.Openshaw & D.McKenzie (eds.), *Reinterpreting the Educational Past Essays in the History of New Zealand Education*, N.Z.C.E.R., Wellington, 1987, p.122.

<sup>34</sup>P.A.Gregory, 'Saving the Children in New Zealand: A Study of Social Attitudes Towards Larrikinism in the later nineteenth century,' BA Hons Dissertation, 1975, p.19, see also J. Beagle, 'Children of the State: A Study of the New Zealand Industrial School System 1880-1925', MA Thesis in History, Auckland University, 1974.

<sup>35</sup>Shuker, 'Moral Panics and Social Control', in Openshaw & McKenzie, *Reinterpreting the Educational Past*, p.130.

<sup>36</sup>Olssen, 'Towards a New Society', *Oxford History of New Zealand*, p.257.

<sup>37</sup>The Superintendent of Child Welfare wrote to Harris explaining that a system of control over boys when they left school would prevent them 'from lapsing into anti social ways, which very frequently develop into a career of crime'. Harris, 'The Boy just left school', pp.92-93.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid*, p.173.

## Chapter VIII: 'Playing Together'

class child savers shaped concern for children and helped to shift attention 'away from the family as the main socialization agency' resulting in family becoming more accountable to the State.<sup>39</sup>

### II

#### *Family Leisure*

Authorities supported a vision of family leisure that rested on middle class notions of family life. Intimacy characterised this definition of family life, and Lynn Jamieson and Claire Toynbee observed that in the twentieth century the distance between parent and child diminished. Parents established more friendly relationships with their children. They argue that this change occurred in the 1950s but undoubtedly this process had already begun within some families in the 1920s and 1930s:

Wanting to be a pal to the children means wanting to spend more time with them. This can have unanticipated penalties as Seeley *et al.* slightly gloatingly observe in the North American context. It is difficult for parents to reconcile their closeness with their children when they, as teenagers, abandon family company for the peer group (1956).<sup>40</sup>

The greater emotional closeness between parent and child that gradually developed in the twentieth century promoted family interaction. Sociologists have shown that working class parents tended to be more authoritarian and punitive than middle class parents. They also discovered that middle class mothers appeared to feel more burdened by their children. Toynbee and Jamieson note that 'it is unclear from existing studies whether persistent class differences are due to fundamental differences in attitude or to the presence or the absence of resources that alter the priorities of parenting.'<sup>41</sup> Social class and geographical differences emerge in this study, particularly in relation to leisure activities. Middle class parents absorbed concerns that leisure should be educational and healthy. Their ability to dispense with their children's assistance in the family economy meant that they could concentrate on developing their children's abilities. Middle class children frequently learnt extra activities or 'accomplishments'. These parents expected to spend more time with their children, to take them on holidays and outings, and to establish friendly relationships. Leisure took priority over work in the middle-class home. For working-class children and many rural children work took priority over leisure. Of course all parents did not respond to these pressures in the same way, and wealthier middle class families followed the English middle-class pattern of

---

<sup>39</sup>Shuker, 'Moral Panics and Social Control', in Openshaw & McKenzie, *Reinterpreting the Educational Past*, p.130.

<sup>40</sup>Lynn Jamieson and Claire Toynbee, 'Shifting Patterns of Parental Authority, 1900-1980', unpublished conference paper, pp.97-98.

<sup>41</sup>*ibid*, pp. 99-100.

## Chapter VIII: 'Playing Together'

greater separation between children and parents.

Certain factors increased the dominance of middle class leisure patterns. Better housing conditions in the interwar years promoted family and home centred leisure. This development occurred both in New Zealand and Britain. A study of parenting in Britain revealed the impact of housing developments on leisure patterns. Home ownership increased dramatically there in the interwar years. Ten per cent. of families owned their own homes in 1920 but this had jumped to 30 per cent. by 1939. British authorities cleared slums and created 4 million new rental houses in the interwar years. Local councils built new suburbs for the working classes with comfortable houses and gardens. Humphries and Gordon in their study of parenting in this period suggest that better home conditions, combined with reduced work hours, smaller family size, and the introduction of labour saving devices, allowed parents to spend more time with their children.<sup>42</sup> 'Fathers played with their children at home or in the back garden and children spent less time on the streets'.<sup>43</sup>

Housing in New Zealand also improved in the early twentieth century although New Zealand had never faced the overcrowding that plagued Britain. Official definitions of housing here reinforced the recreational possibilities of the home. For example the Municipal Corporations Act insisted that every new dwelling house should possess an area outside with 'not less than 300 superficial feet open space'.<sup>44</sup> These regulations encouraged home-centred leisure, allowing men to garden, and children to play within the confines of the home. Authorities thought environmental conditions important, fearing that poor housing led to uncontrolled street leisure, and immorality.<sup>45</sup>

Family ideologies promoted family-based leisure, but in practice home and leisure were not always synonymous, since home was a gendered space. Men regarded their home as a place of relaxation, but women saw the home as a workplace.<sup>46</sup> Women's duties required them to make their homes attractive to keep their menfolk and children at home. But men and children, and especially their leisure activities, introduced chaos and disorder. Women had to fight the battle against disorder through 'sweet order, management and decision'.<sup>47</sup> Paradoxically, women's attempts to order and beautify their home, often encouraged them to

---

<sup>42</sup>Steve Humphries & Pamela Gordon, *A Labour of Love: The experience of parenthood in Britain 1900-1950*, Sidgwick & Jackson, London, 1993, pp.88-89.

<sup>43</sup>ibid, pp.126-7.

<sup>44</sup>Christchurch Bye-Law No. 5 & Municipal Corporations Act, quoted in Harris, 'The boy just left school', p.276.

<sup>45</sup> For example, a welfare report on one family in 1949 thought that 'unsatisfactory home conditions and cramped sleeping conditions' had gravely affected the eldest girl's conduct. E2 1950/25b. A report on assistance to needy families stressed that government assistance would save the state money by preventing the development of delinquency and crime which might result in costly prison terms.

<sup>46</sup>Anne Hughes, Karen Hunt, 'A culture transformed? Women's lives in Wythenshawe in the 1930s', in Andrew Davies & Steven Fielding (eds.), *Workers' Worlds Cultures and communities in Manchester and Salford 1880-1939*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, New York, 1992, p.93.

<sup>47</sup>Ruskin, quoted in L. Davidoff, *Worlds Between, Historical Perspectives on Gender & Class*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1995, p.52.

### Chapter VIII: 'Playing Together'

encourage children to play outside in the garden, or occasionally the street, wherever possible. The ordered, meticulously clean house left little room for living, and may have caused resentment among family members. Phillips notes that popular jokes in the interwar years parodied the house-proud nagging wife.<sup>48</sup>

The following part of the chapter concentrates on interview material, since by looking at oral evidence, a more complex picture of leisure emerges. Oral testimony reveals that in contrast to Australia, respectable culture dominated New Zealand society. Urban men and women spent much of their time in family and home-based activities. Organised leisure began to dominate children's games, although urban working class boys continued to enjoy the more anarchic form of entertainment reviled by authorities. Leisure in interwar New Zealand was more respectable than historians such as Phillips or Eldred-Gregg have suggested, but undoubtedly did not always fit the narrow patterns espoused by authorities at the time.

Interview material reveals that family activities at home fit into two categories, practical and purely recreational: both promoted a sense of mutual family life. Practical activities included making toys, knitting, sewing, renovating and gardening. Women tended to concentrate on interior and men on outdoor activities. Men's activities often occurred outside the home, in the garden, the stable, garage or workshop. A greater emphasis on outdoor leisure pursuits appears in New Zealand. Certainly descriptions of fathers gardening occurred with greater frequency in the New Zealand sample. Only a fifth of the British sample, in contrast to almost seventy per cent. of the New Zealand families, gardened. The percentage of indoor games played remained fairly similar.

Most leisure activities were centred around the home, and gardening enjoyed considerable popularity, both as a leisure activity and an economic activity. Gardening typified respectable culture, and emerges as one of the important activities related to the home. People from all social classes gardened, but a variation emerged between town and country. Greater gender separation occurred in urban gardening: women looked after flower gardens at the front, while men worked on vegetable gardens at the back. Gardening linked private and public worlds since an attractive garden made a public statement about a family's sense of order, creativity and respectability. Hughes and Hunt argue that in the new council suburb of Wythenshawe in England, 'gardening was not simply a practical necessity but an activity which carried with it notions of improvement and moral worth'.<sup>49</sup> When men produced vegetables from their garden they reinforced their role as provider and showed their dedication to home and family. John Allison explained that his father was an expert vegetable gardener and 'my father was always very interested to show people round his immaculate vegetable garden. Some of his patients would come in and he'd show them round

---

<sup>48</sup>Phillips, *A Man's Country*, pp.248-250.

<sup>49</sup>Anne Hughes, Karen Hunt, 'A culture transformed?', in Davies & Fielding (eds.), *Worker's worlds*, p.93.

### Chapter VIII: 'Playing Together'

there, or show them his workshop of which he was rightly proud as well'. The children also had a small garden patch, and gardening appears to have been a truly family activity.<sup>50</sup>

Urban interviewees' recollections of their fathers usually relate to practical leisure activities. Gardening was one such activity, carpentry another.<sup>51</sup> David Moore watched his father work in his shed. 'When I was fairly young I remember, when he would make things, when he was making a cot for example - for the baby - I was there. I felt it was nice being with him. He would say "Hand me that chisel", or "hand me this", or "pass the saw over," and he let me think I was sort of being useful'.<sup>52</sup>

Although men spent much of their time in practical leisure activities, a substantial number of recollections relate to playing games with children, chatting to them or reading them stories. Men used the opportunity to escape adult concerns and enjoy play. Margaret Anderson explained that her father adored children: 'he was really known as the children's doctor here for many years, he loved acting the goat - he didn't mind making a fool of himself, he play-acted, he was musical, played the piano of course, just was a lot of fun'.<sup>53</sup> It is interesting that American studies of parent-child relationships observed these activities as emerging in the 1970s, but obviously this aspect of father/child relationships has a rather longer history than many sociologists believe.<sup>54</sup> This sense of play does not appear to the same extent among the middle-class interviewees in the British sample. An impression emerges that middle-class English parents were more remote from their children, perhaps reflecting the ease of access to servants, and greater formality.

Parents reading to children represent another concrete example of the emotional and social closeness of the 'modern' family. These apparently 'modern' descriptions of friendly intimacy between father and children emerge most strongly in solid middle class families, although roughly half of the urban sample in New Zealand read to their children. A major contrast with the British sample appears here, since less than ten per cent. of the British interviewees read to their children.<sup>55</sup> Joan Wicks explained that they enjoyed leisure

<sup>50</sup>John Allison, 6.4.97, p.6.

<sup>51</sup> Mada Basting's father, a carpenter, made his children a large doll's house out of a tractor case, a trolley that had a windsail to go along the beach, doll's prams, cradles and other toys, and wrote poems that he recited to the children. Mada Basting, 3.10.94, p.8. She recalled that when her mother made scones her mother let her make little ones, 'I'd always put my little finger in there [made a dimple in the scone] and serves them with my cups and saucers to my friends'. Mada remembered her childhood with considerable nostalgia and emphasised the good times. David Moore's father made a cradle and cot, a rocking horse for David and a jigger. Marjorie Walker's father made them bats. Mr Anderson made Ivy a skate board, and various toys for his children. Mr Grether also made Basil a jigger.

<sup>52</sup>David Moore, 29.3.95, p.10.

<sup>53</sup> Margaret Anderson, 14.10.94, p.21. Joan Maudsley's father put the children to bed quite often. He had very big feet and 'sometimes when we were very little we would say "can we have a ride on the coach?" that meant going upstairs - each of us sitting on one of his feet going up the stairs'. Joan Maudsley, 24.3.95, p.5.

<sup>54</sup>Jamieson and Toynbee discuss this question in their article, and caution that variations have always emerged in child-rearing patterns. Jamieson & Toynbee, 'Shifting Patterns of Parental Authority, 1900-1980', p.99.

<sup>55</sup>New Zealanders of all ages appear much more enthusiastic about reading. These estimates depend on the information recorded in interviewees and so are dependent on responses to questions. It is possible that the percentage of British parents reading to children may be higher than this.

## Chapter VIII: 'Playing Together'

activities with their parents.

Our parents really did spend time with us - especially reading stories and things like that. We had ordinary books during the week, and bible stories on Sundays, yes and mother had a lovely voice and she would sing to us, so it was really very good. Children were quite close to their parents, I can remember Marjorie's father - that was an age gap between the three children and then a gap and then the two, - and I can still see him with one child in one arm and one in the other, singing "Old Macdonald had a farm". Families were really quite close knit.

In contrast to urban parents, only a quarter of the country parents read to their children. In farming families especially, parents often lacked the time or the energy to play with their children. Few accounts of parents playing with their children emerge, and most recollections describe children playing by themselves or working with their parents.<sup>56</sup>

Recreational patterns varied from town to country because of differing patterns of work, and the existence of fewer facilities in the New Zealand countryside. Rural homes centred around work rather than leisure. Rural interviewees were most likely to say 'we made our own fun', and they talked about musical evenings, story telling, and card playing as a major source of amusement.<sup>57</sup> Almost seventy per cent. of rural families, as opposed to forty per cent. of the urban sample recalled musical evenings as an important source of entertainment. Hard-working farming families had little time for leisure, except in winter. Thomas Ryan commented that in winter they dried off all their herd except for the house cows. They enjoyed the long dark evenings when their father recited poems, and told stories: 'my youngest brother described him as a man of words'. They often listened to their mother sing, and the whole family played draughts and cards together. Thomas learnt to play the piano by ear and played the mouth organ.<sup>58</sup> Some urban families had musical evenings,<sup>59</sup> but the radio had begun to take the place of independent activities. Vera Marrett commented '[the] radio was our entertainment at home, that's all there was about it, there was nothing else'.<sup>60</sup> Only two rural families in this study had radios in the twenties and early thirties;

---

<sup>56</sup> Frances Denniston's father, a threshing-mill owner, did not play with them because he was never at home at night except in wintertime. Like other middle class fathers he took his families for Sunday outings in the car and regularly gave his family holidays. There were exceptions to this, Jean Bevan recalled playing kick the can and sometimes her mother played as well. Annette Golding played games with her father at night - euka, 500, cribbage, and basique. She later realised that they played games because her mother taught ballroom dancing in the house, and used the hall and sitting room to teach in. When Irene Keehan's father was unemployed he played hopscotch with them and taught boys to box.

<sup>57</sup> Descriptions of musical evenings abound, and cards were the other major form of entertainment in rural areas. Jean Bevan recalled neighbours visiting them to play cards. Her parents sometimes sat up until two in the morning playing euchre 'and you could hear them shouting and banging the table'. Jean Bevan, 10.6.96, p.8.

<sup>58</sup> Thomas Ryan, 10.6.96, p.13.

<sup>59</sup> Ivy Anderson talked about musical evenings at home. 'Mom would play till three o'clock in the morning.' Visitors came round once a week on a Saturday after the theatre. Ivy Anderson, 14.6.95, p.16.

<sup>60</sup> Vera Marrett, 13.4.95, p.6.