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COMBATING ISOLATION:

THE WOMEN OF THE MANGAPURUA

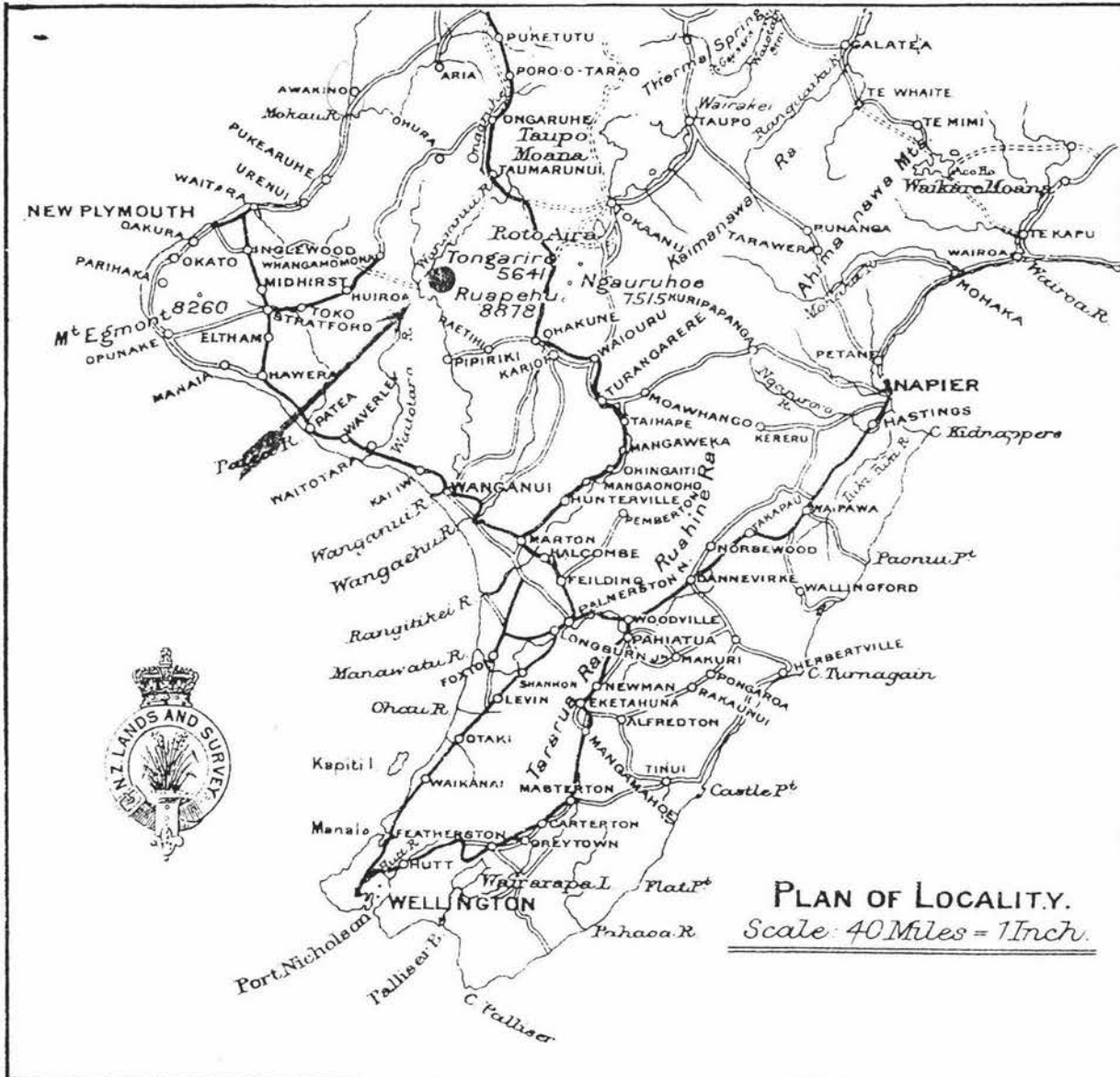
1917 -1942.

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in History at Massey University.

Jocelyn M. Carver
1998

MANGAPURUA

LOCALITY MAP



*Sites of Trigonometrical Stations and rights-of-way thereto are reserved.
Interference with any survey peg or mark is a misdemeanour under
the Land Act.*

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Source: LS(1) 21/296, NA.

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ABSTRACT

In 1915 the Discharged Soldiers' Bill was introduced into Parliament in recognition that many returning servicemen would be looking for land. The Mangapurua was one of the areas offered to servicemen. It was an isolated valley, covered in virgin bush, on the Wanganui River. The first of the men arrived in 1917 and by 1920 the women were entering the Valley; wives, mothers and sisters. Some of these women would live here for the next twenty years until the Valley was closed and they were forced to leave their homes and farms. The conditions that most of the women faced on arrival were primitive. The housing was in many cases sub-standard and they had few facilities. To exacerbate their problems was the financial situation of the period which meant that there little money available for anything but essentials. The focus of this thesis is the ways the women combated their isolation, taking into consideration their backgrounds, their standards and values, their workloads and the homes they developed.

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INTRODUCTION

Towards the end of the First World War the New Zealand Government organised a rehabilitation scheme to place as many returning servicemen as possible on their own farms. Many of these farms were situated in remote areas. The Mangapurua was one such settlement, although more isolated than most, with very few amenities and only limited access to the outside world.

Claire Toynbee, in her research into family relationships in New Zealand in the early part of this century, argues that isolation strengthened links between people so that they tended to form "highly cohesive social relationships, as they [the people] were dependent on each other in crisis situations."¹ This thesis will try to determine if this was true in the isolated Mangapurua. This community was made up of a mixture of single and married men who all shared the common bond of being returned servicemen. Some of the men were officers while the rest came from the 'other ranks', but all were dependent on each other's skills and help. Did the women develop a similar bond and turn the settlement into a cohesive community?

The main theme of my thesis is to examine how the wives combated the isolation and the foreign environment into which they were brought. Although they came from many different backgrounds they all had to face similar challenges. The thesis examines how they accepted, adapted to or overcame the conditions that confronted them on their arrival in the Valley. These women brought with them the values and the standards of a society that held strong views of a women's place. How did these values fit into or be moulded to the life of the valley? They also

¹Claire Toynbee, *Her Work and His, Family, Kin and Community in New Zealand 1900 -1930*, Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1995, p.28.

brought a variety of skills of their own into the Valley, which were to benefit not only their own husbands and families, but all the settlers.

The studies that have been done on pioneers in the nineteenth century all recount the sacrifices made and hard work done by the women who settled in remote areas in New Zealand. These pioneering situations continued into the twentieth century as people who wanted land had to move further away from the towns and the Mangapurua represents one of these situations. Post-World War One studies on soldier settlement show similar patterns in other areas such as Aotuhia in Taranaki. The women who settled in the Mangapurua were living in conditions of the nineteenth century but attitudes to a women's role were changing towards motherhood and femininity.

In addition to Toynbee, the study has drawn on the work of W.T. Doig about the standards of life of New Zealand dairy-farmers in the 1930s, and Marilyn Lake, *Limits of Hope* about the soldier settlements in Australia after World War One to establish a comparative context in which the Mangapurua experience can be assessed.

Each chapter will deal with an aspect of the women's lives in the Valley. Chapter One will give an overview of the Valley during the period, 1917 - 1942, when the settlement existed. Chapter Two discusses the influence society had on the women's role in a community and how this affected the Mangapurua society. Chapter Three deals with the importance of communications, especially in isolated areas such as the Mangapurua. Chapters Four and Five examine the housing and the work-load of the women respectively, while Chapters Six and Seven discuss the

values and standards maintained by the women of the Valley, and their social organisation.

My main primary sources are the oral testimonies of the children of the original settlers. These are always difficult to interpret, because, as Megan Hutching says: "testimony cannot simply be taken at face value."² Most of the children who have been interviewed indicate that they had a very happy and sheltered life in the Valley but there is no doubt in the children's minds that their parents were careful to hide some of their anxieties and loneliness from them. The following quote expresses the feelings of all the children I have interviewed about their life in the Valley and indicates the problems of memory and interpretation of which I have needed to be aware.

It was not until recently I really began to realise the grit and determination my dearly beloved late parents must have had to make such a happy home for us... we had such a feeling of well being - always so well dressed and fed, yet our parents really had very few facilities and they could not have very much money. But it never showed.³

Much of the period covered in my research was a time of financial hardship for the settlers but their children consider that they were well fed, well dressed and lacked for nothing essential. It is only in retrospect that they realise the hardships that their parents suffered. "I realise just how much energy and dedication our parents put into keeping four little girls happy."⁴

As much of my source material is from these people with their concepts of one's golden childhood, it must be taken into consideration that some of their

²Megan Hutching, *Talking History. A Short Guide to Oral History*, Wellington: Bridget Williams Books Limited, 1993, p.58.

³Helen McDonald, 'Memories of a Mangapurua Childhood', *Wanganui Chronicle*, Wednesday 13 December 1989, p.29.

⁴ibid.

recollections could be flawed or incomplete, as we tend to remember the best things in our lives. Another aspect that needs careful scrutiny is the interpretation that is placed on events by those relating the story. Unfortunately it is sometimes hard or impossible to get two different versions of the same story even when two or more members of a family has been interviewed. They remember similar things as the important events in their lives have been discussed between them, so ideas are fixed. Another main primary source of material will be from unpublished manuscripts written by the settlers or their children. The works of Arthur P. Bates, Elizabeth Allen and *Okoroa* edited by Bates are valuable primary material about the region. Lands and Survey files on the Valley where they touch upon the women's lives within the Valley is another source.

The following photograph shows many of the Valley families including some of the children who have so willingly given me interviews and material for my research.

FAMILIES FROM THE MANGAPURUA

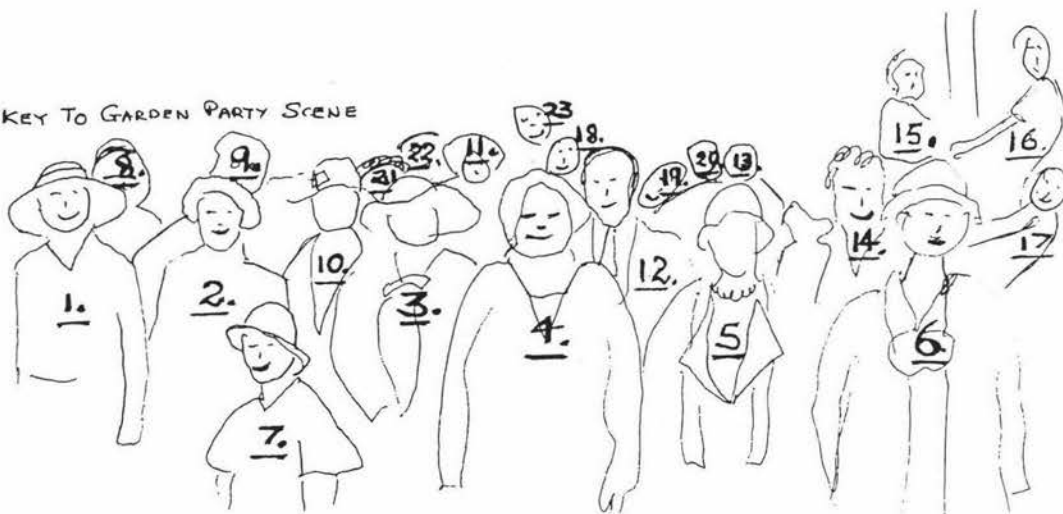


A photograph taken of the Valley Women attending a Garden Party at the Browns' home in the Mangatiti about 1935. With the help of the photograph's owner, Ruth West (nee Aislabie) Arthur Bates was able to identify and name many of the people. The names identified are on the numbered plan.

The names are:

- | | |
|----------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Mrs Mowat Snr. | 2. Mrs V. Aislabie |
| 3. Mrs Jim Shaw | 4. Mrs Brown |
| 5. Mrs Bettjeman | 6. Mrs Bolton |
| 7. Mary Mowat | 8. Mr Aislabie |
| 9. Mr T. Brown | 10. Miss I Stafford |
| 11. Daphne Bettjeman | 12. Mr Bettjeman |
| 13. Mac Bettjeman | 14. Mr H. Bolton |
| 15. Michael Anderson | 16. Allen Aislabie |
| 17. Mark Aislabie | 18. Ruth Aislabie |
| 19. Ron Bettjeman | 20. Ross Brown |
| 21. Pat Mowat | 22. Alice Milbank |
| 23. Harry Brown | |

KEY TO GARDEN PARTY SCENE



CHAPTER ONE

GEOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC OVERVIEW

" It is the duty of the state to do everything it possibly can to provide lands for ... our soldiers ... and assist them to get on to that land in any way we can."¹

This chapter is an overview of the Mangapurua Valley Settlement's twenty-five years of existence, from 1917 to 1942. It will examine the surveying and initial settlement of the Valley, the settlers' development of their properties, the various problems they encountered and how these impacted upon the lives of the women within the Valley. The period was a time of great fluctuations in prices farmers received for their produce, culminating in the collapse of prices in the Great Depression of the 1930s. These fluctuations were to have a direct bearing on what would be required from the wives and mothers who lived in the Valley. They would have to learn to make-do, practice in some cases extreme thrift when little or no income was available from the farm, and to continue to give support to their husbands, when often under extreme stress.

The Mangapurua Valley is about thirty kilometres upriver from Pipiriki and situated in the most isolated section of the Wanganui River on the eastern bank. It is about thirty kilometres long, from the landing to the Trig: narrow, with only small flats and the deep gorge of the Mangapurua running through it. 'Mangapurua' means 'abundant (purua) streams (manga)' ², which is a very apt name. The

¹New Zealand Parliamentary Debates, 175 (1916), p.841. (Right Hon. W. Massey).

²Arthur P. Bates, *The Bridge to Nowhere. The Ill-fated Mangapurua Settlement*, Wanganui: Wanganui Newspapers Ltd., 1993, 7th edition, p.10.

Mangapurua was "one of the few large valleys off the Wanganui River which the Maori had not occupied and cultivated."³ There does not seem to be any particular reason for this. It may have been that the landing area was not suitable for many canoes. But the Maori did go there for hunting and for suitable trees for the building their canoes.

The virgin Valley was completely covered with bush. The report of the surveyor filed in 1914 stated:

This block is all under heavy bush, varying from flats of rimu, pukatea, kahikatea, etc, and heavy rata, tawa sidlings [sic], to poorer spurs under tawhero and birch. The undergrowth is dense, and comprises chiefly supplejack, ponga, mahoe, matipo, etc. The soil is light, with only a thin coating on the sharper spines and steeper sidlings, but with a good depth of good soil on the stream flats and easier sidlings.⁴

The report then describes the contour of the Valley as having small flats, which were to prove extremely fertile, and the rest as rough, steep, gorgy with poor quality light soils which were prone to erosion once the bush had been cleared.

The Whirinaki Survey District had been surveyed and opened up for settlement about 1910, but the Mangapurua Valley was withdrawn from offer because of the lack of interest by settlers in the nearby valleys, the Mangatiti and the Retaruke. In 1915 the Minister of Lands, William Massey, introduced into Parliament the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Bill. It was a recognition by Parliament that many of the returning servicemen would be looking for land. "In all 9500 soldiers were financed onto the land; 4000 of them on 570 000 hectares of

³ibid., p.9.

⁴ibid., p.10.

Crown land and 5500 on 500 000 hectares bought by the Crown from private owners."⁵

As the Mangapurua Valley was Crown land and had already been surveyed it was seen as a logical area to develop under the scheme. It was opened for settlement in 1916. The sections were some of the largest offered to the returning servicemen anywhere in the country, and this may have been one of the incentives which encouraged men to apply for them.

From the beginning of the Mangapurua scheme there was disapproval. The Crown Lands Ranger at Piriaka was very pointed in his remarks against the project in a letter to the Crown Lands Commissioner, saying:

The settlers I met spoke very strongly against the action of the department in settling discharged soldiers on the Retaruke and other blocks in that vicinity. From my knowledge of the country, I am of the opinion that the land is too rough and too far back for men with such shattered nerves.⁶

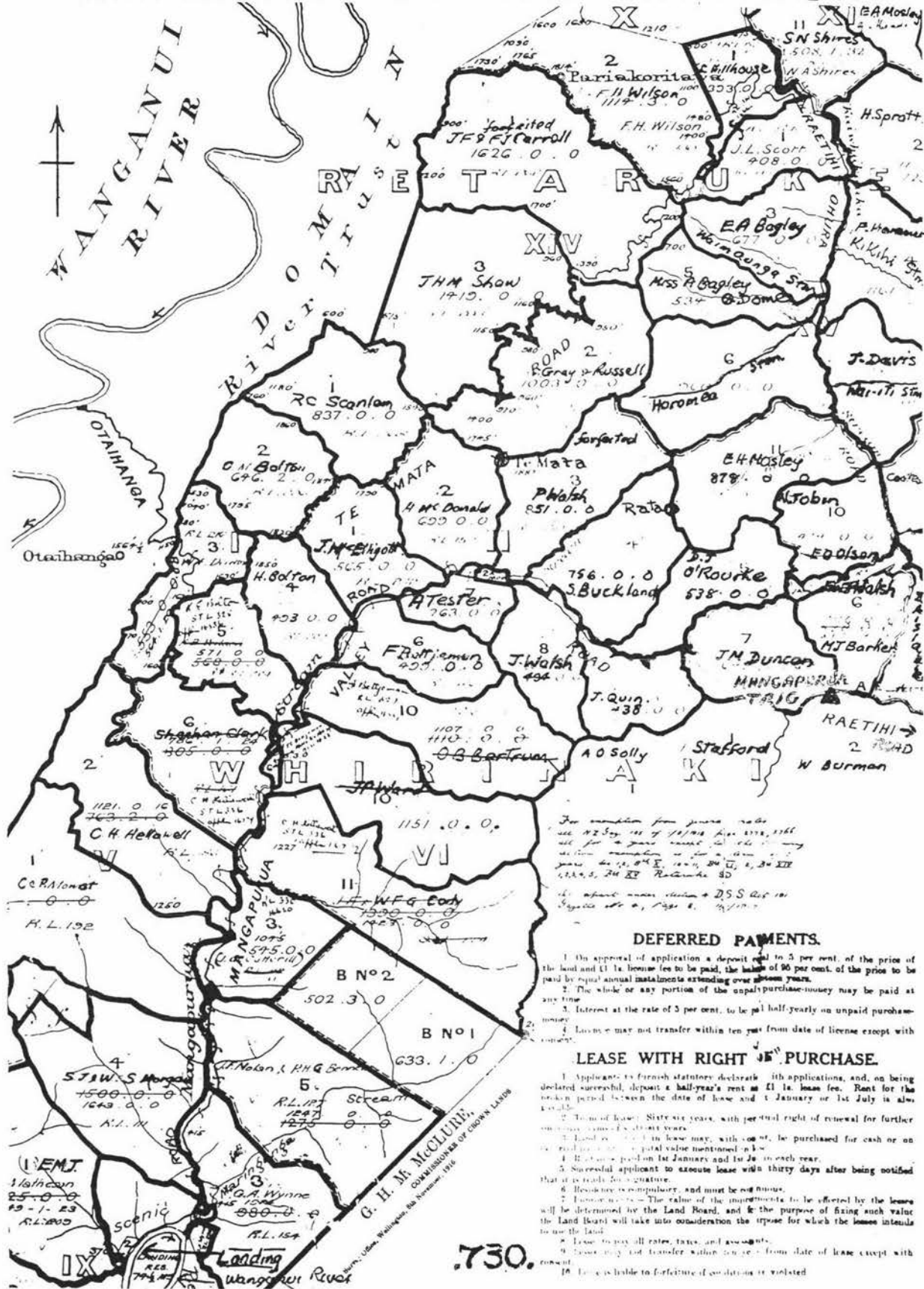
Such advice was ignored. By 1917 men were moving on to their selections and starting to clear the land. Of the 40-odd sections that were offered to the returning servicemen in the Mangapurua, 35 were selected. Of these about 30 were developed, some more than others. Many were to change hands during the settlement's life; while others were amalgamated, when the original settler left, to make more viable farms. In 1925 Hugh McDonald noted that at that stage no-one had left the Valley,⁷ but this soon changed. Nine settlers left within the next

⁵ 1990 *New Zealand Year Book*, Wellington: Department of Statistics, p.412.

⁶ Bates, *The Bridge to Nowhere*, p.16.

⁷ Hugh McDonald, 'Notes on the Mangapurua' Unpublished Manuscript, 1967, Courtesy of Ivy Mossop, Auckland, p.15.

WHIRINAKI SURVEY DISTRICT.



ORIGINAL SURVEY MAP

Source: Arthur Bates, *The Bridge to Nowhere*. Front Cover.

twelve months and by 1932 only nine remained. By 1942, when the Valley was closed, there were only four families left.

The following is a list of men who chose sections in the Mangapurua. Those marked with an asterisk are the settlers who are known to have left before March 1926.

TABLE 1 *List of Original Settlers*

Block 1.

- Section 1. R.C ScalonStatus unknown.
 Section 2 G. BoltonUnmarried. Left the Valley after an
 accident.
 *Section 3 K. Wilson.....Unmarried.
 Section 4 Herb BoltonMarried Nancy Bettjeman's sister Jean.
 One of the last to leave in 1942.
 *Section 5 K.B.Wilson.....Status unknown.
 *Section 6 Sheenan and Clarke.....Unmarried.

Block 11

- Section 1 J. McElligott.....Unmarried.
 Section 2 H. McDonald.....Married. The last to leave in 1942.
 *Section 3 P. Walsh.....Unmarried. Later leased to Agnes
 Anderson.
 *Section 4 S. Buckland.....Unmarried. Also leased to Agnes
 Anderson
 Section 5 D. O'Rourke.....Status unknown.
 Section 6 F. Bettjeman.....Married. One of the last to leave.
 *Section 7 A.Tester.....Married. One of the first wives to
 enter the Valley.
 Section 8 J. Walsh.....Unmarried. Section later leased to T.
 Johnstone. One of the last to leave.
 Section 9 J.Quinn.....Unmarried.
 *Section 10 O. Bartrum.....Married.

Block 111

- Section 2 W. Burman.....Status unknown. Never worked his selection
- Section 4 F. Davis.....Status unknown.
- Section 5 J. Aislabie.....Married. Vera Aislabie ran the telephone exchange.
- Section 6 M. J. Barker.....Status unknown.
- *Section 7 J. Duncan.....Status unknown. J. Mc Intyre took over the lease in early 1920s. Married.
- Section 10 M.B.Tobin.....Status unknown.

Block V

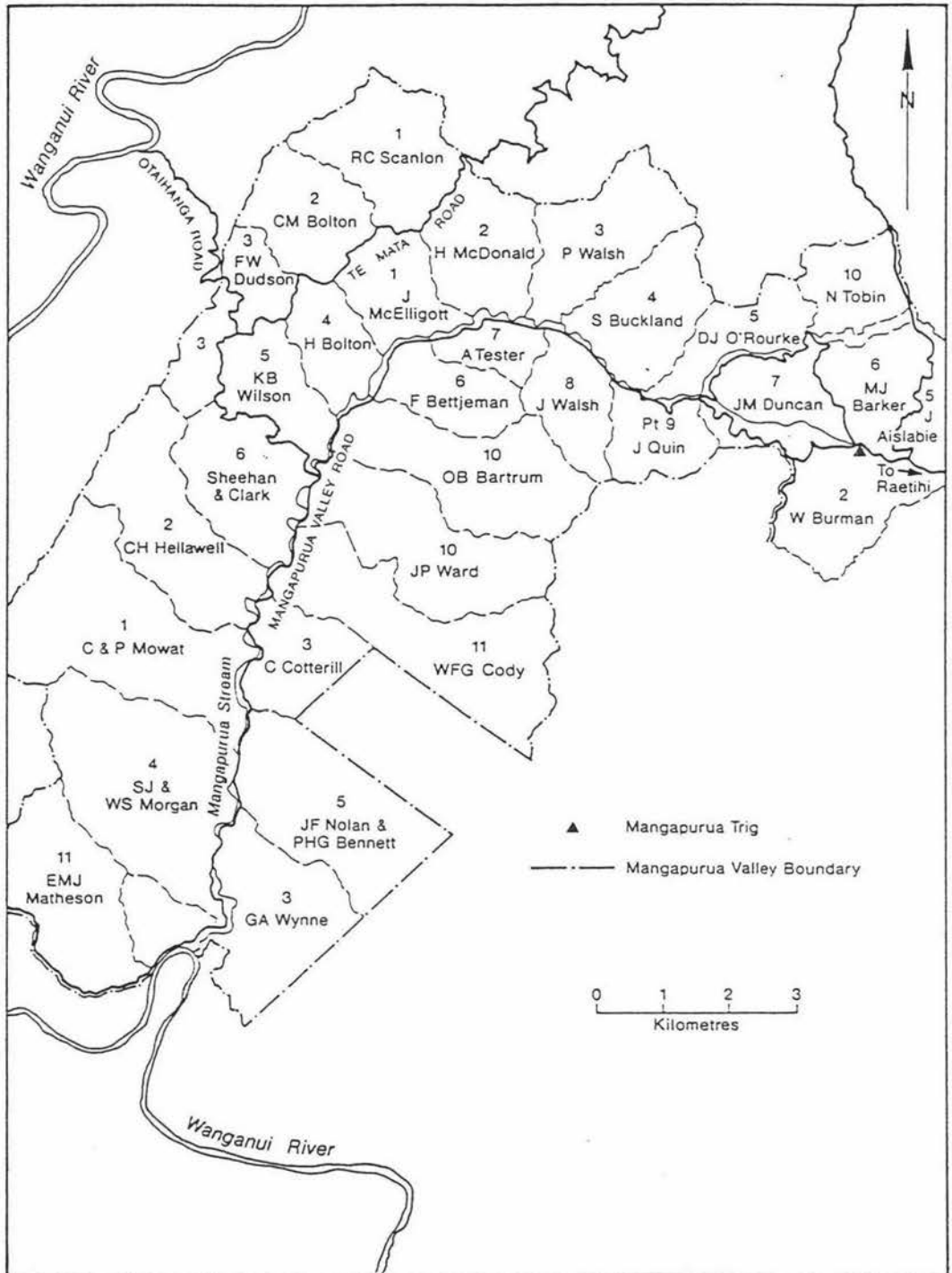
- Section 1 P.Mowatt.....Mother and sister cared for his needs.
- Section 2 C. Hellowell.....Married.
- *Section 3 C.Cotterill.....Married.
- Section 4 W. and S. Morgan.....Unmarried.
- Section 5 P.Bennett and J. Nolan.....Married and Status unknown.

Block VI

- *Section 10 J.Ward.....Unmarried.
- *Section 11 F.Cody.....Married.

Block IX

- *Section 1 Matherson.....Status unknown.
- *Section 3 G.Wynne.....Married. Later B.Dust lived in the house but did not take over the lease of the land.



*MAP SHOWING THE SELECTIONS OF THE ORIGINAL SETTLERS
IN THE MANGAPURUA*

The Government had promised that all the sections would be linked by road to the river: "Roads are unformed at the present, [1916] but horse tracks are being provided ... for about 10 miles north of the Mangapurua Valley road from the landing. The horse tracks will be extended as required and widened to dray roads when labour is available."⁸ At the Trig end of the Valley the future road was being surveyed, not at first to give road access to Raetihi but rather to connect that end of the Valley to the river.

This extremely isolated area was a two-day trip to the nearest town, either by boat to Wanganui or by foot over an unformed track, then by horse to Raetihi. The most common method of transport in and out of the valley was the riverboat, a regular service bringing in goods and passengers and taking out their produce. All the wool went out of the Valley and all stock came in by the riverboat. It was not until the Mangapurua - Raetihi road was formed, about 1929, that there was any choice for the farmer. Even then the road was always unstable, with frequent slips and washouts which would isolate the settlers for days on end while repairs were carried out. In 1934 the road from Raetihi was still described as 'as a rough clay road.'⁹ It was the constant cost, to the Government and County Council, of repairing the road that finally decided the fate of the Valley. After heavy rain in 1942 the roads were so badly damaged that the Government refused any more assistance, officially closed the Valley and ordered the last four families to leave. The Cabinet of the day approved this decision, which was signed by the Prime Minister, Peter Fraser. Although the Treasury recommended that the settlers be offered up to £250 for removal expenses the Government only gave them £100 to

⁸Rural Lands advertisement for selection by Discharged Soldiers. Waimarino Block, LS(1) 21/296, NA.

⁹*Wanganui Chronicle*, April / May 1934. (The exact date and page number is not known as the paper is unavailable at this time).

help them shift.¹⁰ This seems to have been rather harsh as in 1938, on the advice of the Adjustment Commissions, the Lands Department was offering £200 to farmers to vacate small uneconomic blocks so economic farm units could be formed.¹¹

The overriding influence on all the settlers in the Valley, during the entire life of the settlement, was the general economic climate. When the settlers were granted their selections prices for primary produce were strong, because of the wartime commandeered purchase agreements which guaranteed New Zealand primary producers a profitable export market.¹² The Government need to acquire land to sell to returning servicemen coupled with these high fixed prices meant that there was land speculation which inflated land prices. Thus the Mangapurua settlers took up difficult and as it turned out expensive land.

The decade since the First World War had seen a rural land boom, marked price fluctuations, and a significant number of settlers walking off their land. By paying well above market value for land for soldier rehabilitation settlements, and by expanding loan schemes, the government had fuelled land speculation. Throughout the decade, land prices followed export prices with sharp upward movements in the former in response to any encouraging signs from the latter.¹³

All the land in this area was selected on leasehold tenure which gave the settlers a renewable lease for 66 years with compulsory residence and improvements requirement as laid down by the Lands Board. The rental for these leasehold blocks was 4% of the capital value of the land.¹⁴ The servicemen were

¹⁰Bates, *The Bridge to Nowhere*, p.165.

¹¹Barrie Macdonald, David Thomson, 'Mortgage Relief, Farm Finance, and Rural Depression in New Zealand in the 1930s', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 21(1) October 1987, p.247.

¹²Ashley Gould, 'Proof of Gratitude? Soldier Land Settlement in New Zealand After World War 1', Ph.D. Thesis in History, Massey University, 1992, p.3.

¹³Macdonald, Thomson, p.229.

¹⁴1918 *New Zealand Official Year Book*, p.475.

eligible for a £750 loan for the development of their farms and a four-year exemption from rent.

ABSTRACT OF CONDITIONS.

CASH SYSTEM.

1. APPLICANTS to furnish statutory declaration with applications, and, on being declared successful, deposit one-fifth of the purchase-money; the balance, with Crown-grant fee, is payable within thirty days. The Crown-grant fee is £1 for first 100 acres or less, and $\frac{1}{4}$ d. for each additional acre.

2. Purchaser may not transfer within ten years from date of sale, except with consent.

DEFERRED PAYMENTS.

1. On approval of application a deposit equal to 5 per cent. of the price of the land and £1 1s. license fee to be paid, the balance of 95 per cent. of the price to be paid by equal annual instalments extending over nineteen years.

2. The whole or any portion of the unpaid purchase-money may be paid at any time.

3. Interest at the rate of 5 per cent. to be paid half-yearly on unpaid purchase-money.

4. Licensee may not transfer within ten years from date of license except with consent.

LEASE WITH RIGHT OF PURCHASE.

1. Applicants to furnish statutory declaration with applications, and, on being declared successful, deposit a half-year's rent and £1 1s. lease fee. Rent for the broken period between the date of lease and 1st January or 1st July is also payable.

2. Term of lease: Sixty-six years, with perpetual right of renewal for further successive terms of sixty-six years.

3. Land comprised in lease may, with consent, be purchased for cash or on deferred payment at capital value mentioned in lease.

4. Rent to be paid on 1st January and 1st July in each year.

5. Successful applicant to execute lease within thirty days after being notified that it is ready for signature.

6. Residence is compulsory, and must be continuous.

7. Improvements.—The value of the improvements to be effected by the lessee will be determined by the Land Board, and for the purpose of fixing such value the Land Board will take into consideration the purpose for which the lessee intends to use the land.

8. Lessee to pay all rates, taxes, and assessments.

9. Lessee may not transfer within ten years from date of lease except with consent.

10. Lease is liable to forfeiture if conditions are violated.

Government policy was to advance money for work only when it was completed, so the farmer paid and recouped from the Government at a later date. There were set payments for the work done regardless of what the real cost was to the farmer. For example bushfelling was £2/ 10/- per acre and fencing between 15/- to 30/- per chain, depending on the type of fence.¹⁵ The same policy was implemented for the other expenses incurred, such as for wire, grass-seed and stock. This practice made it extremely hard for the settlers to plan ahead as few had capital of their own when they entered the Valley.¹⁶ The interest rate on the loans was 5%.

In 1921 when the first settlers were looking forward to selling their first wool clip, which would enable them to start repaying their debts, prices plummeted to an all-time low.¹⁷ Wool which had been fetching 14½ pence a pound in 1920 fell to 4¼ pence a pound in 1921.¹⁸ Most of the wool from the Valley was sold for even less because: "The first year's wool was downgraded as it was blackened by the charcoal from the burnt logs and also the first crop of grass always included a lot of bidibids which was not popular with the buyers."¹⁹ A bale of wool is about 400 lb., therefore the settlers would have been expecting about £23 per bale. They only received about £5. Freight charges for wool, in 1927, were: 16/- per bale, to Pipiriki, and, from Pipiriki to Wanganui, 10/- per bale, including landing charges.²⁰

Because of the low prices the newly formed Mangapurua Returned Soldiers' Settlement Committee, often called the Settlers' Association, applied to the Government for a further three years exemption from their rent. The response to

¹⁵Commissioner of Crown Lands to the Under Secretary for Lands, 25 March 1926, LS(1) 21/296, NA.

¹⁶Bates, *The Bridge to Nowhere*, p.78.

¹⁷Tom Brooking, 'Economic Transformation', in *The Oxford History of New Zealand*, 2nd ed., Geoffrey W. Rice (ed.), Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1992, p.231.

¹⁸Gould, p.30.

¹⁹Bates, 'Mangapurua Secret Revealed', *Wanganui River Chronicle*, 23 August 1989, p.20.

²⁰Memorandum for The Hon. Minister of Lands from W. Robertson, Asst. Under Secretary, 23 May 1927, p.2. LS (1) 21/296,NA.

their request, prepared by the Crown Lands Ranger, raised some very important issues. He felt that Crown Lands had failed to address the problems of the settlers or to give them adequate assistance, that the original advance made to the settlers was inadequate, and that the Government's refusal to release funds to allow the settlers to purchase stock when prices were low had compounded their problems:

Owing to the limited Govt. advances and private means feed in abundance is going to waste. Insufficient stock tends to depreciate the pasture and the successful working and breaking in of the country, as much of it tends to go back quickly. It is quite apparent that owing to high cost of developing this settlement the advances made by the Dept. are quite inadequate as they do not carry the settler to a stage when the holdings are developed to a paying proposition. Until this is done the settler cannot succeed.²¹

He continued with recommendations as to how the Department could help in the development of the Valley: "Otherwise the Dept. will lose considerably as will the settler. Unless the settler, who is trying to do his best, is financed sufficiently to develop his respective holding up to a paying state, he becomes discouraged knowing that it is impossible for him to pay his way from such a limited source of income."²² It was not until 1925 that the recommendations made by the Crown Ranger were acted upon and the settlers received some further assistance from the Government. The Dominion Revaluation Board recommendations were to be back-dated to 1923 and had six main points of assistance: a promise of fair capital values when each current account 'washed up'; writing off arrears of rent; writing off current account interest; partial discharge of loan interest; remission of rent of five years, and further advances for fencing and regrassing of lands that had gone back, and

²¹J.B. Smith, Crown Lands Ranger, to the Commissioner of Crown Lands, 20 January 1923, LS (1) 21/296, NA.

²²ibid.

* The Mangapurua Returned Soldiers' Settlement Committee will be further examined below.

advances for stock.²³ By 1927 the Dominion Revaluation Board had reduced the capital value of the sections from between 60% - 85%.²⁴

Throughout the next fifteen or so years the Settlers' Association continued to press the Government for relief from debt, revaluation of properties and improvements to their road. The following letter, written in 1932, from their Member of Parliament, Frank Langstone, to the Minister of Lands has much in common with many others written about the Valley. After sketching the Valley's history and noting that only eight or nine of the original soldiers were left, he continued:

Your Lands Department are evidently sick of hearing complaints from this quarter and say more has been done for this particular district than any other - be that as it may. The present position demands quite a lot of further sympathetic attention or else let the Government and the Department admit that they are primarily to blame in opening up this country and inducing the settler to settle thereon.

This land has no improved value for rental purposes and will not carry the mortgages which it is loaded with to keep the improvement effected in something like condition. Money must be found or otherwise in fairness to these men chose [sic] some other area and settle them afresh. To act like 'Pontious Pilate' and wash your hands of the affair is not a solution of the difficulty and were you to visit this area you would be seized of the necessity of having something done.

Present mortgages want reducing or wiping out altogether, rent cancelled and fresh finance made available to meet settlers' requirements. Much of the abandoned farms and reserves are a breeding ground for wild pigs which infest the country doing incalculable damage to fences, destroying young lambs, etc. Two settlers have this year destroyed over 300 pigs on their sections but this is a mere fleabite and problem wants handling.

The road requires metal as no rates are being paid the county cannot do anything to help and in the winter time these settlers are isolated owing to bad roads.²⁵

²³Memorandum for the Hon. Minister of Lands from the Dominion Revaluation Board, 13 February 1925, LS(1) 21/296, NA.

²⁴Dominion Revaluation Board, 23 May 1927, LS(1) 21/296, NA.

²⁵Letter to The Hon. E. A. Ranson, Minister of Lands from Frank Langstone, 22 August 1932, LS(1) 21/296, NA.

The depression put great pressure on both the men and the women who lived in the Valley. By 1935 Hugh McDonald was in a desperate situation trying to meet his costs. "The Budget I had asked from the Crown, that is 1935, was £50 per year for six of a family."²⁶ After being refused any further credit he wrote to the Government requesting an advance of £10 to tide him over until his wool was sold. "I got a reply saying your letters to hand when your wool cheque comes in a matter of two or three months, your proposition will be considered."²⁷ So he was forced to go for "tick to the stores."²⁸ He started an account firstly with Hatrick's, then when they refused any more credit, "I went to Wilson's and Co. Raetihi and they stood me a certain amount and cut me off. I was just about finished and I went to Mr Stanley storekeeper Raetihi and he stood to me."²⁹ In fact that year, 1935, he had asked for a minimum amount to see the family through the year.

Hugh Mc Donald was married with children as were many of the people still living in the Valley in the 1930s. Altogether nearly half the settlers were to married. One farmer who married after he left the Valley had his widowed mother and his sister living with him, in the Mangapurua, to take care of his needs. The McDonalds' experience was typical of the economic pressures placed on the women, who were expected to demonstrate thrift and ingenuity in keeping their expenses as low as possible.

This type of economic pressure was on the settlers for most of the Valley's life. They, especially the women, would have to compensate for their isolation, poor, unreliable roading, expensive freight costs, a lack of modern facilities, and little

²⁶McDonald, 'Notes on the Mangapurua', p.21.

²⁷ibid.

²⁸ibid.

²⁹ibid.

monetary return for their labours to the best of their abilities. The fact that many were able to overcome many of the problems facing them and create comfortable homes and gardens under such straitened circumstances shows determination and commitment to their partners, their families and their homes. Then just as they could see some reward for their labours, their farms becoming efficient paying units the Government refused any further help in maintaining the road and closed the Valley.

CHAPTER TWO

THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF THE WOMEN'S ROLE IN THE VALLEY.

"Women had long been identified, in Lady Barker's words with 'refinement, morality and culture.'¹

In the early twentieth century women were still very much influenced by the standards set by late Victorian society. These standards were brought to New Zealand by many of the early women settlers who set about trying to impose a rigid moral and social code on much of New Zealand society.

The story of women in early Southland, as in the rest of New Zealand, must take into account their place in a living Stone Age, as well as in the transplanted society whose mores were influenced by among other things, good Queen Victoria's standards of behaviour, soap, education, porridge.²

Leonore Davidoff in her published works on Victorian society discusses the limitations placed on women and the 'woman's place' within these boundaries. Women were to be segregated from the tainted, commercial world of men in a 'separation of the spheres':

By this was meant the organization of society into a public and private life. In this definition public coincided with the world of productive work, of politics and of men; the private with the world of home, of women, children and servants.³

¹J.O.C. Phillips, 'Mummy's Boys: Pakeha Culture and Male Society in New Zealand', in P. Bunkle and B. Hughes, (eds.), *Women in New Zealand History*, Auckland: Allen and Unwin, 1980, p.226.

²Sheila Natusch, *On the Edge of the Bush. Women in Early Southland*, Invercargill: Craig Printing Co. Limited, 1976, p.15.

³Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, 'The Architecture of Public and Private Life English Middle-Class Society in a Provincial Town, 1780-1880', in Derek Fraser and Anthony Sutcliffe (eds.), *The Pursuit of Modern History*, 1993, p.328.

It was a woman's place to build 'a nest' where she could nurture her husband and provide a haven of peace protected from the outside world. This was the place where a man could find support and comfort. In the book *Littledene*, H.C.D. Somerset evocatively describes such a 'nest', one set in a Canterbury home during the depression:

The kitchen is the farmer's retreat from the battle with forces over which he has no control. It is his little haven of security: the window is close curtained, the wind and rain shut out. Here are food and warmth, the memory of the last meal and the smell of the next cooking.⁴

It was this 'separation of the spheres', especially in the upper classes, which was to make women completely dependent on men, their fathers, brothers and husbands, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, both in England and in New Zealand. J.O.C. Phillips also talks about the separation of home and work in his article 'Mummy's Boys'.⁵ He further elaborates on this theme in *A Man's Country* when he discusses the establishment of the nuclear family: "The home and family became the domain of the woman; the business/factory arena that of the man."⁶ It was because of this separation, with the man often having to leave the home for work, that a "stronger sense of the private, introspective family emerged."⁷ He also argues that although this 'cult of sentimental domesticity' did spread to New Zealand the high cost of manufactured goods meant that the productive functions of the household were never completely lost.⁸ This could be the reason why many of the women of the Mangapurua were able to adapt to a world that was about fifty years behind the times, a world that had no telephones, no electricity, no roads and

⁴H.C.D. Somerset, *Littledene. A New Zealand Rural Community*, Auckland: Whitcombe and Tombs limited, 1938, p.21.

⁵Phillips, 'Mummy's Boys', p.226.

⁶J.O.C. Phillips, *A Man's Country? The Image of the Pakeha Male - A History*, Auckland: Penguin Books, 1987, p.222.

⁷ibid.

⁸ibid.

the only means of transport was on foot or horseback. These women had to learn to cook over an open fire use a camp oven and make their own bread and soap. They did their washing outside in very primitive circumstances and had to learn to order their food and basic essentials, for a six month period, at one time.

The standards which had been imported into New Zealand, where a woman was seen as the provider of comfort and nourishment for the family and the keeper of the family morals, were to have a big impact on not only the women of the colony but also on many of the men. The men were, however, because of their gender still a major influence on women: "because males have controlled social, political and economic power in New Zealand, their attitudes have necessarily affected the place of women in society."⁹ Toynbee says "Husbands are the *instrumental* leaders, on whose breadwinning activities other members of the household are dependent."¹⁰ These ideas were to be adapted to suit the new conditions in which the women were now living. Many women, especially dairy-farmers' wives, had to assist their husbands outside the home because the economic pressures upon them meant that it was no longer possible to be exclusively a home-maker. In a survey done on dairy-farmers by W.T. Doig in 1937 it was found that about 55% of wives of the farmers surveyed worked between 25 to 40 hours on the farm as well as having their own household chores to attend to.¹¹ Marilyn Lake also discusses this use of woman's labour on the farm, and the breakdown of the idea of 'separate spheres' for men and women, in her book *The Limits of Hope*. She says that "the ideology of separate spheres decreed women's work in the fields to be 'unsexing'.¹² In the

⁹Phillips, 'Mummy's Boys', p.218.

¹⁰Claire Toynbee, *Her Work and His. Family, Kin and Community in New Zealand 1900-1930*, Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1995, p.43.

¹¹W.T. Doig, *A Survey of Standards of Life of New Zealand Dairy-farmers*, Wellington: Government Printer, 1940, p.55.

¹²Marilyn Lake, *The Limits of Hope. Soldier Settlement in Victoria 1915-38*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1987, p.178.

Mangapurua there was little dairying, although most households had a house-cow for their own needs, so the women of the Valley were able to maintain the idea of 'separate spheres' between what was considered man's work and what was woman's work. In the study *Women Together* the Women's Institute's part in promoting this ideology is discussed. It suggests that the W.I. strengthened this 'separation of the spheres' by emphasising the importance of domesticity.¹³ Even with the degree of freedom that women were acquiring during World War One many of the old values, such as filial duty were retained. Ita Cody, who later came into the valley as a bride, was a graduate from Auckland University and a trained teacher. Earlier, before her marriage, her mother became ill so she was expected to, and as the only unmarried daughter, to give up her work and return home to look after her father and her brothers.¹⁴

In the colonial world it was believed that one of a woman's duties was that "they had the special task of preserving a civilised order."¹⁵ The gaining of the vote by women in 1893 was seen, by some, as more a way to settle and domesticate the country than a step towards independence by women. Women's suffrage was seen as "The 'Home vote' - that is, the vote of the more settled and more earnest-minded part of the community,"¹⁶ and was a way to counteract the vote of the itinerate male. Many saw the woman's vote as giving the settled and domesticated man a double vote which would nullify the vote of the fiercely independent and mobile single men.

¹³Rosemarie Smith, 'Heart of the Country. Rural Organisation', in Anne Else (ed.), *Women Together. A History of Women's Organisations in New Zealand. Ngā Rōpū Wāhine o te Motu*, Wellington: Daphne Brasell Associates Press/ Department of Internal Affairs, 1993, p.379.

¹⁴Interview with Pat Fry, 6 June 1997.

¹⁵Phillips, 'Mummy's Boys', p.226.

¹⁶Kate Sheppard, *Prohibitionist*, 1893, p.6, cited in Phillips, 'Mummy's Boys', p.226.

Jack Ward describes the first election (1919) which occurred in the Valley when it was entirely populated by men. He remembers the candidates addressing the settlers. First, Frank Langstone, the Labour candidate, who told the settlers that they should never have been settled in the Valley and made several other predictions which turned out to be very accurate. This message was considered a joke by the majority of the men:

For we were nearly all young, reckoned this guy was just saying this to get elected and hadn't we all been settled here by Bill Massey's Government and were looking forward to the day when we would be prosperous and were we not entitled to be known as " Bill Massey's Squatters"?¹⁷

Certainly the next candidate, David McLean, standing for Massey's Reform Party, was well received. He promised to supply, within the next two weeks, a milking cow to any settler who needed one, a promise that he kept.¹⁸ The electoral returns from the two polling booths in the valley that year showed that the Reform Party received an overwhelming majority, 75% of the vote. At only one other election did the Reform Party have such a good result from the voters in the Mangapurua; in 1925, it again received 75% of the vote. This may have been because of the improvement in the economic climate. From that time on the Labour candidate, Frank Langstone was to be the sitting member for Waimarino and was to have a substantial backing from the voters in the Mangapurua; in some years about 90% support. Was the vote of the Mangapurua women counteracting that of the single men? The results published from the two polling booths would indicate that most of the settlers, men and women, followed the same political pattern. In 1936 Nellie McDonald wrote to Frank Langstone claiming , "I have always stuck loyally to you

¹⁷ Jack Ward, in Arthur P. Bates, *The Bridge to Nowhere. The Ill-Fated Mangapurua Settlement*, 7th Edition, Wanganui: Wanganui Newspapers Ltd., 1993, p.112.

¹⁸ *ibid.*

and the labour cause, and now I have converted my husband after over sixteen years of battling for the labour cause or should I say Humanity."¹⁹ This indicates that at least one woman voted against her husband. At the 1938 election, the last before the Valley was ordered to be abandoned, the polling booth in the Mangapurua recorded a 100 per cent support for Langstone, the Labour candidate.²⁰

The Victorian idea was a woman had a calming and settling influence on the 'basic instincts' of a man, making him ready to accept his responsibilities and to make him become a sober law-abiding member of the community. Women were thought to be a stabilising force on men, "women symbolize that touch of homeliness which stems the lonely savagery of men when they live too close to the soil."²¹ These ideas are also mentioned by one of the early settlers to the Mangapurua, Jack Ward. He considered that their male friendship was special and some of the men regretted its loss in the change brought about by the arrival of the women.²² The women's place was to care for and nurture her husband, thus "Preserving the moral fibre of the nation."²³

Within the Valley the arrival of the women seem to have made quite an impact on the lives of both the single as well as the married men. Alcohol, its consumption and abuse were very much linked with social values and gender relations in the wider new Zealand society and this was also an issue in the Valley, despite the Mangapurua being a 'dry' area. Although Hatricks could sell liquor while their boats were on the

¹⁹Letter McDonald to Langstone, 1936, LS(1) 26/1940, NA.

²⁰AJHR, Volume 111, H33A, 1939, p. 24.

²¹Miles Fairburn, 'The Rural Myth and the Urban Frontier. An Approach to New Zealand Social History, 1870-1940', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 9(1) 1975, p.4.

²²Jack Ward in Bates, *The Bridge to Nowhere*, p.85.

²³Raewyn Dalziel, 'The Colonial Helpmeet. Women's Role and the Vote in 19th Century New Zealand', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 11(2) 1977, p.112.

river they were not supposed to sell it to riverside settlers at their landings. However quite a bit of alcohol arrived in the Valley this way, to the detriment of some of the settlers who preferred the bottle to the axe.²⁴ Alcohol was part of the men's social activities in the early days of the settlement, and quite a few tales are told of drinking sessions, some lasting several days.²⁵ Jack Ward tells the story of a stag party held in the Valley. Alf Tester, the only married settler at that time, had celebrated the event well but not wisely. On his way home he was met by his wife who seeing the condition he was in, proceeded to beat him with a supplejack stick she was carrying, reminding him of his marriage promise not to drink.²⁶ As she was a member of the Salvation Army her reaction was hardly surprising.

As the Valley developed and more women settled there were less of these events.

The arrival of the wives into the valley did much for the stability of the area but their arrival was rather regretted by some of the bachelors. Up until then, it had been a continuance of the comradeship of the war years and this friendship was strictly a male world liberally stitched with drinking, late nights and rough humour.²⁷

Society's guidelines also placed constraints on the men to modify their behaviour and dress when women were present as is shown when the men of the Valley promised to behave at the picnic day because there would be ladies present.²⁸

²⁴Anderson, p.11.

²⁵Fry, p.71.

²⁶Jack Ward in Bates, *The Bridge to Nowhere*, p.84.

²⁷ibid., p.85.

²⁸ibid., pp.102-103

In the Mangapurua Valley this idea of a 'women's place' and her duties was focused on the home. Most of these women seem to have contributed little labour to farming, although in some cases the children were expected to assist with the farming chores. Ivy Mossop, nee McDonald, recalls that her father expected her and her sisters, but not her mother, to help him with his farm-work as there were no boys in the family.²⁹ This separation of work in the Valley was at variance with a lot of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century thinking about small free-holding farming both here and in Australia. The concept of 'the yeoman farmer' working with family labour played a major part in the development of many of the returned soldier settlements.

In *The Limits of Hope*, Marilyn Lake discusses the results of her research into the Victorian Repatriation Scheme for settling Australian returned servicemen on the land after World War One. One of the central arguments of her book focuses on the development of the idea of the yeoman farmer.³⁰ The concept was, "The invocation of the yeoman ideal grew out of an idealized memory of England,"³¹ of the self-sufficient yeomen with their small blocks of land who were thought to be the backbone of that country. Although already a myth in England it was thought to provide a solid and dependable class of people. "The yeoman model... with its emphasis on family production and self-sufficiency"³² was the vision of the Victorian [Australia] authorities who saw it as a way to populate their vast empty areas with people who would be self-sufficient and with the assistance of their wives and families - unpaid labour - require little or no support from the authorities to turn marginal land into productive farms. Their situation was judged by their

²⁹Interview with Ivy Mossop, 8 October 1997.

³⁰Lake, p.12.

³¹ibid.

³²ibid, p.13.

results, regardless of any outside influences, climatic or economic, and if they failed it was often put down to their lack of character. "The ideal required that the settler possess particular character traits - honesty, sobriety and the willingness to work hard as well as sturdiness and a large family."³³ The idea that yeomen families were large appealed to the authorities as it would help population growth. The women were expected not only to take on the responsibility of providing a home for their families, comforting them in times of need, and assisting on the farm, but to help to populate the country by having large families. Lake found that although some of her survey group did have large families the average was only 3.3 children.³⁴

Toynbee discusses the same idea of small holdings in the New Zealand setting, self-sufficient and using the family as the main source of labour. She found that those farming families in her survey had an average of 7.3 children.³⁵ This could be because the families she surveyed were about a generation earlier than those in Lake's survey. Toynbee found that many of the smaller farming families were dependent on the labour input of the women. Women worked in the milking sheds with the assistance of their children, as soon as they were old enough, and often were responsible for all the dairy work. If dairying was not the major income earner for the family it was often the proceeds from the wife's industry in this area, processing the surplus products of butter and milk, that helped the family to survive. This was particularly important if the family was reliant on 'one off' payments such as wool cheques. In her book, *Victoria's Daughters*, Eve Ebbett also discusses the amount of time New Zealand women spent labouring beside their husbands over and above their domestic duties.³⁶ But within the Mangapurua the

³³ *ibid.*, p.14.

³⁴ *ibid.*, p.144.

³⁵ Toynbee, p.36.

³⁶ Eve Ebbett, *Victoria's Daughters. New Zealand Women of the Thirties*, Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed Ltd., 1981, pp.59-60.

women's labours were directed towards the home and it was not until the late 1930s that there was any possibility of selling surplus produce to an outside market.

The Mangapurua was not typical of the many other soldier settlements because the allotments, which ranged from about 250 acres to over 1700 acres, were considerably larger than most being offered at that time, where land was often divided into blocks of about 100 acres or less. The size of the Mangapurua properties and the fact that they were covered in virgin bush, coupled with the distance from the nearest town, meant dairy farming was not practical and that the main emphasis was on sheep and cattle farming. After the road went through to Raetihi, there was a cream run to the junction of the Mangatiti and Mangapurua roads and in later years some farmers sent out cream to give them a regular source of income.³⁷ The size and type of farms within the valley meant that the concept of the 'yeoman farmer' with its dependence on family labour was not practical. Because of the type of country, men with specialised skills were needed to help to clear the bush in readiness for the burn and seeding of the land. The women did not come into the Valley until the first of the land had been cleared. They were not considered as an unpaid labour force on these farms, but were fully occupied in their homes, bringing up their children and doing their household chores. Even the term 'yeoman' does not sit easily on the shoulders of the men or the women who populated the Mangapurua.

Another reason for this may have been that the women who entered the Valley, mainly as wives, came from a range of backgrounds, though all seem to have been well educated and in some cases independent before their marriage. The first

³⁷Interview with Ivy Mossop, 8 October 1997.

woman was a Mrs Hunter, who lived there only a short time and left when her husband died. Mrs Tester, the next to enter the Valley, came from Wellington and was a member of the Salvation Army. Both Mr and Mrs Tester were in their forties when they took up their selection. They lived in a small one-roomed home which became the school after they abandoned their farm. Mrs Nancy Bettjeman was the next to arrive. She was to live in the Valley the longest of all the women. She was a skilled nurse, from Glasgow, who came from a comfortably well-off family. Kathleen Bennett was from English landed gentry and regularly took trips back to England. Several of the women were trained teachers. One, Ita Cody, was a graduate. Florence Hellawell was a primary school teacher; while Mrs Bartrum was a music teacher and had a piano carried into the Valley when she arrived. Irene McIntyre had received higher education at a finishing school where among other accomplishments she had learnt to play the piano. Nellie McDonald, who married quite late, had lived an interesting life as the hostess to her uncle who was the Member of Parliament for Wanganui. These were some of the earliest women in the Valley. They were certainly not women who were uneducated and subjected, but were intelligent and motivated people, from cultured backgrounds, who could be expected to exercise a level of ... within the domestic and community life.

Throughout its history there was a steady flow of people leaving the Valley and a few new families arriving to take up the surrendered sections. Some of these people lived there for only a short period. Mrs Agnes Anderson and her husband Reg arrived in the Valley in the early 1930s and took up the leases of Pat Walsh's and Sydney Buckland's farms. That the lease of the farm was in Mrs Anderson's name,³⁸ without mention of her husband, was unusual as it was not common for a woman to

³⁸Lands and Survey, LS(1) 26/13074, NA.

* See photograph of Tester's home as the school on p. and the photograph of the women of the Valley on p.

hold a lease. They were the first people who were not returned servicemen to farm in the Valley.

These women brought with them into the Valley a grounding of 'the women's place' which had been dictated by society and their upbringing, regardless of the developing independence that women were starting to enjoy. This background set out what was expected from a woman as a wife and mother, what was proper and acceptable and what was not. There is no evidence that any of the women assisted on the farm as a necessity, although some may have helped in one way or another for companionship. Even the task of milking the dairy cow was not always the chore of the wife. Some families recall that their father did it until a child was old enough to do it; others that their father did it most of the time and that their mother only did this chore when it was a necessity.

By the 1920s the new values and liberties for women which had emerged before and during the war years were being submerged by the idea that women had national and social obligations, such as bearing children and raising them to be suitable future citizens. This was to have a far-reaching influence on women and their place in the pattern of society. The return of the soldiers brought about an upsurge of the idealisation of the family which had developed in the beginning of the century:

When the New Zealand soldiers returned in 1919 and 1920 it was confidently expected that they would return to a 'home', back into the enveloping bosom of a family The ideal family was conceived to be a bourgeois family, a family of hearth and home, a private largely nuclear family sentimental in tone and ruled in maternal love by a non-earning woman.³⁹

³⁹Phillips, *A Man's Country?*, p.221.

There were several reasons for this regression of women's liberties and the pressures placed on them to return to the hearth and home. The first and possibly the most significant was the falling birth-rate in the early part of the century. The idea that large families would increase the national population as well as being the unpaid labour source on their parents' farms or businesses was no longer viable as schooling was now compulsory and children were unable to give as much time to the family enterprise. That mothers were now having smaller families meant that the children that they did have were being better cared for as their mothers had more time to spend on their upbringing.⁴⁰ Strangely, many thought that this falling birth rate was because women were becoming selfish and withdrawing from their proper role, especially those women who were well educated or, as Phillips puts it, the 'racially superior people'.⁴¹

One of the most influential people of this early twentieth century period was Dr Frederic Truby King. It was the support given by his Society for Promoting the Health of Women and Children, the Plunket Society, for the idea that a child's early life was of vital importance to the making of the 'adult man' that helped to emphasise the place of the mother in the home and at home. Her care and discipline of her children would be the key to the production of healthy, self-disciplined and well balanced adults. Another of his recommendations was the separate development of boys and girls. In this he was not alone as the government of the day was also proceeding with the same principles. In 1912 home science had become a degree course at Otago University. "Home-making and motherhood was now seen

⁴⁰ibid., p.224.

⁴¹ibid.

as a full-time profession. Women's career aspirations were being channelled back towards the home."⁴²

Many of the women who lived in the Mangapurua were "well educated" and smaller families seem the most common there. The largest family in the Valley had five children, while many of the others had only two or three. This is slightly less than the average size of a farming family in this period. The 1971 Census asked women over 70 the number of children they had, and gives the average number of children in a North Island rural family as 3.48.⁴³ The role of the wife in the Valley was to make the home and care for the family. All the children who grew up in the Valley speak of the feeling of being surrounded by a safe carefree environment, one in which they had both responsibilities and freedoms.

Women were not expected to remain in permanent paid work once they were married, except in certain circumstances, and then it was usually in the domestic field. In New Zealand the ideal of the wife's position being in the home was not dented with the onset of the depression. Even at its height there were no more married women in employment than ten years previously, a much lower percentage than in any other western country.⁴⁴ Ita Cody, who returned to teaching after she and her husband left the Valley, was at the centre of a controversy caused by the fact that she was a married woman.⁴⁵

So just what were the expectations of society on the women of the time and how did the women settlers of the Valley fit into the pattern set out for them?

⁴²ibid., pp.224-5.

⁴³1971 Census, Wellington : Government Printer, 1972, Volume 10, p.116.

⁴⁴Phillips, *A Man's Country*, p.226.

⁴⁵Interview with Pat Fry, 6 June 1997.

Phillips says of women that "they had a special task of preserving civilised order,"⁴⁶ while Fairburn sees women as having a calming influence on the 'basic man', nurturing a husband and protecting him from his worst instincts. and Dalziel writes that women were: "Preserving the moral fibre of the nation."⁴⁷ Society's pressures on women were to become a good wife and mother regardless of what other skills they had to offer. Bill Massey's wife was awarded the OBE after his death, "not because she had played a leading political role in her own right but because she had been 'a good wife and mother'."⁴⁸

There were definitely societal influences placed on the women in the Mangapurua but they were also governed by other factors. They did stay at home and care for the home and family but the type of farming that was carried out in the area, sheep and beef, meant that the women's labour was not as crucial to the success of a venture as in the case of a dairy farm. The distance from a market meant that the idea of a making extra income for the family by milking a few cows and selling cream and butter over and above their families' needs was not practical. The isolation of the women of Mangapurua meant that they were able to follow the trends of society as it fitted with their lifestyle without many outside pressures being placed upon them to do so.

⁴⁶Phillips, 'Mummy's Boys', p.226.

⁴⁷Dalziel, p.112.

⁴⁸Phillips, 'Mummy's Boys', p.237.

CHAPTER THREE

COMMUNICATIONS AND THEIR PLACE IN THE LIVES OF WOMEN OF THE
MANGAPURUA

"Aislabie's home became the telephone exchange, and it was a very important link in the Valley life."¹

To people living in remote areas the development of communication systems were of major importance, bringing contact with the outside world and closer support within the community. This chapter will examine how important they were to the settlers, especially the women, living in the Mangapurua. The extent to which they were cut off can be gauged from the memorandum sent to the Under-Secretary of Lands in 1932, seventeen years after the settlement was established: "For instance, in some cases settlers and their wives have been forced by circumstances, ie., isolation and lack of money, to remain on their farms without so much as a day in town for periods of upwards of three years."² This extreme isolation emphasised the need these women had for regular mail and a telephone. I will look in this chapter at the part played by Hatricks River Services in meeting this need, also at the impact a road made on the community, and the effects of the postal service, telephone and radio.

At first the Wanganui River was seen as the main access route for the settlers as there was already a shipping company, A. Hatrick & Co. Ltd., servicing the remote farms along the river's edge as well as transporting tourists up and down

¹ Arthur P. Bates, *The Bridge to Nowhere. The Ill-fated Mangapurua Settlement*, 7th edition, Wanganui: Wanganui Newspapers Ltd, 1993, p.87.

² Memorandum from Mangapurua Valley settlers to the Under-Secretary of Lands, 2 December 1932, LS(1) 21/296, NA.

the river. In 1928 the company's name was changed to Wanganui River Services Ltd. The lower reaches of the river up to Pipiriki were serviced by the *Wairere* which could carry 250 passengers, and the area above Pipiriki by the smaller *Ongarue*.³ These boats also transferred settler's stock and carried up to 120 sheep or 30 head of cattle per load.⁴

Hatrick's role in the development of the of the Valley was important as they had a monopoly on river transport. In 1927 freight charges were : from Taumarunui to Mangapurua £4/10/- a ton and; from Wanganui, £5 a ton. Fertilizers for settlers were carried at half rates,⁵ being subsidised by the government. Even as late as 1927 the Government thought the river would provide the main access to the Valley: "Settlers probably desire to take advantage of the Wanganui River Steamer Service, [Hatricks] which is subsidised by the Government at £2,700 per annum; and, in addition, grants varying from £2,500 to £3,000 have been provided annually to the Wanganui River Trust for several years past to enable it to keep the river open for navigation to Taumarunui."⁶

Hatricks saw their dealings with the settlers as a strictly commercial venture. As they were also suppliers of many of the goods farmers needed they expected those items to be purchased from the company's Merchandise Department.⁷ Many were unhappy with some of their dealings with Hatricks and considered their charges were too high. There were "murmurs of discontent"⁸ from many of the

³Kathy and John Omer, *The Wanganui River*, Wellington: Department of Lands and Survey, 1982, pp.51-53.

⁴Bates, *The Bridge to Nowhere*, p.45.

⁵Memorandum for the Hon. Minister of Lands from W. Robertson Asst. Under Secretary, 23 May 1927, LS(1) 21/296, NA.

⁶*ibid.*

The subsidy mentioned here was probably in part the subsidy for the Wanganui River Mail Service of £1705, 1927 AJHR (Vol 1) B 7, p.171.

⁷Elizabeth Allen, *A Farm on the Wanganui River*, Wanganui: Wanganui Newspapers Ltd., 1980, p.76.

⁸*ibid.*

farmers who were forced to use them. Ivy Mossop remembered that, "It cost more to get a hammer up the river than the cost of the hammer".⁹ Hatrick's own customers were given a good service and their goods were well taken care of by the crew of the steamers but, "Supplies for those who chose not to deal with Hatricks received no such attention. They were liable to be slung off to land where they might, rain or no rain. A bag of flour rescued from the mud or the weather can never be quite the same again".¹⁰ Edith Mason, who lived on the opposite side of the river to the Mangapurua, recounts a similar story about their radio:

The deck hand on the boat had called out to our fellow on the bank "Here catch, it is a radio" but unfortunately he threw short and the package just disappeared into the river. Unfortunately freight notes for the river boats were worded such that neither the company nor the crew could be held liable for loss or damage and we were simply told "Sorry, the boy on the bank should have caught it". The irony of was we still had to pay for the repairs and freight.¹¹

A group of these dissatisfied river settlers decided to challenge Hatricks domination by setting up their own company. Hatricks responded by undercutting their rivals' charges until they had put them out of business. They bought up the new company's boat, at half its original price. Then "They were at liberty to double their fares and freight charges, which they promptly did."¹²

Although many had reason to grumble about Hatricks service there were some compensations. The trip on the river was very beautiful and as it took two days to go from Mangapurua to Wanganui everyone had to stop overnight at the hotel at Pipiriki. Even though Pipiriki House was owned by Hatricks it provided a very

⁹Interview with Ivy Mossop, 4 October 1997.

¹⁰Allen, p.76.

¹¹Arthur P. Bates (ed.), "*Okoroa*" *A Wanganui River Diary*, Wanganui: Wanganui Newspapers Ltd., p.96.

¹²Allen, p.76.

welcome place to stay. "The House sitting high on the hill above the river - very comfortable and convenient;"¹³ Even the young bachelor farmers appreciated the luxury of home comforts at the 'House': "It would be great to sleep in a nice bedroom with sheets on the bed once again. The baths were worked overtime...."¹⁴ The women really enjoyed their stay. Some continued to use the river service rather than the long, dusty and winding drive to Raetihi during the summer and the often impassable road in the winter, so as to include the stop at the 'House'. How enjoyable it must have been to have a night wrapped in luxury with their meals prepared for them. The other reason for preferring the river route was that Wanganui was a larger centre and able to provide a greater range of merchandise and professional people.

When, in 1917, the first settlers arrived, full of optimism, there were navvies building a track up from the river and around the many bluffs. The road through the Valley had been very slow to reach the river end because of the steep bluffs which made building it very expensive. Few rates were received from the settlers so the council was not able to spend a great deal developing and maintaining the road. Conversely most of the settlers were able to earn a little 'ready cash' working on the road. Keeping it open was a constant battle, as it was not very reliable and frequently closed by slips and wash-outs. By 1927 £80,000 had been spent on it and a request for another £15,000 had been made for the continuation of the Mangapurua Valley Road down to the Wanganui River.¹⁵ By 1928 the Public Works was widening the road from a six-foot track to a motor road from the Trig down into the Valley. Agnes Anderson recalled: " ... the ROAD (it needed capitals) was

¹³Bates, *The Bridge to Nowhere*, p.150.

¹⁴*ibid.*, p.91.

¹⁵Memorandum to Hon. Minister of Lands from W. Robertson, Asst. Under Secretary, 23 May 1927, LS(1) 21/296, NA.

one of our main interests. It was always slipping away or washing out or misbehaving in some way. So towards the end of the slump the Public Works decided to put in a camp of unemployed to work on it."¹⁶ A letter written in 1932 to the Minister of Lands mentions this: " The road requires metal as no rates are being paid the country [county] cannot do any thing to help and in the winter time these settlers are isolated owing to bad roads."¹⁷

At the river end of the Valley a swing bridge over the Mangapurua stream was opened in early 1920 to make access easier. Before this there had been only a 'flying fox' wire cage. The swing bridge was in use until June 1936 when the new concrete bridge was opened, known now as the 'Bridge to Nowhere' and an unique part of the history of the Valley. This bridge was little used as by 1936 most of the settlers at the river end had abandoned their holdings. These farms were generally steeper and much harder to work than those further up the Valley. But Phil Bennett, the last farmer from the river end of the Valley, did not leave until after his wife left him in the mid-1930s. Those who remained were nearer to top end of the Valley, where the contour was easier, so they generally used the road out over the Trig to Raetihi.

The first car entered the Valley by this road in 1929. The coming of cars, for those who could afford them, opened up a far wider field of social contact for the women. No longer were they so reliant on just the people of the Valley, although the road was often unpassable. By the mid-1930s the car was seen as a necessity rather than a luxury to people who lived at a distance from a town because it gave a

¹⁶ Agnes Anderson, Unpublished Manuscript, Courtesy of Myra Barron, Balclutha, p.62.

¹⁷ Letter Langstone to E.A.Ransom, Minister of Lands, 22 August 1932, LS(1) 21/296, NA.

freedom choice of where and when one went out.¹⁸ One of the last of the settlers to get a car was Hugh McDonald. In 1936 Nellie McDonald, his wife, wrote several letters to her local Member of Parliament, Frank Langstone, asking for an advance of £60 so that they could buy a second-hand car. In these letters she gives several reasons for needing a car: health, children's needs, the fact that the Government had assisted several others to pay for their cars, and the need to visit Raetihi on Christmas Eve.¹⁹ It certainly seemed that they, like many others in the farming sector, were "remarkably eager to acquire the means to travel to the city and spend as much time as possible there."²⁰

The only way to get to Raetihi if one did not own a car was by the 'bus'. One rode, by horse, to the end of the road, about four kilometres from the Andersons, who in 1931 took over the abandoned Buckland and Walsh selections at the top end of the Valley. From there one caught the 'bus' into town. The 'bus' was an old truck, with no floor boards, which carried a miscellaneous collection of mail, freight, people and dogs.²¹ The trip home was an entertainment. Agnes Anderson describes one such trip: "the bus carried the mail for a very large district. Right out the Middle road, down the hill to the Oratahau, various side roads, then right out to the Mangatiti and Ruatiti."²² The trip home from Raetihi started at 7.30 am. and took about five hours: "The charge 4 bob - 40 miles of scenery and thrills."²³

¹⁸James Watson, *Links. A History of Transport and New Zealand Society*, Wellington: GP Publications, 1996, p.182.

¹⁹Letter Nellie McDonald to Langstone, 10 July 1936, LS(1) 26/1940, N.A.

²⁰Watson, p.198.

²¹Anderson, p.49.

²²ibid.

²³ibid., p.52.

* Refer to Historical map on page

In January 1942, "an unprecedented downpour of rain occurred - 5.92 inches fell between 9am and noon."²⁴ The road was closed in many places by slips, fillings washed out and bridges gone. It would be over a year before the road would be partially opened. Harry Brown recalls the day. It was Show day in Raetihi and most people were out of the area to visit the show. The rain was so heavy that the Show was cancelled. The next day, "Four of us walked home ... the main bridge over the Manganui-a-te-ao was swept away and we had to divert over farms, up hill and down dale. We were clothed in our new blue serge trousers and ordinary shoes. It took us all day. It was nearly 12 months to the day before we got our car home. They had to rebuild the bridges."²⁵

The first of the wives arrived in 1920 but it was several years before the settlers realised they, and their wives particularly, needed to be able to contact each other quickly. The 1922 suggestion that a telephone was needed had been "greeted with the retort: 'Do you want to spoon feed us?'"²⁶ However by 1923 The Mangapurua Returned Soldiers' Settlement Committee saw that "with the arrival of the families, it was time to seek a telephone system."²⁷ The Post and Telegraph were then approached about a telephone service and they agreed to supply second-hand telephones, wires and insulators. These were sent up on the river boat and left on the landing. Unfortunately no-one was notified of their arrival and a flood in the river washed them all away. "Some crates of telephones (left for the settlers) were picked up on Foxton Beach."²⁸ The Post and Telegraph replaced the

²⁴Bates, *The Bridge to Nowhere*, p.163.

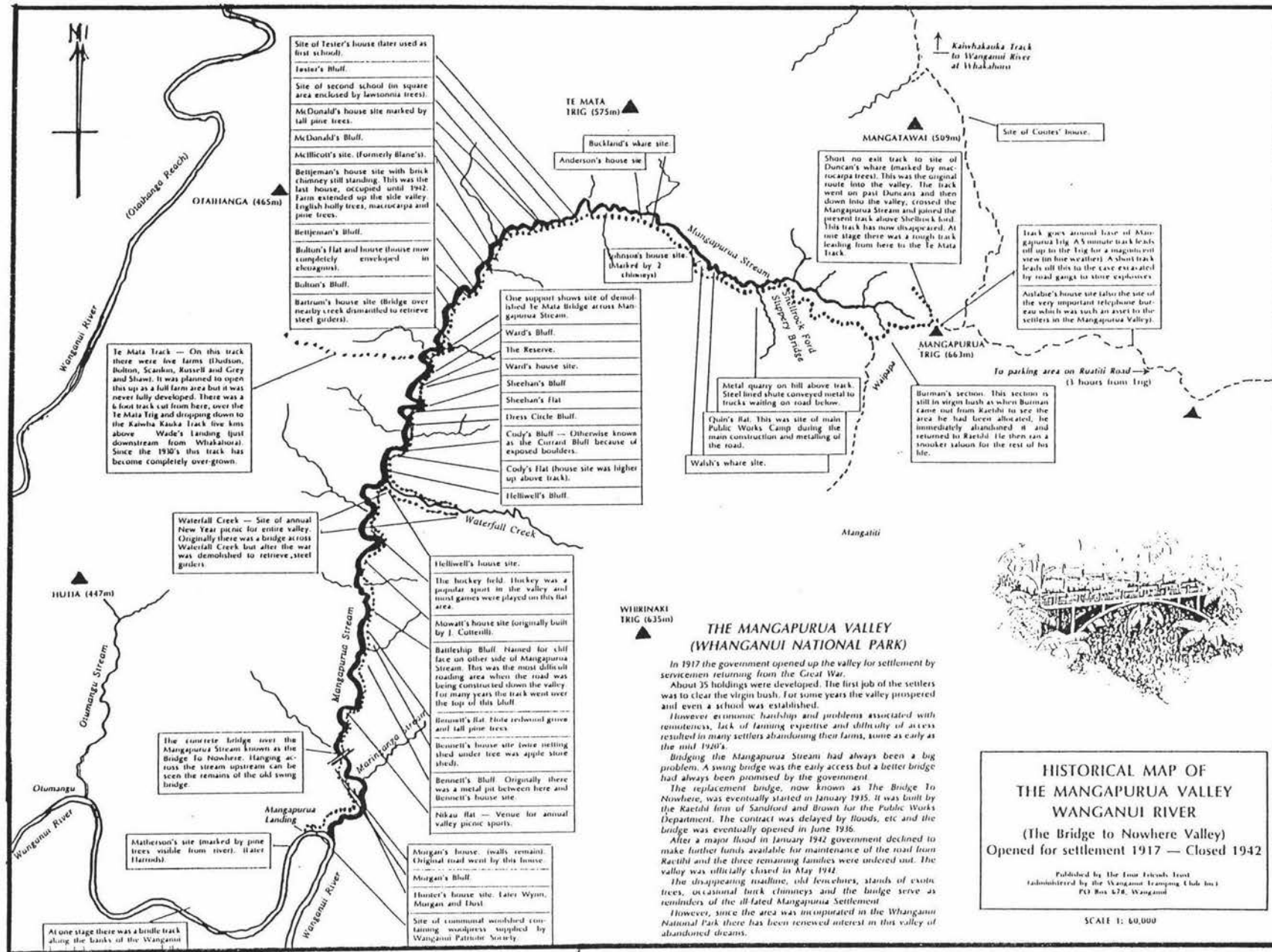
²⁵Interview with Harry Brown, 3 November 1997.

²⁶Jack Ward in Bates, *The Bridge to Nowhere*, p.86.

²⁷Bates, *The Bridge to Nowhere*, p.86.

²⁸*ibid.*, p.86/87.

Source: Arthur Bates,
The Bridge to Nowhere.
 Back cover.



equipment, sending in again the telephones found at Foxton beach. The settlers had to erect the lines and install the telephones. They were given only enough material to build a line to Quinn's place, which was at the bottom of the hill leading up to the Trig, about 20 kilometres from the landing. Although they now had internal communication within the Valley it was several years before a connection was made to Raetihi.

Only when the Public Works Department started widening the road from the Trig in 1928, and needed a telephone link to Raetihi, was assistance to complete the telephone connection given. The Public Works Department provided the materials and paid for the construction of a two-wire line from Quinn's place up to the Aislabie's place. The Aislabie's house, which was near the Trig, and already linked by telephone to Raetihi, became the exchange and Vera Aislabie became the operator. This meant that she always had to be available to answer the phone during the hours it was open. Most of the married settlers were connected to the telephone but some of the single men did not bother. Ivy Mossop remembers often taking messages to an unmarried neighbour as they had the nearest telephone.²⁹ Agnes Anderson also recalls that the roadmen who worked on the road towards the end of the depression used her telephone. It cost 4d. to ring Raetihi.³⁰ The fact that it was mostly the married members of the community who had telephones installed seems to have made little difference to the social attitudes between the settlers. Some of the bachelors were happy with their isolation, to some it was a healing period after the traumatic experience of the war. They were welcome at any of the social activities and functions that the Valley held and they wished to attend. No-one seemed to be affronted at the idea of taking messages to those who

²⁹Interview with Mossop, 8 October 1997.

³⁰Anderson, p.64.

did not see the need or did not want the expense of owning a telephone. This was another example of community integration, this time produced by the telephone.

For the twelve years Vera Aislabie ran the exchange she provided a service to the families in the Valley beyond what was expected of her. For instance, whenever she heard a car passing on the way home from town, late at night, Vera would ring ahead to notify the people in the Valley that their menfolk were on their way. The exchange was open from 8am. to 5pm daily. Outside those times she was paid extra. "I remember that if anyone rang outside normal hours they had to pay 1/- opening fee. How I treasured these as the money automatically belonged to me."³¹ Another service she provided was a nine o'clock call every morning: "I put through a call to all the 10 to 12 subscribers on the exchange so they could set their clocks. After all it was before the wireless and clocks were always going wrong. Of course, we also used the nine o'clock as a general bulletin so that all us ladies could have a good yarn and exchange news. Maybe somebody had excess cabbages so whoever wanted them could get them - and so on."³² With the connection of the phone service to Raetihi people now could contact a doctor and get medical aid more easily although many still called Nancy Bettjeman, a trained nurse, first.

Mail was an important aspect of the women's lives. It was through their letters that they were able to keep contact with their family and friends outside the Valley. Most of the women had only brief holidays out of the Valley as there was little money for such luxuries. David Hellowell recalled that his father always made

³¹ Arthur Bates, 'The Final Years in the Mangapurua', *Wanganui Chronicle*, 9 August 1986.

³² *ibid.*

sure that his mother had an annual holiday,³³ others were not as fortunate and for long periods were unable to leave the Valley for a holiday, or even a day out .

The mail also brought the newspapers, such magazines as the *Weekly News* and *Free Lance*, and the popular *Farmers' Trading Co.* catalogue which was used to order clothing and articles that could not be made. These magazines would have given the women a chance to see the changes in fashions, which may not have been important within the Valley but could have made them feel uncomfortable and out of place elsewhere. They also would have been a source of recipes, knitting patterns, stories and information about the rest of the country.

The mail came into the Valley from both the Raetihi and the river end. The mail from the top end was brought to the Trig and anyone going that way brought it down to the Valley. In the early 1920s, John, nicknamed "Goog", Aislabie became the mailman for the top of the Valley and the Mangatiti. The price of wool was low: "So my husband got a contract to earn money by delivering mail on horseback over 15 miles three times a week and we saved the wool in hope it would rise in value ... Sometimes I would ride the 15 miles mail run for my husband. It was hard work."³⁴ In 1929 the road into the Mangatiti was opened so from then the mail run from Raetihi into the Mangatiti was done, twice weekly, by the 'bus'.³⁵

The mail delivered by Hatricks Services was, at first, left in the shed at the Landing and the settlers had to organise their own delivery.

³³Interview with David Hellowell, 6 June 1997.

³⁴Vera Aislabie in Bates, 'Memories recalled of the Mangapurua Valley' *Wanganui Chronicle*, 2 August 1986, p.9.

³⁵Interview with Brown, 3 November 1997.

The Settlers' Association wrote to the Postmaster at the Wanganui Post Office, asking for a postman to deliver the mail at least twice weekly.³⁶ This request was successful and in the early part of the Valley's history Sydney Buckland had the mail run from the Landing. By 1930 the two delivery days were Monday and Friday. May Ross remembered, as a child, her Mother writing letters on Thursday for the mail the next day.³⁷



The Mangapurua Postman

Source: Arthur Bates, *The Bridge to Nowhere*. p.94.

Teddy Johnstone, a settler who arrived in the Valley from Mangatiti in the late 1920s, was the mailman. He most probably took over from Sydney Buckland in 1927 when the latter left the Valley. "He lived above us and used to ride down about 7.30 am. collecting outward mail from the boxes as he went down. Meet the boat, put one bag on, take one off, sort the mail and so up the Valley once more. His

³⁶Bates, *The Bridge to Nowhere*. p.68.

³⁷Letter from May Ross to the author, November 1997.

coming was anxiously awaited for and usually each person as he passed rang the next to say that he was on his way."³⁸

In the last few years of the Valley the mail delivery from the river was stopped. First Ivy McDonald and then her sister Helen had the mail contract into the Valley from the top. They would ride out to Aislabies and collect the mail, and then ride back and deliver it, a round trip of about 30 kilometres.³⁹

Another innovation of the time was the radio, or 'wireless' as it was known then. It was run from batteries. For many it helped to lessen the feeling of loneliness. Elizabeth Allen recalled: "It was such a joy to have a wireless at last and be able to listen to the news first hand. I would even turn it on for a little music now and then, but I was careful of this. Wet cell batteries had a habit of running out and their replacements were such heavy brutes to hump up from the river landing."⁴⁰ Edith Mason, who got a hers in 1930, also tells of the excitement of having one: "The radio opened up a whole new era to us bringing us up-to-date news and entertainment from the outside world, but batteries were expensive and did not last long."⁴¹ In the Valley the children remember their parents listening to the news but they did not hear it often themselves. Harry Brown also remembers listening to the 1930 British Lions test matches on their wireless.⁴²

The wireless was important to many people in isolated areas as it narrowed the 'gap' between their own small world and the 'great outside' and gave people a chance to be current with what was happening. When in 1929 there was a controversy over

³⁸Anderson, p.66.

³⁹Interview with Mossop, 8 October 1997.

⁴⁰Allen, p.34.

⁴¹Bates (ed.), "Okoroa", p.94.

⁴²Interview with Brown, 3 November 1997.

broadcasting the Lion's tour test matches, a man from Eketahuna wrote the Broadcasting Service of the time, saying: "Let us hear the best. Wireless today has become part of the life in the backblocks."⁴³ In the beginning the radio stations broadcast for a few hours each evening, mostly music." By the end of the 1930s morning and afternoon sessions had been added, and radio listening was both the country's main form of leisure-time activity and a new means of communication from the government to the population."⁴⁴

Although there were wireless sets in the Mangapurua there is little mention of them, probably because the children interviewed were given little opportunity to listen to the programmes offered. Also the reception in such an isolated valley was not very good, May Ross tells of her father with his head by the speakers listening to static while he pushed and twiddled with the wires. Sometimes if he was lucky a voice came on to give the news.⁴⁵ Agnes Anderson mentions their "wireless arial[sic]" was a coil of No. 6 wire strung right across from one side of the hill to the other and we were down below."⁴⁶ This also indicates the difficulty the settlers had to get a reception. She makes no further reference to the wireless, its reception, or how much it was used although she talks about friends visiting in the evening and the things they talked about.

The whole period of the Valley's life was dominated by the shortage of money and the outcomes of the Great Depression but improvements to the road and the coming of the telephone and radio did much to make the women feel less isolated.

⁴³Patrick Day, *The Radio Years. A History of Broadcasting in New Zealand*. Auckland : Auckland University Press. 1994. p.116.

⁴⁴ibid., p.1

⁴⁵Letter May Ross to the author, 18 October 1997.

⁴⁶Anderson, p.6.

Cooney wrote: "Probably the most important change in rural life in this decade was the increasing ease and speed of communications. Motor transport, the telephone and radio broadcasting helped to break down the old division between town and country."⁴⁷ Even if these improvements were later arriving in the Mangapurua, by the 1930s there was a road, open some of the time, to Raetihi, the telephone was connected to Raetihi and some families were enjoying listening to the radio. Although some of the new technologies being developed elsewhere, electric power for example, were still unavailable to the settlers, those that were must have helped to lessen the isolation of the women of the Mangapurua.

⁴⁷David J. Cooney, 'An Exercise in Oral History : Rural Life and Labour in Taranaki from World War One to the Depression', MA Thesis in History, University of Auckland, 1980, p.42.

CHAPTER FOUR

'HOME SWEET HOME': ACCOMMODATION AND FACILITIES.

" Well, thank goodness we're home at last."¹

These were reported to be the first words that Nancy Bettjeman uttered on entering her new home in the Mangapurua Valley in 1920. A Scottish war bride, from the city of Glasgow, she was to spend the next twenty-two years of her life in this isolated area. Home was a small four-roomed house made out of pit-sawn timber and built by her husband



Bettjemans' first home

Source. Mrs May Ross. (nee Bettjeman.)

¹May Ross, ' Nancy Bettjeman's Story ', *Whanganui River Annual 1993*, p.54.

Fred and a builder he had employed to help him. It had a large kitchen with a wood-burning stove (quite a luxury), a living room and two bedrooms, and it had real wallpaper on the walls.

The Bettjeman house was one of the largest in the Valley and it was to be their home, with alterations and additions, for their entire life in the Valley. It was superior to many of the first homes that greeted the women when they arrived. Most of them were only one-roomed or two-roomed shacks. The men generally built for themselves, as soon as they could, rough, slab or shingle one-roomed huts, usually unlined. Some of them were wallpapered with the centre pages from the *Weekly News* or the *Free Lance*. They had limited facilities, with most of the cooking being done over the open fire and in camp ovens. Sue Pearce (nee Crabb) wrote the following description of one settler's hut on a visit to the Valley in about 1921, which gives us a picture what many of the single men's dwellings were like.

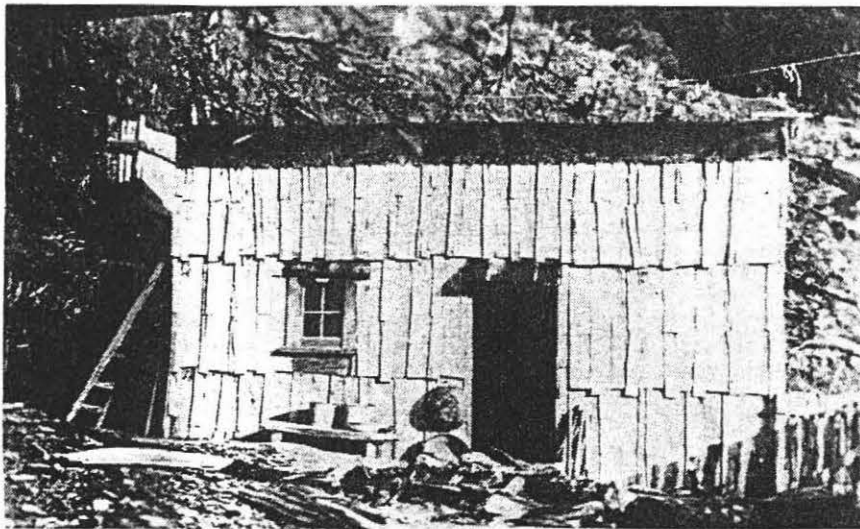
The owner was away so we brewed ourselves a cup of tea in his "kitchen" The conditions in that building was a revelation! strung across the room was a hammock, which apparently was being used as a cupboard to store supplies in. And those supplies had been there so long that onions were growing in the deep pile of rubbish in the hammock. Over the sleeping bunk was hanging half a sheep. One could laugh -- or one could weep --these were the conditions thought good enough for the men who had fought to save us and to preserve our democratic way of life.²

Fred Bettjeman told his son that this was a fairly accurate description of some of these early dwellings.³

²Sue Pearce in Fry, 'Mangapurua' Unpublished Manuscript, Courtesy of Pat Fry, Wellington, p.5.

³Letter Mac Bettjeman to Fry, 1984.

Many of the early houses fitted this description being just as primitive, as official reports show. The Aislabie's house was made of slabs, even the chimney, which caused frequent chimney fires: " A tiny three roomed slab whare with no glass in the windows - just white linen to keep the weather out and to let the light in. Later my husband carefully carried out from Raetihi one pane of glass so I did have one window I could see through."⁴ In 1924 the rural supervisor for the area filed this report on the Aislabie home: " Whare, split timber, poor condition, wood chimney. Value £2. Married with one child.... Occupier urgently requires a dwelling. Present dwelling is unthinkable."⁵ By 1929 a note was added to the effect that there had been improvements made to the house, since it now had : " four rooms and a scullery and was valued at £300."⁶ Their daughter Ruth can just remember their first house; "a slab whare with a dirt floor. We then built a three bedroomed house.... It was an ugly red colour all over."⁷



Phil Bennett's original house, typical of many found in the Mangapurua.

Source: *Whanganui River Annual 1992*, p.88.

⁴Vera Aislabie in Arthur Bates, ' The Aislabie's ... An Important Family from the Mangapurua Valley ', *Whanganui River Annual 1996*, p.65.

⁵Rural Supervisor's Report, 1924, LS (1) 26/16388, NA.

⁶ibid.

⁷Ruth West, 'The Bridge to Nowhere', Unpublished Manuscript, Courtesy of Ruth West, Rotorua, p.1.

Mrs Johnson, who lived first in the Mangatiti then in the 1930s moved into the Mangapurua, spent her time on board the ship bringing her to New Zealand making lace. She also brought with her a chest of fine linen to use in her new home. Her new home was to be a one roomed whare with a dirt floor!⁸

Other early families in the area give similar descriptions of their first homes. The McIntyres arrived in 1924 and at first lived in a small whare built by a previous settler: "we acquired his one room pit sawn whare and that is where we lived for a year or so"⁹ until able to build a larger dwelling. Mrs McIntyre recalls the thrill of " building our fine new house. We moved in about a year later [1926] and we were so proud of it. It was made of corrugated iron and consisted of one big room with three bedrooms off it."¹⁰ The McDonalds' house was also very small: " He [Dad] then cleared enough space to build a whare using the cut trees to frame the building and using slats to cover the walls and roof."¹¹ The family lived there for several years until they could afford to build a better home for their growing family. Even as late as 1935 the supervisor's report read: "recommends assistance with the addition to house; present dwelling has only three rooms. 24' x24' with four daughters."¹²

Agnes Anderson gives this description of the house they moved into on their arrival in the Valley in 1931:

I can see it now. A slab whare, stark and bare down below the road, a few trees below it again and not much else. It, the whare was ... about 24 feet long, divided into two rooms, the kitchen and bedroom. The kitchen sported an open fire place quite eight by six feet in size made from iron and so badly constructed that one could sit

⁸Interview with Molly Sommerville, 3 November 1997.

⁹Irene McIntyre in Bates, 'Mangapurua Secret Revealed', *Wanganui Chronicle*, 23 August 1989, p.20.

¹⁰*ibid.*, p.20.

¹¹Helen McDonald in Bates, 'Memories of a Mangapurua Childhood', *Wanganui Chronicle*, 13 December 1989, p.29.

¹²Rural Supervisor's Report, 1935, LS(1) 26/1940, NA.

inside and watch the world go by. There was a big black kettle' sundry pots and pans, and the camp ovens. But to me it was heaven. ¹³

Lake's descriptions of the living conditions of many of the returned servicemen's farming settlements in Victoria (Australia) are as bad, and in many of her case studies worse, than those of the Mangapurua settlers. Her conclusions were that: "Miserable accommodation was one of the more humiliating consequences of material poverty,"¹⁴ and when discussing the lack of bathrooms, surmises that: "Lack of privacy was one of the most demeaning consequences of the architecture of poverty."¹⁵ This dreadful weight of poverty and despair that she portrays among many of the farmer settlers in her case studies is not evident among the settlers of the Mangapurua. There does not seem to have been any feeling of humiliation because of their lack of facilities but rather one of determination to improve, to the best of their ability, what they had. One contrast that needs to be mentioned in this context is that most of the Australian wives and children of those studied by Lake were expected to assist in all aspects of labour on the farm while the women in the Mangapurua were able to spend most of their time in and around the house. Another factor could have been the availability of suitable timber, for free, in the Valley to use for improving their buildings.

Although the Codys were only in the Valley a short time, 1923-24, and their home was a very simple two-roomed shack, Ita Cody enjoyed her year in there. She soon knew there was no future there for them and was thankful that they had been burnt out before they had to leave. She considered that there was something special about those days for young people. She loved the life, learning to cook over

¹³ Agnes Anderson, Unpublished Manuscript, Courtesy of Myra Barron, Balclutha, p.5.

¹⁴ Marilyn Lake, *The Limits of Hope. Soldier Settlement in Victoria 1915-1938*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1987, p.154.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p.155.

an open fire and to use a camp oven, seeing it as an interlude, a time where she could be "out in the open, living through a bit of adventure in breaking in the land. You washed in kerosine tins over open fires,"¹⁶ and learned to 'make do' with what you had.

These circumstances were repeated in the Mangatiti Valley where firstly the earlier settlers then the returned servicemen and their wives also lived in primitive housing. Harry Brown recalled that their first home had only a large open fireplace on which his mother did all her cooking.¹⁷ The first thing that the women had to learn when they arrived was to make bread, usually in a camp oven. As Irene McIntyre recalled: "Soon I had to learn the art of cooking over an open fire in a camp oven."¹⁸ Most of them had never even made bread before, and they not only had to make bread but also make the yeast. Mrs Aislabie recalled her first 'stove' and learning how to use a camp oven when she arrived, a young mother with one baby son. "When I went in I saw a heavy pole of wood over the fire place and from this chains hung down with camp ovens hooked into them. When I first arrived I had no idea of how to go about camp oven cooking."¹⁹ She then goes on to say how much the help of her neighbour was appreciated, teaching her how to make yeast and bake bread.²⁰ Agnes Anderson gives this description of camp ovens:

Three camp ovens - big, middle, and little. The big one was used for bread, the middle one for meat etc, and the little one for cakes.... a camp oven is - a three legged pot, only it is NOT a pot. It is like a large enamel basin in shape - flat bottom, straight sides and a lid with a lip to hold the embers. One hangs it over the fire and piles the embers on top - to cook the top of the bread etc.²¹

¹⁶Fry, 'Fred and Ita - A Family History', Unpublished Manuscript, Courtesy of Pat Fry, Wellington, p.73.

¹⁷Interview with Harry Brown, 3 November 1997.

¹⁸Irene McIntyre in Bates, 'Mangapurua Secret Revealed', *Wanganui Chronicle*, 23 August 1989, p.20.

¹⁹Vera Aislabie in Bates, 'Memories Recalled of the Mangapurua Valley', *Wanganui Chronicle*, 2 August 1986, p.9.

²⁰ibid., p.9.

²¹Anderson, p.15.

In her article about her mother, May Ross (Bettjeman) recalls how her "mother had to learn to make bread with potato yeast."²² Potato yeast was made from potato water to which was added flour, sugar and some old yeast. This mixture was ready to use in twelve hours. Some of the yeast mixture was reserved to start the next batch of yeast and this was a valued gift to a new settler. She also had to learn, as did the other women, how to make their own soap and butter.

The facilities that these women had were at the very least primitive and were not characteristic of the New Zealand domestic scene of the 1920s. The conditions under which the women of the Mangapurua lived and worked were closer to the late nineteenth century. Many of the Australian settlers surveyed by Lake had similar if not worse conditions. In 1927 a deputation claimed that the condition of housing was a disgrace.²³ Lake writes, "The house usually lacked bathrooms,"²⁴ then compares the settlers to the people who settled in towns: " While the inhabitants of new houses in towns enjoyed the amenities of an indoor bathroom, settlers had to wash from a bowl or a tin out of doors."²⁵

At first the Mangapurua settlers had no running water. It all had to be carried, usually from the nearest creek. Hot water was heated on the stove, if they were lucky enough to have one, or in kerosene tins over the open fire. "We had a long walk one way for water and a long walk the other way to the draughty toilet."²⁶ There was plenty of water available in the numerous creeks in the area, but the problem was getting it to the house. At first there were no tanks as they were an awkward

²²Ross, 'The Nancy Bettjeman Story', p.55.

²³Lake, p.155.

²⁴ibid.

²⁵ibid., p.154.

²⁶Irene McIntyre in Bates, 'Mangapurua Secret Revealed' *Wanganui Chronicle*, 23 August 1989, p.20.

shape to pack.²⁷ May Ross remembers the well at their place which was covered with a lid to stop the children falling in. The water was carried to the house in kerosene-tin buckets. "We had a deep well at the house from which lovely clear water was pumped by hand-pump Later we also had a tank at the back of the house."²⁸ Lifting and carrying the heavy tins to the house was hard work. Ruth West (Aislabie) remembers that, "when the dry weather came we had to sledge water for drinking in big barrels by horse."²⁹ Several others recall the pleasure of getting water laid on to the house. Ivy Mossop remembers that her father had laid on both hot and cold running water in their house about the end of the 1920s. They had a channel from the creek to a well and then to the house - "running hot and cold water through the stove."³⁰

We kids were very clever at fixing the pipes if they burst and it could be a terrible thing one frosty morning, someone hadn't left the tap on and you'd see the water whoosh into the creek and we'd pull the pipes and bind them up until Dad fixed it.³¹

At first the 'bathroom' was usually a basin on a shelf at the back porch, where all the family washed. Bath night was, in most places, Saturday night and all clothing was changed then: " We didn't change our clothes daily as we do now."³² "Sheets, towels, pillow cases and tablecloths were changed on Sunday mornings."³³ This cleansing was probably a 'hang-over' from the past, everyone and everything cleaned ready for Sunday. For bath night, water was heated in kerosene tins over the open fire or on the stove. In some places where they were lucky enough to have a copper, they heated the water there. The water was then poured into a small tin bath in front of the stove in the kitchen. The children first and then the parents later.

²⁷Elida Brown, 'Memories of Mangatiti', *Wanganui Chronicle Farm Review*. 1969, p.20.

²⁸Ross, 'The Nancy Bettjeman Story', p.55.

²⁹West, 'The Bridge to Nowhere', p.1.

³⁰Interview with Ivy Mossop, 8 October 1997.

³¹ibid.

³²Letter May Ross to author, November 1997. p.7.

³³ibid., p.7.

Not many homes had a full-sized bath because of the problems of bringing such items into the Valley. Hugh McDonald recounts this story about packing his stove and bath the twenty-four kilometres from the river to his home:

I had a bit of a job packing in a No 1 Orien range, had to take it to pieces. I got it up the river by boat and on a six ft track and not that in places. I also got a bath. I had little pack horse and it just fitted over his back and when tied to his neck and a cirsingle [sic] buckled over and under was pretty hard to shift - anyway going home there was half a dozen old horses on the track and when I got to them they took fright and my horse went after them there was a six foot gate near the end of the cliff hundred ft below and likewise above. Well every one of those horses cleared the gate but mine stopped. Well I got home alright and the range fixed in and Bath also was set.³⁴

It was some time before many of the settlers had bathrooms or running water in the house. May Ross recalls that she was in her teens, about 1933, before they had a bathroom with taps: "Real luxury, taps - real taps, the only other real tap was on the stove."³⁵ Some stoves had a water cylinder attached on one side which held about nine litres- of water. There was a lid on the top where the cold water was poured into it, and a tap on the front to empty it when it was hot. David Hellowell also talked about bathing in front of the fire but later: " We did get a bath of normal size."³⁶ His father, who was a 'handy-man', fixed up a device to bring the water to the bathroom from the copper to save carrying it to the bath.

There was only cold water from the tanks into the wash-house and kitchen ... the bath was in a tiny room next door, had to boil the copper to have a bath ... so he put a big funnel through the wall to the bath so there was no business of dipping it out with buckets and putting it in the bath, you just dipped it out into the funnel.³⁷

³⁴Hugh McDonald, 'Notes on the Mangapurua', Unpublished Manuscript, Courtesy of Ivy Mossop, Auckland, p.13/14.

³⁵Interview with May Ross, 21 April 1997.

³⁶Interview with David Hellowell, 6 June 1997.

³⁷ibid.

One of the settlers in 1931 had very few amenities at all and for the first week in the Valley washed in the nearby creek. However this soon palled and she wanted a hot wash. Her husband arose to the occasion and overcame the problem:

Out came the crosscut saw and we sawed off a length of a huge yellow pine log approximately the length of a set of tubs and Dad [Reg] split it into lengths, adzed and then planed the boards off. My widest part was measured - alas, no board wide enough to accommodate that, so two pieces for the bottom were joined, caulked with soaked newspapers, the rest exactly like tubs, sloping sides all morticed in.³⁸

By nine o'clock that night the bath was complete, and the first bath was in progress.

Waste water plumbing was also basic. Water from the bath, usually the only place that needed drainage, went straight into a drain under the bathroom and out into the paddock. "Otherwise dish water etc was thrown out onto the garden or grass."³⁹ Laundry facilities were just as primitive. Many of the women did their laundry outside on a bench beside an open fire where the water was heated and the clothes boiled. Another family recalled that their mother had her copper and bench set up several hundred metres down the hill by the creek. This certainly made it easier in the sense that she did not have to carry buckets of water, but they recall the heavy baskets of wet clothes that had to be carried back up the hill.⁴⁰ The Aislabies also went to the creek to do the washing in dry weather so that there was less water to cart from the creek, which was a fair distance from the house.⁴¹ Those families with coppers considered themselves very lucky. Vera Aislabie was delighted with the gift of a copper and Dover stove from a departing settler: "What treasures. I will always be grateful for his kindness."⁴² Helen McDonald recalls how

³⁸Anderson, p.14.

³⁹Letter Ross to author, November 1997, p.14.

⁴⁰Interview with McIntyre family, 5 May 1997.

⁴¹West, 'The Bridge to Nowhere', p.1.

⁴²Vera Aislabie in Bates, 'The Aislabies', p.67.

her mother did the family wash: "For many years mum just boiled up the big weekly washing in old four gallon kerosene tins on an open fire outside. I remember very well the day mum got a copper to do the washing in. We all got very excited and mum was over the moon."⁴³

Outdoor toilets were common to all the homes, being very simple wooden buildings with a seat set over a hole dug in the ground. They were built well away from the back door with a path leading to them. Toilet paper was an unheard of luxury. The newsprint pages of the *Weekly News* were torn into squares and placed in the toilet.⁴⁴ Going to the toilet at night was done as little as possible: "night visits were dreaded so avoided except in an emergency, chamber pots under the bed sufficed for bladder relief."⁴⁵ May Ross recounts the story of her mother being scared stiff one evening when visiting the 'long drop' and on opening the door coming face to face with a weasel.⁴⁶

Most of the houses in the Valley were lit, at first, with kerosene lamps and candles but later a few of the settlers organised some sort of power system. The Morgans had, quite early on, installed a "Wizard" lighting system which was run from petrol gas piped into the house to a mantle in the ceiling.⁴⁷ The Johnstones built a waterwheel in the creek behind their house to generate power,⁴⁸ and Harry Brown can recall "the big banks of batteries that were charged by a generator down in the valley."⁴⁹ This meant that they had electric lights but there was not enough power generated to run any other electric appliances. Even an iron took too much

⁴³McDonald in Bates, *Wanganui Chronicle*, 13 December 1989, p.29.

⁴⁴Interview with Brown, 3 November 1997.

⁴⁵Letter Ross to author, November 1997, p13.

⁴⁶Interview with Ross, 21 April 1997.

⁴⁷Interview with Mac Bettjeman, 1 June 1997.

⁴⁸Interview with Mossop, 8 October 1997.

⁴⁹Interview with Brown, 3 November 1997.

power. In contrast Doig found in his survey of 455 dairy farmers throughout New Zealand in 1937 that 89% had either electric power or access to electric power.⁵⁰ This did not necessarily mean that they all took advantage of or used the facility. Those families within the study who did not use the electric power supplied, or who were not on a supply line, used the same forms of lighting as the people in the Mangapurua, such as "acetylene, benzine or kerosene lamps and candles."⁵¹

One of the major problems for the women of the Valley was keeping their food fresh, meat in particular as it deteriorated so quickly. Many families combined and shared their meat, each family killing a sheep every second week and having half each.⁵² All families had a cool-room for their meat, a building called a 'safe'. This is described in May Ross's words: "We had a construction built outside at the end of our store house which had a roof and a floor and open sides covered with mesh wire."⁵³ This building was big enough to hold at least half a sheep. All the settlers had some sort of 'safe' to keep their meat and other perishable foods as cool as possible and away from the flies. The Bettjemans, at first, kept their butter in an earthenware crock set in the ground.⁵⁴ Later they made a larger cool-storage area. "Dad dug a fairly big cupboard like hole in the papa-clay bank of the creek. Water ran over and round it off the hillside all the time and it was always cool."⁵⁵ This 'cool-store' was some distance from the house, so supplies had to be collected about every other day.⁵⁶ All the other settlers in the Valley experienced the same sort of problems trying to keep their food fresh. They all preserved some meat, by pickling, salting or making pork into bacon. Ruth West describes what happened when her

⁵⁰W.T.Doig, *The Standards of Life of New Zealand Dairy-farmers*, Wellington: Government Printers,1940, p.41.

⁵¹ibid.

⁵²Interview with Bettjeman, 1 June 1997.

⁵³Letter Ross to author, November, p.14.

⁵⁴ibid.

⁵⁵ibid.

⁵⁶ibid.

father killed a pig: " In winter we would kill the fatted pig and cure the bacon by rubbing in brown sugar and saltpetre and salt every morning for three weeks."⁵⁷

It was the woman's job to turn the house she entered into a home for her husband and family. The women who came into the Valley moved into small wooden whares which had few comforts and fewer facilities. Apart from the things that the women brought into the Valley there was little chance of improving their lot except by their own labour. It was almost impossible to bring some things in. The following is an account of the difficulties of bringing a piano into the Valley from the river end:

The transportation of this piano up from the landing was really his problem but we chaps decided to help and carry it up for him. I think it must have been the oddest load that ever went up that track. We got two strong poles and eight of us set out with it four carrying and four waiting to take their turn.⁵⁸

Most of the furniture in their houses was handmade. "The carpenter with my assistance made all of the furniture except for the beds."⁵⁹ The furniture was fairly simple: in most homes a large wooden table with benches along the sides and chairs at each end. Those families who had the luxury of a living-room as well as a kitchen had furniture built for that room. It also was fairly simple. At the Bettjemans it "consisted of a settle type two seater couch with a straight back and arms and a slatted seat, two armchairs also straight backed that could be altered into a slanting position."⁶⁰

⁵⁷West, p.1.

⁵⁸Jack Ward in Arthur P. Bates, *The Bridge to Nowhere, The Ill-fated Mangapurua Settlement*, Wanganui: Wanganui Newspapers Ltd., 7th edition, 1993, p.126.

⁵⁹Fred Bettjeman in Bates, 'River Settlement's Rise and Fall Recalled by a Living Legend', *Wanganui Chronicle*, 5 October 1981, p.13.

⁶⁰Ross, 'Nancy Bettjeman Story', p.54.

The women had to use all their ingenuity to make comfortable homes with the material that was available to them. Because of the economic climate there was little money available to spend on non-essentials such as curtains or floor coverings. Nothing was wasted: sugar sacks and flour sacks were used in a variety of ways. The flour sacks not only made bedspreads and curtains but also were used for children's clothing.⁶¹ "Sugar sacks were dyed, stuffed with wool and embroidered to make squabs for benches and chairs."⁶² Floor coverings were also 'home made'. Wool packs were often used: "One carpet runner was a wool pack opened out lengthwise and decorated down each side with stencilled designs. The stencil was a potato cut in a pattern and dipped in paint and dye."⁶³ Others recall the sharing of paint and dye among the women. "Wool packs opened up and stencilled in gay coloured paint - a tin went around us all."⁶⁴ Curtains were made out of bleached flour bags and cretonne sewn in strips.⁶⁵ The Andersons used old sheets, dyed yellow, across their ceiling to stop any drips as their whare had no lining.⁶⁶

Many women developed lovely flower gardens, as it was a way to turn their simple houses into homes. "Everyone had a garden and I suppose our characters were in a way revealed in our plots. Certainly they were very diverse in lay out and in the way they were tended."⁶⁷ All the children speak of the flower gardens that their mothers grew in the Valley, and they recall other people's gardens. Ivy Mossop mentions the Shaws' garden as being outstanding and the joy she felt when visiting it.⁶⁸ Kath Baddeley mentions a visit to the Valley and remarks: "Such pretty houses

⁶¹Interview with Brown, 3 November 1997.

⁶²Ross, 'Nancy Bettjeman Story', p.54.

⁶³ibid.

⁶⁴Anderson, p.60.

⁶⁵Ross, 'Nancy Bettjeman Story', p.54.

⁶⁶Bates, *The Bridge to Nowhere*, p.132.

⁶⁷Anderson, p.46.

⁶⁸Interview with Mossop, 8 October 1997.

and nice gardens a lot of them turned out to be.⁶⁹ For some it was a symbol of civilisation, a sign of their social standing because their gardens showed they could afford to spend time on an activity, that apart from its beauty, had no practical use.⁷⁰

By the end of the settlement it seems clear that in many ways the women of the Mangapurua in the late 1930s were, apart from electricity and its benefits, in a similar situation to many of the dairy farmer's wives in Doig's survey. The size of the houses of the last settlers in the Mangapurua compare reasonably favourably with the houses of the dairy farmers in the 1937 survey by Doig. There he found that the average number of rooms was 5.3.⁷¹ The 1936 census states that 75% of all houses had 4-6 rooms. Doig surmises that many of the women in his survey went without conveniences while the family acquired such things as a radio or a car, but he was unable to say why they were prepared to do this.. He was not sure whether possessions were "the expression of ability to provide, or custom, habit, prejudice, or personal preference, or a combination of these."⁷² He then went on to say:

It is perhaps safe to say that dairy-farm families are willing to tolerate a certain amount of domestic inconvenience in order to be able to enjoy the possession of those facilities which help them to keep in contact with other people - telephone, radio, car. No doubt such arrangements maximise the families' satisfaction from the resources available at their disposal, but they do so in many cases, unfortunately, at the expense of the housewife and 'home maker'.⁷³

Certainly the families in the Mangapurua enjoyed having a car and/or the radio. But by the late 1930s most homes had stoves and running hot and cold water, so

⁶⁹Kath Baddeley, 'River Settlements of the 1920s and 1930s....', *Whanganui River Chronicle*, 1996, p.69.

⁷⁰Interview with Hellowell, 6 June 1997.

⁷¹Doig, p.38. "Rooms" includes bedrooms, living-rooms, and sitting-rooms, and also a kitchen used for living purposes; kitchenettes, pantries, sculleries, washhouses, bathrooms, and other such rooms excluded.

⁷²Doig, p.47.

⁷³*ibid.*

there were few other facilities available that could have taken their place. The freedom that a car gave them far out-weighed some inconveniences in their lives. The men would have seen having a vehicle as a priority and far more important than any household item. Power and its associated luxuries were unavailable to them so they were happy to enjoy those that they could have. Certainly having a car opened a door to the outside world and widened the women's social activity. A telephone was considered a necessity, particularly for the married settlers. Some of the single men did not have them installed. The telephone was not only a means of social contact it was also a life-line in cases of emergency.

These women did start their lives in the Valley in relatively primitive circumstances but most adapted to them. Mrs Aislabie in an interview, when she was in her nineties, indicated just how few luxuries they had, when describing the thrill she still gets doing simple things that many even then took for granted: "I still get pleasure every time I turn on a light or get water from a tap - so different from the candles and the three chain water supply I lived with for so long in the lonely but lovely Mangapurua Valley."⁷⁴

⁷⁴Vera Aislabie in Bates, 'The Aislabie's...' p.67.

CHAPTER FIVE

WOMEN'S WORK

"... settler's wives knew that housework, cooking, and washing for a family, if properly carried out, prevent idleness or ennui from visiting the household."¹

In the 1920s and 1930s there was an assumption that there was a clear division between what was perceived as 'woman's work' and what was 'man's work'. Women were, because of their physical and biological make up, seen as home-makers while the men were expected to do the heavy manual labour: " the sexual division of labour in society and in the house-hold was generally assumed to be the 'natural' outcome of adult females' biological propensities to conceive, gestate, give birth and breast feed their children."²

Within the Valley the families, in common with most groups elsewhere, faced "the basic problem of subsistence."³ All family members were reliant on each other for support in day-to-day living. Strategies had to be evolved to deal with this because of, "the social organisation of family farming in which subsistence depended on the combined efforts of parents and children alike."⁴ However the man was seen as the head of the family and the wife and children were subordinate, meaning that the family and household revolved around him.⁵ Although there were many widely held

¹Edward Tregear, 1893, cited in Miles Fairburn, *The Ideal Society and its Enemies. The Foundation of Modern New Zealand Society 1850-1900*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1989, p.201.

²Claire Toynbee, *Her Work and His, Family and Community in New Zealand 1900-1930*, Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1995, p.42.

³ibid., p.10.

⁴ibid.

⁵ibid., p.11.

beliefs about what was a right and proper gender division of labour it proved, in practice within the Valley, to be varied depending on the circumstances of the families concerned.

On the surface it seemed that there was a clearly defined gender-related attitude to what work was done by men and what was considered as the women's domains. A woman's responsibilities and contribution to the progress of the farm were to manage the house and its environs and care for the welfare of her husband and family. The gender issue was less clear when looking at the children's contribution, some daughters playing a major part in running the farm. This chapter will examine the work done by the women in the Valley, and their contribution towards the families' social and economic welfare. It will discuss their daily and weekly routines so that a comparison can be made between their workload and facilities and the workload and facilities of rural women in other areas during the same period.

Many of the women who came into the Valley brought with them preconceived ideas of what work was expected of them. Some of these ideologies were brought with them from England, and others were developed in response to conditions in New Zealand.

Within the Valley the women did not play a major part in assisting their husbands on the farm. Certainly there were no dairy farms in the Valley, which was mainly where many women in other parts of New Zealand were involved: nor could they sell surplus fruit and vegetables, as the outlets were too distant. Toynbee found in her research that many of the families she surveyed remember how hard their mothers worked on

the farm, being in charge of the dairying side, as well as assisting in other aspects. "She helped father at harvesting time. She was never at home then."⁶ She also found that "it was not unusual for girls and women to do heavy manual work."⁷ Lake also discusses the work that was expected from wives of the settlers in her study of Victorian servicemen.⁸ None of the women in the Mangapurua had to do any farm work on a regular basis. Any assistance they did give was not from necessity but to enjoy their husband's company.⁹

Since this was a male-only community in the first few years, the men had to become self-sufficient in and around their dwellings as well as continuing to break-in and improve their farms. Some of these settlers were very particular about keeping their dwellings and surrounds as neat and tidy as possible, but others, as the description of a whare in Chapter Three shows, were not so careful. Many became very good camp-oven cooks, making good bread and stews. It is interesting that, in many cases, they did not pass their expertise on to their wives when they arrived. Vera Aislabie's husband had 'bached' on the property before she joined him and done his own cooking but he did not teach her to cook in the camp-ovens, a neighbour's wife did that. This could be that the women thought that cooking was in their sphere and it would have been humbling to have a man teach them this skill. Conversely the men may have thought it was unmanly to be proficient in such activities and did not display them to their women. Several women mention their neighbour coming and helping them to learn to use these utensils. " When I first arrived I had no idea how to go about camp-oven cooking.... My nearest neighbour Nell Thompson, came over to welcome us with lovely scones. I do not know how I would have managed without her help as she was the best

⁶Toynbee, p.53.

⁷ibid, p.54.

⁸Marilyn Lake, *The Limits of Hope. Soldier Settlements in Victoria 1915-38*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1987, p.143.

⁹Interview with David Hellawell, 6 June 1997.

bread maker I knew and she soon taught me how to cook in camp-ovens."¹⁰ Nancy Bettjeman seems to have had the same experience. Fred Bettjeman tells how he was given his first lesson in bread-making and some potato yeast on his way into the Valley, by one of the surveyors in the area.¹¹ Until his wife joined him in the Valley he did all his own bread-making. However there is no indication that he taught his wife skills. At least Nancy Bettjeman had a wood stove to use although she still had to learn to make the yeast and make bread. With the coming of the women the men seem to have relinquished many household tasks and used that time on their farms.

The men's contribution to the running of the house was limited, partly because of the long hours they worked, often leaving the house in the dark and returning home after nightfall, and partly because of the conception of masculinity and what was thought, by them, to be suitable work for a man. The main tasks done on a regular basis by men in and around the house were providing the supply of firewood for house use, killing all the meat for the family and assisting with the vegetable garden. Irene McIntyre recalls that her husband did all the vegetable garden:

Dad had a large vegetable garden and in the spring and summer he worked hard at growing things. As daylight had to be spent trying to develop the farm lands he got into the habit of doing his vegetable gardening by moonlight so days and nights were always busy.¹²

Another chore which seemed initially to be done by the men was milking the house cow. Most of the children interviewed could not recall their mothers ever milking the cow although some admitted that they may have done so in an emergency. David Hellawell can remember his mother doing it, but not all the time.¹³ Many remember very

¹⁰Vera Aislabie in Arthur Bates, 'Memories Recalled of the Mangapurua Valley', *Wanganui Chronicle*, August 2 1986, p.9.

¹¹Arthur P. Bates, *The Bridge to Nowhere. The Ill-fated Mangapurua Settlement*, Wanganui: Wanganui Newspapers Ltd, 7th edition, 1993, P50.

¹²Irene McIntyre in Bates, 'Mangapurua Secret Revealed', *Wanganui Chronicle*, 23 August 1989, p.20.

¹³Interview with Hellawell, 6 June 1997.

clearly when they inherited this job. May Ross recalled the day when at the age of nine she milked the cow by herself. "That day my father walked into the house and exclaimed with heart-felt feeling ' That's the last time I'll ever milk a cow again ' and true to his word he never did."¹⁴ She then describes some of the difficulties she and her younger sister had, such as breaking in a new heifer: " Daphne and I were both in tears trying to bring her into the yard,"¹⁵ and coming home in the early morning, after an all-night dance, and knowing that before she could go to bed she had to milk the cow. Most probably if she had not been the eldest child, a brother being the first, she would have inherited the job as soon as she was old enough while her brother went onto more adult male tasks, such as lambing beats and pig-hunting with his father.

As the families grew the children were expected to do their share of the work around the house. As soon as they were old enough they were expected to help fill the wood boxes, feed the hens and ducks, care for any orphaned lambs and feed the calf. As the children grew older so their work-load increased, as May Ross's description of learning to milk the cow indicates. All children helped in the house as well as outside, but as they grew older their work became more gender-orientated, with most of the girls giving more time to assisting their mothers while the boys helped their fathers on the farm. The main exception was the McDonald girls. There were no sons in the family and the girls worked hard on the farm alongside their father learning all aspects of farming. From an early age, nine or ten, they had their own dog and could muster the sheep by themselves. At the age of about 15 they were proficient blade shearers and would do all the shearing on the farm. "Dad made us into shearers and musterers."¹⁶

¹⁴Interview with May Ross, 21 April 1997.

¹⁵ibid.

¹⁶Interview with Ivy Mossop, 8 October 1997.

Although they gave him so much assistance on the farm, they were still girls in their father's eyes. Ivy spoke about the meccano set that had been given to her sister Muriel and how her father had given it away to a neighbour's son because he did not have any sons of his own. Seemingly the girls could work like boys but did not have the mechanical ability to use and enjoy a meccano set properly. Later when speaking about leaving the farm she remarked that it may have been different if they had been boys.¹⁷ The fact that there were no boys in the family may have been a contributing factor in the decision to finally accept the Government's offer of £100 and leave the Valley. The McDonalds continued farming in the Valley for about two years after the road was closed. Even after he had left the Valley Hugh McDonald continued to graze the area. Helen McDonald remembers regularly returning to the valley to check the stock. "Often on leave from Ohakea I would train to Raetihi, borrow a horse, ride 35 miles to check the stock, then return to Raetihi to catch the train to Otorohanga."¹⁸

Ruth Aislabie can also remember helping her father on the farm:

Dad decided to sell some sheep so had to take them 35 miles. He had no heading dog so I was the dog. I went all the way in front of the sheep. We stayed with people along the way as it took three or four days. I was about ten, so when we neared Raetihi I left the sheep and, on my horse, went in and bought some lollies and then went back and carried on with the leading. Dad was most annoyed at the deserting.¹⁹

Although she tells this story of helping on the farm she does not seem to have done it on a regular basis, perhaps because she had two brothers who could assist their father.

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ Helen McDonald in Bates, 'Memories of a Mangapurua Childhood', *Wanganui Chronicle*, 15 December 1989, p.29.

¹⁹ West, 'The Bridge to Nowhere', p.2.

However, regardless of what was defined as 'women's work' and 'men's work' many of the children recall ways in which their fathers assisted their mothers doing 'women's work'. Fred Bettjeman always made himself available to assist his wife on laundry day as he considered that lifting the heavy tins full of water and emptying the wash-tubs were jobs too heavy for his wife. The McIntyre family can recall their father making jam because their mother was away and the plums were ready. People could not afford to waste food. Agnes Anderson tells about her husband helping her to cut out a child's dress.²⁰ David Hellowell also spoke about his father making improvements: "He tried to make things as comfortable as possible for my Mother."²¹ They may not have done the ironing, but many gave as much assistance as they could. Their isolation meant there were no kinsfolk nearby to lend support, and that may have been one reason why the men seemed to have contributed such support.

The women's responsibilities were wide and varied. Toynbee's explanation of this was the isolation of farms:

Since most of the farms were isolated (in terms of geographical distance from shops) rural women and girls were involved in a greater range of tasks than other women, including a great deal of preserving, baking bread and other products which could not be bought. There was also the management where appropriate of the six monthly shopping list.²²

The major task for all the women was, of course, caring for their husbands and breadwinners. 'Woman's work' was extremely routine with set tasks being done on the same day each week. In the Bettjeman family it followed the following pattern: Monday was laundry, a full day's work; Tuesday was bread-making and cooking; Wednesday was ironing and mending. Ironing was a very hot and tiring job using 'Mrs Potts' irons which

²⁰Bates, *The Bridge to Nowhere*, p.157.

²¹Interview with David Hellowell, 6 June 1997.

²²Toynbee, p.49.

had to be heated on the stove. As the girls became old enough they took over the ironing. Thursday was a quieter day with a chance to do some gardening and write letters ready for the mailman the next day.

Fridays were for cleaning the bedrooms and sitting room. Everything was dusted, windows cleaned and floors polished (lino). In the winter the open fireplace in the sitting room had to have all the ashes removed and the papa clay hobs rewashed with a watery mixture of clay. The fire had to be re-set with paper and kindling ready to light in the evening. Fresh flowers were put in a vase on the table.²³

Saturday was another baking day but first there was a major clean-up in the kitchen. May Ross describes it in detail:

Saturday was kitchen cleaning day. In the morning the stove fire was allowed to go out after breakfast and the stove cleaned. What a dirty job that was. After the fire box was emptied of ashes the stove was taken to pieces as much as possible. Each piece was cleaned with black lead and polished to a shine. When all the bits were together again the ornamental edge of the stove top which was steel or something shiny was polished with emery paper. The oven door had three ornamental triangular strips across it of the same metal. When it was all done it looked very nice. Oh! I forgot to mention, the flues were cleaned as well. An opening under the bottom of the oven door was a narrow oblong slit where a poker with a flat scraper on it was used to pull out all the accumulated soot.²⁴

Also on Saturday the children cleaned the cutlery and the silver ornaments. Cleaning the knives was an unpopular task. " We used a piece of carpet sprinkled with some powder and pulled each knife blade back and forward through the folded over bit of carpet."²⁵ They also had to clean the brass door knobs and any brass ornaments. " My sisters and I sometimes recall those days and groan in memory of all that polishing."²⁶ Then there were the floors and shelves that had to be scrubbed and

²³Letter May Ross to author, November 1997. p7.

²⁴ibid., pp.7-8.

I have used May Ross's descriptions of the work done by the women in their homes as it was the most detailed but all the other children gave me similar stories.

²⁵ibid., p.8.

²⁶ibid.

windows cleaned so that "everything was sparkling clean by the time Dad came home for lunch."²⁷ It would seem as if much of the weekly polishing and cleaning was part of the struggle to maintain respectability and morale. This will be explored in Chapter Five. On Saturday afternoons Nancy Bettjeman was busy with baking and bread-making, a very busy and tiring day for all. Her daughter, May Ross, remarked: " I don't know where she got all her energy. She certainly needed her day of rest."²⁸

Although in other families there may have been minor differences in the order, all had the same work which needed to be done on a regular weekly basis, Monday was universally considered to be laundry day. Doing the laundry was an all-day affair. The clothes had to be scrubbed before they were boiled either in kerosene tins over an open fire or in a copper, a luxury that only a few of the women enjoyed. After the clothes were boiled they were lifted out of the boiling water and rinsed in a big tub next to the fire, then wrung either by hand or by a wringer before being hung out to dry. The following extract is May Ross's description of doing the laundry at the Bettjeman house:

Water was heated in kerosene tins over the fire and white clothes like sheets tablecloths etc were boiled after they'd been scrubbed on the washing board. There was a large galvanised bath on the bench and along side it a hand wringer mounted on a block of wood. On washdays Dad would fill the tub with hot and cold water and Mother would set work to scrub the clothes on a corrugated washboard in soapy water. White things first and they'd be put into a kerosene tin of warm water with some washing soda and shredded soap and the tin hung over the open fire to boil for a few minutes. Every now and then Mother would poke the clothes under the water to make sure everything would be clean.²⁹

Once the whites had been dealt with the coloured washing and the work clothes were scrubbed, rinsed and hung out on the clothes line:

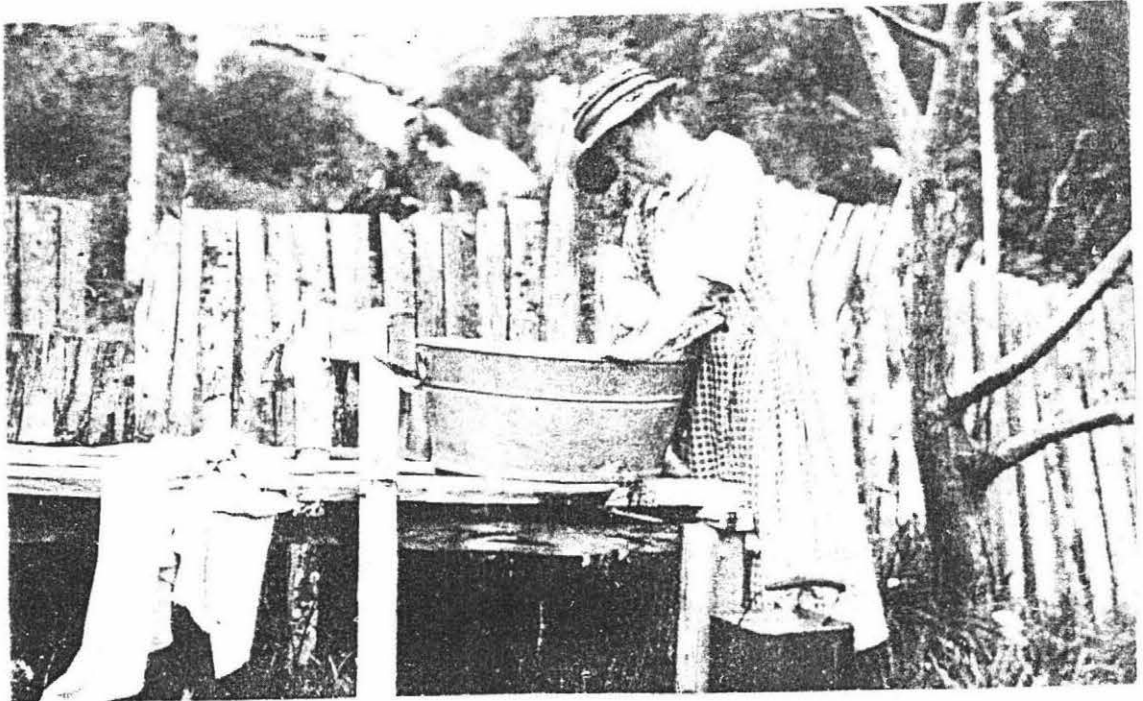
²⁷ibid., p.9.

²⁸ibid.

²⁹ibid., p.6.

The clothes line was outside our garden fence in a paddock and it was just a long piece of No 8 fencing wire strung between two posts about thirty feet apart. Once the clothes were pegged onto it a prop in the middle lifted them well clear of the ground.

By now the white clothes were boiled and ready to be rinsed. Two rinsing waters, one clear and one with Recketts blue added to give that pristine whiteness. They too went on the line in the paddock. As you can imagine washing took a long time.³⁰



Laundry day in the Mangapurua.

Source. Arthur Bates, *Bridge to Nowhere*. p.36

These tasks and many others were the daily and weekly routines of the women living in the Mangapurua as well as many other places in the country. Seasonal work such as preserving was a feature of women's work common to most rural areas. All the Valley farms had large orchards, one of the first things planted when sufficient land had been

³⁰ibid.

cleared. The following description of an orchard, was typical of most: "3/4 acre orchard consisted of 13 apple, 7 plum, 2 walnut, 2 peach, 2 nectarine, 2 apricot, 1 lemon, 1 quince, 2 pear."³¹ The climate of the Valley was ideal and the orchards and gardens flourished. The children also had their jobs, such as picking and cleaning the fruit. Ruth West can remember plum jam being boiled up in the copper then put into jam jars made out of old beer bottles: "we would make plum jam by the copperful and cut off the beer bottles by putting a red hot ring on their necks and dumping them into hot and cold water. Mum would paste brown paper over the top to keep them sealed."³² Everybody took pride in the quality and the quantity of their preserves. May Ross remembers that her mother always tried to bottle enough fruit to have one bottle for each day of the year. This work had to be done in the middle of summer, and cooking on a wood range would have made it very hot and tiring work. The women considered that it was just part of their workload, their contribution towards the well-being of their families.

Another high-pressure time for all the family was shearing, which created added work for the men, women and children. In the early days of the settlement there were only a few sheep to be shorn and the settlers helped each other. Later, when woolsheds had been built and sheep numbers had risen, a shearing gang came to the valley and did most of the shearing, living with each family while they shored their flock. This was an extremely busy time, although fortunately for only a short period, for the women. Their day would begin with early morning tea for the men at 5am, then they had to prepare a cooked breakfast for them all ready to serve the moment the men returned from the shed at 7.30am. As soon as breakfast was finished preparation began on morning smoko, scones and cakes and large billy-cans of tea that had to be taken to the shed on time. Lunch was a hot cooked meal in the house and again afternoon smoko had to be taken to

³¹LS (1) 26/13074, NA.

³²Ruth West, 'The Bridge to Nowhere', Unpublished Manuscript, Courtesy Ruth West, Rotorua, p.2.

the shed. The evening meal was a full hot dinner, usually served about 6pm. After tea the men would return to the shed to prepare for the next day. The children were usually co-opted into helping in the shed, picking up the wool or as runners taking the smokos down to the shed and bringing back the empty baskets. At the same time much of the regular work had to be done, beds to be made, washing and ironing done, as well as even greater amounts of baking and bread-making. This was similar to many other rural sheep-farming areas throughout New Zealand, but for the women of the Mangapurua, because of their isolation, extra mouths had to be carefully catered for as provisions only came into the Valley every six months.

Although much of the food was grown in the settlers' large gardens, basic staples had to be ordered: "The main things we wanted money for was sugar, flour and tea. ... I remember that I had to order all our supplies for six months."³³ This was a very important job and another responsibility of the women. The lack of 'ready money' to meet the bills for even basic grocery orders put a lot of stress on the women. They needed to exercise great managerial skills to ensure that they had the right quantities of all the essentials, such as flour, tea and sugar, kerosene for lighting, matches, caustic soda (for soap making), baking powder and other cooking necessities. Everything had to be on the list because Hatrick's freight charges were so high. The cost was the same for either a large item or a small one: "Hatrick and Co owned the River Boats and had a monopoly. They virtually owned that river [Wanganui] and their freight charges were high to say the least. There was a flat rate ... be it a sack of chaff or a packet of hair pins."³⁴

³³Irene McIntyre in Bates, 'Mangapurua Secret Revealed', *Wanganui Chronicle*, 23 August 1989, p.20.

³⁴Elizabeth Allen, *A Farm on the Wanganui River*, Wanganui: Wanganui Newspapers Ltd., 1980, p.14.

JEAN BOLTON'S STORES ORDER FOR 16th JUNE 1922

	£	S	D		£	S	D		£	S	D
				Brought forward	£8	4	8	Brought forward	£21	14	6
½ lb Tartaric Acid		1	7½	1 doz pkts Epsom Salts			6	3 tins White Pepper		6	
3 bottles of Ammonia		1	3	1 bottle Lemon Ess			8	10 lbs Rice		2	11
20 lbs Bacon		16	10	1 bottle Vanilla Ess			8	6 lbs Ground Rice		2	9
8 tins Edmonds Baking Powder		13		3 tins Salmon		3	6	12 lbs Sago		3	5
1 lb Baking Soda			2½	3 tins Sardines		2		14 lbs Salt		1	5½
6 lbs Barley		1	5	200 lbs Flour	3	6	4	6 tins Cerebos Salt		6	10
10 lbs Haricot Beans		2	8	3 lbs Dates		1	9	1 lb Saltpetre			8
1 doz tins Zebra Stove Polish		1	4	6 lbs Apples		7	3	6 bottles Tomato Sauce		5	6
1 doz tins Blue Bags		1	3	10 lbs Currants		7	6	1 doz Toilet Soap		6	6
3 tins Bon Ami		2	1½	3 lbs Prunes		2	3	6 boxes Starch		6	6
½ lb Borax			4½	10 lbs Raisins		13	4	70 lbs Sugar	1	3	8
1 large tin Brasso		1	11	10 lbs Sultanas		14	2	10 lbs Tapioca			9
25 lbs Butter	1	17	6	1 lb loose Ginger		1	6	9 pkts Tabacco	1	3	6
1 doz pkts Candles		10		1 bottle Glycerine		1	8	1 doz pkts Papers			10
3 lbs Caustic Soda		10	6	7 lbs Syrup		2		15 lbs Tea	2	5	
¼ lb Cayenne Pepper			10	6 lbs honey		6	6	3 bottles Vinegar		4	9
10 lbs Cheese		10		3 lbs Icing Sugar		1	7½	14 lbs Washing Soda		1	8
1 gross Clothes Pegs		2	8	1 doz tins Jam		10	10				
1 bottle Cochineal			8	7 lbs Marmalade		8	9				
1 lb Cocoa		4	3	1 doz pkts Jelly		5	9				
1 lb Desiccated Coconut			10	1 case Kerosene	1	5			£26	13	2
1 tin Coffee		2	9	6 lbs Lentils		4	3				
1 bottle Coffee Essence		2	10	2 doz boxes Matches		15					
2 lbs Lollies		1	10	2 doz tins Condensed Milk	1	2	10				
12 lbs Brown & Polsons Cornflour		10	3	6 lbs Mustard	1						
1 lb Cream of Tartar		1	10	¼ lb Ground Nutmeg			11				
3 bottles Curry Powder		9	9	1 lb Walnuts		1	6				
1 doz bottles Jeyes Fluid		1	10	25 lbs Oatmeal		7	6				
1 doz pkts Egg Powder		8	9	1 bottle Camphorated Oil		1					
				1 bottle Castor Oil		1	2				
				1 bottle Olive Oil		1	9				
				6 lbs Peas		1	3				
	£8	4	8		£21	14	6				

Source. May Ross.

This stores order, dated 16 June 1922, was the first written by a new bride, Jean Bolton from Glasgow. As she had just entered the Valley it contained items needed to set up house and not generally found on such lists. The total cost appears quite high but that year she would have had no time to establish a garden nor did she have the summer to preserve, pickle and make sauces and jams as most of the other settlers' wives had done. Also included were items, such as butter, which in future she would make herself. Jean was fortunate that her sister lived nearby and would have been available to give her some assistance in the preparation of her list.

Other jobs also had to be fitted into the weekly routines on a regular basis. One of these was making laundry soap. This was also a hot messy task as Ruth West recalls: "We made our own soap by boiling fat in the same copper and adding caustic soda and stirring the whole time to stop it boiling over".³⁵ This 'home-made' soap was used for everyday - dish washing, cleaning floors, and hands and feet while for the Saturday night baths in the big galvanised bath in front of the kitchen stove we used bought toilet soap."³⁶

Many of the settlers worked long hours on the roads to get some 'ready cash'.³⁷ Their wives had little chance of helping to add to the families' incomes because of their isolation. Irene McIntyre recalled that because there was so little money in the first few years while they were trying to establish their farm they had to supplement their income: "this meant that we had to rely on income from things like gathering the soft Jew's Ear fungus which grew on the felled timber and which we sold for \$6.00 per sack. Dad [her husband] used to shoot wild pigs as he got 2/6d per snout if he dried them

³⁵Ruth West, p.2.

³⁶May Ross, ' Nancy Bettjeman's Story ', *Whanganui River Annual*, 1993, p.56.

³⁷Bates, *The Bridge to Nowhere*, p. 65.

and took them into the County Office.³⁸ Vera Aislabie also remembered collecting fungus: "But the fire did give us an unexpected bonus as a source of a little bit of extra money. After a time the tawa stumps would grow fungus and the kids and I would gather it."³⁹

With the continued economic downturn there was little or no money for any extras and pressure was put on the women not only to feed but clothe their families. They made nearly all of their children's clothing and some of their own. Once again, as seen earlier, the versatility of the sugar and flour bags showed up and a variety of things were made from them:

Bags of any sort in those days were hoarded. Flour came in 50lb or 100lb bags. The uses of them were legend. Two 100s opened up and joined together made a sheet for a child's bed, bleached and dyed - wee boys wore shirts to school of them, grey or khaki - I favoured grey, with white for Sunday, underclothes for all sorts, pants and bra, small boys' and girls' pyjamas, trimmed with scraps of floral material or embroidery.⁴⁰

In the evenings and whenever they had some time to spare the women would knit or embroider. As Toynbee writes more generally, "These women also sewed, knitted attended to their children's homework and generally kept the household going, all the time exercising principles of domestic thrift unknown today."⁴¹

Another part of the women's work was to take care of any sickness or injury that happened to their families. The major task, of course, was caring for their husbands, their bread-winners. They would often be away from daylight to dark working to clear

³⁸Irene McIntyre in Bates, 'Mangapurua Secret Revealed', *Wanganui Chronicle*, 23 August 1989, p.20. This seems a very high price for the time, Harry Brown thinks it was about 1/- a snout. Interview with Brown, 3 November 1997.

³⁹Vera Aislabie in Bates, 'Memories Recalled...', *Wanganui Chronicle*, 2 August 1986, p.9.

⁴⁰Bates, *The Bridge to Nowhere*, p.157.

⁴¹Toynbee, p.50.

the heavy bush off the land, a highly dangerous occupation, especially as many of the young soldiers were unskilled in this kind of work. Many of the wives were concerned about what would happen in the case of an accident. It was, after all, a two day trip to the nearest doctor, either in Raetihi or Wanganui.

Elida Brown, who in 1919 as a young bride went into the neighbouring valley, describes some of these anxieties:

One point was the everlasting fear of illness and no help at hand.

This fear seems to be at the bottom of every back country woman's heart.

The fear of a blocked road, or a dangerous road and nursing a seriously sick child or husband without medical advice or nursing assistance.

The fear of a mother's possible illness with no one at hand to attend to the family.

Serious complications or accidents could occur before help arrived.⁴²

In this respect the Mangapurua was fortunate because there was a highly qualified nurse settled in the Valley who was willing to assist whenever needed. Many of the children recall the respect held by all for Nancy Bettjeman. Her nursing services were called upon in many different ways, assisting at childbirth, stitching up the bushmen's wounds and setting broken bones as well as tending to dogs which had been badly ripped by wild pigs. " Nancy's nursing qualifications made her the unofficial health authority in the valley. The Red Cross provided a trunk of medical supplies and replenished it when required."⁴³

Only three children were born in the Valley, all being premature births. Most women would leave the valley at least a couple of weeks before the due date. Several

⁴² Elida Brown, 'Memories of the Mangatiti when It Was Farmed By The 'Diggers', *Wanganui Chronicle Farm Review*, 1967, p.24.

⁴³ Bates, 'Bettjeman, Agnes Muir 1885-1964, Bettjeman, Fredrick Charles 1884-1987', in *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, 1921-40*, Claudia Orange (ed.), vol.4, Wellington: Bridget Williams Books/ Department of Internal Affairs, 1998, p.59.

always went to Wellington to have their babies, staying with relations until the birth and afterwards until they were well enough to return home. Others had their children in Wanganui or went to Raetihi. Those that had no relations to stay with faced quite high expenses, first their stay in a boarding house then the cost of the Maternity Home.

Vera Aislabie remembers that she had to ride part of the way out to Raetihi to have her babies:

I'd ride out and be met at the foot of the hill by Lou Barnard who would take me out....
I had to stay at a private hospital for two or three weeks at Raetihi as public hospitals wouldn't take maternity patients. It cost nearly \$170 of our own hard won dollars as I'd be taken in to Nurse Goulay's Hospital in plenty of time.⁴⁴

Within the Valley all members of the family were expected to bond together for the good of the whole. Work was not for work's sake but was necessary to keep up the standards that were important and for the progress of the farm which was to be the provider for the whole family. The comparison between the work expected from the women of the Mangapurua and other rural women in different areas indicates that there was little difference in the workloads when considering the domestic part of their duties. The rural families interviewed by Toynbee all recall stories of the housework, how it was done, and the assistance expected from the children, especially the girls, similar to those told by the children of the Mangapurua. As Toynbee's interviewees were all about twenty years older than the children of the Mangapurua it indicates that the Valley was 'behind the times', in comparison to contemporary but less isolated rural areas. By the late 1930s, if compared with Doig's survey on the *Standards*

⁴⁴Vera Aislabie in Bates, 'The Final Years in Mangapurua Valley', *Wanganui Chronicle*, 9 August 1986.

of life of New Zealand Dairy Farmers, the Valley families had narrowed the gap and there was not the wide difference in conveniences that there had been previously. The major problem for the Mangapurua was their access road. It was narrow and prone to closure due to slips.

The greatest difference between the work that the women of the Mangapurua did and the work done by the women in other areas was that there was little or no farm assistance given by them. Feeding shearers or others working on the farm was their share. This is in contrast to Toynbee who found that many women and their daughters ran the dairy side of the farm as well as assisting in many other ways. Doig also found that, in many of the families that he surveyed, women gave a great amount of time helping on the farm as well as doing their own domestic duties.

CHAPTER SIX

STANDARDS AND VALUES AMONG THE WOMEN

"The meal table was always laid correctly regardless of the circumstances. Starched white table cloths and cutlery and crockery correctly laid according to the particular meal."¹

The aim of this chapter is to try and establish the importance, to the women of the Valley, of maintaining their standards and values. Did this strict adherence to these standards help them to overcome their isolation and, what must have been at times, a very lonely life? Many of these women had been "reared... in a discipline of duty and self effacement."² Isolation could have meant that there was less pressure on the women to maintain the social standards of the time, such as wearing hats and gloves when they went visiting, changing into an afternoon dress or starching white tablecloths could have been neglected. It would seem, however, that rather than relaxing the social codes of behaviour, isolation meant that the standards were strengthened and existed for a longer period in the Valley than in more populated areas.

There are several possible reasons why this may have occurred. Firstly and perhaps the main reason, was that these standards were not being eroded by outside influences of the developing modern world. Another factor to be considered could be that the women kept their standards high to help them overcome their loneliness in the isolated place they were living. They were determined that their primitive living conditions were not going to undermine their standards. It was a way which helped them to cope and to keep the ideal of a 'stiff upper lip'. This seems to be indicated in the formal codes of address and behaviours that the women

¹ Arthur P. Bates, (ed.), "*Okoroa*" *A Wanganui River Diary*. Wanganui: Wanganui Newspapers Ltd, 1988, p.14.

² Elizabeth Allen, *A Farm of the Wanganui River*, Wanganui: Wanganui Newspapers Ltd, 1980, p.69.

practised. Possibly they developed because of the social backgrounds of the women who entered the Valley, middle to upper class, which meant they were careful to preserve their dignity in an alien environment.

The men who came into the Valley saw their farms as a 'step forward', a way to climb the class ladder, and the acreage of the farms was one incentive to move into the Valley. Jack Ward recalled this feeling of the future: "I started to feel a bit excited at the thought of standing on my own section, even though it was a bit rough at present ... perhaps some day I would look out over a successful and prosperous farm from this spot."³ The idea was that runholders were 'gentlemen farmers', with large farms and employing workers, in contrast to small dairy farms which were 'hands-on' and labour-intensive for the whole family, leaning to the yeoman-farmer concept. This attitude would suggest that some of the values and standards practised in the Valley were preconceived notions of how certain sections of the community behaved.

One of the major problems facing the women in the Mangapurua was the lack of kinsfolk. In the early part of the twentieth century kinship was an integral part of New Zealand society. Relations were nearly always nearby to lend a hand when necessary. "Kinship was important in economic life in those days because many businesses and farms relied on unpaid family labour, either on a day-to-day basis, or at times when the demand for labour was high."⁴ In the Mangapurua there was only one family who had the comfort of relations living nearby: Nancy Bettjeman's sister

³Jack Ward in Arthur P. Bates, *The Bridge to Nowhere. The Ill-fated Mangapurua Settlement*, Wanganui: Wanganui Newspapers Ltd., 7th edition, 1993, p.39.

⁴Claire Toynbee, *Her Work and His. Family, Kin and Community in New Zealand 1900-1930*, Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1995, p.105.

came out from Scotland for a visit and ended up marrying "the handsome farmer over the way,"⁵ Herb Bolton.

All the children interviewed recall the efforts their parents, especially their mothers, made to maintain the standards they brought into the Valley with them. Sometimes this must have added greatly to their already heavy workload. Harry Mason, from "Okoroa", wrote about the starched white table cloths that his mother always insisted on having on the table for each meal. How much extra work washing, starching and ironing would that have entailed?⁶ David Hellowell remembers that his mother always kept things as nice as possible considering the conditions in which they lived.⁷ In the Bettjeman house their mother made sure that the table was set correctly, especially when there were visitors. May Ross recounted the story about how a visitor, the school inspector who was staying at their place for the night, commented "about the good standard of living she maintained although we were so isolated. I think mother was a bit put out because she replied, ' Just because we live so far from a more civilised society doesn't give us the excuse to live in a rough manner'."⁸

Relationships between the women within the Valley were generally kept on a very formal basis. The children all recall how strictly a code of manners was adhered to by nearly all the permanent settlers. The men all called each other by their Christian names but few of the women ever addressed other women by anything other than their formal title of Mrs or Miss. May Ross recalls that the only family that they, as children, ever addressed as Uncle and Aunty, apart from

⁵Interview with May Ross, 21 April 1997.

⁶Bates, (ed.), "Okoroa", p.14.

⁷Interview with David Hellowell, 6 June 1997.

⁸Letter May Ross to author, November 1997, p.10.

their mother's sister and her husband, the Bolttons, were Barney and Ivy Dust: "...the women all called each other Mrs, or Mr and their last names. We children always called adults Mr or Mrs."⁹ In some cases the women would have known each other for ten years or more. It seems that for the women to become too familiar with each other could have weakened their determination to remain stoic and made their isolation and loneliness much more acute. Also had they shown their feelings too much their relationships with their husbands could have been affected. The men were already in a desperate financial situation and pressure from inside the family would have given him a greater sense of failure.

The Minute Book of the Women's Institute nearly always gave formal identification to members, Mrs this or Miss that, and there was no mention of Christian names. In fact there was only one entry in the book that used Christian names, where two younger members were called "Daphne and Beth."¹⁰ Even plants and cuttings named after their donors were called by their formal titles. "A stranger may have been surprised to hear someone remark that the scent of Mrs Hellawell was wonderful, that Mrs Hamilton was laughing in her corner and that Mrs Mowat sure tasted good - but we knew honey-suckle, red hot pokers and huge white cauliflowers."¹¹

The fact that they kept everything on a formal basis must have made it so much more difficult for the women to confide their problems to another person. How did they convey their unhappiness and loneliness to someone they only addressed in a very formal manner? The fact that they were childless, or had a

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ Minutes from June Meeting 1936, Mangapurua Women's Institute, Waimarino Museum, Raetihi.

¹¹ Agnes Anderson in Bates, *The Bridge to Nowhere*, p.152.

still-born baby, or were desperately lonely were all kept locked up under the cover of formality. Many old adages came into play with this mental outlook: "A lady does not lose her temper, a lady does not make a fuss' she had said. Yes Mother, and she never grizzles when things go wrong, we know'.¹² How hard it must have been for these well-educated women, coming from the lifestyles they had previously known, to accept the change in circumstances. Mac Bettjeman recalls being totally devastated when he came in and found his mother in tears. He never knew what had caused them, homesick for Scotland or just the weight of loneliness? "Mother was extremely, I thought, unemotional. I suppose, I think deliberately so, so that the family didn't catch her displaying her emotions."¹³

These ideas did not make things easy for women who were really depressed. One side of them would be telling them to make the best of things while they were silently crying out for help. One woman who lived in the Valley is said to have attempted to commit suicide by jumping off a bridge but did little physical damage to herself. This action may have been the reason that her husband, a reasonably successful farmer, decided to forfeit his section. Another wife also seriously considered drowning herself in the Mangapurua. "I suppose that Dad was away out in the hills and she was feeling depressed and she said she thought she might take her own life. This is what she told me - She said you were such a sweet little girl. I'm walking down and you were holding my hand and I get to the river and you had such a little smile, a lovely smile, I couldn't do it so I walked back up."¹⁴ In 1936 Nellie McDonald wrote to their Member of Parliament, Frank Langstone, Minister of Lands, asking for an advance of £60 so that they could buy a second-hand car. One

¹²Allen, p.42.

¹³Interview with Mac Bettjeman, 1 June 1997.

¹⁴Interview with Ivy Mossop, 8 October 1997.

reason she mentioned to further the cause was her ill health; "I have already had one nervous breakdown and feel like another. The monotony is awful in here."¹⁵

Now Mr Langstone we or rather I have lived in this Valley for sixteen years and never as much as been to Raetihi to spend Xmas Eve. Don't you think that you could as Minister of Lands give us [a car] to take our children out to see festive season or are we to serve life imprisonment for the term of our natural life. ... and we could get a run out to enjoy ourselves and whats more our children see a bit of enlightenment.¹⁶

Hugh McDonald also wrote of the inconvenience that not having a car caused the family, stating how difficult they were finding it to get the family out to Raetihi for medical assistance. "The family is growing up and it is very inconvenient to get them out to the Dr. or having their teeth attended too.[sic]"¹⁷ The McDonalds did get a car shortly after these letters were written but by the tone of the replies from the Government it did not advance a loan at that time. Ivy continued by saying how much she admired the strength and courage of her mother in overcoming her depression. She knew that her mother was a city person but was able to persevere. She was the last woman to leave the Valley.

May Ross talked about her mother always changing into an afternoon dress after she had finished her 'rough cleaning' morning work. She also changed her hair style. In the morning she wore her hair in a single bun and covered it with " what she called a mob cap to cover her long hair. It was a circular piece of material threaded round the edge with elastic forming a frill."¹⁸ In the afternoon she took

¹⁵Letter Nellie McDonald to Frank Langstone, 10 July 1936, LS(1) 26/1940, NA.

¹⁶Letter Nellie McDonald to Frank Langstone, 2 December 1936, LS(1) 26/1940, NA.

¹⁷Letter Hugh MacDonald to Frank Langstone, 10 August 1936, LS(1) 26/1940, NA.

¹⁸Letter Ross to author, 17 May 1997.

off the cap and redid her hair into two smaller buns over her ears.¹⁹ Being appropriately dressed for the occasion was important to everyone, even in the early days of the settlement. "Despite the rough and ready nature of the Valley, it was always a matter of principle to wear one's best clothes when going down to Pipiriki on one of Mr Hatrick's boats."²⁰

There was a simple pride taken in presenting their homes and families in the best possible manner, to demonstrate to each other and to visitors how well they kept up their standards despite their living conditions. "In such communities, [small and close knit] status is earned by individuals who are directly evaluated on the basis of their personal qualities."²¹ The Mangapurua was small but evidence is growing that they were not a close knit community as the formality they practised indicates. David Hellawell thought that his Mother would have considered anyone not having a flower garden to be uncultured.

She had a nice garden - flower garden, it was the thing.
You should have a flower garden, you were primitive if you didn't. That would have been her outlook Most women then would think that was an adjunct to civilisation, to have a nice garden.
A little bit of culture.²²

At meal times tables were set with all the correct cutlery and crockery. At dinner-time most of the men stripped to the waist and washed before changing into clean clothes before eating and the children washed their hands and feet.²³ In the Mason household everyone changed for dinner:

The family always changed to clean clothes before the evening meal and on special occasions such as

¹⁹ibid.

²⁰Bates, *The Bridge to Nowhere*, p.95.

²¹Toynbee, p.30.

²²Interview with Hellawell, 6 June 1997.

²³Letter Ross to author, November 1997.

birthdays or when special lady visitors were staying, the men folk would wear a collar and tie and the ladies their jewellery. Even the children did this.²⁴

Another way that showed that they were not prepared to let their standards slip was their care of their own and children's clothes. Most women made most of their own clothes as well as their children's clothes. "A certain standard which they tried to keep up, not flashily dressed but properly dressed."²⁵ Lake also found that the Australian women she studied worked hard to present a good face to outsiders. "A mother's skill and hard work could transform a family's public face; a change of clothes offered some relief from the stigma of poverty."²⁶ Although many of the children's clothes were made out of flour bags the children were never allowed to use them if they had holes in them. David Hellowell remembers that his mother put patches on the seat of his pants but it did not cause him any embarrassment: "We were always well dressed in the sense that we weren't cold or ragged ... having a patch on the seat of your pants was no stigma - all the kids had that."²⁷ None of the children were concerned about the origins of their clothes, after all they were all wearing similar things.

Most of the children went bare-footed, especially in the summer, but they always wore shoes when visiting or when on their infrequent visits to town. Clothes were passed down to the next child as one grew out of them, if there was any wear left in them. They were also pleased to receive parcels from relatives which included clothing for the family; nobody was too proud to refuse hand-me-downs. Adult clothing was often cut down to make clothes for the children. The isolation of the Valley sheltered the children from any stigma because of their clothes. This

²⁴Bates, (ed.), "*Okoroa*", p.14.

²⁵Interview with Hellowell, 6 June 1997.

²⁶Marilyn Lake, *The Limits of Hope Soldier Settlement in Victoria 1915-38*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press 1987, p.151.

²⁷Interview with Hellowell, 6 June 1997.

was in contrast to the Victorian soldier settlements that Lake surveyed where children felt victimised by their teachers because of their muddy boots. "Work clothes and boots could seem out of place in the schoolroom. Cecil Lamb, a settler's son, retains a painful memory of arriving at school ... in muddy boots to face daily shoe inspections."²⁸ It was only outside influences that made the Valley children aware and ashamed of their clothing, as Agnes Anderson recalled: " Did I not win a competition with a small girl's frock and pants? [made out of flour bags] ... Myra wore that frock with pride until we went to Marton and the first day she went to school she proudly told its origin (she was nine or ten) but, alas, Marton kids did not admire it so it soon stayed at home."²⁹ The idea of flour-bag clothes seems at a variance to silver, good china and dressing for dinner but it must be remembered that china and silver would have been brought into the Valley when the women arrived. Agnes Anderson recounted the following story about how some women tried to maintain their standards against almost hopeless odds:

I remember a lady from Whakahoro who got burnt out one day saying of her children who were put out round the neighbours: 'they may have been dressed in flour bags, but there was not one hole amongst the six of them,' and when one remembers her really dreadful whare, helpless husband, her absolute minimum of conveniences or comfort, it was indeed a tribute to the spirit and enterprise that there was not one hole amongst the six of them. Poor little lass - a product of one of England's middle-class families - who had never worked in her life - but she coped.³⁰

Even in the latter years of the Valley some of the last settlers showed a very conservative attitude towards what they thought was appropriate dress for their children. May Ross remembers a visit, in the early 1930s, with her Mother and her sister Daphne, to a friend who lived in Raetihi. The daughter of the house, "who was

²⁸Lake, p.145.

²⁹Agnes Anderson, Unpublished Manuscript, Courtesy of Myra Barron, Balclutha, p.59.

³⁰Anderson, p.61.

very modern and wore lipstick,"³¹ proudly showed the visitors her new ball gown, "it was long and had no back to the waist and was decidedly décolleté at the front."³² On the way home the two girls discussed the ball gown but their mother had very different views on the matter: "It was quite disgusting and the lipstick she was wearing made her look very 'fast'.³³ May Ross recalls that it took her a long time to overcome her parents' early training and become 'modern'.

In the Bettjeman family everyone was expected to be on time for meals and to remain seated at the table until permission was given to leave. "Your Mother has spent a lot of time preparing the meal so it is only courtesy that you show your appreciation and remain at the table until the end of the meal."³⁴ Although there was not a lot of visiting between the women in the Valley, because of distance, the state of the roads and lack of transport, coupled with the formal behaviours that had been established, whenever they did visit there was a lot of effort to provide a good afternoon tea. There were sandwiches, scones and several different kinds of cakes all served on the best china and the tables were covered with lace tablecloths. This ritual was an outward sign of how well they were coping and how they had kept up their high standards in an alien environment.

The men were all careful of their language when they were talking to the women and children but some of them were apt to forget that the hills echoed and that they could be heard working their dogs quite clearly. A story from the Valley tells how one husband would implore his wife to go indoors whenever their neighbour

³¹Letter Ross to author, November 1997. p.11.

³²ibid.

³³ibid.

³⁴Letter Ross to author, 17 May 1997.

started mustering as the language he used was highly 'colourful'.³⁵ May Ross also mentions how careful her father was with his language:

He was very careful never to swear near my mother or any woman really. However sometimes he didn't realise how his voice carried from high on the hill in one of the nearer paddocks and the dogs were not being obedient. However if any of us kids thought it funny to repeat some of those words we really did get our mouths washed out with soapy water.³⁶

Children were expected to show respect to their elders and their parents were fairly strict about manners. All the children recall that their parents expected their children's behaviour to reflect the standards that their parents had laid down. Children addressed all adults by their formal titles and always stood up when an adult entered the room and remained standing until the lady was seated. Men did not shake hands with a lady, only with another man. Mac Bettjeman remarked that this training in etiquette was to put pressures on him in later life when these actions were no longer part of accepted social behaviour.³⁷ Men also stood up whenever a woman came into a room. Children were expected to open a door for someone older than themselves then stand back and let them go first. Rudeness in any form was not tolerated. May Ross recounts the story about the dreadful trouble she and her sister got into and the embarrassment that they caused her parents when they got the giggles while having a meal at a neighbour's house:

We stopped there to have lunch. People were always very hospitable and generous. Anyway we were having lunch there. I remember sitting at the long table ... my sister Daphne and me and maybe at this stage Mac might have been just a little fellow. [Our host] was a bit of a health freak and believed that you chewed every mouthful 22 times. He was a very thin man with a very big nose and he had a very very obvious 'Adam's apple'. He was sitting opposite and he was chewing his meat and this

³⁵Pat Fry, *Ita and Fred - A Family History*, Unpublished Manuscript, Courtesy of Pat Fry, Wellington, p.73.

³⁶Letter Ross to author, 17 May 1997.

³⁷Interview with Bettjeman, 1 June 1997.

'apple' was going up and down, up and down. Well it got too much for my sister and I and we started to giggle. We couldn't stop we just kept on giggling and giggling. Well my poor parents were so embarrassed and Dad got so cross.... So in the end Dad said 'Excuse me, but these girls must leave the table immediately.'³⁸

Although the head of the family was definitely the man, within the house itself the wife was in sole charge. Parents showed a united front to their children, always backing each other in the matter of discipline, although Mac Bettjeman remembers that their mother would sometimes intervene if she thought their father was being too severe.³⁹

Alcohol was always a part of the Valley life and it was more part of the men's social activities than the women's, but it did impact on them. The constraints put on the men did not stop the drinking of alcohol but coupled with the downturn in the economy seems to have reduced the level of consumption. The Mangapurua was in a 'dry' area so the settlers had to devise their own ways to overcome the 'drought'.⁴⁰ In the 1930s several crazes swept the Valley to overcome the problem. The first was making plum wine from the yellow Kitchener plum that grew so well in the Valley. Fred Bettjeman is credited with the idea, although his wife was not so pleased, remarking: "There is always money for men."⁴¹ It is easy to understand her frustration as the women were having to budget so carefully, to feed and dress their families, then to have the men happily spend 15/- a bag on sugar for their own pleasure would not have been pleasing. However wine making continued during the season and there was much friendly rivalry to produce the best vintage.

³⁸Interview with Ross, 21 April 1997.

³⁹Interview with Bettjeman, 1 June 1997.

⁴⁰Anderson, p.43/44.

⁴¹ibid., p.43.

Next came home-brew. Many different varieties were trialled and new ideas were experimented. "Dad who always sought perfection became an expert and it was he who had the great separator idea. To clear the mixture put it through a separator - the sediment came out and the sparkling ale flowed out through the skim milk spout."⁴² Irene McIntyre remembered using the weed Hoarshound, which grew freely on new burns, to make beer.⁴³ It seems possible that these crazes were a way that the settlers could get away from the grind of everyday life. Rather than drowning their sorrows in drink they not only made it and also had the pleasure of drinking it.

In conclusion there does seem to be a link between the importance of the values and standards maintained in the Valley and how the women coped with their isolation. These standards were their outward signs which gave them the strength to control and overcome difficulties. The children all felt that their mothers were too busy simply dealing with the necessities of life and bringing up their families to add to their burdens by doing unnecessary work. This may have been so to a large extent but such things as always having white starched tablecloths on the table for every meal does seem to be an added burden considering how few facilities they had. Another sign of the importance of keeping up their standards was the effort that was put into the formal afternoon tea parties. Several of the children remarked that there was perhaps only one person in the Valley that had the spare time to make extra work for herself, 'work for work's sake' and that was because she had no children.⁴⁴ Harry Mason on the other hand is positive that his Mother's

⁴²ibid., p.44.

⁴³Irene McIntyre in Bates, 'Mangapurua Secret Revealed' *Wanganui Chronicle*, 23 August 1989. p.20.

⁴⁴Interview with Mossop, 8 October 1997.

strict adherence to her self-imposed standards was her way of dealing with an alien environment and her isolation.

May Ross considers that one reason why most of the women coped so well with their change in life-style was the fact that they had been told what to expect. They knew that their homes would be simpler and that they would have none of the comforts and 'mod cons' they had been accustomed to. There was one woman, that she knew about, who was unhappy living in the Valley. May Ross thinks that the reason for this was that she had been led to believe that her living conditions would be better than she found them. Being prepared was a way of being able to face the situations which arose; not just to accept but to rise above them. Knowing empowered the women and strengthened them so that they could overcome problems and improve their conditions. In this sense their flower gardens would have been a way of coping.

Most women of this generation were expected to hide their emotions, one did not cry in public or moan about one's problems. This attitude could help explain some of the formality within the Valley. Their pioneering lifestyle, and primitive conditions emphasised the isolation. That a young mother a toddler, pregnant and a Catholic would even consider taking her own life indicates some of the emotional problems faced by these women. They had no family nearby to support them, and showing that they were unable to cope was an unacceptable alternative.

Within the Valley there does not seem to have been any social distinctions between the settlers, all were accepted for what they were: "They [Mrs Mowat and

Mary] spoke in an affected manner but they were nice,"⁴⁵ but the women all seem to have been very reserved and mostly they kept things to themselves. This reserve was maintained until the last settlers left the Valley, even if they were able to visit each other more easily because of the road and could maintain contact with the telephone. Harry Brown, who lived in the Mangatiti, thought that his mother used the telephone as a means of social contact rather than visiting the neighbours. "As far as families visiting, they didn't visit each other. The Milbanks were only about a mile away. I can never remember my mother visiting the Milbanks or *vice versa*. Brights might have come once a year."⁴⁶ The Mangatiti road was opened to Raetihi much earlier than the Mangapurua's road access was opened, which may have accounted for the lack of social contact within the Mangatiti. Mrs Brown did belong to the Mangapurua Women's Institute and visited families in that Valley.

Even if there was only infrequent visiting, all the women worked hard to present to all who did visit them a high standard of cleanliness, cooking and flower gardens, showing just how well they were managing under difficult circumstances. The security that the women got from maintaining set standards and values would have been of assistance in helping to cope with their isolation but it would not have been the solution. Many of these standards and values that the children of the Valley learnt from their parents remain with them to this day.

⁴⁵Vera Aislabie in Bates, 'The Aislabies...', *Whanganui River Annual 1996*, p.60.

⁴⁶Interview with Brown, 3 November 1997.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SOCIAL ORGANISATION

"Sociability is the means by which people create, maintain and reinforce their patterns of collective social life, their shared meanings."¹

This chapter will investigate the various organisations formed in the Valley and their importance to the welfare of the settlers. It will also examine the leisure-time activities of the community as a whole and how the people undertook and shared the responsibilities related to their district. Within the Valley there was little visiting between the women. Often they would not see each other for long periods of time,² although they were in contact by telephone.

Societies need guide-lines and support structures for stability and unity. For this reason many new communities organised themselves into clubs, committees and organisations to further the collective interest, and provide a source of comfort. In many communities the main feature that was common to most was their religion.

In many early settlements throughout New Zealand there was often one predominant social, religious or ethnic background. Where possible people chose to settle among those who had the same ethnic and cultural backgrounds, which meant that they usually held the same religious beliefs too. This gave them an understanding of each other's needs, which was a comfort when embarking on a

¹ Claire Toynbee, *Her Work and His Family, Kin and Community in New Zealand 1900-1930*, Wellington: Victoria University Press. 1995, p136.

² 'Mangapurua', *Home and Country. The Journal of the New Zealand Women's Institute*. 1 January 1935, p.9.

strange new life. For many settlements one of their first priorities was the establishment of a church, or a place to gather and worship. In his book *Settler Kaponga*, Rollo Arnold writes about the rapid development of the settlement and how in less than three years a busy village, which included a Wesleyan church, had grown from the bush.³ The church would, in many cases, be a pivotal point of the society. "Sociability was associated with farming work, attendance at church and with the numerous events organised in the community and attended by men, women and children together."⁴ People who did not belong or held different religious beliefs were considered outsiders to the community and were not given the same degree of support. Communities which did not have this common bond were more fragmented. As these differing religious groups became established they developed within New Zealand a negative and divisive attitudes towards different churches and cultures.

Religion had no community significance to the Valley because of the mixed religious backgrounds of the returned servicemen who settled there. There were several Presbyterians, some Anglicans, a member of the Salvation Army and at least one Roman Catholic. At no time was there any thought of building a church or even holding services in their own homes as was done in the neighbouring Ruatiti Valley.⁵ On only one occasion did a clergyman ever enter the Valley: "One day the parson came to call - the first one ever to get into the block - a nice wee man. He arranged a service to be held at the school and when he beheld Mike [her infant son] still a heathen he nipped in and arranged a christening too. All the Valley Protestants and Catholics turned up."⁶ That the Catholic family attended the service was unusual as

³Rollo Arnold, *Settler Kaponga 1881 - 1914. A Frontier Fragment of the Western World*, Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1997, p.101

⁴Toynbee, p.136/7.

⁵Interview with the MacIntyre family, 7 April 1997.

⁶Agnes Anderson, Unpublished Manuscript, Courtesy of Myra Barron, Balclutha, p.15.

attending the church of another faith was considered a sin. This was the only reference to any service being held in the Mangapurua, and it did not become a regular feature of the community. The children interviewed made no mention of the christening and none recall ever going to a church service. They all received their religious teaching from their parents, particularly their mothers.⁷ However it seems that there were incidences of disharmony between some of the settlers that may be attributed to religious bigotry.

In the Mangapurua the settlers were not of the same religious belief so no church was ever erected there, nor any parish community formed. The only common bond was that the men were all returned servicemen and all about the same age. Jock Phillips discusses this special bond in *A Man's Country*, describing it as a "mateship of circumstance" ⁸ then continues: This perhaps explains the extraordinary nostalgia that surrounded mateship after the war - never again would circumstance create such tight bonds between men.⁹ This bond was strengthened in the first few years of the Valley's life as it was a community of males who supported each other on their farms by sharing the workloads, helping each other with fencing, seeding, shearing and building their homes as well as joining together for entertainment and sports.

The first quasi-formal organisation in the Valley was the all-male Mangapurua Returned Soldiers' Settlement Committee. This was established in 1920 when all the settlers gathered at the informal opening of the new swing bridge which replaced the frightening 'flying fox' in use up to that time. The men decided that a

⁷Interview with May Ross, 21 April 1997.

⁸Jock Phillips, *A Man's Country? The Image of the Pakeha Male - A History*, Auckland: Penguin Books, 1987, p.207.

⁹ibid.

committee would have a greater influence than single voices when raising the concerns of the settlers.¹⁰ This Committee, often referred to as the Settlers' Association, was to work tirelessly throughout the life of the Valley to improve the settlers' conditions. As a collective voice it approached the government and other agencies for help to improve the standard of life.

The Settlers' Association was an all-male committee and generally dealt with matters which were considered to be in the men's field of duties. The Association was run in an informal manner with no regular meetings or minutes. The men met whenever something came up that required their collective attention. Phil Bennett, who originated the idea,¹¹ was elected chairman, a position that he held throughout his whole life in the Valley. The secretaryship changed hands several times. Letters written to Government Departments were signed by different people all using the title "Secretary of the Mangapurua Returned Soldiers' Settlement Committee."¹² This may have been because the holder of the office had left and someone else had to take on the work. The main work of the Association was to approach the government on financial matters, such as mortgage and rental relief, revaluation of their land, increases in the amount of money available for loan, and their road.

It played an important role in the development of the Valley too. From the Association came the request to the Post Office for a paid mailman to collect and deliver the mail from the landing. Up until about 1921 the mail had just been left at the landing and delivered by whoever happened to be there at the time, which was rather haphazard. It was also responsible for the telephone system installed in the

¹⁰ Arthur P. Bates, *The Bridge to Nowhere, The Ill-fated Mangapurua Settlement*, 7th edition, Wanganui: Wanganui Newspapers Ltd., 1993, p.67.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p.67.

¹² LS(1) 26/296, NA.

Valley in about 1923. Not only did the Association put in the request but on receiving the equipment from the Post and Telegraph Department organised the settlers to erect the lines and install the telephones.

The only other group to be formed in the Valley was also a single-sex organisation, although it was formed fourteen years after the Settlers' Association. In 1934 Agnes Anderson, a relative newcomer to the Valley, suggested that a branch of the Women's Institute should be formed. On 27 April the women gathered at Agnes Anderson's home to meet and hear "Mrs Millen, president of the Wanganui [Federation of the] Women's Institute, [which] culminated in an Institute being formed here."¹³ The inaugural meeting was attended by practically every women in the settlement.¹⁴ A newspaper article mentioned that it was the smallest and most isolated Institute in New Zealand and concluded: "And so ended a meeting unique in the history of not only Wanganui district, but of the Dominion as a whole."¹⁵ Nancy Bettjeman was elected president and Agnes Anderson was the secretary.¹⁶ In contrast to the men's Association, the Institute was part of a worldwide organisation and so had to conform to its modes and practices, such as keeping minutes of all its meetings.

The New Zealand Women's Institute was established in 1921 to improve the conditions for rural women and children.¹⁷ It promoted motherhood and home management and "believed that raising the status of domestic work would raise the

¹³Minutes from 27 April 1934 meeting of the Mangapurua Women's' Institute, Waimarino Museum, Raetihi.

¹⁴*Wanganui Chronicle*, April/May 1934. (This paper is unavailable at this time).

¹⁵ibid.

¹⁶Minutes from 27 April 1934 meeting of the Mangapurua W. I.

¹⁷Rosemarie Smith, 'The Heart of the Country. Rural Organisations' in Anne Else, (ed.), *Women Together. A History of Women's Organisations in New Zealand. Ngā Rōpū Wāhine o te Motu*, Wellington: Daphne Brasell Associates Press/ Department of Internal Affairs, 1993, p.377.

status of all women."¹⁸ It was a non-political, secular and practical organisation which promoted thrift and self-sufficiency, which was so much a part of the daily lives of the women living in the Mangapurua. The Women's Institute placed importance on using the correct procedures when conducting meetings. Although the meetings were held in different homes everybody attending contributed towards the afternoon's activities. The fact of having an appointed person to run the meeting meant the hostess of the month only had to supply the space and the crockery needed.

The monthly meetings were always well attended and were extremely important to the women. "It being the only day in the month we come face to face. Less than a year ago, months would pass without this happening."¹⁹ The men were also supportive of the of the Institute, driving their wives and neighbours to the meetings.²⁰ Some of the members rode to the meetings and at least two from the Mangatiti, Miss Stafford and Mrs Brown were regular attenders. Being a branch of a nation-wide organisation aligned them to the rest of New Zealand and made them less isolated. People could read about their activities in the Institute magazine, *Home and Country*, and they could enjoy reading about what was happening to others throughout the country. It must have been a comfort to know that others had similar problems.

One of the first objectives of the Institute was to raise funds to build a community hall. This project indicates the feeling of permanency within the Valley at that time, and the looking forward to the future; but no site was ever selected

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p.379.

¹⁹ 'Mangapurua' *Home and Country, The Journal of the New Zealand Women's Institute*, 1 January 1935, p.9.

²⁰ *ibid.*

to build the hall. Another reason for the project could have been that everyone wanted a place that was neutral ground to hold their meetings, a place where there was no competitiveness, no showing how well you were doing or trying to hide failure. They put on dances and organised a horticultural show in early 1935 to raise funds for the hall. Unfortunately the show had to be cancelled because of bad weather. When the Institute folded and the Valley closed they had raised "nine pounds, eleven shillings and four pence," for the hall fund.²¹ Members were also able to participate in Institute activities outside the Valley. They went to Federation Conferences and took part in competitions organised in their district.²²

The Women's Institute allowed the women to make a positive contribution to the Valley community as they had put in place a committee structure that could organise activities within the Valley. It was in the Institute that the Valley women came closest to being a close-knit community. They were able to talk, swap recipes and ideas as well as work together for the common good of the Valley and help those less fortunate by raising funds and sending toys and clothes to different charities.²³ According to the minute book these varied from Disabled Soldiers and the Blind, through to a 5/- donation to the Surf Club,²⁴ which was presumably at Wanganui and seems rather odd, but no explanation was given. In January 1936 the members decided to send 5/- to "Mrs Kelso Dominion Organiser to help with expenses for delegate to Washington USA Conference of Associated Countrywomen of the World."²⁵ All these activities gave members a glimpse of what was happening in a wider world. By 1937 there were only five members left so they were forced to

²¹Letter re Mangapurua Women's Institute from Olive Millen, V. O. Ruapehu Federation of Women's Institutes, July 1937, Waimarino Museum, Raetihi.

²²Minutes from the Annual Meeting, 12 March 1936, Mangapurua Women's Institute Minute Book.

²³1934/ 35 Annual Report, Mangapurua Women's Institute Minute Book.

²⁴ibid., May 1935.

²⁵ibid., January 1936.

disband. The money raised for the hall fund was divided, some going to the school, some to the Federation and some kept in trust.²⁶

By 1925 a number of children had reached school age so the Wanganui Education Board was approached about the possibility of setting up a school. " This request was turned down and eventually my father [Fred Bettjeman] was deputised to go to Wellington to see the Minister of Education."²⁷ The Minister did his best to sell the idea of the Correspondence School,²⁸ but the outcome was the establishment of a local school under certain conditions: the community had to provide the building, board the teacher, free, and supply a horse for her/him. The Education Department supplied the desks and other equipment and paid the teacher.²⁹ Payment was based on seven children at £15 each. If the number of children fell below seven the community had make up the deficit.³⁰ The original school was the abandoned one-roomed Tester whare, which was situated approximately mid-way between the River Landing and the Trig, and opened in 1926 with seven pupils.

Schooling for many of the children required riding long distances. Ruth West (nee Aislabie) had to do correspondence from about ten years of age because riding 20 kilometres a day was affecting her health.³¹ David Hellawell and his brother were also taught at home until their parents considered them old enough to ride the

²⁶Letter re Mangapurua Women's Institute from Olive Millen, V.O. Ruapehu Federation of Women's Institutes, July 1937, Waimarino Museum, Raetihi.

²⁷May Ross, 'Nancy Bettjeman's Story', *Whanganui River Annual 1993*, p.56.

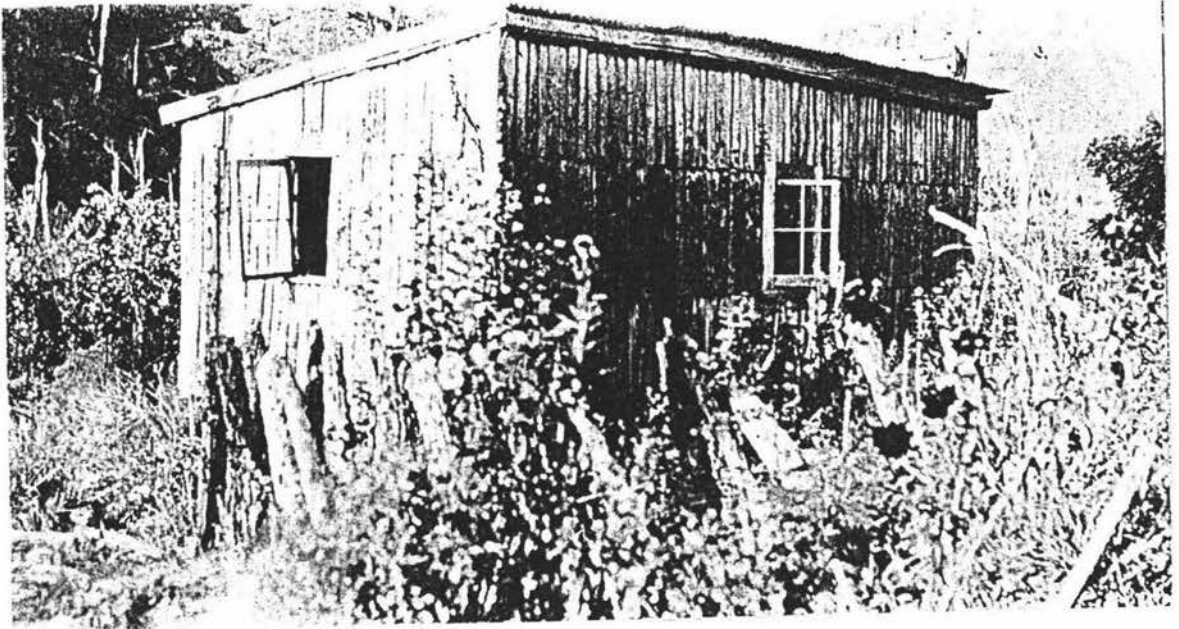
²⁸Interview with Ross, 21 April 1997.

²⁹Ross, p.57.

³⁰Bates, *The Bridge to Nowhere*, p.93.

³¹Interview with Ruth West, 16 July 1998.

distance.³²The original school was burnt down in 1933 and replaced by a prefabricated building. The school was finally closed in 1939.



The original school

Source: Bates, *The Bridge to Nowhere*. p.93.

The running of the school was the only official responsibility required of the community. "As we were such a small community we did not have a school committee but the settlers took turns year about at being commissioner and looking after its affairs."³³ There was no secondary school near enough for the children to attend so most went on to correspondence. Secondary schooling was not seen as a priority by many in the 1930s although it was becoming more important, especially in urban

³²Interview with David Hellawell, 6 June 1997.

³³Anderson, p.26.

areas. The number attending secondary schools rose by over 50% between 1919 and 1940.³⁴ May Ross recalled that her father was not interested in higher education, and she finished her formal schooling at the end of her primary years.³⁵ This was not uncommon in the 1930s and less importance was placed on girl's education the main thrust being to prepare them for "home and motherhood."³⁶

Nearly all the children found that the pressures and pleasures of the farms and pig-hunting were too inviting and school-work came a distant second. Most had given up by the end of their second year of secondary correspondence.³⁷ This was just below the average time spent by pupils in secondary schools.³⁸ Mac Bettjeman found that this neglect meant that he had to do extra study later in life so that he could enter the Air Force.³⁹ Harry Brown's father took out a mortgage so that he could send his son to Feilding Agricultural College. Harry could only attend for two years as his younger brother also needed an education.⁴⁰

It seems strange that there was not more emphasis placed on the importance of secondary education considering the backgrounds of the women, and that they would have insisted their children receive as good an education as possible. Is this another indication of the role of the father as the head of the family? If he considered it unimportant for the children to attend school any longer that was the final decision.

³⁴Roger Openshaw, *Unresolved Struggle. Consensus and Conflict in State Post-Primary Education*, Palmerston North: The Dunmore Press Limited, 1995, p.28.

³⁵Interview with Ross, 21 April 1997.

³⁶Openshaw, p.31.

³⁷Interview with Mac Bettjeman, 1 June 1997.

³⁸Openshaw, p.31

³⁹ibid.

⁴⁰Interview with Harry Brown, 3 November 1997.

Throughout New Zealand "*people in rural areas made their own fun*,"⁴¹ and the Mangapurua was no exception. From the beginning the settlers organised events and entertainments for their mutual benefit. Some of these were impromptu occasions, such as taking a day to go pig-hunting, or the opening of the swing bridge, the news of which came down the Valley by word of mouth, but others were more organised affairs. By 1923 most of the settlers were on their sections and some decided to form a rugby team.⁴² This team was composed mainly of the single men and played against sides from Pipiriki, Ruatiti and Retaruke. The team only survived a couple of years because of members leaving the Valley. There is no mention of any of the wives accompanying the team to any of the matches. Perhaps there was a general disapproval of married men playing a contact sport when they had the extra responsibility of a wife and family to support.

The next organised event, also about the summer of 1923/4 was a picnic sports day and dance. "We could set up running races, both human and horse, and also horse jumping and wood chopping, ... we all agreed to dub in financially."⁴³ Women were also catered for with special events arranged for them and for the children.⁴⁴ At such occasions every one was "expected to contribute and attend."⁴⁵ Everyone had their designated jobs and the married men "arranged that their wives would look after the catering side."⁴⁶ After the day's events were concluded there was a dance held at Pat Mowatt's house. There was alcohol available but all the men promised to behave themselves and act in an appropriate manner as there were

⁴¹Toynbee, p.136.

⁴²Hugh McDonald, 'Notes on the Mangapurua', Unpublished Manuscript, Courtesy of Ivy Mossop, Auckland, p.10.

⁴³Jack Ward in Bates, *The Bridge to Nowhere*, p.102.

⁴⁴ibid.

⁴⁵Toynbee, p136.

⁴⁶Jack Ward in Bates, *The Bridge to Nowhere*, p.103.

ladies present. Although there does not seem to have been another picnic sports day there were picnics and dances in the Valley.

After the women arrived they organised a picnic at Waterfall Creek each summer, which was well attended for the first few years. The outing seems to have been a formal affair with the families dressing in their best clothes. People rode to the site and had a communal picnic lunch. After lunch the women had the rare opportunity to relax and chat with their neighbours. May Ross remembers the children swimming in the creek but thinks that the picnics were rather boring for the children.⁴⁷ These picnics faded out in the mid-1920s as other more exciting activities took their place.

In contrast to the annual picnic, the Valley dances held in Bettjeman's woolshed were vividly remembered by everyone. Attended by both young and old, married and single, they were the most important social events of the year. Fred Bettjeman had designed his woolshed so that it could be used for dances.⁴⁸ Not only did the women have time to relax and talk to their neighbours but visitors from neighbouring valleys also attended. The dances usually ran all night as most people came on horseback and could not ride home until there was enough light to see their way home. The women did the catering, preparing enough food for at least two suppers, and decorated the shed while the men organised the heavy work, converting the shed into a dance floor. "We simmered for days, the men cut each other's hair and trimmed their wives. Frocks were titivated up and Mr McDonald treated his hair with cold tea. I don't look so old like if I'm not so grey".⁴⁹ The dances started

⁴⁷Interview with Ross, 21 September 1998.

⁴⁸ibid.

⁴⁹Anderson, p.30.

about nine o'clock and the music was provided by an accordion. "Dad [Reg Anderson] played the waltzes, Pat Mowat the modern dances - one steps and foxtrots - and Mr McD. the sets and the highland schottische which we all had a go at."⁵⁰ Between the dances items from members of the Valley were given. May Ross recalls singing folk songs and Beth McDonald singing ballads.⁵¹

Another popular entertainment for the younger women and children was the hockey matches. These took place firstly on Ward's Flat then moved to a smaller flat nearer Anderson's place. As the news came that a game had been arranged everyone sought a suitable branch which looked like a hockey stick. As soon as everyone arrived the teams were organised and the game commenced. Ivy McDonald remembers being in the goal with her sister and abandoning their place as a large women bore down on them.⁵² Hockey had been introduced to the Valley by one of the school teachers.⁵³ Sport for women was becoming increasingly popular in the period between the wars. Rather than being detrimental to women sport was being regarded as essential to health.⁵⁴

For many these activities were the only relief from the everyday struggles to make ends meet. Some were unable to leave the Valley for a day let alone have a holiday.⁵⁵ Others devised their own break away from the house and farm. Agnes Anderson described a brief family holiday they took by riding to the next valley and camping along the way.⁵⁶ For the women the chance to relax and have a little time talking, dancing, playing a game of hockey or simply just watching the others was

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

⁵¹ Interview with Ross, 21 September 1998.

⁵² Interview with Ivy Mossop, 8 September 1997.

⁵³ Interview with Bettjman, 1 June 1997.

⁵⁴ Else, (ed.), p.408

⁵⁵ Letter from the Mangapurua Valley settlers to the Under-Secretary of Lands, 2 December 1932, LS(1) 21/296, NA.

⁵⁶ Anderson, p.36.

very important as most found it hard to just relax while at home when there was always something waiting to be done. The Women's Institute gave the women a purpose that was outside their environment as well as the opportunity to enjoy each other's company. These Valley activities indicate the need that many of the settlers had for support from their neighbours as well as telling of their aspirations for the future of the Valley.

CONCLUSION

In 1942, after a cloud-burst, the government closed the Mangapurua and Mangatiti Valleys and ordered the settlers to leave. The families had very little to show for their twenty-five years of hard work. They were paid £100 in compensation to help them move, less half the amount that they had been recommended.¹ They were allowed to remove the house and buildings, and several families did. Harry Brown recalled that; "Our house was taken out wall by wall, but Jim Bright took his out board by board, labelled the lot. Dad came out with his stock, his house and £100."² Others were not as fortunate as the construction of their houses meant that they could not be dismantled and moved. These men and women had now to resettle and start again. The children of these last settlers were adamant that their parents had farms that by now were now becoming economically successful and none wanted to leave.

Their work load was heavy but it was similar to what was expected of women in many rural areas throughout New Zealand. On the other hand the women of the Mangapurua were not expected to be part of the labour force on the farm as were many women in other areas, as shown in the research of Toynbee, Doig and Lake. These women had the time to spend to improve their living conditions, make flower gardens, and do their household chores. Many of the tasks that were done would now be considered as 'making work for work's sake' but the children interviewed do not think that this was so in their case. The routine was set and the work had to be done regardless of any interference or interruptions. These women had to use all

¹ Arthur P. Bates, *The Bridge to Nowhere. The Ill-fated Mangapurua Settlement*, Wanganui: Wanganui Newspapers Ltd., 7th edition, 1993, p.165.

² Interview with Harry Brown, 3 November 1997.

their ingenuity and skill to make comfortable homes out of, in some cases, fairly primitive dwellings with limited resources. Being a time of financial hardship there was no money to buy extras and items such as curtains and cushions had to be made by the women. Because, at first, there was only a track from the river up the Valley; all goods had to be packed by horse or carried by hand. This meant that certain articles were almost impossible to bring into the Valley, a stove had to be dismantled at the river, packed in and then reassembled. This meant that many settlers went without goods that may have made life a little more comfortable.

The roads was little better than a six foot track which was often impassable, especially in winter. However it was an alternate route out of the Valley and gave people a greater freedom and choice of entertainment. It also gave them a chance to send produce out of the Valley and have larger items delivered by truck. Regardless of the method of transport, either river or road cartage was expensive and kept to a minimum.

My principle conclusion is that the women who lived in the Mangapurua were able to overcome their primitive living conditions and extreme isolation by imposing a strict set of standards upon themselves. Some of these standards were preconceived ideas about what was correct behaviour and how other people lived. Although in daily contact by telephone the success of the Women's Institute indicates their need for regular, albeit formal, face-to-face interaction . Considering their hardships, most of the marriages survived. Only one, of all the families from the Valley, is known to have failed. This suggests a commitment by the women to persevere in adverse conditions, and that the standards they set were kept.

Although the women were always supportive of each other they did not form an intimate community. There seems to have been several reasons for this: the movement of settlers out of the Valley as the economic hardships became too great; being returned servicemen was the only common link between the settlers and that was an all-male bond; the whole community was about the same age which meant that there were no established families available to give leadership, support and advice; the men came from different ranks within the army which could have created a social gap between the women which could explain their formality.

The Mangapurua was only one of the many 'backblock' areas found throughout New Zealand. There were small isolated settlements which were faced with the same or similar problems. Daisy Schepens, in her book *Ring Back the Curtain*, tells the story of the pioneers of a Northland settlement in the early part of the twentieth century. She recounts stories of their hardships, isolation and pleasures in the simple improvements to their lives as well as the poor and sometimes impassable road access and the problems it created.³ These were experiences similar to those in the Mangapurua, but a generation earlier.

Aotuhia, in eastern Taranaki, was also developed as a soldier settlement after World War One. It too was steep, marginal land and its settlers experienced many of the same problems as the Mangapurua; roading, isolation, and insufficient funding which caused many of the original settlers to abandon their farms. The difference was that Aotuhia was a little closer to the railway and it was easier to get goods and produce to the market. The settlement developed and even built a small community hall but although it has survived very few people now farm in the area.

³Daisy Schepens, "*Ring back the Curtain*". *A True New Zealand Story*. Whangarei : The Northern Publishing Co. Ltd. c1964.

Throughout the study there has been a underlying thread of hardship and sacrifice by the women. They went without, and supported their husbands and families. They gave their children a sense of happiness and security and most children retain fond memories of that "lonely but lovely Mangapurua Valley".⁴

The Valley is now abandoned, there is little evidence of the homes and gardens that once thrived in the area: a few fence posts; the remains of a house; a brick chimney; pine trees; hedges and garden plants once tenderly nursed but now invading the Valley. Only the ghosts of the settlers and their abandoned dreams remain to remind visitors to the region of the birth and death of the Valley.

⁴Vera Aislabie in Arthur Bates, 'The Aislabie's ...', *Whanganui River Annual 1996*, p.67.

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