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# Horseracing In The New Zealand Colonial Community, 1841-1911

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## INTRODUCTION

Apart from the victory of a New Zealand horse at the Melbourne Cup or a million dollar offering paid at the yearling sales, horseracing no longer fires the wider public imagination. This was not always the case. For most of the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, horseracing did play a central role in the life of the New Zealand people. It was one of the earliest organized sports introduced to the colony and the first to attract large numbers of participants. Unlike many other horseracing countries, the popularity of horseracing was not limited to certain areas, rather the sport flourished throughout the country. All levels of society found opportunities to participate in the sport and its appeal crossed gender, age and racial boundaries. Men, women, and children, Maori and Pakeha came together at special times of the year to enjoy the colour and excitement of horseracing. Every early colonial race meeting, whether held at a nearby beach, a publican's paddock or at a specially created course on the outskirts of a burgeoning town, reflected the character of the community that created it.

There are two key arguments to this thesis. Firstly it contends that the sport of horseracing can be used to gain insight into the colonial community and secondly that horseracing created bonds within that community.

It is because of its unique position in colonial life that horseracing can be regarded as a lens through which New Zealand society can be glimpsed. It reveals the aspirations and values of the settlers who embarked upon a new life in this country. Their belief in progress combined with an attitude of self-reliance and a democratic spirit shows in the way horseracing developed. The sport also offers a look into the power relationships within the community; which individuals or groups were able to influence decisions and outcomes and what forms did this take. Tensions within the community are brought to light as well, not only between Maori and Pakeha but also between those rugged individualists who sought freedom from the restraints of the

Old World and those who saw the future of the colony as a civilized place replicating the social structures and rituals of Mother England. Racing also reveals the settler attitude towards the physical environment. To transform the landscape into lush pastures for prize thoroughbreds and to enclose some of it with the gleaming white rails of traditional European racecourses became the collective ambition of many colonial communities. Horseracing demonstrates the shift in colonial consciousness from a highly local focus to one more regional in outlook and then in the closing years of the century, an emerging nationalism.

The other contention is that horseracing in early colonial New Zealand played an important role in bringing members of the community together in a shared focus of activity. It provided a source of community pride and a chance to show off a locality's progress, whether in terms of high valued prizes, fast horses or a beautiful environment graced with splendid facilities. The local press played its role in promoting its community's race meeting and engendering rivalry between competing communities, both local and provincial. Later it became an important element in the establishment of horseracing as a national sport.

Miles Fairburn in the *Ideal Society and its Enemies* argues that horseracing and other 'community festivals' did little to create bonds in the community.<sup>1</sup> He is quite correct in his statement that events like this may have taken place in the local community perhaps only once or twice a year. But this fails to take into consideration the months of planning and organization needed to bring such an event to fruition. Horseracing events were organized at the local level and involved much in the way of pooling community resources. They were planned for the local population but also in anticipation of visitors from other districts. The work ethic and the belief in progress that Fairburn attributed to the colonists contributed to the success of community based horseracing. Almost every local community organized at least one race meeting a year and excursions were commonly arranged to neighbouring events. Although as Fairburn points out, interest in a particular meeting waned from time to time, that did not signify a decline in horseracing or the loss of the sport to the community. The financial insecurity of some of the early

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<sup>1</sup> Miles Fairburn, *The Ideal Society and its Enemies: The Foundations of Modern New Zealand Society 1850 – 1900*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1989, pp.161-3, 52-4.

racing clubs or the loss of key individuals meant that organized racing may have stopped for a time in some localities but inevitably others came along with renewed enthusiasm to reinvigorate the sport in their community. The story of colonial horseracing in New Zealand is one of adaptability, a high degree of resourcefulness and of vibrant community life.

Horseracing in the early colonial period was not just a spectator sport. Members of the community participated in many different ways. Some were involved in the organization of the event; others contributed by way of making a site available or providing facilities or race prizes. Horsemen and occasionally horsewomen displayed their horses and their skills as they raced against their neighbours. Part sport and part social occasion, all members of the community joined together to enjoy a day's racing. Plentiful food and drink were part of the festivities as were games of chance and other fairground amusements. The race meetings had a strong local character and depending on the locality, boat races, foot races and other athletic contests often took place along with the horseracing.

The period covered is from 1841 to 1911. The starting date has been chosen, as this was the first anniversary of the settlers' arrival to present day Wellington. With the inclusion of horseracing as part of the celebrations, this set the pattern for other settlement's anniversary festivities. The first five chapters look at horseracing in the early colonial period from 1841 to the early 1880s. No study of New Zealand horseracing can be undertaken without first examining its British heritage. The first section of Chapter One gives a brief survey of the sport as it evolved in Britain. Despite its strong association with the military and the aristocracy, it was also a sport with a wide popular appeal. Horseracing was a traditional rural pursuit but by the time the first British emigrants were arriving on the New Zealand shores, it had acquired a recognizably modern face. Urbanization, industrialization and increasing commercialism had made their mark on the sport. The horseracing that the colonists introduced, however, was more reminiscent of the rustic community event of an earlier time. The second part of the chapter describes how the sport was introduced and integrated into New Zealand community life. The purpose is to show how the British sport was modified to suit the colonial environment and its people.

The thesis then examines four key aspects of horseracing in the early colonial period. Chapter Two looks at horseracing as a Maori sport. One of the unique features of New Zealand colonial horse racing is the high degree of Maori involvement. Maori acquired horses very early and quickly became recognized for their skills of horsemanship. Some local race meetings held races restricted to horses owned and ridden by Maori but also Maori controlled racing clubs were a feature of the period. Maori horseracing was recognized for its informal and lively atmosphere, warm hospitality and high degree of community involvement. Some of these elements are recognizable in the horseracing that took place in the frontier regions of the country. Chapter Three examines horseracing as a frontier sport. At its most basic level, horseracing required little in the way of organization; at least two horses and a reasonably flat stretch of land. The fast and dangerous nature of horseracing appealed to the predominantly young, male frontier population. Its association with alcohol, gambling and yarn telling also assured its popularity on the frontier. But from the earliest years, there was another element that sought to civilize the land and its people. Chapter Four shows how some communities used racing as a means to duplicate the class and gender distinctions associated with the British sport. Certain racing clubs and meetings, particularly those in the urban centres, provided the colonial elite with opportunities to demonstrate their power, wealth and status. Men were active participants in the sport while women were relegated to a passive role. Another aspect of horseracing's civilizing function explored in this chapter is how the landscape was altered and buildings erected to create racecourses resembling the grand racing parks of Britain. But more than just a picturesque site, the racecourse became a community gathering meeting place at a time when few other social institutions existed. Chapter Five demonstrates how horseracing played a role in developing a community consciousness. It helped create and maintain the social bonds essential to the welfare of the community.

Chapters Six and Seven deal with the later colonial period, from the 1880s to 1911. This was a time of immense social, technological and political change and Chapter Six will show how these were reflected in the sport. Chapter Seven discusses horseracing as a national sport. It survived the many moralist assaults on it and emerged from the turbulent years as a sport very different from the informal local community event established by the early colonists. The year 1911 has been chosen

as a concluding date for it was at this point that horseracing cut the last ties with its British tradition and made itself into a distinctly New Zealand sport. It was the last year that bookmakers appeared on New Zealand racecourses and the year that the first government appointed racing commission delivered its report that was to define the form horseracing was to take in the years to come.

A rich literature of horseracing exists in this country and has provided the starting point for this thesis. Most of it has been written by 'insiders', those within the horseracing industry or, as in the case of racing club histories, closely associated with the organization. Because of this, the literature is by nature celebratory, and is concerned with key individuals and their horses. The aim of this thesis is to look beyond these 'racing worthies' to the mostly nameless men, women and children who attended community race meetings as part of their holiday celebrations. The approach taken is a social history of colonial New Zealand horseracing. To this end, a primary source of material has been local newspaper accounts of horseracing events. The colonial newspapers reflected and in part shaped the perception of the early colonial sport. Because racing was such an important part of early community life, selected local histories as well as some published memoirs contain valuable information on the sport. For comparative purposes, this thesis has also made use of some material pertaining to horseracing in Britain, Australia and Canada. Finally, the wealth of visual material pertaining to the topic should be mentioned. The Alexander Turnbull Library was the source of the photographs and reproductions used in this thesis.

## 1

## HORSERACING IN A COLONIAL SETTING

The New Zealand colonists brought with them a love of the turf, a sport with a history traced back to Antiquity. They also arrived with the belief that their success in the colony was dependent on hard work and enterprise. The natural abundance of the land meant that their success was best achieved in a rural setting.<sup>1</sup> The first part of this chapter will look at horseracing in its British context to understand the reasons for the attraction of the sport and to see how it was modified in the colonial environment. Horseracing has always had a strong relationship with military and aristocratic concerns as those in authority recognized its value in providing a showcase of their power, skill and generosity. It also had a broad appeal, attracting patronage from all levels of society. But as Britain experienced social, economic and political change, so too did the sport change to meet new needs. Puritanism, urbanization, industrialization and commercialism would all make their mark on horseracing and help to mould it into the popular sport of nineteenth century Britain.

Horseracing has a long tradition in Western civilization. The hippodrome at Olympia was the site of organized horseracing events with chariots drawn by different combinations of horses as well as horses, foals and mules ridden by youthful jockeys.<sup>2</sup> There are some striking similarities between horseracing in ancient Greece and the sport, as it was to evolve in Britain. Firstly, there was a strong connection between horseracing and military prowess. In Greece the chariot was a fearsome vehicle of war but in times of peace it was used for sport. From the Middle Ages, the horse carried British soldiers into battle. Although the heavily armoured knight required the size and strength of the modern equivalent of the draught horse, speed in battle also mattered, so the blood of the faster, more agile Eastern type of horse was

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<sup>1</sup> Fairburn, Miles, *The Ideal Society and its Enemies: The Foundations of Modern New Zealand Society, 1850-1900*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, pp.42-59.

<sup>2</sup> Terence Measham, Elisabeth Spathari and Paul Donnelly, *1000 Years of the Olympic Game: Treasures of Ancient Greece*, Sydney: Powerhouse Publishing, 2000, pp.112-26.

introduced. The breeding of better warhorses and the skill in handling them remained an important part of military considerations up until the modern age. In 1803 as the army assembled in England, fearing French invasion, the cavalry officers passed the time and kept fit for war by racing each other.<sup>3</sup>

A second factor is the close relationship that always existed between horseracing and class. Horses were extremely expensive to purchase and maintain in ancient Greece so it was only the wealthy aristocracy that could indulge in racing. Victory at the hippodrome meant enormous prestige for the successful owner. The Olympic chariot win of Philip II was considered so significant in terms of propaganda that coins were minted in commemoration during his lifetime as well as following his death.<sup>4</sup> The upper classes in Britain also enjoyed exclusive access to horses. Those in power realized very early on that they were better placed to exercise their authority from horseback. Not only could they move quickly over varied terrain but also their superior position gave their inferiors an impression of leadership and power. The horse became a symbol of authority in Medieval Britain and kings demonstrated their might with the establishment of great stables<sup>5</sup>. Horseracing, while it remained an impromptu and informal affair in the Middle Ages, was the testing ground for those who sought to breed faster and more powerful horses. Most of the early contests were 'match races', where two owners each put up a sum of money to be claimed by the winning horse. Even when it became a more organized sport with several horses competing together, British horseracing continued to enjoy royal and upper class patronage. During the reign of Charles II, the heath at Newmarket was transformed from a royal hunting domain into a centre for racing with regular organized events. The King established the Newmarket Town Plate and laid down rules for this and other later Royal Plates.<sup>6</sup> Charles encouraged the attendance of the masses and they demonstrated their regard for him with wild cheering as he rode around the heath on a magnificent charger.<sup>7</sup> Queens too, Elizabeth, Anne and later Victoria realized the

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<sup>3</sup> Dereck Birley, 'Bonaparte and the Squire: Chauvinism, Virility and Sport in the Period of the French Wars', *Pleasure, Profit, Proselytism: British Culture and Sport at Home and Abroad, 1700-1914*, J.A. Mangan (ed.), London: Frank Cass, 1988, pp.27-8.

<sup>4</sup> Measham, Spathari and Donnelly, pp.112, 127.

<sup>5</sup> Dennis Brailsford, *British Sport: A Social History*, Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1992, pp.6, 22.

<sup>6</sup> Brailsford, p.45.

<sup>7</sup> Walter D. Osborne, *The Thoroughbred World*, Tel-Aviv: Leon Amiel, n.d., p.17.

value of patronage of the turf. During her brief reign, Queen Anne founded Ascot as one of England's prestigious racecourses. Where kings and queens practiced their sport, the nobility and gentry followed. Race meetings such as Ascot, Epsom, Goodwood and Doncaster although attracting spectators from all classes, emerged as grand social events for the gentry. Racing at these elite venues provided an opportunity for the upper classes to establish and to maintain links with each other. Some would come to town for the duration of the racing while others who lived in the vicinity would entertain in lavish style. But aristocratic racing with its sleek thoroughbreds, extravagant gambling and upper class patronage revealed only one aspect of the sport.

While the upper class and military connections remained significant throughout British horseracing, it has long had a popular following as well. From the late fourteenth century, the alehouse increasingly became the focal point for many local recreational activities. This was a natural transition from the church's role in the organization of feast days with their association of play, eating and drinking. As the church became less central to the social life of the community, the alehouse assumed the role of provider of indoor recreation as well as outside sporting activities. Horseracing was organized by publicans and became one of the first sports to attract a mass audience. Entry fees were not charged but the publicans seized the opportunity to make profits by supplying food, drink and bookmaking services to the spectators drawn to the races. As well as individual patronage, local town corporations realized the value of attracting visitors to the district and often gave active financial support to the race meeting by investing in grandstands and other improvements.<sup>8</sup>

Not surprisingly, recreation such as horseracing with its high degree of popular interest came under the scrutiny of Puritan ideology. The Puritanism that grew out of the English Reformation condemned the sports or games that could be seen to lead to immorality, idleness and popular unrest. Although the edicts controlling recreation that were issued during the Commonwealth were seen as a means of instilling a

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<sup>8</sup> Brailsford, pp. 11, 49-50.

sombre piety, they were more likely to do with concerns of national security. Cromwell himself a keen horseman, opposed race meetings and other sports as a matter of political pragmatism. Ever vigilant of royalist plots and other acts of sedition, it was safer to discourage activities that drew large numbers of people. Regardless of the reasons for the Puritan intervention into the pastimes of the people, its ideology was to surface regularly throughout the history of British and colonial horseracing. A sense of seriousness had entered the national consciousness and efforts would continue to purge recreation of any perceived bad behaviour or immorality. Dennis Brailsford in *British Sport: A Social History* contends that an important contribution of Puritanism to British sport was that it made sport a subject of serious national debate.<sup>9</sup> For most of their history, sports (including horseracing) have been linked with politics and with issues of power and control.

By the eighteenth century horseracing had become well established as a popular rural activity that was often used to celebrate a local holiday. Most races were run not just for specially bred thoroughbreds but also to include half-bred horses, hunters and ponies. Horseracing was frequently associated with travelling shows, cockfights, boxing and wrestling matches. Often cricket matches and various athletic contests were held alongside the racing. For many people the local races came just once a year and were eagerly anticipated as a break from work, an opportunity to catch up with friends and to indulge in the fun and frivolity of the fair. Gambling may have been an important element of racing at Newmarket and a few other select meetings but it was less significant at the smaller meets.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, there were plenty of opportunities for the townspeople to spend money at the gambling booths, publicans' tents and food stalls set up for the occasion.

Although horseracing continued to have a strong association with the country, it also developed as an urban sport. Increasing urbanization meant that migrants to towns brought with them their traditional recreational pursuits. Industrialization also meant more regular working hours and income for workers that allowed both a set time for

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<sup>9</sup> Brailsford, pp.29, 35.

<sup>10</sup> Hugh Vamplew, *The Turf: A Social and Economic History of Horse Racing*, London: Allen Lane, 1976, p.18.

leisure and cash to be spent on sports such as horseracing. But the changing economic and social conditions also imposed restraints on the working population. Industrial modes of production were dependent on a disciplined and conforming workforce. The large and sometimes drunken, unruly crowds that congregated at urban racetracks posed a potential threat to law and order. The needs of capitalist industrialism combined with the old tenets of Puritanism and a new evangelical force within the churches joined to create a spirit of moral earnestness that invaded all aspects of British life. Leisure activities were particularly scrutinized, with 'rational' sports that encouraged self-control and co-operation receiving approval while others were deemed immoral. The growing central power of the state meant that legislation could suppress certain sports such as cockfighting and animal baiting. That horseracing remained unscathed by what some historians have called the 'moral' or 'leisure' revolution<sup>11</sup> was due to its support by the upper classes. When Joseph Strutt produced the first social survey of sport in 1801, he asserted that only the 'lowest and most despicable class of people' would attend bull and bear baiting. On the other hand, horseracing along with hunting, hawking, fowling and fishing received his approval, as they were 'rural exercises practiced by Persons of Rank'.<sup>12</sup>

There is a conception that nineteenth century British horseracing, although attracting upper and lower class patronage received little support from the middle classes.<sup>13</sup> Mike Huggins argued that despite some middle class opposition to horseracing, others gave active support through attendance, betting, financial sponsorship and racehorse ownership. Racing officials and administrators, who had to be literate and numerate with good organizational skills, were often drawn from the middle class. Huggins points out that the volunteerism demonstrated by those serving on race club committees in many ways paralleled the unpaid work associated with Mechanics Institutes, temperance societies, church groups and other similar organizations. For ambitious industrialists, merchants and manufacturers, involvement in horseracing

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<sup>11</sup> Greg Ryan, 'Sport in Christchurch', *Southern Capital Christchurch: Towards a City Biography, 1850-2000*, John Cookson and Graeham Dunstall (eds.), Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 2000, pp.325-6, Vamplew, p.22.

<sup>12</sup> Birley, p.26.

<sup>13</sup> Vamplew, pp.133-4.

could be regarded as a way of gaining respect and status.<sup>14</sup> Racehorse ownership, sponsorship and club administration could be perceived as a means of entry into the elite world of the British gentry. Some may have found commercial gain from racing involvement but for many the excitement of the sport or of betting was reason enough for participation. Huggins found in his research that racing involvement did not stand in the way of respectability and success for the many MPs, councillors, aldermen, JPs or professional men either attending races or contributing to the sport in other ways.<sup>15</sup> It would appear that most people in nineteenth century Britain did not appear to have strong views on horseracing and that there was a strong base of support from all classes.

The general appeal of the sport combined with rising income, sufficient leisure time and improved transport meant that by the middle of the century, horseracing had experienced unprecedented growth. In the 1850s, sixty-two new events were established and in the 1860s a further ninety-nine race meetings were introduced.<sup>16</sup> Also evident in this period was a growing importance of commercial values. Saturday racing meant that working men could attend and so guaranteed a larger audience. More horses and new owners were attracted into the sport by the introduction of sweepstake races that meant owners risked less money for a chance of winning more. It was realized that if younger horses were raced the investment in valuable bloodstock could yield an earlier return. Shorter races and lighter jockeys became necessary by the use of younger horses. To increase their chances of winning, owners began to employ professional jockeys and trainers. Handicap races became more popular as a means of getting more races out of a limited number of horses and by giving all horses a chance of winning.<sup>17</sup>

Up until the last quarter of the nineteenth century, there was no attempt to enclose racecourses or to charge entry fees. Money was made by charging vendors of refreshment stalls and gaming booths to set up on the grounds. If the racecourse had

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<sup>14</sup> Mike Huggins, 'Culture, Class and Respectability: Racing and the English Middle Classes in the Nineteenth Century', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 11:1 (1994), pp.19-34.

<sup>15</sup> Huggins, p.37.

<sup>16</sup> Vamplew, p.35.

<sup>17</sup> Vamplew, p.24.

a grandstand, patrons paid for the privilege of using the facility. Sandown Park in England was the first enclosed racecourse to charge an entry fee in 1875 and before the turn of the century virtually all the British racecourses had followed its lead. The success of the enclosed racecourse was due to its ability to attract greater numbers of spectators by offering better quality racing with high prize money to attract more horses and by providing improved facilities. Before the advent of the enclosed meeting, relatively few women went racing other than to some of the elite events where the privileged few could watch from carriages or private stands. From its inception, Sandown encouraged the attendance of 'ladies' with the formation of a racing club with vetted membership to ensure a quality of respectability. Club membership was a male privilege but members were entitled to be accompanied by two ladies.<sup>18</sup> Horseracing lost much of its original rustic appeal, as it became a more organized and commercial form of entertainment.

The second part of this chapter will look at the nature of horseracing in its formative years in New Zealand from the early 1840s to the 1880s. Despite its ancient roots and strong British traditions, horseracing continued to evolve to meet the needs of the people it served. It was during the nineteenth century, a period of major social, political and economic change that many British emigrants left to establish a new life in New Zealand. These are the people that established horseracing in the colony and it is to them that we need to look to understand some of the dimensions of the sport, as it was to develop in New Zealand.

Horseracing has been in New Zealand a very long time, probably as long as horses have been in the country. Reverend Samuel Marsden landed the first horses in 1814 at Rangihoua as part of a shipment of supplies to establish a mission station. The mare and two stallions were gifts to the Maori from Governor Macquarie of New South Wales.<sup>19</sup> Supplementing this first breeding stock, more horses were sent across the Tasman in the following years. Horseracing at its most basic level

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<sup>18</sup> Vamplew, pp.38-40.

<sup>19</sup> Miriam Macgregor Redwood, *Proud Silk: A New Zealand Racing History*, Wellington: A.H.& A.W. Reed, p.7.

required very little in the way of organization and it is not difficult to imagine how the sport first began. A challenge of one proud owner, boasting of the attributes of his mount to another proud owner was all that was needed to initiate a horse race. In the absence of any organized recreation, spectators would gather to watch the excitement, perhaps even willing to place a wager on their favourite. There are several recollections of such spontaneous contests in colonial New Zealand and no doubt far more that have not been recorded. The *Bay of Islands Observer* in 1842 reported a match race that was to take place on Queen's Birthday between Mr. B.E. Turner's Valparaiso mare, Betty and Mr. J. Smith's colonial 'blood' mare, Judy on Oneroa Beach.<sup>20</sup> It is curious that at this early stage there was an interest in breeding, with the locally bred thoroughbred standing against the one imported from South America. Even when horseracing became more organized, the tradition of informal 'match' racing involving only two horses continued, with the results often reported in the local newspapers.

When settlers began arriving, fond memories of holiday festivities likely prompted them to include horseracing on special occasions. In January 1841, the people of Wellington celebrated the first anniversary of their arrival with a hurdle race as one of the entertainments along with a whaleboat race and a ball. Nelson also marked the first anniversary of the settlement with a horse race that was described in the *Turf Register* as a gruelling race up and down steep terrain and through heavy bush.<sup>21</sup> Despite difficulties with finding a suitable course and an element of church disapproval, horseracing was also part of Dunedin's first anniversary in 1849.<sup>22</sup> Two years later, the anniversary celebrations at Christchurch included four horse races over a course in Hagley Park. Ignoring the tussock covered course, the *Lyttelton Times* commented on the 'resemblance to open air holiday-making in the neighbourhood of some country town at home'.<sup>23</sup> As the settlements grew, racing marked other holidays. Boxing Day and Easter traditionally saw race meetings in Britain and this custom was transferred to New Zealand. The racecourse at Silverstream was the 'centre of great attraction' Boxing Day 1868 for the Dunedin

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<sup>20</sup> *Bay of Islands Observer*, 26 Apr 1842.

<sup>21</sup> *New Zealand Turf Register*, 1876, p.XI.

<sup>22</sup> Redwood, p.80.

<sup>23</sup> *Lyttelton Times*, 20 Dec 1851.

people, attracting more custom than the Oddfellows Fete or the entertainment at either the Princess Theatre or Academy of Music.<sup>24</sup> In Christchurch, the 1852 anniversary races had proved so popular that a meeting was arranged for the following Easter.<sup>25</sup> Auckland and Hokitika were among the other towns that held Easter races. In remote pastoral areas, far from family and church, horseracing provided a welcome diversion at Christmas. A race meeting was established in 1855 at Wairau as a Christmas sport and was well supported despite the small number of people and the distance at which they lived apart.<sup>26</sup> At Hakateramea in the Waitaki Valley, a hundred people gathered to watch horse races on Christmas Day 1867.<sup>27</sup> New Year was a particularly popular time for race meetings with Napier, Clyde, Hokitika, Christchurch and Auckland among the towns that celebrated in this way. In some areas horseracing was a feature of Saint Patrick's Day. Gisborne had racing on the seventeenth of March, as did Greymouth, Boatman's Creek and Inangahua on the West Coast.

Race meets in colonial New Zealand resembled the rustic social sports of eighteenth and early nineteenth century Britain. Often horseracing was combined with other sports such as foot racing, high jumping and throwing contests. In Mackenzie County in 1868 over one hundred people met at Christmas Day and Boxing Day on a racecourse at Tekapo to watch horseracing, a regatta on the lake and Caledonian sports.<sup>28</sup> By 1865 Christchurch had a sparring booth at their races and a year later, a large number of people at Hakateramea watched horse races as well as 'a few free fights', one fighter being 'the celebrated pugilist', 'The Black Prince'.<sup>29</sup> Race meetings such as these were social occasions; an opportunity for families to celebrate the holiday together with far flung friends and neighbours. Race days offered entertainment for all members of the family. At the 1869 Hokitika Races a merry-go-round delighted a large number of children.<sup>30</sup> An advertisement for the 1877 Easter

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<sup>24</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, 26 Dec 1868.

<sup>25</sup> Redwood, p.88.

<sup>26</sup> *Nelson Examiner*, 6 Jan 1858.

<sup>27</sup> *Oamaru Times and Waitaki Reporter*, 1 Jan 1867.

<sup>28</sup> Oliver A. Gillespie, *South Canterbury: A Record of Settlement*, Timaru: The South Canterbury Centennial History Committee, 1958, p.216.

<sup>29</sup> *Press*, 19 Jan 1865, *Oamaru Times and Waitaki Reporter*, 4 Jan 1866.

<sup>30</sup> *West Coast Times and Observer*, 31 Dec 1869.

Castlepoint Races announced the appearance of a clown.<sup>31</sup> Popular British racecourse games such as 'Aunt Sally' and 'Three Pins' made their appearance at New Zealand race meetings. The gaily decorated booths of the sideshows and those dispensing refreshments along with the music of local bands added to the carnival atmosphere. In one of the earliest descriptions of New Zealand horseracing, Edward Jerningham Wakefield described a wagon containing a musical band arriving for races on Petone Beach in October 1842.<sup>32</sup>

Early New Zealand horseracing had a strong local character. Again, this was not unique to the young colony but had its beginnings in Britain prior to the advent of the railway when horses had to be led or ridden to race meetings. Although a few New Zealand owners were prepared to have their horses travel long distances to compete, many race organizers sought to retain the local character of their meetings by accepting only local horses. The 1866 Boxing Day races at Benmore Station were only open to horses from Benmore or adjoining stations.<sup>33</sup> Three of the six races at Kowhai Pass in 1869 were limited to horses the property of persons residing in the road board district of Courtenay, North Raikaia and Malvern.<sup>34</sup> South of Auckland, the Maukau Races had a Settlers Stakes eligible to horses of settlers owning fifty acres or less in the Waiuku Militia District.<sup>35</sup>

Sometimes races were set aside for competitors engaged in particular occupations within the community. The 1864 Ladies Purse at Potter's Barn in Auckland was open to horses that were owned and ridden by officers of the Imperial Army, Navy or of the Colonial forces.<sup>36</sup> Hokitika's first race meeting held in 1865 offered the 'Packer's Plate' for horses who had packed goods over the last month.<sup>37</sup> Four years later, Hokitika's race card advertised the 'Butchers' Purse' for horses that belonged to retail butchers on the West Coast.<sup>38</sup> Included in the Arrow Races in Otago was a

<sup>31</sup> Mike Simms, *Sand, Sea and Hoofbeats: One Hundred Years of Horseracing in the Tinui Castlepoint District, 1872-1972*, Masterton: Castlepoint Racing Club, 1972, p.7.

<sup>32</sup> Edward Jerningham Wakefield, *Adventure in New Zealand*, Auckland: Golden Press, 1975, p.255.

<sup>33</sup> *Oamaru Times and Waitaki Reporter*, 5 Feb 1867.

<sup>34</sup> *Lyttelton Times*, 8 Feb 1867.

<sup>35</sup> *New Zealand Turf Register*, 1876, p.141.

<sup>36</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 24 Oct 1964.

<sup>37</sup> Redwood, p.123.

<sup>38</sup> *West Coast Times and Observer*, 1 Jan 1868.

miner's hack race open to horses that were the property of 'bona fide working miners'.<sup>39</sup> Also in Otago, shepherds and station hands had their own race in Omarama, while rabbiters had an opportunity to race together at Mandeville.<sup>40</sup> Local flavour was provided at the Reidson-Moheno racecourse in North Otago with a bullock driver's race where for an entry fee of 5s a bullock driver had the opportunity to race his horse for a prize of a saddle and bridle.<sup>41</sup> A lively addition to racing at Whangarei was the Sailors' Race where willing sailors off a boat berthed at the town wharf were provided with a horse to race.<sup>42</sup> Another novelty race sure to promote laughter at race meetings was the Cheroot Skurry where each rider began the race with a lighted cigar and the first to hand it to the Clerk of the Course at the finishing line was declared the winner.<sup>43</sup>

Gambling played a part in colonial racing as it did in the British sport with bookmakers making an appearance even at the smallest New Zealand meetings. Bookmakers were a colourful presence on the racetracks with their extravagant dress and showmanship designed to attract custom their way. H. Bullock-Webster recalled the 'bookies galore' at the Auckland Races and reminisced how they 'did much to liven things up'.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, Charles Bannister of Masterton remembered the 'clamour of voices yelling, 'I say, I say, I pay, I pay five to one, bar one'.<sup>45</sup> Although the bookmakers themselves or the various gambling games at the race meetings did not incite criticism from the early colonial newspapers, gambling on the horses was either not mentioned in race meeting accounts or was downplayed. The writer of the account of the 1869 Hokitika Races stated that 'very little betting took place on the various events'.<sup>46</sup> The Napier Races in 1865 also attracted little betting if the

<sup>39</sup> *New Zealand Turf Register*, 1876, p.36.

<sup>40</sup> *New Zealand Turf Register*, 1881, pp.2, 57.

<sup>41</sup> *New Zealand Turf Register*, 1876, p.178.

<sup>42</sup> Florence Keene, *Between Two Mountains: A History of Whangarei*, Auckland: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1966, p.312.

<sup>43</sup> *New Zealand Turf Register*, 1876, p.177.

<sup>44</sup> H. Bullock-Webster, *Memories of Sport and Travel Fifty Year Ago: From the Hudson's Bay Company to New Zealand*, Auckland: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1938, p.138.

<sup>45</sup> Charles Bannister, *Early History of the Wairarapa* (1940), Christchurch: Cadsonbury Publications, 1999, p.94.

<sup>46</sup> *West Coast Times and Observer*, 31 Dec 1869.

*Hawke's Bay Herald* can be believed. According to its reporter, the highest bet he heard was 'two ginger beers to a tot'.<sup>47</sup>

The moral earnestness that had impacted on British horseracing did not make a major impression in the colony and what little apparent resistance there was to the introduction of horseracing appeared very early. The Scottish immigrant, Alexander Marjoribanks in *Travels in New Zealand* criticized the English for 'wasting their time and money' on 'two most absurd of all absurdities' horseracing and public dinners. He queried why anyone would want to buy a racehorse in the 'wilderness' when a working bullock would be far more useful.<sup>48</sup> Criticism on religious grounds came from Richard Taylor, the Church of England missionary stationed in Wanganui. In his 1848 diary entry he contrasted the Maori observance of Christmas with that of the European population. While nearly 4,000 Maori attended his service, on the other side of the river almost all of the 700 settlers went to the races. Apart from their choice of holiday activity, Taylor condemned the European race-goers for spending their time at the races 'swearing and gaming'.<sup>49</sup> An article in the *New Zealand Evangelist* in 1850 appealed to the interests of the respectable folk who were planning to attend the Wellington Anniversary Races to socialize but would refrain from gambling, drinking or swearing. It suggested that the excitement of horseracing provided too many temptations for the young and the morally weak and that it was the duty of principled Christians to provide alternative anniversary activities to improve the body and mind. Although the church was sufficiently powerful to close racecourses elsewhere, the author acknowledged that this was unlikely in New Zealand.<sup>50</sup> In this regard, the author proved correct. Religious and moral criticism had little impact on the sport from the 1860s and for the most part did not resurface until closer to the end of the century.

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<sup>47</sup> *Hawke's Bay Herald*, 2 Mar 1865.

<sup>48</sup> Alexander Marjoribanks, *Travels in New Zealand: With a Map of the Country* (1840), Christchurch: Caper Press, 1973, pp.45-6.

<sup>49</sup> Flora Spurdle, *More Stories of Old Wanganui*, Whanganui: L.W.L. Van den Broek (ed.), 1963, pp.82-3.

<sup>50</sup> *New Zealand Evangelist*, 2: XIX (1850), pp.246-51.

The lack of strong opposition to horseracing may have been because horseracing was organized at the local level to provide an opportunity for families and friends to come together at holiday times and to participate in a traditional sporting activity. In 1865 a small item appeared in the *Southern Cross* concerning the first races that were held in the small Northland harbour settlement of Mangawai.

The settlers of Mangawai, having determined that Boxing Day should be kept as a holiday, elected a committee to arrange some general plan, so that all could participate in it. They resolved, that as the district was now well settled, that the time had arrived when annual races could be commenced. Mangawai is now progressing very well indeed.<sup>51</sup>

It is an interesting reflection on the early community life of Mangawai that the notion of progress should be associated with establishing an annual holiday celebrated with horseracing. Also notable, is the intention that all members of the community should be given the opportunity to participate in the organization of the event. This was an experience not unique to Mangawai. In many communities, prior to the advent of the racing clubs, committees made up of interested people organized the local races on an annual basis. In September 1866, a notice appeared in *The Press* inviting anyone interested in horseracing in the Leeston area to attend a meeting to appoint a committee, stewards and to plan a programme for the district races.<sup>52</sup> In Oamaru, the local paper announced on 7 December 1865 that the working committee, selected at a recent public meeting, would meet the next day to make preliminary arrangements for the forthcoming races meeting.<sup>53</sup> The date set for the races was 22 and 23 February 1866, so this would mean that for some ten weeks members of the community would be working together to plan the upcoming races.

During the period from about the mid 1850s to 1880 most of the racing clubs came into existence. Previously, organizers of local race days operated on yearly donations from the community, but in order to put racing on a firmer footing, they found the need to establish properly constituted clubs. Generally what brought this about was the desire to acquire a permanent site for the racecourse so that a properly formed

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<sup>51</sup> *Southern Cross*, 3 Jan 1865.

<sup>52</sup> *The Press*, 8 Sep 1866.

<sup>53</sup> *Oamaru Times and Waitaki Reporter*, 21 Dec 1865.

track, grandstand and other racing fixtures could be constructed. The Canterbury Jockey Club, one of the major clubs in the early colonial period was formed at a public meeting in 1854 with one of its objectives being the acquisition and preparation of a suitable racecourse. For this purpose, a request was made to the Governor asking that a public reserve of not less than 300 acres be vested in the committee and stewards of the club. Club subscriptions enabled an ambitious three mile racetrack to be formed at the new Riccarton site and a stone grandstand with seating for 400 to be built for the first meeting in 1864.<sup>54</sup> On the West Coast, the people of Westport during the 1860s attended race days at various venues including Gibson's paddock, the Jones' paddock near the Orowaiti Bridge and Dr. Thorpe's paddock. It was not until the Westport Jockey club came into being around 1880 that plans could be made to purchase their own land at Sergeant's Hill.<sup>55</sup> The early New Zealand clubs were vastly different from the Jockey Club of Newmarket that from its inception in the 1750s controlled horseracing in England. Throughout the next century, that illustrious body remained predominantly aristocratic, excluding anyone not deemed 'suitable to exercise authority', much to the chagrin of many aspiring members, themselves often captains of industry or commerce.<sup>56</sup> Regardless of the designation, jockey, turf or racing, the clubs that came into existence throughout New Zealand were formed to organize and regulate race meetings at the local level. Democratic in spirit, they were formed at public meetings instigated by one or more racing enthusiasts in the community.

The resources of the community were needed to bring the event to fruition. As properly prepared racetracks were a rarity in the early days of the sport, one of the first tasks of the organizers was to find a suitable venue. Beaches at low tide could provide a flat, hard packed surface suitable for racing. The Wellington races of 1842 described by Edward Jerningham Wakefield, took place on Petone Beach.<sup>57</sup> In 1867, the North Auckland Township of Wade held their Saint Patrick's Day race meeting

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<sup>54</sup> John Costello and Pat Finnegan, *Tapestry of Turf, The History of New Zealand Racing, 1840-1997*, Auckland: Moa Publishers, 1988, p.43.

<sup>55</sup> Costello and Finnegan, p.63.

<sup>56</sup> Vamplew, p.77.

<sup>57</sup> Wakefield, pp.254-57.

on Orewa Beach.<sup>58</sup> However, most settlements in the early days of racing were forced to find a supportive landowner who would allow racing to take place on his property. The Papakura Races in 1874 were held in Mr. Walter's paddock and he also acted as one of the race stewards.<sup>59</sup> The 1874 Anniversary Day holiday in the Auckland area was celebrated with the Whau races followed by athletic sports in Messrs. Aikens' paddock.<sup>60</sup>

As horseracing in its formative years was considered a community social occasion, very often spectators were not charged an entrance fee and so alternative sources of revenue had to be found. Contributions for the prizes were sought from local businesses and residents who were canvassed for their support. Adela Stewart recalled in *My Simple Life in New Zealand* 'sporting settlers' visiting to request a subscription to the Katikati races for which her husband Hugh, obliged with a guinea. Although the Stewarts would not have considered themselves racing people, as a prominent family in the area, they felt obliged to support the local races.<sup>61</sup> An advertisement in the *Southern Cross* for the Waiuku Easter Monday races reminded residents that the subscription list was 'lying open' at the Exchange Hotel and also at the Kentish Hotel in Waiuku.<sup>62</sup> Many early race programmes had a race called the 'Ladies Purse', the prize money donated by the women in the district. It was also not unusual to collect money on the racecourse on a 'pass the hat basis'. The 1866 Oamaru races were deemed so successful that the merchants of that town raised £40 so that a third day of racing could take place.<sup>63</sup>

Also found within the community were the horses for racing. In the early years of the sport, these were often the same animals used for travel, cartage and farm work. Although thoroughbreds were imported for racing from the early 1840s, firstly from New South Wales, later England, most horses that lined up at the starters flags were mixed breed saddle horses. Hack races that excluded specialized racehorses were a

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<sup>58</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 9 Mar 1867.

<sup>59</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 30 Jan 1874.

<sup>60</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 1 Feb 1874.

<sup>61</sup> Adela B. Stewart, *My Simple Life in New Zealand* (1908), n.p.: Southern Reprints, 1995, p.44.

<sup>62</sup> *Southern Cross*, 3 Apr 1855.

<sup>63</sup> *Oamaru Times and Waitaki Reporter*, 1 Mar 1866.

feature of almost every programme in the early days of racing.<sup>64</sup> The *Oamaru Times and Waitaki Reporter* reported that Miss Foote, the winner of the 1866 Maiden Plate in Oamaru was ‘only known as a mare for driving cattle by her owner’.<sup>65</sup> A day’s racing could include races on the flat as well as over hurdles. At some venues, trotting races in which horses could be ridden or driven were included, with bakers, butchers and other tradesmen racing their cart horses against each other.

Another characteristic of colonial horseracing was the sense of entrepreneurship that permeated many aspects of the sport. It was realized that horseracing provided financial opportunities for members of the community to make financial gain. The organizers of the first Auckland race meeting held in January 1842 invited publicans to erect booths on the course for a fee of £1. Thomas Russell of the Rising Sun Hotel advertised in the *New Zealand Herald and Auckland Gazette* the previous November that he would sell wine and spirits as well as a ‘cold collation’ on the day of the races.<sup>66</sup> In 1865, Lawrence Robertson of the Union Hotel, Auckland announced in the *Southern Cross* that he had secured Potter’s Barn at the racecourse for ‘a considerable outlay of money’ and so would be able to offer a wide range of food and drink from these premises. Other businessmen by the names of Burke and Rose also advertised in the same paper that they had purchased the rights to the grandstand and would charge 5s for entrance to it where patrons would be offered refreshments from ‘civil and attentive waiters’.<sup>67</sup> The advertisements in newspapers give an indication of the range of goods available for sale at the races. A notice was placed in the *Thames Guardian and Mining Record* in 1872 concerning applications for fruit and cake stalls at the Saint Patrick’s Day Races at Parawai, also the right to carry baskets for the sale of fruit and cakes.<sup>68</sup> A Christchurch baker, A. Thiel, advertised in the *Press* that ‘having purchased the right of amusements and confectionary for the forthcoming races wishes to inform his friends and the public that he will sell confectionary at his usual Christchurch price’. The *Otago Daily Times* was less than

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<sup>64</sup> The usual definition of a hack in nineteenth century racing was a horse that had not won an advertised race.

<sup>65</sup> *Oamaru Times and Waitaki Reporter*, 1 Mar 1866.

<sup>66</sup> *New Zealand Herald and Auckland Gazette*, 6 Nov 1841.

<sup>67</sup> *Southern Cross*, 2 Jan 1865.

<sup>68</sup> *Thames Guardian and Mining Record*, 14 Mar 1872.

enthusiastic about the goods for sale at the Dunstan Jockey Club Meeting in 1869, claiming that among the items available were ‘stale pastry, cheap jewellery and small wares’.<sup>69</sup> Appealing to ‘hawkers of race cards’, the *New Zealand Herald* gave notice that cards could be purchased from the *Herald* office at 10s per dozen.<sup>70</sup>

Almost every race meeting attracted ‘spielars’, an Australian term for gambling operators who ran dice or card games and wheels of fortune. Thimble illusions or magic tricks were performed as another way of extracting money from the race crowd.<sup>71</sup> A popular attraction at the Parawi Races was ‘Black Bob’s Canary’, a form of sweepstakes where for 2/6 the canary would pull the winning ticket by drawing a card from the deck.<sup>72</sup> At other venues a monkey, parrot or a goose played this role.<sup>73</sup> Chinese operators attended various goldfields meetings where they sold ‘pakapoo’ tickets or organized ‘fantail’, that involved betting on how many pebbles remained at the end of the game.<sup>74</sup> These games of chance may have been crude and some ‘spielars’ condemned for unfair play, but on the whole, the entrepreneurial spirit behind these commercial ventures was an accepted part of colonial racing.

One of the traditions that the British brought with them to New Zealand was the sport of horseracing. It was introduced in the early years and was adapted to fit colonial conditions. Whether out of a sense of duty or to support their own recreational interests, members of the early New Zealand communities contributed their time, skills and other resources to the planning and running of local races. The advent of the racing clubs did not significantly alter this. Those who could afford the subscription fee could join and have a hand in the decision making of their district’s racing club. By encouraging local participation and catering for the interests of their own particular community, early New Zealand racing had a strong local emphasis. A reflection can also be seen of some of the values of the early settlers, notably a belief

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<sup>69</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, 10 Feb 1869.

<sup>70</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 3 Jan 1867.

<sup>71</sup> David Grant, *Thoroughbreds, Trainers, Toffs and Tic Tac Men; A Cartoon History of Horse Racing in New Zealand*, Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 2001, p.11.

<sup>72</sup> Johnny Williams, *Racing for Gold: Thames and the Goldfields with the History of the Thames Jockey Club*, Thames: Williams Publishers, 1987, p.53.

<sup>73</sup> Grant, *Thoroughbreds, Trainers, Toffs and Tic Toc Men*, p.11.

<sup>74</sup> Grant, *Thoroughbreds, Trainers, Toffs and Tic Toc Men*, p.20.

in democracy and the importance of enterprise. The 'Sport of Kings (and Queens)' was to thrive in New Zealand but from its formative years it demonstrated characteristics unique to the colony. One of the most striking of these was the high degree of Maori involvement.

## 2

## MAORI HORSERACING

A wood engraving published in the *London Illustrated News* in 1853 shows spectators at races in the Wairarapa in the 1850s (Plate 1). The European race-goers not only outnumber the Maori spectators but they also dominate the pictorial space. The dismounted European in the foreground leads the eye in a zigzag pattern to the rider in the middle ground, then to the rider on the light coloured horse and on to the main group of mounted riders who point the way to the three racing horses at the far left of the picture. The horseless Maori remain sandwiched between the Europeans. The artist has made the intended meaning clear. The indigenous people have no role to play in the European sport of horseracing. The presence of Maori is an acknowledgment of the New Zealand context of this scene and adds an exotic element for the British audience but they are merely passive observers. This, however, is a fabrication. This chapter will show that Maori did play a key role in the development of horseracing in New Zealand. Their involvement may have been ignored altogether, or, if acknowledged provoked strong responses from European commentators, but there is no denying the Maori contribution to the sport as spectators, breeders, owners, trainers as well as racing club administrators.

The long association of Maori with horses in this country is believed to date back to 1814 when Samuel Marsden presented to local chiefs three horses on behalf of Governor Macquarie of New South Wales.<sup>1</sup> Horses were seen to be valued possessions by the Maori and their popularity spread quickly. William Colenso noted that within a few years of seeing a horse led from Rotorua to present day Clive in 1847, every Maori who could afford to do so had bought himself a horse.<sup>2</sup> It was Colenso, too, that noted the first organized horse race in Hawke's Bay. It caused him much distress to come upon this race in 1851 as the course set out was around the Waipukurau chapel and burial ground.

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<sup>1</sup>Miriam Macgregor Redwood, *Proud Silk: A New Zealand Racing History*, Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1979, pp.7-8.

<sup>2</sup>A.H. Reed, *The Story of Hawke's Bay*, Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1958, pp.84-5.



Plate 1: Races on the Plain of the Wairarapa Near Wellington, New Zealand.

From *Illustrated London News*, 23:656, p.497,

Alexander Turnbull Library, National Library of New Zealand, Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa, Reference Number: PUBL-0033-1853-0479.

The race had been organized by newly arrived settlers, but in all probability the local Maori were interested participants. Certainly, by the time of the next recorded race meeting at Waipukurau in 1856, the Pakeha were greatly outnumbered by Maori. Of the six horses in the first race, five were owned and ridden by Maori.<sup>3</sup> The lower West Coast region of the North Island was also a centre of early Maori racing. Rod McDonald, the son of the first white settler in the Otaki region claimed that when his mother first arrived on the coast in 1854, race meetings were held at Katihiku Pā. Maori racing also reputedly took place at Waikawa, west of Ohau, at Lake Horowhenua near present day Levin and further north at Poroutawhao.<sup>4</sup>

One of the earliest documented references to Maori racing is an entry in the journal of Abel Dottin Best, a young officer who was one of the organizers of the 1842 race meeting in Auckland. He wrote:

A race among the Mauri Jockeys concluded the days sport it was the best fun in the whole day although not highly scientific. The Mauries had their horses given them in part payment for land only a few days before.<sup>5</sup>

This suggests two somewhat contradictory European responses to Maori horseracing. Firstly, there is a mocking attitude towards the Maori race. It was considered a novelty event and as such it did not appear in the published race programme but was included as a late addition to provide some light relief at the end of the day's serious racing. Although both Best and the writer for the *New Zealand Herald and Auckland Gazette* gave detailed reports of the day's events, it is significant that neither recorded the results of the Maori race, the newspaper failing to mention its existence all together.<sup>6</sup> But concurrent with this view and implied in Best's comment is an acknowledgment of, as well as a grudging admiration for Maori horsemanship. As any nineteenth century Englishman or woman would know, to ride a horse only recently acquired in the highly charged atmosphere of a race would require

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<sup>3</sup> Redwood, pp.140-1.

<sup>4</sup> E. O'Donnell, *Te Hekenga, Early Days in Horowhenua: Being the Reminiscences of Mr. Rod McDonald*, Palmerston North: G.H. Bennett, 1979, p.77.

<sup>5</sup> Nancy M. Taylor (ed.), *The Journal of Ensign Best, 1837-1843*, Wellington: R.E. Owen, Government Printer, 1966, p.331.

<sup>6</sup> *New Zealand Herald and Auckland Gazette*, 6 Nov 1841.

considerable courage and skill. The two themes of ridicule and of respect prevail in almost all of what has been recorded in European writing on Maori involvement in horseracing.

To begin with, most of the Maori racing took place within the context of European organized events. The idea of including a race for horses owned and ridden by Maori evidently caught on and many race meetings prior to the 1880s held one. Following Auckland's lead, the first race meeting in Christchurch in 1851 included a 'Native' race with four entries.<sup>7</sup> The Maori races tended to be casual affairs, accepting entries on the day and they were advertised as 'catch weights', in other words the weight the horses carried was irrelevant, unlike the more important races of the day. Often, as was the case of the 1874 Maori race at Thames, the prize money was not stated in the programme, or if it was it was generally the lowest stake of the day.<sup>8</sup> As an example, at the Otahuhu races in 1855, the highest prize money was £60 for the winner of the Farmer's Purse, followed by the Maiden Plate for £40. The Ladies Purse was worth £30, the Hack Race £15 and the Consolation Stakes, for which the beaten horses of the day were contenders, had a chance of running for £20. The lowest prize of the day was for the 'Maorie' Race of only £10.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, the poorest prize at the 1877 Ohinemutu races was 5 sovereigns offered for the Rotorua Plate, for horses 'to be ridden and owned by natives'.<sup>10</sup> It is clear that although Maori participation in these race meetings was accepted even encouraged, with the inclusion of races exclusively for them, they were not regarded very highly.

Maori owned horses were not restricted to Maori races and there were some extremely good horses that had considerable success. In the 1870s Maori owned horses won the Hawke's Bay Cup, the Tauranga Plate and other important races. G.K. Prebble claims that Maori acquired thoroughbred horses that had been brought over from New South Wales from the late 1840s. High quality mares came in a shipment from Valparaiso, Chile and the chiefs, Mowai and Hori Kingi, bought some of these. According to Prebble some of the best jumping horses were bred from these

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<sup>7</sup> *Lyttelton Times*, 20 Dec 1851.

<sup>8</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 18 Dec 1874.

<sup>9</sup> *Southern Cross*, 6 Feb 1855.

<sup>10</sup> *Bay of Plenty Times*, 7 Feb 1877.

founding stock.<sup>11</sup> While chiefs were able to buy racehorses, members of their hapū would sometimes pool their resources to purchase a thoroughbred, which was then owned by the hapū.<sup>12</sup> Another source of horses that some Maori were able to utilize were wild horses. A mob of these, traced back to Figaro, the first imported thoroughbred, ran wild up the Ohau River flats. Some of the best of these were caught and broken in for racing. Mares were also turned out with them to take advantage of the thoroughbred blood. Another herd of wild horses grazed the Weraroa. These were mostly grey, supposedly descended from an Arab stallion once owned by Tamihana te Rauparaha, himself a racing enthusiast.<sup>13</sup>

To manage blood horses such as these, the Maori riders and handlers had to become good horsemen. Rod McDonald had a high regard for the riding skills of Maori riders. He remembered young Maori in the 1850s, racing their horses along the beach to determine the merits of their respective horses.<sup>14</sup> J. Pattison of Longwoods Station in Otago recalled the skilful Maori stockman of the 1860s. He said that 'on horseback the young Maori was at home and soon began to equal, if not excel his Pakeha comrades'.<sup>15</sup> According to Mrs Malcolm Ross, a week before their race meeting in the Waikato, the Maori 'rounded up wild horses on the plains, caught several, broke them in, and trained them industriously'.<sup>16</sup>

There is also indication that Maori women became used to riding horses and were even prepared to race them. Prebble related; that to add variety to the programme at a race meeting held at Tauranga in January 1874, a hat was passed around for donations for a race for Maori women riders. Four women apparently contested the race.<sup>17</sup> The programme for the 1877 Ohinemutu races in the *Bay of Plenty Times* listed a race, 'to be ridden by women'. A photograph taken by Mrs Malcolm Ross,

<sup>11</sup>G.K. Prebble, *Horses Courses and Men: Early New Zealand Racing*, Tauranga: Ashford-Kent, 1972, pp.13-14.

<sup>12</sup>Mary Mountier, 'Early Maori Involvement in Horse Racing in the Wellington Horowhenua Region', *Historical Journal: Otaki Historical Society*, 12, (1989), p.44.

<sup>13</sup>O'Donnell, p.83.

<sup>14</sup>O'Donnell, p.23.

<sup>15</sup>Herries Beattie, *Early Runholding in Otago*, Dunedin: Otago Daily Times and Witness Newspapers, 1947, p.54.

<sup>16</sup>Mrs Malcolm Ross, "A Maori Ascot" Thirty-Five Years Ago in the Waikato', *Wanderlust Magazine*, 1:2 (1930), pp.15.

<sup>17</sup>Prebble, p.36.

published later in *Wanderlust Magazine*, shows the field of three in the 'Wahines' Race' (Plate 2). The accompanying description claims that Maori women were 'pioneers of their sex in riding astride'. She relates how sidesaddles were unknown to these women and that they simply tied their gowns to their ankles. But there is no mistaking the writer's admiration for the courage of these riders. She writes that despite the fact that the horse ridden by the 'little lass in pink and white muslin' was uncontrollable before the start of the race, and that anxious relatives begged her not to compete, the jockey carried on with her race.<sup>18</sup>

Published programmes show quite a number of Maori names listed amongst the officials and organizers of early North Island race meetings. By the late 1860s, Maoris were assisting in running races around Wairoa and other East Coast locations.<sup>19</sup> Around the same time, the Wade races that took place on Orewa Beach had two Maori stewards.<sup>20</sup> Half of the total of ten stewards who organized the Ohinemutu races in 1877 were Maori.<sup>21</sup>

Although early Maori involvement was through Pakeha run events, it was not long before they began to organize their own events. Plate Three is a translation of the programme that was originally printed in Maori for a race meeting held at Karioi, in the central North Island on 1 January 1870. An almost identical programme from Otaki from the 1860s has been printed in Miriam Redwood's *Proud Silk*.<sup>22</sup> Both meetings were run under the patronage of the Maori king and the rules are similar, only the names of the officials vary. All of the stewards at both race meetings have Maori names. Although the rules state that 'girls' could not be jockeys, the Karioi officials included a woman as secretary and the handicapper was assisted by his wife. There are no records of European women serving as stewards at race meetings at this time. Another photograph taken by Mrs Ross at the race meeting in the Waikato shows the clerk of the course (Plate 4).

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<sup>18</sup> Ross, p.23.

<sup>19</sup> Redwood, p.155.

<sup>20</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 9 Mar 1867.

<sup>21</sup> *Bay of Plenty Times*, 7 Feb 1877.

<sup>22</sup> Redwood, p.152.



Plate 2: Wahines' Race

Mrs Malcolm Ross, ca 1890s, Making New Zealand Collection,  
Alexander Turnbull Library, National Library of New Zealand, Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa, Reference Number: F-1046-1/4-MNZ.



**Programme**  
**Maori Race Meeting**  
 Karioi, January 1st, 1870

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**COME! COME! COME! NOTICE TO ALL!**

This notice is to all friends in the East, in the West, in the North, in the South.

**OH, FRIENDS LISTEN!**

Horse races will be held at **KARIOI**.

These races will be run under the patronage of the King of Maori people.

**STEWARDS OF THE RACES:**

Chairman: **Te Wheoro** and his friends.  
 Judge: **Te Tahuna** and his friends.  
 Starter: **Te Harihari** and his friends.  
 Clerk of the Course: **P. Wanihi** and **Te Amaru**.  
 Clerk of Scales: **Te Kamanomano**.  
 Handicapper: **Tom Pepa** and his wife.  
 Treasurer: **The Rev. Hori Wirihi**  
 Secretary: **Mrs. Harihari**.

**RULES OF THESE RACES:**

- 1.—Men owning horses and wishing to enter them must deposit money in the hands of the secretary.
- 2.—Don't bring any drink to these races.
- 3.—Men who have taken much drink will not be allowed on this course. If any man disobey this rule he will bring the whip of the club down upon him.
- 4.—No girls will be allowed to ride as jockeys in these races.
- 5.—Jockeys must wear trousers in all events.
- 6.—No jockey must knock any other jockey off his horse or touch the reins of any other jockey or strike any other jockey with his whip during a race, or strike any other horse other than his own, or swear at or threaten any other jockey.
- 7.—Any jockey breaking these rules will be driven from the course if he does not pay twenty shillings to the treasurer.
- 8.—You must not change the name of the horse. You must not suppress the fact of a win at any other race meeting. You can be expelled or fined not more than 50s. if you break this rule.
- 9.—Persons allowed to see these races must not say rude words to the stewards, or swear at jockeys who do not win, or otherwise behave improperly.

Plate 3: Programme of the Maori Race Meeting at Karioi, 1 Jan 1870.



Plate 4: Clerk of the Course

Mrs Malcolm Ross, ca 1890s, Making New Zealand Collection,  
Alexander Turnbull Library, National Library of New Zealand, Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa,  
Reference Number: F-1045-1/4 MNZ.

Few photographs of race officials exist from the period, and the assumption is that the photographer was touched by the quaintness of the unlikely looking steward on his coarse little hack, so different from the elegantly dressed and mounted officials she would have been familiar with at Pakeha meets.

The organization of Maori race meets followed much the same pattern as those of European settlers. Rod McDonald recalled in the 1870s when race meetings were held at his family property at Horowhenua that a meeting was convened for those interested in planning the races. Stewards were elected at this time and a few of these were given the task of canvassing the district for subscriptions towards the stakes. He claimed that everyone in the almost exclusively Maori community contributed, the usual amount being five shillings but £1 was expected from the stewards.<sup>23</sup>

Maori also formed their own racing clubs, the Otaki Maori Racing club, being the first formed in 1886. At least three others were established, Akura Maori Racing Club near Masterton, Waiomatatini Native Jockey Club close to Ruatoria and Turanganui Native Jockey Club at Gisborne but these were short lived. The Otaki Maori Club, however, succeeded where previous European clubs in the area failed and by the end of the century was one of the country's most successful clubs in terms of earnings and amount of prize money offered. Although the rules stated that only members of the Ngāti Raukawa, Ngāti Toa and Te Ati Awa tribes could belong to the club, Mary Mountier in her article on racing in the Wellington Horowhenua area notes that the Otaki Maori club included white settlers such as Rod McDonald among their stewards.<sup>24</sup> So it would appear that some mixing of the races appeared in both Maori and Pakeha clubs.

Several descriptions of Maori race meetings by Pakeha writers give an insight into the nature of these meetings and also their attitude towards them. Leon Smith, an amateur jockey who rode at a turn of the century King Country meeting describes the efforts made by the Maori committee to run the event in a traditional European

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<sup>23</sup> O'Donnell, pp.82-3.

<sup>24</sup> Mountier, p.46.

fashion. This made for some difficulties and improvisation that Smith was quick to ridicule. Lacking a proper judge's box, one was made from a gig with its shafts resting on a couple of posts. Smith relates how the portly judge, becoming excited during a race was tipped over backwards. He also laughed at the improvised jockey scales and the clerk's inability to read them. According to Smith, the Maori organizers would not accept any Pakeha interference in this or any other matter and called for the secretary who was one of the few Maori there who could read or write. Whether this was true or not is irrelevant, the point is that Smith indicated that this was very much a second rate affair and that Maori efforts to run their own meeting was a source of high amusement. Yet despite this, Smith acknowledged the gratitude of the Maori owners of the horses he rode that day and their insistence that he accept payment for his efforts. He also remembered the good feeling that prevailed during the day and the pleasant social occasion.<sup>25</sup>

A more sympathetic description of Maori race meetings has been left by Rod McDonald. His vivid memories of Otaki's New Year meets were of large audiences, intense excitement and warm hospitality offered to Maori and Pakeha alike. He remembered the high degree of support shown by the Maori over a wide area. Mounted race-goers arrived along the beach from Foxton and Rangitikei in the north and from as far south as Porirua and Wellington, having broken their journey at Paekakariki or Waikanae. As slow moving bullock teams pulling drays loaded with people arrived at the racecourse, the animals were turned out to graze and the drays were positioned as improvised grandstands. Ngāti Toa, Ngāti Raukawa and Muaupoko all ran horses at Otaki so tribal rivalry was intense. Whole hapū arrived together in procession, following proudly behind their racehorse.<sup>26</sup> In the course of a few hours three to four thousand people had congregated on the racecourse. McDonald described the pre-race tension:

... in different parts of the staked off saddling paddock a dense throng surrounded each horse which is to compete, watching the business of saddling-up, yelling advice and encouragement to the rider, and giving to

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<sup>25</sup> Leon L. Smith, 'A Maori Race Meeting in the King Country', in *First Past the Post: A Anthology of New Zealand Racing Stories*, Brian Phillips (ed.), Auckland: Random House, 2000, pp.191-3.

<sup>26</sup> O'Donnell, p.79.

ejaculations of admiration of their horse's points. Suddenly with a yell one crowd sweeps into a haka hurling defiance at their opponents in word and gesture, which means rather more than a reference to the occasion on hand. Other groups in front of their respective horses take up the challenge, and with the whole crowd seething with excitement the horses are led out to the track.<sup>27</sup>

But the excitement had just begun. Once the starter's flag dropped, sending the racehorses on their way, mounted spectators galloped alongside them as best they could shouting on their favourite. McDonald recalled hundreds of hard-riding men, women and children that followed each race in this way. The noise, dust and sheer numbers of excited people and horses must have made the atmosphere electric. As the first horse charged across the finish line, the crowds of supporters surged to surround the champion, dancing a haka of triumph. The win was a collective one and was celebrated as a tribal victory.<sup>28</sup>

This scene was repeated over and over again as each race began and finished. In between races the spectators enjoyed the Otaki hosts' hospitality. McDonald remembered the shared feasts of pork, potatoes and fish served steaming hot from the umu.<sup>29</sup> The food at the Maori King Country meeting was also a highlight for Leon Smith. Everyone present was invited to luncheon, laid out on a long table that was covered with a white tablecloth. A large quantity of cakes and tarts were available but what really impressed Smith was the four tiers of cooked crayfish arranged at intervals along the table, brought by coastal Maori for their inland friends and relatives.<sup>30</sup> Mrs Ross was also taken by the hospitality offered to her and the rest of her camping party at the New Years race meeting they attended. They received a written invitation to 'bring your own mugs and plates' and following the horse races and a tug-of-war, they danced with their hosts in the moonlight to the music of an accordion. Thirty-five years later, she wrote that she had attended many races since but none had been 'so filled with interest and charm' as the 1890s Maori race meeting in the Waikato.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> O'Donnell, p.81.

<sup>28</sup> O'Donnell, p.81.

<sup>29</sup> O'Donnell, p.79.

<sup>30</sup> Smith, p.192.

<sup>31</sup> Ross, p.26.

The nostalgic memories of Mrs Ross and Rod McDonald concerning Maori horseracing meets differ in tone from other European descriptions. Perhaps McDonald himself gives a clue to this when he says that the Maori language was universally spoken and ‘only the man thoroughly used to Maori life and mode of thought could catch the true spirit of the gathering’.<sup>32</sup> Certainly most newspaper journalists failed to appreciate Maori horseracing involvement. Many racing reports failed to publish the name of the winning horse or its owner, if Maori were involved and any reference to Maori participation was generally critical or meant to be amusing. The writer of the *Thames Guardian and Mining Record* clearly thought his readers would laugh at a Maori jockey’s keenness at the Saint Patrick’s Day races when, on completing the two required circuits of the course, continued on around a third time.<sup>33</sup> The *Wanganui Herald’s* reporter at the Turakina races wrote of his irritation at Maori owners causing delays at the scales by having to weigh a number of prospective jockeys until one could be found near enough to the required weight. The same writer was amused at a particularly garish set of jockey silks of bright scarlet trimmed with black bows that was passed around and worn by many ‘dusky jockeys’ during the course of the day.<sup>34</sup>

Any dishonest behaviour of Maori participants or spectators was earnestly reported. Leon Smith complained that the judge at the King Country meeting he attended was not impartial and went out of his way to see that his son-in-law’s horse won.<sup>35</sup> Several histories of New Zealand racing repeat the story of the judge at the racecourse at the Maori settlement at Orakei, near Auckland who always ensured that a Maori horse was declared the winner.<sup>36</sup> The *Hawke’s Bay Herald* report on the 1865 Napier races mentioned a native on the course who robbed a European but was ‘cleverly’ chased into the swamp and captured.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> O’Donnell, p.79.

<sup>33</sup> *Thames Guardian and Mining Record*, 9 Mar 1872.

<sup>34</sup> *Wanganui Herald*, 2 Mar 1878.

<sup>35</sup> Smith, p.192.

<sup>36</sup> Redwood, p.158.

<sup>37</sup> *Hawke’s Bay Herald*, 2 Mar 1865.

Although drinking was part of Maori racing as it was with Pakeha, it is interesting that the rules of the Karioi and Otaki meetings prohibited alcohol from being brought onto the course and indicated that intoxication was not tolerated. Yet acts of Maori drunkenness at the races appear in the local newspapers. At the Waikato Racing Club's meeting in 1889, an intoxicated Maori was said to have run in front of the field in the 'Flying Stakes' and was knocked down by a horse.<sup>38</sup> The 'grand war dance' put on by the Maori, concluding the New Years Day sports at Paeroa in 1872 was said to be not very successful by the reporter because the natives were not sufficiently 'tight'.<sup>39</sup>

There is enough evidence to show that Maori played an active role in all aspects of early horseracing and did much to contribute to the popularity of the sport in New Zealand. Although Maori adopted many of the features of the traditional British sport, they also added their own variations. Although perhaps not widespread, the fact that women rode in races in some places, furthermore that they rode astride is a unique feature. Not only women were allowed a more active role, Maori horseracing seemed to make the sport more accessible to a wider range of people. The shared ownership of some racehorses, for instance, could be seen as an early form of syndication. Despite this, many Pakeha commentators at this time did not see the Maori involvement in a positive light. They may have acknowledged Maori as talented horsemen but they also found much to criticize and ridicule.

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<sup>38</sup> Neville Northover, *Winning Against the Odds: Racing In and Around Hamilton From 1866-1887 - The Centenary of the Waikato Racing Club*, Hamilton: The Waikato Racing Club, 1994, p.5.

<sup>39</sup> *Thames Guardian and Mining Record*, 3 Jan 1872.

## 3

## HORSERACING AS A FRONTIER SPORT

Some of the aspects of Maori horseracing outlined in the previous chapter are also ones that characterize horseracing as a frontier sport. The social function of race meetings, as well as the raw excitement and high risk, applied to racing in the frontier regions of the colony. Horseracing was readily adaptable to frontier conditions and offered a strong attraction to the predominantly male population. It provided a respite from their often lonely and demanding working conditions and offered opportunities to socialize as well as to drink and gamble. The 'rough and ready' nature of the frontier sport was a contributing factor in the development of New Zealand horseracing.

One of the defining features of nineteenth century New Zealand was the degree to which frontier conditions prevailed over much of the country. Miles Fairburn in *The Ideal Society and its Enemies* contends that during the period from the 1840s to the 1880s the frontier expanded rapidly, drawing large numbers of colonists into new areas. This had the effect of creating an atomized society that lacked social institutions, resulting in serious social problems.<sup>1</sup> Jock Phillips also acknowledges the significance of the frontier. His timeframe is longer and he argues that throughout the century much of the activity carried out by European immigrants involved the exploitation of frontier resources. He saw this operating in five distinct but interrelated frontiers. The first, and beyond the scope of this study was, the exploitation of the marine resources, the sealers and whalers that worked these waters from the late eighteenth century to about 1850. The discovery of gold in Otago in 1861 opened a new frontier that provided large scale employment at various locations in Otago, a few years later on the West Coast and later still around Thames on the

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<sup>1</sup>Miles Fairburn, *The Ideal Society and its Enemies: The Foundations of Modern New Zealand Society, 1850-1900*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1989, pp. 93, 182-3, 191-3.

Coromandel Peninsula. Phillips points out that this frontier in its various forms lasted for most of the century and by 1891 there were over 12,000 gold miners in New Zealand only 3,000 less than in 1874.<sup>2</sup>

The attraction of land and farming resulted in an important frontier to many of the colonists seeking a new life in New Zealand. Phillips sees two different types of farming in this period. The first was the dry plains of the east coast, predominantly Canterbury, also parts of Otago, Marlborough and areas of Wairarapa and Hawke's Bay. Although these areas had small self-sufficient yeoman farmers, they were best known for the large pastoral holdings that provided employment for large numbers of men. The second rural area that Phillips identifies were the dense bush areas of the West Coast, Taranaki, Waikato, Manawatu and Northland. Maori resistance initially stalled development in these areas but from the 1870s, land confiscations and large-scale emigration programmes resulted in numerous small farms being cut out of the bush. Following in their wake were the road-makers and railway navvies providing essential links for the isolated communities. Although a much smaller geographical area and attracting far fewer men, Phillip's final frontier was the kauri gum digging enterprise of Northland that reached its peak in the 1890s.<sup>3</sup>

Looking at Phillip's model, it can be seen that horseracing as a sport thrived on the four frontiers that existed during the second half of the nineteenth century. The first organized race meeting in the goldfields took place in Clyde on 31 December 1862 and 1 January 1863, less than two years after Gabriel Read's momentous discovery.<sup>4</sup> Six years later the Clyde correspondent for *The Otago Daily Times* was able to report that 'horse racing is at present the chief outdoor pastime'.<sup>5</sup> Horseracing also followed closely behind the gold prospectors on the West Coast and the Westland Racing Club's inaugural meeting at Hokitika was able to boast an attendance of

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<sup>2</sup> Jock Phillips, *A Mans Country? The Image of the Pakeha Male: A History*, Auckland: Penguin Books, 1996, pp.11-12.

<sup>3</sup> Phillips, pp.12-14.

<sup>4</sup> James Crombie Purcell, *The Heart of the Desert: A History of Cromwell and Bannockburn Districts of Central Otago*, Christchurch: Whitcoulls, 1951, p.336.

<sup>5</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, 11 Jan 1869.

between three and four thousand people.<sup>6</sup> Horseracing was also popular in the pastoral areas, offering entertainment for the employees of the stations at holidays or following shearing. *The Oamaru Times and Waitaki Reporter* considered it newsworthy to report on the 1867 Boxing Day races on Benmore Station in North Otago. A ‘good gathering of shearers and shepherds’ attended the meeting and following the foot racing and jumping; they were able to enjoy the hospitality of Benmore’s owner.<sup>7</sup> In the North Island’s Horowhenua, Rod O’Donnell recalled the circular racecourse his family built about a half a mile from the homestead to provide racing for their employees and friends after the shearing was over.<sup>8</sup>

With fewer horses and a more isolated population, it would be expected that horseracing would not have the same following on the bush frontier. Yet Frances Porter in her biography of Jane Maria Atkinson asserts that in the 1850s horseracing was already established in Taranaki as a popular recreation for both Maori and settler.<sup>9</sup> On their remote farms deep in the bush, the settlers of Kaponga needed a special reason to make the arduous trip into town. Rollo Arnold claims that the Boxing Day racing at Manaia provided just such an occasion. Others obviously felt the same way, as by the later 1880s the Manaia Races were drawing crowds of over a thousand.<sup>10</sup> Some of these spectators might well have been men from work camps involved in railway construction and other public works programmes. Prebble mentions the ‘roughly organized’ racing that took place on the beach at Omokoroa in the Tauranga district as catering to the gambling instincts of the workers in the camps that swelled the local population at the time.<sup>11</sup> Race meetings of this nature also took place in Northland, drawing men from the gumfields, bush camps and farms. Generally clubs were not formed, racing was organized on a year by year basis, often

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<sup>6</sup> John Costello and Pat Finnegan, *Tapestry of Turf: The History of New Zealand Horseracing, 1840-1997*, Auckland: Moa Publications, 1988, p.61.

<sup>7</sup> *Oamaru Times and Waitaki Reporter*, 5 Feb 1867.

<sup>8</sup> E. O’Donnell, *Te Hekenga, Early Days in Horowhenua: Being the Reminiscences of Mr Rod McDonald*, Palmerston North: G.H. Bennett, 1979, p.77.

<sup>9</sup> Frances Porter, *Born to New Zealand: A Biography of Jane Maria Atkinson*, Wellington: Allen and Unwin, 1989, p.54.

<sup>10</sup> Rollo Arnold, *Settler Kaponga, 1881-1914: A Frontier Fragment of the Western World*, Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1997, p.69.

<sup>11</sup> G.K. Prebble, *Horses Courses and Men: Early New Zealand Racing*, Tauranga: Ashford-Kent, 1972, p.46.

by the local publican and hacks and cart horses rather than thoroughbreds provided the sport.<sup>12</sup>

Life on the frontier involved hard, physical work. Much of the work was by nature transitory which tended to discourage settled family life. It is generally agreed among historians that a significant sex imbalance in favour of men existed in the frontier regions. Although Charlotte Macdonald argues that the disparity between the sexes varied considerably over time and place, she is willing to concede that it was a factor on the Otago goldfields in the early 1860s and perhaps in other frontier 'pockets'.<sup>13</sup> The sex imbalance is a keystone in Fairburn's argument that New Zealand's 'ideal society' was essentially flawed. The high ratio of adult men to women was a major factor responsible for a deficient social organization revealed in high degrees of loneliness, drunkenness and interpersonal violence.<sup>14</sup> Phillips goes further than Macdonald and Fairburn in asserting that a demographic basis existed for establishing a 'rich male culture, fertile soil for the growth of all-male institutions'.<sup>15</sup> His male communities were mostly found on the frontier and in rural districts rather than in the towns and growing cities. Moreover, they were more likely to comprise young, unmarried men. The often solitary nature of work on the goldfields, high country stations and bush camps attracted young physically fit men without family responsibilities. There are exceptions to this, of course. Families often ran the subsistent farms cut into the bush, but even in this situation it was quite common for the cash-strapped farmer to leave for long periods of time to seek employment with a work gang felling bush or constructing roads and railways. This would mean that for at least a temporary period of time these family men would become members of a mostly male community.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Prebble, p.136.

<sup>13</sup> Charlotte Macdonald, 'Too Many Men and Too Few Women: Gender's "Fatal Impact" in Nineteenth-Century Colonies', in *The Gendered Kiwi*, Caroline Daley and Deborah Montgomerie (eds), Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1999, pp.24, 32-33.

<sup>14</sup> Fairburn, *Ideal Society and its Enemies*, pp.195-229.

<sup>15</sup> Phillips, p.9.

<sup>16</sup> Phillips, pp.13-14.

Even if we do not go as far as accepting the premise suggested by Phillips that a vital male culture flourished on the frontier, it can at least be agreed that these regions contained a higher proportion of young men, either single or temporarily absent from their families. Given the popularity of horseracing in the frontier towns and high country stations, it can be said that men patronized the race meetings, often in large numbers. What was it then, about horseracing that appealed to these frontier men? Firstly, race meetings provided a respite from their often solitary work and an opportunity to come together to socialize. Katikati was a well attended race meeting during the Coromandel gold rush days. Horses were ridden over Thompson's track from the Waikato while others came from Thames, Paeroa and Waihi. Coaches arrived packed with miners intent on a good days outing.<sup>17</sup> Even James Cox, the marginalized labourer, whose diary was brought to light by Miles Fairburn, went to the races seven times during the five months he spent in Lyttelton. Cox placed small wagers on only three of these occasions so the appeal was not gambling.<sup>18</sup>

Many of the race-goers, however, were attracted by the opportunity to gamble and bookmakers and 'spielars' could be found at even the smallest and most remote meetings. The Castlepoint beach races in the early days have been described as a 'masculine affair' with a large number of bookmakers making their way there from Wellington. Other more devious characters, 'loafers' and 'thugs', also reputedly from Wellington were known to be adept at separating punters from their hard earned cash with games such as 'Crown and Anchor' and 'Thimble-and-Pea'.<sup>19</sup> The Whangaroa and Kaeo Jockey Club Races in December 1882 were also plagued by disreputable outsiders. The *Referee* reported that the 'local constable disappointed several of the sharp witted fraternity who had come up from Auckland in the hope of earning a few shillings'.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Prebble, p.46.

<sup>18</sup> Miles Fairburn, *Nearly out of Heart and Hope: The Puzzle of a Colonial Labourer's Diary*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1995, p.51.

<sup>19</sup> Mike Simms, *Sand, Sea and Hoofbeats: One Hundred Years of Horse Racing in the Tinui Castlepoint District, 1872-1972*, Masterton: Castlepoint Racing Club, pp.9-10.

<sup>20</sup> *New Zealand Referee*, 7 Jan 1882.

The ancient attraction of horseracing as a fast and highly dangerous sport no doubt appealed to the predominantly young, male and single population. In an age of amateurism, men commonly rode their own horses in the races. Even watching a race was not necessarily a passive occupation. Before the introduction of running rails to separate the racers from the spectators, some enthusiasts would follow the race closely on horseback. The columnist from the *Daily Southern Cross* described how the numerous equestrians at the 1863 Auckland races jostled for position at the post, then galloped wildly across the course to try to be first at the finish to spot the winner.<sup>21</sup> A *Herald* reporter complained about this practice, saying that riders often rushed their horses into a race not quite finished.<sup>22</sup> Of course, racing would not just be limited to race days, 'training' took place whenever time allowed. The male members of the Atkinson family of Taranaki, in the late 1850s took horseracing seriously. It is recorded that whenever they rode into New Plymouth on business, they always seemed to find time to do a few circuits of the racetrack on the way.<sup>23</sup>

Accidents causing injury, even deaths were not infrequent occurrences on early colonial racetracks. All accidents, no matter how minor were reported in detail in local newspapers. Many of these involved mounted spectators. For example, at the 1871 Taranaki races, two young horsemen riding at full speed collided, one horse was knocked over and its rider died from internal injuries. At the same event an 'old Maori man' suffered a broken leg when he was run over by a horse ridden quickly around a corner.<sup>24</sup> The following year at Thames, a boy knocked down by a horseman, then trod on was 'conveyed to hospital by order of the committee'.<sup>25</sup> A young man riding around the Tauranga course between races was thrown from his horse and had his head cut open by another horse's hoof.<sup>26</sup> There were two incidents at the 1872 Parawai Races where children were knocked over by horses although they were not seriously injured.<sup>27</sup> E.C. Studholme recalled in *Te Waimate: Early Station Life in New Zealand*, that it was customary in the case of a serious accident to

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<sup>21</sup> *Southern Cross*, 3 Jan 1863.

<sup>22</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 3 Jan 1871.

<sup>23</sup> Porter, p.106.

<sup>24</sup> *Southern Cross*, 4 Jan 1871.

<sup>25</sup> *Thames Guardian and Mining Record*, 9 Mar 1872.

<sup>26</sup> *Bay of Plenty Times*, 31 Jan 1877.

<sup>27</sup> Johnny Williams, p.38.

pass the hat around while the rider was still on the ground.<sup>28</sup> When a race meeting was favoured with no accidents, the local newspaper commented on this. In a column devoted to the 1865 races at Totara in North Otago, the correspondent's concluding statement was, 'and not the least pleasing feature to chronicle is that no accident of any kind occurred'.<sup>29</sup> Colonial newspapers leave the reader in no doubt about the high risks involved in frontier horseracing.

From the founding years of the sport in the colony, drinking has been associated with race meetings with publicans plying their trade from stalls. The number of booths selling alcoholic beverages varied from meeting to meeting but generally there were several competing for trade. When the newly formed Westland Racing Club auctioned the rights to sell alcohol at their 1867 New Years Day races, bidding for the privilege of obtaining a booth site reached £55, with eight licensed stalls being erected.<sup>30</sup> The fact that alcohol was readily available at race meetings contributed to the convivial social atmosphere but it also provided opportunities for over-indulgence. Another factor that is applicable here is what Jock Phillips describes as the pattern of drinking that emerged on the frontier, commonly called the 'spree'.<sup>31</sup> Fairburn also acknowledged that intense drinking bouts occurred because so many of the men working on the frontier lived a lonely existence, and when they did come into town seeking relaxation and companionship they were likely to find it in a licensed hotel where they drank until their money ran out.<sup>32</sup> Race meetings provided an occasion for men from outlying areas to come together to indulge in heavy drinking. Drunkenness seemed to be an inevitable part of frontier race meetings and is often commented upon in reminiscences and newspaper columns. William Vance in his history of the Mackenzie Basin quoted from Jack Tripp, a former manager of Richmond Station, on the subject of the Tekapo Races. He claimed that, 'most of the crowd were drunk, and when they got too rowdy, they were tied up to a tip-dray'.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> E.C. Studholme, *Te Waimate: Early Station Life in New Zealand*, Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1954, p.283.

<sup>29</sup> *Oamaru Times and Waitaki Reporter*, 28 Dec 1865.

<sup>30</sup> Miriam Redwood, *Proud Silk: A New Zealand Racing History*, Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1979, p.123.

<sup>31</sup> Phillips, p.34-5.

<sup>32</sup> Fairburn, *Ideal Society and its Enemies*, p.216.

<sup>33</sup> William Vance, *High Endeavour: The Story of the Mackenzie Country*, Timaru: William Vance, 1965, p.88.

As this comment indicates, it was not the alcohol itself that was of concern but the increased likelihood of unrestrained spectator behaviour. The *Otago Daily Times* reported that at the Clyde races in 1869, police were needed to break up fights.<sup>34</sup> Vicesimus Lush recorded that the ten hotels in Thames saw in New Year 1869 with free drinks. The celebrations lasted four days and on the second day of racing, a group of miners disagreed with the stewards' decision and succeeded in holding up further races by drawing a rope across the track. With no police in sight, the stewards were forced to withdraw and leave the miners in charge.<sup>35</sup> So concerned was the Westport police inspector about potential drunken behaviour at the town's first race meeting that he requested a lockup to be built under the grandstand. This consisted of a large log sunk into the ground with a heavy bullock chain stapled to it, to which any arrested men could be handcuffed.<sup>36</sup>

The male culture existing in the frontier areas undoubtedly had a hand in shaping the nature of horseracing in this country and not just in the negative ways that have been outlined here. Phillips suggests that in the absence of legal and social restrictions in the early years of the frontier, a code of behaviour evolved among the male community. One of the most significant of these was the expectation that within a community of males, class background counted for little. The trappings of class, the fine clothes, servants and luxurious living of the British elite could not be sustained on the frontier and if remnants did exist in some places, they were forgotten in the gatherings around a campfire or hotel bar.<sup>37</sup> They were also disregarded at the early horseracing meets. Before the days when grandstands and enclosures were built, people of all backgrounds stood side by side to watch the races. Thoroughbred horses were not much use in the goldfields and the bush camps, and so a labourer's hack had just as good a chance to win as one owned by a landowner. Even when there was a disparity in the quality of horses, handicapping which came early to colonial racecourses was intended to give every horse an equal chance. This spirit of egalitarianism at race meetings was clearly noted and often commented upon in the

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<sup>34</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, 10 Feb 1869.

<sup>35</sup> Alison Drummond (ed.), *The Thames Journals of Vicesimus Lush, 1868-82*, Christchurch: Pegasus Press, 1975, p.27.

<sup>36</sup> Redwood, p.123.

<sup>37</sup> Phillips, p.30.

local newspapers. In discussing the success of the annual Auckland races, a reporter commented, that the 'absence of those marked social distinctions which prevail at home enables all classes to mingle heartily together in the pursuit of pleasure'.<sup>38</sup> Northover in his book on the history of the Waikato Racing Club quoted the *Waikato Times* as; 'pleased to see the happy mingling of people of all classes'.<sup>39</sup>

Another tradition that had its roots in the frontier male culture was what Phillips refers to as 'yarn' telling. These were stories based on past experiences, passed on by word of mouth and almost always exaggerated.<sup>40</sup> In some parts of the country, particularly where frontier conditions prevailed, yarns concerning horseracing have endured. In the Mackenzie, a local legend has grown up about the forming of two of the major high country stations, Benmore and Ben Ohau. Hugh Fraser and McMurdo in 1857 rode together looking for grazing land. Both favoured the land between the Ohau and Ahuriri Rivers extending to Lake Ohau, so to settle the argument they raced their horses to the nearest matagouri bush. McMurdo got there first so applied for the land, which was to become Benmore, while Fraser settled for the neighbouring property he called Ben Ohau, across the Ohau River.<sup>41</sup> Further down the Waitaki, a yarn is told about Reverend J.C. Andrew, the first leaseholder of Otematata Station who happened to be riding past the unfenced racecourse at Oamaru while a race was in progress. In spite of the efforts of the parson, his mount joined the runners and as legend has it, finished first.<sup>42</sup> Another variation of this yarn is told in the Kurow area. This time it concerns a newly arrived Presbyterian minister whose zealous preaching had already made him unpopular in the community. One Sunday he was lent a hack to ride to a service further up the valley. Unknown to him, the mare had been in training for the local races and as the road out of town crossed the race track, the horse began to gallop and went several circuits before the distressed clergyman was able to gain control. Some of the unhappy parishioners

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<sup>38</sup> *Southern Cross*, 3 Jan 1871.

<sup>39</sup> Neville Northover, *Winning Against the Odds: Racing In and Around Hamilton from 1866-1987: The Centenary of the Waikato Racing Club*, Hamilton: The Waikato Racing Club, 1994, p.2.

<sup>40</sup> Phillips, pp.32-3.

<sup>41</sup> Marion Aubry, *Omarama: Place of Light and Early Waitaki Valley*, n.p., 1978, p.40.

<sup>42</sup> K.C. McDonald, *White Stone Country: The Story of North Otago*, Oamaru: North Otago Centennial Committee, 1962, p.84.

happened to be up on Kurow Hill to witness the event and so the story began.<sup>43</sup> Yarns such as these became engrained in local folklore and played a part in instilling a sense of community. Perhaps too, as with the hapless clergymen, there is a lesson here that practical skill such as the ability to ride a horse counts for more on the frontier than formal education or class background. Implied also in these stories is a lack of respect for authority figures and so provided opportunities to 'let off steam' which may not have been acceptable in day to day life.

The adaptability and improvisation, which marked early colonial race meetings, can also be attributed to life on the frontier. Faced with isolation, a lack of community structures, high labour costs and shortage of manufactured goods, those on the frontier had to make do on their own. Edward Jerningham Wakefield describes how placing chairs on some planks supported by 'eight or ten water-butts' created a grandstand at the 1842 Petone Beach Races. In keeping with his role as Clerk of the Course, Wakefield borrowed the only pink coat in the colony to wear.<sup>44</sup> At Tararu near Thames in 1868, miners cut an oval shaped clearing through scrub around the Royal Oak Hotel as a track for races held to celebrate the first anniversary of the opening of the goldfields.<sup>45</sup> An unfinished bridge did not deter punters from attending the Reefton Jockey Club's 1880 meeting and they crossed the river in boats, drays and on horseback.<sup>46</sup>

Horseracing was a popular form of outdoor recreation for the predominantly young and male population who worked in the frontier regions of New Zealand. It provided a focus for social interaction and an opportunity to participate in a sport of speed and danger. Gambling, drinking and 'yarn' telling were closely associated with horseracing and clearly part of its frontier appeal. But these also brought risks and there were efforts to contain what was seen as unsociable activity. It needs to be remembered that horseracing was also a sport of the military and the upper classes

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<sup>43</sup> Erskine and Mabel Neave, *The Land of Munros, Merinos and Matagouri: Its Kirk, Pioneers and Descendants*, Kurow: D.E. Neave, 1980, p.51.

<sup>44</sup> Joan Stevens (ed.), *Adventure in New Zealand*, (by) Edward Jerningham Wakefield (1845), Auckland: Golden Press, 1975, pp.254-6.

<sup>45</sup> Williams, p.22.

<sup>46</sup> *Inangahua Herald*, 30 Feb 1880.

with an interest in maintaining law and order. Consequently, the seemingly paradoxical role of horseracing as a civilizing influence on colonial society needs to be examined.

## 4

## HORSERACING AS A CIVILIZING AGENT

Horseracing was established early in New Zealand and it attracted large numbers of people throughout the colony. Racing was easily adapted to frontier conditions but the success of this very English sport can also be attributed to the desire to provide a link with 'home'. But was it just nostalgia or was it a deliberate attempt by those in authority to replicate the British social structure and to exercise some control over the colonial population? A look at early horseracing in the colonies of New South Wales and South Australia would seem to indicate that the sport was promoted as a means of establishing a class consciousness as well as providing a civilizing influence on the colonial population. That this was also the case in New Zealand was due largely to the shaping role of its colonial press. This chapter contends that attempts were made to civilize both the people and the land. It is significant that when the citizens of Auckland planned their first organized races, they named the chosen but yet to be cleared venue, 'Epsom Downs' after the prestigious English racecourse.<sup>1</sup>

John O'Hara and John Daly are two historians who have discussed horseracing in the Australian context. O'Hara makes the point that in 1810 when the first horse race in Hyde Park, Sydney was organized by the officers of the Seventy-Third Regiment it was done so with the official sanction of Governor Macquarie. By introducing the preferred leisure activity of the English aristocracy, it provided the colonial elite with an opportunity to proclaim not only their wealth and status but also that the new society had triumphed over its penal beginnings.<sup>2</sup> South Australia was an experiment in the 'systematic colonization' ideas of Edward Gibbon Wakefield. Based on Wakefield's principles, the young colony was to be moulded into a society resembling an idealized conception of an English pre-industrial community. This involved a hierarchical class system. Many of the settlers who had paid their own way to the colony and were able to buy land on arrival formed the colonial

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<sup>1</sup> *Southern Cross*, 1 Mar 1865.

<sup>2</sup> John O'Hara, 'Horse and Trotting', in *Sport in Australia: A Social History*, Wray Vamplew and Brian Stoddart (eds), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp.93-111.

aristocracy. According to John Daly, the Adelaide gentry became a clearly defined group who socialized together and adopted the manners, language and habits of the English upper classes. One of these habits was horseracing which they took up with enthusiasm, organizing races within a year of settlement and holding an annual St. Leger and a Derby even though the quality of the colonial horses fell far short of their English counterparts.<sup>3</sup>

It would be reasonable to assume that this situation could be applied to the Wakefield settlements of New Zealand. Certainly we do know that the colonists in Wellington, Nelson, Dunedin and Christchurch were all able to rally their resources to include horseracing as part of their first anniversary celebrations. Jim McAloon in his study of the Christchurch gentry claims that a classical definition of an upper class involving descendants of successful individuals, sharing a distinctive style of life and monopolizing political power did not apply to Christchurch.<sup>4</sup> Colonial conditions meant that an exclusive upper class could not be maintained and that a high degree of social mobility existed for the 'talented, the lucky and the well-connected'. McAloon also dispels the myth that the elite had complete political and economic power. Although they had less power than imagined, a consciousness of a social elite did exist that was created and maintained through social networks and rituals. Horseracing was one of these social rituals and it grew to have an important role in the life of the Christchurch elite. The success of the anniversary races at Hagley Park prompted a number of Christchurch settlers to establish a racing club. A public meeting was held November 4, 1854 following the 'market dinner', a weekly event held by farmers at the Golden Fleece Hotel. The meeting was chaired by John Cracroft-Wilson, who after a successful career as a civil servant in India retired to his station on the Cashmere Hills. It seems fitting that the resolution to form the Canterbury Jockey Club was proposed by Edward Jerningham Wakefield, son of the colony's promoter. The meeting unanimously passed the resolution, and then went

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<sup>3</sup> John A. Daly, 'A New Britannia in the Antipodes: Sport, Class in Colonial South Australia, *Pleasure, Profit, Proselytism: British Culture and Sport at Home and Abroad, 1700-1914*, J.A. Mangan (ed.), London: Frank Cass, 1988, pp.163-74.

<sup>4</sup> Jim McAloon, 'The Christchurch Elite', *Southern Capital Christchurch: Towards a City Biography, 1850-2000*, John Cookson and Graeme Dunstall (eds), Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 2000, pp.193, 220.

on to decide that the club consist of 'gentlemen' who should before December 2, 1854 pay an entrance fee of one guinea and a yearly subscription of one guinea, to be paid in advance. Almost immediately the fledgling club embarked on ambitious plans, leasing a site at Riccarton and developing a three mile course. A stone grandstand with seating for 400, completed in 1864, was funded by members who subscribed £10 each. Continuing high fees throughout the period meant that membership was effectively restricted to only the wealthiest settlers. By 1867 membership was restricted to thirty-six and those members paid five guineas annual subscription, a further 10s per day admission to the grandstand, also 10s for each lady guest, 5s for entrance to the saddling paddock, plus a 10s charge for any vehicle entering the main gate.<sup>5</sup> With only three days racing a year, membership in the Canterbury Jockey Club remained an expensive and exclusive privilege. What membership did buy, however, was entry into the social elite of Christchurch, a small group of wealthy pastoralists, merchants and financiers whose upper class status was reinforced by replicating the English aristocratic horseracing traditions. As all levels of society attended the early race meetings, an opportunity was provided to display themselves segregated together in the grandstand, promenading on the lawn or if fortune was with them that day, at a presentation in the winner's circle.

Vice-regal and very occasional royal visits added a further lustre to the elaborate social ritual and endorsed the elite's values and status. In honour of the Governor, Sir George Bowen's visit to the Christchurch Races in 1869, the central arch of the balcony on the grandstand was draped with flags. The *Press* reported that when the Governor, accompanied by Commodore Lambert of *H.M.S. Challenger* and His Honour the Superintendent drove onto the course in a four horse brougham he was welcomed with loud and enthusiastic cheers. He 'courteously acknowledged them' before being seated in the grandstand where he spent the afternoon conversing with the gentlemen presented to him and showed 'the liveliest interest in the proceedings'.<sup>6</sup> The grandstand in this case played a dual role in the social ritual of Christchurch society. It became a privileged viewing platform from which the elite

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<sup>5</sup> G.K. Prebble, *Horses Courses and Men: Early New Zealand Racing*, Tauranga: Ashford – Kent, 1972, pp.176-8.

<sup>6</sup> *Press*, 13 Jan 1869.

could see all of the events of the day and could also look down upon their 'social inferiors'. As well, the grandstand acted as a stage, the actors being the Christchurch elite, on stage for all to see. Even within this select group a drama was being acted out with certain individuals deemed important enough to be seated near or to be presented to the Governor, the highest ranking member of the colonial elite. Almost all New Zealand racecourses had grandstands built, even if they were temporary ones, so this social drama would have been played out in towns and cities throughout the colony

The separation of classes was more difficult in rural areas without the social life and facilities of the larger centres, yet it still existed. With the importation of thoroughbreds from the early 1840s, such horses became expensive status symbols. Only the very wealthy could afford to purchase and maintain horses solely for racing, so ownership implied a certain socio-economic standing. It also emphasized the relationship between employer and employee. The early newspaper reports named the owner of the horse, seldom the rider and almost never the trainer. For example, the *Hawkes Bay Herald* recorded that the first race of the 1864 Porangahau Races was won by John Bird's Rowdie<sup>7</sup> and in 1882 the *Inangahua Herald* announced the winner of the Hurdle Handicap at Reefton as Mr. Carter's Hercules.<sup>8</sup>

The clothes worn to the races were an effective way to display social position and wealth. As an important social outing, spectators put aside their everyday clothes and dressed up for the occasion. The *Southern Cross* described the spectators at the 1871 Auckland Races as 'all decked out in holiday attire'. Young men appeared 'regardless of expense with boots and spurs'.<sup>9</sup> A photograph of the spectators at the Nelson Racecourse around 1910 shows smartly clothed men, almost all in suits and hats (Plate 5). They mingle freely with elegantly attired women and children also dressed in their finery.

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<sup>7</sup>*Hawkes Bay Herald*, 3 Jan 1865.

<sup>8</sup>*Inangahua Herald*, 21 Mar 1882.

<sup>9</sup>*Southern Cross*, 3 Jan 1871.



Plate 5: Nelson Racecourse

Frederick Nelson Jones, ca 1910s, Jones Collection,  
Alexander Turnbull Library, National Library of New Zealand, Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa, Reference Number: G-11393-1/2.

Maori also adopted the tradition of dressing up for the races although the descriptions of their colourful clothing was no doubt intended to incite scorn rather than admiration. Te Hoterini Taipari, chief of the Ngāti-Marū who had become wealthy from payments for Coromandel mining rights and land leases appeared at the first Thames anniversary races wearing a purple shirt, blanket kilt and black waistcoat, complete with gold Albert chain. His wife, Hiwi wore a brightly coloured frock that swept the ground, a colourful shawl over her shoulders and a large feathered hat.<sup>10</sup>

Race dinners and balls were another way of including some of the population while excluding others. The *Taranaki Herald* announced that following the 1855 races, the stewards and 'friends' would be dining at the Ship Hotel.<sup>11</sup> Michael Studholm entertained selected visitors to the Waimate Races and his son recalled that it was not unusual to have fifty or more guests sit down to meals at the Te Waimate homestead.<sup>12</sup> Race balls were the highlight of the social life of many towns but the high cost of admission and of the formal dress required limited the attendance to the wealthier citizens. The *Nelson Examiner* advertised two balls in connection with the 1860 races. The Race Ball was held on Friday 13 April with tickets available from the race stewards at a cost of 20s for 'gentlemen' and 10s for 'ladies'. Just underneath this, a notice appeared for a ball to be held at the Turf Hotel on the Wednesday and Thursday of the races with the admission of 5s.<sup>13</sup> The cost, the language of the advertisement, even the fact that the tickets were only available from the race stewards no doubt ensured that the official ball would be patronized by a chosen few. The alternative, much less expensive ball was expected to cater for many more people as it was to be held on two nights.

Despite the attempts to emulate the class distinctions of British horseracing, sometimes colonial conditions made this difficult. The *Otago Daily Times* in its report of the 1869 race meeting at Clyde claimed that the dust on the course

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<sup>10</sup> Johnny Williams, *Racing for Gold: Thames and the Goldfields and the History of the Thames Racing Club*, Thames: Williams Publishers, 1987, pp.23-4.

<sup>11</sup> *Taranaki Herald*, 23 Mar 1885.

<sup>12</sup> E.C. Studholm, *Te Waimate: Early Station Life in New Zealand*, Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1954, p.75.

<sup>13</sup> *Nelson Examiner*, 2 Jan 1865.

concealed the white ‘belltopper’ of the gentlemen riders from the coloured skull caps of the stable boys and that the ‘get up’ of the ‘exquisite’ blended in with the holiday ‘rig’ of the ‘wagesman’.<sup>14</sup> The availability of horses in New Zealand also helped blur the distinction between the classes. At prestigious English racecourses such as Newmarket, the gentry followed the racing on horseback. Mounted spectators in large numbers also attended races in New Zealand but it was no longer the preserve of the elite. Hacks became reasonably inexpensive to buy and to feed on the year around grass so ownership was possible for a greater section of the population. Rollo Arnold has pointed out that by the 1880s, one horse existed for every three people in New Zealand compared to one for every eighteen in Britain.<sup>15</sup> There is no way of knowing how many of these were actually saddle horses but anecdotal evidence seems to indicate that more men and women were able to ride in New Zealand. Lady Barker in her *Station Life in New Zealand* expressed dismay when her maid announced her intention to attend the Christchurch Races on a horse she had been loaned.<sup>16</sup> Social snobbery was certainly alive in New Zealand but it was generally more difficult to maintain than in Britain.

Newspapers played an important role in shaping the perceptions of colonial horseracing. It has been well acknowledged by historians such as Rollo Arnold that a flourishing local press existed in colonial New Zealand.<sup>17</sup> In some places newspapers were established within weeks of the arrival of the first settlers.<sup>18</sup> Patrick Day contends that the early newspapers were under the control of and represented the interests of the wealthier and earlier established landowners. This situation arose because of the generally unprofitable nature of journalism during the early years of its establishment. A division existed between the editorial and manual aspects of newspaper work with the manual workers being paid for their work while the contributors and the editors were unpaid. The voluntary nature of journalism

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<sup>14</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, 10 Feb 1869.

<sup>15</sup> Rollo Arnold, *Settler Kaponga, 1881-1914: A Frontier Fragment of the Western World*, Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1997, p.310.

<sup>16</sup> Mary Anne Barker, *Station Life in New Zealand*, London: Virago Press, 1984, pp.44-45.

<sup>17</sup> Rollo Arnold, ‘Community in Rural Victorian New Zealand’, *New Zealand Journal of History*, 24:1 (1990), p.3.

<sup>18</sup> Patrick Day, *The Making of the New Zealand Press: A Study of the Organizational and Political concerns of New Zealand Newspaper Controllers, 1840-1880*, Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1990, p.81.

therefore favoured the colonists who could afford to give their time to such an enterprise. Journalism was regarded as a public service and the contributors viewed their activity as worthwhile community work.<sup>19</sup> This argument could be turned around to claim that newspapers served as a mouthpiece for those articulate and well established colonists who wrote for their local newspapers. Certainly Day makes the point that the press served the political ambitions of many of the newspaper proprietors and editors.<sup>20</sup> The representatives of the colonial elite who contributed to their local press used their columns to express their aspirations for their individual communities. It would have been in their interests to see their community prosper and become a desirable place to live and work. They would want to see the district shed its frontier status and to be seen as a civilized place, becoming more like the old world they had left behind. It is reasonable to assume that journalists emphasized what they saw as the positive aspects of their communities, and no doubt exaggerating its virtues. The ballad entitled 'Our Correspondent' written in the 1890s by David McKee Wright expresses such a sentiment.

There used to be a sort of dance as happened once a year,  
A kind of quiet station spree with just a drop of beer;  
The woolshed floor was polished up, the walls were hung with boughs,  
There used to be a fairish feed, and sometimes fairish rows.  
And this is what Tom made of it - Lord, how that bloke can write:-  
'A most delightful ball  
Rich viands graced the groaning board and decorations bright  
Festooned the lofty wall'.<sup>21</sup>

The accounts of horseracing meets that appeared in the local newspapers must also be seen in this light. Newspapers played an important part in promoting horseracing in their districts as a respectable sport with the participants exhibiting a high degree of behaviour that equalled if not exceeded that at British racetracks. The journalist who wrote the account of the first anniversary races at Christchurch was enthusiastic about the suitability of the land for horseracing and could also express satisfaction that 'nor were the enjoyments of the well-disposed marred by any of those breaches

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<sup>19</sup> Day, pp.77-9.

<sup>20</sup> Day, pp.107, 118.

<sup>21</sup> David McKee Wright, *The Station Ballads and Other Verse*, Auckland: John A. Lee, 1945, p.35.

of law and order which are too frequent on similar occasions in the old country'.<sup>22</sup> Throughout the country, from newly established racecourses in the towns to humble country meetings, newspaper journalists lavished praise on the proceedings of their local races. In 1865 the *Hawkes Bay Herald* declared the Porangahau Races 'one of the most orderly and well-conducted meetings we had the pleasure to witness' and that throughout the day the 'greatest harmony and good will prevailed'.<sup>23</sup> The *Southland Times* account of the Winton Races complimented its citizens 'whose orderly behaviour during the day was the subject of remark by those who frequently witness the reverse elsewhere'.<sup>24</sup> Newspaper contributors frowned upon excessive drinking and the absence of drunkenness at the races was often commented upon. The *Oamaru Times and Waitaki Reporter* was able to report that despite the refreshments booths at the Oamaru Races doing 'a roaring trade', that 'tipsy people ... were the exception rather than the rule'.<sup>25</sup> Similarly at the 1877 Tauranga Races, the *Bay of Plenty Times* claimed that, 'sobriety and decorum were the order of the day as a rule'.<sup>26</sup>

Issues of law and order were ever present in the minds of those who wrote for their local newspapers. The detachment of police 'preserving order' during the Christchurch Races in 1869 came under praise from the reporter of the *Lyttelton Times* who quoted Commodore Lambert as saying that the force was equal to the Victorian police, considered the best in the world. Furthermore the writer declared that this compliment from such an esteemed guest was 'appreciated beyond the members of the force' and he could assure his fellow citizens that Christchurch was indeed a civilized city.<sup>27</sup> Newspaper writers were also quick to point out and condemn unrespectable individuals and behaviour. The *Otago Daily Times* was critical of the 'do-nothings and spendalls' who came out to the Dunedin Races 'for no particular reason'.<sup>28</sup> Although the *Wanganui Herald* praised the 1881 Turakino Jockey club races as a 'capital country meeting', it complained that the best viewing

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<sup>22</sup> *Lyttelton Times*, 20 Dec 1851.

<sup>23</sup> *Hawkes Bay Herald*, 3 Jan 1865.

<sup>24</sup> *Southland Times*, 11 Jan 1870.

<sup>25</sup> *Oamaru Times and Waitaki Reporter*, 1 Mar 1866.

<sup>26</sup> *Bay of Plenty Times*, 31 Jan 1877.

<sup>27</sup> *Lyttelton Times*, 13 Jan 1869.

<sup>28</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, 28 Feb 1868.

spot was occupied by tables of the 'peripatetic sports' and called upon the stewards to keep the hill clear another year.<sup>29</sup> Although there is little evidence of serious breaches of law and order on early New Zealand racetracks, the newspaper press remained vigilant. However, the continuing fear of 'roughs' and 'rowdies' getting out of control was realized at the 1874 Auckland Races. Both the *Weekly Press* and the *New Zealand Herald* reported in detail how a mob of men, unhappy about the running of a race, turned on the Clerk of the Course and succeeded in knocking him off his horse. Police and 'law abiding spectators', both mounted and on foot 'flew to the rescue' and were able to 'battle off the ruffians' before order was restored. The cause of the riot was not investigated by either paper but the *Herald* expressed concern that such behaviour could result in racehorse owners being unwilling to jeopardize their property if their horses and jockeys were to be put at risk.<sup>30</sup>

The sort of people who attended the races could also help to enhance the reputation of the event. The high viewpoint of the photographer at the Nelson Racecourse is informative, as a large section of the crowd becomes the subject rather than the racing itself (Plate 5). Perhaps it was the photographer's intention to show the family nature of the occasion, the fact that ladies and children as well as gentlemen patronized the Nelson Races. The presence of women is often commented upon in the press accounts of race meetings. The *Southern Cross* said of the Auckland Races; 'the grandstand was graced during the day by the presence of a few ladies and there was a very strong muster of the fair sex on the course'.<sup>31</sup> In Wanganui the grandstand was crowded with 'the number of ladies giving the stand a remarkably pretty appearance'.<sup>32</sup> Even at the 1866 races held at Hakateramea Station the reporter was able to state that 'a very large number assembled including the beauty and elite of the neighbourhood'.<sup>33</sup> Jock Phillips has said that the mere presence of women was seen to be able to temper the 'barbarism and animal desires of frontier men'.<sup>34</sup> The civilizing role of women he claims was an attitude that ran deep in British culture.

<sup>29</sup> *Wanganui Herald*, 4 Mar 1881.

<sup>30</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 2 Jan 1874, *Auckland Weekly News*, 3 Jan 1874.

<sup>31</sup> *Southern Cross*, 3 Jan 1871.

<sup>32</sup> *Wanganui Herald*, 9 Mar 1878.

<sup>33</sup> *Oamaru Times and Waitaki Reporter*, 4 Jan 1866.

<sup>34</sup> Jock Phillips, *A Man's Country? The Image of the Pakeha Male: A History*, Auckland: Penguin Books, 1987, p.51.

Colonial newspapers in their frequent and flattering references to lady spectators played a significant part in informing the population as to women's role at the races. Fine weather, important guests and grandstands were all that were needed to attract women to the races and to fulfil their role as passive participants. Little was required of them except to add elegance and respectability to the occasion.

The military's early and continued involvement in horseracing added a degree of respectability to the sport. 'The Committee', made up mainly of officers and militia members although civilian participation increased each year, controlled the 1842 to 1849 Auckland Races.<sup>35</sup> The *New Zealand Herald's* description of the crowd making its way to the Auckland Annual Races in 1867 noted the appearance of General Chute, Major Brooks and Major Baker who demonstrated 'superior driving skills'.<sup>36</sup> Most of the military officers who were stationed at the garrison also attended the three day meeting.<sup>37</sup> The Waikato Turf Club was considered a very reputable organization when it was formed in the 1870s and its office holders included local military and political leaders. Lieutenant Colonel W.F. Lyon, Major George and Captains J. Runciman and W.S. Steele served the club, as did A. Cox, J.B. Whyte and F.A. Whitaker, all of who were currently Members of the House of Representatives.<sup>38</sup>

As was the case in Britain, racing in New Zealand had a solid base of support from the middle class. Many prominent names are seen in connection with horseracing. One of the best known and versatile was the Irish born, Edward Stafford, who took a leading role in the Nelson racing scene. As a frequent contributor to the *Nelson Examiner* he was said to have written the account of the 1845 Waimea Races. In 1847 he chaired the race committee, acted as steward as well as rode his own horse to two second placings. By the 1853 Nelson Races he was able to race young thoroughbreds he had bred himself.<sup>39</sup> His political adversary, Donald McLean, was

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<sup>35</sup> Prebble. p.102.

<sup>36</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 2 Jan 1867.

<sup>37</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 4 Jan 1867.

<sup>38</sup> Neville Northover, *Winning Against the Odds: Racing In and Around Hamilton from 1866-1987-The Centenary of the Waikato Racing Club*, Hamilton: The Waikato Racing Club, 1994, pp.4-5.

<sup>39</sup> Edmund Bohan, *Edward Stafford, New Zealand's First Statesman*, Christchurch: Hazard Press, 1994, pp.30, 34, 61.

interested enough in racing to become the first president of the Hawkes Bay Jockey Club in 1866.<sup>40</sup> While it could be argued that these people were part of the colonial elite in New Zealand, there are other less known names that would unquestionably fit into the middle class group. Publicans have already been mentioned for their involvement in racing but other local businessmen promoted the sport as well. When a meeting was called in 1872 at Tuck's Prince of Wales Hotel to form the Masterton Racing Club, at least eleven of the sixteen men present had been long standing settlers in the area, having purchased land before the mid 1860s. A leading pastoralist, W.H. Donald chaired the meeting but along with other runholders and farmers were H. Bannister, storekeeper and owner of a carrying company, his business partner, A.W. Cave and T.H. Hill, a native land purchaser.<sup>41</sup>

Another way in which the aspirations of colonial society could be realized was the colonization of the landscape. New Zealand was the last and most remote outpost of the British Empire but there remained a determination that given the colony's natural advantages, it could become a 'pastoral paradise' in which the 'best elements of British society might grow into an ideal nation'.<sup>42</sup> Such a dream required the efforts of the colonists to 'improve' the land by cutting down the lowland forest and sowing its rich soils with the seed of English pastures. The watercolour sketch by an artist only known by the initials of G.A.R.D., is an idealized representation of the Island Bay Racecourse near Wellington (Plate 6). The style of the work conforms to the picturesque landscape tradition of Claude Lorrain, popularized by eighteenth and early nineteenth century English artists. The regularity of the rails defining the racetrack and the two buildings, just right of centre, picked out in Chinese white stand in stark contrast to the soft blues and greens of the landscape. The art historian, Ann Bermingham, contends that landscape pictures are not ideologically neutral; rather they embody certain values and beliefs.

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<sup>40</sup> John Costello and Pat Finnegan, *Tapestry of Turf: The History of New Zealand Racing, 1840-1997*, Auckland: Moa Publications, 1988, p.39.

<sup>41</sup> Charles Bannister, *Early History of the Wairarapa* (1940), Christchurch: Cadsonbury Publications, 1999, p.93.

<sup>42</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell, 'Imperial Landscape', in *Landscape and Power*, W.J.T. Mitchell (ed.), Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994, pp.20-1.



Plate 6: Island Bay Racecourse Near Wellington

Artist's Initials G.A.R.D., 1883,

Alexander Turnbull Library, National Library of New Zealand, Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa, Reference Number: B-038-023.

In Plate Six, the viewer's position is a commanding one, looking down on the racecourse, already showing some resemblance to the lush parkland of their English counterpart. The stumps of the recently cleared bush with a few trees left standing, and the man made features in the middle ground, express an aesthetic preference that has little to do with New Zealand's natural environment. Geoff Park in *Ngā Uruora, The Groves of Life*, cites Thomas Shepherd, an English landscaper and surveyor for the New Zealand Company who envisioned the perfect prospect as 'large openings made through valleys' with trees left 'for ornament', and that 'cattle and sheep grazing upon the cleared land and upon the hills would add greatly to the beauty of the prospect'.<sup>43</sup> It is a small step to see this ideal landscape filled with thoroughbreds and well appointed racecourses.

The colonists who established the early racecourses showed a desire to make boundaries, to separate their creations from the natural environment. As early as the 1860s, some colonial racecourses were fenced and an entry fee charged. This is quite extraordinary when it is recalled that it was not until 1878 that Sandown Park became the first racecourse in Britain to be enclosed. The *Hawkes Bay Herald* in 1861 noted that a 'new and very proper feature appeared in the arrangements of the day – that of making a charge at the gate for horses and vehicles'. It also expressed indignation that a large number of people entered the grounds by 'some circuitous route with the view of enjoying the sport without paying anything towards it'.<sup>44</sup> By the mid 1870s, most of the racecourses in New Zealand had been enclosed and entry fees charged. This sometimes caused indignation, a letter published in the *Press* complained about having to pay 1s at the Hokitika racecourse to sit on a blackened stump and to watch 'a miserable apology for races'.<sup>45</sup> Yet other towns made a concerted effort to transform so called 'waste ground' into a familiar recreational space. The 3,000 visitors to the 1874 race meeting at Parawai were able to enjoy the new Pleasure Garden containing a variety of English trees and gardens. Six and a half acres had been set aside for sports such as cricket and archery and a further three acres planted in strawberries to provide refreshment at the races. Future plans called for an aviary

<sup>43</sup> Geoff Park, *Ngā Uruora, The Groves of Life: Ecology and History in a New Zealand Landscape*, Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1995, p.87.

<sup>44</sup> *Hawkes Bay Herald*, 9 Mar 1861.

<sup>45</sup> *Press*, 14 Jan 1874.

filled with exotic birds and a shooting gallery.<sup>46</sup> The same year Ellerslie Gardens opened in Auckland as a centre for all kinds of outdoor activity. Adjacent to the racecourse were grounds for football, athletic sports and cricket. An artesian well supplied water to a fountain and rockeries were planted with all varieties of New Zealand fern. Three cottages and two rustic houses were built on the property and birds and animals housed in the zoological section of the gardens.<sup>47</sup>

Colonial communities were also proud of the grandstands built on the racecourses and local newspapers were unstinting in their praise. In 1858 the *Nelson Examiner* claimed that Nelson's new grandstand 'surpasses anything in the Australian colonies'. It continued to describe the main building as fifty feet long with a bar and a 'spacious dining room' on the ground floor. Upstairs was a gallery capable of seating 300 people along with a stewards' room and a 'ladies' apartment'. The space between the stand and the track, a distance of about seventy feet was enclosed as a saddling yard, 'by which the crowd can be kept from the horses when saddling and the risk of accidents much lessened'.<sup>48</sup> A photograph taken by an unknown photographer in the 1860s shows the attractive Classical styled building as described in the newspaper (Plate 7). Yet it also shows some of the crowd watching from the vantage point of bullock wagons and farm carts as well as mounted spectators. The enthusiastic descriptions of superior facilities often fell short of reality. The *Daily Southern Cross* declared the grandstand at the 1865 Auckland Races as 'capacious and respectable' even though it was only a temporary construction.<sup>49</sup> Some years later, the *Wanganui Herald* praised Wanganui's 'commodious stand' and 'capital luncheon rooms' and foresaw the day when vehicles at race meetings would no longer be needed as viewing platforms.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Williams, pp.39-40.

<sup>47</sup> William Mackie, *A Noble Breed: Auckland Racing Club, 1874-1974*, Auckland: Wilson & Horton, 1974, p.27.

<sup>48</sup> *Nelson Examiner*, 13 Mar 1858.

<sup>49</sup> *Daily Southern Cross*, 3 Jan 1865.

<sup>50</sup> *Wanganui Herald*, 9 Mar 1878.



Plate 7: Nelson Racecourse

Photographer Unknown, ca 1860s, Making New Zealand Collection,  
Alexander Turnbull Library, National Library of New Zealand, Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa, Reference Number: F-2008-1/2-MNZ.

Despite its frontier characteristics, horseracing had a role to play in the making of a mature and respectable British colony. In drawing together all levels of society, horseracing provided a means by which the colonial elite could display their success and standing to the rest of the community. Their control of the newspaper press was an essential part in this civilizing process and helped to create a sport well suited to the kind of society to which they aspired. They also had an ideal landscape in mind when they cleared the land for pasture and constructed their racecourses. The shared vision of these colonists helped to play a part in creating bonds within the early colonial communities, an aspect that is developed in the following chapter.

## 5

## HORSERACING AND COMMUNITY CONSCIOUSNESS

The financial benefits of horseracing were well recognized by colonial communities. Apart from monetary gain, there were other reasons communities sought to foster the sport. Horseracing received a high level of community support and many people contributed to the success of a local race meeting. In drawing the various elements of settler society together, horseracing helped to develop a strong sense of community consciousness.

Over 88% of the racing venues listed in Charles Elliot's first *Turf Register*, published in 1876, had only one or two days of racing a year.<sup>1</sup> It was important to colonial communities that their annual race meeting was successful and well supported, not only by the local community but by neighbouring ones as well. Although public holidays usually meant large attendances, communities had to ensure that their race day did not conflict with others in the region, as this would limit the available audience. The solution to this was to declare a local holiday and many did do this to boost the numbers at their meeting. Reverend Vicesimus Lush recorded in his journal that Thames declared a holiday to commemorate the landing of Captain Cook, 105 years ago, although he felt it was really an excuse to get together for some horseracing.<sup>2</sup> In Oamaru a notice appeared in the local paper on 22 February 1866 listing the Bank of New Zealand and eleven other businesses that would close the next day for the second day of the Oamaru Races.<sup>3</sup> All of the Christchurch banks closed at 12 o'clock from Monday to Thursday of the 1867 summer race meeting.<sup>4</sup> The same year, the principal stores and public offices of Blenheim were closed on the Monday of their December races so that the townspeople were free to attend.<sup>5</sup> School children and their teachers in some districts also got a holiday on the day of

<sup>1</sup> *New Zealand Turf Register*, 1976.

<sup>2</sup> Alison Drummond (ed.), *The Thames Journal of Vicesimus Lush, 1868-82*, Christchurch: Pegasus Press, 1975, p.151.

<sup>3</sup> *Oamaru Times and Waitaki Reporter*, 22 Feb 1866.

<sup>4</sup> *Press*, 16 Jan 1867.

<sup>5</sup> *Marlborough Express*, 18 Dec 1867.

the local races. The chairman of the Turakino school committee who also happened to be secretary of the local Jockey Club declared a public holiday on race day to avoid truancy.<sup>6</sup> In *Horses Courses and Men*, Prebble cites an entry in the 1886 *Tinui Register* that read, 'the school was closed Thursday and Friday in accordance with a resolution formed by the committee for the occasion of the races'.<sup>7</sup>

The fact that everyone was encouraged to attend their local races indicated that the sport meant more to the locality than just financial gain. The social benefits were considered important to the developing colonial communities. In a time of few public leisure activities, most members of the community participated in horseracing in some way or other. Well before the race day, some would be working together in planning the event, other volunteers would be preparing the racecourse, perhaps building new facilities, while horse owners would be concentrating on their horse's preparation, trying to fit in some training sessions at the beach or local tracks, all the while keeping up with news of the opposition. For others, race day wardrobes had to be organized and closer to the day, food prepared for family picnics or for sale. So in the months leading up to the race meeting, the shared focus of the members of the community would be towards that common goal. Inevitably, this had the effect of creating bonds within the community.

A key factor is that early race meetings were planned at the local level for the benefit of the community. When the racing clubs took over the business of organizing racing, they remained non-profit organizations; any profits made were put back into local racing or the community. In the 1876 *Turf Register*, twelve Otago meetings were listed as running Hospital Races, where the winnings from the races were donated to the district's hospital. Dunedin in 1890 held a Kakanui Relief Fund Stakes, in which the winner was sold by auction and the surplus as well as proceeds of the totalizator went to the relief fund for the benefit the mining disaster victims.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> G.K. Prebble, *Horses Courses and Men: Early New Zealand Racing*, Tauranga: Ashford- Kent, 1972, pp.152-3.

<sup>7</sup> Mike Simms, *Sand, Sea and Hoofbeats: One Hundred Years of Horseracing in the Tinui Castlepoint District*, Masterton: Castlepoint Racing Club, 1972, p.9.

<sup>8</sup> *New Zealand Turf Register*, 1876 and 1891.

The culmination of months of planning, and hours of volunteer labour, race day brought residents closer together. As the racecourse was often some miles distant from the town, the journey there was a feature of the day's proceedings. Newspaper accounts of a race meeting usually began with a description of the holiday traffic on the road to the racecourse. In 1861, the *Hawkes Bay Herald* described the animated scene on the narrow bush track of horses and vehicles on their way to the Napier Races, 'following close upon each other and forming at times an almost uninterrupted procession of probably one mile in length'.<sup>9</sup> Four years later, the track had given way to a road and the reporter commented on how the 'refreshing green pastures on either side were refreshing in the extreme to those whose avocations were such as to permit but few holidays in the course of the year'.<sup>10</sup> The road from Dunedin to the racetrack at Silverstream was also described as a picturesque drive and the scene of lively activity on the occasion of the 1868 Tradesmen's Races. 'Dashing horsemen and women and a throng of vehicles from humble dogcart to more pretentious four-in-hand' were noted as being different from the ordinary routine of farmer's carts and wagons.<sup>11</sup> While some of the riders engaged in impromptu races, others travelled at a leisurely pace more conducive to socializing with friends and neighbours.

Whether the journey was relatively short or a longer trip to another town, it is evident from newspaper reminiscences that the sense of shared fun and camaraderie made it a highlight of the day. Charles Bannister in his *Early History of the Wairarapa* wrote of a party made up in 1876 at Masterton to travel together to the races at Tauherenikau. He recalled that one of Hastwell, Bannister and Cave's large brakes, normally used in the transport of goods between Wellington and Masterton was fitted out for the occasion. Seats were constructed along the sides and made comfortable with cushions and rugs. Lunch hampers and cases of drinks were loaded and the festive group departed from the Club Hotel at half past eight. A stop was made for morning tea at Greytown before arriving at the racetrack. As it was too late to return to Masterton, the travellers spent the night at Hastwell's in Greytown where

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<sup>9</sup> *Hawkes Bay Herald*, 9 Mar 1861.

<sup>10</sup> *Hawkes Bay Herald*, 2 Mar 1865.

<sup>11</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, 28 Dec 1868.

Bannister remembered that they had ‘a glorious time’.<sup>12</sup> It is an interesting reflection on horseracing at the time that Bannister’s memories are more concerned with the long and enjoyable journey to and from the venue than with the races themselves. As a result of travelling together to another town, cheering on their local favourites and sharing experiences, the Masterton group would have felt a renewed sense of community identity.

Isabella Mitchell in her thesis on picnics in New Zealand explored the idea of picnics as a social ritual that fostered values of community harmony and solidarity. The act of travelling together to a site, enjoying a meal, playing games and then returning home with shared memories encouraged community bonding.<sup>13</sup> In the same way, a race meeting can be seen as a social ritual that brought together the diverse elements of a colonial community. The site where the races took place was transformed for that day into a community-gathering place. In providing opportunities for socializing, relaxation and entertainment for men, women and children of all levels of society, the racecourse became more than just a venue for organized sport. All members of the community, regardless of their roles, became participants in an important community event. In the same way as colonial picnics, horseracing helped maintain the social ties that were essential for the continuity and well being of the community.

In reading the early accounts of horseracing, one is struck by the strong sense of community pride expressed by residents of the host town. An attractive site was often remarked upon, as was the case of the people of Parawai who claimed that their racecourse surrounded by the Kauaeranga River, made it the most picturesque in the colony.<sup>14</sup> A reporter for the *Nelson Evening Mail* stated that following the completion of the new grandstand; ‘Nelson will undoubtedly have the most picturesque and one of the best courses in the colony’.<sup>15</sup> Considerable pride was also

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<sup>12</sup> Charles Bannister, *Early History of the Wairarapa*, Christchurch: Cadsonbury Publications, 1999, pp.98-100.

<sup>13</sup> Isabella Mitchell, *Picnics in New Zealand: An Interpretive Study*, MA Thesis, Massey University, 1995, pp.33-4, 45.

<sup>14</sup> Williams, p.51.

<sup>15</sup> *Nelson Evening Mail*, 24 Mar 1887.

taken in a well-run meeting. The writer for the *Wanganui Herald* was particularly enthusiastic about Wanganui's 'great festival' of horseracing where he claimed that 'the arrangements were so complete and all in such good order' that it would have 'made a deep impression upon visitors'. The fact that all the races got away on time was also worthy of comment.<sup>16</sup> Punctuality mattered as well to the *Nelson Evening Mail* writer who was able to boast that the Nelson programme 'was got through in excellent time and the last race was over by 5:30'.<sup>17</sup>

The ability to attract high quality horses to enable good racing was another aspect considered important. The *Lyttelton Times* was able to record that even the first race meeting in Christchurch in 1851, resulted in the spectators being 'astonished at the number of very tolerable horses collected together'.<sup>18</sup> By 1865, Auckland claimed that nine horses, 'representing some of the best blood in the colony' entered for their Maiden Plate race.<sup>19</sup> Yet later the same month, Christchurch was able to boast, 'a better race has never been run in Canterbury, nor, in our opinion, has it been surpassed in the Southern Hemisphere'.<sup>20</sup> Early on, it was realized that in order to attract the best horses, local race committees had to offer attractive prize money. Thames, with the gold rush in full swing was able to offer £500 for the premier race at Tararu Flat in 1869, the largest prize in New Zealand that year. Mr Hunt, a local mine owner, received a lot of publicity by importing a horse from Melbourne especially for the race.<sup>21</sup> Although the prize was won by Peerless, a Nelson horse, the *New Zealand Herald* saw fit to comment; 'We cannot but congratulate Mr Hunt on the public spirit he has shown in introducing so good a horse as Kaiser into our province'. He could also add that 'the Thames Races now rank amongst the best in the colony'.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>16</sup> *Wanganui Herald*, 12 Mar 1881.

<sup>17</sup> *Nelson Evening Mail*, 24 Mar 1887.

<sup>18</sup> *Lyttelton Times*, 20 Feb 1851.

<sup>19</sup> *Southern Cross*, 2 Jan 1865.

<sup>20</sup> *Hawkes Bay Herald*, 28 Jan 1865.

<sup>21</sup> John Costello and Pat Finnegan, *Tapestry of Turf: The History of New Zealand Horseracing, 1840-1997*, Auckland: Moa Publications, 1988, pp.54-5.

<sup>22</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 20 May 1869.

More than anything else, however, what the people of colonial New Zealand took pride in were signs of progress. Charles Elliot in the first *Turf Register*, wrote of his optimism for the future of horseracing in New Zealand:

Wherever there are Englishmen and horses, a horse race is the popular pastime, though the animals are only beasts of burden, employed for packing provisions: As communities increase in numbers and wealth the character of these races improve. Proper courses are found, better horses are procured and convenient stands are erected, until a race meeting compares not unfavourably with the average of country meetings in Britain.<sup>23</sup>

Horseracing provided a number of opportunities to demonstrate a community's progress. To begin with, horse races were often planned to mark a special occasion in the life of a community. The anniversary meetings, celebrating the arrival of a town's first settlers have already been mentioned. A significant event in the lives of the people of Hawkes Bay was the Separation Fete, held in recognition of their establishment as a new province. As well as a dinner and a ball, the celebrations included two days of racing.<sup>24</sup> The material prosperity of a community was demonstrated by its racehorses and racing facilities. The *Southern Cross* said of the 1863 Auckland Annual Races that it was a 'true exhibition of the qualities and powers of our racehorses in this province'.<sup>25</sup> The *Taranaki Herald* in 1881 noted 'the rapid advancement' of racing in the province and expressed the belief that Taranaki 'will soon rank as a district of importance in racing circles'. Going beyond the sport, the writer saw significance in the free spending racing crowd:

Indeed the amount of money that was lavishly expended proves one thing—that the district must be wealthy to an extent not generally recognized. Even the juveniles appeared to have no lack of 'sugar' at their command and the numbers of sweeps they indulged in on their own account was truly incredible.<sup>26</sup>

It stands to reason that proud citizens would be keen to show off their community's achievements and as horseracing attracted large numbers of visitors, it provided the

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<sup>23</sup> *New Zealand Turf Register*, 1976, p.XI.

<sup>24</sup> Although Hawkes Bay was proclaimed a province in 1858, the celebrations were postponed from December until the following March. The horseracing took place 15, 16 March, 1859.

<sup>25</sup> *Southern Cross*, 3 Jan 1863.

<sup>26</sup> *Taranaki Herald*, 31 Mar 1881.

ideal opportunity. Favourable responses from guests were recorded in detail by local newspapers. A visitor to the Oamaru Races in 1867, Mr Pelan, spoke at the race dinner of how gratified he was of his reception in the town and how commendable it was to see the sportsmanship displayed in such a young town.<sup>27</sup> When vice-regal visits corresponded with the local races, the townspeople went out of their way to make a good impression. However, following Sir George Grey's failure to appear at the Christchurch race meeting, the *Press* registered its disapproval with an article headed, 'Sold Again'. The *Hawkes Bay Herald* in reporting the incident claimed that; 'His Excellency is now as unpopular in the South as he lately was in the North'.<sup>28</sup> To receive hospitality at the local race meeting was obviously a political necessity. The most eagerly anticipated guest on New Zealand's early racecourses, and unlike Grey a genuine racing enthusiast, was the Duke of Edinburgh who toured New Zealand in 1869. Race meetings were held in his honour at Nelson, Christchurch, Dunedin, even Thames added a special meeting to their racing calendar. Although the *Lyttelton Times* boasted that the Christchurch meeting was 'one of the most successful items in honour of the royal visit',<sup>29</sup> Dunedin was equally proud of its efforts to provide his Royal Highness with a handsome drag with four bays to drive himself to the Silverstream course.<sup>30</sup>

Local newspapers played an important role in not only promoting local horseracing but also in encouraging rivalry between neighbouring communities. The *Waikato Times* journalist was jubilant when the local mare, May Moon defeated the Auckland horse, Kingfisher at Ohaupo in February 1877. He noted that although May Moon was heavily weighted, she 'shook her tail derisively in Kingfisher's face all around the course'.<sup>31</sup> Although a ninety-mile coastal journey separated Tauranga and Opotiki, a long-standing rivalry was carried on between the two settlements. The *Bay of Plenty Times* had to report in 1877 that two thirds of the money at the Tauranga Races was 'carried off' by Opotiki owners but it was able to add the more

<sup>27</sup> *Oamaru Times and Waitaki Reporter*, 12 Mar 1867.

<sup>28</sup> *Hawkes Bay Herald*, 28 Jan 1865.

<sup>29</sup> *Lyttelton Times*, 24 Apr 1869.

<sup>30</sup> Not only would a vehicle driven by a matching team of four horses make an impressive spectacle, it was also a high compliment to the Duke. The people of the time would have realized that to control a four horse team required considerable skill and strength, especially on the rough colonial roads.

<sup>31</sup> Northover, p.4.

promising news that several of the Opotiki visitors had expressed interest in becoming members of the Tauranga Jockey Club.<sup>32</sup> But newspapers reserved their most intense discussion for the provincial rivalries carried out symbolically on the racetrack. The quality of racehorses from one province to another was a point of contention regularly raised in newspaper columns. A writer for the *Oamaru Times and Waitaki Reporter* wrote in the week before the 1866 Oamaru Races that as so many horses were coming from out of the district, there was danger that some of the prize money might 'cross over' to Canterbury. It was with noticeable relief that following the races, he was able to report that the Otago horses excelled themselves and that the district was to be congratulated on possessing such fine racehorses.<sup>33</sup> The *Nelson Examiner* expressed disappointment that the Nelson horses were unable to be tested against the Auckland horse, Deception, due to the rumour of a threatened attack on Auckland by the 'Waikatoes' that compelled horse and owner to return home before a match could be arranged.<sup>34</sup> When 'Sinbad' was sent by the *Press* to cover the 1874 Auckland Races, he was pleased to report that Canterbury was well represented at the post. He was in no doubt of the superiority of the southern horses and noted that, 'a race horse in Auckland is a scarce commodity'.<sup>35</sup>

Newspapers sometimes raised controversial issues concerning local racing issues. An article in the *Weekly News* in 1864 expressed concern that Otago men, made rich by their goldfields, were buying many of Auckland's best racehorses. It warned that although Auckland was ideally suited to breed racehorses, its citizen/s must ensure against 'leading horses' leaving the province. In a highly charged statement, the author concluded that Auckland should feel threatened, not by the Maori but by southern gold diggers poaching their yearlings.<sup>36</sup> Five years later, the journalist of the *New Zealand Herald* wrote of the shocking defeat at the Thames Races of the Auckland horses. He hoped that this would rouse the Auckland racing fraternity and incite them to put more effort into breeding, rather than on relying too much on

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<sup>32</sup> *Bay of Plenty Times*, 31 Jan 1877.

<sup>33</sup> *Oamaru Times and Waitaki Reporter*, 22 Feb 1866, 1 Mar 1866.

<sup>34</sup> *Nelson Examiner*, 18 Apr 1860.

<sup>35</sup> *Press*, 3 Jan 1874.

<sup>36</sup> *Weekly News*, 29 Jan 1864.

imported horses.<sup>37</sup> Another cause for complaint appearing in newspapers was favouritism shown by handicappers towards their provincial horses. Responding to criticism by the *Nelson Examiner* on the handicapping of an 1865 Canterbury race, the *Press* pointed out mistakes made by the Nelson handicappers at their races.<sup>38</sup> In another example, a letter printed in the *Press* complained that the handicapper at the Westland Racing Club's races at Hokitika in 1874 showed partiality towards the local horses by penalizing horses outside the province with heavier weights.<sup>39</sup> Clearly, winning horse races mattered and 'ownership' extended beyond an individual owner to a collective one shared by members of the community, both local and provincial.

Racing played a significant role in nineteenth century community life. For at least a few weeks a year, it became a common focus of activity. Horseracing provided a means of establishing community loyalty and pride and of generating competition with others. All of these factors in partnership with a highly parochial local press had the effect of bringing individuals together and creating a vital colonial community. But the progress that the communities welcomed also brought changes that were to impact significantly on colonial life in the closing decades of the century. The following chapters will show how these affected community horseracing.

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<sup>37</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 20 May 1869.

<sup>38</sup> *Press*, 10 Mar 1865.

<sup>39</sup> *Press*, 14 Jan 1874.

## 6

## CHANGES TO HORSERACING

By the mid 1880s some fundamental shifts were discernable in New Zealand society. The longer established parts of the country began to shed their frontier characteristics and signs of a new modern society were emerging. Fast growing transport and communication networks served to integrate the various regions and to draw New Zealanders closer together. Towns and cities grew both in size and number. Although New Zealand was to remain an essentially rural economy, more of the population began to be drawn to the cities and towns and to be employed in clerical, secretarial and managerial roles. Even the first tentative moves towards urbanization were to contribute significantly to social change.<sup>1</sup> Horseracing was not immune to the spirit of change. As New Zealand society was to become more organized, bureaucratic and specialized in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, so too was the sport of horseracing.

A number of demographic changes that impacted on New Zealand society have been well documented. Erik Olssen points out that in the 1870s, the colonial population was in general terms, young, mostly male and the rates of fertility and mortality were high.<sup>2</sup> But only twenty years later, this frontier pattern had given way to a more normal demographic structure. The non-Maori population had grown from 256,393 in 1871 to 626,658 in 1891, a staggering 144% increase.<sup>3</sup> Immigration by this time had slowed and the increase in population was more the result of natural increase and falling mortality rates. By 1891, 62.1% of the population had been born in the colony.<sup>4</sup> The sex ratio was becoming more normalized. In 1900, the male/female ratio was evenly balanced in the four main cities and towns, although men still outnumbered women in the rural areas. The age structure also matured with the

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<sup>1</sup> Erik Olssen, 'Towards a New Society', in *The Oxford History of New Zealand*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Geoffrey W. Rice (ed.), Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1992, pp.254-5.

<sup>2</sup> Olssen, p.255.

<sup>3</sup> G.T. Bloomfield, *New Zealand: A Handbook of Historical Statistics*, Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1984, pp.42-3.

<sup>4</sup> Bloomfield, p.78.

middle aged and elderly becoming a larger proportion of the population.<sup>5</sup> One of the most significant changes for the purpose of this study was the growth of cities and towns. In 1871, of the non-Maori population, 21.7% lived in the four main cities of Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin. Almost more startling was the development of the towns. Only Nelson, other than the four main cities had a population of over 5,000 in 1871. The census returns showed that in 1891 three further towns, Napier, Oamaru and Wanganui surpassed the 5,000 mark. The growth in urban centres continued with 47.8% of the Pakeha population in 1911 living in urban centres and the number of towns in excess of 5,000 had grown to thirteen.<sup>6</sup>

Although these factors would appear to indicate that the New Zealand population was becoming more settled and urbanized with characteristics more like the old world society, it needs to be remembered that just over half the population still lived in rural areas. In some of these areas, elements of frontier society persisted. In the North Island, in particular, small subsistent farms were still being hacked from the bush or acquired from the Maori. Mining continued on the West Coast of the South Island and in isolated pockets elsewhere. In these districts, frontier demographic patterns still prevailed.

Increasing urbanization was to have a profound effect on the sport of horseracing and on other leisure activities. Leisure was to become more important than it had been in the rural frontier environment. Shorter working hours and a weekly half-holiday provided by legislation such as the Shops and Shops Assistants Act of 1894 and the Offices Amendment Act of 1905 meant that a designated time was available to pursue leisure activities. The higher disposable income of those employed in trades, shops and offices meant a wider range of people had money to spend on recreation.<sup>7</sup> For some, sport and leisure provided essential relief from the monotony of repetitive work. But just as urban life and employment became more organized, so too did leisure activities. Sports such as horseracing lost much of their informal local character and became more structured and regulated.

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<sup>5</sup> Olssen, p.257.

<sup>6</sup> Bloomfield, pp.56-61.

<sup>7</sup> Greg Ryan, 'Sport in Christchurch', in *Southern Capital Christchurch: Towards a City Biography, 1850-2000*, John Cookson and Graeme Dunstall (eds), Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 2000, p.339.

An important feature of the modernizing of New Zealand was the development of transport facilities. Railways revolutionized horseracing in Britain and they were also to alter the nature of the sport in this country. With the advent of rail, horses no longer had to be walked to race meetings but could be transported quickly and safely to more distant venues. This meant that racehorse owners had a greater choice of races at which to compete and could choose races that offered the highest stakes or the greatest chance of success. Railways also did much to increase the popularity of horseracing as a spectator sport by providing a relatively inexpensive and comfortable way to travel to the races. New Zealand Railways placed lengthy advertisements in newspapers, advising of excursion fares to various race meetings. An entry in the Waimate Racing Club Minute Book from 1882 indicated that a request was made to New Zealand Railways to postpone the departure of the train by an hour on the race day and also to issue a return ticket to race goers for the price of a single fare.<sup>8</sup> Obviously, racing clubs that were near railway lines gained from the increased patronage. A club such as Timaru benefited from excursion fares advertised from Christchurch, Ashburton, Oamaru, Fairlie, Waihao Downs and 'intermediate stations'.<sup>9</sup> In Christchurch, a rail link to the racecourse was considered so vital that the extra mile of track to the Riccarton course was constructed under guarantees from several members of the Canterbury Jockey Club. It was deemed a success when almost 4,000 spectators travelled by train to the course on the second day of the November 1880 meeting. Wellington's Hutt Park track was one location that was disadvantaged by not having a rail connection. The Government's refusal to build an access line from its main railway line was a strong incentive for the Wellington Jockey club to develop a new site at Trentham. Railways helped increase the prize money offered by racing clubs by bringing in more spectators.

The tramway was also able to convey large numbers of people to the races. From the time of their appearance in the late seventies and early eighties, they provided easy access from city centres to the racetracks.<sup>10</sup> In Christchurch, Lancaster Park racecourse could be reached by tram in 1882. The tram link to New Brighton in

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<sup>8</sup> Waimate Racing Club Minute Book, 11 Dec 1882.

<sup>9</sup> John Costello and Pat Finnegan, *Tapestry of Turf: The History of New Zealand Racing, 1840-1997*, Auckland: Moa Publications, 1988, pp.50-4, 97

<sup>10</sup> James Watson, *Links: A History of Transport and New Zealand Society*, Wellington: GP Publications, 1996, pp.88-9.

1887 no doubt provided an incentive to form the New Brighton Beach Racing Club in 1890, followed by the establishment of a racecourse there in 1895. Trotting fans in Auckland could travel by tram to the races at Potter's Paddock in Epsom, the present day Alexander Park. The grandstand, constructed at the site to hold three to four hundred people was built by the tramway manager costing the Auckland Trotting Club only £14.<sup>11</sup>

Horseracing traffic also made use of the coastal steamships. The *Auckland Weekly News* noted that the Coromandel and Thames Steamers contributed to the large attendance at the Auckland Racing Club's summer meeting in 1882.<sup>12</sup> In this period, racing enthusiasts from Tauranga travelled on the *Ngaphui's* overnight run bound for the New Year's Races at Ellerslie. Also on board were racehorses and as well bookmakers who set up trade in the crowded saloon.<sup>13</sup> Steamships also made inter island trips possible for spectators and racehorses. The racing journalist, 'Spectator' described the fifteen hour trip in 1892 from Lyttelton to Wellington to take in the Wellington Racing Club's summer races. Other sporting fans from Dunedin, Christchurch, Hawke's Bay, Taranaki, Wanganui, Nelson and Blenheim joined him on the holiday excursion.

Another technological innovation, the telegraph also played a key role in horseracing. Beginning in the early 1860s, a network of lines connected Canterbury with Otago, Southland and parts of Westland. North Island construction proceeded at a slower rate at first, but the laying of the submarine cable across Cook Strait in 1866 hastened the establishment of lines throughout the colony. With the arrival of the telegraph to Auckland in 1872, linking the four main cities, a national communications system was firmly in place.<sup>14</sup> Among the benefits for the racing community, the telegraph made it easier for racehorse owners to enter their horses in upcoming race meetings. Placing bets was also facilitated by the telegraph and by the 1880s most of the major clubs had constructed a telegraph office on the course

<sup>11</sup> Ron Bisman, *A Salute to Trotting; A History of Harness Racing in New Zealand*, Auckland: Moa Publications, 1983, p.48.

<sup>12</sup> *New Zealand Referee*, 7 Jan 1882.

<sup>13</sup> G.K. Prebble, *Horses Courses and Men: Early New Zealand Racing*, Tauranga: Ashford-Kent, 1972, p.77.

<sup>14</sup> A.C. Wilson, *Wire and Wireless: A History of Telecommunications in New Zealand, 1860-1987*, Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1994, pp.28-50.

for this purpose. In 1879 when the Canterbury Racing Club first used the telegraph, its officials dealt with over one hundred telegrams cabling bets from around the country.<sup>15</sup> Newspaper proprietors had been among the leading advocates for the development of the telegraph and once constructed they were able to quickly announce the racing results from all over the colony. 'Sporting Telegrams' published in local newspapers for acceptances and weights of future races allowed gamblers to make more informed choices. Julius Vogel, who somewhat controversially managed to combine his political roles with newspaper ownership, pushed for a cable connection to Australia and beyond.<sup>16</sup> This was realized in 1876; with the result that up-to-date 'intelligence' including racing news from Australia, Europe and America became readily available.

Improved communication contributed to an enormous growth of newspapers in this period. Fifteen newspapers were published in New Zealand in 1859. Within the next twenty years a further 181 papers had been founded, although these were offset by the failure of 87 newspapers. While this left 109 newspapers publishing in 1879, the newspaper industry was still growing, reaching its peak in 1910 with 193 newspapers, of which 67 were published daily.<sup>17</sup> Although newspapers still served political needs, some more than others, commercial viability had become an important concern. For the daily press, financial survival meant appealing to the interests of a wide audience. Specialist sports commentators, writing under *noms de plume* such as 'Vigilant' of the *Evening Post* or 'Phaeton' of the *New Zealand Herald* not only meticulously reported racing results but also watched and reported on the track training sessions. For example, 'Spectator' in a March 1881 issue of the *Wanganui Herald* accessed for his readers the fitness and merits of some of the fifty or so horses training at the track that morning.<sup>18</sup>

This was also the period when weekly sports publications made their appearance. The *New Zealand Referee* began publication in 1884, combining with the *Weekly*

<sup>15</sup> Costello and Finnegan, pp.44, 97.

<sup>16</sup> Patrick Day, *The Making of the New Zealand Press: A Study of the Organisational and Political Concerns of New Zealand Newspaper Controllers*, Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1990, pp.212-6.

<sup>17</sup> Day, p.137.

<sup>18</sup> *Wanganui Herald*, 8 Mar 1881.

*Press* in 1891 under the ownership of the Christchurch Press Company. The directors of the company included the two most successful thoroughbred breeders of the time, George Stead and Sir George Clifford. Both men were also involved in racing club administration, along with fellow directors, Endell Wanklyn and Robert Heaton Rhodes. Harry Hayr, a former seaman with a number of racing interests, began an Auckland equivalent, the *Sporting and Dramatic Review* in 1890. In the first issue, he announced that his was the only newspaper in the North Island given over to sporting subjects. For racing enthusiasts his paper would publish editorial comment, racing programmes, stud news and items of racing interests written by 'Sir Launcelot', and 'Pegasus'. Hayr claimed that while writers of other papers were 'colonists' with 'no experience of the world', his would pander to no one'.<sup>19</sup> His remarks were clearly intended as criticism of the more prestigious *Referee*, controlled by the business and social elite of Christchurch.

Charles Elliot, proprietor of the *Nelson Examiner*, first compiled the *New Zealand Turf Register* in 1876. Elliot died before it was published, so his son, George finished the project. This publication gave a brief history of the early years of horseracing in the colony and printed the programmes and results of races that had taken place in the 1875-6 season. However, it appeared that the sport was not ready for a national compilation of results at this time and further volumes were not forthcoming until 1881. In the preface to the second *Turf Register*, George Elliot requested racing clubs to assist in defraying costs as the sales from the first volume were insufficient to pay even a third of the printing expenses. Elliot also complained that the volume was not very complete as very few secretaries sent in results of their meetings in the detail required.<sup>20</sup> The *Turf Register* was published annually from this date, despite the fact that securing financial support for the project remained difficult.

Financial success for a club meant being able to attract large crowds to the races. This often involved heavy expenditure in upgrading racecourse buildings and facilities. The Wellington Racing Club's summer meeting in 1890 was said to attract the largest attendance in five years due to course improvements. According to the *Evening Post*, the ladies who previously declined to go to the races returned that year

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<sup>19</sup> *New Zealand Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic Review*, 6 Aug 1890.

<sup>20</sup> *New Zealand Turf Register*, 1881.

to admire the improved grandstand with its new ladies' tea-room and the enlarged lawn.<sup>21</sup> In making the racing more attractive to spectators, the racing clubs were forced to improve the organization of their meetings, ensuring that the racing was conducted professionally and ran to time. This called for experienced and skilled officials and the last twenty years of the century saw the introduction of paid handicappers, starters and club officials. In the 1890s, Gray's Starting Machine and variations on it meant that horses lined up behind a strand barrier that was raised at the starter's signal. This did away with the manoeuvring for position and false starts associated with the traditional flag starts.<sup>22</sup> With the larger numbers of people involved, crowd control became more of an issue, with running rails being built around the track to keep the racing separated from the spectators. This also meant that it was no longer possible on these tracks for mounted men and women to dash alongside the racers. Racing not only became more professional in these years, it also became more of a spectator sport with the novelty races that encouraged local participation being excluded from the programmes.

Fewer racing clubs were running races for Maori owned and ridden horses. In 1876 the *Turf Register* listed only ten Maori races that took place during the previous season and by 1891, this was further reduced to seven. But this is not to say that Maori racing had diminished. Although some of the Maori clubs folded during this period, the Otaki Maori Racing Club thrived. With an organization highly regarded by Maori and Pakeha alike, four years after its inception it was able to attract 1,200 people for its New Year meeting.<sup>23</sup> In 1897 it established a record turnover of £9,480 and the same meeting set a new record of 170 for the number of entries. Some Maori became well known for their involvement in the racing industry. Utiku Marumaru, chief of Ngāti Apa became a thoroughbred breeder on a large scale. Another successful owner, Hira Parata trained his horses at his private Waikanae training track.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> *Wellington Evening Post*, 7 Feb 1890.

<sup>22</sup> Costello and Finnegan, pp.73-5.

<sup>23</sup> *Evening Post*, 2 Jan 1890.

<sup>24</sup> Mary Mountier, 'Early Maori Involvement in Horseracing in the Wellington Horowhenua Region', *Historical Journal: Otaki Historical Society*, 12:42 (1989), pp.46-7.

In the early years of New Zealand horseracing, most of the thoroughbreds had been imported but by the 1880s a number of major breeding studs had been established in the South Island, Hawke's Bay and Auckland. George Gattonby Stead bred and raced horses from Chokebore Lodge at Riccarton. Another successful Canterbury breeder was Sir George Clifford whose horses bred at Stonyhurst in Ashley County earned stakes totalling £240,149.<sup>25</sup> During the 1880s and 90s, Hawke's Bay gained a high reputation in racing, with breeders such as Captain Sir William Russell at Flaxmere, the Hon. John Ormond at Karamu and the Douglasses at Te Mahanga.<sup>26</sup> By 1888 Sylvia Park had become known as one of the most prestigious breeding establishments with 101 broodmares grazing on a lush 300 acres just south of Auckland. The New Zealand Stud and Pedigree Company was owned by a syndicate of Auckland businessmen. The company was forced into liquidation in 1891 due to the failure of some of its other ventures, but one of the shareholders, Thomas Morrin continued on with some of the horses at his Wellington Park Stud.<sup>27</sup>

It was in the period from about 1880 to the end of the century that the nature of horseracing changed from an informal social activity to a highly competitive and structured sport. As prize money increased it became evident that there was money to be made from horseracing and thoroughbreds became a valuable commodity. The 1884 *Turf Record* noted that the top price paid for a yearling was 400 guineas<sup>28</sup> but this had more than doubled by 1890 when a yearling sold for 930 guineas.<sup>29</sup> To protect their investment, owners became more diligent in the training and care of their racehorses. In the early years of the sport, there were few public trainers. Often an owner trained his own racehorses or, on a bigger establishment a trainer was an employee who as well as training the owners thoroughbreds, also cared for the other horses on the property. However, as horseracing became more commercialized, trainers of successful racehorses became sought after and by the end of the century a number of men had set themselves up as public trainers. Richard J. Mason, who had gained a reputation as a trainer of winners while working in Henry Redwood's

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<sup>25</sup> Miriam Macgregor Redwood, *Proud Silk: A New Zealand Racing History*, Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1958, p.185.

<sup>26</sup> Costello and Finnegan, p.73.

<sup>27</sup> Redwood, p.138.

<sup>28</sup> *New Zealand Turf Record*, 1884, p.339.

<sup>29</sup> *Wellington Evening Post*, 2 Jan 1890.

stable, trained for various owners as well as his own horses. His services were in such demand that he was able to select only the very best horses for training.<sup>30</sup>

Jockeys on the other hand, remained lowly in status and poorly paid. Although by the 1880s, the age of the amateur 'gentlemen' riders had passed, jockeys were mostly young boys employed for general stable or household work. Their skills must have been sufficiently recognized, however, for the Canterbury Jockey Club to pass a resolution in 1879 to the effect that no trainer was allowed to employ a 'stable servant' without the permission of his former employer. Further to this, any jockey who left his employer before the terms of his engagement were completed was disqualified from riding in any race. The Auckland Racing Club went some way in recognizing jockeys as a distinct occupational group by its 1885 decision to license jockeys in the area and to establish a Distressed Jockeys Fund. Several years passed however, before other clubs followed Auckland's lead.<sup>31</sup>

The 1880s saw the introduction of the totalizator to New Zealand racetracks. An article in the *Nelson Evening Mail* described the 'new fangled innovation' as 'one of the fairest betting contrivances that was ever devised'. It explained that the machine worked much the same as a £1 sweepstake, except that the gambler, rather than drawing a horse could choose his favourite. The tickets cost £1 and the total collected was equally divided among the holders of the winning horse less ten percent.<sup>32</sup> When the totalizator was used at New Plymouth the following year, the journalist from the *Taranaki Herald* was equally enthusiastic about it, claiming that sooner or later, it would supersede the old method of bookmaking.<sup>33</sup>

Although many sporting writers purported to welcome the totalizator as a means of protecting the punter from being 'fleeced by the black sheep of the bookmaking fraternity', it was the racing clubs that benefited most. Bookmakers at this time contributed nothing to club funds, while a percentage of the totalizator takings were

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<sup>30</sup> Redwood, pp.61-3.

<sup>31</sup> Redwood, pp.40-1.

<sup>32</sup> *Nelson Evening Mail*, 11 Feb 1880.

<sup>33</sup> *Taranaki Herald*, 31 Mar 1881.

taken by the club.<sup>34</sup> The totalizator in this period only returned a win dividend and at some meetings the price of a ticket was prohibitively expensive. The Auckland Racing Club Committee decided in 1885 that the totalizator tickets on the Auckland Cup, Auckland Racing Club Handicap and Summer Steeplechase would be priced at £2. For the less affluent punter, bookmakers offered a wider choice of betting options and often paid a better dividend.

A consequence of the increasing investment in horseracing was the need for more control and consistent regulation. Up until the 1880s, most racing clubs followed their own rules, but as more horses were being raced outside their local areas, this could cause confusion. The well-known Nelson breeder, Henry Redwood ran into difficulties when he took his horse Kakapo to run at the Auckland Turf Club's meeting in December 1873. In the Nelson district, the age of horses was taken from the first of July. This meant that Kakapo foaled in July was entered as a three year old. Yet presumably unknown to Redwood, the Auckland Turf Club designated the first of August to age horses. A protest against Kakapo was lodged on the grounds that the horse was four, not three as his owner claimed. The protest was upheld, resulting in the horse's disqualification.<sup>35</sup>

There were concerns too, that the corrupt practices that plagued racecourses overseas could destroy the developing racing industry here. The New Zealand racing public was kept well informed by local newspapers of international racing fraud, for instance, a report in the *North Otago News* appeared in 1887 concerning a court case held in Liverpool in which an attempt was made at the United Border Hunt Steeplechase to pass off a racehorse with a false name. Inconsistent running, 'ring-ins', and bribery attempts worried racing club administrators and were thought to be particularly prevalent at country meetings. The *Referee* made the point in 1900 that the larger clubs were well served by good officials but some country clubs were not so fortunate, so crimes were more likely to be committed on country courses.<sup>36</sup> The *Press* reported on what they called the 'Tinwald Racing Scandal' in which John

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<sup>34</sup> While some clubs owned and operated their own totalizator, others were run for a tendered price. The Waimate Racing Club Minute Book recorded that in 1883, Dodge and Roberts of Oamaru were awarded the right to work the totalizator at 8%.

<sup>35</sup> Redwood, pp.68-9.

<sup>36</sup> *New Zealand Referee*, 8 Jan 1900.

Corbitt and Charles Paget were apprehended by the stewards for attempting to bribe a jockey to 'stiff' the race favourite.<sup>37</sup> In a further incident at a country meeting, a protest was made at the 1895 Cromwell Races against Jess, claiming that she was a 'ring-in'. The horse was disqualified for life when the mare was found to have also raced under the names of Amelia, Semolina and Ellen.<sup>38</sup> Although racing misdemeanours certainly took place on New Zealand racecourses and were well publicized, there is little evidence that it was as wide spread as fears would have it.

Pony, hack racing and trotting were also seen to be more subject to corruption than the more elite thoroughbred racing. A letter to the editor of the *Evening Post* in 1889 complained about the hack racing meeting at Island Bay, claiming that hack racing develops as much 'ringing in and cleverness as its sister sport of trotting'. The writer requested the Colonial Secretary who 'is a real sporting man and owner of racehorses to thoroughly satisfy himself with the bonafide character of the Island Bay Racing Club before granting totalizator permits'.<sup>39</sup> The calling upon the government for greater control is indicative of a growing concern, not only to root out any corruption within horseracing but also to position the sport with the interests of the rich and powerful.

There were several steps towards the formation of a national governing body for racing and the adoption of a uniform set of rules. In 1876 William Russell, owner of Flaxmere Stud and president of the Hawke's Bay Jockey Club, put forward the suggestion that the principal clubs in each district be designated as 'metropolitan' clubs and assume responsibility for the rest of the clubs in their areas. The Canterbury Jockey Club was the first to act on the Hawke's Bay suggestion and resolved in 1877 to recognize only the Dunedin, Wellington, Auckland and Hawke's Bay Clubs and to not recognize any complaint or disqualification made by any other club 'unless such a complaint or disqualification had first been referred to and confirmed by the Metropolitan Club of the Provincial District with which such club holds its meetings'.<sup>40</sup> What was to become an historic meeting took place in Napier

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<sup>37</sup> *Press*, 24 Jan 1890.

<sup>38</sup> James Crombie Purcell, *The Heart of the Desert: A History of Cromwell and Bannockburn Districts of Central Otago*, Christchurch: Whitcoulls, 1951, p.341.

<sup>39</sup> *Wellington Evening Post*, 9 Jan 1889.

<sup>40</sup> Costello and Finnegan, p.44.

on 15 and 16 May 1887. On the suggestion of the Wanganui Jockey Club, delegates from Auckland, Canterbury, Dunedin, Hawke's Bay, Taranaki, Wanganui and Wellington met to consider the means by which horseracing in this country could be controlled. Under the chairmanship of the Hon. George McLean, a letter was composed to the colonial secretary expressing support for the totalizer but requesting that the licenses be restricted to only those racing clubs prepared to follow the rules and programmes approved by the metropolitan clubs in their district.<sup>41</sup> Although the Colonial Secretary's reply indicated that the government was not willing to act upon the request at the time, it was evident that the major clubs had formed themselves into an effective lobby group, with an annual conference of delegates.

By 1900, the body that now called itself the New Zealand Racing Conference had consolidated its control. Official status had been conferred when it was recognized by the English Jockey Club as the governing body of racing in the colony. Sir George Clifford had been chairman for three years and W.H.E. Wanklyn, secretary of the Canterbury Jockey Club was appointed the Conference secretary. Under these influential racing men, uniform rules of racing were established, as was the registration of clubs with the conference. Auckland, Hawke's Bay, Taranaki, Wanganui, Wellington, Greymouth, Canterbury and Dunedin were designated Metropolitan clubs and under the rules of the Conference, they held jurisdiction over all the race meetings in their metropolitan district. The administrative headquarters of the New Zealand Racing Conference was Christchurch, as was the newly established New Zealand Trotting Association. Yet although the Racing Conference had effective control of New Zealand racing, it remained merely an association of racing clubs without statutory authority or power.<sup>42</sup>

The question remains then, how was this administrative body able to gain and maintain control over a diverse range of racing clubs throughout the country? A key to this is that the Racing Conference had a powerful ally in George Stead. In 1890, he purchased the Christchurch Press Company and so was in a position to secure the

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<sup>41</sup>William Mackie, *A Noble Breed: Auckland Racing Club, 1874-1974*, Auckland: Wilson & Horton, 1974, pp.93-4.

<sup>42</sup>Costello and Finnegan, p.113.

*Referee* as the official calendar of the New Zealand Racing Conference and the New Zealand Trotting Association.<sup>43</sup> This proved a vital tool in pushing the issue of centralization. Editorial comment backed the position of the Conference and only registered clubs had their programmes published in the *Referee*, a well-established periodical with a loyal following. In 1891, the sporting editors of the *Referee* took over the publishing of the *New Zealand Turf Register*, issuing the first issue as Volume one. Wanklyn also felt the need for the conference to oversee the publication of an official studbook. Although ten previous studbooks had been issued, the first in 1862 by Charles Elliot, the eleventh was published in 1900 as *The New Zealand Studbook, Volume One*. There is significance in the fact that both the *Studbook* and *Turf Register*, once under the control of the Racing Conference were published as first volumes. It was not that New Zealand racing was denied a previous history; credit was given to Charles Elliot and others who had laid the groundwork. The point to be made here is that a new beginning was envisioned for New Zealand horseracing, firmly under the control of a strong central body and led by men with a vested interest in the sport.

Horseracing had undergone major change during the last two decades of the century. Increasing urbanization and technological innovation offered new opportunities for the growth of the sport. In this climate of change, horseracing established itself as a popular leisure activity attracting large numbers of spectators. A national administrative body had been founded in Christchurch with the support of the major racing clubs and of individuals with a strong commitment to the business of racing. But the process of change was far from complete. Horseracing was to be buffeted by the winds of moral indignation and social reform sweeping the country. Government had a role to play too, in shaping the direction of horseracing as both a sport and an industry for New Zealand in the twentieth century.

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<sup>43</sup> Ryan, p.343.

## 7

## HORSERACING AS A NATIONAL SPORT

By the end of the century horseracing was developing a more national orientation. Developments in transport and communication meant that participation in the sport was no longer restricted to a local or even provincial level. A central body that strived to ensure that the rules, quality and conditions of racing were consistent throughout the country administered the sport. Although driven by powerful and able men, the Racing Conference had no statutory powers and so to consolidate its hold and to protect the growing horseracing industry, they called on the government for support. But another voice demanding government attention was the social and moral reform movement. Growing increasingly vocal through the 1880s and 1890s, this group turned its attention on horseracing as a perceived hotbed of drinking, gambling and other social evils. They called upon the government to restrict the activity that they saw as a threat to family life and a corrupting influence on the nation's morals.

The debates that raged during this time centred on fundamental differences in the perceptions of sport and its function. Many saw horseracing as part of New Zealand's sporting culture, one that had evolved from a long and proud British tradition. Some also saw the potential of thoroughbred breeding as an important aspect of the country's growing agricultural sector. The nation's well-being was also at the heart of an opposing ideology that saw horseracing not as a sport but as a blight on civilized society. The reform activists espoused the principles of Muscular Christianity, believing that the role of sport was to improve the moral and physical vigour of its citizens. Yet against this background of friction between the often-conflicting values associated with nationalism, commercialization, urbanization and social reform, horseracing survived and entered the new century as a sport very different from the one the settlers had introduced to the new colony.

Betting on horses and games of chance had always been a part of New Zealand racing but up until the 1880s, there had been little organized resistance to gambling. It was also considered a private matter; colonial governments did not feel the need to intervene into the recreational life of its people. But as New Zealand began to leave the frontier age behind and take its place in the modern world, the country became drawn into the larger social and cultural issues that had confronted Western Europe and North America for most of the century. At the core of these issues were the concerns of racial fitness and superiority. From the western perspective, the Anglo-Saxon race had not only prospered and progressed but it had spread the benefits of civilization throughout the world. But in the rapidly changing world of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there were very real fears of racial survival. Cities were monuments to progress and provided the large numbers of people needed for industrial production. Yet they were also considered physically and morally dangerous places. Carefully controlled sport was a means to maintain the healthy body and mind associated with rural living. Certain sports such as rugby gained a heightened importance as it encouraged the values of cooperation, discipline and team spirit required of the modern workforce.<sup>1</sup> Horseracing, attracting mass gatherings of people who were likely to indulge in gambling, drinking and other unacceptable behaviour was increasingly revealed as a threat to social order and civilized society. The move towards organized sport and controlled leisure time was part of a changing pattern of recreation that took hold in western societies. Fears of racial degeneration combined with the economic necessity of the state to have control over its workforce gave sport a greater social power than it had ever experienced before. Although the debates surrounding sport were essentially to do with economic and social issues, they emerged publicly as moral and religious arguments.<sup>2</sup>

It is in this context that the opposition to horseracing in New Zealand and in particular the gambling associated with it can be seen. The first significant attempt to legislate against gambling was the 1881 Gaming and Lotteries Act. This banned

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<sup>1</sup> James Watson, 'From the Frontier to Cyberspace: A History of Leisure, Recreation and Tourism', in *Time Out: Leisure, Recreation and Tourism in New Zealand and Australia*, H.C. Perkins and G. Cushman (eds), Auckland: Longman, 1998, p.20.

<sup>2</sup> Mike Huggins, 'Culture, class and Respectability: Racing and the Middle Classes in the Nineteenth Century', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 11:1 (1994), pp.21-2.

gaming houses and made games involving coins, cards and tables subject to prosecution. The totalizator was restricted to racing clubs that had been issued permits for its use by the Colonial Secretary. By not restricting the bookmaker trade and regulating rather than banning the totalizator, the government acknowledged horseracing as the only acceptable outlet for gambling.<sup>3</sup> This created almost no disruption to the business of horseracing and in all likelihood attracted even more would be gamblers to the races. What this did mean, however, was that horseracing and in particular the government-sanctioned totalizator provided a focus of attention for those opposed to gambling. Even so, the anti-gambling lobby was slow to gain momentum.

It was not until the late 1880s that the Protestant churches began to turn their attention towards the evils of gambling. It was part of a wider social purity movement advocated by the Protestants dedicated to the prohibition of alcohol, keeping the Sabbath sacred and eradicating prostitution. The position of the New Zealand churches was essentially middle class and family orientated.<sup>4</sup> Gambling was an anachronism because the profits generated from it were not based on thrift, hard work and skill. It was believed responsible for increased criminal activity such as embezzlement and other forms of theft. Ultimately gambling led to financial ruin and the breakdown of family life. While the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches remained divided on the gambling question, the Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists and the Salvation Army grew increasingly determined and vocal throughout the 1890s with their demands to ban all racetrack gambling.

The anti-gambling movement found dynamic leadership in Reverend Rutherford Wadell, a Presbyterian minister from Dunedin who appealed to politicians, the press, trade union leaders and all Christian men and women to avoid the racecourse and seek legislative change. In 1898 Wadell formed an anti-gambling league in Dunedin. Another followed in Wellington with Chief Justice Sir Robert Stout as president and included parliamentarians, clergymen and the city's mayor on the committee. As the

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<sup>3</sup> Jock Phillips, *A Man's Country? The Image of the Pakeha Male: A History*, Auckland: Penguin Books, 1987, p.68.

<sup>4</sup> David Grant, *On a Role: A History of Gambling and Lotteries in New Zealand*, Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1994, p.75.

movement spread, branches were set up in Auckland, Napier and Christchurch also led by influential citizens. By 1902 the Women's Christian Temperance Union entered the campaign to ban the totalizator. Together with the churches and the anti-gambling leagues, they organized a series of petitions to parliament and held meetings throughout the country to demonstrate the growing support against gambling.<sup>5</sup>

This leads to the question of why the government was reluctant to legislate against racecourse betting. A powerful pro-gambling lobby group existed consisting of the men who ran the metropolitan racing clubs. They had an influential spokesman in Sir William Russell, the wealthy landowner and thoroughbred breeder who had been instrumental in the establishment of the New Zealand Racing Conference. As MP for Napier and Hawke's Bay from 1876 to 1905, he represented the racing interests in parliament and was a staunch supporter of the totalizator.<sup>6</sup> A letter, which he had been party to, was sent by the Racing Conference to the Colonial Secretary in 1887 outlining their arguments for the retention of the totalizator. It was pointed out that the importance of breeding good horses of thoroughbred blood was realized in many countries. England supported breeders by offering large sums of money to be run for as Queen's Plates, while some European countries established Imperial Studs for the purpose of breeding superior bloodstock. Recent sales had shown that New Zealand bred horses were in demand by buyers from Australia and India as racehorses and military mounts. This growing business was maintained by the profits of the totalizator by way of increased prize money for horse owners. Racing was considered necessary to breed good horses. If the totalizator was carefully supervised with licenses given only to registered clubs willing to put the profits back into racing, it would spare 'the government of any expense either for breeding establishments or any other outlay'.<sup>7</sup> A self-supporting industry that had already made inroads on the international market clearly had appeal. In a more direct way the government had realized the potential of the totalizator as a revenue generating opportunity. In 1891, John Ballance introduced a taxation of one and a half percent

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<sup>5</sup> Grant, pp.72-82.

<sup>6</sup> Grant, p.63.

<sup>7</sup> William Mackie, *A Noble Breed: Auckland Racing Club*, Auckland: Wilson & Horton, 1974, pp.93-4.

on totalizator turnover and this was to remain in effect until it was increased to two and a half percent in 1915.<sup>8</sup>

While it was apparent that deep divisions over gambling existed in Parliament and among New Zealanders in general, the issue over horseracing needs to be seen in perspective. Throughout this period, people attended race meetings in ever increasing numbers and they continued to bet on horses. Auckland's Boxing Day Races attracted over 15,000 spectators in 1905.<sup>9</sup> The photograph of the Wanganui Racecourse taken by Frank Denton, a racing photographer of this period gives an indication of the crush of people attending the metropolitan meeting (Plate 8). In January 1906, 8,000 people attended the opening meeting of Wellington Racing Club's new Trentham Racecourse, which was more than double the number that attended the club's races at Hutt only fourteen years previously (Plate 9).<sup>10</sup> Although the club's new electric totalizator was not in operating order for the opening, the manual machine put through £23,729 in bets.<sup>11</sup> The totalizator profit for the 1906-1907 season was £1,800,000, a rise of £524,187 in five years.<sup>12</sup> Although there was a strong ideology condemning gambling, this was not born out by the behaviour of the general public.

Racecourse attendance and even betting was justified by turning gambling into a class issue. The morality of gambling was related to one's economic means and station in life.<sup>13</sup> The captions of photographs of the 'Bookmaker's Corner' in the *New Zealand Graphic and Ladies Journal* gives an indication of this point of view:

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<sup>8</sup> W.A. Saunders, *Historical Racing Records and Inauguration of the Racing and Trotting Clubs in Otago and Southland*, Dunedin: Dunedin Evening Star, 1949, p.14.

<sup>9</sup> *New Zealand Graphic and Ladies Journal*, 7 Jan 1905.

<sup>10</sup> *New Zealand Referee*, 29 Jan 1892, *New Zealand Graphic and Ladies Journal*, 7 Jan 1905, p.32.

<sup>11</sup> *New Zealand Referee*, 24 Jan 1906.

<sup>12</sup> Grant, p.82.

<sup>13</sup> Douglas A. Brown, 'Thoroughbred Horse-Racing Receives an Imperialist Nod: The Parliamentary Debate on Legalising Gambling in Canada, 1910', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 11: 2 (1994), pp.262-63.

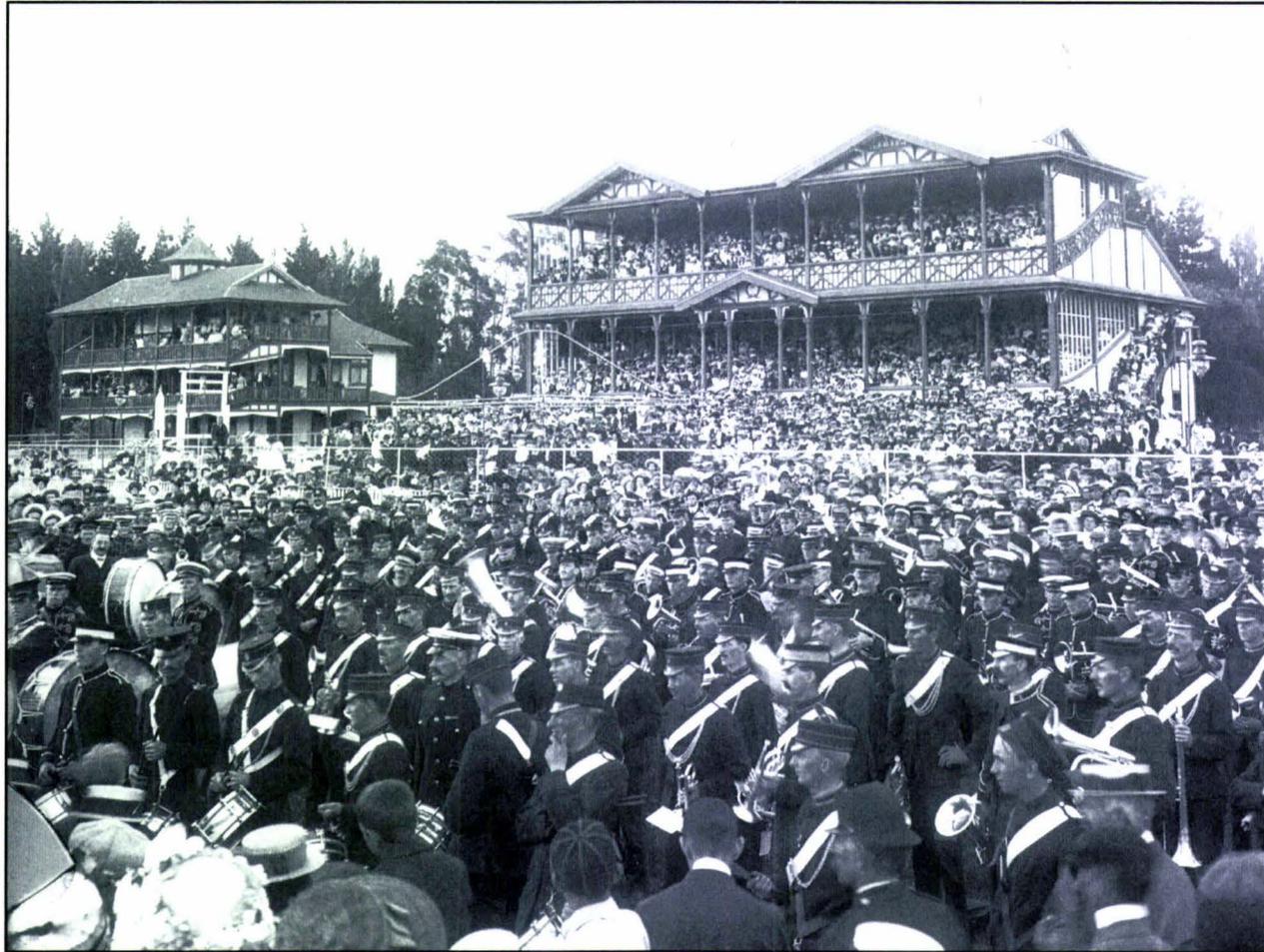


Plate 8: Wanganui Racecourse

Frank J. Denton, n.d., F. J. Denton Collection,  
Alexander Turnbull Library, National Library of New Zealand, Te Puna Māturanga o Aotearoa, Reference Number: G-21520-1/1.

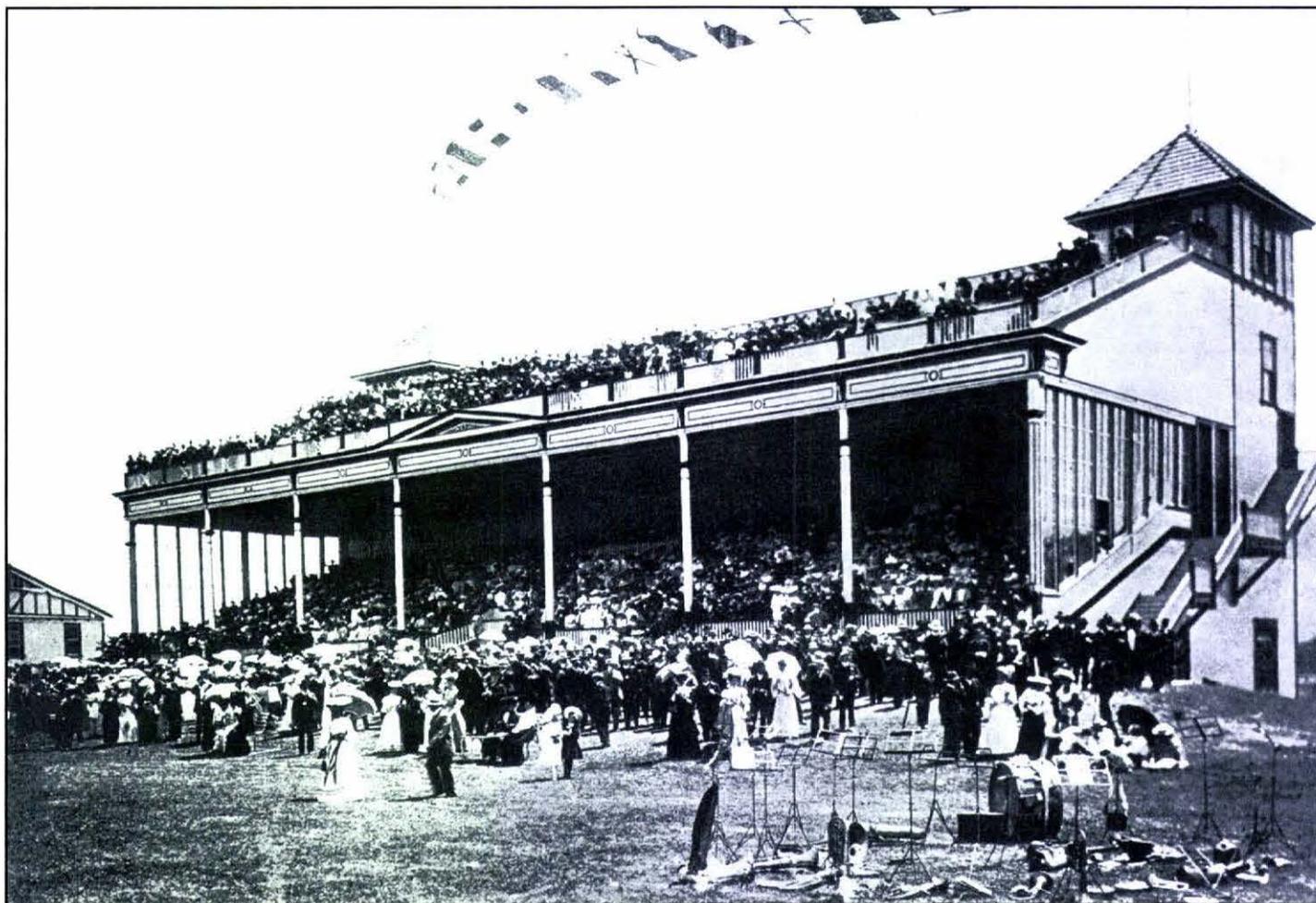


Plate 9: Trentham Racecourse Upper Hutt

Photographer Unknown, 1905,

Alexander Turnbull Library, National Library of Library of New Zealand, Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa, Reference Number: F-3787-1/2.

For the heavy gamblers there may be dark quarters of an hour, but to those good people who, like the writer, enjoy racing for its own sake, and only spend a shilling or two, at most an odd pound or so in sweeps and small bets, there can be no gloomy ending to the day, and the pleasure has been as innocent as say even Mr McNeil could devise. Observe too, the young aristocrat with the cigar in the background – the very impersonation of the good fellow who can win or lose his half – sovereign with a careless grace which might be envied by the heavy gamblers and the machine.<sup>14</sup>

The writer suggests that gambling at the races is harmless if there is a genuine interest in racing, the bets are small and if the patron can afford to lose the money. The mention of ‘good’ people at the races implies that there are also ‘bad’ people.

In the ‘bad’ category were mothers who brought children to the races, presumably to pursue their gambling habit. The journalist who wrote the account of the 1887 Northern Jockey Club Races expressed indignation at the ‘gross carelessness’ of some who failed to notice their children on the course ‘just as the horses were coming up’.<sup>15</sup> In another incident at the Auckland Races a baby, supposedly suffering from whooping cough, was left with the ladies’ cloakroom attendant. The reporter of the incident castigated the mother for being ‘willing to sacrifice the good of her children to her own selfish ends’ and called upon the Auckland Racing Club to prohibit children.<sup>16</sup> Again this argument had class implications, as it would have been the working class women unable to afford childcare who took their children with them to the races. Maori mothers were also targeted. In a small cartoon entitled ‘Demoralizing effect of the Races on Wahines’ relating to a Maori Sports Day at Waiheke, three women were shown in a drunken dance, one with a baby in arms.<sup>17</sup>

Another ‘bad’ element in the moralizing campaign was the bookmaker. The administrators of the larger racing clubs encouraged this as bookmakers affected the profitability of the totalizator. Publicly, however they took a paternal stance, insisting that the betting public needed to be protected from unscrupulous operators. While some clubs began licensing bookmakers and charging a daily fee, others

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<sup>14</sup> *New Zealand Graphic and Ladies Journal*, 5 Jan, 1895.

<sup>15</sup> *Northern Advocate and Whangarei County Gazette*, 19 Mar 1887.

<sup>16</sup> *New Zealand Graphic and Ladies Journal*, 4 Jan 1900.

<sup>17</sup> *New Zealand Graphic and Ladies Journal*, 4 Apr 1896.

banned them altogether. The *Referee* complimented the Auckland Racing Club for making the move to disallow bookmakers in 1905.<sup>18</sup>

The idea of needing to shelter children and the less fortunate from the perceived dangers of the racecourse is an indication of just how far attitudes towards horseracing had changed. Only about twenty years earlier, horseracing had been regarded as a community social occasion in which families came together to indulge in some harmless amusement. By the early 1900s the racecourse had seemingly become a menacing place filled with traps for the unwary. There was the ever present risk of dishonest bookmakers, pickpockets and 'spielers' willing and able to 'fleece' the unsuspecting of all their money. Added to this was the temptation of readily available alcohol and prostitutes. It was well known that 'ladies of easy virtue' operated from carriages parked at the far end of Auckland's Ellerslie course.<sup>19</sup> It was not only at the metropolitan meetings that such vice was displayed. Stevan Eldred-Grigg cites the *Tuapeka Times* as denouncing the 'obscenities and oaths' of 'the disreputable class' found at country meetings.<sup>20</sup>

The government under Joseph Ward was put in a difficult position. Unable neither to ignore the growing pressure from the anti-gambling interests nor to offend the powerful horseracing lobby, the Gaming and Lotteries Amendment Act was introduced in 1907. The purpose of this legislation was to contain gambling and its associated evils to the confines of the racecourse. Under the Act, bookmaking outside of the racecourse was made illegal and all bookmakers had to be officially licensed. While racing clubs could continue to be licensed to operate the totalizator, they were no longer able to accept telephoned or telegraphed bets. Newspaper publication of tips and dividends was illegal as were any advertisements pertaining to gambling.<sup>21</sup> While betting could continue either through bookmakers or the totalizator on racecourses throughout the country, gambling was to be kept off the streets and out of newspapers, effectively screening it from the public gaze.

<sup>18</sup> *New Zealand Referee*, 3 Jan 1906.

<sup>19</sup> G.K. Prebble, *Horses Courses and Men: Early New Zealand Racing*, Tauranga: Ashford-Kent, 1972, p.124.

<sup>20</sup> Stevan Eldred-Grigg, *A Southern Gentry: New Zealanders Who Inherited the Earth*, Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1980, p.168.

<sup>21</sup> Phillips p.68, Grant p.86.

Horseracing may have been contained within the high walls and fences of the racecourse grounds but it was too much a part of the social fabric of the nation to be forgotten. Combined with this, racing promoters found in the emerging national consciousness a new weapon in the fight to retain horseracing. Despite the enormous political, social and economic changes experienced by the turn of the century, the Arcadian premise still existed.<sup>22</sup> New Zealand remained a land of plenty and its unique character derived in part from its temperate climate and fertile soils. Together with its rich pastures and rolling terrain, this created an ideal environment for the breeding and development of the young thoroughbred. A vision emerged of New Zealand taking its place on the international stage as a nursery for the best thoroughbreds. In a sentiment strikingly similar to the one of racial superiority, New Zealand saw itself as producing vigorous horses with the character and strength needed for the world's most demanding tests.

There was enough evidence to show that this dream had the potential to become a reality. There had already been a noted increase both in the number of foals bred and the improvement in quality of New Zealand thoroughbreds. From the time John White bought the Musket colt, Martini-Henry for 1,250 guineas and won the 1883 Victoria Racing Club's Derby and the Melbourne Cup, New Zealand horses were sought by the Australian market.<sup>23</sup> Two other Musket progeny, Carbine and Trenton also had success in Australia before being sent to stud in England. Carbine was sold to the Duke of Portland for 31,000 guineas, a record price at the time for an Australasian horse.<sup>24</sup>

It was not only in racing that the New Zealand bred horse was making its mark. Over 8,000 horses were sent to South Africa to serve as military mounts. Although the New Zealand horse could not compete with the Boer mounts on their home soil, they were on the whole considered hardier and better suited for military duty than

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<sup>22</sup> Fairburn, *Ideal Society and its Enemies*, p.262.

<sup>23</sup> John Costello and Pat Finnegan, *Tapestry of Turf: The History of New Zealand Racing, 1840-1997*, Auckland: Moa Publications, 1988, p.78.

<sup>24</sup> Peter Willet, *The Classic Racehorse*, London: Stanley Paul, 1981, pp.189-90.

those sent from Britain, Canada and Australia. Although very few survived, the South African war enhanced the reputation of New Zealand bloodstock.<sup>25</sup>

The newspaper press at the turn of the century played an important role in promoting the national dream of New Zealand's ascendancy as a thoroughbred breeding nursery. The focus was now on national rather than regional identity and the daily news reported the progress of New Zealand's racehorses overseas. The *Otago Daily Times* announced in May 1890 that the Auckland horse, Guy Fawkes had won the steeplechase at the Melbourne Hunt Club meeting.<sup>26</sup> Earlier that year the *Press* reported that Mr. White's horses, Kirkham and Narelland had been entered for the 2,000 Guineas, the *Grand Prix de Paris* and the English classic, the Saint Leger.<sup>27</sup> Four days later, the *Press* turned its attention to the Australian racing scene, announcing that Mr. Hammon was to ship Sulton on the first boat to Sydney while Mr. Stead's horses, Scots Grey and Medallion sailed that day to Melbourne. The handicap for the Australian Cup had been announced with Carbine carrying the heaviest weight of nine stone thirteen.<sup>28</sup>

Through the 1890s the two weekly sporting periodicals, the *New Zealand Referee* and the *Sporting and Dramatic Review* continued their sniping battle while still promoting racing as a national sport. The *Sporting and Dramatic* complained that Carbine, Maxim and Sir Modred were considered Australian horses and that New Zealand did not get credit for producing them. This it claimed was the fault of the Racing Conference and it called upon the establishment of a national jockey club to promote New Zealand horses.<sup>29</sup> The paper also complained that New Zealand racing was hampered by the poor horsemanship of New Zealand jockeys who used too much whip and spurs. Colonial jockeys also were allowed to wear moustaches and beards, which would be unheard of in England. The Racing Conference's mouthpiece, the *Referee* countered these arguments claiming that jockeys were as good in New Zealand as they were in England and that the rival paper was a

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<sup>25</sup> Neville Northover, *Winning Against the Odds: Racing In and Around Hamilton from 1866-1987-The Centenary of the Waikato Racing Club*, Hamilton: The Waikato Racing Club, 1994, p.17.

<sup>26</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, 13 May 1890.

<sup>27</sup> *Press*, 24 Jan 1890.

<sup>28</sup> *Press*, 28 Jan 1890.

<sup>29</sup> *New Zealand Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic Review*, 2 Aug 1890.

supporter of 'certain old fashioned conservative notions in preference to our more advanced colonial ideas'.<sup>30</sup>

The story that captured the imagination of all New Zealanders during the first decade of the century was that of Moifaa, a thoroughbred of modest parentage, born on the Hawke's Bay hills. When Moifaa's talent for jumping became known, Spencer Gollan of Mangatarata Station near Waipukurau, bought the big gelding. Gollan maintained a stable of colonial bred horses in England but he had not been successful in previous attempts to win the Grand National at Aintree. In 1904 Moifaa was shipped to England for another attempt at the renowned steeplechase. The favourite was Ambush II, owned by King Edward VII. Contrary to all expectations Moifaa won easily, causing some of the English commentators to describe him as 'the 'greatest jumper ever seen in the history of the race'. He also caught the king's eye who bought him for 2,000 guineas. Moifaa only carried the royal colours once as he 'went in the wind' shortly after the purchase. However, due to his good manners he became the king's favourite mount and was ridden by him on all state occasions. At the funeral of King Edward in 1910, Moifaa took pride of place in the funeral cortege behind the gun carriage bearing the king's body and in front of all the European heads of state. He bore the symbolic empty saddle with the boots reversed in the stirrups.<sup>31</sup> The Moifaa story became a legend and it is not difficult to imagine the impact it had in New Zealand. It was the realization of a dream, the colonial of humble origins, who not only beat the mother country at its own sport but also was able to take his place among the world's royalty. The performance of the equine athlete was taken as a sign of colonial maturity. New Zealand had come of age and sports nationalism was to become a significant aspect of the twentieth century.

In June 1910 Prime Minister Ward addressed a delegation of 300 anti-gambling representatives on the steps of parliament. He was forced to admit that the 1907 legislation had failed to restrict bookmaking and that the trade was now 'tarnished by rogues'.<sup>32</sup> This time Ward's personal anti-gambling views were supported in

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<sup>30</sup> *New Zealand Referee*, 25 Feb 1892, 11 Dec 1892.

<sup>31</sup> Much of the information came from undocumented sources held at Mangatarata Station, Waipukurau where the Moifaa legend lives on. Other sources are Redwood, pp.186-92. and Prebble, pp.171-74.

<sup>32</sup> Grant, p.89.

parliament and by December that year a new gambling Amendment was passed. As from the end of January 1911, bookmaking became illegal both on and off the course. Racing was restricted to only 250 days a year with no more than eight races on any one day. Under the terms of the Act, a Racing Commission was appointed to allocate licenses to the racing clubs. The legislation had far reaching implications. Not only did it restrict the amount of racing to take place, it took the sport out of the hands of the community based racing clubs and into the control of a government appointed body. With the limitation of only eight licenses issued for a particular day, traditional holiday racing was disrupted. Clubs no longer had the option of charging bookmaker fees, forcing them to apply for a license to operate a totalizator.

The appointed Chairman of the Racing Commission was Sir George Clifford, the wealthy racehorse owner, breeder and club administrator. Along with four other Commissioners, they outlined in their report the criteria on which they granted some clubs totalizator licenses while denying others. Priority was given to the larger city clubs as they were seen to cater not only to their own residents but also to visitors from neighbouring districts. The control over licensing also gave the Commission the opportunity to shut down the proprietary clubs that operated on a profit basis. Clubs were to remain amateur organizations run by administrators that saw that all profits were put back into the sport by way of prize money and improved facilities. The elite clubs also received favourable treatment in the stipulation that the racecourse be at least a mile in circumference and fenced on the inside of the track with an approved fence. The Commission reiterated that the safety of riders and the public was paramount and as well 'sanitary arrangements' had to be of an acceptable level. The Commissioners inspected nearly all racecourses before their report with its recommendations was published in June 1911. Seventeen clubs were denied totalizator licenses. Of these the popular Ashhurst- Pohanga Racing Club that had attracted crowds of up to 3,000 was deemed 'unnecessary' as it was midway between Woodville and Palmerston.<sup>33</sup> Westport Jockey Club was considered 'hopelessly ill appointed and obviously (had) no interest in the sport'. Other clubs were told to merge in order to share a totalizator license. North Canterbury Jockey Club was 'very ill appointed' and urged to unite with Amberley Steeplechase and the Ohaha

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<sup>33</sup> *New Zealand Referee*, 3 Jan 1895.

and Eyreton Jockey Clubs to form one strong club for the North Canterbury district.<sup>34</sup>

While the Commissioners were deciding the fate of racing clubs throughout the country, many New Zealanders continued to spend their 1911 summer holidays at the races as they always had done. Prime Minister Ward was among the many distinguished visitors at Ellerslie in January to witness the gathering of over 20,000, the largest attendance to date at a New Zealand sporting attraction.<sup>35</sup> Thirty-eight bookmakers were licensed to operate and over a million pounds were put through the totalizator by the second day of racing.<sup>36</sup> But that was the last Ellerslie was to see of the bookmakers. On the last day of January in an incident many times retold, the bookmakers were fare welled at the Takapuna Jockey Club course. Following the last race, 'punters' and 'bookies' linked hands to sing, 'We parted on the Shore'.<sup>37</sup> A few months later, the *New Zealand Referee* reminded the readership how fortunate they were in the organization and control of their sports.

In racing, the powers-that-be have gone far to realize their ideal, which may be defined as genuine contests on well appointed racecourses, so improved that the sport may be seen as well by the poorest visitor as well as the richest. The ideal may be regarded by some as at once too high-flying and too democratic. But the quality of the racing provided has steadily risen; and the policy of considering every body equally has proved to be wise as it is generous.<sup>38</sup>

Horsereading was to survive in New Zealand but not in the democratic manner suggested here. It was to remain firmly under the control of the government and its representatives. The compromise that had been reached, diverted attention away from the totalizator that continued to add to government coffers as well as to fund the business of racing. Bookmakers had become victim but so too had many of the country clubs and race meetings that provided a social occasion for members of the local community. In only about twelve years, horseracing had been transformed from a local activity into a thriving industry with a strong national focus.

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<sup>34</sup> Gaming Act Commission, Report of Commission Appointed under Section 6 of the Gaming Amendment Act 1910, *Appendix to the Journals of the House of Representatives 1911*.

<sup>35</sup> *New Zealand Referee*, 4 Jan 1911.

<sup>36</sup> *Press*, 4 Jan 1911.

<sup>37</sup> Prebble, p.122, Grant, p.89, Costello and Finnegan, p.77.

<sup>38</sup> *New Zealand Referee*, 12 Apr 1911.

## CONCLUSION

*They're off!*

There is a hush. A gull screams. Thundering down the sand comes the field, Maoris and whites bunched tightly together. Hell for leather and few holds barred they storm down the beach, encouraged by the shouts and roars from Mrs Clements' mixed bag of onlookers.

A Maori boy on a piebald breaks from the bunch, is overtaken by a chestnut, doubles his whip and pulls free again. Men, women, children and dogs leap, shout, dance with delirium. Duncan and Joe race for the betting shed.

The piebald passes the post, the Maori boy stands in his stirrups, clenches his fists 'Hai!' he roars. He's won. And so have I, five shillings. Ann stands silent beside me, her hands still clasped in wonder. Charlie, having almost broken Derek's neck, is lowered once more.

James is right, the chase is the thing. All you need is speed and skill and strength and courage. Chariots, wagons, cyclists or runners, all are exhilarating, but men on horses win hands down. The flashing hoofs, the floating manes, the sheer beauty of animals at speed is the bonus.

This is how races should be seen. Only yards from the action, close to the sweat and oaths of the protagonists, on a course encompassed by sea, sky, hills and sheep.<sup>1</sup>

This passage from Barbara Anderson's novel, *Long Hot Summer* evokes many of the memories and elements of New Zealand horseracing of the past. The sights and sounds and sense of danger are captured along with the power and speed of the horses as they pound along the beach. Maori and Pakeha, men, women and children are caught up in the intense excitement of the spectacle before them. It is an exhilarating mix of animals and humanity in a quintessential New Zealand setting of sand, sea, hills and sky.

From the time that horses were first brought to the shores of the new colony, horseracing has been a part of New Zealand colonial life. The settlers brought with them the British love of the Turf but for the majority of them, their previous involvement in racing had been as spectators and perhaps gamblers. Racehorse

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Anderson, *Long Hot Summer*, Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1999, p.93.

ownership was the domain of the highest levels of society with wealth and social standing being the accepted prerequisites to race club membership. But New Zealand was a new land with new possibilities. With its equable climate and year round pastures, horse ownership came within the reach of a much greater proportion of the population.

Many settlers brought with them a belief in progress and a drive to succeed. To be able to participate in a sport that would have been denied to them in their home country would surely have been a mark of success. There is something elemental too, in the mastery of the horse that perhaps related to the settler's efforts to tame the natural environment. Competition would have also played a part in the will to succeed and once horse ownership and riding skills were realized, the next step forward was the desire to pit one's horse against another's. This is how New Zealand horseracing evolved and although such races remain unrecorded, they no doubt took place wherever in the colony people and their horses settled. Maori too, acquired horses early and were to make a lasting contribution to the sport.

Organized horseracing was initiated in some areas by Imperial military officers and in others by the colonial elite. But populations were too small for these early organizers to exclude the rest of the community and increasing numbers of colonists became involved in all aspects of the sport. It is not difficult to imagine why the popularity of the sport spread. Horseracing was one of the earliest colonial institutions at a time when few alternative activities existed to occupy leisure time. It provided an opportunity for all members of a community to socialize at holiday times and to celebrate progress.

The development of horseracing in New Zealand may appear to be a straightforward process but it was by no means a simple activity. Horseracing reveals a number of complexities about colonial society and culture in New Zealand. The form the sport took in the colony had old world elements as well as distinctly new world ones. It was a sport with frontier qualities, yet it could also be used as a means to impose order and control. It evolved in New Zealand as a sport associated with democratic values but it could also be strongly elitist. It was both a rural sport and an urban one. Maori involvement was encouraged and their horsemanship often admired, yet their

efforts were often ridiculed. Women were an essential component of some aspects of horseracing but excluded from others. Horseracing was seen as an acceptable family entertainment for much of the period but it changed into something seen as a threat to the social and moral welfare of family life.

Yet for all the complexities and issues associated with the sport, it played an important role in the community. It was the chosen activity to mark a holiday or significant day in the life of the community. For one or two days a year, the racecourse became a meeting place where all members of the community congregated. In bringing people together in common purpose, horseracing helped construct a community consciousness. The racecourse grounds, its facilities, the success of local horses, the organization of the meeting and the gentility of the crowd all gave cause for pride in a community's progress. This sense of community was experienced at the local level, the provincial level and towards the end of the century, the national level.

To a large extent, the colonial press determined the way the sport evolved in the community. Newspapers were controlled by and represented the interests of those in power. Accordingly, they shaped horseracing into the kind of institution that served their causes. Overall the stories that appeared within the pages of the newspapers indicated that horseracing was at its best when it mirrored the sport as it was conducted in Britain. Spectators were to be restrained in their behaviour, respectful of those in authority and be aware of their place in society. The sport was best administered by those experienced in positions of control and who were prepared to give their time voluntarily for the good of the community. Professionalism in the sport was limited to jockeys, trainers and certain paid officials. In this way the sport could retain its amateur status and profits used to benefit racing in general. Quality racing was believed to be the outcome of high prize money that was able to attract more and better horses. Those who gained most from the higher rewards were the racehorse owners who were generally the same men who administered the racing clubs. Although technological changes explain some of the shifts in the nature of nineteenth century horseracing, the social and cultural forces at work are even more revealing. A hierarchy of control was established in which the regional centres exercised control over the smaller communities in their jurisdiction. These

metropolitan racing clubs were presided over by a national controlling body, the New Zealand Racing Conference. Having more power than the name suggests, its structure was enforced by legislation enacted in the two decades spanning the turn of the century.

A few beach races and 'picnic' races still remain but for the most part they are a distant memory and the material of fiction. As local communities lost the autonomy over the way their race meetings were conducted, the sport lost much of its local character and social function. For a while at least, horseracing became a national sport with its own dreams and myths. Whether this has been sustained remains to be seen.

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