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**'Of course you had to keep the cake tins full': Pakeha women
and afternoon tea from 1930-50**

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Abstract

This thesis contributes to an understanding of female Pakeha cultural history through the study of an important social occasion: afternoon tea. It explores afternoon teas hosted in homes around the Manawatu from 1930-1950, through oral interviews, archival and object-based research, arguing that it was a performance of contemporary female identity as well as a social occasion. Certain items of material culture were ubiquitous: fine china tea sets, embroidered linen, baking and finely sliced bread, and these items demonstrate the critical importance women placed on cooking, cleaning and their own creativity.

Overall this case study reveals that Pakeha culture is a hybrid one, and through the examination of decorative motifs on tea sets and table linen, and contemporary cake and biscuit recipes, understandings of contemporary cultural influences are drawn out. The key influences discussed are English, Scottish, Irish and, to a lesser extent, Danish, although the influence of American popular culture is also apparent. As well as the practices of contemporary femininity and creativity, and the influence of different cultural mores, this thesis shows how class distinctions were also in play in rural Manawatu at this time, and how they were apparent at afternoon tea. The period chosen also allows for an examination of how wider economic and social events – poverty during the 1930s Depression and rationing during the World War Two – affected preparations for and the taking of afternoon tea. This research also shows the varying degrees different sectors of society were affected by these events.

The study of afternoon tea adds important dimensions to our understanding of the wider historical discourses on gender, class, and Pakeha cultural identities and makes a valuable contribution to women's history by emphasising the ubiquitous, but largely undocumented

activities of women's domestic lives. Additionally, this thesis demonstrates the fresh perspectives that can be gained by using a wide range of sources, such as material culture, cookery books, oral narratives and contemporary periodicals.

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Table of Contents

Abstract		ii
Acknowledgements		iv
List of Figures		vi
List of Tables		vii
Introduction		1
Chapter One	About Afternoon Tea	26
Chapter Two	Afternoon Tea and Identity: Femininity, Domesticity and Class	46
Chapter Three	Pakeha Culture and Afternoon Tea	75
Chapter Four	“There Mightn’t Be Money About, But the Cows were still In, and the Hens still Laying:” The Depression and Afternoon Tea	98
Chapter Five	Keeping the Tins Full Against All Odds: World War Two and Afternoon Tea	113
Conclusion		147
Bibliography		157

List of Figures

		Page
Figure 1	Shamrock detail on embroidered Irish linen supper cloth	82
Figure 2	Belleek china tea cup	82
Figure 3	Bambi detail from supper cloth	85
Figure 4	Poppy and aster detail on embroidered supper cloth	88
Figure 5	Daffodil detail on embroidered supper cloth	88
Figure 6	Primrose tea set	89
Figure 7	Hollyhock tea set	89
Figure 8	Embroidered elephant detail	93
Figure 9	Silver jug, sugar bowl and koruru inspired teaspoons made by Rita's father	94

List of Tables

		Page
Table 1	Average sugar use in cake recipes 1940-1946	130
Table 2	Average white sugar, brown sugar and syrup use in cake recipes 1940-1946	131
Table 3	Sugar quantities in cake recipes in <i>Aunt Daisy</i> .	132
Table 4	Sugar quantities in cake recipes in <i>War Economy</i> .	133
Table 5	Sugar quantities in cake recipes in <i>Truth's</i> .	133
Table 6	Average numbers of eggs in cake recipes 1940-1946.	135
Table 7	Numbers of egg used in cake recipes in <i>Aunt Daisy</i> .	136
Table 8	Numbers of egg used in cake recipes in <i>War Economy</i> .	137
Table 9	Numbers of egg used in cake recipes in <i>Truth's</i> .	137
Table 10	Average quantities of butter used in cake recipes 1940-1946.	139
Table 11	Quantities of butter used in cake recipes in <i>Aunt Daisy</i> .	140
Table 12	Quantities of butter used in cake recipes in <i>War Economy</i> .	140
Table 13	Quantities of butter used in cake recipes in <i>Truth's</i> .	141