This book provides unique insights into atypical childhoods lived within institutions that most people have forgotten or never knew to exist in New Zealand. It explores the ways in which one province dealt with the care and custody issues associated with orphaned, illegitimate, abandoned or destitute children in Hawke’s Bay’s eight children’s homes and orphanages from 1892 to 1988. Drawing upon personal collections and recollections as well as institutional archives, school and government records, this book explores the intersections of benevolent care, state protection and education. The first-hand stories of people who lived their childhoods within these institutions bear testimony to a ‘culture of toughness’ in the delivery of care and education to children whose circumstances left them with nowhere else to go.

Author Kay Morris Matthews is well known internationally as an academic historian of education. Her published work has canvassed New Zealand education policy and girls’ and women’s higher education. She has also researched and published two books focused on Hawke’s Bay: *Behind Every School: the history of the Hawke’s Bay Education Board* (1988), and, with Kuni Jenkins, *Hukarere: the politics of Maori girls’ education 1875–1995* (1995). Following a career in New Zealand universities, latterly as Professor of Education at Victoria University of Wellington, in 2008 Kay returned to her home region of Hawke’s Bay, where she is Research Professor at the Eastern Institute of Technology.
This book is dedicated to all those who spent their childhoods within orphanages and children’s homes in New Zealand
Who Cared is at times harrowing, at times comforting, yet it is most importantly always enlightening. Who Cared exposes one of the many neglected aspects of colonial life – providing insight into the heart-breaking lives of the Nineteenth and early Twentieth century poor of Hawke’s Bay, and those who cared sufficiently about the plight of local children that they were driven to act. This is regional history of a quality that one only rarely encounters and is to be savoured as a major achievement in its field.

Douglas Lloyd Jenkins, Director/Manager, Hawke’s Bay Museum and Art Gallery

‘This book reflects our experiences of being raised within a Children’s Home where no love was evident. However, we were given security and were well looked after, which was needed at this time.’

Jill Baker (nee Rees) and Betty Chittick (nee Rees) raised at Abbotsford Home, Waipawa.

I enjoyed this book. Kay Morris Matthews is a gifted story teller and has captured the experience of the children in these homes in Hawke’s Bay with compassion and charm. This is an important piece of the history of childhood of New Zealand and deserves to be read by all those with an interest in children.

Dr Russell Wills, Paediatrician, Children’s Commissioner
# Contents

Preface and Acknowledgements \hspace{5cm} ix

Hawke's Bay Children's Homes and Orphanages \hspace{5cm} xii

Established Prior to 1950 \hspace{5cm} xii

## Chapter One

**Who cared?** \hspace{5cm} 1

- Origins of care \hspace{5cm} 1
- The introduction of government and local body funding \hspace{5cm} 4
- Send them away: Industrial schools and orphanages \hspace{5cm} 5
- Keep them together or at least keep them locally \hspace{5cm} 6
- Boarding children out \hspace{5cm} 9
- Local women to the rescue \hspace{5cm} 11
- Amelia Randall 1844–1930 \hspace{5cm} 12
- The first Hawke's Bay children's home \hspace{5cm} 15
- Against the tide and into the future \hspace{5cm} 20

## Chapter Two

**Their first home:** \hspace{5cm} 25

- Bethany (1896–1978) and St Mary's (1915–1940), Napier

  - Bethany Receiving Home, Napier \hspace{5cm} 25
  - St Mary's Receiving Home, Napier \hspace{5cm} 32
Chapter Three
‘Cared for but not loved’:
St Hilda’s Orphanage, Otane
(1918–1958) 51
   Origins and overview 51
   Who were the children? 53
   Childhoods at St Hilda’s 57
   The good times 59
   The routine times 62
   The bad times 66
   Leaving St Hilda’s 68
   Managing St Hilda’s 75
   Conclusion 81
   Postscript 82

Chapter Four
‘Strong values’:
Abbotsford Home, Waipawa
(1926–1986) 85
   Who were the children? 90
   Childhood at Abbotsford 91
   The good times 95
   The routine times 97
   The bad times 104
   Leaving Abbotsford 104
   The state perspective 106
   Managing Abbotsford 108
   Final Years 1962–1986 111
   Abbotsford Home Trust Fund 116
   Postscript 117
Chapter Five

‘You had to be tough to survive’: Hawke’s Bay Children’s Home (1892–1909)

Randall House (1909–1966)

Gordon House (1910–1924)

Background
Origins and overview
Who were the children?
Childhoods at the Hawke’s Bay Children’s Trust Homes
The good times
The routine times
The bad times
The state perspective
Leaving the homes
The personal context
Final years

Chapter Six

‘Band of brothers’:

France House, Eskdale (1924–1973)

Origins and overview
Who were the boys?
Who were the Shaws?
Boyhoods at France House
The good times
The routine times
Leaving France House
France House Old Boys
Chapter Seven
‘No child turned away’:
Hillsbrook Children’s Home,
Havelock North
(1947–1988)
Origins and overview
Life at Hillsbrook

Chapter Eight
Conclusion:
Who cared?
Whose children?
Dispelling the myth: Illegitimate (ex-nuptial) children
Parents, circumstances and poverty
Institutions or Fostering
The children’s homes of Hawke’s Bay
Last words: Growing up in a children’s home

Bibliography

Index
Preface and Acknowledgements

There are few in-depth accounts, combining archival material and oral testimonies, of the children who spent their childhoods within New Zealand children’s homes and orphanages. In the main, this is because institutional files and archives remain under embargo to protect the privacy of those who were raised within institutions. Further, many of the adults raised in such homes and orphanages have, for a variety of reasons, been reluctant to speak about their childhoods.

This book arose from a combination of circumstances. The Hawke’s Bay Museum holds the archives of the Hawke’s Bay Children’s Homes Trust. I was given full access to these as part of research undertaken for a forthcoming museum exhibition, ‘Hawke’s Bay childhood, 1860-1960: the best days of their lives?’ Access to these archives led to my increasing interest in what happened to the hundreds of children raised within Hawke’s Bay institutions. The files of the Child Welfare Branch, later Division, of the Department of Education (later absorbed into the Department of Social Welfare) at Archives New Zealand provided the state view of not only the three Trust homes, but also the other five church-run homes, via correspondence and annual inspection reports. So rich was the material that I realised there was a separate history of the institutional care and protection of Hawke’s Bay children to be written. This was reinforced by a number of adults, including some among our most senior citizens, who volunteered to be interviewed. These, the last of the children who were raised in the homes and orphanages, now range in age from their mid forties through to their mid nineties. Understandably, the older informants wanted to read a published record sooner rather than later, and in advance of the exhibition.

The Anglican children’s home archives were mostly destroyed in the 1931 Napier earthquake and fire. However, since the release of the first edition of this book in 2012 I was granted permission to access the archives of the Diocese of Waiapu. As agreed, any names of children or their parent/s within the Church archives remain confidential. This newly acquired material has provided added depth to the earlier account which had been dependent on government archives and the diocesan newsletter. In particular, to the content of St Mary’s in chapter two as well as to St Hilda’s in chapter three and Abbotsford in chapter four.
This combined information was included within the 2013 Exhibition St Hilda’s and Abbotsford- Our Children’s Homes within the Central Hawke’s Bay Settlers Museum. In turn, interest in the Exhibition content led to further images being sent in and these are included here with the permission of the donors.

Adults who had lived at St Hilda’s Orphanage at Otane and Abbotsford at Waipay- wa agreed to be interviewed, as did adults who had lived at Hillsbrook, the Presbyterian home at Havelock North, at Randall House, Napier and France House at Eskdale. The voices of those who had lived as children in the region’s homes and orphanages are included with their written consent. They are interwoven with the archived Trust home records, archived government inspectors’ reports and correspondence related to children’s homes housed at Archives New Zealand, and other primary material housed at the archives of the Salvation Army, the Diocese of Waiapu and the archives of Presbyterian Support East Coast.

I located those who had lived in the homes through family and friends, and in what is commonly referred to in research as the ‘snowball effect’, those who offered to speak with me in turn told me of others who would also be prepared to do so. As I listened to their accounts, I was strongly aware that for many, this was the first time they had spoken in detail about a chapter of their lives that some would rather forget. This went as far as not ever telling a spouse anything other than ‘I lived in a Home for a time when I was a child’. For others, the actual telling of their story meant articulating that they had been born ‘illegitimate’ or, if abandoned, acknowledging that they had not been wanted by one or both parents, and the reasons for that. There were many raw emotional moments. On the other hand, there were others for whom being raised in a children’s home was a relatively positive experience, compared with where they might have been otherwise; for many, that would have meant fending for themselves, caring for siblings and not knowing where the next meal would come from.

The stories of childhoods across a range of institutions revealed common themes: a culture of toughness with little ‘caring’, combined with predictable daily routines and large doses of religion. Most children had been only three or four years old when admitted; they suffered the longer term effects of emotional abuse, such as adult sarcasm and being ‘put in the hole’, the dark cupboard under the stairs, for hours at a time. A strong theme emerged of becoming self-reliant and resilient from an early age. For some, the children they grew up with remained ‘like family’ all their lives, and their networks and friendships remain strong.
All those I approached agreed to speak with me, realising that as the last of the surviving former ‘inmates’, it was important to record, for the future, a first-hand perspective of their atypical childhoods, compared with the majority of their peers. To each I place on record my grateful acknowledgement and thanks for your preparedness to tell your story, to let your names be used in this book, to share your memories, papers and photographs, and for the hospitality provided to me in your homes.

I would also like to thank those associated with archives and other primary material: Gail Pope, Curator of the Collection of the Hawke’s Bay Museum Trust Archives, who first alerted me to the Hawke’s Bay Children’s Homes Trust Archives and then assisted in so many ways to make this project possible; Joy Axford, former Curator of the Hawke’s Bay Museum and Art Gallery Archives, who put me in touch with initial interviewees; Robert Buckley of Napier, for making available his collection of papers relating to St Hilda’s Orphanage, Otane; Cheryl and Brian Looker of St Hilda’s Gallery, Otane, for their interest and support; John McKinnon of Hastings, for making available the France House Old Boys’ Archives and photograph albums, as well as for his support and advice; Dr Sally Harvey of Presbyterian Support East Coast, who assisted with locating former Hillsbrook children and material; Major Garry Mellsop, Major Susan Jarvis and Major Paul Jarvis at the Territorial Archives, Salvation Army, Upper Hutt; staff at Archives New Zealand and the National Library of New Zealand, Wellington; Bishop Murray Mills for permission to access the Diocese of Waiapu Archives and Jana Uhlirova, Curator/Manager of the Central Hawke’s Bay Settlers Museum for arranging the 2013 Exhibition St Hilda’s and Abbotsford: Our Children’s Homes and collecting new material relating to both homes.

At EIT, many colleagues have been interested in and encouraged this project; particular thanks are due to Dr Shona Thompson, Professor Bob Marshall, Professor Roger Maaka, Dean Fred Koenders, and also to Jill Price for secretarial support, and Peter Reece, for his reprographic work. To Dr Anne Else of Wellington, for her editing of this text, thank you. This book has been published in the region in order to keep the price as low as possible, and therefore, I hope, widely accessible.

Finally, I would like to thank members of my family for their sustained support, particularly my father, the late Jock Morris and my partner and co-archives note-taker, Richard Matthews.
Hawke's Bay Children's Homes and Orphanages

Established Prior to 1950

(All registered by 1929 as Children's Homes under the Child Welfare Amendment Act, 1927)

Hawke’s Bay Children's Home (for girls and boys) 1892–1909
Established in 1892 in Burlington Road, Napier Hill, Napier by the Hawke's Bay Children’s Homes Trust. Later divided into three institutions managed by the Trust:

Randall House (for girls aged 4–15) 1909 –1966
Coote Rd/Priestley Rd 1909–1945, then Napier Terrace, Napier Hill.

Gordon House (for boys aged 4–15) 1910 –1924;
(for boys aged 4–10) 1924–1948

France House (for boys aged 10–15) 1924–1973
Shaw Road, Eskdale.

Bethany Home (for girls and boys aged 0–4) 1896–1978
St Mary’s Receiving Home
(for girls and boys aged 0–4) 1915–1940
Burlington Road / Finnis Lane, Napier Hill, Napier. Operated by the Anglican Church.

St Hilda’s Orphanage
(for girls and boys aged 4–15) 1918–1958
Higginson Street, Otane, 1918-1952; transferred to Waipawa, 1953-1958. Operated by the Anglican Church.

Abbotsford Home (for girls and boys aged 4–15) 1925–1986
Abbotsford Road, Waipawa. Operated by the Anglican Church.

Hillsbrook Children’s Home
(for girls and boys aged 3–15) 1947–1988
Te Mata Road, Havelock North. Operated by the Presbyterian Church.

Other Children’s Homes in the East Coast Region

Napier Receiving Home
(for girls and boys aged 0–15) 1946–1950
Francis Street, Greenmeadows, Napier. Operated by the Child Welfare Division of the Department of Education.

Edward Murphy Memorial Maternity Home, Gisborne
(for girls and boys aged 0–4) 1920–1975
Aberdeen Road, Gisborne. Operated by the Salvation Army and registered as a Bethany Home.

Heni Materoa Children’s Home, Gisborne
(for girls and boys aged 0–15) 1913>
Founded by Lady Carroll (formerly Heni Materoa) and operated by the Cook County Women’s Guild. Also operated as a day care centre and short term stay centre for children during its history.
Chapter One

Who cared?

Who Cared? Childhoods within Hawke’s Bay Children’s Homes and Orphanages traces and analyses the development of regional benevolence alongside state legislation and funding to support children from 1892 to 1988, the year in which the last of the Hawke’s Bay children’s homes closed. It aims to make visible, for the first time, a variety of perspectives on childhoods lived within institutions.

This is a history of generations of children: those who were orphans; those who were illegitimate (later termed ex-nuptial); those who were abandoned; those who were destitute; and those who still had either one parent or both parents living, but were separated from them because of desperate circumstances to do with poverty or illness, gaining or retaining paid employment, desertion and/or marriage breakdown.

The story told here centres on three interwoven themes: the children and their childhoods within the children’s homes; the beliefs and attitudes of those who ran the children’s homes; and the perspectives of government officials who regulated and inspected the children’s homes. The unpacking of each of these themes highlights the ways in which economic, social, political, cultural and religious influences have, at different times and in different ways, both enabled and constrained the care and protection of children raised within institutions.

This chapter traces early regional responses to the care and protection of children, leading to the emergence of the first children’s home in Hawke’s Bay in 1892.

Origins of care

Historically, child care and protection has been intertwined with wider social, cultural and economic factors. This was evident as early as 1846, during the period of Crown Colony government, when the Destitute Persons Act 1846 was passed. This legislation set out the principle that the family, not the state, was responsible for those who could not look after themselves. That is, relatives
Who Cared? Childhoods within Hawke’s Bay Orphanages and Children’s Homes 1892-1988

should care for the sick, the aged, the homeless, the deserted and the orphaned. The reasoning behind this principle was that the government of the new colony simply did not have the resources to take on this responsibility; nor were there sufficient funds for a benevolent parish system or poorhouse system, as there had been in Britain. However, by the 1860s, neither the regional provincial councils nor a reluctant state could any longer deny the existence of serious social problems within a colony promoted as a ‘land of plenty’.

The side-effects of the gold rush in Otago, notably alcohol consumption, gambling, prostitution and the desertion of wives and children, brought matters to a head, particularly given that extended family often did not exist or could not step in. The Otago Provincial Government was forced to find ways of distributing aid to the ‘deserving’ poor, especially deserted women and children. It established the Otago Benevolent Society in 1862, and the Otago Industrial School (later known as Caversham Industrial School) in 1865. Children could be placed there if they had no home, had been abandoned, were neglected, or had parents who were prostitutes, drunkards or thieves. There were also children who were classed as criminals, or who could not be controlled by their parents. All were raised alongside one another.¹

Like other regions, Hawke’s Bay soon had to deal with a similar range of social ills, combined with mounting levels of poverty and growing numbers of destitute children. In the main, these were the children of Pakeha settlers; Māori children continued to be cared for as they had traditionally been, by members of their extended whanau/family.

There were a range of early responses to caring for destitute children, depending on circumstance. If, for example, a child had no parents, or neglect of the child could be proved, police officers took the child to appear in front of the Resident Magistrate, who had sole authority for deciding on their future. Ideally, relatives would be found to take the child; but if not, the child was admitted to an industrial school, established under the Neglected and Criminal Children Act 1867. Industrial schools were set up mainly in the four large towns of Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Otago, which meant that a Hawke’s Bay child was literally sent away. For example, in June 1879 three ‘neglected’ Napier children were ordered to be sent to Burnham Industrial School in Christchurch, Constance and Thomas McKenna for seven years each and James Langham for five years.² In 1880, two ‘delinquent’ Connell brothers appeared before Napier
Resident Magistrate Kenny, charged ‘with maliciously breaking a window in Mr Robinson’s bakery.’ For this crime, Henry Connell, aged ten, and Thomas Connell, aged eight, were sent to St Mary’s Industrial School and Orphanage in Nelson for five and seven years respectively.

Children who lived with their widowed mothers usually fared slightly better, in that their mother having no means of support was viewed as a circumstance beyond her control. If these women had no family members to help, they were forced to seek aid from a church or another individual benefactor. For example, in Napier, it was known that widows (and others who had fallen on hard times) might receive a sympathetic hearing from William Colenso, former missionary, provincial councillor and later inspector of schools. He would give money and/or ask others he knew to do the same.

Requests to support widows and orphans were issued via the local newspaper, as in August 1868, when funds were sought for the support of the Dowd orphans. Before bridges were built, many lost their lives crossing rivers on horseback or on foot. This is what happened to widower James Dowd, who drowned crossing the Waipawa River. He left five children, the eldest being eleven and the youngest only five. Their immediate wants were covered by eight pounds subscribed by Te Aute residents; other subscriptions were received by Rev. Reignier to support them. Two of those who came forward were Mr H. Holder, who donated one pound, and Mr. T. Lowry, who donated two pounds.

Another form of early regional assistance to support needy children came via men’s clubs such as the Freemasons, established in Hawke’s Bay in 1865, Oddfellows in Napier (1868), the Waipukurau Working Men’s Club (1872), and the Napier Working Men’s Club (1878). Clubs such as these were known to make donations to support needy children more generally, but in the main they assisted the widows and children of their own members.

The economic recession of the 1880s resulted in more unemployment and led to hard times for many families everywhere. Hawke’s Bay had now to confront its own social and economic realities. Only a few could afford insurance premiums or the fees of men’s clubs, with their own built-in insurance. The majority had no such provision.
The introduction of government and local body funding

In Hawke’s Bay, the responsibility for what to do with destitute or orphaned children fell first on the Napier Hospital Charitable Aid Committee, established as a sub-group of the Napier Hospital Management Committee in 1880. Aid could be allocated, for example, to support medically related cases, for example involving the illness of a mother. This is likely to have been why the Charitable Aid Committee gave funds to support Sarah Wilson, the mother of five children, in order to keep the family together at home. This worked for a short time, but in July 1880 Sarah Wilson and her children turned up at the Napier Barracks. The Barracks on Hospital Hill had been vacated by the military, and now served as the Town Refuge, providing temporary shelter for those with nowhere else to go. Sarah Wilson had been at the Refuge for only a week when she was charged with having no lawful visible means of support. Apparently, she ‘was of extremely dirty habits, and kept herself and children in a filthy state’. Moreover, ‘she would not work’. This case highlights the impossibilities facing poor women on their own with children. How could Sarah Wilson fulfil her role as a mother of young children, yet at the same time be self-supporting? She was clearly not meeting the expected standards of motherhood, yet, given her lack of personal hygiene, she was also unlikely to be employable. She could not meet the middle-class ideals expected of her as a mother while the everyday realities of even feeding her family were beyond her means.

This state of affairs prompted Dr Spencer, Chairman of the Charitable Aid Committee, to write to the Resident Magistrate ‘complaining of her habits, characterising them as dangerous to the health of the neighbourhood, and asking for her to be removed from the barracks’. By this time he had stopped the money she had been receiving from his committee, thus forcing matters to a head. Being charged and appearing before the Court was the end of the road for Sarah Wilson and her family. The Magistrate was convinced that the charge had been fully proved, and sentenced Sarah Wilson to three months in prison with hard labour. Her children were now classified as ‘neglected and having no means of support’. They were sent to the Burnham Industrial School in Christchurch, the eldest two boys for four to five years, and the youngest three children for seven years.
Send them away: Industrial schools and orphanages

Under The Industrial Schools Act 1882, children convicted of crimes could be committed by a magistrate to the care of the state, and incarcerated within an industrial school. Hawke’s Bay magistrates favoured sending Hawke’s Bay children to institutions in Christchurch and Nelson. On the other hand, children over ten years of age who were committed to the care of the state through no fault of their own, for example due to the death or imprisonment of their parents, were sent to an industrial school or state subsidised orphanage or boarded out with foster parents. In December 1882 the two Meanee brothers, George Chase, aged ten, and Samuel Chase, aged eight, appeared before the Napier Resident Magistrate, Captain Preece. They were charged with being neglected children under the Neglected and Criminal Children’s Act 1867, ‘in that they had no home or settled place of abode, or any visible means of subsistence’. Preece committed them to the St Mary’s Orphanage in Nelson for the term of seven years.

Initially, children under seven years of age were boarded out; this was extended to children under ten years of age from 1884. Children committed to the care of the state were maintained by government funding, with the money being paid to the industrial school or the foster parents.

By 1885 a range of children’s institutions were operating in New Zealand. Their funding reflected the complexities of care arrangements. Children committed to the care of the state under the Industrial Schools Act 1882 were funded at a higher rate than those who were not committed. Non-committed children were of two types: those admitted to institutions by a local government body, for whom maintenance from government funds was not always provided; and those who were admitted on the order of a government relieving officer, such as the Hawke’s Bay Charitable Aid Board Relieving Officer, in which case a capitation payment was made.

In Hawke’s Bay, when the Resident Magistrate committed children to the care of the state, either because of crime or because they were destitute, he usually sent them to the Burnham Industrial School in Christchurch. Burnham was funded wholly from government revenue and under the direct management of the Department of Education. On the other hand, non-committed children, such as those being dealt with by the Hawke’s Bay Charitable Aid Board, were usually sent to St Mary’s Industrial School and Orphanage (for girls and boys) in Nelson;
it was funded at one shilling per child per day, and inspected by the Department of Education.\textsuperscript{16}

What this meant for the children was that they rarely returned to Hawke’s Bay. This was because the philosophy on which these institutions were based set important precedents for the care and protection of orphaned, destitute and neglected children in New Zealand. The state would care and protect its younger citizens under fifteen years of age, in that they could be educated and live at the institution, while also being ‘lent out’ from time to time in order to learn basic work skills. Upon their release at age fifteen, regional employers, for example in Canterbury (Burnham) and Nelson (St Mary’s), would offer paid positions. Girls would enter domestic service and boys would work on farms or in factories. This pattern for young adults would be copied into the charters of children’s homes established over time.

It quickly became obvious that the few state run industrial schools and subsidised orphanages could not cope with the numbers of orphaned, illegitimate, neglected and destitute children requiring care, especially those who lived in regions such as Hawke’s Bay. Concern was expressed for the wellbeing of those children sent to industrial schools; in August 1886, for example, an editorial in the Hawke’s Bay Herald stated that ‘These Industrial Schools are little better than nurseries of crime. There vicious children, convicted of crime, or beyond the control of their parents, and children not so vicious but only suffering from poverty, are sent. The general result is that the bad contaminate the good. The tendency is always that way.’\textsuperscript{17}

\textbf{Keep them together or at least keep them locally}

Local responsibility for distributing regional aid was transferred from the Hospital Charitable Aid Board to the newly established Hawke’s Bay United Charitable Aid Board in 1885, as part of a national system of charitable aid introduced under the Hospital and Charitable Institutions Act 1885. In Hawke’s Bay, the decision was made to separate out the administration of the hospital/s from that of charitable aid. This system meant that destitute, neglected or abandoned children in Hawke’s Bay were most often referred by the police to the district relieving officer (later social worker), who was appointed by and reported to the Hawke’s Bay United Charitable Aid Board.
The Board’s relieving officer would arrange for the children, classified as non-committed children, to be boarded out with local foster parents, or to be sent to an industrial school or orphanage outside the region. In 1888, seventeen children from the district were in industrial schools, at a cost to the Board of 280 pounds.\(^{18}\) In either case, the children’s care was paid for by the Hawke’s Bay United Charitable Aid Board at one shilling per child per day. This funding came from two sources: a levy from regional town and rural local authorities, and a pound for pound government subsidy on these local body contributions.\(^{19}\)

In this way, the Hospital and Charitable Institutions Act 1885 returned the problem of what to do with the children of paupers to the regions in which they lived. In Hawke’s Bay, as elsewhere, the response took on particular parochial characteristics. In this region, the Charitable Aid Board members came mainly from the wealthy pastoral male elite who also served on a number of other government bodies. For example, the Chairs over time included John Ormond, pastoralist, MP for Napier and Chair of the Hawke’s Bay Education Board; George Swan, MP; Henry Tiffen, agriculturist and businessman; and Henry Cohen, insurance agent. Members of the Board included MPs Frederick Sutton and Samuel Carnell, and pastoralists Thomas Tanner and Douglas McLean.

While these men were well placed to convince local bodies to pay subscriptions and to manage the Board budget, such boards, as historian Margaret Tennant observes, tended to find ‘the reality of poverty in their communities hard to accept’.\(^{20}\) Board minutes indicate that they left the practicalities of dealing with the deserving poor to the Board’s employee, the relieving officer, and concentrated on bringing in the money from local authorities. Between 1885 and 1892, the decisions made about the children and the amount of money spent on caring for them came under increasing local scrutiny, including by those on the Hawke’s Bay Queen’s Fund committee.

The ‘Queen’s Fund’ was set up in 1887 especially for women in distress.\(^{21}\) It served as a focus for women raising money to support other women, and was significant for several reasons. First, it heightened awareness among mainly middle class women of the impact of local poverty following an accident to or the death or desertion of a male breadwinner. Secondly, it highlighted the dilemmas associated with illness, for example when a mother had to go to hospital. Indeed, the Queen’s Fund committee, which included Amelia Randall, Emily Hill, Mrs Ormond and Hannah Cohen, was inundated with applications, leading to
the support of 78 cases in 1892 and 88 cases in 1893.\textsuperscript{22} This local initiative not only demonstrated the ability of local women to raise and administer large sums of money, but thereby made them think about alternative ways of caring for destitute children. In short, they disagreed with many of the decisions made by the all male Charitable Aid Board in relation to these children.

At first, the Board had paid to have children looked after within industrial schools; but when this proved too expensive, it adopted the practice of paying local foster parents. The Relieving Officer of the Hawke’s Bay Charitable Aid Board, Mr Thomas Fox (who was also Immigration Officer and Depot Master), had difficult choices to make concerning the future of small destitute children under his jurisdiction. From 1885, he could allocate ‘outdoor relief’ to a parent, such as food vouchers known as ‘blue chits’, in a bid to keep families in their homes; or he could provide institutional or ‘indoor relief’. For example, if a family or a woman with children could not pay the rent and had nowhere else to go, the Relieving Officer would usually arrange for them to stay temporarily in the Napier Refuge administered by the Charitable Aid Board. As noted above, the initial Refuge had been the Old Barracks of the militia on Napier Hill. It housed not only women and children but also the aged, infirm, and mentally unstable – the full range of ‘unfortunates’.\textsuperscript{23}

The Board quite rightly thought this arrangement unsuitable for children, and arranged to rent cottages in Wellesley Road for women and children. This gave Mr Fox some time to put in place a number of alternatives. He could arrange to have the family shipped out of town to relatives or friends, sending the older children to Industrial Schools outside the region if there were places available; or he could arrange to have the children boarded out with local families.

The Westoby Relief Fund provides an example of a widow and children being supported to leave town. The case was brought to the attention of residents by sponsor Henry Wilding, who related the background in the Hawke’s Bay Herald. Mr Westoby had died trying to ford a river near Waipukurau on 2 May 1886. ‘He leaves a widow, who is by no means strong, and three children. Two of these are now suffering from fever, and as the mother is endeavouring to earn a living by her needle, the young sufferers have been sent to hospital.’ However, Mr Wilding had a suggestion. ‘The widow has friends in England who would assist in the maintenance of the children could she get there, and with that view I beg to invoke the aid of the charitably disposed that money be raised to provide the
family with a passage to England.’ Having offered to collect and acknowledge subscriptions, Mr Wilding was by August able to report the extent of the support, over one hundred pounds, enough to cover maintenance for the family until their departure, their passages to London, and some cash. The Charitable Aid Board had contributed ten pounds to the fund.

Decisions about who was most deserving of public aid came down to what Margaret Tennant describes as the application of ‘a clear hierarchy among women without male support’. Women with children were defined in relation to men. At the top came widows with dependent children, who were viewed as very worthy of outdoor relief, in order to keep the family together. Next came deserted wives with dependent children; their numbers increased rapidly in the 1880s, as men left home to seek work but did not return. At the bottom came those mothers classified as immoral or criminal, including single mothers, thieves and prostitutes.

Aid was distributed accordingly. Widows were more likely to be supported in order to keep their children, while women in the other categories were more likely to be charged with ‘neglect’ of their children and, if proved in court, to have the children taken from them and placed in care. However, Mr Fox the relieving officer (and secretary to the Board) was not to make such decisions. He died in tragic circumstances in August 1886. When his job was advertised, it included the roles of not only relieving officer and secretary to the Board, but also ‘Master of the Refuge’. There were 23 applicants, and the Board appointed ex-Constable Neale at a salary of 100 pounds in August 1886.

**Boarding children out**

By the end of 1886, the Hawke’s Bay Charitable Aid Board agreed with the newspaper editor and others that ‘children left destitute should be placed with some respectable family and brought up in a way which is likely to make them useful members of society’. By that time, members of the Charitable Aid Board favoured the boarding out system, whereby children were placed with foster parents who were paid one shilling per child per day to raise them. The reasons for this were set out in December 1886, when J.D. Ormond reported that this worked well in the South, where:

> the plan was that the Board received applications for children from people in the country or people requiring apprentices...The children
were got rid of as fast as they were received. The children were thus brought up without the taint which did rest on them more or less through their being brought up in an industrial institution.  

What the Board already knew, however, was that the month before, ‘a large part of their revenue’ had been paid for the maintenance of children in the Nelson and Burnham industrial schools. The editor of the Hawke’s Bay Herald had already publicised the amount in his 18 August 1886 editorial, revealing that it was as much as 550 pounds a year, compared with the 50 pounds a year paid for boarding out children with local families. He had also reported that at the Charitable Aid Board meeting in August, it was stated that ‘there is no difficulty in getting respectable families, especially in the country, to take children at a shilling a day’.

In what could be viewed as a win-win labour outcome for farmers, artisans and their households, the Board was convinced by J.D. Ormond:

*That the care of children who become destitute in future in this charitable aid district, be provided for by a system of receiving applications from persons willing to receive such boys and girls, and provide a home for them in some cases as apprentices and in others to aid in house work in the families in which they are received. Such applications to state the terms on which such children will be received and maintained. Such agreement to be for such terms as will continue until the children come to an age to provide for themselves.*

In 1888, the Board reiterated its position, stating that ‘Industrial Schools are not the best places to which children can be sent, and we are certain the boarding-out system is the best, and cheapest in the end for all concerned.’

As was to be later emphasised, any conditions ensuring the safety and welfare of children were absent. Children might be housed, clothed and fed, but were also vulnerable to exploitation and abuse by the unscrupulous. Neither had the Board thought through what would happen when children were found to be unsuitable or incompatible with the families to whom they were sent.
Local women to the rescue

Matters came to a head in 1892, when a group of politically-minded Napier women, led by Mrs Amelia Randall from the Napier Baptist Bible Women and Nurses’ Society, believed they were better placed than the Charitable Aid Board to make decisions about destitute and needy children. They decided that there had to be a better way of caring for neglected local children than either sending them to far away industrial schools, or boarding them with families who might not always have the children’s best interests at heart.

Two destitute girls in particular became the focus of a local child rescue campaign. Mrs Randall and her peers had become increasingly concerned about numbers of children generally roaming Napier streets, but had particularly noticed a trend of more young girls doing so. One of these was Katie Nielson, aged eight, whose mother had been deserted by her father and ‘was leading a dissolute life, thoroughly neglecting her child’.37

At their monthly meeting in May 1892, the Baptist women raised the issue of finding a home for the girls. In a unique move, the women took matters into their own hands: they considered the possibility of starting a Children’s Home where neglected children could be cared for.38

In the meantime, Katie Nielson was admitted to a foster home run by a widow, where she could be cared for until the Home was opened. She was joined there in August 1892 by Mary Mansfield, a motherless girl aged thirteen, who was ‘rescued by the Home Committee from her infamous surroundings’ and also from her father, ‘a well known disreputable character in Napier’.39

The Baptist women’s group called for wider support for the establishment of a Children’s Home. Behind the scenes there was considerable political activity, both personal and public. Central to this cause was Amelia Randall. By calling for a children’s home, she was questioning the decisions about children’s care made by the Charitable Aid Board, at a time when she was an Executive Committee member and also treasurer of the Queen’s Fund. The Chair of the Charitable Aid Board happened to be her uncle, Henry Tiffen, with whom she was living.40
Amelia Randall 1844–1930

When Amelia Randall’s husband died suddenly in Ghana not long after their marriage, she was left destitute. Fluent in French and German and described as having a ‘brilliant brain’, she taught for a few years before coming to New Zealand in 1876, as companion-housekeeper to her mother’s brother, Henry Stokes Tiffen. Her association with him proved to be a major turning point in her life. Tiffen, who had been twice widowed, was Chief Provincial Surveyor and Commissioner of Crown Lands, and had also served as member of the Hawke’s Bay Provincial Council, 1859–1875. He was a shrewd investor in land, with an early purchase of a large sheep-run in central Hawke’s Bay, which was managed by his brother. He later sold this and bought up land in Greenmeadows near Napier, on which he experimented with orchards, grapevines and other crops. Tiffen made his money by selling parts of Greenmeadows over time and investing in a range of businesses, such as shipping, woollen mills, and fruit and vegetable processing. He was very active in the community, including the Anglican Church and the Charitable Aid Board, and prominent in the establishment of a number of Hawke’s Bay agricultural and horticultural societies, and the Napier Mechanics Institute.

When Amelia Randall came to Henry Tiffen’s house in Napier on the south side of Tennyson Street, adjoining what is now Tiffen Park, he was travelling overseas seeking out plants or crops that could be grown in Hawke’s Bay. It is likely that Amelia managed or helped to manage her uncle’s many business affairs and that he paid her to do so. Within a few years she was recognised for her formidable business skills and was known to have financial resources. Amelia Randall was also a devout Baptist. Although her uncle was an administrator and benefactor of the Anglican Church, she persuaded him to donate a
piece of land for a new Baptist Church, backing onto what is now Tiffen Park. In 1892, when the Baptist Church moved across Tennyson Street, Amelia gave money towards the relocation; by this time she was also the church treasurer, and active in the Napier Baptist Women’s Group. She was also a member of the Napier branch of the Women’s Franchise League, and treasurer of The Queen’s Fund. This was also the year in which she helped found the Hawke’s Bay Children’s Home. She was the first treasurer of the home (1892–1913), its secretary (1893–1895), a House Committee member (1892–1915), and the first woman on the Board of Trustees (1906–1919). Amelia Randall did not restrict her activities to the administration of the home. From 1895 she took a special interest in two sisters admitted to the home: Doris Howard, aged eleven, and Alice Howard, aged nine, whose mother had died and whose father had recently taken his own life. Doris obviously did well at school; when she passed the proficiency examination in 1902, Amelia Randall and her sister Miss Davenport wrote to the Home Committee (of which they were both members) saying ‘they were desirous of giving Doris more schooling and thus fitting her for a position better than domestic service’. They proceeded to make a case that Doris be exempted from the one year of domestic training at the Home. Their request was granted, enabling Doris to be sent to study and live at Wanganui Girls’ College. After two years there she returned to work for her benefactors, before taking up domestic work in Wanganui and Havelock North. Her sister Alice, similarly sponsored by Amelia Randall, received three years secondary education at Woodford House in Havelock North, before being sent to Gisborne.

In 1945, when the children’s home moved to the former home of Douglas McLean on Napier Terrace, the new building was named Randall House in honour of Amelia Randall. Her name lives on in Randall Place, created in the 1957 sub-division of the former grounds of the home, one of the few streets in Napier to be named after a local woman.

When Henry Tiffen died in 1896, Amelia Randall inherited half his estate, thus becoming one of the wealthiest women in the province. She continued to live at and run (with the help of a manager) the Greenmeadows Vineyard and Fruit Farm, exporting high quality apples and pears. Throughout, she was a generous benefactor of the Hawke’s Bay Children’s Home, and when she died in 1930, her will bequeathed 23,000 pounds to be distributed between the home and various Baptist charities.
It is interesting to imagine the dinner table conversations between Amelia Randall and her uncle concerning neglected children, especially in June 1892, when he was reported in the local paper as having spoken in support of the boarding out system that his Charitable Aid Board favoured. He did so in reply to a letter from Amelia Randall’s church group signalling their intent to establish a children’s home in Napier; they had already taken in fourteen children off the streets and placed them with a Matron in a house in McDonald Street. Board members made clear their displeasure at such interference, stating, ‘That the ladies, who might be actuated by the highest motives, and were worthy of praise, would not be able to look after destitute children so well as the Board would.’ This turn of events was intriguing. Within a small community, a great deal was going on in the intertwined domestic, social and political realms.

Amelia Randall and the Napier Bible Women and Nurses’ Society were undeterred. By October 1892 they had been joined by other women, with the aim of starting a children’s home in Napier. A few were widows and spinsters; most were married to wealthy landowners and urban professionals. Wives of Board members, such as Mrs Cohen and Mrs Carnell, friends of Amelia Randall, were not only already involved in her child rescue mission but, with others, were also involved in the issue of the day: women’s suffrage. Mrs Bessie Brown, of the Bible Women and Nurses’ Society, was also the secretary of the Women’s Franchise League.

In Hawke’s Bay, the Women’s Franchise League had its origins in the church-based Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). It had been involved in the nationwide campaign to ban licensed premises and restrict access to alcohol. A major impetus was the impact that drunkenness and the resulting violence, combined with less money available for food, had on innocent women and children. However, because not all who supported suffrage supported bans on alcohol, Hawke’s Bay women united under the more generic banner of the Women’s Franchise League (WFL).

As the suffrage campaign intensified, the WFL attracted large numbers of women, and supportive men. They proved to be efficient fund raisers, experienced organisers of meetings, and effective strategists. The Hawke’s Bay branch gathered 1442 signatures on the national suffrage petition, including many from country areas. The WFL was a powerful and highly organised force in the bid for women’s franchise in New Zealand, and in October 1892 women were highly
mobilised towards their goal. This was achieved one year later with the passing of the Women’s Electoral Act 1893.48

The first Hawke’s Bay children’s home

As well as the women involved in the Hawke’s Bay suffrage campaign whom Amelia Randall persuaded to join her in a bid to set up a children’s home, others joined too, motivated by Christian principles and their ability as middle class women to give time and money to a worthy cause. As Margaret Tennant has stated:

Justified on the basis of women’s special compassion and moral authority, charitable activities were seen to have biblical sanction.... Many did vast amounts of fundraising for charitable causes, running charity shops and bazaars, and soliciting subscriptions.49
Together, the Napier women believed that they knew best what type of care and protection was the most appropriate for local neglected children. Moreover, when children were innocent victims of poverty, feckless parenting and abandonment, they needed to be rescued and saved, not merely sent away to distant industrial schools or boarded out, as directed by the men on the Charitable Aid Board.

When a public meeting of those interested in the establishment of a home for destitute children was held at the Athenaeum on 17 June 1892, it was well attended by women and some men. Bessie Brown chaired the meeting, beginning with a summary of what had been achieved to date: fourteen children were being cared for by a Matron in a house in Macdonald Street. Bessie Brown also spoke about an application for a subsidy having been turned down by the Charitable Aid Board, on the grounds that ‘the Board had an agency which provided for the shelter of destitute children, that is, the farming out system’, and that ‘to be subsidised would tend to pauperise the children’.50 Both arguments were demolished by those present, leading to a number of new subscribers to the home;
others who already subscribed offered to double their money, ‘as they thought the ladies were far more capable of conducting a Home than any one else’. In the end a motion was passed ‘that the Home be managed by six ladies and three gentlemen’. This led to a committee comprised of Bessie Brown, Amelia Randall, Ethel Welsman, Mrs Patterson, Mrs Lang, Mrs Sandilands, Mr Craig, Mr Adams and (curiously) Henry Tiffen.

Indeed, at the first Annual General Meeting of the Hawke’s Bay Children’s Home one year later, not only was Henry Tiffen the Chairman, but fellow Charitable Aid Board member Douglas McLean moved a motion praising and thanking the women for the work achieved. It seemed that the Charitable Aid Board had not only had a change of heart, but was prepared to eat humble pie, not least because by this time it had realised that the home saved the Board time and money. Douglas McLean explained that:

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\text{The institution met a want. It relieved the Charitable Aid Board of a considerable amount of work and heavy burden of responsibility. The Board apart from the institution had but two methods of dealing with destitute children – to board them out or to send them to one or other of the industrial schools. But in neither of those cases would the children be so well and devotedly looked after as they would be under the care of the Ladies of the Children’s Home, who would study their future welfare from motives higher than could be aroused by mere monetary considerations. (Applause.)}\]

The motion was seconded by Henry Hill, regional inspector of schools and husband of Emily Hill, the president of the Women’s Franchise League. Having congratulated the ladies on their excellent work, he made the point (already well understood by the women) that ‘the existence of the home enabled children to be dealt with here, instead of sending them away to the industrial schools’.

Those who comprised the newly formed House Committee elected at this meeting in 1893 were Bessie Brown, Agnes Begg, Mrs Beamish, Emily Hill, Hannah Cohen and Mr D. Adams. The Executive Committee was Agnes Begg, Bessie Brown, Isabella Craig, Nellie Dick, Helen Glover, Mrs Lang, Amelia Randall, Ethel Welsman, Marianne Williams and Mrs Sandiland. They were joined by Mr Adams and Henry Tiffen.
While Bessie Brown and Emily Hill, both on the Women’s Franchise League executive, were extremely busy at this point, many of the other women named above were also united in a bid for suffrage, as indicated by their signatures on the suffrage petition of 1893. Of the thirteen on the House Committee, ten had signed the petition. Together in 1893, this impressive group took responsibility for establishing and funding a mixed sex non-denominational children’s home for children aged between four and fifteen years of age. Many also served for long periods of time as members of the House Committee.

Emily Hill was one of these, serving for 38 years. She had come to New Zealand in 1873 with her husband Henry Hill, to set up schools in Christchurch for the Canterbury Provincial Government. Married and with young children, she continued to run the Christchurch East Infants School until the Hills relocated to Napier in 1878, when Henry was appointed Inspector of Schools for the region. Both were active in the Anglican Church. Emily Hill served on the House Committee of the Hawke’s Bay Children’s Home from 1892 until her death in 1930. Working alongside her for many years was Marianne Williams (1893–1926) of Hukarere Maori Girls' College, daughter of the Bishop of Waiapu; Mrs Annie McLean (1893–1913); Lady Whitmore (1893–1913); and Amelia Randall’s sister, Henrietta Davenport (1893–1913).

The stewardship of the home was held by a majority of women until 1907, when a compromise was reached. It was agreed that a group of influential men, appointed as Trustees, might raise more funds from their peers, in order to maintain and extend the home. On the Executive Committee of the home, three powerful women, in the roles of Chair (Mrs T. Tanner), Treasurer (Amelia Randall), and Secretary (Henrietta Davenport), continued to oversee its operations. Further, the women who had done the majority of the work over fifteen years now became the Home Visiting Committee.

This restructuring was prompted by the impact of two pieces of legislation. The Infant Life Protection Act 1907 required anyone caring for children of less than six years of age for more than seven days to be licensed and open to inspection by the Department of Education. In order to be licensed, the Hawke’s Bay Children’s Home had to meet certain prerequisites, including the ratio of staff to young children and the upkeep of buildings. More funds were urgently needed in Napier to meet both standards. The second piece of legislation resulted in the home being incorporated under The Hospital and Charitable Institutions Act; it thus became
eligible to be subsidised by the government, and came under its protection.

The women’s Visiting Committee reported in accordance with the newly formed Constitution and the Staffing and Training By-laws for running the home, covering such matters as staffing, daily routines, admittance and release, attendance at the local public school, church attendance, instruction in domestic duties, punishments, weekly dietary requirements, clothing, and recreational outings. Throughout, the women took responsibility for organising the annual street parade and securing subscriptions to raise funds to maintain the home. However, from 1907, the ledgers indicate that the male Trustees (Montague Lascelles, Douglas McLean, John McVay and F.W. Williams) had been successful in increasing subscriptions and donations, including of food, trades and professional expertise. In addition, many generous bequests were made from the estates of early settlers.

Suitable Form of Bequest to the Hawke’s Bay Children’s Home.

(To be Embodied in Your Will.)

With all convenient speed after my decease, I direct my Executors to pay out of my estate, to the Treasurer, for the time being, of the Hawke’s Bay Children’s Home, Napier, the sum of __________ Pounds sterling, free of Legacy Duty, which sum I hereby direct shall be applied to the use and benefit of the said Home in such manner as the Trustees for the time being thereof shall in their uncontrolled discretion deem advisable.

Bequest Form 1894
(Collection of Hawke’s Bay Museums Trust, Ruawharo Tā-ū-rangi, Second Annual Report, Hawke’s Bay Childrens Home, AR1472)
By 1913, there were sufficient munies to establish a separate home for boys aged four to fifteen years of age (see Chapter Five). A Training Farm Home for older boys aged ten to fifteen was established in 1924 (see Chapter Six). In that year, a total of 105 children were being cared for within what were now the three Hawke’s Bay Children’s Trust homes.62

This benevolence would continue for over seventy years, and was almost unique in New Zealand. It helps explain the number of children’s homes in the region, in that the Trust homes established a precedent: local needy or neglected children, both Pakeha and Māori, were deserving of local non-denominational support. This in turn aroused public sentiment and brought in the necessary funds, through annual street parades, bazaars, individual sponsorship of a child’s clothing, regular donations – of particular food types from farmers, or professional services by local doctors, dentists and accountants – and, importantly, the sizable bequests of money and property over time. It was in this way that the three Trust homes became synonymous with local charity and bequests. Not only did local residents feel very strongly attached to ‘their Homes’, but they also felt that the home or homes they supported were doing a good job in preparing local needy children for adulthood.

What to do with increasing numbers of destitute babies and toddlers, however, remained a problem. It led to churches providing institutions for very young children and then, over time, extending these to homes for older children.

**Against the tide and into the future**

All eight of the Hawke’s Bay children’s homes eventually established were to continue long after institutional care was no longer thought appropriate by the government. Under the Child Welfare Act 1925, Part III Section 19 stipulated that children were not to be permanently maintained in institutions, ‘save in exceptional circumstances’.63 Yet children’s homes and orphanages run by churches continued to operate until the early 1970s, when a combination of legislative and financial constraints, mixed with increasing publicity around proven cases of abuse, led to their closure. As late as 1940, New Zealand had over 85 church run and privately run orphanages, and children’s homes provided for nearly 2,854 children registered under the Child Welfare Act.64

Under this legislation, social workers were appointed to monitor a child’s well-being during his/her placement either in a state run children’s home or with a local
foster family. In an attempt to further take control of an institutionalised child’s care and protection, social workers were also made responsible for the annual inspection of children’s homes from 1927, when the Child Welfare Amendment Act stipulated that all children’s homes had to meet set standards in order to be registered. While most did so, there were breaches of conditions and lapses in standards. Such was the state frustration with institutions that in 1942, a national committee set out new criteria for placing children in institutional care. These included:

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\text{no children under ten years of age unless children of parents who because of personality/interference have proved to be an insuperable obstacle to foster home placement; children over the age of three needing care for 6 months or less – provided they are placed in institutions designed for temporary care; children who have been frequently shifted from place to place with no sense of security as a condition for normal development, provided they are placed in institutions which offer life in a small group and with supervision which promises to provide a secure adult relationship; two or more children from the same family for whom foster care cannot provide natural and daily association with each other, provided an institution makes such association possible.}\]

Overall, the committee concluded the best use of the institution was in preparing children for foster care, which, it reiterated, was state policy because:

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The child is not lost in a mass but has the opportunity of securing individual interest and affection and a feeling that ‘he belongs’ and is cared for. He is in a natural relation to life and infinitely freer than the institution child to develop initiative and independence, and to realise the value of money. Altogether, foster home life better fits a child for the real life of the world.\]

State policy or not, children still continued to be cared for within institutions. In the main, these were the children’s homes whose governing bodies were not totally dependent on state aid, subsidies having being reduced and/or withdrawn over time. Such was the case in Hawke’s Bay, where seven children’s homes continued to run in 1942, funded largely through donations from churches, fund raising events and bequests, until the last was phased out in 1988.
Thus for nearly one hundred years, the region’s children’s homes cared for young children and youth. The history of each of these homes is presented in the chapters that follow.

Notes
2 *Hawke’s Bay Herald*, 26 June 1879, p.2.
3 *Hawke’s Bay Herald*, 23 October 1880, p.2.
4 *Hawke’s Bay Herald*, 23 October 1880, p.2.
5 Bagnall & Petersen. (1948).
6 *Hawke’s Bay Herald*, 21 November 1868. Advertisements.
7 *Hawke’s Bay Herald*, 4 August 1868; 15 August 1868, p.2.
9 *Hawke’s Bay Herald*, 22 July 1880, p.2.
10 *Hawke’s Bay Herald*, 22 July 1880, p.2.
11 *Hawke’s Bay Herald*, 22 December 1882, p.3.
12 *Hawke’s Bay Herald*, 22 December 1882, p.3.
13 Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives (AJHR) 1885, E-3, p.6.
14 Others in this category were the Auckland Industrial School (both the Naval Training School at Kohimarama and the Howe Street Orphan Home), and Caversham (Dunedin) Industrial Schools. While other institutions were also inspected by the Department of Education, they were managed by different bodies and, importantly, their funding came from the Charitable Aid vote. These included the Anglican St Stephen’s Orphan Home in Parnell, for non-committed children, and the Roman Catholic St Mary’s Industrial School and Orphanage in Ponsonby, for both committed and non-committed children.
15 16. Other institutions at this time included the Catholic run St Joseph’s Providence Industrial School and Orphanage for Girls in Wellington; the Thames Orphanage, run by a local committee for committed and non-committed children; and the Lyttelton Orphanage, run by the Christchurch Charitable Aid Board. Another type of arrangement existed for the Motueka Orphanage, run by a private individual, whereby eight shillings a week per child was paid by the Nelson Charitable Aid Board. In 1884, there were 675 committed children and 159 non-committed children living in the institutions named above. Over time, other industrial schools were established - Te Oranga in Christchurch for girls in 1900, and the Boys Training Farm at Levin in 1905.
16 *Hawke’s Bay Herald*, 18 August 1886, p.2.
18 *Daily Telegraph*, 4 November 1885, p.2.
Thomas Fox arrived in Napier in 1861 as Sergeant in the second battalion of the Fourth Regiment. He subsequently married and had three children. He took his own life on 3 August 1886, aged 52. At the Inquest (reported in the Hawke’s Bay Herald, 9 August 1886), his wife indicated that ‘he wished he had not accepted the appointment with the Charitable Aid Board ....as it caused him so much worry’.

51 *Daily Telegraph*, June 17, 1892, p.2.
52 *Daily Telegraph*, June 17, 1892, p.2.
53 *Hawke's Bay Herald*, June 3, 1893, p.3.
54 *Hawke's Bay Herald*, June 3, 1893, p.3.
55 *Hawke's Bay Herald*, June 3, 1893, p.3.
56 File- *Signatures of Hawke's Bay Women on the 1893 Suffrage Petition*, HBMAG.
60 Ibid.
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid.
64 AJHR, 1942: E-4.
65 Child Welfare Amendment Act, 1927.
66 Mathew, H.C. (1942).
67 Mathew (1942), p. 132.
Chapter Two

Their first home:
Bethany (1896–1978) and
St Mary's (1915–1940), Napier

While children aged four years and over could be taken into the Hawke’s Bay Children’s Home after 1892, there remained real problems as to who should care for babies and toddlers who were orphaned, abandoned or neglected. The most common solution was for relatives to absorb the under-fours into their own families, or to have them boarded out until such time as they could be admitted to a children’s home. However, it became clear that there were other related issues. Increasing numbers of unwed pregnant women had nowhere to live until they delivered their babies, having often been forced to leave their job and/or their home once their pregnancy was obvious. Moreover, these women had no access to maternity care, nor to any set process for having their babies adopted out or cared for when they were not able to do so themselves. It was therefore this group of women and their babies who were the next to be provided for in Hawke’s Bay.

The identities of the majority of the babies born at both the Bethany Home and St Mary’s Receiving Home remain unknown. The data for this chapter has been gleaned in the main from Salvation Army archives, the Anglican Diocese of Waiapu Archives, the Waiapu Gazette, and Child Welfare files.

Bethany Receiving Home, Napier

This home, for girls and boys aged from birth to four years old, was set up in 1896 by Miss Alice Parve, who ran it until 1914. The Salvation Army then ran it from 1914 to 1978.

Although Bethany homes became best known for their maternity home functions, most were also the first homes for hundreds of children. This was because
the Salvation Army was one of the earliest organisations to take in unwed pregnant women, with a view to ‘saving their souls’ and turning their lives around by equipping them for the paid workforce. The babies were commonly kept at the home after the mother had left, until they were adopted out, or the Army arranged for them to be relocated to another of their homes for older children.

The home also took in numbers of children who had been ‘rescued’ from a range of dismal home circumstances, or had nowhere to go when abandoned or as a result of a parent being sent to jail. In this way, many children born in Napier spent varying periods of their early lives at Bethany Napier before being sent to, for example, ‘The Nest’ in Hamilton or Hodderville for Boys near Putaruru. It was because of the numbers of children at any one time living without a parent that Bethany Napier was registered as a children’s home in 1929, under the Child Welfare Amendment Act 1927.

The first home for unmarried mothers and their babies in Hawke’s Bay was already called ‘Bethany’ when the Salvation Army was gifted the property in 1914. The original name ‘was retained and subsequently used for most of the Salvation Army Hospitals in the Dominion’.1 These private maternity hospitals were located in Russell, Auckland, Gisborne, Napier, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin. While married women were increasingly admitted to Bethany homes over time, these institutions remained places of refuge for unmarried pregnant women until the late 1970s.

**Origins**

The first person in Hawke’s Bay to address the plight of unmarried mothers and their babies was Miss Alice Parve. Other than that she was a Seventh Day Adventist, not much is known about her. However, for eighteen years she provided a valuable service, giving unmarried pregnant women somewhere to go to deliver their babies. It is not known if Miss Parve was herself a registered midwife or maternity nurse, or whether she employed women who were.2 However, it is believed that Miss Parve arranged for the babies born at her establishment to be adopted, and it is likely that Adventist families were particularly favoured.

Miss Parve operated out of two premises, first from a tiny cottage on Coote Road, and later moving up the hill to 29 Fitzroy Road, where the larger house could cater for up to ten women. However, by 1914, when the Salvation Army took it over, the functions of Bethany had expanded beyond those of a maternity home
to include ‘rescue and temporary care of children from unfavourable or dangerous surroundings’.3

Indeed, the rescue and temporary care of young children in the region fell solely to the Salvation Army. This was because the other two homes, Gordon House for boys and Randall House for girls, run by the Hawke’s Bay Children’s Homes Trust, admitted children only after they had turned four (see Chapter Five). Both were full to capacity, with vacancies arising only when older girls and boys left to take up paid employment.

The Salvation Army’s entry into providing social services for women and children in Napier no doubt put pressure on the Anglican Church, not only to match the service and meet a growing need, but also to recruit children to its own fold. By the time the Salvation Army opened Bethany Home in Napier in November 1914, the Anglican Church was already preparing a house for similar purposes across the gully on Napier Hill.4 So when the Bishop of Waiapu (head of the Anglican Church for the region) agreed to speak at an inaugural gathering of Bethany Napier on 26 November 1914, he was quick to ‘express his silent sympathy’ over their shared mission, adding that: ‘As long as there was sin in the world, such institutions would be needed. It would be a place where sinners would be brought to their Saviour.’5

The Bishop no doubt also sympathised with the 85 pound debt revealed in Bethany’s first financial statement by the Army’s Chief Secretary, Colonel Powley. However, those attending the meeting immediately put matters right, Mr J.H. Coleman contributing 25 pounds and other donations totalling over 95 pounds. It was also evident that Mr T.H. Lowry’s paying off and clearing the 500 pound mortgage on the property ‘gifted’ by Miss Parve was greatly appreciated by all.6 Indeed, Tom Lowry, a pastoralist from Okawa, would continue to support children’s homes over many years.

**Fit for purpose**

The first matron was Adjutant Simpson, a certified midwife, who was also responsible for attending the Police Court. She did this in order to be on hand should there be children who needed immediate care and protection, as a result of a parent being sentenced to a prison term. She was assisted by Captain Quickfall. This active rescue side of Bethany work was reduced in scope with the introduction of government employed Child Welfare officers in 1925. However, Bethany
continued to play a central role in taking in babies and very young children at short notice at the request of Child Welfare officers, until an appropriate home could be found.

By 1920, Adjutant Margaret Sinton had taken over as matron; her term at Bethany Napier coincided with major changes to state regulations concerning the care of infants, maternity home standards and nurse training. From 1925 and the passing of the Nurses and Midwives Registration Act, maternity nurses and midwives were required to undertake a course of postgraduate training at one of the seven St Helen’s Hospitals, and more stringent rules came into force concerning the presence of a doctor during deliveries. Further, out of concern for maternal mortality, all maternity hospitals were to be regularly inspected by state inspectors. This was in addition to the annual inspections by Child Welfare officers.

Matron Sinton was still in charge at the time of the 1931 earthquake. The Fitzroy Road home was extensively damaged, and the twelve babies in residence were among the first refugees to reach Wellington. When Bethany Napier re-opened in 1938, Major Christiansen was the matron, followed for a short time by Major Ethel Nairn in 1942.

Major Nairn oversaw the relocation of the home, and on 7 February 1942, Mrs T. H. Lowry opened the Bethany Maternity Hospital at 42 Morris Street, Nelson Park, Napier. Formerly a large private residence, it had been altered and extended to provide modern hospital and staff quarters, as well as accommodation for unmarried mothers. This meant that ‘girls come to the hospital at any stage of their pregnancy and remain, living in a ten bed
hostel next to the hospital’.\textsuperscript{11}

This physical separation of unmarried mothers coincided with Bethany’s modern mission: to meet the local demand for delivering the post-war babies of married women, by running Bethany as a private maternity hospital. Staff were trained as maternity nurses or midwives, supported by a Medical Superintendent who could be called upon to assist with difficult deliveries.\textsuperscript{12} The maximum number of patients at any one time was limited to twelve.\textsuperscript{13}

Yet it was the other side of Bethany that continued to intrigue the public. An article in the Weekly News in 1950, headed ‘Home of Secrets’, gave Matron Captain May Johannis the opportunity to advocate for the unmarried pregnant women in her care, and to dispel some of the myths about how the Army treated them:

Bethany Home, Morris Street, Napier. The original Bethany Home was located on Fitzroy Road, Napier Hill, Napier. (The Salvation Army Territorial Archives)
..The girls, mostly teenage, from as far south as Dunedin or as near as Hastings who seek the seclusion of this Salvation Army Home, often without telling their parents or the man involved. ...They are girls from 14 to women of 35 years of age, but the group most vulnerable is around 17 years.

At Bethany unmarried women are admitted in their fifth month of pregnancy and can stay up to three months afterwards caring for her child. Mothers are encouraged to keep their babies if the child will be well cared for.

They are not refused anaesthetic at confinement or kept behind prison bars. They receive the same treatment as the other patients. Girls who lose wages receive an emergency sickness benefit, part of which goes towards their board. The rest is pocket money.

Babies are later taken to the upstairs nursery where they stay until adopted or boarded out into a Christian home.¹⁴

It is difficult to ascertain just how many babies were born to unmarried mothers at Bethany Napier, or what proportion were placed for adoption or sent to other homes. The Log Book entries do throw some light on certain periods; in 1964, for example, they show that because of the increase in the numbers of unmar-
ried mothers, ‘staff bedrooms [were] being used and extra beds put up wherever possible’. The entries also show that by the mid-1960s, adoptions were becoming more difficult to arrange.15 However, births to single women are recorded in the Log Book for three years only, from 1970 to 1972. They made up 72 out of 313 births in 1970; 78 out of 364 births in 1971; and 61 out of 364 births in 1972.16

By 1974, although there had been a record number of deliveries (387), fewer single women were ‘living in’.17 This is probably due to two reasons: more readily available contraception, and the 1972 introduction of the Domestic Purposes Benefit, which provided financial assistance for sole mothers, enabling more to keep their babies. By the time Bethany Napier closed in October 1978, it was estimated that 6,500 babies had been born there since 1914.18 The Chief Secretary for the Army in New Zealand, Colonel Dean Goffin explained why Bethany homes were no longer needed. ‘Unmarried pregnant girls’ he said, ‘no longer feel
a stigma and no longer want a place of refuge. Many are keeping their babies, whereas previously the babies were adopted out. The Salvation Army has always maintained a compassionate and caring service for these girls, but we are caught up in the trends of modern society.\textsuperscript{19}

The fact that the Bethany homes, like the one in Napier, ran effectively for such a long period of time is testament to the combined strength of the Salvation Army’s national infrastructure and compassionate philosophy. It set clearly defined lines for professional nursing training, pastoral care, professional development, administration and funding. In this way, it was possible for its staff to be transferred from one Bethany home to another as the need arose, and for all to work to a predetermined standard, no matter where they were located. Matrons were delegated managerial powers and administered operational matters according to a budget. They reported to a centralised administration through which all funds were collected and allocated.

Bethany homes were inspected both by the Army’s own nursing and administrative auditors and by Child Welfare officers employed by the state. At the interface of maternal pastoral care and social work, Bethany staff were trained to be non-judgemental about the circumstances leading to the admittance of unmarried pregnant women, to offer employment skills training and spiritual guidance prior to the birth, to encourage mothers and babies to spend some time together, and then to support mothers as they gave up their babies for adoption and left the home. This consistency of philosophy and management underpinning maternity and pastoral care was central to the longevity of the Bethany home in Napier.

**St Mary's Receiving Home, Napier**

This home, too, was for girls and boys from birth to age four. It ran from 1915 to 1940, first in Burlington Road and later in Finnis Lane, Napier Hill, Napier. It was operated by the Anglican Church (Waiapu Diocese).

The opening of St Mary’s Home by the Waiapu Diocese on 31 May 1915 signalled that it was extending its role to include provision of residential social services for children. The Anglican Church, established early in Hawke’s Bay, had been quick to focus upon Mäori children and youth through its two Mäori residential schools: Te Aute College for boys, opened in 1850 at Pukehou, and Hukarere College for girls, opened in 1875 on Napier Hill, Napier. Both schools were run
Their first home: Bethany (1896–1978) and St Mary’s (1915–1940), Napier

‘in keeping with the policies of the Church Missionary Society – to convert Māori to Christianity, and also with the policies of the State – to “civilise” Māori through assimilation’.20 By the time the Anglican Church opened St Mary’s Home in 1915, it had a reputation for transforming young men and women, both educationally and spiritually.

Origins

Exactly why the Church ventured into running a home for unwed mothers and their babies and for the care of small children is not evident within contemporary published Diocesan notes or the Minutes of Synod. While the Bishop’s reports and notes from Synod record in great detail discussions relating to overseas missions and the new bible-in-schools scheme, there is silence about this forthcoming significant development. There is no philosophical debate or discussion in relation to the Diocese becoming involved in social work, nor any prior mention of setting up a Home. This is consistent with Brooker’s (2009) account of early Waiapu social services, where she found little ‘recorded of parish responses to poverty’ during the critical times of the 1890s’ depression and the impact of the First World War.21 It is likely that the Diocese was taking its lead from other Dioceses already engaged in social work activities with women and children, and also, from January 1914,22 from its newly appointed Bishop, William Sedgwick, who would later be credited with founding the Home.23 A more cynical view is that the Diocese was prompted to move as quickly as it did in order not to be outdone by the Salvation Army, which by 1913 was known to have inherited the Bethany home in Napier. Adding new souls to church membership was as important as rescuing them from their current lives.

The origins of St Mary’s Home are evident in the Minutes of the Waiapu Synod meeting of October 1912, when a Bill was passed and adopted to establish a Social Work Fund,24 to be administered by a sub-committee. The purposes of the Fund were made clear: ‘(a) The inauguration and maintenance of a Rescue Home and Homes in the Diocese. (b) The training of workers in social work. (c) The making of such grants for charitable purposes as the Board may from time to time think fit.’25 A Report from this group to Synod in 1914 outlined an implementation plan. Having consulted the clergy of the Diocese and made enquiries ‘from various institutions with regard to their work’,26 it was necessary ‘to engage a Deaconess who shall have the oversight of the Home, and gather round her such workers as may be necessary for this work and the development
of women’s work generally in the Diocese’. Further, a Women’s Committee in each Parish would raise funds to support this work, and a Central Committee comprising a woman representative from each parish would become the governing body. Clearly, such endeavours were seen as properly women’s work. The report concluded with the recommendation ‘that the Home should be established in or near Napier’.

By 1 April 1914, the administrative committees were in place and the Bishop had secured the services of Deaconess Esther Brand, head of the Ely Diocesan Home in Bedford, England. Because she was to take up her new role in November, the pressure was on to find a suitable building for the Napier Home. This did not prove difficult. In July 1914, a sub-committee were dispatched to ‘examine the buildings and see what repairs are required’ on ‘Sections 18, 19, 21, and 22 with buildings thereon be used for Social Work’. These sections and buildings were in fact Church owned property in Burlington Road on Napier Hill in Napier. It transpired that repairs would cost 114 pounds, and an appeal went out to the Diocese to raise this sum.

When St Mary’s Home opened on 31 May 1915, it created a situation unique in New Zealand: the Anglican Church and the Salvation Army had each opened a home for unwed mothers, their babies, and young children within six months of each other, on the same hill in the same provincial centre. The longer term implications were that both institutions became recognised as places of refuge for unwed pregnant women and their babies from throughout New Zealand; that both institutions provided hundreds of babies for adoption, particularly by Hawke’s Bay families; and that hundreds of children left from both institutions to live out their childhoods in denominational orphanages and children’s homes.

St Mary’s Babies and Nurses
(Diose of Waiapu Archives)
**Fit for purpose**

The work of St Mary’s Home can be divided into distinct eras. Between 1914 and 1921, the Diocese was able to have its social work plan realised through the expertise and knowledge of Deaconess Esther Brand. In her role as matron of St Mary’s, the rescue work, the maternity work and the social work training were able to be conducted in parallel, as she had done in England. That is, while a trained maternity nurse concentrated on the ante and post-natal functions of the Home, the Deaconess trained new assistants in pastoral care work. They lived at St Mary’s, working with the ‘inmates’ and those in need within the Napier community until they left for posts within the Māori or overseas missions. In this way, St Mary’s provided a training base for future Diocesan workers. When Esther Brand left to become Deaconess in Hastings, she took with her the role of leading deaconess training.

Esther Brand’s successor in 1921 was Nurse Anne Carter, who remained until the Home closed in 1940. Her appointment reflected the increasing demand for maternity work in line with stricter government maternity home regulations. By that time, St Mary’s had to be led by a senior midwife as matron. These stricter controls and inspections by the Department of Health, which resulted in the original building being condemned, were further tightened by the Child Welfare Division of the Department of Education in 1929, when St Mary’s was required to be registered as a Children’s Home.

**Years of hope: 1914–1921**

Two references to the purpose of St Mary’s as a ‘rescue’ home were set out in the *Waiapu Church Gazette*:

> It is a Rescue Home for girls who have got into trouble. Girls remain in it, after their confinement, for training and sympathetic help until they are spiritually and morally strong enough to face temptation. Situations are then found for them and they are kept in touch with good influences. If necessary their babies are kept at the Home until they can provide for them, or until they are old enough to be passed on to our Children’s Homes.\(^{33}\)

> ... any girl, irrespective of her faith, who had a first fall, was taken in, cared for until her baby was born and then was taught and helped to regain her self-respect. The only two rules of admission are (1)
That it must be the girl’s first fall into sin; (2) The girl must promise to stay until her baby is six months old.\textsuperscript{34}

Both these rules marked essential points of difference between St Mary’s and the Bethany home run by the Salvation Army. St Mary’s did not encourage adoption, presumably in the interests of the mother’s contrition, as well as ensuring the child was brought up an Anglican. Its reports and statements point to an underlying judgemental and punitive attitude at St Mary’s which is not evident in the Salvation Army records. For example, at St Mary’s it was practice that

\textit{the mother should feed and care for her little one and do all she could to make amends for the stain on its birth. Also, during that time she was taught what the sin she had committed meant; what forgiveness was, and how she could make a fresh start again in the world, fortified by the Sacraments of the Church.}\textsuperscript{35}

At St Mary’s this work was overseen by the Bishop, who in 1916 chaired the Central Committee, whose other members were the Archdeacon and Deaconess Brand, plus ten women each representing a parish of the Diocese. In addition, there were seven male Trustees, a House Committee of eleven and a Treasurer.\textsuperscript{36} Minutes of meetings indicate that major decisions were made by the all-male Board of Trustees, also chaired by the Bishop. While women members could make recommendations relating to the running of St Mary’s, their major role was to raise funds within their respective parishes to maintain it.

The fact that the administrative group was out of touch with the reality of the ‘inmates’ impoverished circumstances and bleak prospects was brought into focus at the meeting of the Social Work Central Committee on 6 June 1916. Here it was proposed and carried unanimously that the new Nursery ‘when built and furnished, will be self-supporting, as the mothers pay 10/- a week for their babies’.\textsuperscript{37} While the purpose of the nursery was to get the babies off to ‘a good start in life’, it also aimed ‘to keep in constant touch with the mothers for two or three years after they leave’.\textsuperscript{38} Given that most mothers had no income and many literally escaped from having to stay on for six months, the policy was destined to fail.

However, the first annual report revealed that there had been two successes in the Home’s first year of operation. The author, likely to be Deaconess Brand, confirmed the key mission of rescue work. Having noted that six girls had been
admitted to the Home, she wrote:

...only those who really know them can tell what an influence on their character those quiet months have had. No more can be said in a report, but the fact must be noted, for it is the main object of our work. One was confirmed in December, and one privately before Easter by Bishop Williams.39

These were the women the Church no doubt particularly wanted to stay in touch with. The other success was due to the tenacity and persuasive powers of the Honorary Solicitor, Mr Ivan Logan. Somehow it had been determined just who the fathers of the six babies were, and in most cases they had been 'made to contribute' to the maintenance of the Home.40

Meanwhile the Secretary of Education had received an application from Esther Brand regarding the exemption St Mary’s had from having to register the Home under Section 41 of the Infant Life Protection Act. The matron realised that as long as mothers and babies stayed together, then all was well. However, when she signalled that ‘we are now intending to keep some of the babies whose mothers have gone out to service’,41 the department responded by sending an inspector from Wellington to visit St Mary’s. The subsequent report was favourable, and provides early insights:

At the time of my visit there were four unmarried mothers in residence and six infants – three girls and three boys under a year old. Two of these infants slept in cots in their respective mothers’ rooms, the other four in a dormitory opening out of the Matron’s bedroom. Beside this dormitory there is a day nursery for all infants.42

The inspector made it clear that permission was sought to keep as many as four infants whose mothers had left the Home. This led to St Mary’s being exempted from registration, which meant that it did not have to be subject to annual inspection by Child Welfare officers.43

By June 1918, the new nursery was up and running and housed eleven children. Fund raising had clearly been effective, partly due to the approach of the Central Committee. At least a couple of times a year, on the Saturday before the Synod met, members of the Diocese were invited to social gatherings at St Mary’s. These events meant that potential donors and fund raisers could see at first hand the facilities and those who lived and worked there. From time to time, keynote
addresses on a range of topics were also offered.\textsuperscript{44}

St Mary’s was also used as a base for other Diocesan activities. For example, the Church Embroidery Guild met there every Thursday afternoon, creating surplices, stoles and cassocks. St Mary’s was supported in other ways as well. For example, individuals and parishes provided fruit, eggs and vegetables, gifts that were most welcome and acknowledged in annual reports.

**State intervention: 1921–1940**

Making ends meet was a constant challenge, particularly so after the original building had been condemned by the Department of Health and the Diocese had quickly to construct new buildings in 1925.\textsuperscript{45} Three years later, the debt was over 4,000 pounds and the call went out again to the Diocese for funds.\textsuperscript{46}

There were already three other Children’s Homes in the Hawke’s Bay region by the time the Anglican Church established St Mary’s Rescue Home for unwed pregnant women and their babies in 1915. Having done so, it was under some pressure to run its own Home for older children, so as to ensure that St Mary’s babies could be then continue to be raised within the Anglican faith. The opportunity to do so was made possible in 1919, when the Waiapu Diocese was given a large house in Otane, destined to become St Hilda’s Orphanage; and again in 1926, when Lissie Rathbone donated land and money for the Abbotsford Home in Waipawa. Both Homes were co-educational, catering for children aged four to fifteen years (see Chapters Three and Four).

Up until 1928, the Bishop of the Waiapu Diocese was ultimately responsible for the running of the Homes and the appointment of staff, and also for ensuring there was sufficient monies to cover all the expenses. The management approach taken was that the Church could cope by drawing upon the goodwill of its parishioners. It confidently assumed that there was no need to go wider, nor ‘to advertise to the world the good work our Church is doing’\textsuperscript{47} within local newspapers. However, there was competition for donations and bequests, particularly given the longer established and higher profile of the Napier based non-denominational Homes run by the Hawke’s Bay Children’s Homes Trust, and the Bethany home run by the Salvation Army. For example, both organisations hosted events such as Garden Fetes and held annual Street Appeals. In addition, the Trust Homes were administered by some of the most influential citizens in the region, who proved successful in attracting permanent subscriptions and
sizeable bequests.

All three Anglican Homes were integral to the Waiapu Diocese Social Work programme instigated in 1915, and were largely dependent upon funds raised from within the regional Anglican parishes. However, the Church’s comparatively late start into social service provision meant that some of its own parishioners had already committed to subscribing to and/or supporting the Hawke’s Bay Trust Homes. Worse still, the Bishop would read in local papers that his own wealthy parishioners had left large bequests to other Children’s Homes, as occurred in 1926. In an attempt to draw parishioners’ attention to the fact that their own church was involved in helping children, he wrote in the Diocesan newsletter: ‘The Anglican Church in New Zealand is doing far more work for the poor, the destitute, the erring and the afflicted than most of its members are aware of. She might, of course, do much more if Churchmen would entrust to their own Church the money which they are at present give to other agencies.’

In a bid to turn matters around, he made clear the purpose of the homes, emphasising that St Hilda’s and Abbotsford took 25 and 30 children respectively:

*These Homes provide for orphans and children who have lost one of their parents, or are destitute and without friends. When the relatives are able to contribute to wards their maintenance, fees are charged in proportion to the means of those responsible for them; but in most cases the children are utterly destitute or their relatives very poor and we receive very little or nothing towards their support.*

The Bishop then set out the facts: St Hilda’s and Abbotsford cost about 2,000 pounds a year to run, while St Mary’s cost about 750 pounds. He urged readers to send donations.

Finally, the Bishop cut to the chase and highlighted the religious and political factors that prompted his article. There was, he said, ‘the prevalent but quite erroneous impression that, because of the Anglican Church does not trumpet its good works in the market place, it is doing nothing about children in need. This is likely to refer to the very public fund raising occasions and resulting media publicity used effectively by the Hawke’s Bay Children’s Homes Trust and the Salvation Army. To be sure there was little doubt, the Bishop referred to the ‘many so-called charitable institutions... run on commercial lines and more than pay
their way’, and the fact that ‘the Anglican, Roman, Presbyterian and Methodist institutions’ were the ones that ‘minister to the really needy who cannot pay.’

The Bishop’s final flourish was to stress that the Anglican Children’s Homes did not receive any government funding, and if the Church did not ‘look after their own little ones’, they would be handed over to ‘tender mercies’ of state institutions and foster homes, where the taxpayer would have to support them.

The Bishop was under pressure, and the timing was not coincidental. Governing authorities of children’s homes had come under the closer scrutiny of the state via the regulations of the Department of Health, which raised the bar in relation to maternity and post-natal care in homes such as St Mary’s. In addition, the passing of the Child Welfare Act in 1925 set out standards for those caring for children in institutions. The combined effects were that the Church was going to have to find even more money to train maternity staff, to provide more staff overall, and to attend to the upgrading of buildings.

Concerns were not limited to money. By 1926, the Director of Education had had his attention drawn to issues at St Mary’s that had previously gone unnoticed. Dr Clark was concerned that the numbers of children in the home without their mothers had exceeded the number agreed, although the home was still exempt from inspection under the Infant Life Protection Act. Further, in noting that Miss Carter was a midwife rather than a Plunket nurse, he drew upon a number of cases to demonstrate that the children and the mothers were not being adequately fed. For example, Miss Carter had told him that 23 pints of milk were taken daily; but ‘as I knew there were at least 26 in residence, comprising 20 children under four years of age, at least three girls, and Miss Carter and two lay women on staff, it struck me that the eleven babies under one year of age, six being over six months, could not be fed according to Plunket rules on that amount of milk.’

Dr Clark was also concerned about the mothers, who ‘had no hot drink permitted after afternoon tea, not even gruel or cocoa to nursing mothers on retiring’.

He did not restrict his critique to mat-
Dietary matters had only been partially addressed by March 1928, when the Child Welfare officer inspected diet sheets and weight charts at St Mary’s. The visit had been prompted by a complaint from a clergyman’s wife who had asked for an immediate visit to the Home, having heard children screaming as she passed by. She was not happy that a young girl had been left in charge of the Home while the matron was on holiday and the acting matron was out. She noted that the children had not eaten, although it was 1pm, and that the place smelt. During the Child Welfare officer’s visit, ‘the absence of green vegetables and potatoes’ was observed: ‘the midday meal comprised soup with bread broken up in it, followed by a milk pudding.’ Matters deteriorated from there. While the evening meal consisted only of ‘bread and butter and a drink of water’, what shocked the Officer more than anything else was that the eating and drinking took place as ‘the children are placed on their chambers – a practice which can only be condemned.’ Upon her return from holiday, Nurse Carter complained, and questioned the authority of the Child Welfare officer to inspect the Home. Her letter to the department ‘seeking a ruling on the matter’ led to the Directors of Education and Health agreeing that St Mary’s should be registered as a Children’s Home under the Child Welfare Amendment Act 1927. By May 1928 the application had been filed, in August Miss H. Burnett, Child Welfare officer at Napier, began her inspection visits, and on 14 February 1929 St Mary’s registration was gazetted.

By this time, the Diocese has appointed Mr R. E.H. Pilson as its Secretary. Part of his role was to administer St Mary’s (as well as St Hilda’s and Abbotsford) to ensure the Anglican run Homes complied with government regulations. Legally, Secretary Pilson was responsible for the children, their admissions and releases as well as appointment of senior staff and oversight of accounts and the overall budget.

Recruitment and retention of trained staff was difficult. This was because the Church had traditionally relied on employing single women from within its
ranks, who in the main did not demand standard rates of pay or equity with clergy, for whom there was a pension scheme. When the government insisted on professionally trained staff within maternity and children’s homes, the Bishop reflected that: ‘It was always difficult to get trained workers as the salary which they could pay was perfectly ridiculous’, and ‘that they could make no provision for the old age of their workers. It was one thing to work for a small salary. But it became quite another in after life, when there was nothing to look forward to in old age.’ Such statements indicate the reasons for the gradual demise of homes such as St Mary’s.

Annual reports provide key insights into St Mary’s. For example, in 1928: ‘The home is for the care of girls in trouble, as well as for their babies. It has accommodation for ten mothers as well as for twenty-four babies; when possible, the home takes in sick and destitute babies whose mothers are in hospital.... the home is nearly always overcrowded.’

This taking in of sick and destitute babies while mothers were in hospital was highly valued by parents, local Child Welfare officers, doctors and Plunket nurses. Indeed, between 1922 and 1937, approximately 150 babies were cared for either because the mother or a baby was ill. For example, in 1922 a two year old and a 15 month old stayed for five months while their mother was hospital and the father out of work. A few years later, a member of the clergy brought to St Mary’s a malnourished baby who was cared for over two months. When babies were nursed back to good health St Mary’s staff reported satisfaction such as the time when a Plunket Nurse brought in a severely underweight baby. After three months the baby had gained four pounds and was returned to the family, who had paid fees to have their baby cared for. Sadly, not all sick or malnourished babies could be rescued. Records indicate that several babies born at St Mary’s and some sick babies given to St Mary’s did die, either at St Mary’s or at Napier Hospital. For example, in the 1930s a very ill baby was brought to St Mary’s to be cared for. Although the baby initially made good progress it died of heart failure eight months later.

Mothers also died. For example, a number of mothers who delivered babies at St Mary’s either died in childbirth or shortly thereafter. Their babies were raised at St Mary’s and either adopted out or transferred to St Hilda’s when they turned four years of age. St Mary’s also commonly retained any children they were temporarily caring for when a mother died in hospital. In addition, there were
cases where fathers living in the region did not know just what to do with a very young baby when mothers died. In such situations, St Mary’s took in the baby and cared for it. The child’s future then depended on the father’s decision. For example, upon remarriage the toddler might be returned or the child might be adopted, or once the child turned four he/she would be transferred to St Hilda’s.

From time to time, St Mary’s would also take children of mothers who had to go out to work. However, perhaps fearing a fall in financial support, the Bishop was quick to remind his Diocese that although they cared for babies born outside the Home, ‘it was well to remember that the Home did not exist for that purpose. They must not forget that the primary object of the Home was to shelter and train girls who had had a first fall, and to help them make a fresh start in life.’

The oft mentioned ‘first fall’ into sin referred to a first pregnancy. The rules made it clear that if a woman fell a second time, she was beyond help, at least at St Mary’s. The key to preventing such an occurrence and setting her on a new path was outlined by the Bishop in 1929:

*The centre of St Mary’s Home has always been the chapel; here before breakfast every morning services are held for a few minutes to which every inmate comes, the children who are able to walk attending them too. Evensong is held here every evening when all the work is done, and once a week there is a service of Holy Communion at 7.30 am.*

Under Annie Carter's stewardship, the extensive new accommodation had been built in 1925, with an entrance off Finnis Lane. Recalling the leaking mildewed walls of the old Home, Annie Carter was able to report in 1929 that ‘...the sun so necessary for babies, was not shut out by any obstruction, but poured all day long on the nurseries. This cost has been fully justified; the babies are never ill, and for two consecutive years the doctor has not been called in to see even one sick baby.’

The babies were doing well because Annie Carter and her two staff, one a Plunket nurse, were doing their utmost to keep the standards maintained, all the while aware of the everyday running costs and the debt yet to be paid off. Writing for the Diocese in 1929, she summarised the work:

*Twenty-five babies are here, cared for and kept until they are three years old, very few of the parents being able to help towards the*
expense of their keep. The mothers, now eight in number, learn all they most need; how to cook, sew, wash and care for babies, etc., and are taught the meaning of Baptism and Confirmation, and often some are confirmed in the chapel.  

That Annie Carter was feeling low in spirits and that support from the Diocese had fallen away is evident in the conclusion of her report:

*Will any of our readers come to see this Home? Visitors are always welcome till 4pm. Will they come to see these little babies growing up, with plenty of love and care – yes, but with no home of their own; no parents’ love so necessary to little ones? Will they help clothe and feed these little ones? Will they sometimes think of the staff, of their long hours on duty, rising winter and summer always at 5.30am., or earlier; of their many disappointments and yet quite happy in their work of trying to do something for God’s little ones and erring ones. Will they sometimes pray, too, for the babies and staff and for means to pay off the debt which is ever present with all in the Home and which is a burden that could be lifted from the shoulders of those working there by a little self-denial from everyone?*

What Annie Carter had perhaps failed to recognise was that by 1929, the Diocese was also running its two Children's Homes, St Hilda’s in Otane and Abbotsford in Waipawa. The Social Work Fund had now to go much further in order to meet government standards relating to buildings, food and clothing. This was no doubt compounded by the economic depression.

Matters worsened for St Mary’s after the 1931 earthquake. Although its own new buildings did not suffer much damage, the Salvation Army’s Bethany had to be evacuated, and for seven years until Bethany re-opened, St Mary’s was the only institution to take in unwed pregnant women. For example, in 1933 Annie Carter reported that they had been at capacity in October 1932, having 26 babies in the Home, including premature twins. While grateful for the 658 pounds donated, she put out an urgent appeal for potatoes and other vegetables.

Letters received by the Diocesan Secretary in 1932 indicate the demand for places at St Mary’s. For example,
St Mary’s Orphanage
Diocese of Dunedin
6 February 1932

I wonder if you could help us out of a difficulty? The case is this; one of our girls, who has been an inmate of our Girl’s Home for some years went out to service last year and has got herself into trouble with a man. She expects to be confined late April–early May.

We understand that your Home deals with such cases but whether you take in girls from other dioceses or not we do not know.

If it should be possible for you to assist by taking this girl we would be grateful, and of course we would pay all charges that would be incurred. The girl has just turned 17 years.

Superintendent Rev. S.J. Cooper

By 1939, running costs for St Mary’s had reached one thousand pounds a year, although by that time Bethany had re-opened, and St Mary’s babies numbered a more manageable sixteen. Adoption was also more common. For example in 1936, eleven babies had been adopted out from St Mary’s. Three years later, someone other than Nurse Carter described what happened to the babies in the Waiapu Gazette:

Many babies get adopted. The girls always have good positions found them when they leave and most of them make good. If not taken by the mothers, the babies stay till they are three years old, and then go, if they are not adopted and if their mothers cannot take them, to S Hilda’s or Abbotsford Home. There has been a confirmation and a marriage this year and many baptisms.

While this summary is a fair reflection of the destinations of mothers and babies there were also other points of note within the annual report to Synod. In 1939 of the 13 babies in residence, seven were recorded as Māori and four of these were motherless, ‘but a picture of health and much admired’. Eight babies had been adopted and four of the mothers had married and taken the babies with them ‘for which we cannot be thankful enough– a mother, a father, a name and a home given them.’
**St Mary’s Home, Napier. Policy Statement 1932**

*We shall not send away unwanted babies to the care of the Government or the Salvation Army. St Mary’s must care for it until it is old enough to go to St Hilda’s or Abbotsford.*

Matters did not always work out so well for babies or mothers across time however. For example, several babies appeared to have been left on the front doorstep of St Mary’s in the middle of the night; their identities would never be known. In such cases, the ‘baby’ was given a name by the Matron. There was also a case where a baby adopted out in the 1930s was returned to St Mary’s two weeks later with no explanation.

As for the mothers, one can only imagine the despair they confronted upon discovering they were pregnant. Some were as young as fourteen years of age when they arrived at St Mary’s, usually in the last trimester of their pregnancy. While St Mary’s policy was that mothers remained and worked at the Home for six months after the birth of their baby, many did not do so. There was one case for example, where the mother was assisted to escape from St Mary’s twelve days after delivering her baby. What seemed to make this worse was that the person who helped her was the married man who was father of the baby. There were instances of mothers smuggling their very young babies out of St Mary’s and running away, unable to be traced. There were others whose babies had been adopted before the six months was up and perhaps, not unreasonably, chose to run away from the Home at or about the point the baby was collected.

For those mothers who did stay the six months at St Mary’s some did take their babies with them when they left. However, more usually domestic positions were found for them by the Diocesan Secretary. In the main their destinations were to well known Anglican citizens, often in Napier. Later if she married, the mother arranged to collect the child. In some cases, relatives such as a grandparent or an aunt would seek to take the child and raise it and usually such permission was granted.

Between 1922 and 1937 approximately 440 babies were cared for at St Mary’s. This means that for its total period of operation between 1915 and 1939 it is likely that the total was over 500 babies. A reading of the records suggests that of the babies born at St Mary’s approximately one third left at six months of age with their mothers; one third were adopted and the remaining third transferred...
at four years of age, usually to St Hilda’s and sometimes to Abbotsford.

When Nurse Annie Carter retired in 1939, the Church put on record that to her it owed ‘a debt for unsparing and cheerful work’.

By April 1940, the decision had been made to change the core work of St Mary’s. It would no longer serve as a maternity home. Instead, the new matron, Miss Ethel Lancaster, along with Miss Laura McColl and two assistants, would care for up to fifteen children under five years of age. Their work was to be short-lived. By 31 July the Child Welfare officer reported that St Mary’s had closed.

Notes
1 Bethany Napier Corp History, p.1.
2 The Midwives Act 1904 allowed for women to be registered as midwives based upon their experience of delivering babies, although they had received no formal training. Unregistered women could also work as maternity nurses under the close supervision of a doctor.
3 Bethany Napier Corp History.
4 St Mary’s, the Anglican receiving home equivalent of Bethany, opened in May 1915.
5 Bethany Napier Corp History, p.2.
6 Bethany Napier Corp History.
8 Bethany Napier staff members are listed by year of appointment in the Bethany Napier Corp History.
9 Major Nairn had previously worked at Bethany Napier as an Ensign in 1920.
10 Walter Atherfold was responsible for the new plans for the residence. Bethany Napier Corp History.
11 Hawke’s Bay newspaper (untitled) clipping, August 8 1977. Bethany Napier Corp History.
12 The Bethany Napier Corp History records the nursing qualifications of staff. Napier medical practitioners Dr E.A. Morris and Dr Perry served in turn as Medical Superintendents for Bethany Napier.
13 Licence for a Private Maternity Hospital, No. 2496. Bethany Napier Corp History.
14 Weekly News, 1950 [clipping otherwise undated], in Bethany Napier Corp History.
15 Bethany Napier Corp History, p.17.
16 Ibid.
17 Bethany Napier Corp History, p.22.
18 Newspaper clipping [no title or source], 30 September 1978, in Bethany Napier Corp History.
19 Ibid.
22 Waiapu Church Gazette, Volume V, Issue 6, 1 December 1914, p.5; Issue 2, 1 August 1914, p.18.
25 Waiapu Church Gazette, Volume V, Issue 2, 1 August 1914, p.18.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
29 Waiapu Church Gazette, Volume V, Issue 2, 1 August 1914, p.18.
30 Ibid.
31 Waiapu Church Gazette, Volume V, Issue 5, 1 November 1914, p.54.
32 For example, the Salvation Army established two other provincial homes, in Russell, Northland, and the Edward Murphy Home, Gisborne, in 1920. It also ran homes in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin. Anglican homes established in provincial centres by 1916 included St Andrew’s Orphanage in Nelson and the All Saints Children’s Home in Palmerston North. This was in addition to Anglican institutions in the main centres: St Mary’s Home in Otahuhu, the Orphan Home in Papatoetoe, St Saviour’s Orphanage in Christchurch and St Mary’s Orphanage in Dunedin.
33 Waiapu Church Gazette, Volume XVII, Issue 1, 1 July 1926, p.1.
35 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
41 NA CWW 1045 31 40/4/44. Deaconess Brand to Secretary of Education, 1 May 1916.
42 NA CWW 1045 31 40/4/44. Report, St Mary’s Napier, by Miss Smith, 11 July 1916 to Mrs Dick, Manager Receiving Home, District Agent.
43 NA CWW 1045 31 40/4/44., Note on file, 1 August 1916. J. Caughley, Assistant Director of Education.
44 Waiapu Church Gazette, Volume VIII, Issue 12, 1 June 1918, p.1.
NA CWW 1045 31 40/4/44. Letter from Dr Clark to Director of School Hygiene reported in Notes from Boarding Out Officer to Director of Education, 28 January 1926.


New Zealand Gazette, No. 8, 14 February 1929, p.403.

Waiapu Church Gazette, Volume XIX, Issue 3, 1 September 1928, p.5


St Mary’s Register 1922-1937, Diocese of Waiapu Archives.

This building was subsequently sold by the Diocese to the Hawke’s Bay Hospital Board, becoming a Ward/Home for elderly women. It remained known as St Mary’s. The building was later halved to become two houses and the sub-divided area is now known as St Mary’s Court, Finnis Lane.

Waiapu Church Gazette, Volume XXI, Issue 1, 1 July 1929, p.7.

Waiapu Church Gazette, 1 September 1933, p.2.

St Mary’s Home Series 4/6/4 380. 1932.

St Mary’s Register 1922-1937, Diocese of Waiapu Archives.

Waiapu Church Gazette, Volume XXX, Issue 6, 1 August 1939, p.8.

St Mary’s Report to Synod, 1939, Diocese of Waiapu Archives.
79 St Mary’s Register 1922-1937, Diocese of Waiapu Archives.
80 Ibid.
81 Waiapu Church Gazette, Volume 30, Issue 6, 1 August 1939, p.8.
82 NA CWW 1045 31 40/4/44. St Mary’s Home, Napier, Child Welfare Officer’s Report 4 June 1940.
Chapter Three

‘Cared for but not loved’: St Hilda’s Orphanage, Otane (1918–1958)

Origins and overview

The two Anglican run homes for children aged four to fifteen were both located in central Hawke’s Bay: St Hilda’s at Otane, and Abbotsford at Waipawa. Both admitted girls and boys, ‘so as to provide a natural home atmosphere in each home’. The locations were not specifically chosen, but arose from bequests to the church, which provided solutions to housing orphans as quickly as possible. However, their shared purpose and close proximity would make it even harder for the far-flung diocese, which spread from Rotorua to Woodville, to raise funds to support them. Over time, the main providers would become the smaller parochial parishes of central Hawke’s Bay.

This chapter focuses on St Hilda’s, followed by a chapter on Abbotsford. Many Anglican children’s home records were destroyed in the Cathedral at the time of the earthquake and fire in 1931. The church-related data for both St Hilda’s and Abbotsford have been drawn from the Waiapu Church Gazette and Diocese of Waiapu Archives. In addition, Child Welfare reports, manuscripts held by individuals and interviews with children raised in both homes have provided valuable information.

Along with other denominations involved in running children’s homes, the Anglican Church had a two-fold mission: rescue and recruitment. The Bishop of Waiapu set these out in the diocesan newsletter:

Are our motherless and fatherless children to be left to the tender mercies of the world and the snares of the devil and so to grow up potential vagrants and criminals, or are they to be brought up as the
children of God and become powerful workers for Christ and valiant soldiers in his Army? We have a wonderful opportunity to enlist them for Christ. We cannot so easily influence children, who are being brought up in un-Christian families but these in our Homes are ours and Christ’s, to train as they should be trained.²

The origins of St Hilda’s and Abbotsford were also closely linked with St Mary’s in Napier. What was the church to do with St Mary’s children once they turned four? In addition, the 1918 influenza epidemic and the impact of World War I left many children orphaned or destitute.³ A short-term measure had been found in 1918, when a children’s home run by Matron Miss S. Lee operated out of a house located opposite St Peter’s Church in Waipawa.⁴ But as the Bishop of Waiapu put it in 1919: ‘It is our duty to our dead brothers and sisters to see that their children are properly “brought up to lead a Godly and a Christian Life” according to the faith of their parents. Church orphanages are a most urgent necessity.’⁵ It is clear that the Bishop of Waiapu led the bid to establish permanent diocesan operated homes for older children within the region, and by February 1919 he reported on progress. ‘Owing to the generosity of friends in Otane, a house has been secured there eminently suitable for a second “home” and this will be adapted as soon as possible and put into use.’⁶ This was the former home of Mrs W. Fletcher, who offered it for sale to the Church, presumably at a reduced price. In February it was estimated that 500 pounds would be required to undertake the alterations.⁷ The following month, the Bishop was forced to go back to the diocese, as his earlier estimate for the Otane house alterations had proved
unrealistic. Apparently 800 pounds had been promised, but this was still 1200 pounds short.\(^8\)

The alterations were completed, and St Hilda’s Orphanage opened on 25 November 1919, on a prime site on the corner of Higginson Street and Henderson Street, in the small village of Otane. It was able to house up to 25 children and two live-in staff. In addition, the orphanage was immediately adjacent to the Otane Anglican Church, and within walking distance of the primary school.

There were only two matrons at St Hilda’s during its years of operation at Otane, and both worked and lived there until they retired: Miss Edith Waller (1919-1944), and Miss Mary Welford (1944-1952).

### Key facts – St Hilda’s

- **Approximately 190 children (both boys’ and girls’ aged 4-16 years) lived at St Hilda’s between 1918-1958**
- **More 4 year olds came directly from St Mary’s, Napier (up to 1940)**
- **More likely to admit a younger single child than one with siblings, however**
- **Widowed fathers admitted two or three children at the same time**
- **Most parent/s lived in Hawke’s Bay at the time a child was admitted**
- **The majority of children lived at St Hilda’s for most of their childhood and adolescent years**

### Who were the children?

*The children at St Hilda’s are the happiest children in New Zealand. They are not the inmates of an institution; they are a family, unspoiled by luxury, surrounded by healthy religious influence, brought up just as Christian children should be. Visit St Hilda’s and see how happy a real Christian Home can be.*\(^9\)
For nearly forty years, St Hilda’s was ‘home’ to children aged between four and fifteen years. Two key factors led to an emphasis on their being their ‘own family’: the location within the small village of Otane, which restricted the opportunities for interaction with others, combined with the philosophy of long-time matron Miss Edith Waller. That their childhoods were ‘happy’ is less certain.

*St Hilda’s is dedicated, or set apart, that children who have no parents to look after them, or perhaps one parent, who must go out to work for a living, might be cared for and loved, and taught to live a happy child life. It is not right to let little children do as they like all day long. How glad we should be that we can all help to look after them at St Hilda’s, that we can teach them about God, and try to make them love our Church, and all the beautiful things of the world in which we live. Of course we teach them housework and sewing too, and they do their work very brightly and willingly as a rule, for even the tiny ones help. (Matron Edith Waller, 1929)*

Although the word ‘orphanage’ was adopted for use at St Hilda’s, and initial pleas for funding were predicated on the children being orphans, as early as 1922 the diocesan newsletter reported that ‘most of the children’ at St Hilda’s ‘have one parent living who pays something towards the support of the child’. In some cases there was more than one child. For example, two of the first children admitted to St Hilda’s were Hall and Hilary Cain. Their mother died in 1916 and their father, Fred, a builder, was unable to care for them. They lived at St Hilda’s for a number of years.

Indeed, the Bishop was keen to stress to parishioners that St Hilda’s catered for all, and that some parents did indeed pay fees for the upkeep of their children:

*No deserving case is refused admission so long as room is available. It’s open to children of all denominations. Most of the children have one parent. In these cases the parent or guardian pays as much towards their support as he or she is able to. Often it is little or nothing. The amount received in fees last year was 332 pounds. The rest of the cost of maintenance (952 pounds) was provided by the subscriptions and donations, and by the General Diocesan Fund.*

While it was true that a few fathers who had been widowed did pay fees to the church and kept in touch with the children, it would appear that most of the
children did not know their one parent. Typically, she was a younger unmarried mother who had given birth at St Mary’s in Napier, and had then given up her child to the care of the Church. This enabled her to return to paid work and, in many cases, to be freer to marry and then have other children. It was common for the existence of a pre-nuptial child to be kept hidden from the husband and later children.

This was the case for Ron Bowles, born at St Mary’s in 1920. He did not know his mother or his father, or know who they were or where they were. At three years of age he was transferred from St Mary’s to St Hilda’s, and was raised by Miss Waller, who at that time was assisted by Mrs Langford and Miss Davies. As an adult he did not try to find his mother, but much later, his own son tracked down and made contact with Ron’s mother’s other children, long after she had died. Ron’s grand-daughter has recently helped him find out details about his mother and his half-brother and half-sister.

Similarly, Monica was born in 1924 at St Mary’s and moved to St Hilda’s three years later. She knew nothing of her parents and would not ever do so. Isabel Fafieta was also born at St Mary’s; like Ron and Monica, she did not know the mother who gave her to the care of the Church. Transferred to St Hilda’s at age three, she remembers arriving there ‘hanging onto Miss Waller’s long black skirt and going down to the nursery’. As an adult, Isabel discovered who her mother was, but did not want any contact with her, even though they lived in the same town. Isabel’s mother had married and had a son and a daughter, and the daughter came to know about Isabel. Much later in life, Isabel discovered the identity of her father.

Mary and Ruth would meet at St Hilda’s in the 1930s. Mary did not ever know her mother, who died three days after she was born. Her father had older children to care for, but could not cope with a baby as well. She was raised at St Mary’s until she was three years old, then moved to St Hilda’s. Her father remarried and had six other children. Mary was twelve years old before she received a visit from her father, stepmother and grandmother. She did not know she had other brothers and sisters until that time. In later years, she regained contact with her sister Joyce.

Ruth’s mother died of peritonitis in 1931, when Ruth was eight years old. She and her two-year-old sister Doris were placed at St Hilda’s by their father. Her first impression ‘was of a fire burning in the grate in the nursery and her father
talking to the matron, but all too soon her father was gone. She says, 'I cried my eyes out.' He had found work in Napier after the earthquake, but could not keep the children with him.

One of the most heart-wrenching tales of arrival at St Hilda's is associated with the Buckley twins, Robert and Robina. They had been born at the Wellington Bethany Home in the mid-1930s, and were sent to St Mary’s in Napier when they were two months old. Their mother subsequently married and had another child; she uplifted the twins when they were about three and a half years old, taking them to Wanganui to live as a family. However, it did not work out, as both the husband and the younger child found the arrangement difficult. The mother thought the twins would have a better life elsewhere, so arranged for them to go to St Hilda’s. They were put on a bus in Palmerston North by their mother, who said good-bye to them. They had a paper bag of belongings. Robert and Robina were four years of age. They did not know where they were going, but
knew that the bus would stop and someone would meet them. The bus eventually stopped on the main road at Otane, and three or four children were there with Miss Waller to meet them.\textsuperscript{20}

When Robert was 43 years old, he arranged to meet his mother outside the shops in Raetahi, and maintained regular contact with her until she died in her nineties. Robina did not want any contact. His half-sisters knew about the twins, but his half-brothers did not. Robert now meets with them on family occasions. Robert did not know who his father was until his mother told him in the late 1990s that his father had married twice and died in 1970.

**Childhoods at St Hilda's**

In 1921, the Bishop of Waiapu told the diocese that at St Hilda’s:

> *There are no happier children, no more affectionate children, loving, loveable and loved in New Zealand than those who, if we may say it, have the good fortune to be members of such a family under a matron who loves them all individually without favouritism not by compulsion but by love.*\textsuperscript{21}

Like St Mary’s in Napier, St Hilda’s and Abbotsford were each managed by long-serving matrons, single women devoted to the Church. St Hilda’s inaugural matron was Miss Edith H. Waller, who spent 25 years in the role. She retired to Christchurch where she died in 1968. Edith Waller left a bequest of 200 pounds to the Diocese which was credited to Abbotsford.\textsuperscript{22} When Miss Mary F. Welford took over as matron in 1944, she knew St Hilda’s very well indeed, having been sub-matron for ten years. Mary Welford ran St Hilda’s until 1952, when she retired to England.

For the 25 years of Edith Waller’s term as matron, the church consistently sang her praises and placed on record its gratitude for her work. Miss Waller, it said, did a splendid job raising up to 30 children at a time. The girls and boys, wearing their distinctive red and grey uniform, could be seen being marching in crocodile formation to and from Otane Primary School three times a day, as well as to church twice on Sunday. When the Bishop and other dignitaries visited the home, the children were well mannered, polite, and spoke only when spoken to. Some of the children, now senior adults, reflecting upon such official views of themselves when at St Hilda’s, agree that this was indeed the case: the emphasis on good manners, particularly dining-table manners, stood them in good stead all their lives.
The positive was again heralded in 1922:

*Those of the children who attend school have an excellent record for conduct and diligence, in fact they are distinguished by their ‘happy family’ character. We are exceedingly proud of St Hilda’s. Needless to say the unique character of St Hilda’s is due almost entirely to its splendid Matron, but we dare not say more about that.*

For its part then, the church was extremely grateful to Miss Waller for her efforts in raising the children in its care. For most of the children, however, writing or speaking as adults, the public face of St Hilda’s as documented by the church was inconsistent with their experiences. While acknowledging that Miss Waller had a very difficult job raising children of mixed sexes and ages, and living alongside them the whole time, all but Ron Bowles were critical of her techniques. Far from her providing the Bishop’s ideal, ‘the mother love which is so necessary to the development of character’, through an intimate and deep personal relationship, many of the children’s independent testimonies suggest that for them, at least, the opposite was the case.

The views provided by those who wrote and spoke about their lives at St Hilda’s concur across various cohorts, for example, from Ron and Mary who lived there in the 1920s to the 1930s, Ruth and Monica in the 1930s, and Robert and Isabel in the 1940s. Further, the terms and language they use to describe events and daily routines have strong similarities. At the same time, it is only fair to point out that these experiences may not reflect those of all children who attended St Hilda’s within the same cohorts. For example, Mary and Ron, who both lived at St Hilda’s in the 1930s, have different perspectives: Mary reflected that the
punishments she received from Miss Waller were ‘very cruel and most unjust’ and ‘I loathed her’; Ron put down his ‘hidings’ to their ‘being deserved’ and said that overall, ‘Miss Waller was superb.’ 24 Others agreed with him. However, for those children from the cohorts who had Miss Waller as matron and Miss Welford as sub-matron and later matron, there is overall agreement. The two were experienced as totally opposite in most respects. While Miss Waller was described as ‘the iron fist’, Miss Welford was ‘friendly and kind’. The presence of Miss Welford made life that much easier; as will be outlined later, her influence as matron resulted in major life changes for some of her charges.

The good times

While it would be easy to focus on the bad times experienced at St Hilda’s, because those are far and away the most commonly reported by the children, there were also good times. All the children who wrote or were interviewed recalled that the best times at St Hilda’s were the summer holiday occasions when they were not on site.

Throughout its history, St Hilda’s children and staff relocated for the summer school holidays. In the early years this represented swapping one Anglican institution for another: St Hilda’s took up residence at Hukarere, the Māori girls’ college on Bluff Hill in Napier. Hukarere was largely vacated by its boarders in the summer, providing a well-appointed and well equipped summer base. Ron Bowles recalls such holidays in the 1920s, when the children were transported by train to Hukarere. Day outings from Hukarere included taking the tram to the port, and walking to Westshore for picnics and swims at the beach. 25 Although the daily routines and chores were ever present, the location provided some first-time recreational opportunities, such as these described in 1923:

> The children’s holiday at Hukarere School, Napier, was a very enjoyable one, long to be remembered. They loved everything, the sea, their visitors, the picnics, the Maori dinner cooked on hot stones, the snails which they found so easily, and the bats, which they unearthed on the walls round the tennis court. The archdeacon’s ducks were very glad of the snails, and Miss Bulstrode [the Principal at Hukarere] was not sorry that so many had been transported from her garden. 26

By the 1930s, St Hilda’s summer holidays were spent at Pourerere Station on the
central Hawke’s Bay coastline, where the Nairn family provided their shearers’ quarters for the children and staff to use. One of the first to go was Monica, who reported that: ‘We loved it although it was rough and ready.’ Ron remembers the logistics needed to set up camp for the holidays. This included taking 32 mattresses on a truck with supplies coming out on the mail run. Mary Hammond remembered that in the 1930s, there was ‘plenty of outdoor life and good long walks. Swims every day – wet or fine. Picnics – a lot.’ Robert Buckley recalls these holidays in the 1940s as ‘the happiest time of my childhood – we would free range on the beach and the paddocks. We lived beside the sheep-yards and spent many hours balancing and walking around the top rail and gates all over the yards – rules were relaxed a bit.’

There were few good times recalled back at St Hilda’s; but one was the occasion of one’s own birthday, as recalled by Ruth, when ‘we were allowed to sit at the dining room table with the staff and senior girls and were allowed to choose a meal. We children nearly always asked for a boiled egg. The other treat we could have on our special day was bread with butter and jam.’

There were also occasional treats when the children were taken on outings. Ron
recalls going to farms, being transported there by the Williams family in cars, and going to picnics at Penlee Station. There was the annual school fancy dress ball, too. Mary remembers ‘I went as a pixie, a fairy, a beautiful red rose and Bo Peep. Had lots of fun and dances. We all had a fantastic supper put on by the parents.’

### The routine times

Insights into the everyday world of children raised at St Hilda’s over the years reveal a common regimen of strict adherence to daily routines. Given that there were usually 25 children or more in residence, with the majority going to school each day, degrees of precision were needed. Ron spent twelve years at St Hilda’s (1923–1935); he recalls around 27 children in residence across those years, with approximately half being girls and half being boys. The boys slept in a dormitory down one side of the house, while the girls were divided among three rooms. The routine included getting up at 6am and kneeling beside the bed for prayers. The older girls dressed the little girls, lined up in the hall to go to the toilet, and washed their hands; then the little ones went to the nursery and sat on forms around the walls. The older girls made the beds, worked in the kitchen and set up the supper.
the tables, while the boys cleaned the shoes and chopped the wood. Of the division of labour in the 1920s and early 1930s, Ron recalled: ‘The boys did the vegetable garden, chopped wood, cleaned shoes, made beds, helped with the washing and peeled the potatoes. The girls did the flower gardens, helped in the kitchen with meal preparation, set the tables and did the dishes.’

Breakfast was at 7.30am, with a hymn and prayers beforehand. Most remember porridge with hard baked bread from the oven for breakfast. The older children in Robert and Isabel’s time then all lined up for the toilet with a little piece of paper. Bowel movements were expected at this point. The toddlers had potties in the bathroom. After the mass toileting, all cleaned their teeth.

Dressed in their red and grey uniforms, the children marched off in crocodile formation to Otane Primary School approximately half a mile away. This differentiation from other village children led to them being referred to as ‘home kids’. However, at school they realised that although they had shoes but no socks, not even in winter, their class-mates were often less well off. For example, Ron Bowles recalls that during the economic depression of the 1930s, he believes he was much better fed and clothed than his counterparts, who often to school came barefoot and ill clad.

Another factor that set St Hilda’s children apart was that they went home for a hot meal during the school lunch hour. Dinner was usually meat and vegetables plus a pudding. Generally, the children across the cohorts thought they were well fed, and that fruit and vegetables were usually part of their diet. Fruit was brought in by truck and stored in the larder at the end of the wash-house.

After school, they were met by the sub-Matron and marched back to St Hilda’s. Once they had done their chores, they could play in the paddock behind the

Robert Buckley and friend ride the donkey in the paddock behind St Hilda’s.
(Settlers Museum, Waipawa)
Two younger children outside St Hildas (Shirley Flay nee Donghi)

Miss Welford and children at Pourerere Beach (Shirley Flay nee Donghi)

St Hildas children at Pourerere Beach (Shirley Flay nee Donghi)
Miss Welford, (right), Shirley Donghi (front).
Five year old Shirley Donghi was placed at St Hilda’s in 1942 following the death of her mother. She lived at St Hilda’s until age 16. Her sister Margaret was adopted by a Waipawa couple (Shirley Flay nee Donghi)
Home until tea at 5pm. Games with hoops, hide and seek, hopscotch and cricket were among the favourites.

After tea there was homework or quiet reading, handwork such as darning or sewing, and then bed. The older children helped the little ones to bed at 6pm. While all the children brushed their teeth every day, baths were less frequent. For example, in the 1920s and 1930s Ron ‘took a bath once a week, with 2–3 boys in the bath at once. We had to clean the bath when finished.’

On Sunday the children and staff attended at least one church service and Sunday School. Most would be confirmed. Each had three pence to put in the church plate, thanks to the secondary school girls at Woodford House, the Anglican boarding school in Havelock North. For years, Woodford House pupils donated one shilling each per month to St Hilda’s, with the pattern becoming that each St Hilda’s child received sixpence per week: half for church and half for their money boxes. On Sunday afternoons, no games were allowed. A common Sunday activity in the 1940s was that children would make greeting cards, and each signed their first names in the cards to send to parishioners who donated food and clothing, or to send to them as Christmas cards. Occasionally, locals would call by at the weekend and take the children for rides in their cars, and sometimes some children would have visits from family members.

Tea at night was usually bread and dripping. Robert and Isabel tell of the children counting the pieces of bread as it came to the three tables and dividing it evenly so everyone had the same. For a treat they had Marmite mixed with the dripping, and on winter evenings they sometimes had hot milk made into cocoa. The younger children slept in the nursery and the older children in girls’ and boys’ dormitories. Once in bed, children were not allowed up until 6am the next morning.

Girls with kittens
(Shirley Flay nee Donghi)
The daily routine as outlined by Matron Edith Waller to the Children of the Diocese (1929)

Our life at St Hilda’s is very like that you live in your own homes. The children get up in the morning when the bell rings and they have their different duties to perform before breakfast. We have our hymns and prayers – each child chooses the morning hymn and prayer in turn – then breakfast, and after that there is the housework to do before school. All the children, except three wee ones, go to a school, which is nearby, so they are able to come home for lunch. After school we either go for a walk, or the children play in our grounds; sometimes I read to them, sometimes they have their mending to do. Then we have evening hymn and prayers, tea and baths and bed-time has come round once more. So, as I said, life here in Otane is a very happy one, and very like your life at home.\(^{39}\)

In between the routine there are glimpses of what the children remembered about their situation and the ways they were regarded by others. As with children from other institutions, St Hilda’s children were not cuddled or held by their carers. The impact of the lack of physical affection is described by Mary:

My sister Joyce sent me a photo of my real mother when I was about twelve years old. I cherish that photo so much. I used to take it to bed with me and talk to her when I was so unhappy....How I longed for a loving Mother. A mother to put her arms around me, and love me and kiss me, to tell me that she is my mother. How many times my heart ached for her and wanted to cry on her shoulders, knowing she was dead hurt me more and never knowing her would hurt me more and upset me.\(^{40}\)

This overwhelming loss is shared by many children who wrote or spoke of their childhoods. At St Hilda’s as at other institutions, no child could be singled out for affection, so therefore no child received it.

St Hilda’s was the only children’s home in the region to insist on the wearing of a compulsory uniform. This was a method of identifying the children and setting them apart at school and within the very small village. In the 1920s and 1930s, Ron says ‘they stood out. We were called “Homies”’.\(^{41}\) Of the decade later, Isabel
said: ‘The uniform meant that “you were a Homie”, you did not mix with other children, you did not go into shops – you were marked as different.’

There were other differences which were realised only when the children were older. For example, childhood toys and games were sparse – so much so that in the 1940s, when the Noble family visited St Hilda’s and the daughters brought dolls with them, fifteen year old Isabel was astounded. ‘The dolls were in a pram-I had not seen that before. It was not until I had my own children that I realised what the dolls and pram represented. ...The children did not play “mothers and fathers” type games as we did not know what that was.’

At all times, the children were trained to be quiet and to speak only when spoken to. Most of the children continued this into adulthood; they said they ‘do not speak much – we are quiet but good listeners.’

The bad times

The outcome of deviating from routine or standards of behaviour stands out in the minds of St Hilda’s children. Punishment was swiftly executed, and most agree that some were singled out for attention more than others. Both boys and girls were pulled by their ears and strapped or hit with supplejack sticks (as indeed were many children not raised within institutions). However, even with some concessions for the historical context, it appears that the child rearing practices adopted at St Hilda’s left a lot to be desired.

One long-lasting trauma for many was not being called by their real name. Instead, Miss Waller assigned each a nick-name, usually with a non-flattering association. For example, Mary was ‘Paleface’ or ‘Rake’; Isabel was ‘Bimbo’; Joan was ‘Pixie’; and Norman was ‘Bumble’. Other dehumanising practices were used on a regular basis, such as reminding the children that any punishment they received was so they ‘would suffer for the sins of your fathers’. As most did not know their fathers or what they had done to sin, all they could possibly make of this was that they were both bad and should be punished.

Bed-wetting was not surprising, given that the children were forbidden from getting out of bed once there. In the 1920s, Mary Hammond tells of children having to hold up their wet night clothes and recite to all the children present, ‘I’m a dirty baby, over and over again until told to stop’. By the 1940s, Isabel was tied into her bed each night because she would get out of bed and wet her pants rather than wet her bed. Her punishment was public humiliation through
‘having to stand in the corner of the dining room during breakfast and going without breakfast’. As she says, she did not eat breakfast very often! The boys were not often punished for bed-wetting, because they had devised a way of coping: their dormitory-style room had a hole in the floor.

However, both boys and girls were subjected to the same punishments. According to Mary, ‘one of the most cruel one ever had was having to drink three cups of salt in water followed by a cup with liquorice powder in it. I was very very ill on this...I drank gallons of water and I had dried bread for tea.’ Although Ron Bowles is adamant it did not happen in the early years of St Hilda’s, others recalled that ‘being forced to hang by your fingers from the top of the washhouse door’ was commonly used. ‘Once you could not hang on any longer, you dropped into a bathtub of cold water.’

An outsider view is provided by a woman who grew up in the house next door to St Hilda’s:
Punishments were severe and at times beyond belief. Punishment meted out to the boys was executed in the boys’ dorm [the room closest to our house]. The strap would be brought down on bare buttocks, with the Matron ordering in a loud voice to the crying boy to ‘stop that noise’. It finally got the better of my mother, who went to the high hedge and called ‘you are a beast of a woman’. The strapping was done elsewhere.50

Leaving St Hilda’s

The issue of transporting children to high school and providing uniforms and books was part of the decision of Home authorities as to whether a child went on to secondary school or not. Aptitude and ability were also considered. At St Hilda’s, the decision for a child to go to secondary school appeared to have been made by the matron, with an endorsement by the bishop. Prior to the provision of transport to the co-educational District High School in Waipawa, the common practice was for children to work for a year or so at St Hilda’s until they were old enough to be sent out to a position that had been found for them. This was the case for Ron Bowles, who attended Otane Primary School until he was 14 years of age. At that point he worked for twelve months as an assistant to Miss Waller in and around St Hilda’s. In 1935, aged fifteen, he was sent to Pourerere Station to work for the Nairn family as a farm hand.51 After twelve years at St Hilda’s, he moved to live on site at the farm and while there, joined the Territorials. When war was declared he volunteered for service, like ten other former St Hilda’s boys.52 As Miss Waller would report in 1940, one of ‘the lads walked five miles to the nearest post office and gave his name on the day war was declared. Most of these boys came to St Hilda’s as toddlers and none has been declared unfit.’53
According to Ron Bowles, at least fifteen former St Hilda’s boys served overseas with one, Norman Coley, being the only casualty. Ron served overseas with the Mounted Rifles First Hawke’s Bay Regiment in the Middle East, Tunisia and Italy, before spending eighteen months as a prisoner of war in Germany. Upon his return to New Zealand in 1945, he went back to St Hilda’s to see Miss Waller and stayed for a couple of nights. As he said, ‘I had nowhere else to go.’ Ron would work on farms in central Hawke’s Bay and later in the freezing works. He married and had a family. Like other St Hilda’s children, he attended the Otane Primary School jubilees, in his case the 90th, the 100th and the 125th.

As with other children’s homes, some parents turned up at St Hilda’s once the child had turned fifteen, and tried to take them back. In the main, this move was not altruistic, but rather because a young person of fifteen could be useful, working for them or earning money to contribute to the family economy. This happened to Monica; but as Robert and Isabel recalled, Monica held her ground and ‘refused to go’.

Once the district high school opened and a school bus service was introduced, those leaving primary school went there, usually for no longer than two years. At that point, they were sent to work positions, usually on farms. This was the
case for Bruce Logan, who lived at St Hilda’s from aged 4 to age 15. He was initially employed as a shepherd at Pourerere in 1947 but it was later arranged by a friend for him to take up a plumbing apprenticeship. He lived in Otane with his wife Colleen and their children and worked as a plumber and drain layer. Bruce remained in contact with many of his peers from St Hilda’s and hosted several of them at the time of the Otane School reunion in 1968.56 However, at a relatively young age Bruce became severely ill and died.57

Mary had two years at high school; when she left she took up a position on the staff at St Hilda’s, and remained for another six years. She was told she ‘had to pay back in work what I had done for me as a child…. Wages were not much, had to pay board, pay for my frocks to be made, work was long hours.’ Mary stayed on to work with Miss Welford after Miss Waller left, and ‘for a time on our own, but Miss Welford wasn’t as strong physically and the responsibilities started to tell on her’.58 After eighteen years at St Hilda’s, Mary left to work for the Ormond family for three years, prior to her marriage. Mary had a large family, divorced and remarried, and lived thereafter in the United States.

Similarly, Monica worked at St Hilda’s after leaving school. She ‘was manpow-
ered to help during World War II, and later worked at Watties Canneries, where she stayed for 37 years until her retirement. She did not marry. Looking back on her time at St Hilda’s, she says: ‘Life was harsh and difficult at times, but they did give me a home and it could have been much worse. I feel very deeply that not one natural family member has ever enquired after me.’

Isabel attended Waipawa District High School for three years, until she was seventeen, before being sent as domestic help on a farm. No one talked to her about her options, and as she commented, ‘I had no choice’. One of her lasting impressions of leaving St Hilda’s was the difference in living arrangements. She had not ever been inside a private home or slept in a room on her own, and found it ‘very traumatic’. She left her first position to take up work with the Nairn’s at Pourerere, the farm where she had spent many happy summer holidays. She thought the Nairn’s ‘marvellous’, and they supported her to apply for maternity nursing. St Hilda’s matron, Mary Welford, accompanied Isabel to the interview in Palmerston North, and at one point, the matron of the hospital checked with Mary Welford as to whether it was true that Isabel had no next of kin. This event is etched on Isabel’s memory; as a young adult, she was truly on her own. Although she was not accepted for nursing, Isabel subsequently worked at the maternity annex in Waipukurau prior to marrying and having a family. Reflecting back on this time, she recalled that because she had no experience of spending money or shopping while at St Hilda’s, ‘I had to learn how to do that – going shopping was alien. It took years before I could accept that I could actually go into a shop and browse.’

When Mary Welford took over as matron in 1944, she took a more liberal view of possible destinations for her charges. For example, she arranged via the Diocesan Secretary residential secondary schooling for several children at Te Aute College for Boys, at Hukarere College for Girls and at Napier Girls’ High School. She made similar arrangements for Robert Buckley, who had lived at St Hilda’s for eight years, along with his twin sister Robina. Robert had no inkling that he was about to leave until the very day he was dressed in a suit, provided with a range of clothes and told he was catching the bus so he could go to high school in Napier, where he would also live. He was so shocked by this that he does not recall much of his first weeks at Napier Boys’ High School. However, in later life he came to appreciate that Miss Welford was responsible for having him sponsored by the Anglican Church and Cliff and Margaret Williams, so that he could go to Napier Boys’ as a boarder. The Williams family took Robert home to Te Uri,
between Ormondville and Porangahau, with their son (and daughter) during the school holidays, where he was treated as a member of their family. Once a young person left St Hilda’s, the policy was that they could not return.

It was Cliff Williams who helped to influence what Robert did after completing his two years at high school, although again, he had no idea what was happening at the time. On his last day at school, he was told that he was going to leave school and the boarding house to go and live and work in Hastings. At the age of fifteen he was apprenticed to Stewart Greer Motors, where he trained as an automotive mechanic, before being appointed to an automotive position at Bird’s Eye, a local food processing plant. Robert saved his money and travelled overseas for three years before returning to his previous job, which he loved; he remained there for 30 years. Significantly, Robert kept in contact with Mary Welford via letters, and when he was in England he went to visit her at her home in Scarborough. Robert married and had a family of his own, but believes that his childhood impacted upon his parenting. ‘I did not know how to be a father,
as I spent my childhood being cared for by women only. I was not sure how to play with my children or just how to relate to them.\textsuperscript{62}

Overall, St Hilda’s children agree that the basis of the institution was discipline. Mary said ‘I certainly learnt right from wrong. I feel I have come out all right in spite of the hardships.’\textsuperscript{63} Robert believes that this emphasis ‘made me more self-reliant and determined’. Isabel agrees: ‘You had to be – you only had yourself.’\textsuperscript{64}

\begin{center}
\begin{quote}
Masterton

8 May 1944

Dear Mr Pilson,

It is nearly six month since I left the sheltering care of St Hildas Otane, and I write this my thoughts stray the nine years I spent with Miss Waller, and the rest of the family whom I can look upon as none other than brothers and sisters.

I feel compelled to write this letter to you and thank you for all that St Hilda’s has done for me personally.

From St Hilda’s I went to High School and was given a good education, and that all the other training I received at St Hilda’s has enabled me you face up to life confidently.

I am now working in an accounts office. My boss is working for the man owner so I am running the office for him… I keep the keys to the office and open it in the morning and lock up at night.

I love my work, and feel that I owe much to the Diocesan office, the church and above all for the overflowing amount of love that Miss Waller gave to us also for the help that Miss Welford was always willing to furnish.

Yours sincerely\textsuperscript{65}
\end{quote}
\end{center}
City Mission Boys’ Hostel  
Te Aro  
Wellington  
3 July 1945  

Dear Mr Pilson,  

I’m writing this letter to thank you for all you have done for me in the past fourteen and a bit years that I was at St Hilda’s. I could not be more grateful for you and everyone who has looked after me and I could not be in better health for it. I have been in Wellington a month now and working at Briscoe EW Mills and earning 30/- per week and 1/6 of that goes to my board and 10/- of the balance is being saved.....  

Yours sincerely

Managing St Hilda's  

St Hilda’s in Otane and Abbotsford at Waipawa were operated in tandem by the Anglican Diocese of Waiapu for over twenty years. Between 1919 and 1928, the Bishop of Waiapu had the oversight of St Hilda’s, including staff appointments, while the Matron undertook most of the administration and all matters relating to the running of the Home. During this period, the Bishop conducted inspections from time to time as did the Department of Health who focussed on matters of building sanitation and the children’s general health status.

State accountability for the overall care and wellbeing of children raised in institutions such as St Hilda’s did not occur until after the passing of the Child Welfare Act in 1925. The state had been early to favour foster homes in which children might be raised within a nuclear family and foster parents paid a weekly sum to do so. However, the state had not reckoned on the tenacity of most denominations to run their own Homes. Therefore, under the Child Welfare Act and its subsequent Amendments all operators of children’s homes were obliged to register and to comply with state regulations. This included from 1927, the opening up of Homes to annual inspections by state social workers. Any breaches of conditions or lapses in standards were referred back to that institution’s designated authority who was required to address the issue and report back to the Minister. Not doing so resulted in de-registration of the Home.
Deserted mother of two children applying to Secretary Pilson in 1932

I am living in my grandfather’s house and it is impossible for me to get a living and to get enough food for the children. Can you take them for about 2 years as I will be getting married during that time and then will be able to take them again. I do not like to part with my children but I cannot go on like this, as I can’t keep enough food in the house for them and much less clothes and cannot get a living while I have children in my care.

For St Hilda’s, (as indeed for St Mary’s and Abbotsford Homes) it was the Diocesan Secretary who had overall authority and management responsibility for St Hilda’s, including finance, appointments and buildings from 1928. Daily operational matters were delegated to the Matron who reported directly to the Secretary. In this way, it was the Diocesan Secretary who had legal responsibility for the children including admissions and releases. Parents/guardians signed a contract with the Secretary whereby children were given over to the care of the Church, usually until they were fifteen and later, sixteen years of age. The form included an indication of the annual income of the parent/guardian and a signed promise they would pay a weekly fee of five shillings per week per child.

The Anglican Diocese of Waiapu was indeed fortunate to have the dedicated service of a single secretary across the years that St Hilda’s was state registered. Namely, Mr R. E. H. Pilson between 1928 and 1956. A reading of his correspondence and reports point to his ability to combine business acumen with humanitarian concern for the children for whom he was responsible. On the one hand he had to keep St Hilda’s afloat whilst also interacting with parent/s and eventually, having finding employment for those leaving the Home. Neither was he an absentee administrator based in the Diocesan Napier office. He visited his three Diocesan run Homes and was known to the children. His correspondence indicates he maintained good relationships with the Matrons despite them having to lobby him on almost a weekly basis. This was because at the Otane end, feeding up to 30 children and several staff three times a day was a constant struggle.

Mr Pilson was more aware than most of the daily challenges associated with keeping St Hilda’s functioning as he was also responsible for all accounting
APPLICATION FORM

I hereby apply for admission of _child_ into _Home_, a children’s Home registered under Part I. of “The Child Welfare Amendment Act, 1927,” of which the controlling authority is “The Waipau Board of Diocesan Trustees (Incorporated)” (hereinafter called “the Board”), AND I AGREE that the said child shall henceforth be and remain under the custody and control of the Manager of the said Home until he, she or they shall have attained the age of ______ years, AND I AGREE to pay to the said Board for the maintenance of the said child at the following rates namely: The amounts to be paid in respect of each child shall be ______ weekly payable in advance, the first payment to be made on the ______ day of ______ 19__.

Date of Application: ______ Signature: ______
Date of Admission: ______

PARTICULARS

NAME OF CHILD: (Pronounce to be given first) Christian Names to follow

Full Names of Parents and Guardians: ______
Name of Members of Family, Brothers and Sisters: ______

Address of Parents and Guardians: ______
Full Names of Grand Parents and other near Relatives: (If Any): ______

Income of Parents and Guardians: ______
Occupation: ______

Job Title: ______
matters associated with the Diocesan Homes. He was required to balance the books. For example, there had to be enough money in the account to pay for food, to clothe the children, to buy their schoolbooks, to pay the staff and to sort out drainage, leaks and heating issues on an ageing building. His was a balancing act between collecting in as much money as possible from parent fees or government welfare benefits and actively seeking donations from parishioners, individuals and community organisations.

It was the task of the Diocesan Secretary to hold parents to account to ensure fees were paid each month. In some cases, such as where the mother ran away from St Mary’s leaving no forwarding address, no monies were ever forthcoming to cover costs. Others, particularly single women earning low domestic help wages promised to pay but found they just could not do so on a regular basis. Further, as they explained to the Secretary, upon marriage they either chose not to tell their husband about their ex-nuptial child or if they did, could not persuade him to pay the weekly St Hilda’s fees for a child that was not his own. Therefore, the Diocesan Secretary had a very difficult job tracing and then cajoling many into paying fees. He was more successful however, with widowers who placed their children at St Hilda’s, as in the main, they could pay fees from a regular income. But all in all ledgers indicate it was not ever enough to cover costs.

But Mr Pilson was resolute in collecting all possible fees from parents and a reading of his correspondence indicates that against all odds, he was remarkably successful. This was because he had strong networks and was well informed. Even if it took months he would eventually trace and make contact with a recalcitrant parent and offer a way to pay off what was owed. Mr Pilson appeared to know just when a genuine case of hardship was the reasons for non-payment of fees and when a parent was deliberately avoiding doing so. He was more sympathetic towards parents who took up his invitation to meet with him at his Napier office to offer explanations for late payments. For example, one young single mother met and spoke with the Secretary when she was between domestic service positions in 1936. She had paid the full fees over many years from her meagre earnings but had got behind in her payments and wanted to make good. Secretary Pilson arranged for her to pay off the money in instalments at a rate she might possibly meet. She did so.

He also had good relationships with the Hastings Unemployment Bureau who upon knowing of a father registered with the agency and whose children were
in the care of the Diocese, would alert Mr Pilson. Having regular money orders come through into the Diocese coffers was particularly valued at the time of the economic depression during the 1930s when jobs were scarce and wages low. Indeed, some parents had to turn to the Church to take their children into care during these years because circumstances were so dire that they literally could not afford to keep them.

Dishonest and feckless parents were given plenty of leeway to pay off fees owed to the Diocese. Finally, however Mr Pilson had the ultimate authority. As he told a father owing 21 pounds in 1932, ‘you promised to make these payments regularly and it was on this understanding that the child was admitted. We endeavour to assist as much as possible but owing to present financial conditions we cannot go any further. Fees must be paid if the child is to remain at the Home’. The patience of the good Secretary was pushed to the limit in 1937. A deserted mother had two children admitted to St Hilda’s ten years earlier but was not eligible for the deserted wives pension until 1937 by which time there was one child remaining in the Home. In between times she got what work she could on a number of different farms and paid fees intermittently. According to Mr Pilson she owed 125 pounds and in a letter to her he suggested a way in which she could off this sum in regular amounts. She had obviously forgotten that she had passed legal responsibility to the Diocese for the child until he was 16 years of age because she replied:

*I will take him away – he has not been happy for some time. I have made arrangements for him to stay in Hastings. I am awfully sorry that I am in arrears with the payment but as soon as the children are earning enough to keep themselves I hope to pay it all, I am very grateful for all the Diocese have done for the children.*

From time to time, parents requested to have their children returned to them because of changed circumstances. On such occasions the new home, often with a grandparent or new step-parent, was visited by the child welfare social worker to check that the environment was satisfactory prior to release. If this proved to be the case, Mr Pilson usually decided to cut the losses, especially if there was more than one child. This was the in 1934 when the mother of two St Hilda’s children wrote saying:

*I am sorry I have not been able to pay for my children. This last 6 months I have not been well enough to work and my mother has*
asked me to go and live with her. I would like to have my children with me if I may have them. My mother is quite prepared to keep me and my two children.\textsuperscript{70}

The children were duly released and in the first year after they left St Hilda’s the Secretary was obviously pleasantly surprised that the grandmother tried to make good by paying the Diocese a small amount towards their keep.

The unpredictable income from parent fees coupled with the realities of running a Home such as St Hilda’s meant that the Diocesan Secretary was constantly seeking donations to keep the Home going.

St Hilda’s was therefore dependent upon the goodwill of parishioners and members of the local community to donate money, goods and services to keep it functioning. That so many did so over so many years is testimony to the generosity of a great number of local citizens. St Hilda’s annual reports indicate regular donations across the years included the following:

- The parishioners of St James, Otane who donated money and clothes
- Free professional services provided by for example, Dr T.C. Norris, Dr Allan, Dr Janet Morgan, Dr Maddison, Dr Anderson, Dr Walker and Dentist Mr C.E.T. Woods
- The St John Dorcas Guild, Napier & Kaiti Ladies Guild, Gisborne who provided clothes and raised funds
- The Mothers’ Unions for example, Pukehou; St Peter’s, Dannevirke and Waipukurau who provided clothes, bottled fruit and ran gala days to raise funds
- Parishioners of churches throughout the region who raised funds
- Country Women’s Institute branches and members who raised funds and provided clothing
- Individuals who gave fruit, vegetables, meat, baking and other food
- The Otane Gun Club who raised funds and donated gifts for the children
- The Nairn family of Pourerere who provided summer camps based at shearing quarters for up to six weeks at a time for over 20 years.
• Service Clubs such as the Waipukurau Lions, Waipawa Rotary Club, Waipukurau Rotary Club and The Waipawa Fire Brigade who provided presents for the children at Christmas as well as picnics and trips to Hastings

• The Rathbone family of Waipawa whose Rathbone Bursary Trust paid fees to enable some St Hilda’s children to attend for example, Te Aute College, Hukarere College and Napier Boy’s High School

**Conclusion**

In the end however, there was not enough money to pay for the extensive repairs needed at St Hilda’s in 1952 and led the church to take the unusual decision to construct a new building for St Hilda’s on the Abbotsford site in Waipawa. The new St Hilda’s opened in February 1953, under the leadership of Abbotsford’s matron, Miss Johnston, who ran both homes. The critics, particularly the district Child Welfare officer of the time, were proved right. The enterprise became ‘a monument to bad planning’; it was simply ‘not a realistic assessment’ having two children’s homes with the same purpose on the same site, at a time when the numbers of children requiring care were low. In addition, the shift occurred
at a time when the state was withdrawing its capitation subsidy for institutions and supporting smaller family-style homes instead. St Hilda’s closed in 1958.

**Postscript**

The original St Hilda’s building on the corner of Higginson Street and Henderson Street, Otane was sold by the Church and in 2013 remains a private residence.

The ‘new’ St Hilda’s building at Abbotsford was used by Church social services for some years before being sub-divided from the larger Abbotsford property. In 2013 it houses the Waipawa Te Kohanga Reo.

**Notes**

6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. *Waiapu Church Gazette*, Volume IX, Issue 21, 1 March 1919, p.172. By 1922, it was reported that St Hilda’s had received about 2,000 pounds in various grants and legacies.
12. Correspondence from Marsha Donaldson to the Hawke’s Bay Genealogy Committee, 12 May 1991. (Marsha’s father was Hall Cain, 1913–1973). Marsha was given Miss Waller’s photo album by Monica Johnson, who had been given it by Miss Waller. Marsha donated the album to the Hawke’s Bay Museum and Art Gallery in December 1993.
14. According to those raised at St Hilda’s, the majority of other children were illegitimate.
15. Interview with Ron Bowles at his home at Westshore, 17 March 2010.
16. Interview with Isabel Fafeita at Robert Buckley’s home, Napier, 4 June 2010.
17. Interview with Isabel Fafeita.
18. ‘The Life of Mary Elizabeth Hammond Iverson (Eagle)’, Robert Buckley MS Collection, p.1. Written by Mary’s daughter ( with quotations inserted from Monica and Ruth, who were also at St Hilda’s).

Interview with Robert Buckley at his home, Napier. 4 June 2010.


*Waiapu Church Gazette*, Volume XII, Issue 10, 1 April 1922, p.261.

Interview with Ron Bowles.

Ibid.


Interview with Ron Bowles.


Interview with Robert Buckley.


Interview with Ron Bowles.

‘The Life of Mary Elizabeth Hammond Iverson (Eagle)’, p.13.

Interview with Ron Bowles.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Interview with Isabel Fafeita; Interview with Robert Buckley.

*Waiapu Church Gazette*, Volume XXI, Issue 1. 1 July 1929.

‘The Life of Mary Elizabeth Hammond Iverson (Eagle)’, p.6.

Interview with Ron Bowles.

Interview with Isabel Fafeita.

Ibid.

Interview with Isabel Fafeita; Interview with Robert Buckley.

‘The Life of Mary Elizabeth Hammond Iverson (Eagle)’, p.3.

Interview with Isabel Fafeita.

Interview with Robert Buckley.

‘The Life of Mary Elizabeth Hammond Iverson (Eagle)’, p.3.

Interview with Isabel Fafeita; Interview with Robert Buckley.

‘Growing up in Otane in the 1920s and 1930s’, Robert Buckley MS Collection.
Interview with Ron Bowles.

Ibid.


Correspondence, Secretary Pilson to Ron Bowles, 21 August 1942. Archives of the Diocese of Waiapu.

Interview with Ron Bowles.

Photographs of former St Hilda’s children (mid 1930s to mid-1940s) taken at the time of the Otane School reunion in 1968 hang in the St James Anglican Church, Otane alongside photographs taken of them during their childhood in 1946. This framed montage was prepared and presented by Colleen Logan (widow of Bruce Logan). Bruce lived at St Hilda’s from 1932 to 1947.

Interview with Colleen Walker (formerly Logan), at her home, Hastings, 26 April 2012.


Interview with Isabel Fafeita.

Interview with Isabel Fafeita; Interview with Robert Buckley.

Interview with Robert Buckley.


Interview with Isabel Fafeita; Interview with Robert Buckley.

Correspondence, former girl from St Hilda’s to Secretary Pilson, 8 May 1944. Diocese of Waiapu Archives, Napier.

Correspondence, former boy from St Hilda’s to Secretary Pilson, 3 July 1945. Diocese of Waiapu Archives, Napier.

Correspondence to Secretary Pilson, 1932. Diocese of Waiapu Archives, Napier.

Correspondence, Secretary Pilson to father of St Hilda’s child, 24 November 1932. Diocese of Waiapu Archives, Napier.

Correspondence, Parent to Secretary Pilson, April 1937. Diocese of Waiapu Archives, Napier.

Ibid.


At the same time as reporting the plans to open a children’s home in Otane in 1919, the Bishop of Waiapu announced that the church intended to operate not just one home, but two. This was because ‘the excellent management of the Home in Waipawa attracted the sympathy of hosts of friends, and much disappointment was felt when the children were removed to Otane’. Consequently, brothers H.M. and W.H. Rathbone of Waipawa had offered, as a gift to the Anglican Church, six acres of land on Abbotsford Road, on condition that a children’s home be built on it. In signalling that money would also need to be raised immediately, so that a new building could commence, the Bishop set out his argument for having small homes (in this case two small homes), rather than one large institution:

No one with slightest knowledge of pedagogy or child psychology would dream of preferring large institutions to small homes. The mother love which is so necessary to the development of character and of which the unfortunate orphan has been deprived must be somehow supplied— and it can be supplied only by a matron kind and motherly who can and will study the characteristics of each child and mould its separate character. To do this the personal relationship must be intimate and deep and no matron can mother, like this, more than twenty children.

It took another seven years to raise the necessary funds and build the children’s home on the Abbotsford Road site. Funding was boosted by the generous gift of 14,000 pounds from the estate of Mrs Lissie Rathbone, who determined that the building would be called The Abbotsford Home. A further grant of 7,000 pounds was made by the Rathbone Trust in 1926, the income devoted to the general
annual maintenance of the Home. Abbotsford Home finally opened in February 1926. The first permanent matron was Deaconess Elsie Smith (1926-1928). She was followed by Miss Alice Jones (1928-1937); Mrs L. Walker (1937-1939); Mrs L. E. Williams (1939-1941); Miss L.E. Johnston (1941-1961); Fergus and Grace Fleming (1963-1971) and Mr and Mrs S. G. Reddy (1971-1986).

### Key facts about Abbotsford (1926-1986)
- Approximately 445 children (both boys’ and girls’) lived there
- More likely to admit two children or more from one family
- Prior to the 1950s more children were admitted by the father following the death of the mother
- After the 1950s more children were admitted following separation/divorce of parents
- More children were older than 4 years of age when admitted

When it opened in February 1926, the Abbotsford Home looked nothing like a ‘small home'. Indeed, its architecture and interior design set it apart from most other children’s homes in New Zealand. Not only was the building purpose built, in a modern architectural style, with its very own chapel and library, but the children who lived at Abbotsford were made to feel they were part of the Waipawa community. This was connected with its Anglican Church origins, its location in St Peter’s parish, the Rathbone family on whose land the home was built, and the philosophy of particular matrons. The Rathbone’s and other neighbours, for example, held regular parties for the children. There were also other integration opportunities available in the town of Waipawa, such as those reported by the Child Welfare officer inspecting the home in 1949: ‘The children play an unrestricted and successful part in local activities. For example, guides, scouts, choir, music – there are five learning piano at present and four girls attend the amateur dramatic society.’

The children got to know the parishioners and their families and were welcome in their homes. For example, in the early 1940s George Morris (and others) could stay the weekend at friends’ houses. The children were invited to and
‘Strong values’: Abbotsford Home, Waipawa (1926–1986)

Abbotsford founders, Lissie (with Elva) Rathbone, William (right) and son Herbert (left).
(Settlers Museum, Waipawa)

Abbotsford Foundation Stone 1924.
(Settlers Museum, Waipawa)
Abbotsford children 1928-1937.
(Diocese of Waiapu Archives)
participated in all major town events. Even when they left Abbotsford as young adults, they knew they were always welcome. For example, they went back for evening meals or to stay during their holidays. This open door policy was singled out for mention by the Child Welfare officer inspecting Abbotsford in 1950: ‘Past inmates are free to return on holiday at any time (there is a steady flow of inmates returning for a day or two) with good aftercare. Past inmates often coming home for weekends.’

Some of the young women even got married from Abbotsford and had their receptions there. For example, Cathy Hamilton and Vicky Lewis both worked at Abbotsford for a time after leaving school, and elected to get married at St Peter’s, the local Anglican church. All these connections were encouraged through the comparatively liberal philosophy of long-serving matron Miss L. Johnston, or Miss Johnny as she was known to the children.
Who were the children?

As at St Hilda’s, children were either sent to Abbotsford from St Mary’s at age four, or came as older children when a parent/parents could not look after them for a variety of reasons. For example, George Morris, the eldest of six children (he had three sisters and two brothers) was nine years old when his mother, Heni Materoa, died in February 1937. The family lived at Manutuke, south of Gisborne. This is where his mother’s marae was located and where she had grown up. George’s father was Pakeha. George’s mother played the piano and was a weaver. The children attended Sunday School at the Manutuke Anglican Church, where there was a Māori Mission attached. Mrs Price and Miss Newman worked at the Mission House. When Mrs Morris died (and was buried at Manutuke), Mr Morris and the children continued living on their seven acre property and milking their cows. The family income came mainly from the monthly cream cheque.

Because Mr Morris needed to be away from home to take on extra paid work, the six Morris children were often left to their own devices for long periods of time. It is likely that the Church intervened by bringing the family’s situation to the attention of the Mission House staff. In any case, on 29 June 1940, George, aged twelve, was picked up from home by Canon Williams and driven to Napier, where he stayed overnight at St Mary’s Home in Finnis Lane. The next day, George was driven to Abbotsford, his new home.

The other children remained at home in Manutuke until the next year (1941). At that time, the two older sisters, Anne and Jane, were sent to the Heni Materoa Home in Gisborne (named after Lady Carroll). The youngest sister went to live with her aunt (their father’s sister) in Manutuke. George’s two brothers, Jack and Charlie, joined George at Abbotsford.

Later, their father sold the Manutuke property, went to live with his cousin in Hastings, and then worked for the Harding family at Poukawa. He would visit the boys at Abbotsford, staying at the hotel in Waipawa for about a week once or twice a year; he would help out with chores around Abbotsford and have his dinner there. Miss Johnny was welcoming and pleased to see him. George believes it is likely that his father made some financial contribution to Abbotsford for the boys’ upkeep. The brothers and the sisters retained contact all their adult lives, and George returns to the marae at Manutuke from time to time.11

While George and his brothers had contact with their father during their child-

90
hood years at Abbotsford, George knew that some of the other children who were there at the same time did not know who they were. There was also June Gunn and her sister, whose parents had been killed in a buggy accident on the road between Waipawa and Waipukurau. Although the circumstances were not clear, George well remembers the day when the entire Waugh family of children arrived in a taxi all the way from Matata (Bay of Plenty). There were seven of them: two boys and five girls.12

Another entire family of children arrived at Abbotsford in October 1949. Up until that time, the five Rees children had lived in Wairoa, where the eldest, Margaret, aged ten, had tried to cook meals and take responsibility for the others after their mother’s death the previous year. The two younger children, Betty, then aged seven, and Jill, four, knew that their father, a rabbiter/truck driver, spent much time at the local hotels. They think it likely that their aunt, who also lived in Wairoa, intervened because there were concerns about the children’s wellbeing. On 4 October 1949, both the father and the aunt drove the children ‘to Abbotsford’. The children had little understanding of what that meant; Betty remembers the car leaving, and wondering when they were coming back. ‘I was lost for years’, she said, and ‘felt sorry for myself- there was always something missing’ Jill, the youngest, admits she ‘had a chip on her shoulder’ because of her family situation. It was particularly hard seeing other children going home with their parents after school or after church. ‘All I wanted’, she said, ‘was a mummy and daddy and a home’.13

The Rees children saw their father for a couple of days each year, during school holiday visits to their grandmother’s house in Auckland, where their father had moved after placing the children at Abbotsford, and also when he visited them at Abbotsford. Later, he would pay for their respective weddings and ‘gave them away on the day’. Once they had their own families, their father wanted to live part of the year with each of them, but this did not work out. Both Betty and Jill attended their father’s funeral.

**Childhood at Abbotsford**

Although George, who was twelve, understood why he was being sent to Abbotsford, it was nevertheless a big shock. He spent the first weeks with his head under the blankets crying, because he was so homesick. The thing he hated most was that when he went to Abbotsford, there was already another child with the
name ‘George’, so George Morris was called by his second name, Edward.

Mrs Williams was the Matron at Abbotsford when George arrived. On holiday at coastal Aramoana, one of the things she got the boys to do was collect enough supplejack to last the year. These were the sticks she used for corporal punishment. Mrs Williams was recalled (as a stern lady, but good) and Mrs Absolum (who lived in the historic house by the Te Aute hotel). Mrs Absolum would play the gramophone to the children, and George remembers a song, ‘The Stein’. At one point Mrs Williams was matron, with Miss Johnston as sub-matron. In George’s final year, Miss Johnston was matron, and he thought ‘she was marvellous... a wonderful woman. She was a real mother and cared for us.’

In George’s autograph book, she wrote: ‘Life is one darn thing after another’ – he has always remembered that.

The Rees sisters also acknowledged the quality of caring and the feeling of security they received from ‘Miss Johnny’. From them, insights can be gleaned into the character of this woman, whose influence would impact upon them for the
'Strong values': Abbotsford Home, Waipawa (1926-1986)

Abbotsford children 1928-1937.  
(Diocese of Waiapu Archives)
rest of their lives. Although they were ‘not cuddled or given any affection’,\textsuperscript{16} one of their strongest memories is associated with Miss Johnny’s support for the children taking part in outside activities. For Betty, these were usually sports-related. She was never stopped from going to practices, tournaments or trips away; Miss Johnny would ‘turn up for school break-ups and be very proud of Betty and her success in sport’. When the children returned from any outside activity, ‘we had to report to Miss Johnny when we got back. She would ask how you got on.’\textsuperscript{17}

A further element of caring was noted by the Abbotsford children when former residents came back to stay for weekends and holidays, and were warmly welcomed by Miss Johnny. To her, Abbotsford was their home. The Rees sisters, like George before them, remember the weddings of girls such as Janet and Lois. ‘They would get dressed there, have photos taken and leave for the church from Abbotsford.’\textsuperscript{18}

Miss Johnny would no doubt be pleased that the children had strong recollections of her influence in relation to religious instruction, leading to their knowledge of services, festivals, hymns and prayers. Another was her ‘strong values’ associated with respect, courtesy and good manners. To this day, they recall having to stand up when adults entered the room; stand back and let adults go through the door; stand up for the playing of the national anthem when listening to the radio in the evening; and learn how to use butter knives and jam spoons. George put it like this: ‘There was no talking at the table and table manners were stressed. We were taught respect for elders, such as standing up when an adult came into the room. We were taught how to behave and how to obey rules. It was difficult at the start but you got used to it.’\textsuperscript{19}

Miss Johnny also impressed her young charges with her great garden. Admittedly she had help to cultivate the large property, but she ‘took care of the roses and pansies and always had flowers in vases in the rooms’. She also modelled
growing vegetables and keeping hens and cows. The children in Betty and Jill’s
time had their own vegetable plots, and took part in the annual Rotary Club
best garden competition. They also remember Miss Johnny preserving eggs and
keeping vegetables in sawdust for the winter months.

Reflecting on their Abbotsford childhood as a whole, Betty and Jill said: ‘How
spoilt we were – we had lots of things the local children did not – we were well
dressed, well fed and well looked after.’

The good times

It was the tradition for Abbotsford children and staff to go out to Aramoana
Station on the coast for a few weeks after Christmas. Like the St Hilda’s children
who went to neighbouring Pourerere Station, the children stayed in the shearers’
quarters.

At Aramoana, the McHardy family hosted Abbotsford children and staff for
many years. The children loved these holidays and became fond of their hosts.
When Mr Forbes McHardy was killed in action in Italy in 1945, Abbotsford was
devastated. Matron Johnston placed on record her gratitude to him and to
Mrs McHardy, explaining that through his generosity, the children had enjoyed
wonderful holidays by the sea:

There everything that can be done has been done for us. Milk and
meat all supplied free, and all our daily wants attended to. ...Always
at the end of our holiday Mr and Mrs McHardy have treated the
children to a party at their homestead, and it was after that party
two years ago that we last saw Mr McHardy, when he said good-bye
to us all so light-heartedly that neither he nor we knew it would be
the last farewell.

However, during the war there were ‘black outs’ in place and Abbotsford children
and staff went to stay at Hukarere, Napier, for the summer holidays. During one
visit there was an outbreak of diphtheria, and most of the senior girls became
ill. George recalls that he and two others were responsible for the washing – and
on one occasion, all the sheets came out pink, as the dye had run in a girl’s
nightie. While at Hukarere, the children went out on trips of all sorts, and George
remembers that ‘these were good times’.

The Aramoana holidays resumed after the war, as Betty and Jill recall:
After Christmas, Cassidy’s of Waipukurau would bring two trucks with which to transport food, bedding, mattresses to go to McHardy’s at Aramoana for several weeks of the summer holidays. We were free to roam the station – helped with the sheep dipping etc. We loved it. Every year the McHardys hosted a party for us at the house and we were given the freedom of the house. One day each year the St Hilda’s children (who were hosted at Pourerere Station just around the coast) would come to visit.24

Christmas time was special and recalled with pleasure by former residents. The Rathbone family gave each child two shillings before Christmas, and every Christmas Eve they went to town to spend their money. There was always a decorated Christmas tree. The children had stockings to hang up by the fireplace. In the morning they would be filled with presents wrapped in brown paper and tied with string. George is still amazed how many presents there were for each child. Later, he asked his father where the presents would have come from; his father thought it was from the RSA, which was indeed the case. Others contributed also, with gifts of cake, fruit, books and cash donations. In 1945, Matron Johnston especially thanked ‘Mrs S. Wilder, of Wallingford, who is so very kind and generous to us all at Christmas time’.25

The child welfare report in 1951 confirmed the extent of community generosity, including the annual picnic arranged by the Waipukurau Rotary Club.26 The club also put on a fireworks display for the children.

Betty and Jill remember Christmas:

White’s Buses took us to Hastings to do Christmas shopping with money from our money boxes (where we had fish and chips and went to the movies). On Christmas Eve there was the tradition of having a midnight feast. Christmas Day was magic. There were gifts – we each got a large Christmas stocking filled with presents. On Christmas afternoon the Waipawa Fire Brigade brought the fire engine
with parcels for us, accompanied by the Brass Band, who played Christmas Carols.²⁷

School dances and community fancy dress balls were other highlights recalled by the Rees sisters. All the children would be dressed in costumes which were kept in a cupboard in the hallway, with a range of outfits for various ages and sizes.

There were also trips away, such as those arranged by the Waipawa Rotary Club for the older children to spend a weekend in Hastings, where they were billeted. On such trips Betty and Jill remember visiting Wattie’s, and Betty recalls going to movies, such as The Student Prince.²⁸

The routine times

The earliest description of daily routines at Abbotsford dates from 1929:

If any father or mother can picture a family of thirty they have a fair conception of the worry of the staff. It is largely a question of discipline, supervising other children’s work, and the hundred and one worries of a large home. Twenty-five children to get ready for school every morning, hair brushed, nails cleaned, school bags ready, twenty-five hats to find, twenty-five children to get back from school without loitering, boots to dry, sox to dry, and twenty-five coats to dry in the wet weather. As the Home is a quarter of an hour’s walk from the school naturally the work is much increased in the winter time....At each meal there are manners to watch, each child’s job is done properly, knives not put in mouths, Bob must pass the bread to Mary and Mary must spread the dripping for Jean, Ian is eating too much, Betty is not eating enough, is she sickening for something?

After meals they must clear the tables, sweep up the crumbs, wash the dishes, go to prayers, get the home work out as the case may be. Then their teeth have to be watched – one is starting a cold, another has swollen glands – is she getting mumps? A boy has fallen and sprained his ankle – half of them have chilblains, one has burst this morning and needs dressing.²⁹

George was in residence when Miss Johnston took over as Matron. ‘So many things changed’, he said, ‘that is, changed for the better.’ For him, a major change
Who Cared? Childhoods within Hawke's Bay Orphanages and Children's Homes 1892-1988

Abbotsford children at Aramoana 1928-1937.
(Dioceae of Waiapu Archives)
to the daily routine was the re-scheduling of the main meal. Prior to Miss Johnston taking charge, the children walked for quarter of an hour down the hill to school and then at lunchtime had to run back for dinner, which they had to eat quickly before running back to school. George recalls that in winter, ‘there was often dumpling stew for dinner – it was very hot and hard to eat quickly.’\textsuperscript{30} After Miss Johnny took over as matron, the primary and district high school pupils took a packed lunch to school every day.

When the Child Welfare officer visited, he was required to report on the daily menu. In 1946, he wrote that ‘the children have three meals per day – cereal, bread and butter, honey, jam, milk-cocoa for breakfast. Lunch is provided at school; Dinner – meat, 2 vegetables, potatoes, fruit and milk puddings plus cocoa when children come home from school in winter and soft drinks in summer.’\textsuperscript{31} Food loomed large in the lives of children at Abbotsford. Betty and Jill remember that ‘for breakfast there was always porridge – bread and dripping – sometimes marmalade with a little piece of butter.’ After school, when they arrived back at Abbotsford, there would be a hot drink in the winter and a rock bun.\textsuperscript{32}

As the girls grew older, they were expected to help cook and serve the food.
As the only older girl at Abbotsford in 1957, this job fell increasingly to Betty, since there were few staff remaining at that time. She would serve the entire meal, ‘larger portions for the bigger children and smaller portions for the smaller children’.\(^{33}\) After dinner and chores, the children would gather in the sitting room with a fire in the winter. ‘We would do homework at the tables, knit, and listen to the radio, such as “It’s in the Bag” and “Dad and Dave”.’\(^{34}\)

The physical layout and daily routine of Abbotsford are etched on the memories of the children some 50 or 60 years later. For example, they describe in extraordinary detail the rooms, the furnishings, the grounds, the timetable and the food.

\textit{From the front door – middle was reception and the office and off to the right was the chapel. On the left side was the study and the girls’ dormitory. The big hall went down the middle and the dining room was at the end. The Library was off the dining room. On the other side there was a porch (boys’ end). They had their own dormitory and bathroom (only 1 toilet) and own entrance. Miss Johnny’s room was next to the boys’ dormitory. The girls’ dormitory had twelve beds – with six beds down each side – with a room off it for three girls (usually for the older girls) although Betty was not ever in there, even as an older girl. There were high windows that were kept open all year round. The girls’ bathroom had seven basins, two baths and four toilets. Upstairs there were two bedrooms for staff.}\(^{35}\)

When George was at Abbotsford, there were over 30 children, with thirteen boys in the boys’ dorm and twenty in the girls’. They had chores that changed every week. The boys took turns to milk the three or four cows. George and Eric Moore took week about on cows and dishes duty. Routines were similar in 1949, when the Child Welfare officer reported that: ‘Those over seven do bed making, housework, lawns, fowls, cows, kindling but not more than 2 hours daily.’\(^{36}\)

This was the year the Rees children arrived at Abbotsford. Betty and Jill recall that life was lived by the bell, hand-rung down the hallway, to signal meals and morning and afternoon tea. Grace was said before and after all meals. In their time, all children completed daily chores on a two-weekly roster. The girls would have duties assigned in the kitchen, dormitory, bathrooms, dishes and dining room. The boys would chop wood, bring in the coke for the boiler fire, and clean their bathroom, the yard and their outside toilet. Boys also took turns on dining room and dishes duty. Both remember a significant event: the introduction of
toilet paper at Abbotsford. Before, they used pieces of cut up newsprint, hanging from a hook. Each Saturday morning a mini-spring clean took place, with polishing of floors, brass door handles and the silver. Once chores were checked by staff, children would leave for school sporting events, and each Saturday all the children would walk to the Waipawa picture theatre to go the movies. Such routines were audited by Child Welfare as in 1947 when it was reported: ‘The tone of this home is that of a large and happy family, each works for the good of all.’

Chores took second place to religion. As the Bishop put it in 1924:

*The whole idea of our Church Homes is to train children to realise that Religion is the centre of their lives. They must be taught the holiness of God’s House, they must learn to regard it as a sanctuary, a place of refuge for prayer when in sorrow or trouble or joy. A common dormitory is not a suitable place of retirement for prayer.*

In Otane, the village church was next door to St Hilda’s, enabling easy access, but the parish church in Waipawa was more than a mile away from Abbotsford. This meant that for very young children, it was ‘quite impossible for them to attend Divine Service there in wet cold weather, and, generally, they will be too young to attend profitably the ordinary services’. The chapel at Abbotsford meant that morning and evening services could be held with all children present each day. Explaining their religious upbringing to the Diocese, the Editor of the Waiapu Church Gazette wrote in 1929:

*The Vicar of Waipawa is Chaplain and as the Matron takes the place of mother to the motherless, so he tries to take the place of father to the fatherless. The children are taught to go to the parish Church and Sunday School, to say their prayers and attend family prayers. Besides this the Chaplain goes up once a week, takes prayers and senior instruction class and has tea with the children. Saints’ Days are observed by Holy Communion at 7am in the little Chapel after which the Chaplain is entertained at breakfast by the Matron and family.*

For church and for school, a range of clothes was required. These ‘were kept in a large cupboard in the hallway next to the ironing and sewing room – all arranged by “boys” and “girls” and size, and all donated’. Betty and Jill remember that ‘some of the church ladies sewed for us/provided clothes’. Jill remembers ‘having
a blue velvet dress with smocking for best as a young girl and a tartan skirt. We always had shoes and socks. We were always very well dressed.  

The matron and the Abbotsford family were ‘hosted’ by the Waipukuruau Sunday School children and teachers once a year on St Andrew’s Day. This meant transporting everyone in lorries and cars to Abbotsford, ‘where they entertained the staff and children to a big afternoon tea and left a good stock of cake behind’. The children were shown over the home by the residents, who ‘were very much interested’, and the afternoon was finished with games. Regular visitors were the members of the Abbotsford Home Committee, who also came for dinner from time to time. Betty and Jill remember that ‘they were ladies and gentlemen and this made a big impression on us’. They included the Vicar, Mathew Calder, whom the children saw a great deal during their Abbotsford days and Mr Loten, the Chairman of the Abbotsford Trust, whom they liked very much.

Another reason for celebration was the confirmation of Abbotsford children. For example, in 1929, when five were confirmed, the matron and the staff held an afternoon tea ‘at home’ for a large number of people, including the Bishop. By the 1950s there was always a special dinner to celebrate confirmation; this was held when Jill Rees was confirmed at age thirteen, and Betty at age twelve. Betty recalled that ‘Church choir played a big part in our lives. I sang in the senior choir on Sundays and also at weddings on Saturdays. I also taught Sunday School.’

St Peter’s Church, Waipawa  
(Settler’s Museum, Waipawa)
A routine was established whereby visiting groups associated with the church were welcomed to Abbotsford on a regular basis. In 1930, the Mothers Union met there, the opening service was held in the chapel and the members were shown around the Home. Such visits broke down the mystique of the Home, and meant that the children came to know many of the local citizens. In return, locals came to appreciate the good work being done and many donations were forthcoming. As with the other Anglican homes, donations were published in the monthly church newsletter, some with names and some without, as this 1940 list demonstrates:

| The Matron of Abbotsford Home wishes gratefully to acknowledge the following gifts:-- |
| Fruit. – Mrs H. Rathbone, Messrs Davis, Moore, Malcolm, Kittow, Slater and Bixley. |
| Easter eggs. – A Friend (Waipawa) |
| Butter. – Mrs H. White. |
| Sweets. – A Friend (Waipukurau) |
| Clothing. – Mrs Hamilton, Mrs Horne (Woodville), Mrs W. Masters (Onga Onga), Mrs Stokes (Argyle). |
| Load of firewood. – Mr Reid (Waipawa) |

During the 1940s, one of the boys, John Deely, taught himself to play hymns on the chapel organ and played at all the Abbotsford services. On Sundays, the older children would also attend the parish church. In the 1940s George remembers that on Sundays, they would walk down to 8am Communion and then go to Sunday School at 10am. They would go back at 7pm for Evensong. George was an altar boy and helped with Communion. Some of the Abbotsford girls and boys were in the choir; George and his two brothers sang in the choir with two to three other Abbotsford boys. The organist was Sydney Boult, the jeweller in Waipawa.

In 1945, Miss Johnston wrote down for the Diocese a review of the year’s activities at Abbotsford. She explained that of her 31 charges, aged between four and sixteen years, six were attending high school, 22 were at primary school and three were pre-school age. All those at school had satisfactory reports and
Elaine, their six-year-old deaf girl, was ‘making good progress’. Of the extra-curricular activities, she reported that five boys belonged to the local Scouts and two to Territorial Cadets, and all had attended camps. In addition, four boys and some girls were members of St Peter’s Church Choir.51

Another important part of Abbotsford childhood was being part of a large community. Betty and Jill believe they ‘had a wonderful childhood’, and recall with pleasure the fact that they had 25 others to play with, which made games such as bull-rush their favourites. ‘We were outdoor kids with the freedom of Rathbone’s farm, and with a staff member on a Sunday would go up Rabbit Hill. We would dam the creek and play “battles” between two sides.’52 This ethos was reflected within the reports of the Child Welfare officer who wrote in 1943: ‘Management here is a good happy atmosphere and the children lead normal healthy lives.53

The bad times

When Miss Johnny became matron, she did not like the children being hit. In George’s time, however, Harry Bolton the gardener would deal to the boys with his belt. There was discipline, and the children were taught to know their place; consequently, they were ‘backward in coming forward’.54 By the time the Rees sisters were at Abbotsford it was usually the assistants who would mete out the punishment, but Miss Johnny also ‘had a whacking stick and would use it’.55 However, it was her novel form of ‘time-out’, a more modern child rearing practice, that is particularly recalled. This meant ‘having to lie under your bed on the cold floor boards until you were told to come out’.56

Another policy was to have plenty of fresh air circulating in the dormitories. Even in the winter, the top louvre windows in the dormitories were left open. The combined effect of open windows and no carpets meant that the children were often cold. This state of affairs led a visitor to Abbotsford to write a letter to the editor of the diocesan newsletter in 1928. ‘I asked how many blankets each child had on its bed. The Matron replied that they had two, and that they often complained of the cold: She had got and made some bed socks for the little ones. Can we allow this? ...I am sending over a pair of single blankets at once. Who else will do so? But let it be at once.’57

Leaving Abbotsford

In September 1942, George left the district high school after only two terms
there. It was arranged that he would go to work on a farm at Takapau, to help milk a herd of 63 cows. Because the power supply was unreliable at that time, he often had to milk the cows by hand. He realised he did not want to milk cows, and because he tinkered around on the farm with various activities he thought he would like to become a plumber. He approached J.R. Fuller, a plumber in Takapau seeking an apprenticeship, and was told to return the following week. When he did so he was offered the job, and started on 5 July 1943. He boarded with Mrs Hayden in Takapau and then the Fuller family while serving his six years. His wages were 16 shillings and 7 pence per week, but if he worked Saturdays he got another 5 shillings. His board was 25 shillings per week, but was subsidised by Child Welfare. When George was working at Takapau, he would go back to Abbotsford from time to time to visit and to have dinner – ‘Miss Johnny was always pleased to see us.’

The Morris brothers were under Child Welfare’s jurisdiction until they were 21. They liked Child Welfare officer Young, who had been an English policeman, as he supported them. George also became friends with Bruce Burton, who was later the district Child Welfare officer. He took a personal interest in George later on in his apprenticeship – ‘he was a gentleman and supported you’.

George’s two brothers were sent to Te Aute College. Charlie then went to work at Apley Station at Rissington, and farmed all his life. Jack was a good rugby player; he worked on the wharf at Napier. Bruce Burton was influential in helping Jack secure a job at the Power Board in Waipukurau in 1951. George did not keep in contact with the other Abbotsford children after leaving, but he would see Nelda Waugh at dances in Hastings, and bump into Eric Moore every so often.

A number of girls raised at Abbotsford stayed on and worked as paid assistants to the matron after leaving school. George remembers Cathy Hamilton doing this. In 1945, Matron Johnston thanked ‘June, who has grown up at Abbotsford and is now a bright and willing helper.’

From all accounts, Abbotsford children did not have to look far in order to gain employment after leaving school. Many secured positions in Waipawa, employed by locals who had watched them grow up, for example two boys in 1945: one was ‘apprenticed to the carpentry trade and the other one is working as a handyman at the local hospital’. In 1956, ‘one girl had been placed in the bank’, this turned out to be Margaret Rees, the eldest of the five Rees children. Her sister Pat
also got a job in town, working as a receptionist for Dr Norris until she married. Their brother Tom worked for Williams and Kettle in Waipawa before joining the Air Force. He would go on to become an aircraft engineer. However, it was their younger sister Betty whose story of leaving Abbotsford is the most noteworthy. Betty was attending high school, but when she turned sixteen she was ‘without warning told by Miss Johnston to pack my bags and leave. I had no money.’ The entrepreneurial Betty learned that a girl was leaving a town office position, ‘so I raced down there in my uniform after school and asked about a position. They offered me the job and to start straight away.’ Betty then had to find somewhere to live, so she went door knocking in Waipawa until Mrs Brandon said she could board there, where she was ‘well cared for’. Despite her rapid forced exit from Abbotsford, Betty returned there once a week until she got married. After Evensong on Sunday, she and another former resident, Ted Cleary, who drove parishioners home in the bus, would go to Abbotsford for tea. They were always welcomed.

After eighteen months in her office job, Betty found out about a job coming up at the local bank and pursued it. Her salary rose from five pounds to thirteen pounds. It was a job she loved, and she worked there until she was 21, when she married Allan Chittick, whom she had known at high school. Miss Johnston attended Betty and Allan’s wedding (wearing her MBE). The Chitticks raised three daughters and lived in central Hawke’s Bay until the 1970s, when they bought an orchard near Hastings, and have lived there ever since.

The state perspective

An alternative view to that of the children who lived at Abbotsford is provided by state social workers required to report on the home. The first reports on file confirm, for example, George Morris’s experiences of about the same time. In 1937, Abbotsford was praised for having its ‘own vegetable and flower gardens and cows’. Overall, ‘the children appear very happy’. Child Welfare officers were required to report on the health and wellbeing of the children, and at Abbotsford they consistently reported positively. In 1951, ‘The children always appear happy and contented’, with a ‘remarkably good health record.’ The Rees sisters put their own good health throughout their childhood down to a regular diet of fresh fruit and vegetables, the ever present fresh air, and the fact that, as a nurse, Miss Johnny would take care of minor ailments, but would not hesitate to call Dr Norris for more serious matters. At such times, children would be transferred to
the sick bay, which no doubt helped to prevent the spread of illnesses.

The management and tone of the institution was a mandatory reporting item. It is clear that Child Welfare officer Bruce Burton was impressed with what he saw, concluding in 1947 ‘Children happy – excellent home’,\(^66\) and five years later, ‘the tone of the place reflects sensible management.’\(^67\)

By 1955, the tenor of the state reports was beginning to change. There were two recurring themes. The first was in relation to the buildings. The new St Hilda’s, on the Abbotsford site, had opened in February 1953, with Miss Johnston running both homes.\(^68\) That building was new and operational, but the condition of the original Abbotsford building, by then nearly 30 years old, had deteriorated. Ongoing dampness was reported each year: ‘interior walls still sweat and make conditions unpleasant in winter’.\(^69\) The Child Welfare officer did not think much of either building, saying that both were ‘poorly planned’ and had ‘one serious weakness. There are only two dormitories in each home, one for boys of all ages and one for girls of all ages.’\(^70\) Making the case for some single rooms, the officer explained that ‘each girl or boy reaching puberty requires some personal privacy and a place to call his own where he can have his own possessions and books and little hobbies around him’.\(^71\) Betty Rees could not have agreed more. For her entire time at Abbotsford, she shared the girls’ dormitory with up to eleven others.

The other main criticism was in relation to the management of the homes. The wording used is consistent with the views of the Rees sisters, who were residents at the time. Each reflects doubts about Miss Johnston’s ability to manage both Abbotsford and St Hilda’s in the ways she had done in the past. For example, in 1957 the Child Welfare report states: ‘The management is deteriorating….Miss Johnston after twenty years in this position is very tired of it all although she may not realise this herself. She has given faithful and loyal service on a most inadequate salary. She should, in our opinion, make way for a younger married couple.’\(^72\) Miss Johnston certainly did not realise this herself, and refused to relinquish her role. This may have been because, at the age of 57, she either had nowhere else to go or any other way of supporting herself financially.

By 1957, the state moved to withdraw the ten shillings per child capitation allowance to institutions such as Abbotsford and St Hilda’s. This was part of a new push to introduce smaller family homes for raising children without parents. It was also a bid to force the churches to be fully self-supporting. Upon being
advised that this funding would expire at the end of 1957, Bishop Lesser tried to intervene, arguing that it would be hard for the Anglican Church to carry on the work of its two children’s homes without the 2,000 pounds provided by the government. This proved to be the case; from this point the number of children halved, until there were only fifteen remaining in 1961.

Miss Johnston hung on until the end, but it was clear that relations between her and the diocesan secretary Mr L. Nash, and also Child Welfare officer Crocket, were severely strained. During the 1960 annual inspection, for example, the Child Welfare report indicates ‘some rather guarded discussion on the rather difficult question of the Matron who in the past has done a fine job but has now passed the stage when she should retire gracefully’. Along with the report in 1961, a file-note reveals the bleakness of the institution and its daily operation. Laying the solution at the feet of the diocese, the file-note concludes that ‘the situation is by no means hopeless provided Miss Johnston can be eased out and retired, as she is fully entitled to expect having given loyal and almost martyred service for many years’. For its part, three members of the Abbotsford Home Committee were delegated to meet with Miss Johnston. Prior to doing so they had increased her salary to 468 pounds per annum and offered her a pension of 78 pounds plus retiring allowance. They were obviously pleased and no doubt relieved, to be able to report to the next Home Committee meeting that the Matron had tendered her resignation. It was agreed to present her with an engraved gold watch and chain.

According to her former charges, Miss Johnny was retired to Waiapu House, the Anglican Home for the elderly in Havelock North by which time she had received the MBE for her services to the children and to the Anglican Church. Betty and Jill visited her until her death in July 1969. Like many other children she had raised, George, Betty and Jill attended her funeral at St Luke’s. As Jill, now living in Havelock North, puts it: ‘When I go for walks through the cemetery I say hello to Miss Johnny.’

Managing Abbotsford

As with St Hilda’s, Abbotsford was managed by the Diocese of Waiapu. For Abbotsford, (as indeed for St Mary’s and St Hilda’s Homes) it was the Diocesan Secretary who had overall authority and management responsibility for Abbotsford, including finance, appointments and buildings. Daily operational matters
were delegated to the Matron who reported directly to the Secretary. In this way, it was the Diocesan Secretary who had legal responsibility for the children including admissions and releases. More often than not, there were more requests for admissions than places available. Most circumstances were desperate and the Secretary had to weigh up the merits of each case and the space available. For example, a widowed father with children could not work if he also had to care for young children but he might be able to find a local woman to help out during the day until the children could be placed. On the other hand, social workers and clergy often advocated for children to be placed urgently, especially if the children were considered to be at risk of harm or where there was no money to feed the children. These letters from the 1930s are typical of those received by Secretary Pilson and in both cases, the children were admitted to Abbotsford.

An East Coast Vicarage

Dear Mr Pilson, (circa 1930)

I am writing in the hope you can help with a situation here....The mother has died and there are seven children. The mother was a saint. She was English and well educated. However, the father has proved to be a brute and beats the children who are living in fear...........

Yours sincerely

Hastings Vicarage(circa 1930)

Dear Mr Pilson,

There is a family here in difficult circumstances, the man has gone and left his wife with four children. She has no means of supporting them and I think it will become necessary to relieve her of some of the children. If we could place a boy and a girl, about 7 years and 6 years of age, it might be the saving of the situation. I hope that such a course may not be necessary, but, as you know, a woman left in such a way has a great deal to face and I hope that we may be able to do something about it if only for the time being.

Yours sincerely
Parents/guardians signed a contract with the Secretary whereby children were given over to the care of the Church, usually until they were fifteen and later, sixteen years of age. The form included an indication of the annual income of the parent/guardian and a signed promise they would pay a weekly fee per child.

It was the task of the Diocesan Secretary to hold parents to account to ensure fees were paid each month. For example, the mother of an Abbotsford child wrote to Secretary Pilson in 1931 in response to his letter reminding her of overdue fees. She replied ‘I have been laid off from the Clarendon Hotel and cannot pay the maintenance. I am sending you one pound as that is all I have’.81 Further, as mothers explained to the Secretary, upon marriage they either chose not to tell their husband about their ex-nuptial child or if they did, could not persuade him to pay the weekly Abbotsford fees for a child that was not his own. This was the case of a mother in 1930 who wrote: ‘I have married and I don’t think it right for me to ask my husband to pay maintenance for another man’s child. Besides he is on sustenance these last three years and still is’.82

Other challenges for the secretary occurred where there were more than four children admitted at once, it was difficult to maintain regular payments, especially during the 1930s economic depression. This was the case for a debt-ridden father in 1931 who having received a series of letters from Secretary Pilson about non-payment of fees wrote back saying: ‘I am now re-employed but only getting 25 shillings per week. The most I can offer is 7 shillings and 6d a week which gives me 2shillings and 6d for myself. After I have cleared the accounts I will pay more’.83

Mr Pilson’s tenacity in collecting all possible fees from parents is clear in his correspondence. This included the fathers of children born to single mothers. His approach was to speak with the mothers whilst they were in residence with the baby at St Mary’s in Napier. A few were prepared to name the father, even though his name did not appear on the earlier acquired birth certificate. The reason was likely to be linked to the Church expectation that fees were to be paid in exchange for the raising of a child and the mother’s realisation that five shillings per week represented a large proportion of any future wages she might earn. Not surprisingly, fathers did not ever want to be found or identified for a number of reasons. For example, a professional man wrote to Mr Pilson in the 1930s pointing out that he was ‘now was married with his own family.... and still paying fees twelve years later. I would like to know when I can stop pay-
ing”. Secretary Pilson noted on this particular letter ‘No query re: the child’ and replied reminding him of his legal duty until the child was discharged from the Home at age sixteen.

Every now and then Secretary Pilson had a success such as in 1930 when a former transient mother who had paid no fees for years was traced. She was now married and living in Waipawa. In August 1929 most parents of Abbotsford children owed fees to the Diocese with one parent of four children owing 74 pounds. In total, the Secretary indicated there was a total of 327 pounds 17 shillings owed at that time. What was worse was the Secretary realised there was little chance of recouping most of it. Of the 14 children discharged from Abbotsford in 1929, there were fees owing of 201 pounds.

From the 1930s when jobs were scarce, more Māori children were admitted to children’s homes in Hawke’s Bay more generally, including those run by the Diocese. This was because although many Māori children continued to be cared for as they had traditionally, by members of their extended family, they were faced with tough choices especially if a parent/s died leaving a number of children. Letters from clergy to the Diocesan Secretary indicate that the pattern was for grandparents or aunts to retain the younger children and relinquish the children who were old enough to be admitted to a Home. In such cases, the Diocesan Secretary was realistic—there would be no money other than the family benefit (from 1938) paid over to the Church. However, once Māori children were old enough to attend secondary school, the Diocesan Secretary could apply on their behalf for scholarships to an Anglican Māori boarding school. In this way, some girls were transferred from Abbotsford to Hukarere College in Napier and some boys to Te Aute College in Central Hawke’s Bay.

**Final Years 1962–1986**

In 1961 the Child Welfare District Officer was of the view that Abbotsford was unlikely to remain viable with only 15 children in residence and Miss Johnston about to be retired. Further, state policy supported and funded smaller family home arrangements for children requiring care. Larger institutions such as Abbotsford were no longer encouraged and subsequently had funding reduced or removed through the cancellation of capitation allowances. Yet, against this backdrop Abbotsford was not only reprieved in 1962 but continued to provide a home for children for another 24 years. That it was able to do so was due to
the commitment of the Diocese of Waiapu and the community that supported it.

In December 1962, the roll at Abbotsford was down to 12 children, Miss Johnston had retired and a temporary Matron, Miss Collett was in place. In cases where the parents were known, those with older children at Abbotsford had been asked by the Diocesan Secretary if they were in a position to take them back. The only income was from a few parent fees, the family benefit or a capitation grant for those who were wards of the state. Indeed, matters were so bleak that Diocesan Secretary Nash wrote to the Minister of Child Welfare admitting that taking state wards was ‘perhaps the only way of carrying on’. The canny Secretary knew that this was the only route for a church run children’s Home to secure government funding, the life-blood for the Abbotsford budget. So it was that Abbotsford carried on, employed Mrs Parkes as temporary Matron in early 1963 until Fergus and Grace Fleming could take up their roles as house parents in July. As they arrived Mrs Parkes met them at the door apologising for wearing her hat but explaining that her doing so was because it was so cold and that condensation was streaming down the walls. Reflecting on this time Grace Fleming recalled that they arrived with their own three children and her
expecting a fourth baby.

Grace Fleming, a trained teacher, was referred to as ‘Misty’ and Fergus Fleming, an electrician, as ‘Skip’, and they took the approach that Abbotsford was ‘a big family’ and ran the Home as such, integrating their own children and the new baby. Much later Grace wrote to one of the children: ‘For Skip and me, we have often spoken fondly of the fun we had with all you young ones. We loved it that our ‘family’ was big enough to be able to take bigger families, all of you, and let you grow up together with your brothers and sister, keeping the family bond.’

As House Parents, the Flemings tried to make things fun for the children. This meant for example, that they took all the children to the river followed by picnic teas and on other outings such as to farms, to Pourerere, to Roy’s Hill near Hastings, so the children could enjoy a range of outdoor experiences. Fergus, who was by all accounts very skilled, would help the children build go-karts, model aeroplanes, sleds and do-up bikes. This couple went the extra mile for the children including taking 8 seniors and 8 juniors on a trip to the south island. They travelled in the Fleming station wagon and an old van that Skip purchased but there was no room for suitcases. The enterprising Grace made drawstring bags out of a number of spare gathered skirts and these bags were also used as pillows at night. They slept on the floors of church halls throughout their 1200 mile tour to the south island and back.

Back at Abbotsford, daily life is recalled by Grace:

*Mr Beck in the garden, Mrs Beck in the laundry. Other helpers in the laundry and in the kitchen, the women seldom seen by the children, because they after Skip and I had see you all off to school, and when you came home, you came home to the two of us, just like a normal family. You would take turns at dishing the meal, and then the dishes—thankfully the dishwasher (donated by the Woodford House girls) lightened that task. Meals began and ended with Grace. Then we would go down the hall to the Chapel, off the front porch. We would have a bible reading, Skip would have a chat about it and how it related to our lives, often that day. Then a prayer, a hymn— I think we all enjoyed the singing—then back down the hall— to homework.*

As in past times, Abbotsford children received many donations of food and goods from local citizens. Grace remembers for example, the bank manager
facilitating a processed sheep each week to be given to Abbotsford, the clothing that kept arriving for the children’s wardrobe from Church women and the Hamilton’s of Porangahou who hosted farm picnics and on one occasion hosted all the children for an entire weekend.

The Flemings began their stewardship at Abbotsford with 17 children but the Abbotsford Home Committee aimed to take up to 27 children, 12 boys and 15 girls. In order to rebuild the roll, run the Home and pay the staff the Diocese drew upon its financial reserves and behind the scenes managed to struggle on for another six years. Grace summarises these years when she and Fergus were parents to over 20 children at a time: ‘And so you were special – each one of you, and it was our privilege to have the opportunity to have input into your young lives and give you a true family life.’

By 1969 however, Home Committee Minutes indicate there were insufficient funds to carry on and the Flemings, who had served as house parents for seven years had tendered their resignation. Undeterred, the Abbotsford Home Committee members called upon political allies to lobby for Abbotsford to remain open. A letter from the now Social Welfare Department to the Diocesan Secretary in November 1970, and again in May 1972, point to the solution that was reached. Namely, that Abbotsford operate as a Department of Social Welfare Family Home with all capital works requests and reporting going to the Department whilst the Diocesan Secretary retained responsibility for the business management and the Home Committee for day to day activities. This agreed, capitation grants resumed and by this time Mr and Mrs Reddy had been employed as house parents. What is particularly noteworthy about this agreement between the state and the church is that the state was willing to compromise its official policy of not raising children within an institution. It declared Abbotsford a ‘Family Home’, yet it was clearly far larger and able to take more children than the average suburban family home being run by the government department in most New Zealand towns and cities. As with the Presbyterian run Hillsbrook Home in Havelock North the government had many good reasons to compromise. That is, too many needy Hawke’s Bay children required urgent care and protection and there were too few foster homes. If government social workers had no alternative options, children could be placed at Abbotsford (or Hillsbrook) under Section 13 of the Child Welfare Act. Further, agreeing to take in whole families to prevent the children from being split up, and providing them with security was central to the philosophy of both the church and the state. In this way, children from the
region were usually able to be quickly accommodated within the region and for this the government agency was very grateful.

The community too continued to support Abbotsford and in 1972 for example, the following groups were acknowledged for their fund raising, sewing, hosting of children in the holidays and for Christmas parties and picnics: the Waipawa Jaycees, Lions Club of Central and Southern Hawke’s Bay; the Waipukurau Rotary Club; Members of the St John’s Church, Dannevirke; the Tauranga Women’s Guild and the Women for Churches in Hastings.97

By the 1980s, the circumstances of children requiring care were in the main those who had a parent/s die, separate or divorce or who were state wards. At Abbotsford in 1983 for example, there were a number of state wards for whom all costs were paid to the Diocese. Indeed, in August 1983 the Home Committee asked the Department of Social Welfare to guarantee the numbers of state wards sent to Abbotsford or ‘jeopardize the home remaining open’.98 The Department however, was now taking a final stand. It wanted state wards in foster care situations and as Committee member Mr R. Nairn reported in June 1984, ‘the department has now openly announced that it is no longer its policy to refer children for long term care in institutional homes’.99

For the next two years, the children resident at Abbotsford were cared for until arrangements were made for them to leave. When Mr and Mrs Reddy left at the end of 1986 Abbotsford closed its doors as a children’s home.
Abbottsford Home Trust Fund

This list was compiled by the Abbotsford Home Trust from the Diocese of Waiapu Year Books100

Bequests and sizeable donations (from 100 pounds to over 30,000 pounds) were given between 1944 and 1985 by the following:

R. Saunders; Caroline Broadhurst; Catherine E. Allen; Phylis Annie Crossland; Mary Peters; Emily Annie Bull; Lillian Sarah Groome; William Henry Rathbone; Lily Fleming; George Fletcher; C. McIntosh; Elizabeth Franklin; Donald Henry Rose; George Edward Staines Daniel; Mrs L.K. Cheer; W. C. Foulis; E.E. Hammond; Edith H. Waller; Sheila Anne Nilsson; Alexander McHardy; W.E. May; J. Hartree; Johannes A. Anderson; Alice Pease; W. Carson; Brian Eric Taylor; L.T. Kessell; Havelock North Parish; Motere Charitable Trust; Gestro Trust; Percy John Sanders; Emily Estella Paddy; Arthur Frederick Lancaster; Edward Keith Bateman; Elizabeth Brett Dudson; Anna Lydia Williams; John B. Discaciati; Springhill Trust, Isaacs Trust
Postscript

In March 1987, Waiapu Anglican Social Services, under the leadership of the Rev. Duncan MacDonald, gained government approval and funding of $160,000 for two years to run the Abbotsford Kainga Atawhai family/Whanau support programme at Abbotsford. A regional resource for the lower north island, this one off programme was unique at the time taking in up to ten families at any given stage. The idea was to help families/whanau with pre-adolescent children to develop their parenting and family living skills whilst living on site for periods between two weeks and two months. The children attended local schools, their living costs being covered by the government. Most parents were in receipt of a government benefit. At the end of 1989 the Diocese reported to the Department of Social Welfare that 28 families, 40 adults and 65 children had taken part in the programme and there had been positive and significant experiences for the families and children.\textsuperscript{101} The funding was extended for a further two years enabling another 47 families comprising 58 adults and 96 children to take part ‘where support and help is given, where families are moved from a problem to a solution orientation and to empower families to regain responsibility and control of their lives’.\textsuperscript{102} By this time referrals were made from health boards, churches and the department of social welfare who appeared to particularly value the strong bi-cultural focus of the programme and that over half the participants were Māori.

In May 1990, the department approved Abbotsford as a Child and Family Support Service for the 1990-1992 period awarding it $150,000 per financial year.\textsuperscript{103} However, in November of that year, the criteria for funding changed so that only referrals from the department qualified reducing the total to $96,000. Over the next few years funding was reduced to the point where in August 1996 the decision was made to close Abbotsford Kainga Atawhai.

Over time, the Abbotsford property was sub-divided and sold. The Abbotsford building and 3.5 acres of grounds were sold in 1997 to Nicolette Brasell and Chris Davis who have carried out extensive refurbishment of the building and redeveloped the gardens. In 2013 they continue to operate boutique Bed and Breakfast accommodation at what is now known as Abbotsford Oaks.
Notes
1  Waiapu Church Gazette, Volume XII, Issue 10, 1 April 1922, p.261
2  Ibid.
3  Waiapu Church Gazette, Volume IX, Issue 20, 1 February 1919, p.159.
4  The Rathbone family of Waipawa continued to give generously to support Abbotsford over
   the years.
5  Waiapu Church Gazette, Volume XII, Issue 10, 1 April 1922, p.261. The first English
   settlement was known as Abbotsford. The name was later changed to Waipawa.
6  Waiapu Board of Diocesan Trustees, Summary. Diocese of Waiapu Archives, Napier.
   Welfare Branch and Child Welfare Division of the Department of Education, Archives New
   Zealand, Mulgrave Street, Wellington.
8  Interview with George Morris at his home in Napier, 1 July 2011.
10 Vicky Murphy (nee Lewis) compiled a chronology of Abbotsford within the St Peter’s,
    Waipawa history (2000). She kindly agreed that photographs featured there could be
    reproduced for use.
11 Interview with George Morris
12 Ibid.
13 Interview with Betty Chittick (nee Rees) and Jill Baker (nee Rees) at Betty’s home, 22 June
    2011.
14 Interview with George Morris.
15 Ibid.
16 Interview with Betty Chittick (nee Rees) and Jill Baker (nee Rees).
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 Interview with George Morris.
20 Interview with Betty Chittick (nee Rees) and Jill Baker (nee Rees).
21 A memorial photograph of Forbes McHardy was hung in the Abbotsford dining room at
   this time.
22 Waiapu Church Gazette, Volume XXXV, Issue 11, 1 February 1945, p.13
23 Interview with George Morris.
24 Interview with Betty Chittick (nee Rees) and Jill Baker (nee Rees).
25 Waiapu Church Gazette, Volume XXXV, Issue 11, 1 February 1945, p.13
27 Interview with Betty Chittick (nee Rees) and Jill Baker (nee Rees).
28 Ibid.
Waiapu Church Gazette, Volume XXI, Issue 1, 1 July 1929, p.8.

Interview with George Morris.


Interview with Betty Chittick (nee Rees) and Jill Baker (nee Rees).

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.


Interview with Betty Chittick (nee Rees) and Jill Baker (nee Rees).


Waiapu Church Gazette, Vol. XV, Issue 1, 1 July 1924, p.416.

Ibid.

Waiapu Church Gazette, Volume XXI, Issue 1, 1 July 1929, p.8

Interview with Betty Chittick (nee Rees) and Jill Baker (nee Rees).

Waiapu Church Gazette, Volume XIX, Issue 9, 1 March 1929, p.10.

Interview with Betty Chittick (nee Rees) and Jill Baker (nee Rees).

Waiapu Church Gazette, Volume XX, Issue 2, 1 August 1929, p.11.

Interview with Betty Chittick (nee Rees) and Jill Baker (nee Rees).

Waiapu Church Gazette, Volume XXI, Issue 5, 1 November 1930, p.10.

Waiapu Church Gazette, Volume XXXI, Issue 3, 1 May 1940, p.10.

Interview with George Morris.

Ibid.

Waiapu Church Gazette, Volume XXXVI, Issue 9, 1 December 1945, p.12.

Interview with Betty Chittick (nee Rees) and Jill Baker (nee Rees).


Interview with George Morris.

Interview with Betty Chittick (nee Rees) and Jill Baker (nee Rees).

Ibid

Waiapu Church Gazette, Volume XIX, Issue 2, 1 August 1928, p.3.

Interview with George Morris.

Waiapu Church Gazette, Volume XXXVI, Issue 9, 1 December 1945, p.12.

Ibid.


Interview with Betty Chittick (nee Rees).

Ibid.
70 Ibid.
71 Ibid.
78 Interview with Jill Baker (nee Rees).
79 Abbotsford Correspondence Files, circa 1930, Diocese of Waiapu Archives.
80 Ibid.
81 Abbotsford Correspondence Files, 1931, Diocese of Waiapu Archives.
82 Ibid, 1930.
83 Ibid, 1931.
84 Ibid, 1932.
85 Ibid.
86 Abbotsford Correspondence Files, 7 August 1929, Diocese of Waiapu Archives.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid, 1938. For example, four boys went from Abbotsford to Te Aute College in 1938 and George Morris’ two younger brothers a few years later.
91 Grace Fleming, 4 April 2013.
92 Correspondence, Grace Fleming to former Abbotsford child, 2013.
93 Grace Fleming, 9 May 2013.
Correspondence, Grace Fleming to former Abbotsford child, April 2013.


Correspondence, Grace Fleming to former Abbotsford child, 9 May 2013. Grace and Fergus Fleming moved to Waipukurau where Fergus worked as an electrician. They retired to Porangahau Beach and then to Napier.


Ibid. 11 June 1984.

Abbotsford Home Trust, Abbotsford Home Committee Minutes 1981-1986, Diocese of Waiapu Archives.

Abbotsford Correspondence, Rev. D. MacDonald to Department of Social Welfare 26 September 1989.Dioceese of Waiapu Archives.

Ibid., May 1990.

Chapter Five


Background

A major reason for the large number of children’s homes in Hawke’s Bay was that for 74 years, from 1892 to 1966, local citizens took responsibility for the establishment, financial support and oversight of the institutions collectively known as the Hawke’s Bay Children’s Homes. These homes originated thanks to Amelia Randall and the women who set up the first home, as outlined in Chapter One. Hundreds of children lived their entire childhoods in these homes. Dedicated Committee and Trust members put in hundreds of voluntary hours to support them, actively seeking charitable aid through subscriptions, donations and bequests to keep the homes running. This privately operated non-denominational group of children’s homes remained unique in New Zealand.¹

The first Hawke’s Bay Children’s Home, in Burlington Road on Napier’s Napier Hill, was opened in 1892 as a co-educational institution for children aged four to fifteen. It was a community response to children left to roam the streets when a parent or parents could not care for them. However, the Hawke’s Bay Children’s Home Trust soon discovered that so great was the need to house and care for children that their Burlington Road house was inadequate to cope with the numbers. By 1909, Randall House, catering for up to 30 girls aged four to fifteen, was established on the corner of Coote and Priestley Road (opposite the prison on the lower eastern side of Napier Hill). In 1910, Gordon House, for up to
30 boys aged four to fifteen, was established on a site behind Randall House. A third home, France House at Eskdale, was added in 1924 for up to 30 boys aged either ten to fifteen (see Chapter Six).

All were managed by the Hawke’s Bay Children’s Trust, whose membership over time represented a powerful social elite. For example, Henry Tiffen chaired the first annual meeting and was a substantial benefactor. Importantly, he was also Chair of the Charitable Aid Board and Chair of the France Trust.

The France Trust originated from a bequest of an Eskdale property by Robert France in 1885. He had wanted to have an orphanage established there, but instead, perhaps because of the rural location and the cost of providing a building, Henry Tiffen himself leased the land from 1890. Tiffen, a canny businessman and philanthropist, ensured that the resulting monies were accumulated, with at least some used to buy Napier property as it came on the market. As Chair of the France Trust, Henry Tiffen then arranged to build houses on the sites, and either sold them or rented them out. The revenue went towards sup-
porting some children in the Hawke’s Bay Children’s Home, paying ten shillings a week to cover their maintenance and clothing.

Amelia Randall, Henry Tiffen’s niece and the leading member of the Baptist Women’s group responsible for founding the first Home, worked in a voluntary capacity for the Trust for 27 years, and in turn left a large bequest. Serving as committee or board members alongside them were representatives of families well known in Hawke’s Bay: McLean, Williams, Bibby, Nelson, Russell, Tanner, Hill and Whitmore. Many served for long periods of time; for example, Mr E. Bibby was not only a Children’s Home Trustee, but also a France House Trustee for 45 years. Those associated with the Hawke’s Bay Children’s Homes worked hard to raise the funds, appoint the staff, maintain the buildings, feed and clothe the children and take responsibility for them. Their efforts, combined with a government subsidy for each child from 1907, and later the work of a permanent secretary-administrator – W.J. Pallot (1914–23), H.E. Edgley (1923–1954, also

The 1992 centennial history of the Hawke’s Bay Children’s Homes sets out key events and personnel from the perspective of the Trust, and is illustrated with photographs, some of which are reproduced here. It is not necessary to revisit the details of the constitution or the administration of the homes, as these are covered in the centennial publication. Instead, this chapter sets out to offer, first, a summary of the origins and overview of the homes for younger children run by the Trust over time, followed by a focus on the children who lived in these homes.

The rigorous keeping and storage of Hawke’s Bay Children’s Home records by the Trust has meant that the archives provide a lens through which to view the operations of each of the homes, over the period 1892–1973. This chapter draws extensively on those records to highlight the care of children in the original Burlington Road home, and later in Randall House and Gordon House.

The perspectives of the children who lived at Randall House and Gordon House have been gleaned from written accounts in personal manuscripts, and from interviews and reports in newspaper articles. There is little in the way of oral testimony to support the archival sources in relation to the Trust-run homes for younger children. The major reason for this is that adults in their eighties and nineties who were raised at Randall or Gordon House were reluctant to recall their experiences there. Even the boys who were raised initially at Gordon House, and who spoke with enthusiasm and in detail of their subsequent adolescent years at France House, were prepared only to summarise their earlier childhood experiences at Gordon House. The impression gained is that for at least this generation of children, Randall and Gordon Houses were very bleak institutions with few happy memories. Malcolm Findlay, who lived at Gordon House between 1932 and 1938, summed up this experience: ‘You had to be tough to survive.’

**Origins and overview**

As outlined in Chapter One, in May 1892 the Napier Baptist Bible and Nurse’s Society took the initiative to find a home for the two destitute Lewis sisters, Sarah (aged six) and Angelina (eleven); at the same time, it realised that there were a number of neglected children in the town needing care. The first steps involved placing the Lewis sisters and three other children with a widow in her
two-roomed house in Onepoto Gully, Napier. A larger house was then found off McDonald Street; but soon this too proved inadequate, and a six-roomed house with an acre of ground was found, in Burlington Road on Napier Hill. In July 1892, a matron took charge of the home, with eleven children in residence.7

One of the first actions of the new committee administering the home was to send out a circular seeking subscriptions and support. The circular made clear the purpose of the home.

*Objects of the Children’s Home for Hawke’s Bay*

1st: The reclaiming of children under 15 years of age from possible degradation, the result of vicious associations; for children whose parents are undergoing long sentences of imprisonment, or who have deserted them; for orphans who have no friends to support them, and others who cannot be received in the France Orphanage.

2nd: To provide home life, and educate them for useful spheres in their approaching manhood and womanhood.

3rd: The Home is established upon the principle of the brotherhood of humanity, for children of all creeds, colour or nationality; providing for them all necessities for the sustenance and development of their physical, mental and moral natures.

4th: The religious training is carried out on undenominational bases, to instil into them principles of righteousness, honesty, industry, the fear of God, and obedience to the laws of the country.

5th: Immediate obedience to authority is the strict rule of the Home.

6th: To endeavour to place the children out on their arriving to the age of 15, and to exercise kindly supervision, as far as possible after leaving the Home until they arrive at the age of 21.8

The most important source of funding was the France Trust, but the children it supported were meant to be those who came into the category of ‘orphans’. This selective sponsorship of orphans was consistent with the intent of the France bequest and with the underlying principles of benevolence of the time. The Christian, law-abiding middle classes who donated funds or who were in charge of distributing charitable aid could more easily make decisions about children born to married parents who had then died, leaving them destitute. Trustees were
more reluctant to supply financial aid in order to bail out a parent or parents associated with immorality (unwed mothers), illegality (criminals or prostitutes), or irresponsibility (drunkards and those who had deserted their families). However, the Register of Inmates for the Hawke’s Bay Children’s Homes indicates that the majority of children admitted over time fell into these latter categories.

This left the France Trust with a dilemma. They had the funds to support at least ten ‘orphans’ per year, but often there were fewer children within this ‘deserving’ category, and many more outside it. As early as 1894, the Trust was interpreting ‘orphan’ more broadly, as in the case of the three Anderson children (also known as Henderson): Mary, aged eight, Joseph, aged six, and Albert, aged four. Admitted to the Burlington Road home, all three were to be funded as ‘France Trust Orphans’. Their plight was outlined in the Register: ‘These three children are by different fathers and illegitimate. Mother dead. Stuart, the father of one of them is dying by slow degrees.’

Children on parade in Napier, Victoria’s Jubilee, 1897.
(Collection of Hawke’s Bay Museums Trust, Ruawharo Tā-ū-rangi, 8617)
The Hawke’s Bay Children’s Home Trust sought annual subscriptions from Hawke’s Bay citizens. Combined with the generosity of Amelia Randall and her uncle Henry Tiffen, these funds enabled the Burlington Road home to be extended by 1896 to accommodate up to 36 children. However, early on the Trust had to turn children away, as these 36 places could not meet the demand. The criteria for admittance were monitored carefully, and only the most urgent cases were accommodated.

As part of the Trust’s preparations to set up a separate boys’ home, it was discovered that a government subsidy could be granted only if the Trust became Incorporated under the Hospital and Charitable Aid Act 1885. From 1907, when 202 pounds was granted, this subsidy was to prove a funding life-line. By December 1907, a matron and four boys were in residence in a Coote Road cottage owned by the France Trust, and rented by the Hawke’s Bay Children’s Home Trust.

In 1909 the France Trust offered one of its properties, a recently built house in Priestley Terrace on Napier Hill, to the Hawke’s Bay Children’s Home Trust for rental. This enabled the Trust to establish a home for 30 girls. It was named Randall House, after foundation committee member, treasurer, Trustee and benefactor Amelia Randall.

Adjoining Randall House was a section further up the gully also owned by the France Trust. In 1910, it was agreed that the Hawke’s Bay Children’s Home Trust would rent this so that a new home for boys could be established. This was a major undertaking, made possible only with the support of Hawke’s Bay residents, who raised 694 pounds to meet the cost of construction. Gordon House, built on a landing cut into the gully, opened in April 1913, with an extension added in 1917.

The two homes shared the vagaries of their adjoining sites. The buildings rarely saw any sun and were cold and damp in winter. The location also proved challenging, especially for the younger children, in terms of getting to school. They had to walk the two miles up and across Napier Hill to Napier Central School and back each day.

Both homes were run by a quickly changing succession of matrons and sub-matrons, unlike the region’s other children’s homes, where it was common for matrons to serve for decades at a time. The Trust minutes indicate that the Trust had trouble securing and retaining staff throughout its stewardship. This was
linked to sickness, pay, and the working and living conditions, although Child Welfare reports also point to staff difficulty in taking holidays, lack of staff numbers, and inexperience. For example, in 1910 the minutes recorded that ‘two matrons had resigned on account of the cold’. As Swinburn noted, few stayed ‘as long as five years’, the exception being Miss McLean, who served for nine years. Later, however, Miss MacRae served for twenty years (1926-1946), Mrs E.Hansen from 1932 to 1946, and Miss McAuslin from 1932 to 1944.

From 1924, when Gordon House boys turned eleven they moved to France House, set up for older boys (see Chapter Six). Their vacant places were filled by older Randall House girls, who moved up the hill to help with the younger boys and domestic chores.

Randall and Gordon Houses remained on the Priestley Terrace site until 1941. By then the buildings were clearly unsuitable, and an alternative building large enough to house both boys and girls, to be known as Randall House, was altered and occupied during 1945. This was Sir Douglas McLean’s former home, on a 2.5 acre property next to Napier Central School. Randall House operated from this site until 1966, when the combination of dwindling numbers and the state of the building led to its closure.

**Who were the children?**

The Register of Inmates documents the names and ages of the children admitted, and the reasons, along with notes added over time on their destination. Many of the earliest children admitted had, like the Lewis sisters, been deserted. Others were admitted because of a health emergency. The father of the three MacKay children, admitted in May 1892, had deserted the family, and the mother, ‘a very industrious sober woman’, had been admitted to hospital, where she remained for five months. When she recovered, she resumed caring for her children.

Katie Nielson, aged eight when admitted in June 1892, had a different experience. In March 1893, Lydia Williams of Te Aute took care of Katie’s wardrobe; in May of that year Katie had measles; but things were looking up by the end of the year, when she was adopted by Mrs Webb of Wairoa. Although she was reported to be well cared for the following May, four years later this was not the case. At age fourteen, she was returned to the home. In October 1898 she went into service at Mrs Becherell’s in Hastings, and in July 1900 went to Mrs Wright’s in Milton Road, Napier. It is left to the reader to interpret the register entry record-
ing that after she left Mrs Wright’s, ‘her life was not very satisfactory’. Katie Nielson died in Napier Hospital in 1901, aged seventeen. 18

Katie’s seven-year-old sister Sophie, admitted in October 1892, was removed by her mother in 1894, before being re-admitted later in the year, classified as ‘destitute’. Placed for service with a Mrs Evans in December 1898, she ran back to the home before being placed with Mrs Gardiner in Wairoa. In early November 1900 she was reported by the Rev. Raeburn to be happy there, although she had written to her mother three times and had not received a reply. Therefore the Trust and Mrs Gardiner were duly dismayed when the mother turned up unannounced in Wairoa and removed Sophie from her position.19

Katie and Sophie Neilson lived at the Home in Burlington Road alongside Mary Mansfield, who was already thirteen and a half when she was admitted in August 1892. This was because, from the age of four, she had spent most of her life at Napier Hospital, having been seriously burned as an infant. She was motherless, and her father was described as ‘a well known disreputable character in Napier’.20 She arrived at the home directly from hospital, and because the Trustees knew she could not cope with domestic work, she was placed with Miss Stewart to learn dressmaking while continuing to live at the home. On 12 August 1893 she returned home from work and was ill. Matron Harding became concerned, having got up to her three times in the night, and called Dr Innes. By the time he arrived Mary was dead; the inquest ruled that she died of an epileptic seizure. She was sixteen years old.21

A very different situation arose in 1894, when a nine-year-old girl applied ‘of her own free will’ for admission to the home. The Trust recorded that ‘it was found that her surroundings were bad in the extreme and that it would be a merciful act to extricate her from them. Her request was acceded to and there is every prospect that she will turn out well.’22

Some children, like the three Mackays, spent only a short time at the home. Trustees regularly received correspondence from a parent wanting to have them back. Trustees would not release children back into the custody of parents unless the home environment had been visited and reported on favourably by a member of the local clergy, and later by a Child Welfare officer. It was common for older children to be sought, but the Trustees knew that this was often in order to provide unpaid domestic or farm labour. Commonly children were returned in cases where a parent had married or remarried, and/or where a stable home
environment could be provided. Yet there were other cases, such as a change of heart by a parent or intervention by another party. For example, the two Kroupa sisters, aged four and five, were admitted in August 1896. Their case was supported by committee member Lady Whitmore, because their father was an invalid and their mother, Nancy, was in hospital. In December 1898, Father Grogan applied for custody of the girls, ‘in order they might be sent to Nelson to their brother and sister’; but the Trust declined, given that both parents were alive and it was they who needed to make such a request. One month later, Mr Kroupa visited the secretary and asked for the girls to be released to Father Grogan. The cautious secretary ‘requested the father to show that this would be with the consent of the mother’; a short time later, the mother wrote asking that ‘the girls be given to Father Grogan, to be brought up in the Convent’. The girls, now aged seven and eight, were duly released.23

Fuller accounts of the circumstances leading to admission can be found in written and oral testimonies provided by the children themselves. For example, Gladys Newman, aged seven, was one of the four Newman children admitted in 1924, following the death of their mother. She recalled the shock when her father delivered her two older sisters and herself at Randall House, then set off up the hill to deliver their four-year-old brother Alfred to Gordon House: ‘He was a working man and could not look after us himself nor could he afford a house-keeper... He loved his children and was a good father but just felt that under the circumstance he could not cope and was doing the best thing for us all.’24 Two years later, their father remarried and the children returned to their Hastings home. However, the two older sisters, by then fifteen and sixteen years of age, left soon after because of the treatment received from their step-mother, and became self-supporting. Things went from bad to worse; when, three years later, the father was offered a job in the country where he could apparently take only his wife with him, Gladys, aged twelve, and her brother, aged nine, were returned to Randall and Gordon House respectively. Three years later Gladys was placed in domestic service. She visited her brother Alfred at Gordon House, but lost contact with him once he moved to France House at Eskdale. They would be reunited in later years, and she would visit her father and step-mother occasionally prior to her marriage.25

Just after Gladys and Alfred Newman had been returned to the Napier homes in 1929, they were joined there by the six Haycock children: five girls, Doreen, ten, twins Margaret and Betty, nine, Alma, seven, Norma, five, and the only boy,
Ray, three. This was not only an unusually high number of admissions from the same family at the same time (and in fact there was one more Haycock child as well), but Ray Haycock was one of the youngest boys ever admitted to Gordon House. Although both parents were alive and up to that time had lived in rural Elsthorpe, in central Hawke’s Bay, the children’s circumstances were dire. Their father, a Gallipoli veteran who was affected by gas during the war, consistently spent his war pension on alcohol, leaving his family destitute. Mrs Haycock could not afford to support seven children; after she placed the older six children at Randall and Gordon House, she still had to foster out her youngest daughter Rosina (who would also come to live at Randall House from age eleven). Mrs
Haycock then secured a live-in domestic position on Marine Parade in Napier, to enable her to visit her children more easily, on the stipulated basis of one Saturday a month.

While the girls had one another at Randall House, they missed their brother. Betty recalled: ‘One day we saw Ray at the fence at the top of the hill (where the Randall and Gordon House boundaries were). We were so excited and rushed up to see him.’ However, such contact between siblings was not encouraged, and the sisters were greatly upset when ‘we were called back and told we were not to see him’. All six Haycock sisters lived at Randall House until they were fifteen, and were then placed in domestic service positions. Ray went on to France House at age eleven. All the while, their mother wrote weekly letters to each of her children. Later, the children would re-establish contact with one another and with both their parents. Their father lived with sister Margaret and her husband for a time, and died at around 65 years of age. Their mother lived until she was 91.

When Ray was six years old, a new boy named Malcolm Findlay, who was the same age, arrived to live at Gordon House. They were to remain firm friends for the rest of their lives, and in their eighties they became co-residents within the same retirement complex in Auckland. As with Ray, both Malcolm’s parents were alive. Up until his arrival at Gordon House, he had lived with them and his sister in Taradale, near Napier. In 1932 his mother and sister left for England to visit Mrs Findlay’s mother, who was ill. The plan was for Mr Findlay and Malcolm to follow when enough money had been saved. However, because of the depression and there being little work for a painter, Mr Findlay left Malcolm with the Knibbs family in Carlyle Street, Napier, to go in search of work. He did not return, thus abandoning his son to the Knibbs, who could not afford to keep him and turned to the Trust to take him. Throughout his six years at Gordon House and four years at France House, Malcolm wrote regularly to his mother and sister. In 1949 he went to England to see them and meet his grandmother, and stayed in contact with them for the rest of their lives. He would also meet up again with his father, but in unusual circumstances. Both had served in the navy in World War II, and subsequently worked on ships. On one occasion they met as they were coming off their respective ships in Auckland; as Malcolm put it, ‘there were no grudges’.

John Hird was two and half years old when he was taken to Gordon House in 1939. For the next fifty years, he believed that he was an orphan. However, in
1989 he discovered that his father lived in Taradale, and that he had two half-brothers and two half-sisters; yet John could ‘not enjoy their company’ or know other relatives, because as he came to realise, ‘his father would not acknowledge him’. The likely reason was that John was illegitimate, and his mother had earlier given him up to the care of a ‘rescue home’, such as Napier’s Bethany or St Mary’s. John lived at Gordon House until he turned eleven, when he was transferred to France House and stayed there until 1952. Later in life, once his father had died, he did make contact with relatives, and attended a family reunion in Gisborne.

A year later, Jennifer McKenzie and her older sister Gwen were admitted to Randall House, now on the Napier Terrace site. Jennifer tells how her father drove them there. ‘He dropped us off in just the clothes we stood up in, with no other personal belongings. I was 10 years old, Gwen was 13.’ Their two brothers had already been sent away, one to a foster home in the Hutt Family and the other to France House in Eskdale. The separation of the siblings occurred following the divorce of her parents and then their father’s subsequent remarriage in 1950. His new wife was the former family housekeeper with two children of her own and as Jennifer recalls, ‘The next three years saw conflict and ill-treatment as she turned our father against his own children.’ Things went from bad to worse with the family living in the Dannevirke camping ground where Jennifer and her sister slept in a covered trailer.

Arriving at Randall House the matron’s words were etched on Jennifer’s memory. ‘You would be better to forget your family- this is now your home’. Reflecting on this time Jennifer says: ‘That may be no comfort to someone wrenched away from their family, but still sound advice within the situation. This was to be my home for the next seven years. And, in fact, Dad made just one visit to Randall House to see us after that.’

Childhoods at the Hawke’s Bay Children’s Trust Homes

The good times

Trust minutes regularly report providing special occasions for the children, such as outings, picnics and Christmas celebrations. The homes also decorated a float to enter in the annual Napier street parade for a number of years. In 1904, Donald McLean treated fifteen of the children to the circus, where it was reported they had ‘greatly enjoyed themselves’; and in 1908, it was reported that ‘Mr
J.Vigor Brown, our worthy Mayor, nearly robbed the boys of speech by giving them a motor car ride into the country. Meanwhile, Dr Caro took the girls to the theatre to see ‘Little Red Riding Hood’.35

However, such events do not stand out in the memories of those children who were residents from the late 1920s. For them, there were seemingly few happy occasions, and those that were recalled were commonly associated with people and events outside the institutions. For example, after the 1931 Napier earthquake the children from both homes were relocated for a year to the Sunshine Club on Motuihi Island, in the Hauraki Gulf. This proved to be a highlight, as Betty recalled: ‘It was so different [from Randall House] as we were not fenced in and we had a great time there.’36 Her brother Ray remembers that: ‘We (the whole of Gordon House and Randall House) went by train to Auckland and then by Blue Boat to Motuihi Island and that is where I started school at the Sunshine School. We were happy there.’37 Part of this positive memory was that the girls and boys, especially those who were brothers and sisters, were able to spend time together, the older ones helping to look after the younger ones.

Such elements of caring were important for the children, and when received, were valued highly. This was because feeling cared for or appreciated was not commonly experienced by those who either wrote or spoke about their childhoods at Gordon or Randall House. Perhaps this is why Betty Haycock vividly remembered that when, in Standard 3 at Napier Central School, she was made head of class, ‘I could not believe it. I rushed back to the Home to tell them. I was patted on the shoulder and told “good on you”. It was a highlight.’38

At Napier Central School in the mid 1930s, Malcolm Findlay was fortunate to
have, as his Standard 1 teacher, ‘Miss Witton, who was very kind. She gave me a kiss and I treasured that. She cared, as did the singing teacher.’

Other forms of caring were recalled by Malcolm’s contemporary, Ray Haycock: ‘I remember the kindnesses of the Toc H Aid people (similar to the Lions Club) – I remember us all going to Hannah’s to get a pair of sandshoes each.’ Also, ‘Mr Husheer (owner of Rothman’s Tobacco Factory) would line us up and give us a chocolate fish.’

Malcolm and other children did not have parents visiting them or taking them on Saturday outings. They watched the lucky ones with envy and anticipation. Malcolm remembered that ‘if they went out with a parent and had lollies, they would bring them back and share them.’

Parents were permitted to take their children out for only a couple of hours once a month. Mrs Haycock, who genuinely cared for her children, would regularly do this; but to the annoyance of the matron, she always arrived early. Her daughter Betty remembers: ‘We would know she was there and wait by the door. She was reprimanded for coming early.’ Their joy at seeing their mother was offset by the harshness of the matron, who reported to the Child Welfare officer in 1936: ‘I had allowed this but personally feel the children would be better off without the mother altogether.’ Betty believes that the matron’s attitude could have been linked to her finding out that Mrs Haycock often breached the ‘no contact with children’ rules away from the home. When Betty left school and was working, but still living at Randall House, her mother came to know her routine, and would meet her at the top of the Milton Road steps. ‘Someone reported us and we were told not to meet.’

For John Hird, who lived at Gordon House between 1939 and 1948, ‘the good times were going to church and Sunday School or down to the beach on Marine Parade, which was then rocky and covered with paua.’ He also recalls a Christmas party held at the hall at the Methodist Church in Clive Square. As for the other children, good times were associated with places outside the home environment.

During her time at Randall House between 1953 and 1960, Jennifer McKenzie was impressed with Matron Jean Hall who ‘involved us when doing things like soap making, preserving and other domestic activities which we were not able to learn from our own mothers. She took us out on walks and explored rock pools with us.’ Further, Jean Hall took all the girls on summer holidays to Lake
Tutira where ‘she actually knew how to catch eels, skin them and smoke them! Not many matrons would be prepared to do that kind of thing!’ In addition, Matron Hall enabled the girls to participate in a range of community activities including attending concerts at the Municipal Theatre and as Jennifer McKenzie did, joining the Girls Life Brigade and Badminton Club.

The routine times

An early insight into the daily routine of a New Zealand children’s home can be found in the rules recorded by the Trust in 1894 for the children and the matron of the Burlington Road home.

1. All are to rise at 5.30am in summer and 6 in winter.
2. The beds are to be turned down and the windows opened.
3. ¼ of an hour to be allowed for dressing.
4. The children to clean their own boots.
5. Each boy is to make his own bed and tidy his own room.
6. The boys are to chop and bring in firewood; to clean the knives and do any work about the house that the Matron may direct.
7. Two children are to peel the potatoes.
8. One boy is to empty all the slops.
9. Four children are to make the beds.
10. The chief housemaid to sweep and dust all bedrooms.
11. The under housemaid to sweep verandah.
12. The parlour maid to clean the sitting room and do the grate, sweep and wash the hall.
13. The cook must light the fire, sift cinders, make the porridge, cut the bread, make tea.
14. The kitchen maid must dust kitchen, lay table, butter bread.
15. In summer kitchen and verandah to be scrubbed every afternoon.
16. Prayers just before breakfast and just after tea.
17. Breakfast at 7.30am.

18. After breakfast four big girls to wash up.

19. One girl to wash porridge pot out.

20. Children never to miss school excepting on Friday afternoon when the elder girls will have instructions in mending.

21. On Monday tea towels and pinafores are to be washed. Children to fold, mangle and iron clothes.

22. Matron to take entire care of children’s clothes and household linen.

23. No child to help herself or himself to clothing.

24. All presents of clothing to be submitted first to the Wardrobe Committee.

25. On Sunday the children to be taken monthly about to the Presbyterian, Wesleyan, Baptist and Episcopal churches.

26. All the children to be in bed by half past eight.

27. No child to be allowed in the grounds after tea. 

In 1894, the Trust reported to its 51 subscribers and other interested parties on the routine activities of the home and the progress of the children:

The majority of the children continue to attend regularly at the public school, where they are making good progress in the ordinary branches of education. All are trained to take part in household work, are taught to see it in present and future blessing, while habits of industry, tidiness, cleanliness and fidelity are urged upon them, both in relation to personal and household duties. The practice of reading from the scriptures, and having family prayers, is regularly carried out by the Matron every morning and evening. On Sundays, under the charge of the Matron, the children attend Divine Service at the Episcopal, Presbyterian, Wesleyan and Baptist Churches, and they attend the Wesleyan Sunday School every Sunday evening. The social side of life has not been altogether lost sight of either, for, irrespective of one or two pleasant evenings of fun and frolic at the
Home the children have, by invitation, been present at the Wesleyan and Baptist tea meetings, at the picnics of the Presbyterian and Wesleyan Sunday Schools, of the Public School Entertainment, and on the occasion of Miss Carr's birthday.49

From the perspective of the Hawke's Bay Children's Home Trust, feeding and clothing the children was a constant challenge, and donations were always appreciated. While in the early days individual children might be assigned a local citizen who would take care of ‘their wardrobe’, in later years the larger task of dressing 60 children fell to a Wardrobe Committee, comprised of women members of the House Committee. The House Rule stipulated that ‘all presents of clothing were to be submitted first to the Wardrobe Committee’, but this was ignored by the mother of one of the Randall House girls in 1909, a woman seen as living up to her already bad reputation. Twelve-year-old Vera Thompson, described in the Trust minutes as ‘half-caste negro’, had been admitted to the Burlington Road home in 1897. The reason given was that her mother, Ella Regan, was ‘a dissolute character who kept a brothel’.50 An accompanying Christchurch Press newspaper cutting pasted into the minute book makes it clear that having been prosecuted in Christchurch for ‘dry-grog selling and keeping a brothel’ in 1907, Mrs Regan had served six months hard labour.51 Two years later she turned up in Napier to fetch her daughter. However, she had not written ahead or provided evidence of a permanent address, or how she was to provide for Vera, prerequisites for consideration by the Trust. Ella Regan was therefore refused custody, ‘due to the immoral life the woman was leading’. This was bad enough, but the hapless Mrs Regan had also ‘brought with her a quantity of common finery for the girl to wear’. Mrs Randall proposed, and Mrs Saxby seconded, that it be returned to the mother, or given to Mrs McGregor, the matron, to keep, and that ‘the girl not be allowed to wear it’.52

In the early years, the Wardrobe Committee was assisted by a number of regional women’s groups, such as the Sunbeam Circle, the Helping Hand Circle of Kings’ Daughters, the Dorcas Societies of the Cathedral of St Paul’s, the Wesleyan Circuit Society of Christian Endeavour, the YWCA and the Dannevirke Clothing Club.53 This very full range of church-based assistance was due to the fact that the children were known through their rostered monthly attendance at the Napier churches listed in the rules. Indeed, Sundays featured strongly in childhood memories. The children would walk to morning services at the rostered Baptist, Presbyterian, Wesleyan, and Episcopal churches in turn, and in the afternoon
‘we would play games but only games that had a religious theme with biblical words’.54

Another association with going to church was that each child had one penny to put in the collection plate each Sunday. The boys interviewed all commented on their ‘each receiving fourpence a week: one penny for church, one penny for the Post Office Savings bank, one penny for Cubs and one penny for ourselves’. 55 This was part of the Trust’s philosophy of children having knowledge of money, giving to help others less fortunate than themselves, and fostering a savings habit. The money was provided by the France Trust, which continued to step in to help out the Hawke’s Bay Children’s Home Trust with regular maintenance allowances to cover costs for some children. In 1905, this included four young children transferred from the Salvation Army Bethany Home.56 By 1914, the France Orphans, as they were called, numbered ten, bringing in ten shillings per week each, plus ten shillings each per quarter to cover clothing costs. 57

Social security payments also helped the overall budget. These payments were
forthcoming when, for example, a father was in prison or was receiving a war pension. For example, for the years 1947 to 1949, the costs for two brothers at Gordon House were paid monthly, at 4 pounds 6 shillings and 8 pence. The mother was at Queen Margaret Hospital in Hamner Springs, and the father was in prison. Similarly, between 1946 and 1948 the costs for five children, where the father had died and the mother received social security, were paid on a regular monthly basis. During World War II, several widowed fathers placed their children in the homes in order to go on overseas service. The costs of keeping two boys aged eight and nine years between 1943 and 1945, for example, were covered by regular payments via the RNZAF. In a more bizarre case, two boys and a girl were admitted by their widowed father in 1939. For the next four years, regular payments were made via a military warrant. From 1943 the payments stopped, and the father could not be traced. Some years later, it was discovered that after returning from the war, the father had taken up a forestry job. Some pressure was obviously brought to bear, as by 1947 he was paying regularly again via social security, and continued to do so until the ledger ended in 1950. Towards the end of the Trust ledger record, increasing numbers of social security payments were attributed to the divorce of parents. This was the case in 1942 when seven children from the same family were admitted, with the last one leaving in 1951.

Costs associated with keeping the majority of children were sought from parents, but with mixed results. The Parents Ledger, 1914 to 1950, lists the names and ages of children, admittance dates, and names of parents, with contact details and any payments made. A few parents made efforts to make regular payments, such as the father of four children admitted in 1924. The ledger indicates that he started off well with similar monthly payments, then in 1925 managed a total of just ten pounds, and tried to make up for it in 1926 with two payments totalling 82 pounds, before reverting to annual payments of less than 13 pounds. By June 1930 he was 145 pounds and six shillings in arrears. On the other hand, the father of three boys at Gordon House between 1946 and 1949 paid six pounds ten shillings monthly in cash. However, it was more common for no payments to be received. For example, three children admitted by the police in 1939, with no family contacts, had no payments listed for the next eight years.

All the while, no matter what the financial contribution, the children were housed, clothed and fed. Individual citizens gave freely at the annual street appeal, paid by subscription, and left generous bequests. Later, organisations such as the
Napier Thirty Thousand Club and Frivolity Minstrels regularly donated proceeds from their concerts. This was in addition to the gifts in kind – food, fruit, trade services, printing, medical and dental services – made to the homes by kind locals. This was still the case in 1955, when the Trust outlined the sources of funding that enabled it to keep open Randall House (by then a co-educational home for young boys and girls of all ages) and France House (for boys aged eleven to fifteen). Estimating that it cost three pounds per week for each of the 46 children, it stated that ‘finance continues to be the trustee’s biggest headache’. Parent contributions and government subsidies provided only one third of the revenue. The remainder:

has had to be obtained from income from the Home’s existing investments and from donations from the public. (For example, the annual street appeal netted 1,454 pounds.) As the investments themselves represent legacies left to the Homes in the will of generous supporters, it will be seen that, directly and indirectly, the residents of Hawke’s Bay provided two thirds of the income required, and without this assistance it would not be possible for the Trustees to carry on their Homes.66

Meantime, life carried on. Betty Haycock, now in her nineties, recalled a typical day at Randall House between 1929 and 1938:

Every morning we had a cold bath. We went in one after the other and would be soaped up first and then get in. Once a week we had a warm bath on a Wednesday. Our underwear was changed once a week. We had 2 petticoats, 2 pairs of knickers, a frock. All the clothes were second hand. Before school we did chores. We walked to school and we wore boots which set us apart from the other children. We were dowdy. After school we could play – we had our own games – we had marbles. There were books that had been donated.67

Betty’s younger brother Ray summarised key memories of Gordon House:

We had a cold bath before breakfast. I have no complaints about my time there. I was not hit. If you talked after lights out then you were put out in the hall with a blanket over your head. Miss Lane would sometimes forget you were there and you stayed all night in the hall.

I remember being given some boots but they were girls’ boots – on
the way to school I took them off – went in bare feet. I put the boots under a hedge until I came home again.  

By the time Jennifer McKenzie was at Randall House in 1953, the relocated Home adjoined Napier Central School. This meant that the children went home for lunch. Other than that, the daily routine was similar to that endured in the past, including the cold bath at 6am and completion of chores before school. Jennifer also recalls:

Generally, all children bathed once a week. One bathroom had three baths in it, and so the children lined up for their turn in one of the baths, with two or even three in the bath at once. As we reached puberty we girls were spared the mixed bathing and had another bathroom which we shared amongst ourselves.

None of us owned our own clothes. They were all pooled, and distributed as needed. Each week we lined up in the anteroom to receive our clothes for the week.
Despite the institutional operational routine, Jennifer believes that Matron Jean Hall worked hard to ‘de-institutionalise’ the home in the eyes of the community. ‘She objected to us being called ‘the home kids’ by outsiders, and insisted that we be given more dignity by being called ‘the Randall House girls’.’

To help break down the associated stigma of children being marched down in lines to Sunday school in uniform, Jennifer recalls that ‘we all wore mufti, and we would walk down in mixed groups, an older girl with some younger children and with the help of students from nearby Hukarere College’.

The bad times

The thing Betty Haycock hated most about Randall House was the washing that she had to help with between 1929 and 1935. This was because ‘I had to get up at 4 am and light the copper so that the dormitory sheets could be washed and hung on racks in the laundry every Saturday. Then when they were dry the sheets had to be ironed and folded.’ Although Betty confirms that ‘we were never hit’, she recalls that ‘it was the way they used their voices. Miss Mountford used to clap her hands [as a means of control]. We never saw any love.’
Henry Danvers, who was raised at Gordon House in the 1930s, did not hold back his criticisms of his childhood: ‘Mrs McCrea was in charge of running Gordon House, with the help of a Miss McCauslin as sub-matron. These two women were very cruel, very harsh and bad tempered. I think they dished out more hidings than hot feeds.’ Malcolm Findlay, who was six years old when he went there in 1932, agreed that the environment ‘was harsh on the little ones’. It was made bearable only because the older girls, who came across from Randall House to look after them, were kind.

Highest on the list of very bad times was the disciplinary practice of ‘being put in the black hole’. This was the cupboard under the stairs where children were put for misbehaving; Betty remembers that ‘sometimes they would forget you were there’. Consistently high on the list of bad memories from both Gordon House and Randall House was the cold bath routine every morning, when children ‘would be soaped up’ and then plunged ‘underneath the water’. The theme of ‘it being cold’ is taken up by Malcolm, who recalled ‘the bedroom and dormitory windows being left wide open all year round. We went around in our bare feet and suffered from chilblains’.

While these were regular occurrences, nothing prepared pre-schooler Ray Haycock for the 1931 Napier earthquake:

It was very traumatic. Gordon House was built on three levels and two wings. The left and right hand wings at ground level and joined by two gangways. Fire escapes led down to large playing areas at the front and the driveway from Priestley Road. The ground sloped steeply towards Randall House and concrete steps led down to a basement on the wing below the sitting room and lockers and bathrooms below the kitchen-dining room. I was playing in the drain with Arthur Bilby when Miss McRae called out from an upstairs window and told us off for playing there – for both of us to go into the sitting room to Miss Lane where she was ironing. That is where we were when the earthquake struck. I ran along the passage onto the gangway which was the only exit. I fell just before the door, and through the falling debris of the upstairs gangway, I saw Mita Mortensen run out of the kitchen towards the gangway. Somehow she crossed the gangway and took me back to the sitting room, to Miss Lane and Arthur. We were dropped out the window to safety.
She probably saved my life.\textsuperscript{79}

For John Hird, raised at Gordon House in the 1940s, the bad times were ‘getting up in the middle of the night to go to a toilet and having to climb down three storeys of a fire escape in the dark to get there... or not shining his shoes well enough and having to run to school barefooted – two miles away and in 15 minutes.’ He remembers ‘two of the matrons as vicious, uncouth women’, although he did recall others with affection.\textsuperscript{80}

Betty Haycock’s childhood at Randall House haunted her into her nineties, to the extent that she did not ever talk about it with her friends, as ‘it was too painful’. Neither did she talk about Randall House to her husband, although he learnt about it from someone else. ‘He did not mention it – it was a closed book to me. I did not ever want to speak about it.’\textsuperscript{81}

The state perspective

The first record of inspection of these homes dates to 1910, when the district agent of the Department of Education undertook the inspection under the Infant Life Protection Act. He confirmed that the Coote Road house for nine boys, under the care of Miss Agnes Pollock, ‘was quite unsuitable, damp and cold’.\textsuperscript{82} The theme of bleakness continued to be raised by Child Welfare officers even after the new buildings were occupied. For example, when Ray and Malcolm were resident in 1933, it was reported to the Superintendent of Child Welfare in Wellington that Gordon House, with eighteen boys and two staff, did not appear to me to have the happy atmosphere evident in the girls’ home – the playground is inadequate and the building lacks sunshine. The rooms are bare and cheerless and devoid of anything which might create a cheerful atmosphere. That the atmosphere of the place does not bespeak either of comfort or happiness for the inmates.\textsuperscript{83}

In the same year, Miss Valentine, Director of Special Classes for the Department of Education, arrived at Gordon House to conduct psychological tests on nine of the boys. Her report throws light on the effects of institutional life on the children, as well as on attitudes towards them and their futures. Describing the boys as ‘nervous, nail biters, inattentive and lacking concentration’, she believed that ‘only one of the group would benefit from a period in a special school when there was a vacancy at Otekaike’. She concluded: ‘There is no doubt that
these boys have a great deal to contend with in regard to their heredity and past environment but with the care they are having and the amount of intelligence they have, they will probably make quite good labourers.’\(^{84}\)

**Leaving the homes**

When it was established in 1892, the Hawke’s Bay Children’s Home set out its objectives, including the destinies of the children once they were old enough to fend for themselves. Object 6 stated: ‘To endeavour to place the children out on their arriving to the age of 15, and to exercise kindly supervision as far as possible after leaving the Home until they arrive at the age of 21.’\(^{85}\)

There were, however, some early exceptions to this rule. For example, the Hawke’s Bay Children’s Home Trust approved children being placed for legal adoption. Two of the earliest to be adopted came from the Page family, four siblings who were taken into the home in 1894; their mother had been prosecuted for running a brothel, and their father was a drunkard. The third child, Ethel, aged eight, was legally adopted by Mrs Staines of Waipukurau in 1897, with the consent of her parents. Her younger brother Jimmy, aged seven, was adopted by Mrs Mackay of Hastings, again with the consent of the parents. The two older sisters remained at the home until 1899, when they were placed in service.\(^{86}\)

Some children died at the home, as described in the second annual report in 1894. In this case, the girl ‘died from heart disease’; if this was not emotionally tough enough for her co-residents, the impact was compounded by their having to attend her funeral, ‘thus conveying to them an early lesson on the shortness of life and the certainty of death’.\(^{87}\)

The records also enable the tracking of children such as the three Anderson (Henderson) siblings, admitted in 1894. Mary, the eldest, spent seven years at the home before being assigned, at age fourteen, to Rev. Martin as a domestic servant, although she continued to live at the home. Presumably with some training behind her, she was sent to Mrs Cowie near Wanganui in July 1900, but was sent back in October 1901, her ‘conduct being unsatisfactory’. This possibly meant she was sexually active and perhaps pregnant, as she was then sent to the Salvation Army Home in Wellington. Beyond that there is no mention of her future life. Her two brothers, however, fared better, both in turn being offered farm training by a Mr Grainger, a farmer from Maharahara, near Dannevirke. No clues are provided in the Trust minutes as to how the farmer knew of the
You had to be tough to survive': Hawke's Bay Children's Home (1892–1909) Randall House (1909–1966) Gordon House (1910–1924)

boys; but in a letter to the Trust in 1899, he offers first ‘to take Joe Henderson on the farm, and thoroughly break him in to country farm life – if after a month’s trial he shows adaptation to it, I will provide a comfortable, Christian home for him, to provide him with proper food and clothing – a bonus of 5 pounds after 6 months and then for 2 years.’ The Trust agreed, although Joe was only eleven years old. A month later he was reported to be doing well, and two months later, Mr Grainger wrote again offering to take the youngest brother Albert as well, ‘for a trial period like his brother’. Albert was ten years old when he was sent.88

Whether to entrust young children to the care of adults other than their parents or relatives became an increasingly difficult decision for the Trust, who received many letters each month from Bay residents seeking farm workers or domestic helpers. Awareness of the potential for exploitation of the children as a cheap form of labour led to a regulation being enacted in 1904, whereby one or both parents were required to sign an agreement upon the admittance of a child/children, handing over responsibility for the child until sixteen years of age.89 While this served as a means of child protection from external exploitation, it also served the purposes of the Trust very well, because it provided greater control over the destiny of the children as they left school. In particular, it guaranteed in part that all girls would undertake domestic work for one year in one of the homes.

Over the years, the Trust minutes indicate that lack of training and incompatibility were the major reasons that girls hired as domestics were returned by employers. It also indicates that those who had financially supported the homes through annual subscriptions and donations believed they were entitled or should have preferential treatment accorded to their requests for domestic help (or farm labour). It also appeared that it certainly helped to know a member of the Trust or House Committee who could vouch for a potential employer, or in cases where the children might be released to reliable relatives.

Although the girls were paid and still lived at the home, the rationale provided was that the year they spent working there constituted ‘training’, so that they became better fitted for a range of household duties and could be more easily matched with locals seeking domestic help. However, as Betty Haycock would later report, she and her four sisters were told by the matron in the 1930s that their time working at the home after they left school was viewed as ‘pay back’ for the years of free accommodation they had each received. With the girls
providing cheap labour, the Trust saved money on employing outside workers who would need to be paid more. From time to time, teachers tried to intervene on behalf of girls; for example, Mr Cowan of Napier Central School wrote to the Trust in 1902, making a case for three girls who had passed the fourth standard to be allowed to continue their schooling. He understood that they were at an age where the matron wanted them to train in housework. Mr Cowan argued that ‘their behaviour and diligence was such...that he was very sorry to lose them as pupils’.  

Unlike most of the other girls, Gladys Richardson did not go out into domestic service: in 1906, when she was thirteen, her grandparents asked the Trust to release her so that she could train as a missionary at the Avondale School for Christian Workers at Cooranlong in Australia. The Trustees obviously thought she was too young, and preferred her to stay until she passed her school leaving examination. The more practical reason behind the decision was communicated to the grandparents in December 1906: ‘She should not leave the Home before she had one year [domestic] training, more especially as her services would have to be replaced by outside help, if she left.’ The grandparents obviously disagreed, and secured Dr Caro to speak with the Trustees on their behalf in May 1907. Having thanked the Trust ‘for bringing up Gladys to be such a modest, sensible and practical girl’, Dr Caro restated the case for her to be released for missionary training. However, the Trust won out, releasing Gladys only after her one year of providing domestic labour at the home. On 26 November 1907, she set sail for Australia. She was fourteen years old.  

In the same year, another girl brought up with Gladys was released from the home after living there for seven years. Bella Eddy had been eight years old when admitted in April 1900 (along with her sisters Mary, ten, and Dolly, six). Unusually, the Trust, which reported ‘this girl being clever’, allowed her ‘to go through to the fifth standard’. Having served her one year working as a domestic at the home, she left at the age of fifteen to work as a dressmaker at Blythe and Co. in Napier. It is not known what events then led to her next step, but she is recorded as then going ‘to Miss Fraser’s Girls’ College, Palmerston North’.  

This objective of placing children out, into farm labour for boys or domestic service for girls, remained. However, in 1924 it was decided that fifteen was too young for the girls to be released. By Law 17 stipulated that:

*When any girl reaches the age of sixteen years efforts shall be made*
to find her a place with a suitable mistress where she can earn her own living, unless the Committee consider it desirable that she should remain for a further period for the benefit of further training. Each girl’s case shall be reviewed by the House Committee at the completion of her primary education, and at such meeting the Matron must present a report as to the child’s character and suggestions for her future.\(^93\)

However, the House Committee, comprised of elected women members, was not to have the final say in this matter. Their recommendations for any future schooling or training of girls had to be referred to the mostly male trustees, and the matron had to be consulted before any girl left the home.\(^94\) In practice, the registers indicate that for the entire period from 1920 to 1950, most girls left the home at or near the age of fifteen.

As for the boys, the age for placing out to earn their own living was raised to eighteen years in 1924, with the proviso that ‘where the Committee considers it to his advantage a boy may leave to take a suitable position at an earlier age. The Master shall be consulted before a boy leaves the Home.’\(^95\) Again, the registers indicate that it was rare for any boy to be kept until he was eighteen, and more usual, from 1920 to 1950, for boys to be released between fifteen and sixteen.\(^96\) Up until 1924, Gordon House boys were placed out on farms as labourers. However, after France House was established in 1924, all boys at Gordon House were transferred there at age eleven (and sometimes at age ten).

For older girls, there was no equivalent to France House. Once a girl left primary school, the typical route was for her to work at either Randall House or at Gordon House caring for the other children, and undertaking domestic chores, while continuing to live there. Once she had acquired basic domestic training and was approximately fifteen years old, she would be placed in a private house as a domestic servant.

Funds for uniforms and books figured in decisions as to whether a child went on to secondary school or not. Aptitude and ability were also considered. At the Hawke’s Bay Children’s Trust homes, a recommendation for each child was made by the matron of the respective homes to the Trust board, which then made the final decision.\(^97\) For example, in 1904, the matron asked the Trust whether both Bella Eddy and Vera Thompson, who had completed the fifth standard, ‘should go into training at the Home’. She pointed out that ‘all the school books were
being charged’, thus indicating further costs to the Trust if they continued their education. Although the rationale was not given, the Trust recorded the decision ‘that Bella remain at the Home and undertake domestic training and that Vera should continue at school’.

The choice of secondary schools depended on geographical location. For the Napier based Randall House girls and rurally based France House boys, this choice was straightforward. Until 1931, they could be sent to the co-educational Napier Technical High School. After the earthquake, when the Technical High School was destroyed, a technical curriculum was amalgamated into the curriculum of the Napier Girls’ and Napier Boys’ High Schools. The Trust minutes indicate that the technical curriculum appears to have been the preferred programme of study for those children from the Napier homes whose secondary schooling was endorsed by the trustees.

While it was believed that two years at high school was sufficient preparation for entering a trade, it should not be overlooked that at the end of those two years, most girls and boys would have turned fifteen years of age and would no longer need to be a financial burden on the Trust. Further, there were always waiting lists for both homes; if an older child could be released, a younger child could be admitted.

From the perspective of the secondary school, it was not envisaged that students undertaking a technical curriculum would stay on at school and sit senior school examinations, which were aligned, in the main, to university subjects. This form of ‘drafting’ was a way for the state to achieve its aim of stratifying secondary schooling. Because of the emphasis on vocational skills, technical courses and those enrolled in them came to be regarded as the ‘poor relations’ to the professional and commercial courses and those who took them. Put another way, children who lived at the homes because of abandonment or neglect did so through the generosity of local citizens. Their schooling experience served to reinforce their marginal social and economic status. It was to be short, sufficient to prepare them for earning their own living and no more.

The release registers and minutes reveal that in the decisions made for dependent children who lived in the Trust homes from 1920 to 1930, social class and economic concerns took priority over personal welfare and educational concerns. At times when the homes were full, for example, once an older girl turned fifteen she was either employed as an assistant, or, if matched with a position, was
released. This was particularly the case when the Trust had a waiting list for domestic positions to be taken up. At such times the House Committee worked hard to identify a girl who was nearly fifteen, discussing her suitability for a particular employer and duties.

The allocation of girls to individual households was taken seriously by the House Committee. Once the Trust secretary received a request for a girl to be employed, the House Committee verified the character and standing of the family involved. Those from well known farming and professional families who asked for a girl did not usually have to wait long; given the small population, members of this group were usually known to at least one or more of the House Committee or Trustees. Those who were not known, or applying for the first time, were verified (or not) by a member of the local clergy, who usually visited the applicant in their home. This method was also used when applications were made for boys to work and live at a farm.

The House Committee members, Trustees and secretary served for long periods of time. They had lasting memories of children they had observed and come to
know through their childhoods, and also of the qualities associated with good employers. If an employer gained a good reputation for their treatment of their workers, then young people from the homes were likely to be assigned to them as soon as was practicable. However, if an employer had a history that was thought to be unreasonable or exploitative, the Trust would turn down their application, on the grounds that ‘no suitable person was available’.

The way the Trust usually learnt of bad employer behaviour was through the young people themselves. The very young, the fifteen- and sixteen-year-olds, either ran away from the employer and back to the home, or were sent back by the employer, who labelled them ‘unsuitable.’

The Trust was not impressed when young people returned having not been paid, or paid less than was agreed upon release. Neither was it tolerant of ‘ill-treatment’, although details of this were not recorded in the minutes. The Trust spent much time discussing these cases; solutions were found through employing the young people back in the home or on the farm until another suitable position could be found for them. Conversely, their patience was also often tested by the young people themselves. Many girls, for example, found the isolation of domestic work in rural houses difficult to cope with, and wanted an urban placement. Others could not seemingly settle into or cope with any position found for them, and were returned by employers time and time again.

**The personal context**

For the adults interviewed who had spent their childhoods in the Hawke’s
Bay Children’s Trust homes, a pattern emerged in terms of secondary schooling: the earlier the period, the less likely it was that high school was regarded as an option.

For Betty, therefore, who completed primary school in the mid 1930s, prior to the abolition of the proficiency examination, the decision was made for her not to receive any further schooling. Betty was furious with the matron and the Randall House Board. She had wanted to be a nurse, and knew she had to have high school qualifications in order to undertake nursing training. She could not accept the argument that there was no Trust money available for uniforms or books, as she knew girls who were older than her at the home, and who attended Napier Girls’ High School. (During the economic depression it was more common for girls not to have a secondary education.) She was even more frustrated when she discovered that she was to be kept to help at Randall House and trained in domestic skills for two years, until she turned fifteen and was old enough to be sent out to work as a domestic servant. Although she was paid for the work in the home, she hated it and everything it stood for.

At 92, she remains resentful that she was prevented from realising her vocational goal. She cannot help but contrast her lack of secondary schooling, and that of her five sisters, all of whom were in the home and directed into domestic service, with that of their younger brother Ray, who had gone to France House. In the interview, she reiterates that ‘Ray was so lucky’ to be able to go to high school; from her perspective, that opportunity increased his choices of vocation and earning power once he left school.99

Gladys Newman and two of her friends from Randall House did make it to Napier Girls’ High School, and by 1933 they had completed two years in the technical stream.100 At the beginning of their second year, Gladys had told the headmistress that she wanted to be a journalist, and she was delighted to be transferred into the commercial stream. However, the peer pressure from her friends, combined with her not knowing anyone in her new group, resulted in her asking to return to her original class; thus, as she later wrote, ‘I blew my chances of being a career girl.’ Her future was therefore determined:

At the ripe of old age of fifteen years we were considered old enough to support ourselves and positions were found for us in domestic service which in those days was considered the only type of work we were capable of doing. Most of us were able to prove this idea wrong
and we gained confidence and were able to improve our lot, and find our own levels in life.\textsuperscript{101}

The gendered differentiation in terms of high school entry reduced over time, with most boys and girls from the homes attending their local secondary school for two years before being withdrawn. The same cannot be said in relation to choice of vocation, and this is clearly marked during the 1920–1950 period.

A review of the release records over those years reveals that for girls at Randall House, the pattern was that upon turning fifteen, they left school and spent a period living there while being paid to undertake domestic duties at either Randall House or the adjoining institution for younger boys, Gordon House. When an application was received from members of the public for a girl to be sent to help at that person’s home, a decision was made by the Trust Board based upon the character and reputation of the applicant, and a suitable girl matched to the appointment. Few girls leaving from either home during this period followed alternative vocational paths, although other unskilled jobs in shops or in manufacturing were open to working class girls at this time, as were a range of trade apprenticeships in dressmaking and millinery.

Clues to the importance of having senior girls available to undertake domestic work at the homes surface in the Trust minutes and Child Welfare inspection reports. These were large houses, with a minimum of 30 children each. Randall House, for example, had three levels, with all the bathrooms and toilets in the basement. It was not possible for the matron, deputy matron and cook to cope with the endless domestic tasks.

Senior girls, paid at an assistant matron’s rate, provided a cheap form of indentured labour. From time to time, they would also be sent out to work for local families, to help out on short-term contracts in times of need – as Betty did in 1935, when she helped a local businessman to care for his invalid wife. Although such training was meant to equip the girls for a range of household duties, it often fell short of this. For example, Betty and her twin Margaret from Randall House had disastrous first experiences of domestic service. They lasted two weeks at their first permanent post, requiring them to cook and serve at the table of a large family house. ‘It did not work’, she said, ‘and we went back to the home.’\textsuperscript{102} Although later domestic positions did prove more successful, both women would eventually extricate themselves from service. Betty did so by volunteering to
work at the Lower Hutt Munitions factory during World War II, leaving to marry and co-run a farm.

By the late 1950s, attitudes towards what girls might do when they left school had changed dramatically. For Jennifer McKenzie attending at Napier Girls High School, this meant that she was encouraged ‘to do something worthwhile in life, and to work hard for school certificate’. Further, ‘for us to continue on at Randall House after turning 15 years old was actually against policy.’103 Yet, with Matron Hall’s support, Jennifer carried on to complete five years secondary schooling which culminated in her being head prefect in 1961. She would go on to study at Victoria University of Wellington, and train as a secondary school teacher.

**Final years**

From the 1940s, the number of children requiring care gradually decreased. At its peak in 1941, Randall House was over-full, with 34 girls, and Gordon House at capacity, with 28 boys.104 Because Randall House required much work to bring it up to standard to continue to house the girls, the Trust decided to purchase the property of the late Sir Douglas McLean on Napier Terrace, and make some alterations, as directed by the Department of Health. However, moving the girls was delayed until 1945, as the Home Guard of the Napier Battalion and then the New Zealand Corps of Signals in turn occupied the house during the war. By 1947, only eleven girls were still in residence at Randall House but there were 24 boys at Gordon House; this led to the boys leaving Gordon House in 1948, and moving across to Randall House.105 Ten years later, the co-educational Randall House provided for 26 children, who were there, the secretary reported, ‘due in most cases to broken marriages where the mother is unable to cope with the problems of raising a young family by herself’.106 By 1966, only eleven children remained, and Randall House was closed.107

Reflecting on the final years of Randall House, former Trust secretary H.M. Swinburn summarised the reasons for the decline in numbers of children requiring care. From the 1930s, parents increasingly sought and gained assistance from Child Welfare to enable them to keep their children; and by the 1950s and 1960s, there was less poverty and hardship than in the past. Above all, however, there was, he said, the questioning ‘both by the Government and the general public’ about institutional care, and ‘foster homes were increasingly considered to be more appropriate’.108 Thus, from 1966 the Hawke’s Bay Children’s Home Trust
became involved in providing and running two residential family homes, where a married couple would raise up to six children at a time. The first, Rochfort, was named after Mr G. Rochfort, who had served as a trustee from 1917 to 1954, including nine years as chair, from 1925 to 1954. It was established in Havelock North and operated until 1990. The second, Edgley, in Taradale, was named after long serving secretary Mr H.E. Edgley, and also ran until 1990. A third home, added in Flaxmere in 1971, was called Nelson, after Mr J.F. Nelson, a trustee from 1953 to 1984 and chair from 1965 to 1973. This home, too, operated until 1990. By then, most of the children were being placed in the three homes by the Department of Social Welfare. Following the passing of the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act in 1989, there was no provision for the Trust to continue providing institutional care for children. The Department took over the Nelson and Rochfort homes, thus ending 98 years of community-supported, full-time care of local children.

Between 1978 and 1992, the Trust ventured into the provision of day care for pre-school children deemed to be in need of care ‘because of emotional upsets, or poor family background’. Originally called the Pirimai Day Care Centre, this venture was renamed Swinburn House, and opened in May 1978, amalgamating with the Onekawa Day Care Centre, which had been run by the Presbyterian Social Services Association. The average attendance was 30, with many families qualifying for government subsidies which helped to finance the operation. In 1990, child care came under the control of the Department of Education, and new regulations stipulated the required qualifications for staff. Later, Swinburn House was transferred to the jurisdiction of the Napier Family Centre. The assets of the Hawke’s Bay Children’s Homes Trust were passed to the Hawke’s Bay Children’s Holdings Trust, which continues to manage and allocate funds to sponsor children’s activities in the region.

Notes
1 According to Child Welfare files, St Andrew’s Children’s Home in Nelson was the only other private institution established for children in New Zealand. By 1928 it was run by the Anglican Church.
2 In 1892 the intent of the France bequest was to establish an orphanage on the France estate at Eskdale. However, this did not occur until 1924, when France House for adolescent boys was built.
3 Daily Telegraph, Issue 5968, October 22 1890,p.1. The Petane Run as it was known was leased for 14 years in 1890.
Ibid.
Hawke’s Bay Children’s Home, Register of Inmates, 27 May 1892, p.1.
Circular, 1892. Hawke’s Bay Children’s Home Trust Archives.
Register of Inmates, 6 April 1894, p.35.
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39 Interview with Malcolm Findlay.
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Randall House was demolished in 1966 and the estate was sold and sub-divided, resulting in the establishment of Randall Place off Napier Terrace. The original Randall and Gordon Houses on Priestley Terrace were sold, the buildings demolished and new houses were built. However, the original concrete basement floor of Gordon House remains.

The Hawke’s Bay Children’s Holdings Trust administers the assets of the former Hawke’s Bay Children’s Homes Trust and allocates funding for community projects that benefit and support children.
Chapter Six

‘Band of brothers':
France House, Eskdale
(1924–1973)

For almost 50 years, France House was home for up to 33 boys aged between ten and fifteen. It is the only former children's home that has an Old Boys’ Association; the members are mainly those who lived there from 1937 to 1957, when it was managed by Hazel and Les Shaw. For decades, they have gathered every two years in different parts of New Zealand, accompanied by their wives, partners, or other family members. In earlier years, they celebrated twenty-first birthdays and attended one another's weddings. They know the whereabouts of most of those from their era of France House, and have assembled an archive, including an extensive photograph collection begun by Hazel Shaw. This chapter draws largely upon the France House Old Boys' Association archival material, the France House records (held as part of the Hawke's Bay Children's Homes archival collection), Child Welfare records held by Archives New Zealand, and the oral testimonies provided so willingly by the ‘band of brothers’ who lived at France House between 1937 and 1957.

Origins and overview

From 1917, the Trustees for the Hawke's Bay Children's Homes began to look for a suitable piece of land that could provide a training farm for the older boys in their care. Their reasons were that the boys needed to learn a trade that would lead to employment, and Gordon House, the Napier boys’ home, was overcrowded. Eskdale farmer Thomas Clarke provided the solution, offering the Trust 40 acres at 50 pounds an acre in May 1918. The land adjoined the proposed East Coast railway line on one side, with the Esk River on the other, and the final deal agreed upon was for 47 acres of land. Tenders for a two-storied brick building were called in December 1922, and the firm of Hamilton and Whellans...
was awarded the contract, at 8,569 pounds. The foundation stone was laid on 20 July 1923 by the Governor-General, Viscount Jellicoe; by then the Trust had decided to name the new residential facility France House, in memory of the late Robert France.¹ Some older settlers may well have thought this ironic, as Robert France had left his farm estate at Eskdale for the specific purpose of building an orphanage. However, as outlined in Chapter Five, the France Trust had rented out and sold the France land in order to support Hawke’s Bay orphans housed at Randall and Gordon House, as well as more generally.

By 1 February 1924, when France House was opened by Major-General Sir Andrew Russell, the railway line was in operation, and a special train came out from Napier for the occasion. Shortly afterwards, however, it became apparent that the site was prone to the frequent flooding of the Esk River, and a stop-bank was built to protect the farm and buildings.² France House was set up as a fully productive farm; by 1930, it had a four-bail cowshed, pig sty, fowl run, implement shed, orchard, and extensive vegetable garden. The orchard would provide

[The original France House on opening day 1 January 1924. This building was destroyed in the 1931 earthquake. (France House Old Boys’ Association)]
fruit not only for France House but for Randall and Gordon Houses as well. Over time, France House became largely self-sufficient in terms of providing meat, milk, eggs, fruit and vegetables for the boys and staff who lived there.\(^3\) Because the farm was relatively small, each year only a few boys who had left school were paid to work full-time on the farm, under the supervision of the house-master. This experience proved both useful and popular: Hawke’s Bay farmers readily employed France House farm boys.\(^4\)

All the boys were rostered to undertake a range of chores associated with practical farming and indoor housekeeping, before and after school. The younger boys attended the local Eskdale School, then moved on to Napier Boys’ High School.

Because France House had been built in brick, it collapsed during the 1931 earthquake. Amazingly, there were no deaths. Ten boys and staff lived in temporary buildings so as to carry on the farm work, and helped local farmers to clear up damage on their properties, while the other boys returned to Gordon House. The Hawke’s Bay Children’s Homes Trustees were faced with the huge financial chal-

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Racing carts 1940s (France House Old Boys’ Association)
lenge of finding the funds to rebuild France House. Through a combination of grants (including 5000 pounds from Mr T.H.Lowry), bank loans and donations, enough money was accumulated to start rebuilding in October 1931. All the boys were back on site by the end of 1931, although the new single storey wooden building was not finally completed and opened by the Governor-General, Lord Bledisloe, until early in 1933.5

France House suffered another setback in 1938, when the stop bank could not hold back flood waters. Water entered the building, and the gardens and farm suffered much damage from being covered in more than a metre of silt.

Les and Hazel Shaw were the longest serving France House ‘parents’ (house-master and matron), serving from 1937 to 1957. Their predecessors had been Mr and Mrs W.H. Phillips (1924-1935) and Mr and Mrs A. Taylor (1935-1937). Miss Anderson worked with the Shaws from 1936 to 1948. Mr and Mrs A.R. Morgan (1957-1968) and Mr and Mrs R.B. Baxter (1968-1973) were the final couple to run France House.6

As with the other Hawke’s Bay Children’s Trust Homes, the numbers of boys requiring care had dwindled by the 1970s. In 1973 the Trust accepted an offer of $65,923 from the Department of Social Welfare to purchase the land, buildings and chattels.7 For over twenty years, France House became known as Beck House, a residential institution for teenage boys, who were either wards of the state or had been placed there for rehabilitation following convictions for juvenile offences. Today the former France House and grounds is home to Hukarere Girls’ College, a residential school for Māori girls, which was transferred there in 2003 from its Napier Terrace site on Napier’s Napier Hill.

**Who were the boys?**

In the main, the boys who lived at France House from its establishment in 1924 had up to that point been living at Gordon House, the Hawke’s Bay Children’s Home for boys in Napier. They had thus grown up knowing one another very well, and most also knew other boys who were older and younger than themselves as they entered France House. The magic age to ‘go up to France House’ was ten years in the 1930s; this was later raised to eleven years. Ray Haycock and Malcolm Findlay, who had grown up together at Gordon House (see Chapter Five), went to France House in 1936. Ray remembers that he ‘could not wait to get there’,8 and this feeling grew stronger after he and Malcolm were sent for a
two week school holiday orientation visit ahead of turning ten years old. ‘We
stayed in the front house that had three or four bedrooms’, Malcolm reported;
this was unusual in itself, as all they had known to that point was dormitory
beds. ‘We were regarded by the other boys as being spoilt [for staying there].’
Both Ray and Malcolm had been there for a few years by 1941, when Don Sim-
mers and Henry Danvers were admitted. In 1943, John McKinnon and Norman
Robertson joined them. As Norman was leaving, a new boy, John Hird, was
admitted.

John McKinnon was one of the few boys who did not transfer from Gordon
House. As it was wartime, John’s father was serving in the air force, and John
and his sister were living with their mother in Napier. When she died suddenly,
both children were sent to live with neighbours for a few days. On the Monday,
John went off to Napier Intermediate School as usual. There ‘the teacher, with
tears in her eyes, told him he was going to be given a medical check.
Although I told her I was not sick, I saw the doctor. Without warning or preparation, I was told to go to Clive Square and a bus would pick me up at 5:15 pm. A bus duly arrived (with some boys from Napier Boys’ High School) and I was taken to France House.⁹...On the bus out to Eskdale, ‘it was Don [Simmers], as head boy, who told me what was happening to me. I had no idea.’¹⁰

John would live at France House until 1946, when he returned to live with his father and his new stepmother.

Hundreds of other boys lived for a time at France House. Their names and dates of residence (along with other siblings) were compiled in a list believed to have been drawn up by the late Henry Danvers. The list highlights the numbers of boys from one family who lived at France House across a number of years.

All the boys named above lived at France House between 1937 and 1957, the years that Les and Hazel Shaw were housemaster and matron respectively. While not all boys of this era enjoyed their years at France House,¹¹ a strong theme

Playing with Mecano, 1941. (France House Old Boys’ Association)
emerges from the available narratives, namely that the Shaws were like parents to them; or as John Hird (1948-1952) put it: ‘Mr and Mrs Shaw treated us like their own sons. I had never known what a mother was until I went there.’

So strong were the bonds established between the Shaws and ‘their boys’, and among the boys themselves, that most kept in contact with the Shaws and with one another for the rest of their lives.

**Who were the Shaws?**

Who were Hazel and Les Shaw, and what philosophies did they employ to achieve such success with hundreds of teenage boys? Growing up at France House, the boys knew that Les Shaw was a veteran of the Gallipoli campaign during World War I. When they were tucked up in their beds at night, they would beg Mr Shaw to tell them stories about the battles he had been part of. They also knew that Hazel Shaw was a trained nurse, and that the couple had no children of their own, but did have a coveted Ford car and shared their dog with the boys, who became very fond of it.

It was only as adults that some of the boys came to know more about the Shaws’ earlier lives. In 1995 they were very impressed to read of Hazel Shaw’s miraculous survival in what was described as ‘one of the most enthralling dramas in New Zealand surf rescue’.

In February 1935, Hazel Bentham, a 30-year old nurse from Mt Eden in Auckland, had gone on a picnic to Piha beach with her fiancé, Les Shaw, a war veteran. Swimming in the surf, Hazel was parted from her inflatable air mattress, and got caught in the notorious northern rip that took her beyond the breakers. Described as a ‘strong and confident swimmer’, Hazel floated to conserve her energy.

[Image of Hazel and Les Shaw, 1940.]
while the Piha Life Saving Club team were summoned. In those days, getting out beyond the surf was the role of the best belt-man; but even after two attempts he could not reach her. Showing remarkable fortitude, Hazel stayed afloat for four hours, and was rescued only when a float plane and crew from the Air Force managed to lift her from the water, onto the floats and into the plane, all achieved on a major ocean swell. Apart from losing her dentures and being semi-conscious when pulled from the water, Hazel was fine. Her rescue was heralded in national newspapers and radio as a superb effort. Hazel and Les later donated four pounds, the equivalent of a week’s wages in 1935, to the Piha Surf Lifesaving Club.¹⁴

Hazel and Les Shaw married soon after the Piha episode. With their respective backgrounds, they were strong candidates for the France House roles, advertised by the Hawke’s Bay Children’s Homes Trust in 1936. Les Shaw had been raised in Dunedin, attended Otago Boys’ High School, and was working as a banker when war was declared in 1914. He served with B Battery of the Otago Regiment, and saw action at Gallipoli. Returning to New Zealand in 1918, he resumed his banking career in Wellington, as secretary to the board of directors of the Bank of New Zealand. He also became president of the Wellington Rugby Football Club. By 1931 he was based in Auckland; there he met boys from France House and took an active interest in their welfare, leading to his considering the position at France House when it was advertised five years later.¹⁵ He was 45 years old, twelve years older than his wife, who was by then an experienced nurse. Yet it is likely that their combined knowledge of raising adolescent boys was limited.

At France House, Les Shaw was responsible for running the farm and training the boys in practical farm chores, as well as for their physical fitness, weekend outdoor activities and general administration. Hazel Shaw, assisted by the housekeeper and cook, was responsible for the daily operations of the House, including rostering the boys to help with a wide range of indoor chores, ensuring they were adequately clothed, and caring for them when they were sick. Together, Les and Hazel Shaw supervised baths, meals, homework and weekly attendance at the Eskdale Church. Both disciplined the boys: Hazel set the rules and dealt with minor demeanours with a quince stick or wooden spoon, and Les responded to more serious cases with his strap. As Don Simmers reflected, their overall approach to managing France House worked, because ‘between them they gelled’.¹⁶
Their day to day operational approach to rearing adolescent boys appears to have been based on a mixture of their own past experience in the military and in nursing, with regular routines, timetables, rosters and rules. However, both the narratives provided by the boys themselves and the Child Welfare reports on their stewardship indicate that they were also undoubtedly influenced by the philosophies of Sir Robert Baden-Powell, founder of the Boy Scout movement. Key elements of Scouting, such as adventures with outside activities, camping and woodcraft, youth working together to solve problems, taking responsibility, and developing self-sufficiency, leadership and independence, were all evident at France House. For example, on Saturday at midday, having completed all chores, the boys were let loose for six hours until tea time. While this no doubt provided the Shaws with a welcome respite from their duties, it also indicates that they had high levels of trust in their charges, and were confident they would take care of one another.

Without exception, all the France House boys who were interviewed or left written notes described their Saturdays in depth. Henry Danvers recalled, ‘On Satur-
days at midday we were given one potato, some veges, a piece of meat, one egg and some flour. We took it down to the river where we had our huts and fireplaces and cooked our tucker. If you fouled up you went hungry.'¹⁷ Don Simmers remembers such times too, but noted that they were not entirely abandoned, because ‘Mr Shaw was very good. He would come around to each of the dining places (where the boys were cooking their lunch) and often offer something but also taste a bit of something, and comment if it was good or not so good.”¹⁸ Once fed, Henry recalls, ‘We had a great time chasing around the river banks, swimming in the river, rafting down the river on logs, sledging on the hill out the back, making tree huts, chasing and digging out rabbits, and pinching water melons – we were never still.’¹⁹ In Malcolm Findlay’s time, they also had knives and tomahawks, so ‘we would also build carts, make the wheels and use pieces of timber for huts, use boxes and cement sacks’²⁰ for their various construction activities.

Such liberty for boys within an institution was unusual. However, according to the chief Child Welfare officer, Bruce Burton, who was responsible for the annual
inspection of France House, the Shaw system was working. In 1946 he wrote:

*There are 29 boys. The institution is run very successfully on the 'Honour system'. Mr and Mrs Shaw take their responsibilities seriously and exercise an efficient control at the same time maintaining an atmosphere of cheerfulness. Inmates are given a fair measure of freedom, but I am not aware of any abuse of liberties. This institution performs a very useful function in Hawke’s Bay.*

Key words associated with Scouting also emerge from the boys’ narratives: honour/respect, friend to all, duty and loyalty. For example, an over-riding attribute mentioned by boys was a ‘code of honour’; according to John Hird, this meant ‘We would never tell on each other and we would never let France House down.’ Building character also meant encouraging ‘a spirit of self-reliance and of unselfishness’, but also, importantly, that boys be ‘brought up as cheerfully and happily as possible’. As Baden-Powell put it: ‘Keep before your mind in all your teaching that the whole ulterior motive of this scheme is to form character in the boys – to make them manly, good citizens….Aim for making each individual into a useful member of society, and the whole will automatically come on to a high standard.’

The philosophy used by the Shaws to manage France House was regarded highly by their employers, the Hawke’s Bay Children’s Homes Trust. Annual reports during their twenty-year stewardship consistently boast of it as ‘one of the best Homes in the country’; and this is reinforced by Child Welfare inspection reports. The reporting officer was well pleased with the levels of collaboration in 1942, reporting that ‘the staff work as a team in the interest of the lads. There is excellent co-operation all round. The management is good here. The general tone is one of a happy sharing of a large family unit.’ Again in 1944, ‘this is an excellent institution in every respect. The lads’ response to the general care is evident in their steady growth and their contentment’; and in 1948, ‘this Home continues to be exceptionally well run – good conduct and happy living.’ Compared with annual government reports on other Hawke’s Bay children’s homes, this was high praise indeed.

The comments in Child Welfare officer Burton’s reports on France House are unlike those on any other children’s home. Most of his reports on a range of homes were short, sharp and to the point, and rarely mentioned staff; but with France House, it was Les Shaw who clearly impressed this government agent:
‘...this institution enjoys great popularity in Hawke’s Bay. Mr Shaw occupies a unique position in the eyes of the boys. He has established a tradition of honourable conduct and although this encourages the Trustees to be selective over admissions it produces a particularly good tone.’28

This veiled reference to the philosophy is interesting, in that it indicates that Les Shaw influenced the trustees as to the type of boy he wanted admitted. The following year, Child Welfare officer Burton throws some light on this, saying that France House is ‘a place for the rugged independent type of boy – an inmate of any marked sensitivity would have to struggle for emotional survival’.29 Those who were interviewed agreed. They knew boys who found it a hard life, and who did not want to be there. John McKinnon summed up the Shaws’ influence, saying: ‘They taught the boys to always be honest and fair; to trust one another and that bullying was not tolerated.’30

**Boyhoods at France House**

In raising up to 33 teenage boys at one time over twenty years, the Shaws achieved what many would think impossible, especially given the boys’ backgrounds. The Shaws turned out a series of young men of whom any family would be proud, who mostly had successful careers and their own families, and who, like the members of other families, wanted to retain contact with one another throughout their lives. Simply put, their years at Eskdale resulted in their being their own France House/Shaw family.

**The good times**

In contrast with all the accounts given by those who had lived in other Hawke’s Bay homes, among those who had been at France House the stories of good times predominated. Central in their accounts were the Shaws. This is not surprising, given that until they were ten or eleven, most France House boys had been raised by single women matrons and sub-matrons at Gordon House. They had limited or no knowledge of married couples who lived alongside them and whom they could see interacting every day. The Shaws, described by Henry Danvers as ‘a very fine couple’, no doubt realised the importance of their modelling of two parents within a stable relationship, and the potential influence this might have on the boys when they became adults with their own families. Those interviewed believed that the Shaws cared for them ‘as if they were their own children’; this was the first time most had received individualised, parent-like attention.
and interest. Ray Haycock, regarded by his peers as being one of Hazel Shaw’s favourites, remembers that, ‘I was at the mangle [in the wash house] one day and Mrs Shaw came in and lifted me onto the table and said that if she won the Art Union I would be a doctor.’ Don, Norman and John believed that the Shaws demonstrated their caring not so much through physical displays of affection, but rather ‘in the way [the boys] were spoken to and interacted with’. John was ‘fearful of them’, but ‘felt safe. There was no bullying or abuse…they were caring but not emotive’. One of the key memories was the expectation that adults were to be treated with respect, so that boys would open doors for staff members and stand up if they were seated when an adult entered a room. The Shaws also modelled treating all the boys the same.

Notable amongst this individualised but equal attention was being on the receiving end of discipline, which was not regarded by any of the boys as being part of ‘the bad times’. Instead, as Don put it: ‘The discipline we had was very good; knowing that if you did anything wrong then you paid the price [as in being strapped by Mr Shaw]... If you obeyed the rules you were all right. It did a lot for me in my future years.’ John agreed, saying that ‘You woke up every day knowing that if you did what you were supposed to do you would be ok – woe betide you if you crossed the line.’

The Saturday afternoons, akin to a weekly Outward Bound experience, when the boys had to cook their own lunch and then entertain themselves, were recalled with great enthusiasm. However, on one occasion during the war years, Les Shaw told the boys that instead of being provided with provisions, ‘There is no tucker today. You have to go and get what is out there.’ By forcing them to work out how to survive without rations, Les Shaw was no doubt interested in how resourceful the boys could be. They were. Don recalls finding the kernels within the scotch thistles and eating those, while Norman developed a lifelong craving for fern shoots. They also found local seasonal food crops, such as grapes and watermelons. According to Don:

\[\text{We would crawl through the fence and collect a few watermelons from the paddock and take them back to the tree huts and eat them. We would spit out the pips and hope there would be watermelons growing there the next year. In later years, the farmer (Brian Cowper-Smith) asked me if it was the France House boys who used to raid his watermelons – he had noticed a few go missing over the years.}\]
Once fed, they worked at finding the wood they wanted, usually piled up through floods under the bridge, to build dug-outs, huts, canoes, rafts, tree houses and carts. Ray Haycock ‘teamed up with Bill Shears and Foozle Bond, as we were the only ones who could whistle through our teeth. We had a bit of a code going – whistle meant “come running”’.39

Early on in their stewardship, the Shaws introduced formal Scouting to the boys, who formed their own troop under the leadership of Rissington farmer Archer (Skip) Absolum. The troop was divided into ‘patrols’, a senior boy being patrol leader. According to Baden-Powell, patrols ‘were the secret of our successes. Each patrol leader was given full responsibility for the behaviour of his patrol at all times, in camp and in the field. The patrol was the unit for work or play...The boys were put “on their honour” to carry out orders. Responsibility and competitive rivalry were thus at once established and a good standard of development was ensured throughout the troop from day to day.’40 According to Ray Haycock, a patrol Leader in the early 1940s, the France House boys honed their Scouting skills during their Saturday afternoon adventures and at the Scout camps run by Mr Absolum at Rissington. ‘Scouting was very important’, Ray said, and they
were so good that having won the highest points at a Scout camp, ‘we went to the 1940 Jamboree in Wellington and stayed at Vogel House’. This was a significant achievement.

The patrol system was also used during the France House summer camp at Lake Tutira. Each year, the Shaws and other staff would take all the boys camping for a number of weeks. There each patrol occupied a different campsite, lived in tents, cooked their meals over fires, swam and boated on the lake, built rafts and tree houses and roamed the hills. These holidays were some of the very best of times recalled by the boys. For example, Norman, Don, John and Malcolm recalled the patrol groups of seven, their own patrols, called ‘Tuis’, ‘Moreporks’, ‘Pigeons’ and ‘Eagles’, and the competition between the patrols, including having the tidiest campsite: ‘We were inspected every day and there was not a stick out of place.’ Being at Tutira meant they had to know how to swim, and Hazel Shaw insisted on their being able to swim the equivalent of the width of the lake at the entry to France House. This prerequisite was no doubt influenced by her own earlier near-drowning experience. All the outdoor physical activities meant that the boys were very fit, and as Ray recalled, ‘we only wore a pair of shorts most of the time and we went brown very quickly’.

As adults, each of the boys reflected that part of the positive experience of France House was acceptance: by the Shaws, by one another as equals, and by the wider Eskdale community. As Don put it, ‘The France House boys were treated equally by the Eskdale community. We were welcomed and made to feel part of it.’ As with Abbotsford children and the residents of Waipawa, the small rural Eskdale farming families knew the boys, many of them individually. In most cases this was through both groups of children attending Eskdale primary school, as well as Sunday services at Eskdale Memorial Church, a short walk from France House. Prior to setting out, Hazel Shaw would conduct a pre-church inspection ‘of her brood’, of whom ‘she was proud’, according to John McKinnon. Central to the Shaw philosophy of helping others through community service, Eskdale residents appreciated that each Saturday morning, a group of rostered boys would go across to clean the Church and tend the lawns and gardens. Norman recalls that as reward for this work, Miss Clarke and Miss Beattie would take them into town ‘for a meal first (at Walker’s) and afterwards to the pictures’. As for their spiritual education, Hazel Shaw made certain they knew key Biblical texts and encouraged their confirmations into the Anglican Church. The inside cover of the Bible Hazel took to church each Sunday is testimony to
her reflections on the boys during many a long sermon: she made notes listing their names and other small anecdotes.\textsuperscript{47} For the boys, going to church was part of the weekly routine, which they did not seem to mind. As Henry put it: ‘We went to the lovely Eskdale Church every Sunday – it didn’t do us any harm.’\textsuperscript{48} Indeed, the relationship between the church and France House continues to this day, with a France House Old Boy representative serving on the Eskdale Church Board of Trustees. The current representative is John McKinnon. He highlights the added significance of his association by pointing out the Memorial Plaque in the church commemorating the France House Boys who died during World War II. Their names have been read out at every Anzac Day service since 1945 by the France House Church Board representative.

Through the association with residents in the community, the boys were also asked to volunteer from time to time to assist on local farms with cropping, haymaking or general cleaning. Norman and John often volunteered to mow lawns and clean at Hedgley and for the Clarkes. They liked doing it because not only were they usually paid two shillings and sixpence for this work, but they were also fed, and as with most teenage boys, food loomed large in their lives. For example, Norman said that ‘when we were asked who wanted to go to the Cowper-Smiths [to help], we all wanted to because Mrs Smith was a marvellous cook.’\textsuperscript{49} Neighbours such as the Cowper-Smiths and Clarkes let the boys roam freely over their farms. The only thing that mattered was that when the bell rang out across the valley at 5.55pm, they had just five minutes to get back to France House, have a wash and be seated at the table.

Having their own money to spend was important to the boys, and these earlier associations with local farmers led to their later being employed in the summer holidays to help with hay making and cropping, as both Ray and Malcolm did in the early 1940s. They were encouraged to buy presents for one another at Christmas. Malcolm remembers the generosity of others, such as the Beattie family, who ‘would give us treats such as money and presents at Christmas time.’\textsuperscript{50}

**The routine times**

The day at France House typically began as described by Ray: ‘Mrs Shaw would call out, “Rise and turn your mattress”. We would leap out of bed, put the bedding on the window sill and go down to the shower. Mr or Mrs Shaw would hold your towel. We had a cold shower every morning. It was cruel. It woke us up.’ \textsuperscript{51}
As with the other children’s homes, the boys at France House were rostered on a three month basis to complete household chores. Henry Danvers described the daily routine in the 1940s: ‘We had our share of work too, plenty of it – hanging out the washing, ironing, polishing, dusting, cleaning all the windows every Friday, making our beds, in fact all household chores. We were allotted our various jobs and look out if wasn’t done properly! Out came the quince stick!’ This reference to Hazel Shaw’s methods of securing quality control was confirmed by John and Norman. ‘Everything had to be perfect’, they said; for example, ‘if you missed any dust on the skirting boards down would come the wooden spoon’.53

Chores were also used, however, to foster special interests. For Norman, this was gardening, and one of his ‘special tasks was to look after the flower gardens during chore time...6am to 7am every day. Sometimes, Mrs Shaw would reward me with a Saturday afternoon in town.’54 Norman also had a reputation as an effective trapper: he got threepence for every rat he caught and was also paid for dealing to rabbits. All boys got paid at the rate of fourpence a week, and the money went into their own bank accounts at the end of each term. All men-
tioned how much having this money of their own meant; as Ray summed it up, ‘one penny for church, one penny for Scouts, one penny for post office savings bank and one penny to spend as we liked’. Older boys who worked on the farm after leaving school were paid directly into their bank account each month. In between chores and before breakfast, Malcolm remembers that ‘Mr Shaw would take us for boxing/wrestling in the courtyard. It was good exercise but it taught us other lessons too – such as not taking on anyone who was smaller than you.’

The major part of the day was spent at school. For the younger boys, this meant attending Eskdale School; as Henry put it, ‘we had to run two miles [3 km] to get there’. Once they returned home after school, the boys could choose to work in their own garden, as John Hird often did, reporting, ‘I had a wonderful garden’. Alternatively, they could play outside, or, as Ray often did, work on their bikes. Ray told a story that links home and school in ways that the average eleven-year-old could not imagine:

> We were very naughty at the school and there was a new teacher and we gave her a terrible time. We would roll our sandwiches into little balls and throw them. I got caught and she called me up to get the strap. I had a piece of sticking plaster on my hands, so when she said hold out your hand I said ‘you can’t hit me I’ve got a sore hand’. She said, ‘hold out the other hand’– ‘that’s sore too’ I said. I went back to my seat. When I got back home I was fixing my bike and needed to borrow a pair of pliers so went to the office and asked Mr Shaw, who said ‘you can’t use pliers – you’ve got a sore hand’, and with that he put my head between his knees and gave me the strap.

All the boys received doses of corporal punishment at one time or another, but collectively believed that ‘it did not do them any harm’, and as Ray put it, ‘it was quite justified’ – part of learning right from wrong. But it was not always Les or Hazel Shaw who meted out the punishment. As boys entered France House, they each underwent some form of initiation rite planned and executed by the other boys. For John McKinnon, who came directly from living with his mother and sister to living in an institution, this was an additional trauma: ‘My hand was jammed into a circuit breaker by some of the other boys. However, instead of an electric shock as they had anticipated, I suffered burns to my hand.’ Holding true to the code of not telling on your mates, John suffered great pain in silence and did not seek treatment for his burns. He still has the scar today.
Using peers as a disciplinary technique was adopted by the Shaws themselves from time to time. This involved all the boys in a ritual known as ‘running the gauntlet’. From the way they describe it, this was worse than either of the Shaws’ usual methods, because it involved the other boys agreeing that a certain action or behaviour deserved punishment – that you had let yourself down and needed to be reminded. Norman well remembers this regime, ‘whereby all the boys lined up with their legs astride and holding sticks, while the boy being punished had to crawl through their legs while at the same time being hit by the sticks.’62

One of the positive peer influences were the series of boys appointed ‘head boy’ in any one year. All agreed they were impressive, with Les Gurr being constantly referred to as ‘outstanding’. This leadership role was treated very seriously by the Shaws and the boys alike. The head boy modelled the attributes required of the role, and the younger boys respected and looked up to him.

Feeding teenage boys must have been a constant challenge for the cook; but unlike the other regional children’s homes, France House had the farm, orchard and market garden to provide most of the food, and it was always fresh. As Ray said, ‘The food was good. It was a good plain diet.’63 Still, there were times when they were hungry and sought out their special stashes in their riverside huts, or raided the orchard. Those boys rostered to milk the cows usually managed to consume some cream at the same time; but as Norman said, when Mr Shaw came round the milking shed, ‘he would always give a cough to let the boys know he was nearby, in case they were putting their fingers in the cream can.’64

Reflecting on his France House adolescent years, Malcolm Findlay summarised a prevailing view held by the boys: ‘I think it was a better life than other kids had. It taught us a lot. We always had friends. I felt we were cared for – not loved – but cared for. The treatment was not cruel although not everyone liked it – it was not universal. Some boys resented the fact they were there.’65

**Leaving France House**

During the Shaw era, as the boys were about to complete two years at Napier Boys’ High School, most were interviewed by Les Shaw and asked about what they would be interested in doing once they left school. While several boys were known to have been supported to stay at school and gain qualifications that led to higher education, the prevailing view of the Children’s Home Trust was that their destination upon leaving school would be labouring on farms. Earlier, as
in 1936, an exceptional boy gained a farm cadetship to Smedley Station, the regional agricultural college. As Les and Hazel Shaw came to know their boys very well indeed, they envisaged a range of prospective futures for them. Thus, it became a pattern for Les Shaw to make recommendations to the secretary of the Hawke’s Bay Children’s Home Trust, and the minutes indicate that these were usually accepted and actioned. This practice was confirmed by Child Welfare reports, such as in 1948, when it was noted that ‘the employment of the older boys is given careful consideration and many past inmates have brought great credit to France House’.

During Ray Haycock’s two years at Napier Boys’ High School, he won the school steeplechase, became renowned for his fitness, and was noticed by Les Shaw as having an aptitude for ‘fixing my bike and an aptitude with tools. I was taken into Napier for an interview with Mr Edgley, the secretary [of the Trust]. He said he had written for an apprenticeship with the Post and Telegraph Office in Auckland.’ Ray waited a long time to hear back, meanwhile working on the France House farm and serving as a member of the local Home Guard, led by Les Shaw. In April 1943 he left to take up his apprenticeship in Auckland. Ray had spent nearly all his life in a children’s home, including seven years at France House, longer than most boys. Thirty-seven years later, for the occasion of the unveiling of a plaque in the Eskdale Church in honour of Les and Hazel Shaw, he wrote this memorable description of his leaving:

_Came April the 5th 1943. I had a brand new suitcase, a new pair of longs, and a sports coat. In my pocket my life’s earnings of fourteen pounds....At the station I put on a brave face, swallowed deeply, and_
waved my farewell from the railcar, which would take me to Napier and then by train to Palmerston North, and eventually to Auckland. I should have been happy, for after 14 years I was leaving, but as the railcar pulled away from the station, I felt a pulling of my very heart apart. My bravery lasted as far as Yule’s Crossing, a mile down the line. Then the tears started, and continued, to Napier, to Palmerston, to Auckland, and a VERY long time after. I had never known such quietness, never known such loneliness. How I missed France House, the boys, Mr and Mrs Shaw, and all they meant to me.⁶⁹

In December 1943, Ray and contemporary Ron Singleton returned to France House for Christmas. It was what they knew. Later, Ray worked in the Post and Telegraph workshops in Hamilton, where he represented the Waikato as a harrier. From there he went to Japan as an army volunteer with the J force. He was nineteen years old, and despite his institutionalised care, he still needed his mother’s signature in order to go. She was reluctant, but eventually agreed. ‘Two years later, having been promoted through the ranks, I was Lieutenant and in charge of 78 men and 34 trucks. I was the youngest officer in Japan.’⁷⁰ Returning to New Zealand, Ray completed his apprenticeship as a certified motor mechanic, and went on to run a large contracting business in Auckland. He married and had a family.

Ray’s friend from the age of six, Malcolm Findlay, proved good at bookkeeping at high school, and in 1944, after four years there, a clerical office position was found for him with the New Zealand Railways. This proved to

Friends for life. Malcolm Findlay (left) and Ray Haycock (right) 1943.
(France House Old Boys’ Association)
be a good starting point for a varied career, including nine years at sea, 21 years as Chief Purser for TEAL (now Air New Zealand), and time as a caterer and as Assistant Secretary of the New Zealand trade union movement. He and his wife Dawn raised a family and continue to live in Auckland.71

Two France House boys of the same era excelled in quite different areas. Jim Burns translated and adapted for the stage a French novel; produced in Auckland, the play ran for a week. Clearly surprised, the trustees recorded their gratification at the distinction he had achieved when they were informed in 1944.72 Roger Smyth would later achieve significant recognition as an artist based in England.73

From time to time, the Hawke’s Bay Children’s Home Trust would receive letters from former France House boys. In 1944, Jim Batt, serving with overseas forces, wrote ‘expressing appreciation for what France House had done for him during his six years there’.74 Similarly, Henry Danvers wrote from Springfield Station in 1947, ‘thanking the Trustees for the care they had taken of him’ over seven years;75 that same year, Peter Moore wrote from NHMZS Tamaki, reporting that he ‘had settled down and was happy’ in his new role in the navy.76

Don Simmers spent five years at France House. Before he left Napier Boys’ High School, Les Shaw asked him what he would like to do next. Don indicated ‘that building was the direction in which he wanted to head, and a joinery apprenticeship was arranged with Robert Holt. Later, Don would build the cook house at Lake Tutira; according to John and Norman, he enjoyed a career as ‘a superb craftsman’ in Hawke’s Bay.77

For those who were keen to go farming, it was possible for up to four boys at a time to be employed to run the France House farm. Norman was not asked about what he wanted to do, because when he left primary school, he was fast-tracked onto the farm, and did not receive any secondary education. He explained that as a ‘farm boy’, you got your own cubicle, instead of sleeping in the dormitory, received ten shillings a month, and went into town on the bus once a month on a Saturday. Norman worked on the France House farm until 1948, until he was sent to work on a farm as a sixteen-year-old. Some years later, Norman teamed up with Arthur and Noel Bilby, also France House boys, and together they hunted possums, built fences and kept horses in the rural hinterland. Norman later became a rural contractor in Hawke’s Bay and did not ever leave the region.78
France House farm boys were highly sought after by farmers in the region, especially in the twenty years Mr Shaw was in charge. It was relatively common, for example, for farmers to offer a holiday on their farm during the school holidays. This often proved strategic in securing tried and tested labour. This was the case in 1945 when Raymond Codlin, aged seventeen, spent two weeks on Ridgemount Station. As a result, the manager, Mr Bramley, ‘favourably impressed with the boy’, wrote to the Trust seeking to employ him, and this was duly endorsed by the Trust.79

Farming was also John McKinnon’s destination after three years at High School. He worked first as cow boy, rising to head shepherd at Mangatutu Station in the Patoka district. Between 1952 and 1961, John became a well known rugby player, representing Hawke’s Bay, which, as he said, ‘pleased Mr Shaw’. After three years at Mangatutu, he went to work for the stock and station agents Murray Roberts & Co., becoming head auctioneer for the Hawke’s Bay and Taupo regions. Later, he worked for the Hawke’s Bay Farmers’ Co-operative Association as company livestock manager for Hawke’s Bay and Poverty Bay. John married, and he and his wife raised a family and continue to live in Hastings.80

When John Hird finished school in 1951, he also ‘worked on the France House farm and earned 4 pounds 6 shillings and 8 pence a month for looking after 50 acres with another boy’. He left France House at the age of fifteen to work on a farm at Raukawa, before joining the navy. After eight years at sea, he married in Auckland when he was 21 and came back to Napier and built a house.81 He and his wife still lived there in 1992, by which time John owned John Hird Ceramics in Onekawa. He and his wife had a son and a daughter.

France House Old Boys

When boys left France House, Hazel Shaw gave each a Bible, writing an inscription inside and wishing them well for their futures. Most still have these Bibles. But Hazel Shaw did more than this. She stayed in contact through letters with as many boys as she could (and as many as wanted to write back) throughout her life. In some cases she attended their weddings and the christenings of their children. In addition, once she retired from her North Shore Plunket Nurse position, and after Les had died, she would visit their homes and stay for a while as a guest, taking a personal interest in their careers, their children and, as Dawn Findlay reported, their wives as well. She was always concerned for the wellbe-
ing of ‘her boys’ and their families, although Dawn did get a surprise on Hazel’s first visit, when she flung open the kitchen cupboards in the Findlay home and was pleased to see little in the way of canned food.\textsuperscript{82}

Insights into just how Hazel Shaw felt about her France House boys can be found in a typed letter she wrote to Dick and Betti Smyth and their two sons in March 1974, thanking them ‘for their loving hospitality. You made me feel very welcome, all of you, and I did enjoy being with you.’\textsuperscript{83} She went on to write out her recipe for ‘Hazelnut Muesli’, and also reported that Malcolm Findlay’s two sisters-in-law had visited her the day before, and ‘wasn’t I glad I was at home’. This was because they had come to tell Hazel of an event featuring their brother-in-law which subsequently became a France House legend. It turned out that in his catering role, Malcolm was asked to serve the Queen during the Auckland
State luncheon held in her honour. Hazel wrote:

The Queen looked weary when she arrived after a walk from the bottom of a crowded Queen Street on a hot day. There were no drinks offered on arrival, so Malc slipped up and said ‘Would you care for something to drink, Madam?’ The Queen rewarded him with a grateful smile, and said, ‘A small gin and tonic please’ and this Malcolm produced. He also gave her the usual small glass of wine while waiting on her, and altogether, I gather he was his own kindly, dapper little self, and she was touched with his thought for her. I have been skiting ever since. Some lads, these France House boys, don’t you think? 84

The boys who stayed in touch with her did so not out of loyalty or duty, but out of a growing awareness of the important role she and Les had played in their upbringing. Les Shaw was eventually awarded the QSM for his work at France House. Ray Haycock, for example, who was based in Auckland, visited the Shaws for a number of years before Les died in 1970. Initially, he took a bottle of whisky for ‘Mr Shaw’, as he still calls him, but was reprimanded by ‘Mrs Shaw’ and told to take it away. The canny Ray ensured from that point on that a bottle of whisky was tucked surreptitiously into Mr Shaw’s bed on subsequent visits.85 Ray remained a favourite with the Shaws, and before he died, Les gifted to Ray for safekeeping his war medals, stirrups and other memorabilia.

After Les died, Hazel moved to Collingwood and then to Picton, from where she launched forth on her ‘home visits’. She also welcomed the boys and their families into her Picton home. They each went prepared, knowing she would have chores for them to do; when John McKinnon visited with his wife and children and stayed for two days, for example, he cleared her high ceiling of cobwebs. At one point Hazel Shaw had to be hospitalised during a visit to Napier, and then required two months’ rehabilitation. As she had no one at home to look after her, some of the France House boys and their wives arranged for her to stay with each of them in turn, so that she could be cared for.

The France House network was sustained through ongoing friendships between the boys, as they celebrated their twenty-first birthdays. When they married, they were often each other’s groomsmen or wedding guests. They also stayed in touch through attending Eskdale School and Napier Boys’ High reunions. They knew where the others were living and what they were doing – and still do. Hence
it was relatively straightforward to set up a reunion every two years in different locations around New Zealand; remarkably, they also set up an Old Boys’ Association, with its own archive, built up by Henry Danvers over the years and handed on to John McKinnon. It houses Les Shaw’s pipe and World War I whistle (used for gathering the boys), Hazel Shaw’s own Bible and photograph albums, donated by her, and photograph albums and videos of the reunions.

Hazel Shaw meant so much to these men that when she died in 1978, many travelled to attend her funeral in Picton. As it was about to begin, a message was delivered to the church asking for a short delay in proceedings. The seas were so rough that the ferry from Wellington was taking longer than expected to arrive. Aboard were eighteen of Hazel Shaw’s ‘boys’, who were determined to farewell her in person.

The boys themselves should have the last word. Ray Haycock believes that the boys of his era ‘acted as brothers in life and later in life’. This is certainly true of Eighty years later. Ray Haycock (left) and Malcolm Findlay (right) met in 1932 aged six at Gordon House and went on to France House together in 1936. In 2012 they ’remain like brothers’ and live in the same retirement village in Auckland. (Kay Morris Matthews)
Ray and Malcolm Findlay, who met in 1932 and spent their childhoods and adolescent years together at Gordon House and then at France House. Over seventy years later, they live in the same retirement complex in Auckland and remain ‘like brothers’. Ray reflects:

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\text{I was able to talk about France House with friends as an adult because I loved the place. I think I knew enough at the time to think that if I was not here, where would I have been? Somewhere far worse.}^{86}\]

Notes

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid; Interviews, France House Old Boys.
4. Interviews, France House Old Boys.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
10. Interview with John McKinnon, Don Simmers and Norman Robertson, EIT- Hawke’s Bay, 4 May 2011.
11. Interviews with Ray Haycock and Malcolm Findlay.
14. Ibid.
16. Interview with John McKinnon, Don Simmers and Norman Robertson.
18. Interview with John McKinnon, Don Simmers and Norman Robertson.
20. Interview with Malcolm Findlay.
25  Annual Inspection Report, France House, 9 November 1942.
26  Annual Inspection Report, France House, 22 November 1944.
27  Annual Inspection Report, France House, 22 December 1948.
28  Annual Inspection Report, France House, 6 October 1950.
29  Annual Inspection Report, France House, 4 October 1951.
30  Interview with John McKinnon, Don Simmers and Norman Robertson.
31  Interview with Ray Haycock.
32  Interview with John McKinnon, Don Simmers and Norman Robertson.
33  Interview with John McKinnon.,
34  Interview with John McKinnon, Don Simmers and Norman Robertson.
35  Ibid.
36  Ibid.
37  Ibid.
38  Ibid.
39  Interview with Ray Haycock.
41  Interview with Ray Haycock.
42  Interview with John McKinnon, Don Simmers and Norman Robertson.
43  Interview with Ray Haycock.
44  Interview with John McKinnon, Don Simmers and Norman Robertson.
45  Interview with John McKinnon.
46  Interview with John McKinnon, Don Simmers and Norman Robertson.
47  The Bible is held in the France House Old Boys’ Association Archives.
48  *Hawke’s Bay Today*, 26 December 2003, p.23.
49  Interview with John McKinnon, Don Simmers and Norman Robertson.
50  Interview with Malcolm Findlay.
51  Interview with Ray Haycock.
52  *Hawke’s Bay Today*, 26 December 2003, p.23.
53  Interview with John McKinnon, Don Simmers and Norman Robertson.
54  Ibid.
55  Interview with Ray Haycock.
56  Interview with Malcolm Findlay.
57  *Hawke’s Bay Today*, 26 December 2003, p.23.
59  Interview with Ray Haycock
60  Ibid.
61  Interview with John McKinnon.
62  Interview with John McKinnon, Don Simmers and Norman Robertson.
63  Interview with Ray Haycock.
64  Interview with John McKinnon, Don Simmers and Norman Robertson.
65  Interview with Malcolm Findlay.
66  Minute Book, Hawke’s Bay Children’s Home Trust, 1936, p.4.
67  Annual Inspection Report, France House, 22 December 1948.
68  Interview with Ray Haycock.
69  Address by Ray Haycock at the unveiling of the Memorial Plaque to Mr and Mrs Shaw, at the Eskdale Memorial Church, 1 June 1980, France House Old Boys’ Association Archives.
70  Interview with Ray Haycock.
71  Interview with Malcolm Findlay.
72  Minute Book, Hawke’s Bay Children’s Home Trust, 16 June 1944.
73  Interview with John McKinnon.
75  Minute Book, Hawke’s Bay Children’s Home Trust, 15 August 1947, p.258.
77  Interview with John McKinnon, Don Simmers and Norman Robertson.
78  Interview with Norman Robertson.
80  Interview and notes, John McKinnon.
82  Dawn Findlay, Interview with Malcolm Findlay, 30 August 2010.
84  Ibid. Malcolm and Dawn Findlay also told this story and noted how proud Hazel was of Malcolm.
85  Interview with Ray Haycock.
86  Ibid.
Chapter Seven

‘No child turned away’: Hillsbrook Children’s Home, Havelock North (1947–1988)

For just over forty years, from 1947 to 1988, the Presbyterian Church ran Hillsbrook, a co-educational facility for up to 30 children aged three to fifteen years in Havelock North. From the outset, Hillsbrook differed from other Hawke’s Bay children’s homes. Most children stayed only temporarily, while a mother was ill or the family was experiencing some form of crisis and urgently needed the children to be cared for. It opened in 1947, at a time when institutional care of children was being strongly discouraged, and the preferred government policy was to place children in smaller family style homes if they could not be kept with a family member. By the time it closed, it was one of the last larger institutions housing children in New Zealand.

This chapter traces the history of Hillsbrook, drawing in the main on Child Welfare and later Social Welfare archival sources in Wellington, the annual reports made available by Presbyterian Support East Coast, and John McFadzien’s 1986 history of Presbyterian support services on the East Coast. It has not been possible to include many of the children’s voices in this chapter, as most were at Hillsbrook on a short-term basis only, and those able to be contacted could not recall their experience in much detail. However, the stories of two children, who stayed for five and eleven years respectively, are interwoven into the text that follows. It is important to note that not all children at Hillsbrook shared the same experiences as these two. Their life there varied according to circumstances upon admittance, length of stay, whether siblings were there too, and interactions with the staff at the time.
Hillsbrook Children’s Home 1947, Te Mata Road, Havelock North (Presbyterian Social Services East Coast)
Origins and overview

The story of Hillsbrook is integrally linked with the strength of organisation within the Presbyterian Social Service Association (PSSA) of Hawke’s Bay and Poverty Bay, and its relationship with the Child Welfare Division of the Department of Education, and later the Department of Social Welfare. Unlike the private homes run by the Hawke’s Bay Children’s Homes Trust in Napier or the Anglican homes in Central Hawke’s Bay, where longer-term care was preferred, the PSSA was prepared to take in children at short notice for short-term residential care. In addition, its location on the outskirts of the region’s other large town of Hastings offered another option to government social workers, who often found that the other regional homes had no places available for children requiring urgent care and protection. Further, as former administrator John McFadzien reported in 1986, a feature of Hillsbrook’s history ‘has been the number of business and professional people who have given the benefit of their administrative experience’.1

At the first meeting of the PSSA of Hawke’s Bay and Poverty Bay in 1946, it was agreed to pursue the purchase of a building, then used as a guest house, but originally the home of Canon St. Hill, in order to set up a residential children’s home. It was duly bought for 8,500 pounds, no small feat for a new organisation.2 The large sum expended, together with the speed of purchase, indicates that the founding PSSA members put residential care for children in need ahead of providing other social services, such as those for the elderly, which began in 1949. It is not clear just what case was made for establishing a children’s home in Havelock North, but the PSSA Constitution gives a clue; clause 2 states: ‘To care for and bring up orphan, destitute and needy children and provide training for their character development and religious instruction including the daily reading of the Bible.’3

What is known is that the PSSA applied to Child Welfare for registration of a new children’s home in April 1947, and by June it was up and running. The speed with which registration was approved, given that setting up new institutional children’s homes ran counter to government policy, suggests that strong political undercurrents were at play. For their part, the PSSA did all that was required of them, in order to avoid failings that had long been criticised in other institutions. For example, the application indicates that in admitting children up to seventeen years of age for both short and longer stays, Hillsbrook would keep detailed records of inmates from point of entry; a register of admissions and
discharges; and a logbook giving day to day information on sickness, outings, visits of parents and friends, etc. A description of the building followed, including the provision of five bedrooms with four children in each; two sick rooms; large play rooms and a sitting room; and large grounds, including a tennis court. Importantly, the application confirmed that funding would come ‘from contributions from Presbyterians from the Hawke’s Bay [and] Poverty Bay area and from parents’. Indeed, a very successful canvass for donations from the district brought in just over 5000 pounds in 1947, plus a loan of 4000 pounds from Mr J.W.McNutt. This funding not only helped to establish Hillsbrook quickly, but also reassured the Minister that it could be self-sufficient and that government monies were not being sought.

The final prerequisite was indicated by Reverend F.H. Robertson, the PSSA Board Chair, in a letter to the Minister of Education in April, stating that, ‘we have engaged a very experienced staff. Miss K.S. Finlayson (Matron) together with
Mr and Mrs R.D. Rule have for 15 years been at the Margaret Watt Trust Home in Wanganui with Miss Jean Eyles to assist. Again, the PSSA heeded the advice of Child Welfare to include staff with nursing experience, and also a married couple. The ratio of five children to one staff member no doubt impressed the authorities too.

**Life at Hillsbrook**

The Child Welfare officer conducting the first inspection of Hillsbrook in June 1947 was Bruce Burton, who was also responsible for the inspection of the other children’s homes in the region. He concluded that the management of the Home is conducted by people of lengthy experience in such matters. The general tone of the Home is yet in the making but should develop above average in comfort and congeniality. His other tabulated comments provide a picture of Hillsbrook in its first year.

There were two girls and two boys under the age of six, plus three girls and thirteen boys aged between six and thirteen. They rose at 6.45am and made their beds, before sitting down to a breakfast of porridge, wholemeal bread with butter and Marmite, and cocoa or Bournvita made with milk. The older children then attended the local primary school, but came home for a dinner of meat or fish and a variety of vegetables, plus stewed fruit and milk puddings. There were apples for snacks between meals, and the evening meal consisted of a vegetable savoury dish, bread, butter, jam and cheese and raw fruit. The staff dined with the children. Officer Burton thought the children were well clothed, and commented on the eight acres of grounds where they could play. At night the children went to bed between 6pm and 7pm, supervised by the matron, whose own sleeping accommodation adjoined the children’s bedrooms.

Two years later, in 1949, Burton reported that he was generally pleased with the operations at Hillsbrook. The staffing remained the same, and two staff were on duty at any one time, including overnight. He thought that the matron discharged her duties ‘possibly too efficiently’, explaining that she had worked in institutions for many years, but that overall ‘there is a friendly atmosphere’ and ‘the children were happy and well’. The fire escapes from the upper floors, which had earlier been criticised by the Department of Health, had been attended to, as had restricting the numbers of children housed at any one time to 22.
Meanwhile the PSSA believed all was going to plan, and reported to its parishioners that ‘Hillsbrook is now well and favourably known throughout the district and is rendering the Church and community a splendid and much appreciated Christian service.’ Set up to cater for up to 22 children at a time, by 1949 it had already provided ‘for over 60 children for varied periods, these children having come from all parts of the Hawke’s Bay and Poverty Bay districts.’ From the start, the PSSA emphasised that Hillsbrook was ‘a TRUE HOME in the full sense of the word, A Home where the children are not only well-provided for, but they are also surrounded by a cheerful Christian atmosphere and environment in beautiful and ideal surroundings.’

Early on, the PSSA had to cope with full capacity, rapid turnover, and a range of backgrounds. In 1951, for example, the 53 children who had been in Hillsbrook that year included ‘children without parents, motherless children, fatherless children, children from broken homes and children needing temporary care during the illness of their mother’. While the quick turnover of children was regarded by Child Welfare as ‘performing an excellent service for children temporarily where parents are in difficult circumstances’, the short stays no doubt produced stressors and challenges for the staff. For example, in 1951 it was reported that 124 children had passed through Hillsbrook in the previous four years, 53 of them during the past twelve months. The main reason was sickness in their own home, according to the Rev. H. Dyson, who stated that, ‘the children we have here will never be turned away while they need a home. They are our children and our responsibility.’ Indeed, Child Welfare’s report that year indicates that out of 22 children, only three were staying permanently. However, the officer suggests that because Hillsbrook was prepared to take in ‘whole families of broken homes’, then return them ‘intact when the parents are united’, the government agency believed that ‘Hillsbrook is performing a unique service in Hawke’s Bay.’

The differences in emphasis point to the PSSA’s need to appeal to its parishioners for funding, knowing that it was more likely to be successful when illness of a parent, especially a mother, was the reason for a child being admitted to Hillsbrook. On the other hand, Child Welfare could more easily justify the continuation of a larger institution if it highlighted its willingness to take children at short notice when parents separated, especially given that the PSSA did not seek government aid at that time.
Being prepared to take all children of all ages and coping with such a rapid turnover took its toll on operations. Expressing concern in 1954, the Child Welfare officer was concerned about ‘too many staff changes’ and ‘complete authority being vested in the Matron’. There was also ‘the danger that this institution may depart from its original policy by seeking revenue producing cases rather than admitting cases on their needs’. The canny official no doubt realised that the number of children arriving because of Child Welfare referrals would inevitably force the government to pay for their care. This change was not long in coming. In 1956, the PSSA applied for a capitation subsidy for all children, on the grounds that it provided ‘care for all children deprived of normal home life’, and yet received no support from public funds. The capitation subsidy of ten shillings per week per child was approved the following year.

Because of heavy financial demands in 1956, the PSSA sold off sections facing Te Mata Road, thus reducing the Hillsbrook property from eight acres to four acres. The PSSA was dependent on the goodwill and donations of Presbyterians to sustain both Hillsbrook and its Homes for the Aged, and was grateful for this support; but it became increasingly difficult for the PSSA to self-fund Hillsbrook, so it turned to the government for help.

That year Child Welfare reported favourably on the matron, with whom the ‘children appear to have a warm and happy relationship’; she was seen as understanding, ensuring ‘that the children return to school after lunch in time to play with the other pupils. Good management and atmosphere’. A total of 40 children entered the home in 1956, and 35 left. In 1958, 47 children passed through the doors. From 1956 to 1958, a total of 120 children were cared for.

The staff lists in the McFadzien history indicate that staffing was a major issue for the PSSA. This is confirmed in Child Welfare reports from 1954. The longest serving staff were the first matron, Miss Finlayson (1947-1951; 1953), Mr and Mrs G.K. Alexander (1960-1967), and Mr and Mrs J.B. Kelleher (1967-1974).

Just how valuable Child Welfare judged Hillsbrook to be was evident when the PSSA again applied for the capitation subsidy in 1959. Writing to support the application, the district Child Welfare officer, B. Tasker, explained to the Superintendent of Child Welfare in Wellington the front-line realities for children and social workers:
No home in my experience has been more cooperative than Hillsbrook. The willingness of the Trustees, at our request, to tax their accommodation to a maximum in an emergency, to take children of a family where there is no hope of maintenance being paid, and to do so at short notice has been most helpful and has been instrumental in avoiding action under section 13 on a number of occasions.²⁴

Section 13 of the Child Welfare Act enabled social workers to place children under the care and protection of the state where there were no alternative options. This, however, was a major undertaking, involving many personnel and vast amounts of paperwork. Being able to avoid this was better both for the child and for the social worker. Often the children who needed to be cared for immediately were very young, and placing preschoolers at short notice had always been a difficult task in the region. Hillsbrook did its best to ‘not turn away any child’, and in 1959 was reported as being prepared to take ‘up to 14 children in this age group at any one time’.²⁵

Violeta Pishief and her two younger sisters were three such preschoolers sent to Hillsbrook in 1960. Their mother had died, and their father could not both look after them and retain his paid work. Instead, he made the difficult choice to keep his older children of school age, and pay to have his three younger children cared for at Hillsbrook. Reflecting on this time, Violeta said, ‘It was not his choice – he had tried his best and did not ever tell his relatives about it as he was very proud.’²⁶ The girls spoke no English, as Macedonian was the language used at home – their parents had arrived in New Zealand nine years earlier, after the Greek Civil War. It was left to four-year-old Violeta to translate as best she could for her sisters, and to learn English quickly in order to help them make sense of their new environment.

At first they struggled with the regimented day and the food, which they did not like. As each child turned five, they went in turn to Te Mata Primary School. Violeta was in Standard Two when her life changed again. She and her sisters were told that they would be returning to live with their father, but not until they had made a couple of Saturday afternoon orientation visits to his home in Clive. Reflecting on this, Violeta thought having to do so was most odd; it meant the girls had to go back to Hillsbrook after an afternoon ‘at home’, perhaps without fully understanding why. Yet they did return home to live with their father; the fact that they were now at school during the day meant he could cope better with
the combined tasks of paid work and parenting.

There were similar stories among many of the families assisted by Hillsbrook. Children were admitted for periods of time, and it was common for them to be returned to a parent once circumstances had changed. In this way, Hillsbrook provided a life-line for parents in crisis, and as the PSSA reported, ‘Expressions of appreciation from parents and guardians have been many, and prove the extent to which our Home has been appreciated and its service recognised.’ While this was undoubtedly true for the parents, the longer term impact upon the children being cared for would not emerge until years later. As Violeta reported, when she hears others speak of their family origins and events, ‘I do not want to talk about my childhood...I am pleased to have come out quite normal.’

The opposite is the case for Kaylene Higgs, admitted to Hillsbrook in the late 1970s, at the age of seven. Two of her brothers and a sister were already at Hillsbrook, having been admitted two years earlier when their father passed custody of the children over to the state. In the meantime, Kaylene and an older sister had been placed with a foster family – indeed, Kaylene had been in two foster homes before she arrived at Hillsbrook. As she put it, by that time she ‘had to fend for herself and look after her siblings’ and had ‘seen things that no child should have seen’. As an adult, she realises that she experienced and was affected by her parents’ rejection, as well as by the impact of being in the welfare system and at Hillsbrook. At the time, however, being there meant ‘feeling safe, food, school, clothing, shoes – all were taken care of’. Indeed, the security at Hillsbrook meant ‘having your own room, being educated, given opportunities, playing sport and so on – we did not know we were in an institution’. Therefore, when she left at the age of eighteen, she was shocked to learn that she and her siblings were wards of the state.

The taking in of whole families to prevent the children from being split up, and providing them with security, even if they never went back to their parent/s, was central to the philosophy of Hillsbrook’s Board. Approximately six members at any one time, especially in the 1960s and 1970s, took a special interest in the children, visited Hillsbrook regularly, and attended their sports matches and school occasions, such as parent-teacher interviews, concerts and prize-givings. Violeta Pishief was quick to praise board members as ‘very friendly and caring, especially Mr Lemon who was concerned about our welfare’, while Kaylene Higgs could not speak highly enough of those members of the board.
and church community who took an interest in all the children. One of these was the late Sir Rodney Gallen, a long-serving Chair, who was also influential in Kaylene’s agreeing to serve on the Presbyterian Support East Coast Board for a period. From both sides, the impression is gained that Hillsbrook board members actively engaged and cared for the children.

Such good work in taking in and caring for children across a range of ages, however, meant that the original building had to be adapted in 1959 to include a larger play room. The renovations were approved, as well as the capitation subsidy per child. Writing to the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Education made the case ‘that the Home is serving a real need in the district’.34

Both Violeta and Kaylene recalled their free time playing in the substantial Hillsbrook grounds, the games, and being part of a sub-group of friends. They liked having their school friends over to play, and enjoyed the meals, and occasions such as fireworks, hosted by board members or friends at their homes.

In the school holidays, to enable the matron and the other staff to have a break, church and local families ‘opened their hearts and homes’ and took the children in.35 Again, this was a unique practice, advocated and approved by Child Welfare on the grounds that it allowed the children to experience an average home. Indeed, the Division tried to persuade the Hawke’s Bay Children’s Homes Trust to take up this practice too; but it refused, on the grounds that it was too disruptive to routines and practices of care. In other words, children might become more unruly or dissatisfied upon their return.

Board members, in particular, rang around friends to procure this holiday experience for the children, often resulting in children being invited back year after year. This was the case for Kaylene Higgs, who was sent to the Brickell family. She roamed their Wairoa farm with the six Brickell children, who ‘became mates’, and their parents, who became ‘mum and dad’, and who remain ‘my family’.36

Children could also pursue hobbies and join local groups, such as ‘Busy Bees’, or play sport. Such activities were encouraged and supported with the paying of fees and provision of uniforms and money for travelling to tournaments. Some, like Kaylene Higgs, excelled: at age fourteen, she achieved a place in the top netball team at high school.37

As for others interviewed about their childhoods within institutions, the less pleasant memories of Hillsbrook are associated with realisations of ‘not having
a home’, feelings of rejection or abandonment, and generally feeling that so far life had not dealt them a fair hand. As Kaylene put it, ‘what you carry inside, the emotional stuff’. For some children, this included being ‘picked on’ from time to time, and being on the receiving end of corporal punishment from staff. They accepted that this was part of life; and importantly, as Kaylene put it, ‘I did not live in fear as I had done as a little girl’.

Indeed, for Kaylene, ‘the natural order’ of the routines and daily life were important. This was especially so when children had come from family situations where they had to feed and look after themselves, because parents were neglectful or absent, or withstand violence when they were present. At Hillsbrook, for the first time in their lives, the Higgs children knew that from the time they got up in the morning until they went to bed at night, all their needs would be taken care of. There were rules and chores, and Violetha, who had been at Hillsbrook ten years earlier, reflected that the matron was strict; but overall, she believed they enjoyed a lot of freedom.

Part of the routine included going to school every day. Both Violetha and Kaylene reported times at school when they ‘felt different’. For Violetha, this meant being singled out from time to time and, perhaps because the teacher felt sorry for her,
sitting on the teacher’s lap in class. Kaylene observed that when other children at high school took money and lined up to buy their books at the school stationery store, she needed to go across either before or after school to collect the books that had been pre-paid for by the PSSA. Over time, the local schools attended by the children included Te Mata Primary School, Havelock Intermediate School, Hastings High School (which became Hastings Boys’ and Hastings Girls’ High Schools) and later Havelock North High School. For a number of years the younger boys attended nearby Hereworth, a private preparatory school run by the Anglican Church. Hereworth reduced the fees, and the Williams Trust paid the remainder. Reflecting on that time, a former board member had not been certain if mixing the Hillsbrook boys with those from privileged backgrounds was necessarily a good thing; but most of the boys later reported that they ‘loved it’, and believed it got them off to a very good start in life. However, Kaylene thought that the girls fared less well: the boys had a better deal, and more was done to prepare them for the transition from school to work, such as helping them find suitable employers for trades apprenticeships.

Sunday included attending St Columba’s Sunday School for the younger children, and morning church service for the older ones. The congregation donated presents for the children at Christmas, and Violeta remembers receiving these. When she returned to live at home with her father, she had become so accustomed to going to church on Sunday that she asked him if they were going to attend. While her Presbyterian stewards would have been well pleased, her father did not share her enthusiasm.

Kaylene believed that their links to St Columba’s Church, as well as living in the middle of Havelock North, meant Hillsbrook children were well integrated into the community. For example, school friends were welcome to come and play in Hillsbrook’s spacious grounds, and enjoyed doing so. In return, the children were free to go and stay in their friends’ homes at weekends. In later years, when there was enough room, Hillsbrook offered to billet members of visiting school sports teams, and the children enjoyed such times. A regular community activity included ‘some of the church ladies coming to Hillsbrook to bottle fruit and us helping them’.

Kaylene was one of the last children to leave Hillsbrook. She was reasonably confident in her ability to manage: both her life before Hillsbrook and her time there had fostered a high level of independence, while her sporting activities had
consolidated her team and leadership skills. She joined the bank staff, and went flatting. In 2012 she enjoys a senior banking role, and is coach of the Eastern netball team. Looking back on her eleven years at Hillsbrook, she reflects that, ‘It was all I knew and like anything else, I was not going to let it beat me.’ 41

But leaving Hillsbrook did not necessarily mean severing ties altogether. Board members and children alike reported that the quality of relationships established during their childhoods meant that as adults, they stayed in contact with those who had taken an interest in them. In some cases, former Hillsbrook children and board members continue to visit, write, and update one another on their activities up to forty years later.

For 42 years, Hillsbrook provided a valuable service. In that time, it was home to more than 500 children. It remained in its original building until 1975, when a new home that could cater for 24 children was built and opened on the same site. In 1985, the smaller numbers of children requiring care made it uneconomic for a larger home to operate, the funding became more difficult to acquire, and Hillsbrook finally closed in 1988. By that time suburban family homes in Havelock North and Hastings were run by the Department of Social Welfare. The PSSA, now Presbyterian Support East Coast, used the building on Te Mata Road as a regional administrative base, and continues to do so.

Notes
2 Ibid.
3 WEL/CH/27PT1, cited in letter from President of PSSA to the Superintendent Child Welfare Division, 14 December 1956, Child Welfare Division Files, Archives New Zealand.
5 McFadzien, J. (1986).
8 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
15 The Hawke’s Bay Herald Tribune, 10 February 1951.
16 WEL/CH/27PT1.CW66, Report on Hillsbrook Children’s Home. 3 October 1951
19 WEL/CH/27PT1. Letter from Department of education to Secretary-President PSSA of Hawke’s Bay and Poverty Bay, 28 January 1957.
25 Ibid.
26 Interview with Violeta Kane (nee Pishief) 19 February 2012.
28 Interview with Violeta Kane (nee Pishief).
29 Interview with Kaylene Higgs, 2 February 2011, EIT, Taradale.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
33 Interview with Violeta Kane (nee Pishief).
34 WEL/CH/27PT1, Letter from the Minister of Education to the Minister of Finance, 31 August 1959.
36 Interview with Kaylene Higgs.
37 In 2012, Kaylene is the coach of the East Coast Netball Team.
38 Interview with Kaylene Higgs.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
Chapter Eight

Conclusion: Who cared?

This final chapter outlines the changing socio-economic and familial contexts behind the placement of children in children’s homes over time. It also suggests reasons for there being more children’s homes per capita in Hawke’s Bay than in any other region of New Zealand. It closes with an overview of the experience of those who lived in the homes as children.

Whose children?

By 1926, there were seven Hawke’s Bay children’s homes and orphanages, catering for a total of approximately 200 children, at a time when the regional population was 65,569. At first reading, this number seems high, and in fact it was. Provinces with populations similar to Hawke’s Bay had far fewer children’s homes: for example, Taranaki (pop. 67,653) had only one boys’ home at Eltham, and Southland (pop. 65,173) had one boys’ home and one girls’ home. Otago, with double the population (149,579), also had seven institutions in 1926.

Dispelling the myth: Illegitimate (ex-nuptial) children

A common belief is that children’s homes cared primarily for the illegitimate or ex-nuptial children of ‘fallen women’. In Hawke’s Bay, this view is likely to be linked to the fact that two of the seven children’s homes in the region, Bethany and St Mary’s, were indeed ‘receiving’ homes, taking in single women who were unmarried and pregnant (see Chapter Two). While some of these women lived locally, anecdotal, the St Mary’s Registrar and oral evidence suggests that numbers of others travelled from other parts of New Zealand, returning once they had given birth and given up their babies. Single pregnant women often travelled to a distant receiving home (or were sent there by their parents) so as to conceal their pregnancy and thus avoid being shamed or gossiped about within their local communities, or jeopardising their marriage prospects. They would be
put to work in and around the home until the baby was born and for a period afterwards, to help recover costs. It was then common for them to return to their own homes in other parts of New Zealand, after ‘a time away’.

The babies were cared for by the home’s staff until they were adopted out or turned four. At that point they were considered old enough to cope with a change of residence. Those from the Anglican run St Mary’s were usually sent to one of the Hawke’s Bay Anglican homes for older children, St Hilda’s or Abbotsford. However, children born at the Salvation Army’s Bethany were commonly sent out of Hawke’s Bay to other Salvation Army children’s homes.

The annual reports of the Department of Education from 1920 make it possible to obtain an overview of Hawke’s Bay children recorded as illegitimate at birth, and of how many were placed in care and/or subsidised by the state. For example, in 1920 there were 77 (out of a national total of 1,424) illegitimate births recorded in Hawke’s Bay. In the same year, the state paid Bethany to care for 12 babies.
under six months old and for 20 babies between six and twelve months old. In all, Bethany cared for 50 children aged up to four years old in 1920.\textsuperscript{10}

The word ‘illegitimate’ ceased to be used following the Births and Deaths Registration Amendment Act 1930. This meant that ‘any entry made prior to the passing of the Act is deemed to be expunged and deleted, and must also be omitted from any certified copy of an entry’.\textsuperscript{11}

Ex-nuptial rates were reported by district in 1935. Out of a national total of 1046 (4.3\% of all births), 54 took place in Hawke’s Bay. In the same year, Nelson and Wanganui, regions with a similar population but no receiving homes, recorded 25, and Otago, with a much larger population, recorded 73.\textsuperscript{12} The proportion of registered ex-nuptial births as a percentage of total births did not vary greatly between 1945 (4.36\%) and 1955 (4.54\%).\textsuperscript{13} However, by 1960 the rate had risen to 5.25\% (2,911 ex-nuptial births).\textsuperscript{14}

**Parents, circumstances and poverty**

Up until 1945, institutions were required to supply information to the state about the circumstances of children (referred to as ‘inmates’) in their care. For example, in 1925 there were 2,620 children aged up to fifteen housed in New Zealand orphanages. However, only 29 (1.1\%) were genuine orphans, and 402 (15.3\%) were classified as ‘illegitimate’. By far the largest group, 839 children (32\%), had their father living but their mother had died, followed by 606 (23\%) with both parents living, and 419 (16\%) whose mother was living but whose father was dead.\textsuperscript{15} So the notion that children’s homes housed mainly illegitimate children was a myth; the principal reason over time for entering the homes was fathers not being able to care for their children after the mothers had died.

The admission registers of the Napier Trust homes and files of the Diocese of Waiapu together with narratives provided by those admitted to other homes, provide examples where the father either decided to take up farm based work and could not take the children with him, or had a different job that precluded him from being able to look after the children at the same time. It is likely that the home authorities were particularly sympathetic to such cases. After all, a man providing for his family was fundamental to societal norms; his not being able to do so because of being bound to domestic work and child care was not generally seen as acceptable. Further, if a father was employed, it was made clear to him that in return for the care of his children within any of the Hawke’s
Bay homes, he was expected to pay a weekly fee. Given the costs of running the institutions, it is not surprising that the children of working fathers were likely to be admitted.

On the other hand, overall the homes tried to balance the needs of parents in different situations, such as where both parents were alive but, for a variety of reasons, could not look after their children. One very common reason was the mother being too ill to run the household, although the father was working. Children of such couples were usually admitted to the homes, again to keep the father in work, and possibly because a fee could also be obtained. In such cases, as at Gordon House, Randall House, Abbotsford and Hillsbrook, the children were released once the mother had sufficiently recovered her health.

Those children who did have a mother, but whose father who was either too ill to work, or a drunkard who could not hold down a job, were also admitted, and generally remained throughout their childhood. Even if their mother did manage to get a job, she usually could not provide for them, as her earnings were too low. As for those children with mothers only, the Admittance Registers show
that these were often widows. Although widow’s pensions became available in 1912, the amount was barely sufficient to feed and clothe any children in their care. Yet they managed as best they could, in order to keep the family together. In 1928, 8,993 children nationwide were being raised by 4,098 widows, who received an allowance of 52 pounds per annum for one child under 15 years of age, and 26 pounds for each additional child. The maximum pension payable was 208 pounds per annum. Widows found it particularly tough if they became ill and/or had to be hospitalised, or were unable to take the children with them to a paid domestic position.

By 1935, the overall number of children in care across New Zealand, 2,435, remained much the same as in 1925; but the primary reason for children aged under fifteen being placed in homes or orphanages had changed. Perhaps because of the effects of the economic depression, and the consequent mass unemployment, the largest group of 998 children (40.9%) had both parents living, followed by 673 (27.6%) with father living and mother dead, and 332 (9.5%) with mother living and father dead. By way of contrast, the number of registered ex-nuptial children, 385 (15.8%), was almost the same as ten years earlier, while actual orphans numbered 146 (6%).

However, this was soon to change again. According to the Secretary of Education in 1945, ‘war conditions’ were to blame for a rapid increase in illegitimate births, numbering 1,767 in 1943 and reaching an unprecedented level of 2,020 in 1944. At that time, before the post-war surge in infant adoption, there was ‘every endeavour to keep mother and child together’, and 820 babies resided with their mothers in 1944.

By 1945, the number of children under fifteen in orphanages and a few other institutions had fallen significantly to 1,077. Further, 73% of these children had both parents alive, and only 99 (9.1%) were classified as ex-nuptial. This decline can be attributed partly to the introduction of Social Security in 1938. A range of new or expanded benefits helped a parent or parents to financially support their children and keep them together in the family home. Increasing numbers of infant adoptions were also a factor in the reduced numbers of ex-nuptial children living in children’s homes. From 1948, information about children in orphanages was no longer included in official statistics.

Contrary to what might generally have been expected, then, the majority of children in homes or orphanages were neither true orphans, with both parents
dead, nor classified as ex-nuptial. Far outnumbering both these categories were children with either one or both parents living. In Hawke’s Bay, as in other places, this situation impacted not only upon the models of care and the state subsidies available, but also on the ability of churches and private trusts to raise enough community based funding to support the running of children’s homes and orphanages.

Institutions or Fostering

From the establishment of the Industrial Schools in 1882, followed by the regionally administered Hospital and Charitable Aid Boards in 1885, and the passing of the Infant Life Protection Act in 1893, the official view in New Zealand tended toward the notion that children who had committed no offence should be with members of their extended family, and if that was not possible, then they should be placed in private foster homes (the cheaper option), rather than institutions. The development of boarding out or foster care for needy children, rather than placing them in institutions, had gained support in the United States and in parts of Australia from the early 1880s. There, influenced by the Scottish model, which did not extensively use institutions as a way of caring for needy children, widows or married couples were paid to take one or more children into their homes.

Children sent to the industrial schools were often boarded out. Initially, children under seven years of age were boarded out, but from 1884 this was extended to children under ten. By 1895, 81 per cent of children from the various industrial schools directly controlled by the Department of Education were in foster homes.

As previous chapters have explained, it was the endeavours of those who were philosophically opposed both to sending children away to industrial schools outside the region, and also to boarding out, that led to the setting up of the first children’s home in Hawke’s Bay. Those opposed to the boarding out system pointed out that some foster parents were taking children into their homes for the sake of the money the state paid them, or were looking for cheap domestic or farm labour. This system also allowed opportunities for exploiting children, and there was no guarantee that individual and loving care would be provided. Instead, destitute children were best cared for, they argued, as a group, where they could ‘be well looked after, brought up in a Christian manner, and taught to
be neat, clean, industrious and obedient’.  

Demand for places in the original Hawke’s Bay Children’s Home was so high that it soon expanded into three separate single sex homes, Gordon House, Randall House and France House, all located in and around Napier. The Salvation Army was the first of the churches to establish its own children’s home known as Bethany, followed quickly by St Mary’s, the Anglican home for unmarried pregnant women on Napier’s Napier Hill, and two homes for older children, St Hilda’s in Otane and Abbotsford in Waipawa. The Presbyterian Church ran the last of the Hawke’s Bay children’s homes, Hillsbrook in Havelock North, which took in both girls and boys of all ages until 1988.

The churches in general argued that denominational homes for needy children kept the children better disciplined and under better control, because the moral and spiritual guidance was more effective than that offered in foster homes. For example, in 1919, the view of the Waiapu Diocese was that one visit to its well run Anglican Children’s Home:

...would convince anyone of the immense superiority of a small orphanage over the boarding out system....It stands to reason that it is far better for children to be brought up by an experienced ‘mother’ under proper hygienic conditions, sharing equally pleasures, rights, duties and privileges with one another, properly fed and clothed than to be boarded out in families where they will be regarded as outsiders, where they will find one set of privileges for the natural family and another for themselves, unloved, exploited, humiliated...  

In general, the state found it difficult to accept such arguments. Importantly, it recognised that institutions such as church-run orphanages and children’s homes were more expensive than foster homes. However, the churches took the view that as long as funds could be raised from local congregations to maintain children’s homes, they could remain autonomous and self-governing.

By 1921, when six children’s homes existed in Hawke’s Bay, it was clear that the practice of raising children in homes and orphanages was markedly at odds with government policy. John Beck, the officer in charge of industrial and special schools (who became the first superintendent of Child Welfare in 1926), was convinced ‘that children did not thrive in an institutional setting’, and began ‘a systematic campaign to close the industrial schools and board more children
in foster homes in the community’. 27 In setting out why institutions in general were inappropriate settings for raising children, and family-style foster homes were the preferred state option, he incurred the wrath of those running children’s homes. The Bishop of Waiapu, for example, came out fighting:

‘Private enterprise under the guise of benevolence’! What do our readers think of this of our Home at Otane? The children do not belong to the infidel State that panders to immorality and excludes God from its schools; they belong to Christ and we, the Christian brothers and sisters of the parents they have lost, justly claim to bring them up as Christ’s children. 28

As for the government view that children’s homes lacked co-ordination of methods, the Bishop agreed that he could live with supervision of hygiene, but ‘we do not want orphanages to be run as factories….A happy orphanage under a trained Matron who does her work for the love of Christ and his little ones is infinitely better than the selfish interest or “enterprise under the guise of benevolence” of foster parents who want to make as much as they can out of their human farms.’ 29

Such views ran against the contemporary tide. The government preference for raising three or four children in family-type foster situations was consistent with the opinions of other western governments at the time. For example, the Child Welfare representative who attended the 1929 National Conference of American Social Workers agreed with the remits that prioritised care for children in a relatives’ family home as the next best substitute for their own family. Failing that, freely provided foster care was the next best option, where the child was accepted as a member of the family. Above all, the view was that a good family boarding home was always preferable to an institution, which should be regarded as a last resort, providing for only a limited number of cases. 30

Child Youth and Family (CYF) is now the government agency responsible for ensuring that children are protected from harm and neglect. Its predecessor, the Child Welfare Branch (later Division) of the Department of Education, was established in 1925, when the government formally acknowledged increased state responsibility for the care and protection of vulnerable children through the Child Welfare Act.

By 1930, most western governments shared a view that innocent and vulner-
able children who were destitute, abandoned or neglected would thrive within a family situation, where they might receive care and attention that would better meet their individual needs. It was believed that an Institutional atmosphere was artificial, in that it deprived children of the intimate and personal contacts possible in the normal family home. Other arguments against institutional care included the danger of moral contamination when children from widely differing backgrounds were put together; the increased chance of the spread of epidemics; the regimentation and rigid discipline; and limited opportunities for earning, handling and spending money. Nevertheless, it was not until 1988 that the last Hawke's Bay children’s home, Hillsbrook, closed its doors.

Over time, the state introduced and extended pensions and benefits for those parenting alone, as a means of maintaining children with their own birth parent and within the family home. For example, in New Zealand between 1903 and 1907, 9,000 married men died, leaving 8,200 children under fifteen years old. Such statistics influenced the introduction of the widow’s benefit in 1912, so as to make it more feasible for a woman to keep her children. In 1938, an orphan’s pension was introduced to encourage the fostering of orphans within their own extended families. However, state support as of right for single, separated or divorced mothers or fathers was not introduced until 1973.

The children's homes of Hawke's Bay

Since at least the 1920s, it has been the state’s conviction that raising children within a family, where they could, ideally, receive love and individual care, would have the best outcome. Yet the pattern in Hawke’s Bay was persistently different.

Why were there so many children’s homes in Hawke’s Bay? Clearly, it was not because the rates of child neglect, child abandonment and illegitimacy were higher there than in other regions. Did the specific plight of children in need spur the region’s congregations and benevolent citizens to find local solutions and fund a range of local institutions over time?

To spend a childhood alongside other children within an institution is difficult for many of today’s children to imagine. Indeed, many adults are surprised to learn that the Hawke’s Bay children’s homes existed at all. That they did exist, for nearly one hundred years, came about because Hawke’s Bay people took it upon themselves to provide, as they saw best, for innocent children faced with
acute need or temporary and unexpected hardship, due to a sudden change in parental circumstances.

The story of ‘who cared for vulnerable children?’ in Hawke’s Bay can be addressed at a number of levels. There were the regular subscribers, who cared enough to pay annual fees to help support a particular home. There were the members of church congregations, who donated directly or raised money via annual street parades, garden parties, fetes and the like. Generous benefactors gave large sums of money at times of need, and left often substantial bequests. These funds were then administered by boards and committees formed mainly of volunteers, who gave willingly of their time and expertise to provide and maintain buildings and grounds, employ staff, and, as always, continually seek money to pay for it all. Indeed, the story of the children’s homes in Hawke’s Bay is associated with generosity and philanthropy consistently given across time.

This scheme of community welfare meant that for decades, bands of women baked cakes, ran gala stalls, preserved fruit, organised sewing bees and provided wardrobes of second-hand clothing for children of all ages. Tradesmen donated their labour as endless taps were fixed, drains unblocked, lights installed and
buildings extended. Orchardists gave fruit, shop owners gave or subsidised merchandise, those with cars and trucks provided transport, while philanthropists gave presents and provided outings. Professionals such as doctors and dentists gave their services freely, many for decades on end. Community pipe and brass bands played at fund raisers, fire brigades regularly turned up to take the children for rides on fire appliances, and members of Rotary and Lions’ Clubs organised picnics or other entertainment. Farmers provided meat and hosted outings, transport and summer camps.

Without this groundswell of community support, the unprecedented number of children’s homes in Hawke’s Bay, compared with anywhere else in New Zealand, could not have been established or survived. Even when government subsidies for children in care were introduced, the funding was insufficient to cover all costs, so locals kept giving. Why did they do it?

Perhaps their generosity can best be described as a type of regional cultural capital, where providing for and helping the children in the children’s homes in some way became part of what many local families and businesses always did. Charity begins at home, and there was a relatively small population in the region who mostly knew one another. Moreover, the children in the homes were not anonymous: they were known by name to their schoolmates’ parents and to parishioners, as well as to other members of the communities in which they lived.

In many cases, their parents were also known in the community, along with the circumstances that had led to the children coming to live in the homes. Most people seemed to realise that, ‘but for the Grace of God’ – if they had contracted an illness and died, for example – their own children might have ended up in a similar situation. Especially in the years before advanced medical care, there was constant awareness of the fine line between surviving and succumbing.

Out of this realisation came a collective response: that local children should wherever possible be raised locally, where there was some knowledge of their past and of their family, and that they should not have to undergo further trauma through being sent away to another part of the country. So local people did their best to see that the children were cared for.

**Last words: Growing up in a children's home**

As adults, those who lived in the homes remain grateful to all who helped them
Hillsbrook children featured on cover of 1954 Annual Report (Presbyterian Social Services East Coast)
in some way. Yet the provision of the basic necessities and even the occasional treat were secondary to the type of caring they yearned for: the emotional caring, the hugs, the cuddles and the individual undivided attention of someone who loved them. Most emphasised this in relation either to feeling frightened in a new environment, or to being raised alongside twenty or thirty others. As adults, they realised that the staff had not been permitted physical contact with them, and expressed empathy for those raising so many children at once. For them, the caring they craved as children had simply not been possible.

Instead, regardless of whether they were born in the 1920s or the 1970s, they spoke of those who were important to them in their childhoods – their peers, with whom they were raised, an adult who took a special interest in them or influenced them at a pivotal time. These were to prove enduring life-long friendships, a point of reference to a sense of belonging.

As they told me their stories, I was overwhelmed by a common thread. Today we call it resilience. All had an undeniable bounce-back attitude with an independent streak, a conviction that from a young age, they had only themselves to depend on. This book then has set out for the first time an account of a unique set of childhoods, of those who lived in the children’s homes of Hawke’s Bay.

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1  New Zealand Official Year Book (1927), p.99. Statistics did not then include the Māori population.
2  Ibid.
4  Hocken Collections, Orphanages and Children’s Homes in Otago and Southland – Reference Guide.
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11 Births and Deaths Registration Amendment Act 1930.
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18 AJHR 1945, E-4, p.5.
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MS     Manuscript

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Index

A

Abbotsford Home, Waipawa, iv, vi, vii, ix, x, xi, xiii, 38-39, 44, 45, 46, 47, 51-53, 57, 75, 76, 81, 82, 83, 85-121, 177, 208, 210, 213, 224, 225

Absolum, Archer, see also France House, 176

Absolum, Mrs, 92

adoption, 30, 31, 32, 34, 36, 45, 148, 211

Anglican Church, see also Church of England, xii, 12, 18, 27, 32-33, 34, 38-39, 51-53, 72, 84, 85-86, 89, 90, 108, 158, 177, 204, 225

Annual Reports, 38, 42, 80, 173, 193, 208, 225, 226

Aramoana, see also McHardy family, 92, 95-96, 98, 99

B

babies and toddlers, 20, 25

Baden-Powell, Sir Robert, 171, 173, 176, 190, 226

Baker, Jill (nee Rees), see also Abbotsford, iv, 88, 91, 92, 95-97, 99, 100-102, 104, 108, 116, 118, 119, 210, 221

Baptist Bible Women and Nurses’ Society, 11, 126

Baptist Church, 13, 139

Beck, John, 213, 227

bequests, 19-20, 21, 38, 39, 51, 116, 123, 142, 216

Bethany Home, Napier, see also Salvation Army, v, xii, xiii, 25-32, 33, 36, 38, 44, 45, 47, 56, 135, 141, 207, 208-209, 213, 219, 223

Bibby family, 125

Births and Deaths Registration Amendment Act 1930, 209, 220, 226

births, single women, 31

Bishop of Waiapu, 18, 27, 51, 52, 54, 57, 75, 85, 214

boarding out (of children), v, 9-11, 14, 49, 212-215

Bowles, Ron, see also St Hilda’s, 55, 56, 58, 69, 62, 65, 68, 69, 70, 82, 83, 84, 221

Boys’ Homes,

France House, vii, viii, xi, xii, 124-126, 130, 132, 134, 135, 143, 151, 152, 155, 158, 163-191, 213, 216, 222, 223, 224

Brand, Deaconess Esther, see also St Mary’s Home, 34-37, 48

Brooker, D., 33, 48, 227

Brown, Bessie, 14, 16-18

Buckley, Robert, see also St Hilda’s, xi, 56, 58, 60, 62, 69, 72-73, 82, 83, 84, 221, 222

Burnham Industrial School, 2, 4, 5

Burton, Bruce, see also Child Welfare, 105, 107, 172-174, 197

Carnell, Mr. & Mrs., 7, 14

Carter, Nurse Anne, see also St Mary’s Home, 35, 40, 41, 43-44, 45, 47

Caversham Industrial School, 2, 22

Charitable Aid, 4-12, 14, 16, 17, 22, 23, 123, 124, 127, 129, 212, 229

children, see also inmates,

babies and toddlers, 20, 25

orphans, 1, 3, 39, 51, 54, 127, 128, 141, 164, 195, 209, 211, 215, 227

Child Welfare Act 1925, 20, 24, 40, 75, 226

Child Welfare Amendment Act 1927, xii, 21, 24, 26, 41, 226

Child Welfare Branch, ix, 49, 118, 161, 214, 223, 224, 226

Child Welfare Division, xiii, 35, 118, 120, 189, 195, 205, 223

Child Welfare officers, 27-28, 32, 37, 42, 106, 147


Child Youth and Family, 214


chores, see also roster, routine, 59, 65, 90, 100-101, 130, 143, 144, 151, 165, 170, 171, 179-180, 187, 203

church attendance, 19

Church Homes,

Abbotsford Home, Waipawa, iv, vi, vii, ix, x, xi, xiii, 38-39, 44, 45, 46, 47, 51-53, 57, 75, 76, 81, 82, 83, 85-121, 177, 208, 210, 213, 224, 225

Bethany Home, Napier, v, xii, xiii, 25-32, 33, 36, 38, 44, 45, 47, 56, 135, 141, 207, 208-209,
213, 219, 223
Hillsbrook, Havelock North, viii, x, xi, xiii, 114, 193-206, 210, 213, 215, 218, 224, 225
St Hilda’s Orphanage, Otane, vi, ix, x, xi, xiii, 38, 39, 41, 42, 43, 44, 46, 47, 51-84, 90, 95, 96, 101, 107, 108, 112, 208, 213, 222, 224, 225
St Mary’s Receiving Home, v, ix, xiii, 25, 32-50, 52, 53, 55, 56, 57, 76, 78, 82, 90, 108, 110, 135, 207, 208, 213, 219, 224, 225
Church of England, see also Abbotsford, St Hilda’s, St Mary’s, Bishop of Waiapu, 18, 27, 51, 52, 54, 57, 75, 85, 214
St James, Otane, 80, 84, 225
St Peter’s, Waipawa, 52, 86, 89, 102, 104, 118, 228
Waiapu Diocese, 32, 39, 213, 227
Waiapu Synod, 33
Clarke family, 163, 177, 178
clothes, clothing, 10, 19, 20, 44, 65, 67, 72, 76, 80, 101, 103, 114, 125, 135, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 149, 170, 197, 201, 213, 216
uniform, 57, 62, 66-67, 69, 106, 145, 151, 155, 202
Wardrobe Committee, 139, 140
Cohen, Henry & Hannah, 7, 14, 17
Colenso, William, 3, 227
Coney, S., 23, 227
Constable Neale, 9
Crawford, P., 83, 84, 227
D
daily routine, x, 19, 58, 59, 61, 66, 67, 97, 99, 100-101, 103, 138-139, 144, 146, 171, 178-179, 202, 203
Dalley, B., 220, 227
Danvers, Henry, see also France House, 167, 168, 171, 172, 174, 179, 184, 188
Davenport, Henrietta, 13, 18
deserted, 2, 9, 11, 76, 79, 117, 128, 130
deserted wives, 9, 79
destitute, 1, 2, 4-6, 8-11, 12, 14, 16, 17, 20, 39, 42, 52, 126, 127, 131, 133, 195, 212, 215
Destitute Persons Act, 1846, 1
Domestic Purposes Benefit, 31
domestic service, 6, 13, 78, 132, 134, 150, 155, 156
donations, 3, 19-20, 21, 27, 38, 39, 54, 78, 80, 96, 103, 113, 116, 123, 140, 143, 149, 166, 196, 199
donors, 37
earthquake (Napier, 1931), ix, xii, 28, 44, 51, 56, 136, 146, 152, 164, 165
Edgley, H.E., 125, 158, 182
Education Department, 46
Child Welfare Branch, ix, ix, ix, 49, 118, 161, 214, 223-224, 226
Child Welfare Division, xiii, 35, 118, 120, 189, 195, 205, 223
Child Welfare officers, 27-28, 32, 37, 42, 106, 147
Edward Murphy Home, Gisborne, 48
Else, A., 23, 228, 229
Eskdale Memorial Church, 170, 177, 178, 182, 191
Eskdale School, 165, 180, 187
ex-nuptial children, see also illegitimacy, single mothers, vii, 1, 78, 110, 207, 209, 211, 212
F
Fafieta, Isabel see also St Hilda’s, 55, 69, 208, 221
farm labour, 131, 149, 150, 212
fathers, 37, 43, 53, 54, 67, 110, 128, 142, 209, 210, 215
Findlay, Malcolm, see also Gordon House, France House, 126, 134, 136, 146, 159, 160, 161, 166, 172, 181, 183, 185-187, 188-189, 190, 191, 221, 222
fire brigades, 217
food, 8, 14, 19, 20, 44, 65, 73, 76, 78, 80, 90, 96, 99, 100, 113, 143, 149, 175, 178, 181, 186, 200, 201
meals, 89, 91, 97, 99, 100, 113, 170, 177, 197, 202
foster care, 21, 115, 212, 214
foster homes, 11, 21, 40, 75, 114, 135, 157, 201, 212, 213, 214
fostering of children, 141, 212, 215
Fox, Thomas, 8, 9, 23
France House, Eskdale, vii, viii, xi, xii, 124-126, 130, 132, 134, 135, 143, 151, 152, 155, 158, 163-191, 213, 216, 222, 223, 224
France, Robert, 124, 164
France Trust, 124-125, 127-129, 141, 164
Frivolity Minstrels, 143
fundraising, 21, 37, 39, 115
G

Girls' Homes,
  domestic service, 6, 13, 78, 132, 134, 150, 155-156

Randall House, Napier, vi, xii, 13, 27, 123, 124, 125, 126, 129, 130, 132, 133, 134, 135, 136, 137, 140, 141, 143, 144-145, 146, 147, 151, 152, 153, 155-157, 159, 162, 210, 213, 223, 224

Coffin, Colonel Dean, see also Salvation Army, 31

Goffin, Major Gladys, see also Salvation Army, 30


H

Hawke's Bay Charitable Aid Board, 5, 8, 9

Hawke's Bay Children's Homes,
  Napier (Burlington Road), xii, xiii, 15, 32, 34, 123, 126, 127, 128, 129, 131, 138, 140

Hawke's Bay Children's Homes,
  Abbotsford Home, Waipawa, iv, vi, vii, ix, x, xi, xiii, 38-39, 44, 45, 46, 47, 51-53, 57, 75, 76, 81, 82, 83, 85-121, 177, 208, 210, 213, 224, 225
  Bethany Home, Napier, see also Salvation Army, v, xii, xiii, 25-32, 33, 36, 38, 44, 45, 47, 56, 135, 141, 207, 208-209, 213, 219, 223
  France House, Eskdale, vii, viii, xi, xii, 124-126, 130, 132, 134, 135, 143, 151, 152, 155, 158, 163-191, 213, 216, 222, 223, 224
  Hillsbrook, Havelock North, viii, x, xi, xiii, 114, 193-206, 210, 213, 215, 218, 224, 225
  Randall House, Napier, vi, xii, 13, 27, 123, 124, 125, 126, 129, 130, 132, 133, 134, 135, 136, 137, 140, 141, 143, 144-145, 146, 147, 151, 152, 153, 155-157, 159, 162, 210, 213, 223, 224
St Hilda's Orphanage, Otane, vi, ix, x, xi, xiii, 38, 39, 41, 42, 43, 44, 46, 47, 51-84, 90, 95, 96, 101, 107, 108, 112, 208, 213, 222, 224, 225

St Mary's Receiving Home, Napier, v, ix, xiii, 25, 32-50, 52, 53, 55, 56, 57, 76, 78, 82, 90, 108, 110, 135, 207, 208, 213, 219, 224, 225

Hawke's Bay Children's Homes Trust, see also France House, Gordon House, Randall House, ix, x, xii, 27, 38, 39, 125, 129, 138, 141, 163, 170, 184, 192

Annual Reports, 173, 225

Trustees, 13, 18, 19, 36, 97, 127, 131, 143, 150, 151, 152, 153, 163, 165, 184, 200

Hawke's Bay Children's Home, Women's Committee, 34

Hawke's Bay Hospital Charitable Aid Board, 6

Hawke's Bay Women's Franchise League, 13, 14, 17, 18

Haycock family, see also Randall House, Gordon House, France House, 132, 133, 134, 136

Haycock, Betty, see also Matuschka, Betty (nee Haycock), 132, 134, 136, 143, 145, 146, 147, 149, 155, 156, 159, 160, 161, 162, 221


Health, Department of, 35, 38, 40, 75, 157, 197

Heni Materoa Home, Gisborne, xiii, 90

Hereworth, 204

Higgs, Kaylene, see also Hillsbrook, 201-203, 204-206, 221

Hill, Emily, 7, 17, 18

Hill, Henry, 17, 18

Hillsbrook, Havelock North, viii, x, xi, xiii, 114, 193-206, 210, 213, 215, 218, 224, 225

Hird, John, see also Gordon House, France House, 134-135, 137, 147, 167, 169, 173, 180, 185, 189

holidays, 59-60, 68, 72, 73, 89, 94, 95-96, 115, 130, 137-138, 177, 178, 185, 202

Hospital and Charitable Institutions Act 1885, 6, 7

Hukarere Māori Girls’ College, 18, 32-33, 59-60, 72, 81, 95, 111, 145, 166, 228
I
illegitimacy (see also ex-nuptial children, single mothers), 215
Industrial Schools Act 1882, 5
Industrial Schools (see also names of institutions), v, 2, 5-8, 10-11, 16-17, 22, 212, 213
Infant Life Protection Act 1893; 1907, 18, 37, 40, 147, 212, 226
infants, in Homes see also Bethany, St Mary’s, 28, 37, 219

J
Jenkins, K. & Morris Matthews, K., 48, 228
Johnston, L. (Miss Johnny), see also Abbotsford, 81, 86, 89, 90, 92, 94-95, 96, 97, 99, 100, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107-108, 111-112

K
Kane, Violeta (nee Pishief), see also Hillsbrook, 200-201, 202, 203, 204, 206, 221

L
Lister, I., 23, 228
Lowry, T.H. (Tom) & Mrs, 3, 27-28, 166

M
meals, 89, 91, 97, 99, 100, 113, 170, 177, 197, 202
Management of Homes, 32, 38, 76, 85, 104, 107-108, 114, 173, 197, 199
Māori, 2, 20, 32, 33, 35, 45, 59, 90, 111, 117, 166, 219, 228
Māori children in Homes, 45, 111, 117
Māori perspectives, see also Morris, George, 2
maternity and post-natal care, 35, 40
Maternity Home standards, regulations, 28, 35
maternity training, 28, 32, 47
Midwives Act 1904, 47
Mathew, H.C., 24, 220, 228
Matuschka, Betty (nee Haycock), see also Betty Haycock, Randall House, 133, 159, 160, 161, 162, 221
McFadzie, J., 193, 195, 199, 205, 206, 228
McHardy family, see also Aramoana, 95-96, 99, 118
McKinnon, John, see also France
House, xi, 167-168, 171, 174, 177,
178, 180, 185, 187, 188, 189, 190,
191, 221, 222
McLean, Sir Douglas, 7, 13, 17, 19,
125, 130, 153, 157
McLintock, A.H., 220, 228
McNutt, J.W., 196
Mein Smith, P., 47, 228
men's clubs, 3, 229
Midwives Act 1904, 47
Morris, George, see also Abbotsford,
86, 90-92, 105, 106, 116, 118, 119,
120
mothers, 3, 9, 26, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32,
33, 34, 36, 37, 40, 42, 43, 45, 46,
110, 128, 209, 210, 211, 215, 228

N
Nairn family, see also Pourerere, 60,
69, 72, 80
Napier Boys' High School, 72-73, 152,
165, 168, 181, 182, 184, 187
Napier Central School, 129, 130, 136-
137, 144, 150
Napier Girls' High School, 72, 152,
155-156
Napier Refuge, 8
Napier Thirty Thousand Club, 143
Neale, Constable, 9
Neglected and Criminal Children Act
1867, 2, 5
Nelson family, 125, 158
Nurses and Midwives Registration Act
1925, 28
nurses, and nursing, 11, 14, 28, 29,
32, 34, 42, 72, 155, 171, 197

O
Objects of the Children's Home,
Hawke's Bay, see also rules, 127
Ormond, J.D., 7, 9, 10
Orphanages, see also names of
Children's Homes, v, ix, x, 1, 3,
5-7, 20, 22, 34, 38, 44, 48, 52, 54,
124, 127, 158, 164, 207, 209, 211,
212, 213, 214, 219, 224, 226
orphans, 1, 3, 39, 51, 54, 127-128,
141, 164, 209, 211, 215
Otago Benevolent Society, 2
Otane, vi, xi, 38, 44, 51, 52, 53, 54,
57, 60, 66, 71, 75, 76, 80, 82, 83,
84, 85, 101, 120, 213, 214, 222,
225, 228
Otane Primary School, 57, 62, 69, 70,
71, 84, 222, 225
outdoor relief, 8, 9

Parve, Alice, see also Bethany, xii, 25-26, 27

pensions, 42, 79, 142, 211, 215

Pourerere Station, see also Nairn family, 59-60, 68, 69, 72, 95, 96

poverty, impact upon children, 1-2, 6, 7, 16, 33, 157, 209,

Presbyterian Church, see also Hillsbrook, xii, 193, 213

Presbyterian Social Service Association (PSSA), 195-199, 201, 204, 205, 206, 225, 228

Presbyterian Support East Coast, x, xi, 193, 202, 205, 225

punishments, 19, 59, 67, 68, 92, 104, 180-181, 203

Q

Queen’s Fund, 7, 11, 13

R

Ramsland, J, 220, 229

Randall, Amelia, v, 7, 11, 12-14, 15, 17, 18, 123, 125, 129, 228

Randall House, Napier, vi, xii, 13, 27, 123, 124, 125, 126, 129, 130, 132, 133, 134, 135, 136, 137, 140, 141, 143, 144-145, 146, 147, 151, 152, 153, 155-157, 159, 162, 210, 213, 223, 224

Rathbone, Lissie, see also Abbotsford, 31, 85, 87

Relieving Officers (later Child/Social Welfare officers), 5, 6, 7, 8, 9

Constable Neale, 9

Thomas Fox, 8, 9, 23

Resident Magistrate, 2, 3, 4, 5

Robertson, Norman, see also France House, 167, 171, 189, 190, 191, 221

Robinson, A., 219, 229

Rochfort, G., 158

Roman Catholic Church, 22

Rosevear, W., 82, 229

roster, see also chores, routine, 100, 140, 165, 170, 171, 177, 179, 181

routine, see also chores, roster, x, 19, 59, 62, 66, 69, 97, 99-100, 101, 103, 138-139, 144-146, 171, 178-179, 202, 203
Rotary Clubs, 81, 95, 96, 97, 115, 217
rules, 28, 35, 40, 42, 56, 76, 107, 110, 138, 139, 143, 171

S
Salvation Army, see also Bethany Home, x-xiii, 25-28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 36, 38, 39, 44, 46, 48, 148, 208, 213, 223, 228, 229

schools, v, 2, 3, 4, 5-6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 16, 17, 18, 19, 22, 32, 65, 69, 70, 72, 11, 117, 136, 147, 150, 151, 152, 161, 167, 170, 200, 204, 212, 213, 227
Eskdale School, 165, 177, 180, 187
Hereworth, 204
Hukarere Māori Girls’ College, 18, 32-33, 59-60, 72, 81, 95, 111, 145, 166, 228
Napier Boys’ High School, 72-73, 152, 165, 168, 181, 182, 184, 187
Napier Central School, 129, 130, 136-137, 144, 150
Napier Girls’ High School, 72, 152, 155-156
Otane Primary School, 57, 62, 69, 70, 71, 84, 222, 225
Te Aute College, 32, 72, 81, 105, 111, 120
Te Mata Primary School, 200, 204
Waipawa District High School, 69, 70, 72
Woodford House, 13, 65, 113
Scouts, 86, 104, 171, 173, 176, 180, 226
secondary schooling, 69, 72, 151-152, 155-157, 181, 184
Shaw, Les and Hazel, see also France House, viii, 163, 166, 168-171, 172, 173-175, 177, 183, 184, 185-187, 188, 189, 191, 222, 223
Simmers, Don, see also France House, 167, 168, 170, 171, 172, 184, 189, 190, 191, 221
single, single unmarried mothers, 9, 26, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 37, 55, 78, 110, 207, 213, 215
Social Security Act 1938, 211
Social security payments, 141, 142
social workers, 6, 20-21, 75, 79, 106, 109, 114, 195, 199-200, 214
sponsorship, 20, 127
St Columba’s, Havelock North, 204
St Hilda’s Orphanage, Otane, vi, ix, x, xi, xiii, 38, 39, 41, 42, 43, 44, 46, 47, 51-84, 90, 95, 96, 101, 107, 108, 112, 208, 213, 222, 224, 225
St James, Otane, 80, 84, 225
St Mary’s Orphanage and Industrial
School, Nelson, 3, 5, 6, 10
St Mary's Orphanage, Auckland, 22, 48
St Mary's Receiving Home, Napier, v, ix, xiii, 25, 32-50, 52, 53, 55, 56, 57, 76, 78, 82, 90, 108, 110, 135, 207, 208, 213, 219, 224, 225
St Peter's, Waipawa, 52, 86, 89, 102, 104, 118, 228
Stuart, J.M. and Herrick, P., 220, 229
subscribers, subscriptions, 3, 7, 9, 15, 16, 19, 38, 54, 123, 127, 129, 139, 149, 216
Swinburn, H. M., 23, 24, 126, 130, 157, 159, 160, 162, 189, 229

T
Tanner, T. (Thomas) & Mrs, 7, 18, 125
Te Aute College, 32, 72, 81, 105, 111, 120
teenage, 30, 166, 169, 174, 178, 181
Te Mata Primary School, 200, 204
Tennant, M., 7, 9, 15, 22, 23, 229
Thomas Fox, 8, 23
Tiffen, Henry, 7, 11, 12, 13, 17, 124-125, 129
Trustees, 13, 18, 19, 36, 118, 127, 131, 143, 150-153, 163, 165, 174, 184, 200

Tutira, Lake, 137-138, 176, 177, 184

U
uniform, 57, 62, 66-67, 69, 145, 151, 155, 202
United Charitable Aid Board, 6 -7
unmarried pregnant, 26, 29, 31, 32, 207, 213
unwed pregnant, 25, 26, 33, 34, 38, 44, 128, 228

W
Waipau Diocese, 32, 39, 213, 227
Waipau Synod, 33, 37, 45, 49
Waipawa, iv, vi, x, xiii, 3, 38, 44, 51-52, 64, 68, 75, 81, 82, 85, 86, 90, 91, 96, 101, 103, 105-106, 111, 118, 177, 213, 224, 225, 228
Waipawa District High School, 69, 70, 72
Waipukurau, 3, 8, 72, 80, 81, 91, 96, 102, 103, 105, 115, 121, 148
Waller, Edith, see also St Hilda's, 53, 54, 55, 57-59, 66, 67, 69, 70, 71, 74, 82, 116
Wardrobe Committee, 139, 140
war service, 69-70, 134, 169-170, 178, 182, 183
Welford, Mary, see also St Hilda’s, 53, 57, 59, 63-64, 71, 72, 73, 74, 81, 222

Whitmore family, 18, 125, 132

widowed, 3, 8, 9, 11, 12, 14, 53, 54, 78, 109, 126, 142, 211, 212

widowed fathers, 53, 54, 78, 109, 142

widows, 3, 8, 9, 11, 14, 126, 211, 212

widow’s pensions, 211, 215

Williams, Cliff, 61, 72-73

women, v, 2, 3, 4, 7-9, 11, 13-19, 24, 25-27, 29-34, 36-38, 40, 41, 47, 49, 57, 74, 78, 89, 123, 140, 146, 147, 151, 156-157, 174, 207, 213, 216, 224, 225, 227, 228, 229

Women’s Christian Temperance Union, 14

Women’s Franchise League, 13, 14, 17, 18

Women’s Organisations, 228, 229

Woodford House, 13, 65, 113

Woodville, 51, 103

working, 3, 18, 35, 44, 69, 70-72, 73, 74-75, 105-106, 132, 137, 148-151, 153, 154, 155-157, 165, 171, 178, 180, 182-185, 204, 208, 210

XYZ
This book provides unique insights into atypical childhoods lived within institutions that most people have forgotten or never knew to exist in New Zealand. It explores the ways in which one province dealt with the care and custody issues associated with orphaned, illegitimate, abandoned or destitute children in Hawke’s Bay’s eight children’s homes and orphanages from 1892 to 1988. Drawing upon personal collections and recollections as well as institutional archives, school and government records, this book explores the intersections of benevolent care, state protection and education. The first-hand stories of people who lived their childhoods within these institutions bear testimony to a ‘culture of toughness’ in the delivery of care and education to children whose circumstances left them with nowhere else to go.

Author Kay Morris Matthews is well known internationally as an academic historian of education. Her published work has canvassed New Zealand education policy and girls’ and women’s higher education. She has also researched and published two books focused on Hawke’s Bay: Behind Every School: the history of the Hawke’s Bay Education Board (1988), and, with Kuni Jenkins, Hukarere: the politics of Maori girls’ education 1875-1995 (1995). Following a career in New Zealand universities, latterly as Professor of Education at Victoria University of Wellington, in 2008 Kay returned to her home region of Hawke’s Bay, where she is Research Professor at the Eastern Institute of Technology.