5

1920s: Working the Permit System

The 1920s was the heyday of the Homes emigration scheme to New Zealand. Several large groups arrived in the middle of the decade, and the *Homes Magazine* was brimming with letters and photographs of the new arrivals. These 'News of our Emigrants' articles portrayed not just individual progress but the development of a lively, multigenerational community, where young emigrants regularly socialized with each other and were supported by the previous generation, who were beginning to marry and produce families of their own. The opportunity to gather at the homes of the earlier emigrants was a key development that separated the experiences of the 1910s and 1920s arrivals. These were safe spaces for the new emigrants to talk about Kalimpong, easing the transition to New Zealand and creating the conditions whereby the community in the north, particularly in Wellington, developed along more open lines. Most of the descendants I have met in the north have known of at least one other Kalimpong family and they often recall regular social gatherings. The further south I travelled, the more individual the path the emigrants appear to have followed.

The fact that the scheme peaked in the 1920s accords with post-war opportunities for assisted migrant labour in New Zealand. But it goes against the reading of the heightened racial anxieties in the 1920s that brought a significant change in immigration legislation. The 1920 Immigration Restriction Amendment Act (IRAA) is considered a landmark in both local and global immigration restriction.[1] In New Zealand historiography, it is cited as the point beyond which new migrants from Asia could not cross the border.[2] The continuation of the Kalimpong scheme challenges this narrative of exclusion; but this assertion is not meant to diminish the impact of the legislation, which was enormously influential, regulating non-British migration to New Zealand until the 1970s.[3] The Act's power was in its simplicity. It required all migrants of non-British (or non-Irish) birth or parentage to acquire a permit before

entering New Zealand. The process was this: apply, and await a decision from the Customs Department. If the application was unsuccessful, no explanation was offered, and there was no right of appeal.[4] The IRAA became a model for other nations looking to implement legislation that avoided overtly discriminating against any particular community, yet was an effective tool of doing just that.[5]

The new legislation caused immediate consternation at the Homes; but as will be outlined in this chapter, emigration from Kalimpong continued and in fact increased after the IRAA came into effect. This cannot be attributed simply to the emigrants' British heritage since, as I will show, very few Anglo-Indians outside the scheme were granted permits. This chapter explores the reasons behind the favouring of the Homes graduates, as well as examining the new paper trail created by the permit system. The new legislation brought another significant shift – a geographic one. With the death of James Ponder in Southland in 1920, new supporters were found in the north and all new arrivals under the permit system disembarked at Wellington and were placed in the North Island. This brought the emigrants into different circles; many women worked for notable political families in Wellington, the capital city, and the men labouring in rural areas came into closer contact with Māori and Indian workers as they moved into different kinds of work. This reflected the encroaching economic depression, which also affected the fortunes of the emigrants already in New Zealand, and was highly gendered in its impact on the scheme.

These dynamics are explored in the first half of the chapter using Customs Department files, newspaper reports and the *Homes Magazine*. I then turn to the letters written by the emigrants from the 'six families' who arrived in the 1920s. In the Kalimpong files, these are first recorded utterings from the emigrants themselves. Their words reveal their initial feelings of isolation and loneliness, and their desire to please Graham by showing resilience in the face of their transition to life away from Kalimpong. They also make plain the continuing negotiation of their place in transnational families, asking questions about who their parents were, where they were, and why they had been sent away from India.

Arrivals under the permit system

Three groups from Kalimpong arrived in relatively quick succession prior to the new legislation coming into effect: groups of seven in January 1920, six in June 1920 and six in early 1921. The group that landed in 1921 was the last to land

in the South Island and included my grandmother, Lorna Peters, her brother George, and Dora Moller. Lorna's bright letters written on the voyage were not published in the *Homes Magazine*, which was preoccupied with the change in legislation. The first 1921 edition carried an article entitled 'New Zealand and Our Emigrants: Will There Be Exclusion?' which connected the 'considerable difficulty' getting the previous group ashore to news of the IRAA:

> There has evidently been fresh legislation passed on the line of what obtains in Australia. … Our friends are afraid the door has been closed to us. That would be a big disappointment. We are making a representation on the subject to the New Zealand government.[6]

The editors were cognizant of the imperial issues at stake, and assumed that 'the legislation has not been passed with reference to individuals or indeed with special thought of India', given India's right to 'press for differentiation in treatment'.[7] The Homes' fear was that New Zealand would follow Australia by requiring 'more than 50 per cent of European blood'. If it would not continue its 'past generous policy', the editors 'pleaded' that the Dominion at least modify the rule to be 'not less than 50 per cent of European blood', thereby allowing first-generation Anglo-Indians, in other words the tea planters' children, to emigrate.[8]

In his annual review of 1922, Graham reported that uncertainty over the new immigration rules in New Zealand had prevented sending any graduates there, and that this 'made the task harder to get suitable openings for some boys who would have found their most likely sphere in farm work'.[9] The potential loss of a destination for ten graduates a year would have a major impact on the Homes, and not just in numbers; it struck at the institution's founding ideology, and risked losing Graham's 'grand vision' of emigration as a means of promotion. As it turned out, the scheme resumed and proceeded with confidence under the newly enacted permit system. The recorded numbers of Anglo-Indians entering New Zealand in this period provide the first evidence that the Homes scheme received special consideration from immigration authorities: fifty-four of the sixty-four 'Eurasian' entries in the new permit register in the 1920s were from Kalimpong.

Like the First World War documentation, enactment of the permit system created a new set of archival records for the Kalimpong narrative. Prior to the IRAA coming into force, the only documented evidence of arrivals was on shipping lists, as evidenced by an official's later admission that 'no information is available as to the number [of Anglo-Indians] admitted prior to 1922'.[10] From 1923 onwards, all migrants who entered New Zealand via the permit system

were recorded in registers organized by race and nationality. Copies of the permits were collated by year. These documents show the standardization of the process to get the Kalimpong emigrants into New Zealand; the occupation listed for all of the men was 'farm labourer' and for the women 'domestic service', their last place of residence was 'Kalimpong, Bengal' and their nationality was 'Anglo-Indian'. All were in possession of 'ten pounds', and all were in good health and of good character. Photographs were attached to the originals.[11] A separate file stored pre-application correspondence, apparently for those cases where the application did not proceed or where a permit was not granted.

Late in 1923 the first arrivals from Kalimpong under the permit system, a group of three young men, sailed unaccompanied into the care of 'that good friend of the Homes, Mr P. E. Suttie in Auckland'.[12] Suttie had worked for a jute company in Narayanganj and facilitated placements for Kalimpong graduates there.[13] Like other Graham supporters he continued his involvement after leaving India. The *Homes Magazine* noted that this was the first group to emigrate under the new legislation and that it was hoped 'many more of our girls and boys may enter the re-opened door'.[14] Careful navigation of the new legislation is apparent in the Permit Register, which shows that permits for this group were secured a full year before their arrival at Auckland.[15] In 1924 Suttie wrote that the new arrivals were 'scattered on different farms but on the same line of Railway', presumably to note that they would be able to visit each other.[16] Regarding the general employment situation, he informed the Homes that, 'on the farms, it is not difficult to find employment for suitable lads … but the supply of labour in the towns is far greater than the demand'.[17]

In 1924, there was no emigration from Kalimpong to New Zealand, and only one Anglo-Indian was recorded in the permit register that year. The number of Anglo-Indian arrivals outside of the scheme remained low in 1925 and 1926 (three individuals and one family of four), but the same period saw forty new arrivals from Kalimpong (see Table 5.1). The preferential treatment evidenced by these numbers is also apparent in the shortened time frame between granting permits and the arrival of the emigrants. The person responsible for this ease in navigating tighter regulations was first mentioned in a celebratory full-page *Homes Magazine* article on the departure of the largest group yet, seventeen youngsters, in November 1925:

> Our good friend, Mr A.W. Blair, Barrister, Wellington, had secured beforehand situations for all the party (that is a condition of obtaining a permit to land), and had found his labours much lightened as regards the boys by the most favourable

> impression made on the Farmers who had engaged the previous year's band. There are many applicants for girls.[18]

For this group, permits were obtained just four months prior to arrival in Wellington and were not sighted until a full month after they arrived. This implies a much-smoothed transition from sea to land. The same applied for the 1926 group, also comprising seventeen young men and women. Their permits were granted only two months prior to arrival – about the time they departed Calcutta. Again, arrangements for 'settlement' of this 'fresh band' were made by Blair.[19]

Confidence in the scheme reached its peak with this 1926 group. In contrast to the immediate dispersal of the earlier groups, they made a highly visible entrance to New Zealand, alighting at Invercargill and visiting noted scenic spots around the South Island on their way to Wellington. Requirements for pre-arranged employment and accommodation seem to have been relaxed too. Roland Spencer, an earlier emigrant, was contacted by one of the new arrivals who was staying at the Wellington 'Salvation Hostel' while waiting for his employment to be arranged. Spencer had heard of a job opportunity and having secured agreement from the farmer, 'hopped into town and phoned up Mr Blair who soon let me take Donald away'.[20] It seems that once Blair, a man of some influence in Wellington's close political circles, had satisfactorily placed a number of emigrants, the bureaucratic requirements loosened. These larger groups set the foundations for the development of a well-connected and

Table 5.1 Arrivals by permit date, 1920–9

Date of permit	Date of arrival	Destination	Number in group	Men (n=)	Women (n=)
N/a	January 1920	Dunedin	7	4	3
N/a	October 1920	Dunedin	6	3	3
N/a	January 1921	Dunedin	6	1	5
December 1922	November 1923	Auckland	3	3	0
October 1924	February 1925	Wellington	6	4	2
August 1925	December 1925	Wellington	17	11	6
October 1926	December 1926	Wellington	17	6	11
December 1927	January 1928	Wellington	6	1	5
Unknown	January 1929	Wellington	5	0	5
Total			73	33	40

Source: Permanent Entry Record Books, 1921–9, Department of Labour, R1900-7319, ANZ-W.

active Wellington community, with the arrival of a relatively large number of emigrants in quick time, and the involvement of Wellingtonians who moved in political circles.

In the Customs Department files, the first reference to Blair's connection to the scheme appeared in a letter penned soon after the arrival of a group of five women in January 1928. By this time economic downturn had begun to affect the possibility of finding work for the men; but for the women, domestic positions were still available. With Blair's assistance this group had been granted permits just three weeks before arrival – well after they departed India. Mrs G. Kelly from Ashburton, south of Christchurch, wrote to the Department expressing her interest in recent press articles regarding 'Eurasian servant girls' and asking if any were available for employment in the South Island.[21] The controller of Customs informed her that she should communicate with A. W. Blair and provided an address for him. A handwritten note on the letter stated that 'applications are received by us through Mr A.W. Blair of Chapman, Tripp, Blair, Brooke and Watson, Solicitors'.[22] Kelly's enquiry indicated the effectiveness of publicity about arrivals as a means of advertising the availability of Kalimpong workers, and the response she received leaves no doubt that there was an established relationship between the Customs Department and Blair.

That publicity came at a cost. An editorial from the *Wanganui Chronicle* filed with the permit correspondence revealed the public debate prompted by press attention to the scheme. Documenting the numbers of 'Eurasian servant girls' that had arrived in the 1920s, the editor mused that 'it would be interesting to know what exactly has become of the original party'.[23] The Homes' emphasis on quiet absorption into settler families was not necessarily regarded in other quarters as a positive sign of acceptance or integration, here provoking a sense of unease. Quoting a report from the *Auckland Sun* about the 1928 group, the *Chronicle* was not without sympathy for 'these unfortunate girls' but asserted that 'the arrival of these particular immigrants should not pass unnoticed'.[24] 'They come from the plains of India', it continued, 'from squalid and indifferent homes, and though they are educated in mission schools, their standards of life must necessarily be very different from those ruling in the Dominion.' The article thus tested the limits of Graham's strategy of positioning the emigrants as reformed children of destitute families, rather than the children of tea planters.

The *Wanganui Chronicle* also challenged claims that the emigration scheme was providing essential labour, stating that 'at the present moment there is no shortage of female labour in the Dominion'. This public debate, brought to the attention of the Customs Department, was filed with the correspondence

regarding permit applications and annotated with a note that 'since Dec 1922 permits have been granted for 40 Eurasians to enter NZ. Of that number 33 have arrived'.[25] Evidently staff had been directed to acquire figures relating to the Homes scheme, though it was not directly named in the note. Despite evidence that the scheme was causing growing concern, Graham did get one more group of women into Wellington, in 1929. No date of permit issue was recorded. A note in the register recorded that the group had 'arrived temporarily 15.1.29 at Wellington and permitted to remain 20.6.30'.[26] The halting of male emigration after 1926 and temporary basis upon which the women entered in 1929 reflected the worsening economic situation, and mirror the restrictions applied to all assisted migrants.[27] While the women's situations were not as seriously affected by the economic depression as the men's, they too were refused entry after 1929.[28]

Work and marriage

The gender imbalance of the 1920s and the tendency for the women to write more frequently than the men saw many more letters written by and about the women emigrants in the *Homes Magazines* in this decade, usually bringing news of marriage, children and establishing their own homes. Marriage for some meant greater mobility than when they were in domestic service; and notably, many single and married women placed in the South Island moved northwards in this period and connected with the growing Kalimpong community there. Mary Ochterloney, originally placed in Marlborough, wrote in 1921 of meeting regularly at Rosie Duck's (nee Cooper) Wellington home with Molly Chambers and Gertie Plaistowe. It was 'so nice to go to her house and to have somewhere which we feel like home', she wrote, adding that 'Thelma, Rosie's little girl is lovely'.[29] These women had previously comprised 'The Trio' in Christchurch (in the South Island). Another emigrant who moved northwards, to Napier, was Mary Roberts, who wrote of her impeding marriage to Walter Ireland in 1922:

> I can hardly realise it's nine years since I left the old homestead. … Now I'm going to take another plunge. At the end of this year I am to be married. You may be sure I am looking forward to having a little home of my own, and some day when you can come and visit your old boys and girls, you will have to make your home with us.[30]

These early reports of the women's marriages provide some useful indicators about the way marriage attached the women to colonial society, and point to

the role of the Kalimpong family as substitute for their birth families in 'giving them away' to their new in-laws. Winnie Lawless, initially placed in Dunedin and settled in Wellington, announced her engagement on the same page of the *Homes Magazine* as Mary Roberts. Lawless suggested that a wedding veil made in the Kalimpong Lace School 'would always come in handy for Kalimpong girls'.[31] Many of the women were bridesmaids at each other's weddings. In the South Island, Kate Pattison wrote of six early emigrants that she had regular contact with, most of whom had been in the city for a decade. None were married and all continued to work in domestic service. It was clear that the pathway out of domestic service was marriage. Kate remained in contact with those who had moved northwards, noting that Molly Roberts 'seems to like married life'.[32] One southerner, Minnie Savigny, had married a labourer in 1921. Kate herself married a Southland labourer in 1925, as did Mavis Haslett. The demographic status of the Kalimpong women's husbands will be explored more fully in Chapter 7; however, it is worth noting here that their economic status was similar to that of the Kalimpong men. Many were rural labourers whose livelihoods (and families) would be seriously affected by the economic downturn.

Articles published in the *Homes Magazine* in the 1920s thus began to provide an answer to the question of the women's futures, and that was marriage. Women emigrants were strongly encouraged to follow the example of those who had already established 'homes of their own'. In 1929 Annie Brown wrote that while she occasionally saw the new arrivals, she had more frequent contact with the older emigrants, who had 'lovely comfortable homes'. She speculated that 'maybe I'll be the next to change my name after thinking I was a confirmed spinster! For is it not the best thing for us to do?' The editor inserted 'Quite right'.[33] Printed beneath Brown's excerpt was a letter from Dora Moller. On a visit to Dunedin, Dora found that 'nearly all the girls are married' and all were considering it.[34] 'We rejoice to hear those Marriage Bells,' the editor commented.[35] Marriage also brought the production of children not marked by the stigma of illegitimacy or exposed to their Indian heritage. Here was the ideal model for future-oriented colonial domesticity.

The increase in the numbers of women sent to New Zealand in the 1920s brought a greater interest in their fortunes, and it was correspondence from these new arrivals that dominated the columns of the *Homes Magazine* (Figure 5.1). Of the large 1926 group, several of the women wrote about their situations in Wellington. Connie Walker had 'a good mistress and a darling child to look after', Margie Smith was in 'a beautiful home' and Violet Allcard was living with the family of one of the barristers who arranged the permits.[36] Eva Masson wrote

of her idyllic residence with the mayoress of Blenheim who was 'just like a mother to me. Every day she lets me go to the swimming baths'.[37] Margaret Fox was 'getting on very much better now since I came over into the big town and I absolutely adore the two wee children I look after. Yesterday we gave a dance. I polished the floor of the dining room, which was used as the ballroom, in the Kalimpong style with bare feet'.[38] It was in these affluent surroundings, in stark contrast to their upbringing in the sparse interiors and communal living of the Homes cottages, that the 1920s women utilized their training, were socialized into New Zealand families and learnt their place in colonial hierarchies.

The men who had served in the First World War returned to the southern communities from which they had embarked. Unlike the women, they tended to stay in the south. Patrick Savigny was mentioned in a letter from his sister Nellie in 1920. The siblings were settled in the same neighbourhood in Dunedin and each was married with one son. Nellie had married Norman Thomson, himself a returned serviceman, and their house, set on half an acre of land, was bought 'by the aid of government'.[39] Further north, Mary Ochterloney reported that her brother Robert had maintained his interest in football and was enthusiastically following South Africa's rugby tour of New Zealand.[40] He had returned to the Marlborough district and although he was seriously wounded in the war, he had by Mary's account resumed his former life. Notably absent from the post-war *Homes Magazines* were letters from the ex-servicemen themselves, many of whom returned home with serious disabilities. Graham's thoughts upon visiting

Figure 5.1 'Picnic at Wilton's Beach, Wellington', Dinning sisters at centre. Courtesy Milne private collection.

them in 1937 will be presented in Chapter 6 to give a clearer picture of the legacies of war service.

The men placed in the North Island in the 1920s encountered similar climatic and working conditions as their predecessors in the south, with instant induction into long days of work, undertaking a variety of manual tasks and enduring cold winters and basic living conditions. The new arrivals did send frequent news of the Kalimpong men clustered in rural areas around Auckland, Wellington and the central North Island. Clarence Bayley wrote in 1926 of joining a football league in Waiuku, south of Auckland, with Fergus Gammie.[41] Charles Spalding and Richard Hawkins wrote from the Auckland district on behalf of the men there, and made special comment about doing their own washing, cooking and cleaning. 'Tell the Fraser chaps to learn how to darn stockings,' Spalding quipped.[42] In the Wellington region, Tom Watson described farm labour as 'healthy and hardy', writing that he liked to 'jump up at 5 o'clock on a cold frosty winter morning, take a minute's run round and commence milking the four cows'.[43] Roland Spencer coped with early starts by focusing on the food that followed: 'A huge slice of bacon and egg, etc. Nothing to beat a farmer's grub.'[44] He wrote of hunting 'up in the bush' and bringing home 'a good dinner which consisted of five rabbits and one wild boar. … It's great fun.'[45] Their colloquial language, hardy attitudes and humour highlight the aspects of the men's upbringing at the Homes that assisted their immersion into rural life.

Photographs of the men printed alongside their letters reinforced this image of robust young colonials. In 1927, Spencer sent a photograph of four Kalimpong men fishing on the Hutt River, knee-deep in water, with trouser-legs and shirt-sleeves rolled up. Like other photographs supplied by the men in this period, there was a marked departure from earlier portraits that featured impeccably groomed individuals posing seated in indoor studios. Photographs of the 1920s men were taken in groups, outdoors, in casual dress and relaxed poses that gestured towards their manual labour. Some sat astride horses. In one image Spencer reclined on a cane armchair on the porch of a small wooden hut, with a small dog in his arms, sleeves rolled up to his elbows and a large grin on his face. Kneeling beside him is another Kalimpong man (Horace Brooks) similarly dressed, with one hand resting on a working dog. Landscapes were visible and often dominant in the images, and the trappings of rural life were demonstrably integrated into their everyday lives. The open identification with farm labour marked by the publication of these photographs in the *Homes Magazine* suggests a shift in the stigma around agricultural work that was a preoccupation in the 1910s articles.

Unemployment began to impinge upon all assisted immigration into farm work in New Zealand from 1926.[46] This had consequences for the continuance of the Homes scheme and the daily lives of the young men already placed there. Roland Spencer wrote that he was 'trying to get jobs for a new batch of Kalimpong boys. … I have hunted up and down to secure jobs but alas!'[47] If they were in the country, Spencer believed, 'we would easily lump them into work but the difficulty is to keep a job open till they come out'.[48] The fluctuating fortunes of agriculture due to environmental and economic conditions, plus the time lag between training and emigration, meant that farm work was always less secure than its domestic equivalent. Horace Brooks described his employer's efforts to 'secure billets for our boys who are ready for emigration' and his approach to 'Government Officials with a view to [securing] permits and commending Kalimpong boys to other farmers'.[49] Attempts by employers and emigrants to source new placements met negative responses as unemployment became a significant social problem, and one that Graham's connections to the Customs Department could not overcome.

The 1928 edition of the *Homes Magazine* carried the first report of Kalimpong men working as 'foresters', a role that was particular to the North Island. Clarence Bayley wrote that there were five Kalimpong men living in a 'Forest Camp' at Putaruru in the central North Island.[50] The men resorted to this work due to the difficulty of finding and retaining steady employment on farms, and it represented a marked departure from the notion of being 'billeted' with farming families. The forest workers reported again in 1929 on the work that many Kalimpong men were now engaged in. Emphasizing the strenuous and seasonal nature of the labour, Bayley described the working and living conditions:

> The men camp in tents and assemble at the mess house for meals (breakfast and dinner). … It is a far better paid job than farming, but as it is not a permanent job one does not fancy it much. The majority of those employed are Maoris and I must say they *can* plant. Most of them could plant three to four thousand a day if they really wanted to. I thought I was pretty good when I passed the test (800 plants a day), but I soon stayed cool when I heard the foreman recounting the tallies for the day.[51]

Living in 'camps' and eating in a 'mess house' was surely a long way from Graham's vision of the stabilizing influence of rural Presbyterian families; and from Bayley's report this work was also bringing them into closer contact with Māori labourers.[52] Though not mentioned in the *Homes Magazine*, forestry work would also have seen them working alongside 'gangs' of Indian settlers who worked as

scrub cutters and foresters in the central North Island.[53] The important dynamic here is that while Māori and Indian workers were historically engaged in this type of employment and then pushed *out* (by white men) as unemployment grew, the Kalimpong men were pushed *into* this type of work as opportunities for steady employment declined.[54] These economic forces are highly suggestive of the Kalimpong men's place in racial hierarchies – that is, their inclusion with the white majority, albeit at a lower working class level.

Inclusion in the white labouring class in this period was of little consolation to the men. Fergus Gammie was blunt in his assessment of this temporary work, bemoaning the required mobility:

> Half the time I don't know where I am. I am on these jobs that last for a few months, then I go to another. It's like that all the time. Most of the last three years I have been in this forest planting pine trees. … It's a terrible place this New Zealand for work at present; of course it has been bad for several years. It seems to be getting worse … .[55]

The men's increasingly negative reports were printed directly alongside bright accounts of their female counterparts entitled 'Marriage Bells' or 'Making Homes of Their Own'. Recent women emigrants wrote of their employers' 'delightful' homes in seaside suburbs in Wellington and did not refer to difficulties securing or retaining employment. Cutting across this gender divide in economic fortunes was a high degree of social contact between the men and the women placed in the North Island. While such contact attests to a strengthening of the local Kalimpong community and its burgeoning visibility, this dynamic also raises the question of their willingness, or ability, to socialize and integrate with 'colonials'. Though Graham encouraged the emigrants to support each other, he was at pains to disperse them, particularly in the early phase. Letters in the 1920s suggest that the unmarried men and women, all of whom had limited time away from their work duties, spent much of their spare time socializing with fellow graduates of the Homes. Marriage, therefore, came to be regarded as a vital means of realizing full social integration for the emigrants, men and women alike.

Six families: Emigration

Numerous children of the 'six families' arrived in New Zealand in the 1920s, often in the same groups.[56] The contents of these families' personal files enable a deeper examination of the dynamics of social integration described above. Each

contains correspondence from the emigrants to the Homes, especially in the period immediately after arrival in New Zealand, representing another major nub in the archival structure of the Kalimpong life narratives. The letters include many observations that were not published, and some show the marking out of paragraphs for inclusion in the *Homes Magazine*, evidencing the workings of that selection process. Their words illuminate the less visible difficulties of adjusting to daily life in New Zealand, which involved not only a myriad of encounters as they transitioned to a new social world, but also finding their places within the local Kalimpong community and their dispersed origin families. Correspondence with Graham and Purdie lessened as the emigrants found their feet, but contact with the Homes remained a crucial means of connecting with siblings and parents. Such were the complex workings of these disjointed interracial empire families.

Dora Moller, the eldest of the Moller children, spent time on the plantation before leaving for New Zealand in 1920. Her brother Charles turned down the opportunity to emigrate for some unspecified reason, which he later wrote was a 'foolish idea'.[57] By late 1921 Charles had changed his mind and wrote monthly letters for the next two years imploring the Homes to assist. Caught in the gap between 1921 and 1923 when uncertainties about the new permit system meant that no Homes graduates entered the Dominion, he spent those years working for the railways in various parts of India. Charles's correspondence indicated a high level of awareness of the racial, political and economic issues that fuelled debate over immigration rules. He read and gave his interpretation of the 1920 IRAA to Graham, and was aware that he would need to work through Homes channels to secure a permit.[58] Charles relayed information from his sister Dora, who told him that her employers, the Maunsells of Dunedin, would be willing to take responsibility for him.[59] Charles eventually gained passage alongside, though not officially a part of, the group of five women who arrived in 1928. Dora was at the port in Wellington to meet him.[60]

The first correspondence from Dora in the Moller file was written in 1925, by which time she had been away from the Maunsells for two years and had evidently been highly mobile. 'I don't know where I have not been and seen since I've left them,' she wrote from central Otago. 'I'll be here only till Easter, am going to the Lakes near Queenstown. I'm going to be working with an old couple as a companion help.'[61] Along with a friend she was hoping to take up business: 'We are going to have fruits, sweets and tea, so when you happen to come out to New Zealand you will have to come and have afternoon tea at our place.'[62] Dora's letter gives a different impression to the *Homes Magazine* accounts of

young women stable in either their employer's or their own homes. Over the next three years she wrote several letters from the Jenkinses' 'homestead', the elderly couple that she had referred to earlier. Dora wrote of her desire to visit Kalimpong again, relaying a conversation on the subject with her employers that conjures an intimate domestic scene and indicates the importance of even minor Indian connections with these host families:

> Mr and Mrs Jenkins and I were just talking about sea trips. Mrs Jenkins doesn't think she would like the sea, Mr Jenkins thinks that a sea trip is not bad at all. Mr Jenkins has a great desire to see India. I told him if he ever took a trip to India not to forget to call at Kalimpong. He was at Bombay on his way to the front during the war. I love Mr and Mrs Jenkins, they are just like a father and mother to me.[63]

Letters from Charles and Dora expressed their continued emotional investment with their dispersed family. Each requested photographs and updates on the progress of their two siblings still at the Homes, and took an interest in whether they too would be sent to New Zealand. Neither Charles nor Dora ever received any letters from their father after leaving India, which caused great confusion and frustration. 'I cannot understand why father should treat us like this,' Charles wrote to Graham in 1921, 'and also it is so strange that you should not know as to his whereabouts knowing he has left you in charge of his children, his flesh and body.'[64] Charles's implication that the Homes was complicit in his father's neglect calls attention to its conflicting responsibilities to different members of the family. With two of his children at the Homes, and a planter who paid the bills on time, Graham and Purdie would be reluctant to upset Moller. Charles insisted that Graham should assist him and Dora in their efforts to force their father to communicate with them, describing himself and his siblings as 'unfortunate God's creations'.[65] After learning that two New Zealand emigrants, the Chaston sisters, were to be visited by their father, Dora wrote to the Homes in 1929 describing her feelings of abandonment:

> By the way is my father still alive? I have written to him several times but I've had no reply yet. I wrote to him four months ago telling him of my intentions [to be married], even then I have had no reply. Mr Purdie can you explain to me why he does not write to us? I feel terribly hurt about it. When he said goodbye to me, he promised faithfully that he would write to me, and here I have been in New Zealand over eight years and I've had not even a line from him. I think he is evil.[66]

Paul Moller had continued to correspond with the Graham, mostly about practical matters such as fees for the children still at the Homes, but he did enquire about Charles and Dora. He had received their letters and told Graham that he was glad to hear of their progress.[67] The impression from Charles's and Dora's letters is that Graham denied knowledge of his whereabouts, or at least refused to act on their behalf in ascertaining his circumstances or the reasons for his silence. The scenario points to the delicacy of these familial arrangements, which had been permanently altered by the physical and bureaucratic intrusion of the institution. The systematic filing of all such correspondence meant that deeply personal matters were dealt with chiefly by managing the paperwork. The letters were stored flat in the 'file' with the graduate's student number written at the top of the page; notes were written between staff about how to deal with the enquiry and the date of reply was recorded. The practice of interleaving the letters of what was essentially a blind conversation has left a vivid paper trail of the Homes disruptive influence. While retention of the files has facilitated otherwise impossible family reconnections many years later, their contents lay bare the active part the Homes played in prising and keeping families apart in the first place.

After all his imaginings of a better future, Charles was initially disappointed with the situations he encountered in New Zealand, and frustrated at his inability to support his siblings. Upon learning of his younger sister Elizabeth's impending emigration in 1928, he wrote to the Homes to dissuade them from sending her, stating that he and Dora were 'absolutely helpless as far as assisting her goes'.[68] The 'Colour Distinction', he wrote, 'is worse here than in India, and we are all treated as "oh! only half-castes", or Indians.'[69] Charles had encouraged Dora to leave her domestic employment because the wages were too low, stating that, 'after all, we are not working for a name, but for wages – and will go where we are offered more wages'.[70] Drawing Dora into a masculine mindset that prioritized monetary reward over loyalty to employers, and dissatisfied with his own situation, Charles convinced Dora to combine their savings and open a confectionary shop in Auckland. Despite accruing enough capital to start the business, the Mollers still had to call upon the Homes network to branch out from the employment into which they had been placed. It was only through assistance from A. W. Blair (the former Wellington barrister, by then a judge in Auckland) that they gained consent to lease premises for the business. Presumably this plan did not eventuate as Dora was back with the Jenkinses the following year.

A copy of Graham's reply to Charles's pessimistic letter was stored in the Moller file. Graham wrote that 'in the same mail I had several other letters and I think in almost all cases the outlook was completely different'.[71] He suggested that Charles was being too sensitive about the 'colour bar' and needed to adopt a hardier approach to racial prejudice, which was merely evidence of ignorance and would be encountered anywhere. Graham offered evidence of his belief that 'New Zealand offers for the future a very much superior chance to India' by informing Charles that 'a Maori has just been appointed a Bishop' and that in 1909 'one who was of mixed race was acting as Premier of the Colony'.[72] As for Elizabeth, the younger sister, Graham advised that their father was strongly in favour of her emigration – further evidence of ongoing contact with Paul Moller. The following year a more upbeat Charles wrote to Graham expressing optimism about his future and real hopes of eventually owning a farm (which he later did). He offered suggestions about how to better equip the boys for farm work and provided information, as requested by Graham, about forestry work. This letter was the first of Charles's from which an excerpt was printed in the *Homes Magazine*.

Emigration had the opposite effect for the Peters family as it did for the Mollers. After more than a decade of refusing to have any direct communication with his children, Egerton Peters wrote to the Homes within weeks of their departure from India, asking for addresses for Lorna and George in New Zealand.[73] For Peters, their settlement in a distant colony paved the way for re-establishing a relationship with them. The Homes, however, still played a role in managing the physical and social distances that separated them. Upon receipt of a letter from Lorna that described difficulties with her work, Peters wrote to Graham on her behalf, and later gave updates of her favourable progress.[74] George, on the other hand, apparently needed 'a strong hard hand over him', and his father felt that 'some hardship will do him a lot of good'. Peters continued to correspond with the Homes regarding his third child Alice who was still in residence there.

Alice emigrated in 1926, soon after Peters himself travelled to New Zealand. Peters purchased a farmlet in Pine Hill where he planned to run a poultry farm. Both daughters lived with him initially, but Alice stayed for only one year before taking up a domestic position with a family north of Dunedin. George and Alice each wrote letters to Graham in the 1920s describing their enjoyment of working in rural Otago. Both were published in the *Homes Magazine*.[75] In 1927 Egerton Peters replied to a letter from James Purdie asking whether he could offer employment for Kalimpong boys. Peters reluctantly informed Purdie that he could not 'employ a hand, except for some team work to put in coops we do

everything ourselves and a very hard life it is too. … Birdie [Lorna] and Alice are both well and great workers'.[76] This was not the last time Peters would respond to requests for assistance – for employment opportunities and for information about economic conditions in the colony.

John Gammie retained regular contact with the Homes after his two eldest children were sent to New Zealand in 1925; unsurprising considering he still had five children resident there. Gammie wrote several letters organizing the emigration of Moira and Alison, who arrived together with the large 1926 group. Betty wrote the first letters from New Zealand, telling Graham of her initial loneliness in Auckland where there were few other Kalimpong emigrants. She waited until this phase had passed before writing to Graham, expressing gratitude for her upbringing at the Homes and stating that although 'when I first arrived I thought that I would never be happy … now I have changed my thoughts'.[77] Fergus, whose report on forestry was included in the *Homes Magazine*, had in an earlier (unpublished) letter outlined the reasons that he and Richard Hawkins had left their initial placement:

> At the time I was working for him, he only gave me £4 a month. At that we used to get up at 2.30 in the morning summer and winter. … You can see for yourself he was not paying us fairly. One would think it is good to stick to one master, but we cannot when he does not pay us the right amount. I'm getting £7–10 a month at present, and I might get more later on. We get up at 6 in the morning.[78]

Although Fergus was aware that it was precisely this traditional form that Graham hoped would support their adjustment to rural life, the reality bore little resemblance to the musings of Graham and others as they theorized solutions to the Anglo-Indian 'problem'. These letters, aside from their suitability (or otherwise) for inclusion in the *Homes Magazine*, were an invaluable source of candid information for Graham about the developing situation in New Zealand.

The Spalding brothers were sent to New Zealand in close succession, Charles in 1925 and Tom in 1926. Charles wrote from a Te Awamutu farm one free afternoon, describing Christmas Day celebrations and concluding that 'I like New Zealand very much, hills all around us, some like Kalimpong and I like the farming too'.[79] Both men wrote in upbeat tones, in letters that revealed a fascinating coexistence of social worlds. Their reminiscences of India informed and were remembered alongside life in the North Island, and they ended their letters with 'best Salaams' to the Homes. They worked in close proximity to each other, and socialized with the same Kalimpong men. Thomas wrote in 1927 of joining a hockey team with Richard Hawkins and Charlie Watson,

and of their hope 'to win the cup for Aka Aka'.[80] The Hawkins file contained no correspondence from the 1920s. Richard was an only child and retained contact with his father independently of the Homes.[81] However, Richard's arrival in the same group as Charles Spalding saw him included in many of their letters. At one time Tom Spalding, Fergus Gammie and Richard Hawkins were all working together in the Auckland region (see Figure 5.2). Tom and Richard were to remain lifelong friends, and their children are still in contact with each other some ninety years later.

The Mortimore siblings arrived together in 1926. Rend wrote to James Purdie having just started work near Wellington after 'two weeks holiday' during which their placements were organized. Rend's letter highlights the Homes' efforts to keep siblings together where possible. 'Mr Blair was going to send me to Auckland to work there,' he wrote, 'but I told him that my sister was working in Wellington.' Rend was then placed closer to Jean.[82] Jean wrote a long letter some months later of living in a 'sweet little cottage' with an 'awfully kind mistress'.[83] Like the Spalding brothers, Jean sent her 'best salaams' to all at the Homes. Nostalgic thoughts of Kalimpong were intertwined with her descriptions of Wellington and were also present in her daily tasks: 'You should just see me doing shopping, not like how you do shopping in India. You see we have to carry our own parcels, no coolies to carry them for us.'[84] Again the Homes performed the role of an extended family at 'home'; receiving observations about everyday

Figure 5.2 Tom Spalding, Fergus Gammie and Richard Hawkins, Auckland region, c. 1930. Courtesy Spalding private collection.

life that only carried meaning for those with experience in common, and that were more safely enclosed in an envelope for an overseas destination than shared with a local acquaintance, or an in-law, or a child.

Interleaved with this correspondence from Jean and Rend were several letters from their mother, Nelly, written from Romai tea estate in Assam. She thanked the Homes for sending photographs of her children, but was dismayed that she had not received letters from either of them since their arrival in New Zealand. Nelly pleaded for the Homes to continue to assist her now that 'Mrs R. Jones frm Cherrapungee is away to Wales' and she could 'find no other [*word illegible*] who can help me in bringing my children and me closer together'.[85] Almost a year later Nelly wrote with the same complaint about the absence of direct correspondence with her children. In letters to the Homes written soon after this, both Rend and Jean referred to miscommunications with their mother after sending letters to her that she never received. Nelly's letter is a powerful reminder of the emigrants' continuing presence in their mothers' thoughts. Despite being relatively empowered by her literacy, Nelly existed, in fundamental ways, outside of the structured channels of communication that might put her in direct contact with her children. Her dependence on the Homes to assist her is another way in which the institution was embedded at the very heart of these broken families:

> Romai T.E.
> P.O. Dikom
> 10th Feby 1928
>
> I am very glad to know that both of my children are keeping good health, by god blessings, as the same attends me up here thank god. But, the thing is, I feel rather uneasy of having no news from my children, anyway I leave it to you, as I have nobody to do on my behalf but I hope that god will bring them back to me again. How [I] long to see them, but god himself know the thing best. I am poor and helpless and I have no way to do a search them such everything I depend upon your honour as I know fully well that you will not fail to send my address to them.
>
> Well I close with thousand thanks
>
> Yours obedient servant
> Nelly[86]

The gendered gulf that proscribed Nelly's hugely frustrating battle against the forces that simultaneously empowered British men was a long way from the challenges faced by the emigrants in New Zealand. Yet gender distinctions

continued to structure their experiences in the 1920s too. Domestic service was accepted as a site of socialization and containment rather than a means of achieving upward mobility, and it was marriage that the Homes identified as the pathway to full social integration and advancement for the Kalimpong women. Although many of the men married in the 1920s, this was not reported in the *Homes Magazine*, nor is there any evidence that their newly established family homes became places for the emigrants old and new to gather. For the men, the legacy of war experiences and the encroaching economic depression were the dominant forces in this period. Even before the Homes stopped sending men from 1926, the *Homes Magazine* reports demonstrated that despite being placed in employment soon after arrival, many men soon joined the ranks of itinerant workers.

Letters from the emigrants have brought a new depth to our understanding of the family sagas that were playing out beneath Graham's confident promotion of the scheme. Despite the changing times, Graham continued to couch his publicity in the original rhetoric of impoverished children being made ready for colonial labour. The photographic record in albums held by descendants tells a different story. Their images capture a particular spirit of that time, especially for the young women, with many photographs of them dressed in 1920s garb, socializing, posing around cars and on the beach. This was also the decade that saw several tea planters arrive in New Zealand to be reunited with their children – the father of the Chaston sisters (Figure 5.3), Egerton Peters and Hugh Dinning, who along with his two daughters provided

Figure 5.3 Gwen and Mary Chaston with their father and Mae Sinclair (right) in New Zealand. Courtesy Milne private collection.

a memorable setting for social gatherings in Wellington. Others received inheritances from their fathers and used this to advance their position in New Zealand and to support Kalimpong friends. Thus the emigrants who were still connected to their British families bypassed some of the difficulties of the economic depression. As the next chapter will show, the emigration scheme itself possessed no such exemption.