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**“A FEMININE ENROLMENT”:
Recovering Women Students of Massey Agricultural College
1932-1963**



**A research essay presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Bachelor of Arts with Honours in History at Massey University.**

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgements
Contents

Introduction	1
Unsuitable for a Girl: Getting to Massey	9
So Much to Learn Courses of study	16
Outside the Classroom Social life at Massey	26
Eve into Eden Being a woman student	36
Educated Helpmates? Leaving the College	45
Conclusion	49
Bibliography	52

Photograph front cover: Women students outside the glasshouse at Massey Agricultural College, 1950. Courtesy of Ila Edmond

Introduction

Massey Agricultural College¹ is the forerunner of what is now Massey University, an institution spread across three cities competing with other New Zealand universities on an equal footing. Its modest and limited beginnings in the 1920s could not have anticipated the University today, most markedly that women students could equal, or even outnumber, men. The women students of the early College were a small and enigmatic group, hidden amongst the pages of archives. Tantalisingly a name is mentioned here and there. It is this largely overlooked group of women I hope to reveal to a degree - this 'feminine enrolment'².

The purpose of this research is threefold. First, to reveal the kinds of women who would enter an agricultural college, juxtaposing them against the general expectations of women at the time to see if their experiences and aspirations differed from that of their peers. Second, to explore the College's attitudes to and expectation of these students. And, foremost, to give a voice to these 'others' at Massey Agricultural College, which was overwhelmingly a young, rural-male domain. Within the limits of this paper tentative insights will emerge into broader issues surrounding women's educational opportunities and practice and the significance of gender in society at the time.

While Massey College was a specialist educational institution one must look at a broad range of educational historiography. Research into education was limited until the advent of a more 'social' history in the 1950s, and studying women as a distinct group within education is a relatively recent occurrence. Prior to this period we have

¹ Massey Agricultural College, Massey or 'the College' will be used to refer to the institution throughout this essay. With changes coming in the early sixties it was renamed Massey College in 1961 and became Massey University in 1963.

² *Dominion*, 2 November 1954.

some histories of institutions, particularly in the tertiary field, in very masculine and general tones³. Pronouns are almost exclusively male, and women students rarely mentioned. Given that 'equal' educational opportunities have always existed in New Zealand, one could justify a general record of education as encompassing both sexes. However New Zealand's educational history has a very strong gendered bias to it, with different expectations and attitudes based upon sex. Therefore, inclusive education history has effectively left women out until fairly recently.

With the second wave of feminism starting in the 1960s and the advent of 'women's history' we initially had the recovery of the early women graduates. Kate Edgar, New Zealand and the Commonwealth's first woman BA graduate, is an obligatory mention in all women-in-education histories. She pioneered the way that led to a peak of women as a proportion of all university students in the 1890s⁴ (a figure not eclipsed until almost 90 years later). More recently we have seen education discussed and researched with gender at the forefront, emphasising its separate spheres nature. This emphasis has changed the perception of New Zealand's egalitarian education system to one that is seen to have been influenced by, and which influenced, the social norms of the time.

Knight and Hitchmen⁵ considered that the initial peak of women's attendance at universities in the late 1890s reflected their status in wider society, coinciding with the era of the suffragists. They suggest that this demand for education was based on women's role as keepers of society's morals and was not a precursor of equal employment. The lowest point of women's attendance at tertiary institutions, in the 1950s, was during the re-construction of women as wives and mothers after the encouragement to move outside their homes during World War Two. The period of

³ Such as J.C. Beaglehole, *The University of New Zealand: an Historical Study*, New Zealand Council of Educational Research, 1937 and *Victoria University College*, Wellington: New Zealand University Press, 1949, and later ones such as W.J. Gardner, E.T. Beardsley, T.E. Carter, *A History of the University of Canterbury: 1873-1973*, Christchurch: University of Canterbury, 1973.

⁴ *All About Women in New Zealand*, Wellington: Statistics New Zealand, December 1993. 39% of students were women in 1891. p.55.

⁵ Stephanie Knight and Belinda Hitchmen, *Women at University: the Report on the position of Women Students at the University of Auckland*, Auckland: Auckland University Students' Association, 1988.

1945-60 is represented as one of retreat for women, both from the workforce and from higher education.⁶ They consider there was an actual increase in numbers of women at university, but a decline in them as a proportion of the student body, though census figures suggest that the percentage of women employed and in tertiary education actually remained fairly stable.⁷

Shuker⁸ has also studied schooling in New Zealand as a gender issue but expanded the argument to one in which women's unpaid domestic labour is socially necessary for the maintenance of the wage labour system. This gives credence to the notion of separate spheres in education for men and women, and girls' education, based on domestic femininity, played its part in the social construction of women.

Page⁹ suggested in her work on the early Otago graduates that higher education gave women agency and a position of power. She supports McKinnon's Australian research, which suggests that women's tertiary education can be viewed as a dissent from men's control. While education offered limited employment opportunities for women it did present them with options and some economic advantages. Page argues that the fact that they married later and had fewer children on

⁶ *ibid* p.11.

⁷ Census figures for the period 1936 -1962 suggest that the percentage of women employed remained at 18-19%. The general report of the 1961 census attributes a slight drop from 1945-51 to women leaving war time work and the slight rise in 1956-61 to the increase of married women in the work force. ('Industries and Occupations', p.3) Percentages were obtained by comparing the numbers of women actively engaged in employment against those not. Information from *Census* 1936, 1945, 1951, 1956 1961. Figures of women as a percentage of university students actually increases from an 18% low in 1947 to 23-24% throughout the fifties. The low in 1947 is attributed to rehabilitation bursaries for ex-servicemen inflating the male student population, not a decline in actual women student numbers. Information from *NZ Official Yearbook: 1947-49*, p.157; 1954, p.166; 1957, p.189; 1963, p.246, Dept. of Statistics, Wellington. Montgomerie, in 'Man-powering Women', would challenge the idea that women were encouraged to forego their maternal responsibilities during World War II and suggests that little change was effected. She considers the majority of women were either compelled to stay in positions already held, or were shifted within traditional women's jobs. Relatively few outside the work force were man-powered. Information from Deborah Montgomerie, 'Man-powering Women', in Barbara Brookes, Charlotte Macdonald and Margaret Tennant, eds, *Women in History 2: Essays on women in New Zealand*, Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 1992. pp.184-204.

⁸ Roy Shuker, *The One Best System?: a revisionist history of state schooling in New Zealand*, Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1987.

⁹ Dorothy Page, 'The First Lady Graduates: Women with Degrees from Otago University 1885-1900' in Barbara Brookes, Charlotte MacDonald, Margaret Tennant, eds, *Women in History 2*, Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 1992.

average gave them an increased bargaining position within marriage. She also explores the idea that higher education for women was widely accepted, particularly for teaching. Women as teachers were an ‘extension of the moral guidance a mother gave her family’¹⁰, and as girls’ schools proliferated women graduates were not competing against men for jobs. However, acceptance and tolerance within non-traditional areas, such as medicine and particularly law, was not easy for students and for those expecting a career.

In the history of women at Victoria University, Hughes and Ahern¹¹ ‘attempt to show how women’s experiences and aspirations at university were in part a reflection of their position in society and how conditions and assumptions changed over time’.¹² They see gender operating against the advancement of women in education. Society, and women themselves, valued their roles as wives and mothers. University students of both sexes internalised the social values of the times and acted accordingly. The women profiled in their book largely saw no signs of discrimination and ‘accepted the fact that men and women were different and behaved differently’.¹³

In the Select Committee on Women’s Rights report in 1975¹⁴ the emphasis is once again upon gender shaping educational aspirations and opportunities. While there has never been any formal discrimination in higher education women have entered less frequently and into more limited areas than men. ‘The problem is not one of formal restriction but of the continuing influence of conventional attitudes to the role of women in society (that educational and training qualifications are less relevant, and, indeed, may be wasted) and, reflecting these attitudes, the tendency for them to limit the extent and nature of their schooling.’¹⁵

This ‘recovery’ of women students of Massey Agricultural College will build

¹⁰ *ibid*, p.120.

¹¹ Beryl Hughes and Sheila Ahern, eds, *Redbrick and Bluestockings: Women at Victoria 1899-1993*, Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1993.

¹² *ibid*, p.7.

¹³ *ibid*, p.63.

¹⁴ *The Role of Women in New Zealand Society. Report of the Select Committee on Women’s Rights: June 1975*, Wellington: A.R. Shearer, 1975.

¹⁵ *ibid*, p.57.

upon the concept of New Zealand's gendered attitude to education, and also help to fill a gap in its historiography. Whereas earlier studies on women university students focus on older university colleges offering general as well as specialist degrees, Massey College, as an institution with an agricultural focus, was more obviously a 'male' domain.

The College was in existence between 1928-1963 and women first appeared as students in 1932. At the time separate spheres for women and men were seen as natural. General education for girls emphasised domestic and home life instruction in readiness for marriage, and society accepted the view of women in the home. Increasingly they were expected to work as a stopgap before marriage, but society, families and often women themselves limited their education and career choices.

The majority of these early Massey women were not graduates of a degree course so they do not conventionally fit within the traditional university system, or within traditional areas of education. Massey was outside the mainstream. The College grew out of New Zealand's agriculture-based economy, and its transformation in the 1960s was symptomatic of a changing economy and culture. Women entered a provincial, largely residential, masculine institution in a period of low attendance by women in tertiary education. By the sixties both women and the College were recognising a change of needs.

Into this scenario came the women students of Massey. For these women gender was not an obvious issue, but from today's historical perspective one can examine the extent to which gender influenced them and the College. They challenged society's expectations of them by making an active choice for a higher education and participation in a traditionally male dominated job market. My research has revealed that on the whole these women had extensive secondary schooling, strong women role models, expected to earn a living and had a desire to work within agriculture, all with family support. Gender shaped them and the College, but could be overridden to an extent.

There was never any bar to women entering the College as students in any

courses and one could say that, at an official level, their presence was actively welcomed. Professor Peren, the Principal, remarked in 1944 when women had arrived in greater numbers:

I am particularly pleased with the influence of the large number of women students. Their presence has undoubtedly a beneficial effect on the general behaviour of the men and produces what one can describe as a more balanced student outlook.¹⁶

But, like society, the authorities imagined women within a prescribed role and new courses were specifically designed. Agendas of preparing women for domesticity in jobs and the home and countering the drift from country to town were implicit in what was offered.

The change of direction of the College into what was to become Massey University in the early 1960s, was the end of an era in more ways than one. One can see shades of a new feminism appearing in the recollections of the later women students. It is unlikely that 'afternoon tea served by the Mog. girls'¹⁷ at an Open Day in 1960 would have been accepted for much longer.

At one stage this sort of history would have been largely unrecoverable, but, with the accepted use of oral sources, photographic evidence and a careful reading of university documents (with attention to the silences), one can begin to reveal a past hitherto hidden. With the passage of time one can also see that some of these methods of recovery will be lost to us. For printed primary resources the Massey University Archives have proved invaluable and I mainly relied upon the Principal's reports, Council documents, College literature, newspaper clippings, and past student associations' minutes and publications. However, it is a group of women students that are the source of much of this inquiry. Found by advertisements and word of mouth nine women have been only too happy to recall and reminisce about their time as

¹⁶ Principal's Report, March 1944, council document, 1.2/1/1, Box 7, Massey University Archives (MUA)

¹⁷ *Bleat*, Number (No.) 20, 1960, 4.1/2/2, Box 2, MUA, p.51. *Bleat* started in 1931 and was an annual publication put out by the Students' Association. Mog. is short for Moginie House, the women's hostel from 1944.

students 40-70 years ago¹⁸. Without them this study would have a completely different face. Oral interviews are an invaluable way to give a voice to these women who were pioneers in their way - for the right to choose a career that was not driven by social norms but was personally desired. Therefore this paper is built around the recollections and memories of some of that 'feminine enrolment'¹⁹.

The Background to Massey's Establishment

New Zealand of the 1920s was affluent and agricultural. Its prosperity and development still lay in agriculture despite increasing urbanisation. Into this environment the College was born, built upon the two new Chairs of Agriculture developed at Auckland and Victoria universities. Accord between the universities and the two Professors appointed, Peren and Riddet, saw the amalgamation of the schools and the eventual unanimous recommendation that they combine, finally settling upon Palmerston North. Lincoln College, as a private institution, had long turned out practical farmers but Massey always envisaged itself foremost as an academic and research orientated institution. Parochial jealousies surfaced in the setting up of Massey but when Lincoln became Canterbury Agricultural College to all intents and purposes two sister Colleges were established along the same lines in 1927²⁰. Lincoln may, however, have been hampered by its origins in the 1880s as Massey could be seen to lead the way in more innovative thinking from its inception.

The purchase of the old Batchelar farm at Fitzherbert and the gift of 'Turitea' from the people of Palmerston North saw the College prepare for a 1928 opening. Into a rural setting 85 male students arrived to study for various diplomas and the degree of Bachelor of Agricultural Science (BAGSc). Accommodation had to be found in

¹⁸ Five women were interviewed on tape and the remainder filled in a written questionnaire due to distance. Women are referred to by their married name in this essay, with maiden names bracketed in initial footnotes.

¹⁹ *Dominion*, 2 November 1954.

²⁰ Information on Lincoln College from T.W.H. Brooking, *Massey, Its Early Years: A history of the development of Massey Agricultural College to 1943*, Palmerston North: Massey Alumni Association, 1977. Lincoln College was handed over to the government in 1927.

Palmerston North, and first year degree classes were to be taken at other universities.²¹

While wording in the first calendar makes the courses appear to be offered exclusively to men, it also pointedly contained a heading 'WOMEN STUDENTS', announcing that, 'Women students will be admitted to all courses'.²² This was to be reflective of the College's thinking throughout its existence. Over the years it sought ways to encourage women students and anticipated their arrival in bigger numbers. However, while welcoming, the administration generally saw women students as fulfilling current societal roles. The views of the College's Chairman, Sir George Fowlds, of where women fitted in would be the basis for the encouragement of women at Massey throughout its years:

So far we have only had men as students, but the college with all its activities, is equally available for women, and we hope that soon they will be attending in large numbers. I hope the day is not far distant when we shall have a school of domestic science operating as part of the college to provide well educated helpmates for the future farmers of New Zealand, training in an institution breathing an agricultural atmosphere such as I am sure Massey Agricultural College will always do.²³

The expectation was that Massey could help rural women waiting for marriage to a farmer prepare for that role. One may question then, whether the women themselves came to the College with this in mind.

²¹ Over the early years a campus developed with a specialised teaching block and hostel facilities, and the farm was extended and developed.

²² Massey Agricultural College (MAC) Calendar of the Year 1928, MUA, p.11. This clause remained in the calendars of the College for its duration. Elsewhere the use of 'for men', 'men wishing to', 'sons of', prevailed.

²³ *Dominion*, 1 May 1931. This was mentioned in the address at the opening of the Main Building. Similar sentiments were mentioned in 1929 when the foundation stone was laid.

'Unsuitable for a Girl'²⁴

Getting to Massey



Pretty maids all in a row: Women students on the drive up to Massey. Women really only became a visible group when the horticulture course began in 1944. (Source: Photographic collection, MUA, circa 1940s.)

The reasons behind women students entering Massey Agricultural College were many and varied but some similarities emerge. Socio-economic background, education and strong women role models would appear to have been factors in their entering this seemingly unfeminine domain. Noticeably, it was rarely a career option that was recommended to them from elsewhere, particularly their schools.

New Zealand has a strong tradition of supposedly offering equal educational opportunities for all, with compulsory education being established along these lines. However, historically there have been marked differences in the education of the sexes. In the nineteenth century girls did not take up the opportunities as often as the boys,

²⁴ Kate Ballard (nee Sturtevant), personal correspondence with Lesley Courtney, 1 and 31 July 2000.

on average starting school later and leaving earlier. And, in the twentieth century we see the establishment of an education system that deliberately set out to teach to the differences perceived between the sexes. With an established education system in place there developed a more questioning approach to the implications of education based on gender. Girls' education, even more than boys, was highlighted as problematic, disquiet being fuelled, in part, by population concerns.

The successful establishment in 1907 of the Plunket Society, which elevated child welfare and parenthood to vocations of great importance, was a precursor to justifying a distinctive education for girls. Truby King, founder of the Plunket Society and Superintendent of the Seacliff Mental Asylum, was most outspoken on the subject. He believed that the teaching of some subjects was not only of little relevance to girls in their futures of establishing happy homes, but that the pressure of it could impact on their physical and mental development. It could, perhaps, hinder their chances of having children, and they might lose their taste for home-life and maternal responsibilities.²⁵

While much debate ensued, both for and against, there is no doubt that King and his adherents were a powerful and influential group in the right places. The male political voice was receptive to the notions and some influential women's groups also heeded the message. Providing a 'domestic' science option for girls would hopefully cure a multitude of problems - a declining birth rate, wife desertion, child neglect and juvenile delinquency among them. Girls were to be taught differently not because of mental inferiority but because of their natural predisposition to the domestic. However, no matter in what terms this ideology was couched there was never overwhelming approval from society in general for domesticity as the only option for girls' futures.²⁶

A further recommendation of the General Council of Education in 1917 was that girls should preferably be taught separately at secondary school, and by women

²⁵ Information from Margaret Tennant, 'Natural Directions', in Barbara Brookes, Charlotte Macdonald, Margaret Tennant, eds, in *Women in History: Essays on European Women in New Zealand*, Wellington: Allen and Unwin, 1986, p.90.

²⁶ *ibid*, p.93-94.

teachers.²⁷ This had a twofold effect. It made it easier to maintain a differentiated education for girls and provided job opportunities for well-educated women who often became strong women role models for those girls in their charge. Both could impact on girls' future choices. It was in this educational climate that the women students of Massey were educated in the 1930s to 1960s.

A particularly strong similarity in the women that came to Massey is in their secondary schooling. Of the nine women interviewed eight went to girls' schools, six of them being private. This may have had a bearing on their confidence in pursuing an education and career of their choice, even into this markedly male domain. Three of the women specifically mentioned their secondary headmistress as a role model who encouraged female achievement. Elizabeth Richards went to school in Christchurch in the 1920s and remembers, 'There were all the Dixon sisters - at Rangi - they had all got degrees. They were owners of Rangi Ruru. There was either four or five of them...so they certainly liked education.'²⁸

Of her schooling in the early 1940s Mary Stratton recalled:

The most important woman in my life had always been my headmistress, that headmistress that I finished Nga Tawa with. Her name with Miss Mitchell and she was an Irish woman and she could be a very wild Irish woman and she was lovely. But boy, if she wanted to take the skin off us, she could take the skin off us.²⁹

The women also had in common a lengthy secondary education, by the standards of the day, all spending at least 4 years or more in post-primary education. Despite both degrees and diplomas being able to be taken at Massey they were perceived as being quite different. For some of the diploma students a university degree was thought about but not pursued for various reasons. Storm Forgan from Kenya intended taking a degree in agriculture at Reading University, but on hearing about Massey and a diploma felt both would be more relevant to the Kenyan farming scene³⁰. Some felt they lacked the confidence to take a degree. Ila Edmond remembers, 'My friends went to university. I never had enough confidence. I would have liked to,

²⁷ *ibid* p.94.

²⁸ Elizabeth Richards, interviewed by Lesley Courtney, 23 July 2000.

²⁹ Mary Stratton (nee Paterson), interviewed by Lesley Courtney, 14 July 2000.

³⁰ Storm Forgan (nee Lyon), personal correspondence with Lesley Courtney, 24 July 2000.

but I was too afraid to³¹. Airini Pottinger, when questioned, replied emphatically, 'No. People didn't do that. I think we had a thing in our mind...It was too hard. I mean knowing what I know now that was ridiculous but it was the norm. I think, then.'³² A degree was also seen as leading to an academic career. Kate Ballard, still in horticulture and loving it, remembers in 1959:

The first thing that happened to me academically was that I was called in for a lecture by the lecturers on the advisability of me switching to do a degree course. After considerable thought and consultation with my father I decided to stick with the diploma course. A mixture of laziness and common sense I suspect. Common sense because I had decided I wanted to grow things, be in business, not in research which was the only field I could see degree students entering other than teaching.³³

Ila Edmond felt an agricultural degree was not the sort of thing a girl did. She recalled only one girl in her time and '[I] still find it rather strange as to why she did'.³⁴ Not mentioned, but of seeming relevance, is that in the educational culture of the day girls were exposed to very minimal science. Domestic science came second to botany in 'sciences' taken by girls, and agriculture was not a subject taught at girls' schools or for girls. As the degree in agricultural science was the only one on offer at Massey³⁵ it would not seem unusual that few chose this course, or that horticulture was the diploma that started to bring girls in any numbers to the College.

But gender stereotypes are a product of the whole of society, not just education. Expectations are established at an early age in the family and then continued and maintained at school and in employment. Similarities emerge in the upbringing and experiences of the women students that made it to Massey. Although few of these women knew someone who was, or had been, at the College most had experienced a rural life. Of the three who lived in an urban setting two had worked after leaving school in agriculture - one at Ruakura Research Station and the other as a land-girl. For all the interviewees career choices were based on some experience and appreciation for agriculture and the rural environment.

³¹ Ila Edmond (nee Krogh), interviewed by Lesley Courtney, 13 June 2000.

³² Airini Pottinger (nee Anderson), interviewed by Lesley Courtney, 10 June 2000.

³³ Kate Ballard correspondence, 1 July 2000.

³⁴ This was Manika Wodzika, MAgSc 1954, who went onto research work at Ruakura Research Station and later Australia, then became a Professor in Djakarta. Information from Ila Edmond interview.

³⁵ The first graduate of the Degree in Agricultural Science (Horticulture) was 1956.

Family background impacted upon the girls making such a choice. Most of the parents were very encouraging of education and supported their daughters in going to Massey. Only one remembered her father as not being happy but he ‘just made up his mind he had a silly kid who did a thing like that.’³⁶ Mothers were frequently mentioned as role models to be emulated. No matter what their mothers had done, or were, most of the women had a bond with their mother, and specifically mention her support and interest. Some were perceived to have missed out on pursuing their dreams and so encouraged their daughters in whatever way they could. Kate Ballard remembers ‘encouragement from my mother who was a very keen and knowledgeable gardener who always wished she had formal education in the field.’³⁷ Two interviewees described their mothers as ‘intelligent’ women who did not have the opportunities to pursue their education. At the other end of the scale some family women had achieved degrees and careers. Coincidentally three of the women’s fathers died at an early age.³⁸ All three were then raised by strong, independent women whom they saw managing a family and, in two cases, running a farm.

Career options for women were limited in this era, and all the interviewees recall nursing, teaching, and secretarial work as choices for women. Going to university was not unusual among their school peers but was not common in general³⁹. Ila Edmond recalls everyone in her class of 1948 went onto university except her, and she would have if eyesight had not been presumed to be a hindrance.⁴⁰ Back in the early 1930s Elizabeth Richards thinks only about half of her [7th form] class went to university or work in any way as ‘most just stuck around until Mr Right came along’⁴¹.

Over the thirty years schools rarely suggested agriculture as a choice for girls.

³⁶ Elizabeth Richards interview, 23 July 2000.

³⁷ Kate Ballard correspondence, 31 July 2000.

³⁸ One of these women was an orphan.

³⁹ In 1931 only 3% of girls leaving post-primary education indicated they were probably going onto a University College. Information from *Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives*, 1932, E1, p.24. This had dropped to 2.1% by 1951. Information from *Yearbook*, 1953, p.149. This drop was also reflected in the numbers of boys intending to study at a University College.

⁴⁰ Ila Edmond interview, 13 June 2000. Ila went to a private girls’ school, and was speaking of her (7th form) class.

⁴¹ Elizabeth Richards interview, 23 July 2000.

Airini Pottinger heard about it at her District High School in a talk by Lincoln College. She determined at an early age it was for her, but the school was surprised:

Everyone including my teachers at High School, said "Oh no, girls don't go farming. They marry farmers." No way. That wasn't my way. I was going to be one [!] I wasn't just going to marry one. I was going to be one. I was a bit of an oddity to the various careers [advisors]: "I believe you want to do agriculture!"⁴²

One found out about it from school through the horticulture prospectus⁴³, and another, on enquiring about floristry, read a Massey calendar and opted for the BA course instead. Kate Ballard found out about it from a friend already there in 1958:

Finding out about Massey and the course I wanted to do was an interesting exercise and I would never have got there if I had taken everyone's advice. It was deemed unsuitable for a girl. However my parents were supportive.⁴⁴

She noted that guidance counsellors either did not know anything or were actively opposed to her going.

It was hardly surprising that women, especially from girls' schools, would have little recourse to literature about Massey. The College made sure information was on hand at secondary schools that taught boys but did not actively market themselves to girls' schools, except for specific prospectuses on 'feminine interest' courses. While the literature pointedly said that women would be accepted in all courses rarely did the material make it into a girl's hands. If it did, the language of the various literature was very masculine in tone, with most courses described as being for 'men', scholarships for 'sons' and would lead to careers for 'him'. It was not until 1957 that the College proposed a 'Girl's Week', similar to the one for boys, but shorter, to show them selected areas of interest.⁴⁵ Over the years the College discussed its marketing of courses, with surveys being sent out to schools in an endeavour to find out more, but inevitably they were sent to schools containing boys. It is interesting then that of the women interviewed all but one came from girls' schools.

⁴² Airini Pottinger interview, 10 June 2000.

⁴³ The Diploma of Horticulture was marketed to girls, and so the prospectus was sent girls' schools.

⁴⁴ Kate Ballard correspondence, 1 and 31 July 2000.

⁴⁵ Peren to Research and Education Committee, Massey Agricultural College Council, 25 January 1957, council document, Box 10. It would seem that this course never eventuated as no further record was found of it in council documents.

The women made the choice of going to Massey themselves, with the exception of one. In her case she had left school during World War II and become a land-girl. Her father felt she should do something she knew about, deciding ‘ “You will go to Massey”’. He was that sort of man and didn’t give me any choice and enrolled me at Massey⁴⁶. This was, however, very much the exception. On the whole these women did not think it was unusual to enrol as they had a career in mind and Massey was a means to achieving it. Although some had experienced some negativity to their going they usually had the support of family and friends.

Two women from the South Island were interviewed and both had initially intended going to Canterbury Agricultural College.⁴⁷ Elizabeth Richards recalls, on enquiring in 1931, that ‘Lincoln was very definite it did not want females’⁴⁸. Later, in 1948, when Airini Pottinger from Central Otago enquired, women had been accepted⁴⁹ but they could not live in. As she wished to do the dairy farming diploma and would need to be on site by 5 a.m. to milk it was impossible for her to attend. She received some support in her request from the staff but the Professorial Board would not relent, so she arrived at Massey in 1949⁵⁰. Massey had no such qualms.

And so these women duly turned up at Massey Agricultural College - from Elizabeth Richards the first and only woman agricultural student in 1932, through to the horticultural courses begun in 1944, where almost half the classes were women. Women were there and welcome, and by their sheer numbers they would hold a distinct place in the history of the College.

⁴⁶ Mary Stratton interview, 14 July 2000.

⁴⁷ Canterbury Agricultural College is generally referred to as Lincoln.

⁴⁸ Elizabeth Richards interview, 23 July 2000.

⁴⁹ The first women students at Canterbury Agricultural College were two past Massey BAgSc students who went to do their MAs in 1944. Lincoln established a horticultural course in 1945, when women entered in their own right. Information from I.D.Blair, *The Seed they Sowed: Centennial Story of Lincoln College*, Lincoln, N.Z.: Lincoln University College of Agriculture, 1978, p.278. Campbell considers that Lincoln admitted women students as a direct result of the war. Information from A.E. Campbell, *Higher Education and its Future*, NZ Council for Educational Research, 1943,p.26.

⁵⁰ Airini Pottinger interview, 10 June 2000.

“So Much to Learn”⁵¹

Courses of Study



'Digging a grave on the Pahiatua Block'. Women students took exactly the same course as men and were expected to pull their weight. (Source: Photographic collection, MUA, circa 1940s?)

The College was a product of its time. While it would seem to have been forward thinking in talking of how to encourage more women as students, it could only imagine women within set parameters. This then required them to develop courses that would be of interest to women. With domesticity and maternity their natural sphere and jobs but a stopgap to marriage, it was natural that the College extended the secondary school focus in developing courses around these themes. Massey was foremost an agricultural college, with the implication that this was for people living, or intending to live, in the country. Awareness of the concern for ‘...the drift from country

⁵¹ Correspondent 1, personal correspondence with Lesley Courtney, 22 July 2000.

to town and with the problem of making life in the country more attractive' to women was also a focus.⁵²

No bar was ever placed in the way of women entering any courses at Massey. Of those offered women entered the BAgSc⁵³, diplomas of agriculture⁵⁴ and wool, certificate courses for herd testing and milk technicians and the three started by the College with women in mind. Poultry farming, homemaking and horticultural courses were developed to encompass the wives' domain, particularly self-sufficient wives of farmers.

George Fowlds had first voiced the College's aim to encourage women students through separate spheres in 1929 and it would appear that this idea of women's place at Massey would not really change. While a domestic science school was never realised numerous attempts were made through the years to institute one.

It is of note that the first women students, entering in 1932, were Elizabeth Richards who enrolled in the Diploma in Agriculture, Katrine Hursthouse to do her Master of Science and Enid Christian in the Poultry course. The early 1930s also saw the appointment of a women lecturer, whose service was seen to be required 'if women students are to be encouraged'⁵⁵, and the presence of Nancy Galpin⁵⁶ doing post graduate research with Dr Dry. Despite this evidence that women were candidates for the general courses the authorities never saw this as an area of potential roll growth. Perhaps with the then current thinking and the known lack of agriculture and science in girls' education this was not unsurprising.

⁵² Instruction in Horticulture, 12 August 1943, council document, Box 7. Concern was expressed by the Country Women's Institute to the College.

⁵³ Only 6 women received Bachelor degrees prior to 1962, four of whom continued on to Masters level.

⁵⁴ For most of the time this was offered with either a sheep or dairy farming option.

⁵⁵ Principal's Report, August 1932, Box 2.

⁵⁶ Nancy Galpin came to Massey in 1933-34 with a first class MSc in zoology and helped Dr Dry voluntarily. She then won the Farmer's Union Scholarship, went to Edinburgh University to get her Doctorate in Science by continuing her work in wool biology and remained on to study genetics. Information from Massey Agricultural College: Annual Reports, December 1932, 1933; Principal's Supplementary Report, April 1933; Principal's Reports, August 1934, August and December 1936, council documents, Boxes 3 and 4.

‘Feminine’ Courses

Poultry was a certificate course and students entered one at a time to mainly learn on the job. Other students did not recognise it as an academic course but it did place women on the campus at Massey in the 1930s.

At the time no more fitting area of women’s education could be seen than domestic science.⁵⁷ The first attempt to institute it at Massey was in 1936 at the instigation of the Women’s Division of the Farmer’s Union. In this year, and 1938, a day or so was spent at Massey during the ‘Country Girl’s Education Week’. This directly led to the College’s three week ‘Homemaker’s Course in Domestic Science’ that ran at Massey from 1939-1941. A compressed programme was taken that was intended to encompass all the necessities in running particularly a country home.⁵⁸ The prospectus described a course in which:

Every day problems will be dealt with in a sound way without any unnecessary technicalities, at the same time cultivating skills in home occupation, arousing interest in them, and developing intelligence.... The training will prove most interesting and useful for all girls who look forward to domestic life, either as a career in their homes, or in the homes of others.⁵⁹

Mr Campbell, then Chairman of the College Board, reported that ‘the innovations would be a radical departure in the history of agricultural colleges in keeping with the new outlook in education’⁶⁰, and the *Dominion* reported ‘Science in the Home’⁶¹. The language used to describe this course blatantly elevated domesticity to an academic

⁵⁷ The Sarah Anne Rhodes Fellow was attached to Massey from 1932 to conduct classes in cookery, dressmaking and nutrition in the lower North Island. The fellow was established from a bequest to Victoria University for use in women’s education. She had much contact with women’s organisations and helped the link between them and the College. Information from Annual Report, December 1932, Box 2 and Hughes and Ahern, pp.47-49.

⁵⁸ The course included food and nutrition, health, maternity, care and management of children, nursing in the home, dental hygiene, clothing and textiles, planning and interior decoration of the home, horticulture, poultry, bee keeping, organisation of social activities in the rural centre: debating; drama; music, and handicrafts.

⁵⁹ Prospectus of the Homemaker’s Course in Domestic Science, 1939, 2.0/1/1 Box 1, MUA.

⁶⁰ *Southland Daily Times*, 6 December 1943.

⁶¹ *Dominion*, 1 November 1938.

study leading to a 'career', which the content belied.⁶² Though the course was suspended during the war it was intended to develop into a one-year diploma. This never happened, mainly because of the lack of women student accommodation and also because the ex-servicewomen who would supposedly be interested never materialised.

The course was begun at the instigation of women's organisations.⁶³ They approached the College and were fully involved in the planning, so helping to perpetuate stereotypical women's needs. Women's organisations played a very important role, particularly in the country, in providing a social network for women. Their interest in the course was partially in response to the drift to towns. The *Auckland Star* reported the course as 'being directed towards breaking down prejudices against rural life and emphasising its attractions and possibilities'.⁶⁴

The College was, however, a very willing participant, with Professor Peren stating: 'Not only would it help to round out student life, but the greater number of students, the better the College is known and, other things being equal, the greater the total enrolment.'⁶⁵ This brings into play another element in the reasons behind encouraging women students.

While this course was short lived it was an important feature of the College. It brought large numbers of women together on campus⁶⁶, albeit for short times, and explicitly illustrates society's and the College's prevailing view of women in education.

Of the courses devised for women it was horticulture that was the most successful in bringing women long term to the College. This was actively set up with women in mind and was marketed to them. The prospectus showed photos of women

⁶² In reality, domestic service, no matter where it was applied, was never accepted by the general public in this vein, and attempts to elevate it to a 'profession' were not successful.

⁶³ Women's Division of the Farmer's Union, Country Woman's Institute and National Council of Women were all involved.

⁶⁴ *Auckland Star*, 25 August, 1943.

⁶⁵ Principal's Report, August 1938, Box 5.

⁶⁶ Each of the three classes had from 40-43 in them.

working in the College grounds, and it was one of the few that were sent out to girls' schools. Ila Edmond was attracted to Massey by the prospectus alone:

One day they were passing around the flyers from the different places and someone said to me, "There. That looks good. Look at those girls weeding the rockery in front of the main building. You'd enjoy that." I thought, "Would I?"⁶⁷

The prospectus outlined the course in part as one 'to meet the requirements of those intending to undertake gardening at home, rather than to take it up as a career'⁶⁸ and that the 'more or less elementary instruction of our own diploma students...offer no difficulties whatsoever'⁶⁹. It was envisaged that 'men who propose to take up horticulture professionally' would take the Horticultural Institutes' Diploma.⁷⁰ Horticulture, or gardening, was seen as the women's domain as evidenced in the *Auckland Star* when commenting on the girls at Massey in 1948: 'What courses were suitable to them? The setting up in 1943 of a horticultural course answered the question.'⁷¹

The four and a half day week was divided into practical work and lectures. The interviewees mentioned their free labour, with Ila Edmond saying:

Prof. did not believe in having people there that didn't do it. He didn't employ a lot of people. He had beautiful grounds and they sold a lot of the produce. And it was the students did the work. And in a way it was sensible. I think we enjoyed it and you learnt because you did it.⁷²

Overall, the feeling was that the course was not very academic, with the exception of botany, where three of the four interviewees recalled Ella Campbell being, as one of the students put it, a 'very good lecturer...who gave us real insights into botany'⁷³. As Kate Ballard recalled of the late fifties:

At the time I thought horticulture was the Cinderella at Massey. There were very few students and the quality of lecturing, with some notable exceptions, was probably not very high.... I don't think

⁶⁷ Ila Edmond interview, 13 June 2000.

⁶⁸ Prospectus of the Course in Horticulture, 1943, Box 1.

⁶⁹ Instruction in Horticulture, August 1943, p.2.

⁷⁰ *ibid*

⁷¹ *Auckland Star*, 1948 (specific date unknown).

⁷² Ila Edmond interview, 13 June 2000.

⁷³ Kate Ballard correspondence, 31 July 2000.

school prepared me well for doing something as unacademic as a Dip. Hort.⁷⁴

However, all agreed it contained much good practical information and was considered worthwhile. This was one course where the ratio of men to women students was generally much lower than others but there was still some division between the sexes and Bonnie Roger perceived some competition between male and female students.⁷⁵

In reality the College's expectations were not entirely met. Women never managed to overtake the numbers of men who took this course, and they certainly intended to use it for a job, not as a preparation for marriage. Elspeth Barter, although not exactly sure of what she would do, was definite on getting a job in horticulture.⁷⁶ All four horticultural women interviewed went straight into horticultural work, and two remained in the field.

General Courses

Women were also present in the general courses offered. Women enrolled in short courses leading to certificates and diplomas⁷⁷. Only six women took the Diploma in Wool and Wool Classing throughout the years, but herd testing proved very popular. Prior to World War II only men enrolled, but, as men entered the armed services women-only courses were set up and women herd testers were to become the norm⁷⁸. Once again a problem hinged on accommodation, although the course was only two to three weeks long.

The Diploma in Agriculture was a two-year course⁷⁹, with either a dairy or sheep farming option. Most years from the forties onward there would be at least one

⁷⁴ *ibid*

⁷⁵ Bonnie Roger (nee McRae) personal correspondence with Lesley Courtney, 18 July 2000.

⁷⁶ Elspeth Barter (nee Gray) interviewed by Lesley Courtney, 20 June 2000.

⁷⁷ The length of short courses varied. Herd testing was only two to three weeks, while wool classing was five months.

⁷⁸ On commenting on the roll of Massey Campbell considered that the increase in the numbers of women students were larger than in normal circumstances indicating that they were preparing to fill places formerly filled by men. Information from Campbell, p.26.

⁷⁹ The Diploma of Agriculture was for one year up to 1933, then again after 1961. When it was two years the academic year was shorter to allow for seasonal farm placements.

woman in the class. The course was mainly lectures with practical work usually done on farm placements away from the college. Lectures after the dinner hour were particularly hard and more than one woman remembered falling asleep. Mary Stratton thought, 'If I knitted I might stay awake but that didn't do. "Miss Paterson, please put away your knitting."⁸⁰ Women took the same course as the men, both practically and academically, showing up differences in attitudes and results.

The women seemed to do very well academically. Elizabeth Richards won the Sir James Wilson Medal for most deserving sheep farm student in 1932 as the only woman in her year. But she

was there to learn something [and felt some of the boys] were put there to fill in time because they couldn't do anything else.... Someone would look after them.... They didn't take it at all seriously. I don't think they'd got much to take it with.⁸¹

And this idea of being there for fun was reiterated more than fifteen years later by others. One past male student remembered that the women shone academically but not practically.⁸² Mary Stratton recalled in 1947 that she felt the boys thought they were 'riff raff' and:

The first time I was really aware of them they were standing watching me trying to saw a piece of wood and the cynical look on their faces. Well, I might have been able to saw that piece of wood if they hadn't been looking on. That really was the opinion of the time, of girls on the course. And we were all about eighteen, just come out of school.... It was with considerable difficulty for most of those boys to put up with girls in their class. It took probably quite a long time for us to be accepted by them.⁸³

Her husband, who was then a student in her class, confirms this attitude which he too held. He remembers turning up in the Main Building the first day and seeing women students: 'I thought what the heck are they doing here.' In supporting society's view of men as the workers and women in the home, he wondered why women would waste time and space being there.⁸⁴ Mary also mentioned that this attitude softened by the

⁸⁰ Mary Stratton interview, 14 July 2000.

⁸¹ Elizabeth Richards interview, 23 July 2000.

⁸² Ted Stratton talk with Lesley Courtney, 14 July 2000.

⁸³ Mary Stratton interview, 14 July 2000. Mary was one of four girls who entered the Dip. Ag. (S.F.) in 1947 but two left after the first year. She was 21 and had been a land girl during the war.

⁸⁴ Ted Stratton talk, 14 July 2000. Ted was a 'rehab.' student. Rehab. was the familiar name given to ex-soldiers being rehabilitated after World War Two, a large number of which went to Massey College. Ted took the two-year diploma course, rather than the short course for rehabs.

second year and 'they were quite happy to have us.'⁸⁵ Just two years later Airini Pottinger, who was one of two girls taking dairy farming, found her classes lively. 'They were naughty. The boys used to get up to dreadful things', but that 'on the whole we were all really good friends.'⁸⁶



'Women Shearers - Learning the job'. Many of the male students believed that the women were not as able practically and waited for them to prove themselves before they gave their full acceptance. (Source: Photographic collection, MUA, circa 1950s?)

⁸⁵ Mary Stratton interview, 14 July 2000.

⁸⁶ Airini Pottinger interview, 10 June 2000.

While the course was not seen to be very rigorous academically, once again it was seen to be relevant practically. In 1960 Storm Forgan found the course 'extremely relevant to dairy farming in New Zealand' but came from Kenya. After doing her year's preparation there, she discovered how hard life dairy farming was in New Zealand. Never the less she 'learned a lot and certainly enjoyed it'.⁸⁷

Women degree students were greatly in the minority. The first entered in 1938 and became not only Massey's first woman graduate but New Zealand's first with a BAgSc.⁸⁸ It is interesting to note that of the six women who gained degrees up to 1962, four progressed to masters. The only degree student interviewed was at the end of this period, starting in 1959. She felt:

In many ways I was not prepared at all for Massey. The biggest thing perhaps was being the only girl in a whole class of boys. It didn't seem to matter academically. Some subjects we had combined with the hort. degree, and there was another girl the same year as me on that course.

She recalls there was 'so much to learn', with some classes more difficult because of her lack of experience or the language involved, but on reflection feels the course was 'marvellous'.⁸⁹

The student-lecturer relationship was one of polite formality. Elizabeth Richards, as the first woman student in agriculture, remembers that 'some of them were scared stiff of me because I was a female'⁹⁰. Up until the fifties it was a 'fairly proper' relationship, if one was perceived at all, with straight lectures and women being called Miss, but by 1953 Elspeth Barter remembers that some called them by their first names.⁹¹

There was no formal dress code for lectures. Practicality demanded that

⁸⁷ Storm Forgan correspondence, 24 July 2000.

⁸⁸ Lincoln, who was less inclined towards women students, did not turn out its first woman through a full degree course until 1948. Information from Blair, p. 278.

⁸⁹ Correspondent 1 correspondence, 22 July 2000.

⁹⁰ Elizabeth Richards interview, 23 July 2000.

⁹¹ Elspeth Barter interview, 20 June 2000.

overalls or trousers were usually worn for outdoor sessions and were seen at other times, perhaps more so than in other universities. In 1955 the Student Association was to request the Principal to allow the wearing of slacks at evening meals, but not overalls. One male student commenting on dress on the campus in general deplored the state of women's dress:

Rather than neglect society rules, we will just take a look at the young ladies of this college. Their dress at meals leaves much to be desired. How many men would like to see their wives continually appearing at meals in their overalls? Although none of the Massey boys have yet reached marital status, surely they should be entitled to see the women folk of this college appearing at meals in dress similar to that worn by women at other University Colleges.⁹²

Immediately post-war, slacks were not worn much outside of practicals but by the late forties they were relatively common among the students, and more so ten years on.

It is significant that the College had evidence of women's interest in general courses but never acknowledged it as an area to encourage. While they welcomed them, the perception was that they would be more interested fitting into society's concept of women in the domestic arena. Women were acknowledged to do well academically in all the courses. In proportion to their numbers they seemed to have won a considerable number of awards, scholarships and distinctions over the years.⁹³

Life at the College was more than just lectures and practical work however. Massey was unusual for a New Zealand tertiary institution in being almost entirely residential throughout its operation. For women, their limited numbers and accommodation meant they were in close contact with each other throughout the whole day.

⁹² 'Disgusted', 'Letter to the Editor', *Chaff*, Volume (Vol.)7, No. 2, March 1955, 4.1/2/3, MUA, p.3. *Chaff* was the 'Official Journal of the Massey Agricultural College Students' Association'.

⁹³ This was determined by awards mentioned in the calendars of the College. Given the means of retrieving women students it is unknown what the fall out rate was. Names of women were taken from graduation lists, or word of mouth. Individuals of people who did make some mention not complete their course.

Outside the Classroom

Social life at Massey



'Off to the Meyricks'. Bicycles were an indispensable part of the women's social life, at least until the late fifties. They took the women all around Palmerston North, day and night. (Source: Photographic collection, MUA, 1947)

Some of the more memorable aspects of tertiary education have traditionally involved life outside the classroom, and the 'learning' that goes on in less formal contexts.

Because of the College's situation it always sought to provide accommodation. Like virtually all of the buildings of Massey, hostels developed over the years. Women put in an appearance in 1932, and by 1935 the Batchelar homestead was available as a women's hostel. Elizabeth Richards had to board in town when she was a student, although when she returned to work at Massey in 1935 she lived at 'Batchelars'⁹⁴. Throughout the thirties Professor Peren pushed for more women's accommodation as

⁹⁴ Elizabeth Richards interview, 23 July 2000.

he saw that without it they could never attract women in any numbers⁹⁵.

In 1943 the Monro estate was purchased primarily for the house. It was renamed Moginie House, after Mrs Moginie, the benefactor, but was affectionately known as Mog. House and its residents the Mog Maids. Women were required to live in, with very few exceptions, so it was around Mog. House, as well as the Campus, that the life of the women centred. Accommodating up to about 25 women in the house and the nissan huts alongside, it was probably living there that united the women as a group. Prior to this the limited accommodation and sporadic enrolment of women made them less visible, particularly outside of classes.

Mog. House is remembered affectionately by all that lived there. The women knew each other well across all the courses, socialised in groups and formed a bond in their minority status. Mary Stratton thought it was probably 'totally different to living down in the hostels, down at the College itself, because you are set apart'⁹⁶, and Elspeth Barter remembers its 'relaxed, family atmosphere'⁹⁷. This was reiterated by many of the others.

While it appeared to be hard to be on one's own, or to study, life around the hostel involved reading, talking, listening to the top ten, river picnics - just as any young women would do. Not all activities were entirely 'wholesome' however, and Airini Pottinger recounted an occasion when some attempted to make home brew from a pumpkin in the roof of Mog. House. It came to a sticky end, dripping through the ceiling and it was thought, 'Our matron never woke up to that one - managed to get away with that'⁹⁸. Many of the interviewees mentioned washing and ironing in the weekends, which was obviously a time consuming business, especially as a washing machine did not appear until the 1950s. Bonnie Roger recalls 'a piano in the drawing room which I used to play when feeling I wanted some time to myself'⁹⁹. An

⁹⁵ The Batchelar homestead only accommodated ten women in total, often including women staff.

⁹⁶ Mary Stratton interview, 14 July 2000.

⁹⁷ Elspeth Barter interview, 20 June 2000.

⁹⁸ Airini Pottinger interview, 10 June 2000.

⁹⁹ Bonnie Roger correspondence, 18 July 2000.

occasional evening's entertainment was referred to, sometimes musical or a film show, and Kate Ballard recalls in 1960, 'We could get permission to cook a meal for friends at Mog. and invite males!'¹⁰⁰

Living at Mog is described as being like boarding school, but, there was a certain freedom that was probably denied many other women of the same age. Women usually lived at home, or in private board if necessary, prior to marriage. The women of Massey were freer to choose their own path, within some rules of the College and the social mores of the time. Despite rules, they were able to pursue a more liberal lifestyle, if they wished, than their peers at home under their parents' eyes. Airini Pottinger felt that 'just the kind of life we lived was so different from High School and life down in South Otago where mother was so strict'¹⁰¹.

The College took its responsibility for the girls seriously. On the opening of Moginie House as a hostel, Professor Peren stated, 'If the accommodation and care of these students is beyond reproach, I am sure that the numbers will steadily grow'¹⁰². The rules that seemed to be remembered vividly concerned this responsibility that the College took for 'protecting' the girls. First, there were curfews and limited late leave passes,¹⁰³ although these were not always strictly adhered to. Over the years means were found to evade this type of rule and apparently there was an advantage to sleeping in the huts outside. Airini Pottinger remembered 'going to bed' and then sneaking out¹⁰⁴. Second, males were not allowed on the grounds, let alone in the hostel, except on very special occasions. Once again this rule was circumnavigated by many, and often not with the women's connivance. It appears that 'activities' at Mog. were part of the male students' social life. Much mention is made of uninvited men on the hostel grounds playing pranks. One woman made comment in *Chaff* of the 'swine who dally there', whose 'dark shapes lingering in the lawyer and cooing in the

¹⁰⁰ Kate Ballard correspondence, 31 July 2000.

¹⁰¹ Airini Pottinger interview, 10 June 2000.

¹⁰² Principal's Report, February 1944, Box 7.

¹⁰³ The women had to sign in and out, and say where they were going.

¹⁰⁴ Airini Pottinger interview, 10 June 2000.

convolvulus tend to be unnerving.¹⁰⁵ As Moginie House was separated from Massey by the Russell home it was perceived to be 'off campus', and perhaps this was deliberate. One student recalls, 'The theory was it was easier, and indeed possible, to keep control of the girls rather than the boys. Our Mog. House was quite a distance away and that was supposed to help'¹⁰⁶.

There was plenty to do on the campus itself. As a prospectus of the 1930s said, it 'provided...a library, Common and Reading Rooms. Situated in beautiful grounds, tennis courts, hockey field and swimming pool are at the disposal of students'¹⁰⁷. From the beginning the women of Massey fully involved themselves in the activities of the College. *Bleat* welcomed them in 1932 with ideas of how they could contribute socially - perhaps only half facetiously:

Hitherto, our social activities have sadly lacked the womanly touch and it is only through the unstinted co-operation of the wives of the members of the College staff that we have gained a reputation in our social functions. Small wonder then that we welcome you, Eve, and wish you the best of luck.¹⁰⁸

Sport was limited in the thirties by women's numbers and Elizabeth Richards had to play hockey for a town team. Tramping was noted as one of the more co-educational clubs. Elizabeth got to know the Tararua Mountains well, sometimes camping out in the company of other students, girlfriends and lecturers¹⁰⁹. Paddy Bassett was on the executive of the Tramping Club, being mentioned as making 'several crossings of the Alps', and served on the Degree Students' Association in 1938-39.¹¹⁰ The Kareti Club organised social activities and women obviously made their mark immediately. 'Of note here is the assistance lent us by our women students not only in Executive assistance but also in wholehearted physical co-operation as

¹⁰⁵ Rebecca Tyger, 'Letter to the Editor' in *Chaff*, Vol. 7 No. 6, June 1955, p.3.

¹⁰⁶ Correspondent 1 correspondence, 22 July 2000.

¹⁰⁷ Prospectus of the Home-Makers' Course in Domestic Science, 1939.

¹⁰⁸ *Bleat*, No. 2, 1932, p.4.

¹⁰⁹ Elizabeth Richards interview, 23 July 2000.

¹¹⁰ *Bleat*, No.8, 1938, Box 1, p.3-4, 47. Paddy Bassett (nee Elsie Thorpe) was the first woman to graduate with a BAgSc in New Zealand in 1941. She continued on to do her masters at Lincoln College.

evidenced in the Haka practises; admirable spirit.¹¹¹

But it was the advent of the horticultural course in 1944, coinciding with the opening of Mog. House, that women really became a visible group. *Bleat* acknowledged:

The most notable feature is the phenomenal increase in the number of women students who now take a large part in student activities. At the beginning of the year the horticultural course was started and its popularity accounts largely for the number of women students.¹¹²

The Basketball Club, newly in existence that year, reported:

For the first time in the history of the College the number of women students has been sufficient for us to take an active part in social activities. The first manifestation was the formation of the Massey College basketball team.¹¹³

A women's hockey team appeared, the Tramping Club looked forward to fielding a full ski team, athletics introduced women's events and women were awarded Representative Honours and College Blues in the remaining years. Mary Stratton loved the sport, after virtually being a games mistress in her last year at school¹¹⁴, and Airini Pottinger said she made life long friends in cross country, where she had to run with the boys for competition¹¹⁵. One male Fulbright scholar commented that all the girls were involved in sport which he thought unusual as most U.S. girls dropped out at about sixteen, - 'got to be feminine you know'.¹¹⁶ However, while it would seem Massey women were overwhelmingly sports-minded, some of the women participated to 'make up the team'. Many went to Easter and Winter Tournaments, sometimes for the same reason.

Tournament was as much about socialising as sport and women would appear to have seen or experienced more than their sheltered peers at home. A letter to *Chaff* in 1955 from a woman Otago student was disgusted and saw it as an 'excuse for

¹¹¹ *Bleat*, No.3, 1934, p.49.

¹¹² *Bleat*, No.14, 1944, Box 1, p.16.

¹¹³ *ibid*, p.32.

¹¹⁴ Mary Stratton interview, 14 July 2000.

¹¹⁵ Airini Pottinger interview, 10 June 2000.

¹¹⁶ NZ Film Unit, Kathleen O'Brien (director), *Graduate Harvest*, , 1954, Film Archives, Wellington.

drunkenness and over indulgence in sex'.¹¹⁷ Storm Forgan remembers:

The gathering of students in the designated place was formidable...the townspeople must have quaked a little as there were many cases where the beers flowed rather too freely, and also that unbelievably horrible sherry that came in a "G" or a half gallon bottle - amazing!¹¹⁸

Skiing was part of the Tramping Club's activities and many of the women remember weekends at Ruapehu. Table tennis, like tennis and swimming, was often enjoyed casually although the facilities were not always available to women. Even the men noticed their exclusion when the tables were set up in one of the men's hostels:

Women players, of course, are not allowed to enter these manly precincts. For the more modern conception that the presence of a few women in a preponderantly male community raises the tone of the latter has apparently not yet penetrated to our welfare officers.¹¹⁹

Debating was a popular activity, and Mog. had its own team. Topics were many and varied with them once having to negate 'The Modern Girl is Degenerate'¹²⁰. They lost. The following month two men's teams debated the topic 'The Government Should Consist entirely of Women'. Both sides used arguments based on women as domestic creatures.¹²¹

Dances were a common social activity over the years, often run by clubs or the Student Association. Frequently the women went in a group. Ila Edmond met her future husband at Massey but remembers, 'That was the nice thing...even when virtually engaged to my husband - say we were going to have a dance down at the Refectory - you'd go in a crowd or the boys would all meet you there.'¹²² But not all the girls enjoyed going in a block, and in a letter to *Chaff* 'Another Mog. Maid' expressed an alternative view:

¹¹⁷ Marigold Fraser, 'Letter to the Editor', *Chaff*, Vol.7 No.4, May 1955, p.3.

¹¹⁸ Storm Forgan correspondence, 24 July 2000.

¹¹⁹ *Bleat*, No.18, 1948, Box 1, p.35.

¹²⁰ *Chaff*, Vol.7 No.6, June 1955, p.4.

¹²¹ *Chaff*, Vol.7 No.10, July 1955, p. 3.

¹²² Ila Edmond interview, 13 June 2000.

As a resident of Mog, I think it extremely rude the way in which the “men” of the College expect us to come to the dances without even doing us the courtesy of escorting us. A notable occasion each year is the Capping Ball when many of the Mog girls are expected to be overjoyed at an invitation during the last week before the ball, or even to arrive unescorted... It’s about time they were given some of the consideration that is given to outside girls who are presumably asked as though they are the ones the boys want to take and not second choices.¹²³

Almost all the women mentioned that nurses were frequently the men’s escorts, and the Student Association would usually guarantee the cost of a bus to the Nurses’ Home for dances. One mid-term dance in 1955, pronounced a ‘howling success’, reported ‘lots of fresh talent in the way of nurses’¹²⁴. ‘It used to get up the noses of the girls a little bit’, Airini Pottinger recalled.¹²⁵

Capping, which involved making floats, the parade, a revue and the ball, was a highlight of the year. This was the introduction to life at Massey and there was an appreciation of the role women could play, as Kate Ballard recalled. ‘The first term was the term of capping, revue and all those other mad things... the shortage of women meant we were all roped in to perform in revue [and] make the costumes.’¹²⁶

The Student Association had an elected Woman’s Vice President, and this was usually the only woman on the executive. Mary Stratton remembered it as being a less memorable part of her time at Massey.

I think it would be fair to say I was only tolerated. I wasn’t all that welcome. Well, not so much not welcome but that I really didn’t know anything much. I think if I made up my mind to say something that was alright. But I think that was the prevailing idea, that it wasn’t much use having a woman there because she didn’t know much. I would [enjoy it] today, but in that day I don’t think I did. I wasn’t relaxed enough to enjoy those fellows.¹²⁷

Minutes of the meetings, and particularly the AGMs, record a lot of jests at women’s expense.

Among some people the myth prevailed that women students were after

¹²³ ‘Another Mog. Maid’, ‘Letter to the Editor’ in *Chaff*, Vol.6 No.9, August 1954, p.3.

¹²⁴ *Chaff*, Vol.7 No.10, July 1955, p.4.

¹²⁵ Airini Pottinger interview, 10 June 2000.

¹²⁶ Kate Ballard interview, 1 July 2000.

¹²⁷ Mary Stratton interview, 14 July 2000.

husbands. One woman countered this in *Chaff*, saying ‘Leave the much criticised Mog. girls alone, who came here in the first place not to dance attendance on the boys but to study agriculture’¹²⁸. Women were serious about their studies but the not infrequent romances, often leading to marriages among the students fuelled the idea. From the beginning *Bleat* imagined such happenings, quipping that women students were ‘much to the delight of our geneticist who had visions of witnessing the foundation of a stock of certified 100 per cent scientific farmers’.¹²⁹ Sure enough, by 1934 it was announcing “Romance on the Poultry Farm”- ‘the first real “College” romance’ and engagement¹³⁰.

Five of the nine women interviewed married their College boyfriends, perhaps not unsurprising given the age of the students. It was not the easiest way to conduct a romance however and could cause much derision and comment. Up until at least the mid fifties ‘Calf Love’ was regularly reported in *Chaff*. It was a yearly competition to find the winners of the most ‘nauseating’ display of love on campus. Mary Stratton recalls a graph that was posted up weekly which she and Ted won a few times until they became engaged and were disqualified for being professionals¹³¹. This ‘tradition’ must have lasted at least ten years. The biggest problem was in being together. Mary remembered the great difficulty in not being allowed to go into each other’s hostels. There was ‘no common place, except out of doors to associate with each other. You had to go somewhere’. The somewhere she and Ted found was babysitting. For 2s 6d an evening they got warmth, a nice supper and a place to be together¹³². Airini Pottinger recalled she hardly saw her fiance once he left college and got a farm. She laughingly remembered there was ‘not the amount of co-habiting that there is today. Not the opportunity’¹³³. However, by 1960 life was changing and parties in town, coffee bars and more private transport made it easier to conduct a romance without constantly being under the eyes of the College.

Other light-hearted activities prevailed through the years. In 1955 the Mog

¹²⁸ V.E.M., ‘Letter to the Editor’ in *Chaff*, Vol.6 No.8, July 1954, p.3

¹²⁹ *Bleat*, No.2, 1932, Box 1, pp.28-29.

¹³⁰ *Bleat*, No.4, 1934, Box I, p.51.

¹³¹ Mary Stratton interview, 14 July 2000.

¹³² *ibid*

¹³³ Airini Pottinger interview, 10 June 2000.

Maids voted for the 'Best Dressed Man About Campus'¹³⁴, and mention is made of a 'Pink Maids and Mog. Men' hockey game, in which 'young men and women briefly clad in each others' games clothes'¹³⁵ played each other. Not everyone saw it as amusing however, as F. G. primly commented in *Chaff*. 'A young man and woman actually wrestling each other on the ground, sticks lost and forgotten and primitive instincts rising to the fore, was revolting.'¹³⁶

Leisure time also included working for 'pin money' for some of the women. For the 'horty' students gardening was not unusual, baby-sitting was common and even some cleaning around the College was done. A big incentive for some was money for skiing. Money was not discussed among the students but most girls seemed to be on a limited amount and it was a consideration in what they did.

Transport also played a part in social activities. Pushbikes were indispensable and almost compulsory, although into the sixties cars were becoming more common. When Ila Edmond arrived in 1949 there were two cars on campus, and the College was quite reluctant to allow them to increase for a long time¹³⁷. Buses were infrequent so not a reliable form of transport, and taxis were expensive. Bikes took the women most places, even at night. Generally the male students looked after the women's transport if they had to travel about the farm for classes, or further afield. In the late forties Mary Stratton said the rehab. students had a small army truck at their disposal and always took the women students first¹³⁸. As the only degree woman in her class in the early sixties another recalled that, 'Someone always asked if I wanted a ride. I don't know if this was "organised" but I was never forgotten'¹³⁹. Airini Pottinger recalls hitch hiking all over New Zealand at the time, and others must have done so too as Bonnie Roger remembers a rule that if you were caught it would go against your

¹³⁴ Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Massey Agricultural College Students' Association (MACSA), 21 June 1955, Minute Book of MACSA, 4.1/1/2, Vol. 2.

¹³⁵ F.G., 'Letter to the Editor' in *Chaff*, Vol.7 No. 8, July 1955, p.5.

¹³⁶ *ibid*

¹³⁷ Ila Edmond interview, 13 June 2000.

¹³⁸ Mary Stratton interview, 14 July 2000.

¹³⁹ Correspondent 1 correspondence, 22 July 2000.

terms¹⁴⁰.

All the women recall that their life centred on Massey and their friends there, although later students would appear to have gone into Palmerston North more. Two later interviewees felt that Palmerston North was tolerant of the students, but the rest were emphatic that Palmerston North did not like the students or the College. Most cited Capping antics as probably the reason, although Airini Pottinger felt 'by comparison with some of the things they do today it was all very minor, but seemed adventurous to us'¹⁴¹. Mary Stratton thought students were viewed with

deep distrust... Palmerston had not had a university, it didn't especially want to have a university and it wasn't prepared to tolerate any behaviour of students that it didn't like, so that even the meekest and mildest of things got the greatest condemnation.¹⁴²

However by the sixties Bonnie Roger recalls that the Mayor was keen to dispel this feeling¹⁴³.

It is perhaps in the social sphere that one sees the greatest change over the years, from Elizabeth Richards spending her evenings studying and making few friends¹⁴⁴, to the camaraderie of the students from 1944 onwards. By the 1960s coffee bars, flatting and student cars were having an impact, girls were drinking socially and teachers had joined the nurses as potential partners at the dances. Life was changing not only for the College, but also for the students.

Prior to 1944 the picture is one of Massey women as individuals existing singly within a male domain. However Moginie House and the horticulture course meant that women became more visible and had greater impact upon the College. This manifested itself in many ways.

¹⁴⁰ Airini Pottinger interview, 10 June 2000 and Bonnie Roger correspondence, 18 July 2000.

¹⁴¹ Airini Pottinger interview, 10 June 2000.

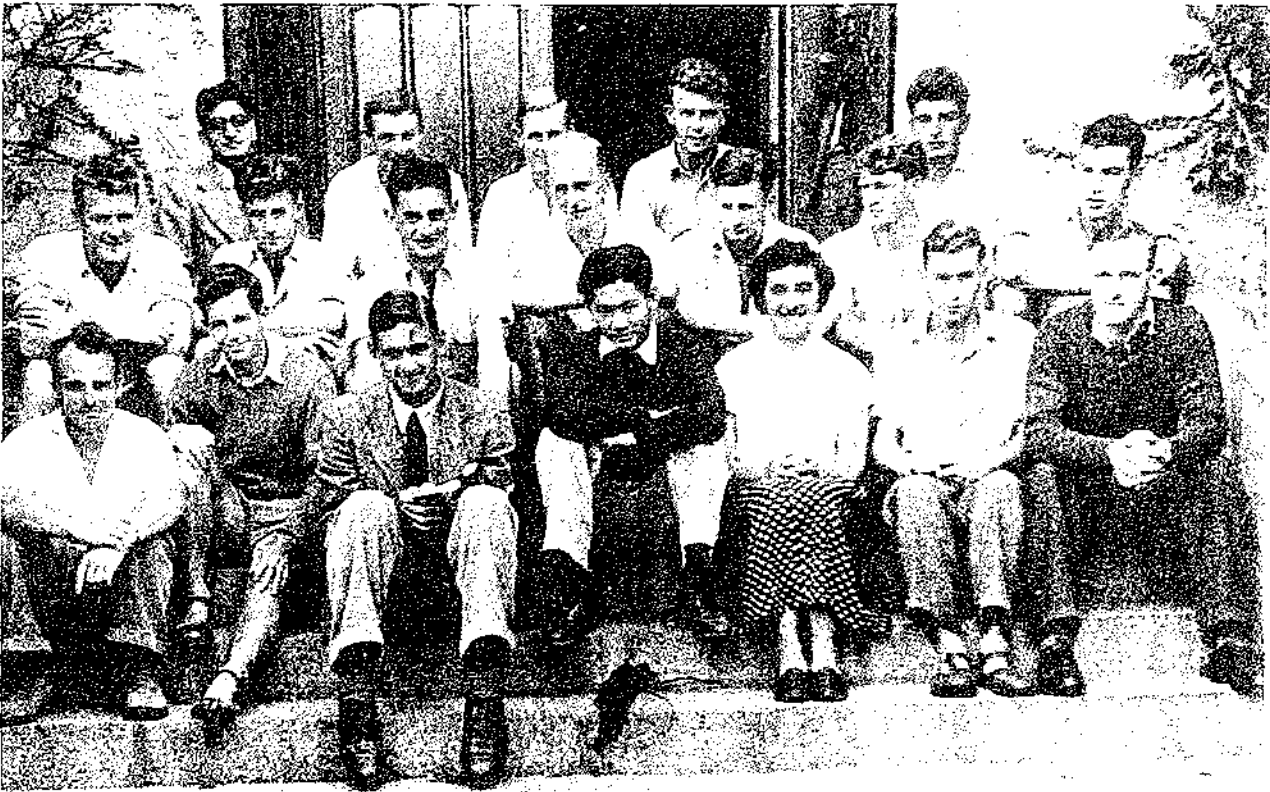
¹⁴² Mary Stratton interview, 14 July 2000.

¹⁴³ Bonnie Roger correspondence, 18 July 2000.

¹⁴⁴ Elizabeth Richards interview, 23 July 2000.

“Eve into Eden”¹⁴⁵

Being a woman student



'4th Year degree class, 1951'. Manika Wodzika as the only 'Eve' in her class, a not uncommon occurrence in any of the courses except horticulture. (Source: Photographic collection, MUA, 1951.)

Gender was not a consideration for the women interviewed. None perceived any form of discrimination from the College authorities at all, and very minimal mention of any from male students. The perception of one student that ‘there were not “men and women” students, we were more an extended family than anything’¹⁴⁶ is a fair reflection of thought. But, looking at the College from a gender perspective, one does see that there were underlying tensions that operated on the women students, different from those affecting men. Educational background, societal stereotyping and values, and institutional factors all shaped the experience of being a woman at Massey.

Just by reaching Massey these women showed that they were not performing

¹⁴⁵ *Bleat*, No.2, 1932, Box 1, p. 4.

¹⁴⁶ Correspondent 2, personal correspondence with Lesley Courtney, 11 May 2000.

within the norm of mainstream New Zealand. Throughout these years society placed women in the domestic arena, and accorded them status by their success there. Women were most likely to work prior to marriage, then domesticity would take over. Storm Forgan, from Kenya, recalls she thought that the New Zealand girls of the time were 'very much brought up to be like mother -cooking, sewing and so on'¹⁴⁷. The caring professions such as teaching and nursing were acceptable for women as they used so called innate abilities, and jobs were essentially gendered. Women's paid work was usually accorded lower status and certainly less pay. Mary Stratton remembers that she and Ted took a job on the college farm, largely as a means to be together. After a hard day's work Ted was paid and told to give Mary what he thought she should get¹⁴⁸.

It was assumed the physicality of farming precluded women from working in this area and in 1943 the General Manager of the New Zealand Co-operative Dairy Company commended the land girls who 'take up farm work which in many cases is really beyond their physical capacity'.¹⁴⁹ Country women were popularly pictured as performing the less arduous tasks around the home.¹⁵⁰ In the early sixties a degree student remembers that, 'Once on a farm trip a wonderful afternoon tea was set out for us. Being the only woman there I was asked to cut the cakes!! If I hadn't they would have been left untouched'¹⁵¹.

Prejudice against educated females also played its part in limiting the number of women who reached Massey. An anonymous article in *Chaff*, 1954, entitled "Education and Females" noted that:

Some people hold the jaundiced opinion that these two are rarely, if ever, found together. What is the use of an education to a girl when she is married? There are even others who say that the educated wife is a poor housewife.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁷ Storm Forgan correspondence, 24 July 2000.

¹⁴⁸ Mary Stratton interview, 14 July 2000.

¹⁴⁹ *Herald*, 2 December 1943.

¹⁵⁰ In reality, women, particularly on dairy farms, often worked equally alongside their husbands.

¹⁵¹ Correspondent 1 correspondence, 22 July 2000.

¹⁵² *Chaff*, Vol.6 No.9, August 1954, p.11.

This perhaps mirrored society's thinking at the time. Certainly access to the study of both agriculture and science was severely limited for girls at secondary level. Agriculture did not hold much status within education, and was seen as a boy's vocational subject.¹⁵³ Even then it was only offered in a third of DHSs, and less so in secondary schools. Principals freely admitted they would not put agriculture forward as an option to bright boys unless they expressed an interest.¹⁵⁴ Little wonder then that girls rarely considered this area. This particularly impacted on the numbers of women taking the agricultural science degree; only six in thirty years. Nancy Baigent, who obtained a MAgSc (Hort) and won a scholarship to study for her PHD in the USA, was reported in the paper to say, 'Most girls find it easier to do the diploma if they want to do horticulture and not many like the idea of having to do a first year of medical preliminaries'¹⁵⁵. This probably reflected the inadequacies felt.

But, having overcome any underlying prejudices about studying at Massey, the women arrived at a very masculine institution. It was set up by men, for men. While the institution was only four years old by the time women arrived a masculine ethos had established a strong foothold. Given the limited numbers of women, even after 1944, they could never have the impact that men could make in the overall tone of the College. Gardner, in *Colonial Cap and Gown*, considers that the treatment of women tertiary students has a history. In the nineteenth century they were 'academic beings who were entitled to male courtesy but whose sex should be ignored as far as possible'. By 1914 this attitude was still widespread but balanced by the recognition that they could be civilisers of 'unruly, male undergraduates'.¹⁵⁶ Massey's thinking clearly reflects this attitude, thus adding an unsuspected gender bias to their education of students. Professor Peren told the Board more than once that the women had a beneficial effect on male behaviour, and felt their presence was 'of value to the

¹⁵³ Figures in the *AJHR* show a declining proportion of women taking agriculture from 1933- 1953. *AJHR*, 1935, 1945, 1955. E2.

¹⁵⁴ An Abstract of a Report on the Investigation into Questions Affecting Enrolment and Subsequent Graduate Employment of Agricultural Science Degree Students, Massey Agricultural College Degree Students' Association, 1952, council document, Box 9. This was based on a survey sent out to secondary schools that boys could attend.

¹⁵⁵ *Manawatu Times*, 21 February 1957.

¹⁵⁶ W.J.Gardner, *Colonial Cap and Gown*, Christchurch: University of Canterbury, 1979.

community and the College¹⁵⁷. A student recalls a lecturer saying it was good to have women students as they lifted the tone of Massey¹⁵⁸. This was acknowledged by some of the male students too.

Women at Massey could take any course and be expected to do exactly the same as the men. They remember that the lecturers were polite and treated the students equally, although one recalled in an exam when she completely reversed how something worked, the lecturer saw her privately afterwards and ‘patiently and carefully explained the correct answer’¹⁵⁹. This may not have been the case for a male. Mention is also made of babysitting and visiting the homes of lecturers for meals. Numbers alone would have precluded many of the males encountering this personal side. The one area that did cause problems for the lecturers was in sexual matters. Elizabeth Richards remembers a veterinarian starting a lecture on what she thought was a ‘sexual thing’ and then he ‘suddenly stopped and went onto something else without saying anything and then told me afterwards did I mind’¹⁶⁰. What was supposed correct for women to know did not change quickly, as a student into the sixties recounts:

Another day we had a Vet. lecture after lunch. I had been out with a visitor for lunch in town, and was late getting back so I crept into the back row. Most of the boys heard me come in but the lecturer was in full flight and didn’t notice. Apparently when the lecture started he knew I wasn’t there and so he launched into one of the stories he was renowned for - but they were pretty dirty and he had not told our year because I was in the class. When he finished there was general laughter and he looked up and saw me in the back and was mortified. I felt terrible to have caused the embarrassment. But worst of all I had no idea what the story/joke had been about!¹⁶¹

Sexual mores of the time meant that the College was mindful of their care of the women on a residential campus. The semi-isolation of Moginie and rules forbidding men on the property were part of the attitude of care and protection offered women by society in general. While most women lived at home prior to marriage single-sex hostels were appearing in response to women shifting to the city for work.

¹⁵⁷ Principal’s Report, April 1938, Box 5.

¹⁵⁸ Correspondent 1 correspondence, 22 July 2000.

¹⁵⁹ *ibid*

¹⁶⁰ Elizabeth Richards interview, 23 July 2000.

¹⁶¹ Correspondent 1 correspondence, 22 July 2000.

Governed by strict rules they were deemed an acceptable alternative by most parents if living away from home was necessary. By the fifties when men at Massey could live out if they 'so wished' women were still required to live in except under special circumstances¹⁶². Accommodation then impacted on the extent to which the College could encourage women. Throughout the life of the college it was recognised that courses for women hinged on this. In the fifties when the College was requesting accommodation for 100, the Director of Education felt that a maximum of fifty was sufficient.¹⁶³

Some factors were not outside the college's influence however. The effective ignoring of marketing to girls' schools, the masculine terms in the literature, and the designing of specific 'feminine' courses demonstrated that gender was an issue in College policies. Not only were the courses for women deemed to be different but all were created with a less academic content. Poultry was 'essentially a practical course'¹⁶⁴, the Homemakers' Course was 'without unnecessary technicalities'¹⁶⁵, horticulture had 'more or less elementary instruction'¹⁶⁶ and a proposed Land-girls' Course was to include 'farming, cultural and recreational activities'¹⁶⁷.

The College never investigated the potential of increasing women's numbers in general courses even though women had demonstrated their interest and success. Society and the college were like-minded in seeing women's education as a 'problem' to be provided for separately. The *Auckland Star* reported that in using Mrs Moginie's bequest for women students a problem was created in finding 'suitable' courses and in the housing of them¹⁶⁸. In writing to the Government with proposals for demobilised servicewomen, the College saw 'the big problem...[was] to provide training for them in suitable fields of work'¹⁶⁹.

¹⁶² MAC Calendar, 1954, p.15. This remained as a Regulation for the duration of the College.

¹⁶³ Minutes of Board of Governors Meeting of MAC, 9 February 1945, Council and Standing Committee minutes, 1.2/2/1, Vol.14, MUA.

¹⁶⁴ MAC Calendar for the Year 1931, p. 49.

¹⁶⁵ Prospectus of the Homemaker's Course in Domestic Science, 1939.

¹⁶⁶ Instruction in Horticulture, 1943.

¹⁶⁷ *Southland Daily Times*, 6 December 1943.

¹⁶⁸ *Auckland Star*, 1948 (specific date unknown).

¹⁶⁹ Technical Instruction and Training of Ex-Service Men and Women in Farming and Allied

More subtly the College also treated women differently. They received cheaper board for much of the time at Moginie House because they cleaned their own rooms, no showers were provided for women despite their practicality considering the water situation and the work¹⁷⁰, and changing sheds were required at the pool, not because of the convenience to the women but because men were 'liable to run into women in various types of scanty bathing attire' around the College grounds.¹⁷¹

Gender was an issue with the male students also. In 1932 *Bleat* extended an ambiguous welcome to the women:

Eve has come to our Eden...It is a sign of the times. Mere woman is sick of domesticity and of playing second fiddle to mere man. The doctrine of the inequality of the sexes has long since gone by the board and now in a world where physical qualification is a secondary consideration, our masculine rights are being slowly but surely violated. Commerce and the professions have long since succumbed to the machinations of the weaker vessel. Now agriculture is threatened.¹⁷²

The idea that women could subvert this masculine community is implicit in what is said, and may have been deeply felt and long lasting. Elizabeth Richards got the feeling in 1932 that, 'Some didn't like me being there. Didn't like me beating them. Nobody actually said anything. I wouldn't have asked for it.'¹⁷³ It is within the male student population that one sees hints of this ambivalent attitude to the women over the years.¹⁷⁴ Was it a slip of the pen that accounted for *Chaff* reporting that 'Calf Love' was to 'foster relations between the students and the women of Massey'¹⁷⁵ or were the women seen by the men as a distinct group separate from the 'real students'?

An element of gender warfare surfaced in a letter debate prompted by 'F.G'. Speaking on the lack of good conversation from the Mog. girls he asserted:

Occupations, 1943, council document, Box 7.

¹⁷⁰ Ila Edmond mentioned the water shortage and the limited number of baths allowed. She felt showers would have been more practical given the work. Interview, 13 June 2000.

¹⁷¹ Report of Committee on Capital Requirements, 11 June 1941, council document, Box 6.

¹⁷² *Bleat*, No.2, 1941, p.4.

¹⁷³ Elizabeth Richards interview, 23 July 2000.

¹⁷⁴ Readings of student publications and minutes of Student Association meetings can reflect this attitude in places, though it is not usually blatantly expressed.

¹⁷⁵ *Chaff*, Vol.7 No.5, June 1955, p.3.

It seems likely that the course is an economic one - the supply of females here falls far short of the demand. The result of this is that most of the girls here do not find it necessary to apply themselves to the acquisition of social graces, their shortcomings are overlooked simply because they are girls in such a predominately male establishment. Some day you will leave Massey and competition will be stronger. Be prepared.¹⁷⁶

The women responded in full force, well able to stick up for themselves. The replies show there could be another side to the friendliness on the campus. One stated:

We are practically ignored by a number of people on the campus, and the rest only converse with us in a superficial manner. If we introduce a subject of more serious strain we are quite often treated with a slightly patronising air of superior knowledge.¹⁷⁷

Perhaps the last word in the debate should go to a male student, maybe reflecting a not uncommon attitude:

Massey certainly is a happy hunting ground for those Mog. girls desirous of male company - mind you there are only a small percentage so inclined.... The position is aggravated by the attitude adopted by the male students towards the women who are not considered as being capable of carrying out intelligent conversation. They are only looked upon as a source of mild (?) spasmodic flirtation with which the men satisfy their ego. If matters of an agricultural nature are brought up, they are scorned as knowing little about such subjects, while if they dare to talk about their own work, there is a strong tendency to scoff at them for following such a "degenerate" calling.¹⁷⁸

Over the years superficial appearance seems to have been important when discussing women, particularly by the male students. Beauty and dress were commented on frequently, if student publications are anything to go by. At 'The Dance' in 1935 some women stood out purely by their appearance:

Among the most conspicuous on the floor were the pretty and charming Richards sisters, Murial and Kath, the charming and pretty sisters Fletcher, Miriam and Helen. The pretty and graceful Margaret Pegden...And of course a whole host of other girls - who weren't so mouldy either (the last sentence as a concession to flatter them in case they feel catty).¹⁷⁹

Comments were made particularly on the women's 'working' clothes, although this became less prevalent as the years passed. Elizabeth Richards wore jodhpurs and

¹⁷⁶ F.G., 'Letter to the Editor' in *Chaff*, Vol.6 No.7, July 1954, p.3. Debate continued over a number of editions of *Chaff*.

¹⁷⁷ J.C., 'Letter to the Editor' in *Chaff*, Vol.6 No.8, July 1954, p.3.

¹⁷⁸ 'Spongospora', 'Letter to the Editor' in *Chaff*, Vol.6 No.9, August 1954, p.5.

¹⁷⁹ *Chaff*, Vol.2 No.2, 1935, p.6.

reference to her was made in many drawings and writings in *Bleat*.¹⁸⁰

Despite this, the overall feeling of the women towards men students was one of friendliness, commensurate with brother and sister. For Storm Forgan life was probably atypical in spending a lot of time with the male Kenyan students. As she stated, 'It was very easy for me to feel free to do my own thing, as I had no parents in the country looking over my shoulder'¹⁸¹. Kate Ballard remembers a lot of socialising with the male students, particularly those she met in activities outside classes. 'I can't remember any one complaining about treatment by males in the class. I found the whole environment very safe'. However she did recall:

The only slightly unpleasant feeling I had on campus was when there was quite a large group of [foreign] students at a Dairy short course. They used to stand around ogling as we passed them in the corridors. It was so noticeable because nothing like that had ever happened before.¹⁸²

This was a rare complaint. Usually the men looked after the women. Ted Stratton remembers giving a ride home to one of the girls who turned up at an RSA organised dance in town, as it was a bit rough. Ted and Ian Robbie, another former student, recall though, that there was talk amongst the men about the girls. Both said that it could be quite derogatory and they had to 'sort' a few of them out.¹⁸³

One student interviewed recalled that she 'very quickly had to learn to have confidence as the only female [in her class] and I think that helped me. Perhaps some shy women found life a bit lonely?'¹⁸⁴ One could say that the women benefited from their small numbers as they developed a closeness and looked out for each other. Recall is made of a time that bras and knickers were taken and hung up in the Refectory. 'So we all attended meals en masse and sat together until they were given back'¹⁸⁵. Also, if someone knew something negative about a boy it was passed around as a warning. While the women did not set out to create rules for themselves Bonnie

¹⁸⁰ *Bleat*, No.3, 1933, Box 1, p.5, 37. Elizabeth recalled the articles of the time.

¹⁸¹ Storm Forgan correspondence, 24 July 2000. She recalls travelling around the South Island on a camping trip with three male students.

¹⁸² Kate Ballard correspondence, 31 July 2000.

¹⁸³ Ted Stratton and Ian Robbie talk with Lesley Courtney, 14 July 2000.

¹⁸⁴ Correspondent 1 correspondence, 22 July 2000.

¹⁸⁵ *ibid*

Roger felt that, 'Any rules imposed on ourselves were probably imposed by society and the need to be safe'¹⁸⁶.

One can see that by the sixties times were changing for women. New rules for women at the College developed in response, such as no hitch hiking and instant dismissal for going into pubs. Combined with the older rules they were still based around concern for women's reputation and safety. An address to the NZUSA¹⁸⁷ Congress, reprinted in *Chaff*, also mirrors that change, but sees that the process is slow. Shirley Smith¹⁸⁸ considered a myth had been created to keep women in the home and that 'where stereotypes exist, people try to conform to the pattern', even though this was 'becoming more old-fashioned.'¹⁸⁹ Women were starting to question their role in society preceding the second wave of feminism, and it is the women students going into the 1960s who hint at some gender issues, as opposed to an unawareness earlier. As Kate Ballard pointed out:

Everything was geared to male students and we just had to fit in. If there had been more women we would have been able to make an impression on conditions and attitudes, but of course then women's issues were not an issue!¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁶ Bonnie Roger correspondence, 18 July 2000.

¹⁸⁷ New Zealand Union of Students' Associations.

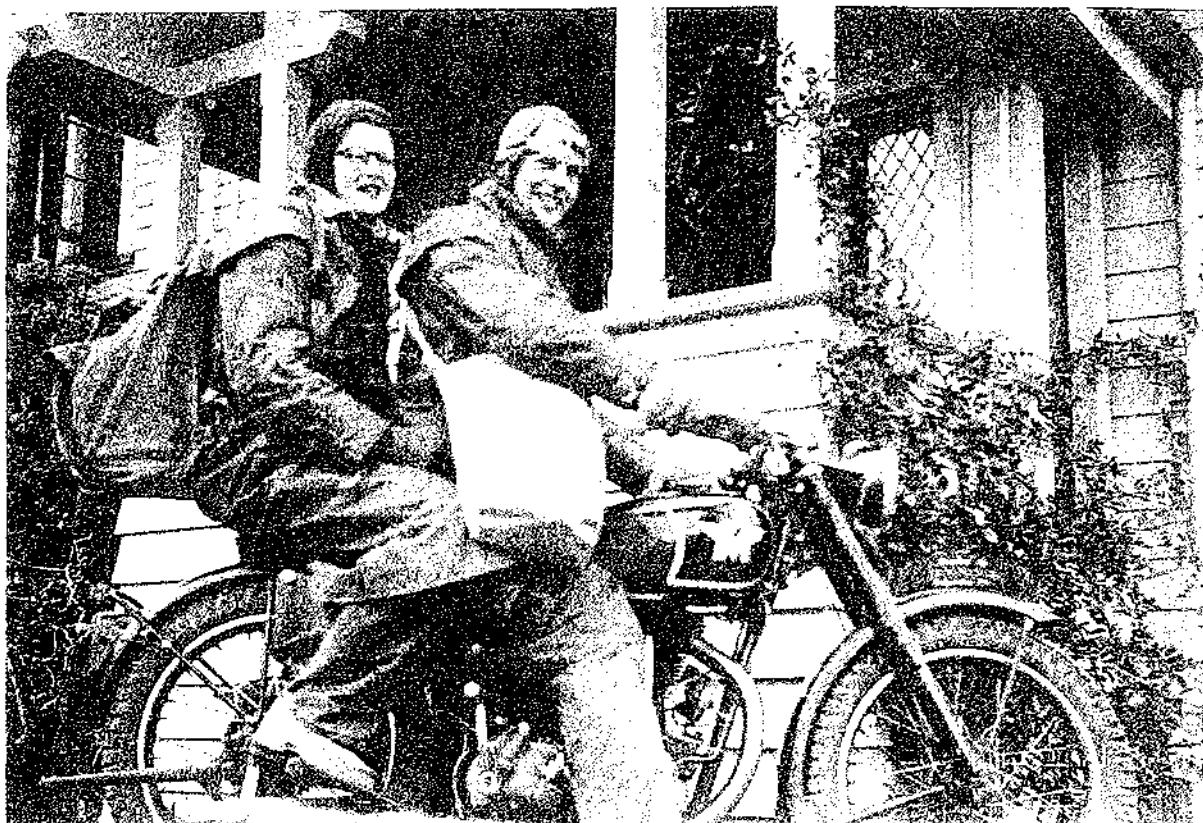
¹⁸⁸ Shirley Smith had been a student of Victoria and went on to make a career in law. Information from Hughes and Ahern, p.99.

¹⁸⁹ *Chaff*, Vol 7 No.1, February 1955, p.1,12.

¹⁹⁰ Kate Ballard correspondence, 31 July 2000.

“Educated Helpmates?”¹⁹¹

Leaving the College



'Picking up Mary at Mog.' Mary and Ted Stratton married on completing their agriculture diplomas and started farming near Taihape. Mary became a very busy housewife and mother of eight children while Ted ran the farm. (Source: Photographic collection, MUA, 1948.)

For the interviewees life at Massey were some of the best years of their lives. They had spent two to three years living in a tight knit group at Moginie House, within a tight knit group of students at Massey Agricultural College, within a provincial centre. Life would never be the same again.

Elsbeth Barter has memories of the 'friendliness, getting on and joining in things. They were very good years, possibly two of the best I had.'¹⁹² These sentiments were not unusual. It was the whole experience of life at Massey that

¹⁹¹ *Dominion*, 1 May 1931. George Fowlds, Chairman of the College, Board quoted in a report of the official opening of Main Building.

¹⁹² Elspeth Barter interview, 20 June 2000.

impinged on their future , ‘a lot to do with forming ideas and attitudes.’¹⁹³ Bonnie Roger summed it up by saying, ‘It was part of my life I do not regret experiencing and it set me on a strong path of confidence and ability to tackle any of life’s challenges, which were many.’¹⁹⁴

The courses at Massey were designed to prepare students for jobs. For some women it stimulated an interest in other courses or degrees on offer, which they then pursued. It is known that at least two of the degree women went on to research and an academic career for much of their lives ¹⁹⁵, and many diploma students continued studies in all sorts of fields.

The most successful course in having an impact on new job opportunities for women was the herd testing course. The College was

extremely pleased with the performance put up by women herd testers in the field. They have shown themselves to be cleaner and more reliable than men and apparently Mr Hume would like to adhere to the use of women for this work. What is more the farmers themselves are more than pleased with them.¹⁹⁶

For many of the women marriage was a direct result of being at Massey, having met their husbands there. For some children curtailed much activity outside the home for a time but Airini Pottinger never let her five children in five and a half years stop her working. Her husband acknowledged that she had the ‘learning’, and they were, and still are, very much equal partners. Airini was always going to be a farmer, was a farmer until her late sixties and is now on a life style block still farming in a small way. ‘The course had prepared me for life. I’d learnt a lot and [there was] always more to learn. I kept reading and applying ideas.’¹⁹⁷

Elizabeth Richards, who never married, worked at a variety of agricultural jobs

¹⁹³ Correspondent 1 correspondence, 22 July 2000.

¹⁹⁴ Bonnie Roger correspondence, 18 July 2000.

¹⁹⁵ These were Paddy Bassett and Manika Wodzika.

¹⁹⁶ Principal’s Report, August 1941, Box 6.

¹⁹⁷ Airini Pottinger interview, 10 June 2000.

until she got part of the family farm. She has only just retired into 'town' at 87.¹⁹⁸ Others are still working within agriculture/horticulture, or are now retired from it.

It is interesting that the two who never really used their training after marriage were the two who had gone to Massey on another's suggestion. Mary Stratton, who had gone at her father's instigation after being a land girl, did become the 'typical' country woman that society imagined, raising eight children and working in the domestic arena of the farm. 'To be honest I don't think I ever really wanted to [be a farmer]'. She felt a 'man has to keep his ego up. He's sure he knows best. My advice has seldom ever been asked for.'¹⁹⁹ Ila Edmond had gone because poor eyesight ruled out university. Subsequent to marriage and children she returned to university, got her BA and became a librarian.²⁰⁰

This study has not delved into life post-Massey in any depth so it is hard to make any assumptions about whether these women remained outside the stereotype of the period. They overwhelmingly recognised that they were different to the average woman of their age in going to Massey. 'Yes it wasn't what everyone went and did. Most went off and did normal university, or trained as teachers or nurses or secretaries.'²⁰¹ Among their school peers it was not unusual to go on to tertiary education but Elspeth Barter felt no one else from her school would have followed her to Massey.²⁰² While Elizabeth Richards thought about half her school peers of 1931 would not go to work at all she also felt different in that '[I] was probably more interested in my job than others'²⁰³.

There was recognition that there were fewer opportunities for women, but as Ila Edmond said, 'Women really didn't expect to do anything different. It was fairly rare to do so.'²⁰⁴ With marriage it was acknowledged that women stayed home and

¹⁹⁸ Elizabeth Richards interview, 23 July 2000.

¹⁹⁹ Mary Stratton interview, 14 July 2000.

²⁰⁰ Ila Edmond interview, 13 June 2000.

²⁰¹ *ibid*

²⁰² Elspeth Barter interview, 20 June 2000.

²⁰³ Elizabeth Richards interview, 23 July 2000.

²⁰⁴ Ila Edmond interview, 13 June 2000.

looked after the children, and one student recalled that, 'Marriage and accumulating capital to buy our farm got in the way of dreams, which I probably turned into making a succession of gardens for myself.'²⁰⁵

Two of the later students voiced a recognition of gender influencing life out in the 'real world'. Kate Ballard felt she had been different to her peers on going to Massey in that she had 'much more belief that being a girl made no difference', but once out of the College she 'soon learnt it did'²⁰⁶. Initial hopes of employment were not lived up to for Bonnie Roger and she felt this was 'mainly due to lack of experience and breaking down barriers to accept women in these areas'²⁰⁷.

Having entered the male domain of Massey Agricultural College and seemingly transcended society's expectations of them, perhaps the world outside the gates of the College was more driven by stereotypical values and attitudes.

²⁰⁵ Kate Ballard correspondence, 31 July 2000.

²⁰⁶ *ibid*

²⁰⁷ Bonnie Roger correspondence, 18 July 2000.

Conclusion

In this paper I have recovered and given a voice to a sprinkling of the women who attended Massey. They were a minority group, and given the circumstances could never have numbered more within the parameters of the time and the College. A multitude of reasons conspired against women attending an agricultural college, most especially educational and societal assumptions of the time.

Society aimed to equip women for a domestic role, through socialisation and education. The words 'agriculture' and 'science' alone would have discouraged many women from attending. While the college sought to encourage women, the administration and staff were hampered by internalised social values. They could not see beyond including women through stereotypical roles even though women had initially, and continued to, prove themselves in the general courses. Gendered educational and work opportunities were evident in New Zealand.

But, of course, not everyone fits a stereotype. The women of Massey College proved that they could overcome society's general expectation of them, and enter a male environment. Gender operated but could be overridden to an extent. With support and independent thought these women had choices that many women of the 1930s to the 1960s lacked in New Zealand.

The women were, to all intents and purposes, from a privileged background. Education for girls was encouraged and expected by their families and teachers, with all of them attending at least four years secondary education. This placed them among peers at school who were also likely to enter some sort of tertiary institution. Most of them attended girls' schools where they were surrounded by women teachers who had atypically continued onto further education. These women provided role models for some, while for others within their family women had attended university and entered careers.

It is the women of the later years who express the sentiment that they were

encouraged within their families to be independent and ‘think outside the square’²⁰⁸, but one can see that all the women were channelled to think beyond domesticity. Mothers were almost always seen in a positive light, making worthwhile contributions and providing role models for independence. Generally fathers were also very encouraging and supportive of their daughter’s choices.

Work was an important factor to these women. Some, like Airini Pottinger and Elizabeth Richards had a passion and ‘would have been a farmer anyway’²⁰⁹. They all expected a job to fulfil them. It was not an assumed stopgap to marriage, and they had the education and support to go after a career that interested them - a luxury that not all women had.

It would appear for women with choices that gender was not the factor it could be in determining their future. But, by entering a male institution they had to operate within male defined parameters. They were always a distinct minority at Massey in more ways than one, although perhaps their small numbers gave them some strength. The College, the male students and the women themselves, internalised the social values of the times to a more or less extent, and gender could not be completely overridden. Once they left the cloistered walls of the College the women were even more vulnerable to social expectations of the time.

But life was changing. The College could see that its foundational aims were being superseded by a rapidly changing culture, and moved to meet that change. Specialised agricultural education, domestically inspired training for women and the attempt to halt the drift to the towns were no longer relevant. For the women ‘just accepting things’ was changing. Bonnie Roger voiced it when she said of 1960:

The average woman of the time was expected to get married and raise a family after perhaps having worked up to that event. [But] women were starting to question society’s attitudes and expectations...prior to the arrival of Germaine Greer in the seventies.²¹⁰

²⁰⁸ Bonnie Roger correspondence, 18 July 2000.

²⁰⁹ Airini Pottinger interview, 10 June 2000.

²¹⁰ Bonnie Roger correspondence, 18 July 2000.

The women students of Massey are an important part of its history, and of the history of women in education. Those 'great' years are remembered well. One student could voice it for all. 'We generally had a marvellous life, sane and privileged - no money, no cars, no booze, plenty of fun and plenty of hard work.'²¹¹

²¹¹ Correspondent 2 correspondence, 11 May 2000.

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