

METHVEN AND MT SOMERS:

REPORT ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC HISTORY
AND CURRENT SOCIAL STRUCTURE

by

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

During 1989 and 1990, John Fairweather and Hugh Campbell carried out research in Methven, with a subsidiary period of investigation in Mt.Somers. The main aims of the study were to investigate pub life in a rural small town. To achieve these aims extensive ethnographic research was carried out with Hugh Campbell living in Methven from June 1989 to October 1990. In the process of carrying out our wider research aims a large amount of historical and social data was unearthed, and it was felt appropriate that this could form the basis of this secondary report outlining the socio-economic history and current social structure of each town.

While Hugh Campbell lived in the subject area and gathered the basic data, John Fairweather, who had applied for the funds and designed the project, also co-ordinated the project from Lincoln University. Hugh Campbell wrote the first draft of this report which was edited and amended by John Fairweather.

Both researchers are interested in rural affairs while pursuing academic careers. John Fairweather is a full time research Sociologist in the Agribusiness and Economics Research Unit at Lincoln University. Hugh Campbell is a post-graduate student in Rural Sociology and is planning to continue research in the Methven area.

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Thanks must also be given to James Dixon and Tracey Ower who were tremendous landlords, and finally to Marion Campbell who made an enormous contribution to the success of the project.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This is one of a number of publications arising from a Lincoln University study conducted in Methven and Mt. Somers during 1989 and 1990. The main report examines both public drinking and social organisation (Fairweather and Campbell, 1990). The purpose of this smaller report is to give a socio-economic perspective on the history of these two small towns. The local history of each has already been documented for the relative centenaries of each town, and each of these works gives a strong impression of incidents and characters that make up the flavour of a particular town's history. We are currently awaiting a publication from the Aged Persons Welfare League involving the recounted life-histories of the elderly in our community. That publication should greatly enhance our understanding of the details of local history. Our intention, however, is not to repeat the colourful accounts of our human past itself, but rather to detach ourselves and present the history of these two towns through the eyes of the sociologist. This will involve recounting the socio-economic history of the towns, including the emergence of the major industry groups and social groups. The changing structure of farming and the effects of enhanced transport and technology on the social structure of the towns are important additional topics of study. Our focus on socio-economic history does not include a detailed account of changes in each community in the last five years.

This report reveals the baseline changes that make up the broad historical trends in an area's history. It is timely to present the history of small towns in this light as most rural small towns have been battered by the effects of the sudden exposure of New Zealand agriculture to market forces. Our current community history is quite obviously determined by major socio-economic change in the country as a whole, and in many cases communities have few options other than to adjust to changes being imposed from outside the community itself. In the present situation we can learn from history that adjustment to economic change has been the constant factor in past survival. Methven has retained its primary economic role while the nature of its contributing industries has changed. Methven and Mt. Somers have always survived as a servicing centre for labour inputs into local industries. The nature of these local industries has changed several times but the labour-servicing role has not.

This brief report is presented in three sections. The first deals with the history and current social structure of Methven, which was the major area studied. A second section presents material on Mt. Somers which was added into the study to provide comparative material for the Methven data. A final chapter provides an overview of some of the important issues facing these rural communities at the present time.

CHAPTER 2

METHVEN COMMUNITY: HISTORY AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the history of Methven community and the origins and nature of its current social structure. This is a large but necessary task in order to provide a proper context to the later ethnographic account. While a narration of Methven's history could be quite detailed, in this case, since we are heading towards a study of drinking practices and their relationship to dominant social groupings in the town, it is appropriate to focus on the developing social formations in Methven, rather than the minute detail of everyday life in past periods of the community's existence.

The following account has been broken into three major sections. The first section relates to the origins of Methven in 1879 and the development of Methven as a centre for servicing rural labour needs until 1920. This first phase saw the decline of estate farming and the rise of family farming which intensified the service role Methven played. The second section deals with the period of time from 1920 to 1970 which was the heyday of family farming and farm-related business in the area. Many social structures which arose with this industry still occur in Methven to the present day. This period ended with the gradual decline in the business participation of farmers in Methven.

Section three discusses changes from 1970 to 1984, including the development of Mt. Hutt as a ski field and the corresponding emergence of a tourist industry in Methven. The old farming sector and the new ski-field businesses remained distinct until the mid-1980s when the farming recession triggered changes which are still being worked through at the present time. These latest events are described in the fourth and final section.

There is a small body of historical literature that formed the basis of the historical material in this chapter. Scotter's (1972) history of Ashburton county is the most comprehensive account of the study area. It draws on the major early Canterbury histories which do present a rather staid and conservative version of local events. Some spice is added to local bourgeois history in the analysis of Eldred-Grigg (1980, 1982). The Methven Historical Society compiled a local history from both the remembrances of famous locals, and the records and accounts of the town. This valuable work (McCausland, 1979) was published for the town centenary in 1979, and provides much of the basic material of this chapter. In the course of the fieldwork some life histories of prominent locals were studied.

Historically, the changing, and persisting, nature of class and gender have been important indicators of macroeconomic change in and around Methven. The general theme to emerge is that early business and social life developed in response to changing

patterns of farming and changing regional relationships. Economic change is reflected in the changing social structure of the community. Within these changes, Methven has always provided services for workers and businesses in the surrounding area. Documenting these changes is crucial to understanding the present nature of the community.

2.2 Origin and Early Development (1879 to 1920)

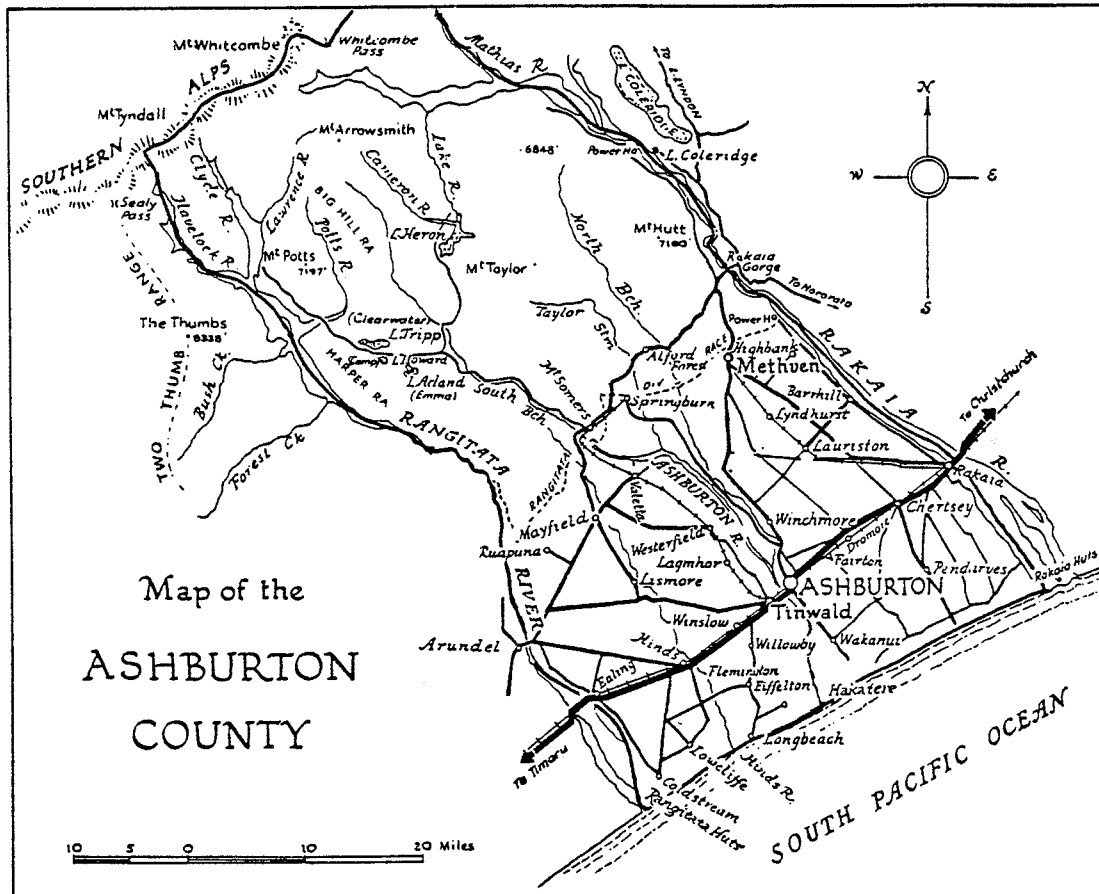
Prior to the establishment of Methven the area was dominated by a number of large runs, on which sheep were grazed on leased land, and estates, on which more intense production occurred on privately-owned land. The area immediately surrounding Methven was considered by estate owners to be very favourable for wheat production--a factor which would have influenced the situation of the township. Springfield estate pioneered the use of irrigation races ensuring that the surrounding area would be well irrigated. The runholders and landowners dominated politics at this time and the politics centred on trying to avoid having to fund the activities of the Ashburton Road Board. In response to these regional tensions, in 1870 the Mt. Somers Road District separated from the Ashburton Road Board, and in 1875 a South Rakaia Road Board formed. In 1879 this new board split again and the Mt. Hutt Road Board was formed. The Mt. Hutt Road Board stretched along the south bank of the Rakaia River (a strip eight miles wide) from Barrhill to the mountains (see Figure 1). This road district remained separate until well into the 20th century and was considered in local politics to be the most prosperous area in the Ashburton District. The town of Methven would appear in the Mt. Hutt Road Board area and it was part of Ashburton County.

2.2.1 Railroad Origins

The District Railways Act 1877 was an obvious attempt by the government to encourage the private development of railway lines. However, in all the country only one private group actually established a line. This was the Rakaia and Ashburton Forks Railway Company which comprised local landowners and Rakaia businessmen all who stood to gain if the interior of the Mt. Hutt Road Board district was opened to the coast by rail. The scheme flourished and the line was completed in 1879. The terminus of the line was a six-way crossroads, on the Ashburton-Upper Rakaia road. This site was near a farm owned by R. Patton called 'Methven' and the name stuck to the locality. Patton had encouraged a blacksmith to set up his foundry on the crossroads and a saddlery and post office had also been established. The subsequent arrival of the railway line saw the establishment of a small community.

The choice of location for the terminus must have had a great deal to do with the grain-producing nature of the area--all of the grain would be channelled out through Rakaia not Ashburton. For the local landowners the railroad not only gave easier access for transportation of goods, it also boosted the capital value

Figure 1

Locality Map of Ashburton County

Source: Scotter, 1972

of the district's land. Generally, developments to the infrastructure were associated with financial gain as the land was subdivided and its value increased. For example, the Mt. Harding estate sold eighty acres (32.4 hectares) of land in the vicinity to McKerrow's, the grain merchants at Rakaiia, at a large profit. Similarly McKerrow's subdivided and sold the land at an even greater profit. It is also recorded that Grigg's, of the famous Longbeach estate near Ashburton, had a permanent 'tin shed' at the site of what would be Methven town, purely for housing Grigg's cattle drovers. This 'tin shed' allowed Grigg to claim the legal 200 acres (80.9 hectares) grazing land allowed by law around any permanent building used for droving. This land would be subdivided into over half of the new town. All in all, a great deal of money could be had by those in a position to exploit the situation of the new town.

The new community appeared to flourish at a fairly rapid pace. Certainly the patronage of many local landowners ensured that all

the usual facilities would be present and there was a steady flow of incoming people. The first church in the area was the Anglican, supported by J. Grigg who donated a portion of his subdivided land to be the site of the Anglican church, and in 1880 the church was built. 1888 saw the construction of a Catholic church, and the Methodists and Presbyterians, all who had congregated since the beginning of the community, built Church buildings at the turn of the century. The Methven School was opened in 1882 with an opening roll of 41 pupils. In an ambitious move, the early founders of the town built a library as early as 1880. This served more than a recreational and educational purpose as all the relevant stock and grain journals were kept at the library, a convenience for the local farmers who could avoid having to travel to Ashburton to hear the latest overseas commodity prices. Similarly, the breakaway Mt. Hutt Road Board used the new town as an operational base. Grigg again donated land and a Road Board office was completed in the first year of settlement (1879). For the wealthy farmers in the region Methven town was providing an alternative to much of the earlier dominance over the district, exerted by Ashburton nearer to the coast and on the main north and south transport routes.

At the turn of the century Methven had weathered the long depression of the 1880s and 1890s and was set to boom in the years before the First World War. The building boom of Churches, Bank of New Zealand and the rebuilding of one of the hotels which had been destroyed by fire a few years before, all indicated that Methven was moving into an era of prosperity. The population of Methven town was recorded as only 300 in 1902. The 1902 population probably did not account for the transients passing through seeking work on the major estates. The early survival of Methven had been as an adjunct to estate production in the area. However, the next decades would see Methven emerge as a small-farmers town, set in some of the most fertile land in Ashburton County.

2.2.2 Early Social Classes

The location of Methven, at the end of the new transport route into the interior of Ashburton County, ensured that business would cater to two sectors of the local community: the farmers and the transient labourers. First, farmers would require all the services pertaining to agricultural production at that time. Blacksmiths and livery stables ensured that horses were kept in working order and that farm equipment could be maintained, and stores catered for the more specialised foods desired in the locality. Similarly, clothing and shoes could now be purchased without the need for a trip to Ashburton. All these businesses slowly prospered as the farming of the surrounding area intensified through the turn of the century. As the number of individual farmers in the area increased, formerly mobile salesmen, smithies, and other small businessmen could now set up shop in one permanent location. The emergence of family farms in the Methven area saw the number of permanent trades settled

in the town increase between the turn of the century and 1920.

The second category catered for were the transient labourers used by the large farms in the area. Even though Canterbury was going through a transition towards a greater number of family farms, Methven lagged behind in the rapidity of this process. The foothills area just to the west of Methven retained a predominance of big farms. Even in the present day six of the largest New Zealand sheep runs, occupying the Ashburton and Rakaia Gorge areas, would have Methven as the nearest service town. This would have been accentuated when Methven was also the main rail route out of the foothills. Consequently the town played host to a large number of farm labourers. Many histories have documented that farm labour in New Zealand was very transient, with the average length of stay on a station being about five months. In Ashburton County, with the predominance of grain production, there were many labourers who would be recruited from Ashburton and be in residence for up to three months during harvest time. The transient labour force either resided in Methven in its search for work or congregated in Methven after working hours or, in the case of more remote stations, during the transportation of wool out to Methven railway station. The presence of this pool of labour led to a demand for grocery and clothing retailers, but to a much greater extent labourers used the pubs, billiard halls, brothels, and boarding houses that were present in Methven in the early days of the town.

These two (partially overlapping) client groups determined the nature of Methven business up until the 1920s at which point some major changes to Methven business occurred.

2.3 Continued Growth as a Service Town (1920 to 1970)

The 1920s saw major changes to farming with the introduction of a whole range of farm machinery and transport technology that reduced dependence upon horses. Correspondingly, business records in Methven (McCausland, 1979) show a change from livery stables and smithies to garages and engineering firms, and there was an increase in the number of motorcars. This gave greater access for farmers both to nearby small towns and to Christchurch, but it also greatly decreased the costs involved in transporting goods out to rural areas. Therefore the 1920s saw the arrival in Methven of outlets of larger companies such as Dalgety's and Wright Stevenson and Co. Alongside these, transport firms began to compete with the railroad in the transportation of farm goods. Enhanced transport was possibly one of the most significant factors in establishing Methven as a prime location for family farming. The arrival of electricity would rank as another major factor in increasing the spare time of family farmers and allowing both farmers and their wives the luxury of visiting town more frequently and participating in community life.

The other side of Methven life, that of the transient labourers, went into a slow decline with the gradual reduction in average

farm size. This is not to say that small-scale farmers and labourers were two different sets of people. Rather, it was a common aspiration for a labourer to save up enough money to purchase land and develop his own farm. The transition from labouring to small holding was reflected in a decreasing usage of pubs, boarding houses, and billiard rooms as leisure time became absorbed into farming life at home and not in town.

It is important to note that communities like Oxford, near the foothills but further north, which saw a complete decline in the size of farms and the complete disappearance of landless labour, experienced an almost total decline in traditional labourers' leisure industries. Five pubs at the turn of the century declined to one pub by 1930. Similarly the billiard rooms disappeared and prostitution almost disappeared. Methven, however, did not change to this extent and its two pubs in 1900 were still going in 1930. The survival of large estates in the Methven area ensured that there was a continual presence of farm labour in the town. The fact that Methven still experienced drunken revelry and other 'vices' well into this century was reflected in the lingering reputation that Methven endured as an uncivilised town. The best efforts of the 'respectable' locals to promote a 'community' image to Methven could not hide the fact that labourers still used Methven as a place to congregate and 'blow their pay'. Further, the prohibition movement stalled in Methven even at the peak of its popularity at the turn of the century. Whereas Ashburton, Hinds, Tinwald and Mt. Somers all became 'dry' at the turn of the century, Methven's pubs remained open and thrived on the new customers who would regularly visit from the dry areas.

2.3.1 Business Changes

From the 1920s an important transition affected business in Methven. Prior to this date most of the local businesses were Methven-based concerns. However from the 1920s onwards business in Methven became increasingly dominated by outside concerns. This process was solidified during the Second World War when many small businesses were absorbed 'for the good of the war effort'. One example was the local transport industry. Even though the industry now had local operators in Methven, a major change did occur in 1939 when a company was formed which merged 17 different private transporting firms into Mid-Canterbury Transport Limited. This company was run from Ashburton and Methven, and the Methven office became a sub-branch of the main concern. Another example was the seed dressing industry which was important in such a prominent grain growing area. The first permanent local seed dressing firm was established in 1926. From 1930 mobile seed dressing plants were operating from Methven. However in 1954, The Mid-Canterbury Seed Dressing Company Ltd. opened in Methven capturing most of the market. Later, in 1969, Pyne, Gould and Guinness Ltd. opened a large grain store and seed dressing plant in Methven.

The economies of scale involved in large-scale grain storage meant that even in early times large businesses presided over

this industry. A prominent Ashburton businessman Hugo Freidlander built a grain store at Lyndhurst, nine kilometres from Methven, at the turn of the century but this was bought out by N.Z. Loan and Mercantile and later bought by Dalgety's N.Z. Ltd. In Methven itself nearly every major N.Z. agribusiness built a grain store: Dalgety N.Z. Ltd., National Mortgage and Agency Co. Ltd., Wrightson N.M.A., and the N.Z. Farmers Coop. Assoc. Ltd.

One industry which has retained local ownership is the Methven Sawmill. The mill was established in 1940 by the Department of Public Works. After the war, and the completion of the Highbank power station, the mill was sold to R.T. Cochrane and the mill is still run by the Cochrane family.

2.3.2 Class Structure and Social Activities

In the 1920s Methven became established as the centre of a family farming area, with some residual larger farms. As technology and transport improved the participation of farmers and their families in the life of the community increased. However the labouring group which had characterised early Methven still remained with one significant difference. Whereas in early Methven the vast majority of labourers were transient, the establishment of farm servicing industries in Methven provided the opportunity for a permanent blue-collar labour force to settle in Methven.

Much of the emergent local farm service industry was the result of settled farm labourers moving into contract work and finally setting up businesses. All the major transport firms operating in Methven prior to 1950 were initiated by solo contractors who worked their way into business. One of the two major trucking firms in Methven at present is still run by a solo truckie who started driving in the 1950s. The increase in the number of settled labourers and contractors continued until the Second World War when many small firms began to be amalgamated by larger units. However it was not until after the 1960s that business actually became centred out of Methven. Even the larger firms which absorbed smaller operators continued to hire large numbers of local workers. Therefore prior to the 1960s Methven supported a large body of blue-collar workers who formed a significant class grouping in the town.

In addition to blue-collar workers, there were the petty bourgeois: the shopkeepers, tailors, cobblers, publicans, garage owners, pharmacist, baker, greengrocers etc. These entrepreneurs were the most stable class in Methven's history. Despite the fact that Methven businesses have often changed hands the existence of a strong petty bourgeois in Methven has never diminished. The population of Methven never suffered any major set-backs up to 1960, and only with the increase of shopping trips to Christchurch in the 1960s did local business feel any pressure.

The obvious third class grouping participating in the Methven

community was the farmers. Two World Wars each brought soldier settlement schemes, and around Methven two such schemes at Highbank and Lyndhurst were, and are still, significant localities of smaller farms. The improvement of roads ensured the increasing participation of farmers in the business and leisure activities of the community. The local schools had a large number of farming children on the roll throughout these decades (and still do).

These three rough class groupings did not necessarily mingle homogeneously throughout local institutions. Principal amongst those institutions accentuating class difference were the local churches and the lodges. Throughout Methven's history, the Anglican church has been patronised by nearly all the wealthier locals. Only one major run-holder patronised (literally) the local Presbyterian church, and he was a self-made man, unlike the predominantly inherited wealth of the other Anglican gentry. The Anglican church has retained its slightly wealthy air. The smaller farmers tended to congregate at the Presbyterian and Methodist churches. These two churches did not really flourish until after 1920 corresponding to the rise in the number of small farms. The Catholic church attracted a few farmers but also catered to a number of the settling, blue-collar families. The various lodges were important institutions in early Methven. The grand masters of the early lodges were often run-holders, estate owners, or successful businessmen although membership did not exclude manual workers (except Catholics) who were permanently residing in the community. Most of the members were married men and, of course, all lodge meetings and matters were forbidden to women especially the wives of lodge members.

The next important institutions were the sporting clubs. In New Zealand, popular memory has often associated early rural communities with their accompanying clubs and associations. However, it is most likely that these clubs are more closely related to the rise of family farming than to rural communities *per se*. As has already been noted, Methven did not appear to be a significant community of small farms until the 1920s and this pattern of development is supported by the early records of various clubs. There was a slow development of the first six clubs over 28 years from 1883 to 1911. Then there was a quickening of pace as there were 17 new clubs over 27 years from 1918 to 1945. The following are the starting dates of Methven's major clubs:

1883	The Methven Lodge
1896	Methven Rugby Football Club
1897	Methven Lawn Tennis Association
1900	The Loyal Methven Lodge
1911	Methven Agricultural and Pastoral Association Methven Collie Club
1918	Methven Outdoor Bowling Club
1920	Methven Cricket Club Methven Ladies Hockey Club
1922	Methven Plunket Society
1924	Methven Golf Club
1927	Methven Gun Club Methven Trotting Club

	Methven Miniature Rifle Club
1928	Methven Volunteer Fire Brigade
1931	Methven Country Women's Institute
1934	Methven Amateur Swimming Club
1935	Methven Young Farmers Club
1936	Methven Caledonian Society Netball Club
	Methven Women's Division Federated Farmers
1939	Methven Croquet Club
1941	Methven Choral Society
1945	Methven Federated Farmers.

Figure 2 shows an aerial photograph of Methven (NZ Aerial Mapping Ltd) in April 1939 illustrating the established pattern of family farms, and showing the foothills with Mt. Hutt under cover of snow.

2.4 The Rise in a Dual Economy (1970 to 1984)

The development of farming-related businesses in Methven proceeded unchecked from the 1920s until 1970. However, local records of businesses show that during the 1960s there was an increasing reliance on branches or agencies of national companies and a decline in locally-controlled industries. As roads and transport became more developed farmers began to travel to Ashburton and Christchurch for their purchases. This trend has continued and whereas five major stock and station firms jostled alongside many local units in Methven during the 1960s, now only two firms tenuously remain with their retail outlets serving principally as a base for farm advisors and grain and wool buyers. Centralisation reflects not only the decline in demand for farm inputs in Methven itself, but also the change in national-level control of stock and station companies. With the changing demographic characteristics of rural life, only the major firms have managed to straddle the gap between rural outlets and urban head offices.

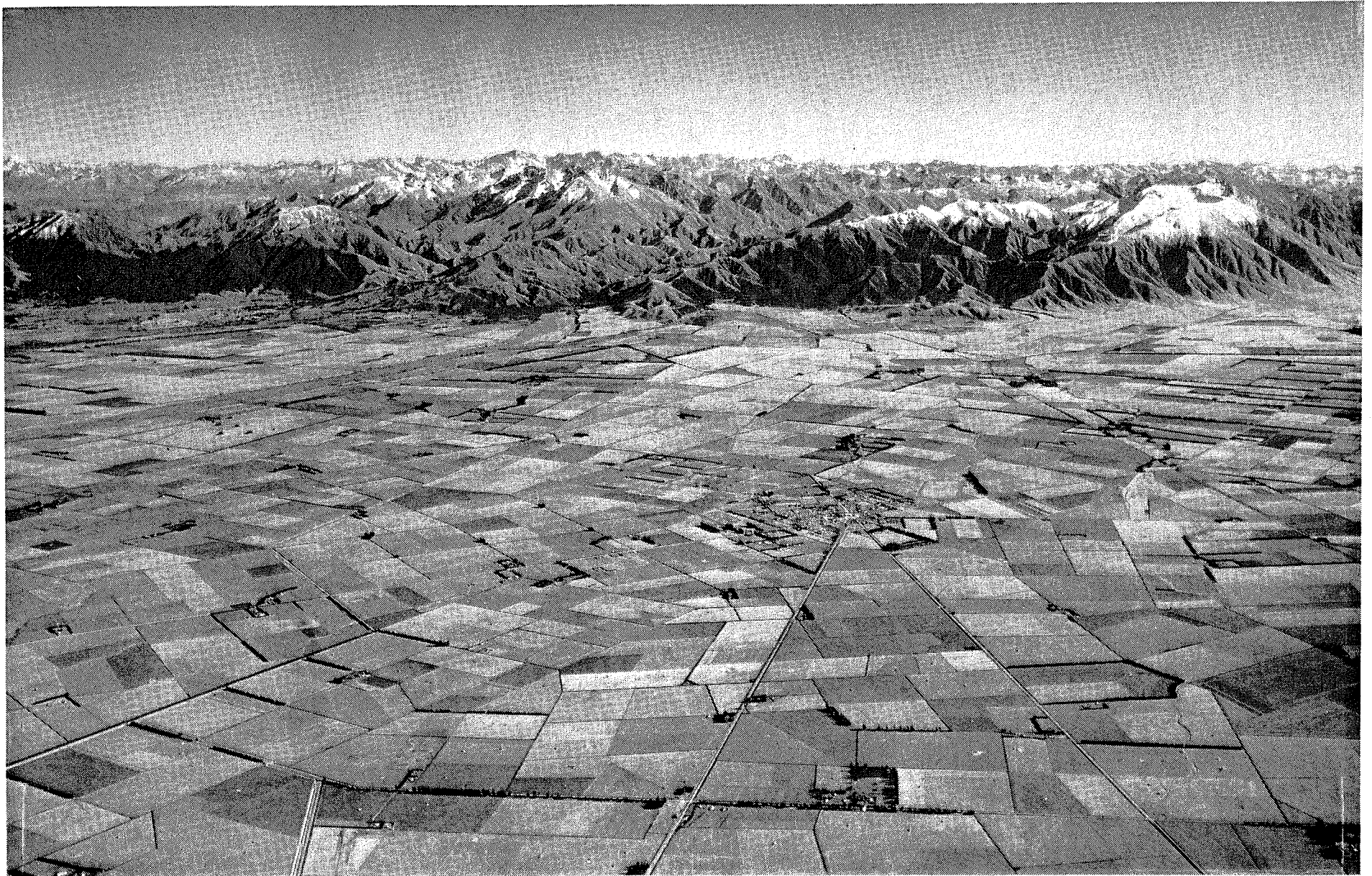
The decline in rural business demand paralleled the decline of Methven as a thriving rural service centre, however the economic direction of the town took a new direction after the Methven Lions Club initiated a feasibility study into the possibility of Mt. Hutt operating as a ski field. This 1971 study led to the opening of Mt. Hutt in 1973 as a commercial venture.

The ski field proved itself to be viable, and while most skiers made the journey to Mt. Hutt from Christchurch on a daily basis, a number of tourists began seeking accommodation and services in Methven. This demand was met with the establishment of a number of accommodational facilities, restaurants, and tourist activities. The town underwent considerable renovation in the main shopping area to facilitate the arrival of new businesses, and the sites for 14 new shops were built in 1975. Some of these sites were not filled until recently. However by 1989 Methven had five hotels, three motels, twenty ski lodges, two camping grounds, nine licensed restaurants, six bring-your-own (alcohol)

Figure 2

Aerial Photograph of Methven and the Foothills

(12)



restaurants and a host of shops catering to the ski industry.

The impact on the town of the new industry has been underrated in some quarters and exaggerated in others. In some respects the farming and servicing side of Methven and the ski industry form a dual economy. It is without doubt that the town feels the effects of recession in either industry, and the years of 1987 and 1988 saw both industries in difficulties. Since 1985 New Zealand primary production has had to adjust to a more-market policy and this adjustment has led to considerable change in rural towns. In recent years there has been an erratic supply of snow, with 1987 and 1988 proving to be difficult years for Methven. Most of the locals consider that these years were the worst in Methven's recent history.

Both the farming and the other non-tourist industries in Methven are based on the production and refinement of primary products. As the supply of capital and technological inputs becomes more centralised into urban corporations, the geographical location surrounding Methven has become wholly devoted to the primary productive sector of New Zealand's now complex agricultural industry. The only major input supplied principally from the local area is labour in the form of farmers, farmer's families, and the contribution of hired farm labour, some of which is local and some of which is itinerant.

The town of Methven serves the farming industry initially by providing outlets for corporate inputs into farming, but more importantly by maintaining the rural labour force. The day-to-day requirements of food and the like are serviced by Methven workers to the local farmers. Methven also provides accommodation and entertainment for the larger contracting gangs of shearers and others. The town also provides recreational, religious, and educational services for the farmers of the area. In this way Methven falls into the pattern of the typical rural 'service' town.

The ski industry is similar to farming in that it is dependent on the weather and requires snow as a basic input. This reliance on a natural phenomenon is identified as the weakest link in the industry and at the start of the 1990 season, artificial snow-making machines were installed on Mt. Hutt. Other than this the industry runs on a mix of capital and technological inputs serviced by a seasonal labour force. The ski industry is very capital-intensive and from only a few years after the establishment of Mt. Hutt as a field, corporate ownership and investment was required to make the ski field viable. Recent changes include a move to off-shore ownership and the ski field is now owned by a Japanese company.

Like the farming industry, the ski industry relies on Methven to service its labour. However, here is where the issue of dual economy comes into question. Typically, the labour force utilised directly in the ski industry is only seasonal, and only a small minority are permanent residents of the local area. In winter the size of the town almost doubles but with very limited

impact on the permanent residence pattern of the town. In the past a number of local entrepreneurs have entered the market for tourist dollars with some success, however this number is proportionately small.

It is beyond the scope of this project to assess the relative wealth deriving from farming as opposed to tourism in the Upper Ashburton region. However, whereas in the past these two industries have been quite distinct, the duality of local industry in the region is now becoming blurred in the town of Methven itself. In recent times the recession in rural areas has led to a blurring of the established distinctions between industries in Methven. This is most obvious in the incorporation of local female labour into part-time work in the tourist industry. The productive base of each industry is completely different, but just as the small rural towns in New Zealand serviced the labour needs of the large estates in early New Zealand, the town of Methven is servicing the labour of both industries.

2.5 Contemporary Methven (1984 to 1990)

Throughout its economic history, Methven has remained as a service centre for workers in the surrounding industries. For the first 100 years of farming in the area Methven was established and has retained the role of servicing the needs of farmers and farm labour. Subsequent industries have all drawn on Methven as a supplier of labour with varying degrees of success. The sawmill was established in Methven at the end of the Second World War to bring logs from the foothills to be processed by labourers resident in Methven. The flax mill also utilised Methven as a source of labour in aid of the war effort. Finally, the ski industry utilised Methven as an accommodator and more recently provider of seasonal labour to work in ski-related business. This 'labour-servicing' character of the Methven economy has remained constant and has had an obvious bearing on the social structure of the community. However, closer examination of the recent social history of Methven indicates that economic change has occurred and is reflected in the changing social structure of the community. Before describing these changes we outline the social activities that were developed by the time of the last decade.

2.5.1 Social Activities

Throughout the last 40 years the backbone of the Rugby Football Club has been farm labourers and farm cadets from Lincoln College. Young farmers also play rugby but there is a marked tendency for active participation to decline after marriage. The older and more-established businessmen and farmers support rugby more at a provincial and national level. The exception has been the publicans who solicit the patronage of the young mens drinking fraternity centred at the Rugby Club.

The Golf Club is a centre for civic pride as the combined efforts of members developed the golf course to a standard somewhat

higher than other country clubs. Membership in the men's club has been maintained at just under 200 per year, which is a considerable proportion of the male population. If the Rugby Club attracts a number of young unmarried men, then the Golf Club holds the bulk of middle-aged and older men. A large number of farmers attend the club and membership has even been held by Christchurch residents who drove out each Saturday. The Ladies Golf Club is also very active.

Other clubs are well attended with squash, bowls, croquet, shooting, and others producing national-level competitors during their history. The clubs tend to be attended by distinctive age and gender groups rather than class groupings. This is consistent with a sense of egalitarianism throughout New Zealand's sporting clubs.

The final major social institution is the pubs. The two major pubs in Methven were historically a centre of activity. As they will be examined later at length, it is sufficient to say that the pubs relied on a predominantly blue-collar male clientele as their chief source of income. Blue-collar workers in local industry, farm labourers, contractors, and unmarried young farmers make up the majority of pub drinkers. Married blue collar workers have attended the pubs while married farmers have tended to drink at the Golf Club.

The general participation in these clubs remained constant after the arrival of the Mt. Hutt skifield in 1971. What was different was that those persons who had arrived in the community to participate in the ski-field and its associated trade had almost nothing to do with the clubs and associations in Methven. These people established their own leisure patterns and associational networks in the community.

2.5.2 Mt. Hutt and Social Boundaries

The arrival of the skifield has attracted a number of people into retail, restaurant, and accommodation businesses in Methven. The original inhabitants have participated in the basic retail businesses and at the budget end of the accommodation businesses. Over and above this a number of people have moved into Methven to exploit business opportunities. Only a minority of these have actually stayed for a number of years. Most newcomers will buy an established business and only invest in it for a couple of winters. The ski industry has organised a promotional association which, although open to any who pay the subscription, is populated by ski and tourism-related businesses, supplemented by some local retailers. This association is the most overt element of the ski industry network and the Mt. Hutt Company interacts with the Methven business community through this organisation.

The tourist industry people who stay in the vicinity tend not to enter into established institutions like the sporting clubs and churches, and they have developed their own networks and leisure patterns. Most notable is the overtaking of the Methven Hotel

during the winter months. The Methven Hotel has become world famous for its hospitality to skiers. This reputation was enhanced by the hostility of the bar manager of the alternative hotel towards any obvious outsiders. Several locals have recounted that the old manager used to greet skiers wandering into his pub with the phrase "Get over the road where you belong". Over the road, the skiers take over the Methven Hotel and members of the ski businesses tend to fraternise in the same locations as their clientele.

The other major influx into the community is the arrival of workers participating in seasonal employment in the ski industry. As the great majority of these workers are also skiers they tend to associate in the skiers leisure activities. These workers are accommodated in a number of rental properties (often on farms) that are on offer during the winter.

Much of the social dynamics of the town is taken up with the maintenance of a distinct boundary between 'locals' and 'newcomers' (or "johnny-come-latelys" as one local described them). One local defined newcomers as those who are "purely economically motivated" and who have "no roots in the town". Despite these strongly-held opinions there is a seeming contradiction in the application of these stereotypes. On one side, there are several people who have strong Methven 'roots' and are firmly established in the new 'purely economically motivated' camp. Similarly, relative newcomers to the area (less than ten years) are accepted into the local fraternity. The difference lies in which industry grouping is involved. Newly-arrived young farmers and labourers are always welcome at the Rugby Club or at the local's pub, the farming and farm servicing networks being reasonably open to newcomers from within the wider farming industry. Some status-seeking occurs within this network and in these pursuits town pedigree is a major factor. Generally, throughout the 1970s, and early 1980s the pastoral industry networks and the ski industry remained distinct.

In between these two camps are the retailers who gladly receive added winter custom. The number of new shops increased competition markedly and therefore the established businesses continued courting locals as the basis of their custom. An uneasy truce emerged with locals grudgingly accepting the presence of skiers but grateful for the amenities they sustained. In general, the locals will take the tourists money at every opportunity and otherwise avoid them.

2.5.3 Recent Changes

Since 1981 distinct demographic changes have occurred within the two industry groupings. A major factor has been the decline in the farming industry. Since 1984 farmers entered a time a high interest rates, declining land values, and low product prices. Low farm incomes affected farm service industries in towns like Methven. The most significant event occurring within the farming industry in recent times has been the recession in farming in the years 1985-1989 and related demographic changes. The recession

has had a significant effect on the nature of the local population. Farming has always tended to retrench in times of difficulty by cutting labour costs, and in Methven this has resulted in the tightening of the farm employees labour market. The result of farm adjustments was the widespread disappearance from the Methven area of farm cadets from Lincoln College (now Lincoln University), farm labourers, and married couples resident on farms. Similarly, some young farmers have been forced off the land. There has been outmigration by these groups with a severe depletion of the 18 - 30 years old bracket. School roll figures show that the number of young people in the community has steadily declined throughout the 1980s. These population changes are exacerbated by a growing tendency for school leavers to depart from the Methven area. In 1980, over fifty per cent of school leavers obtained employment in Methven with only six per cent leaving for other areas. By 1989, 25 per cent of school leavers were remaining in Methven with 30 per cent now leaving for other areas. Many of these migrating school leavers are taking up employment opportunities in the Australian farming industry. The population of Methven community was 923 in 1986 at the time of the last census. Housing occupancy has remained constant in Methven itself in the interim, however the surrounding rural areas have shown a decline in permanent population as farm cottages, which once housed farm labourers, are now accommodating holidaymakers.

With the decline in the number of farm-related labourers in Methven the blue-collar workforce is now dominated by men employed in the local farm service and manufacturing industries. Due to job uncertainty, these men are now less likely to leave their jobs. Recession has lowered the number of manual workers in and around Methven and those who remain tend to be both older and more likely to be married. Some families, typically young couples, have responded to redundancy in Methven by commuting to work in Ashburton. Commuting is one way of remaining in Methven while securing tertiary sector employment which is very scarce in Methven.

Very few youths from Methven remain in town if they are likely to be unemployed, and none have been encountered during field work. However, Methven does have unemployed people living in it, and these are welfare beneficiaries seeking cheaper housing than can currently be found in Christchurch. The Department of Social Welfare has encouraged beneficiaries to consider shifting to cheaper housing in rural areas. The current lack of employment in rural areas means that the beneficiaries will remain unemployed. Recent school surveys showed that seven per cent of Methven households were one-parent families. The same survey showed that concern over the arrival of Domestic Purposes Beneficiaries into the community was the biggest issue parents identified in Methven (one of the other biggest issues was too much alcohol in the community). The number of beneficiaries is moderated by the presence of the ski industry. The development of Methven as a tourist location has meant that housing prices in Methven are higher than in other rural communities. This has ensured that the proportion of very low income families is much

lower than in neighbouring towns like Rakaia. The arrival of beneficiaries is a new change to the industrial groupings present in the town.

In response to economic pressures seasonal jobs at hotels and shops during the ski season increasingly were being filled by local, married women. The Mt. Hutt Company has always had a policy of hiring locals in a bid to improve its image in the town, but previously only a few locals would be interested in seasonal work. There has been a dramatic increase in the number of women working in part-time employment in Methven during the winter. In the 1981 census 33 women (ten per cent) in Methven categorised themselves as being in part-time employment compared with 61 per cent who claimed not to be engaged in wage employment. By the 1986 census, 72 women (22 per cent) were in part-time work with only 49 per cent claiming no employment. In our 1989 survey, even excluding employment in the Mt. Hutt Company itself, 25 local women were employed in a part-time basis at local cafes, restaurants, and pubs. What is more, 77 women were employed at local accommodation businesses, doing mainly cleaning work. In these two sectors of service and cleaning alone, over three times the number of women in part-time employment in 1981 are now employed. A majority of these women are locals as the vast majority of transient workers are employed by Mt. Hutt Company itself.

In this new work force are a large number of women married to blue-collar workers in the town. Farming women are also occupied in this sector, but since they have other sources of income they are not as prevalent. An example can be seen during the asparagus growing season. Growers seem to rely heavily on a network of rural women to pick the crop. Only when local women have been thoroughly canvassed will growers resort to townsfolk from Methven and Rakaia to pick the crop.

Census data shows a similar increase in the female workforce for the rural area surrounding Methven. The proportions of adult women engaged in full-time work rose from 29 per cent to 38 per cent during the 1981 to 1986 period. The proportion of women in part-time work rose from 13 per cent to 20 per cent during the same period.

Local women in the rural areas have other means of obtaining income and one of these is accommodating seasonal workers. The casual accommodation market in Methven is very significant. A network exists which finds accommodation for not only workers but also longer-term tourists (many houses are let on a two week basis). Houses which in the past were used to accommodate farm workers, married couples and contractors now accommodates skiers and ski-field workers. A nationwide New Zealand Tourist and Publicity survey showed that 26 per cent of the 'visitor nights' spent in Methven could not be accounted for in any official form of accommodation. This figure is very high when it is compared with the rest of the country where the next highest figure in this category is six per cent.

The recent movement of women into the tourist-related industry has meant a softening of the boundaries between the two industries. As the rural recession became deeper, it was the women of the area who entered the part-time workforce or engaged in informal economic activity to supplement declining incomes. This change is very recent and the long-term impact on the traditional division of the town between old and new business is hard to assess at this time. The main conclusion is that it has been women who have made the transition. Men have seemingly retained the old divisions. The traditional male domains of pubs and sporting clubs are still cast in the pattern of the last two decades.

2.5.4 Maintenance of the Male Status Quo

The two industries do not mingle at any point in the workplace and so it is in leisure time that the local men strongly resist mixing with newcomers. This leisure time can be observed in two contexts: the pub and the sporting clubs.

The main 'locals' pub is still resistant to infiltration by skiers. The management recognised that skiers were an important source of revenue if the publican was to survive the decline in the number of drinking males in the town. The compromise arrived at was that the pub built a bistro and lounge bar facility to cater for skiers and other visitors, while the precious local clientele could drink undisturbed in the Public Bar. The locals are not too displeased with this as after the ski season ends the bistro is a good facility for occasional dinners. In this way the pub has cashed in on the tourist dollar while retaining its identity as a strong local drinking domain.

Alongside the male domain of the Public Bar at the Hotel, at least one business has its own social club. The 'Boars' Nest' at a local transport firm is definitely a male-only, blue-collar drinking location, and the success of the social club ensures a strong manual work ethic amongst the drivers at the firm. It also drums up a bit of business for the firm.

Sporting clubs have been hard hit by the departure of young male labourers and farmers. The two main clubs in the area, the Golf Club and Rugby Club, have had to take action to ensure their survival. Both have pursued charity and fund-raising activities with mixed success. The problem facing each club is the maintenance of current facilities in the face of declining annual subscriptions and decreasing number of young men involved. The Rugby Club has responded by promoting their clubrooms as a social venue and running a bar for non-rugby events at the clubrooms. To give an example, in June 1989, the Highland Pipe Band fund-raising quiz night attracted a large number of people. The event was held at the clubrooms and the Rugby Club ran the bar and took all bar proceedings. These bar activities have supplemented the falling income of the Rugby Club.

The Golf Club also has used a bar to supplement its income. The club committee devises raffles and other competitions to ensure

the maximum number of men staying on in the bar after club rounds. The revenue from drinking was used by the club to offset falling subscriptions. At the 1989 Annual General Meeting it was revealed that bar takings for the year provided one third of the club's revenue and was the only growth area in revenue, key other than a slight increase in green fees.

In these male enclaves, resistance to change has required some form of economic response to replace the financial losses incurred by men leaving the area. In each male domain, drinking has been a key element to retaining a local male identity, and drinking also provided an economic buffer for the ailing clubs.

2.6 Summary of Economic History

It is clear that Methven has retained a constant economic function within the surrounding industries throughout its history. This function has been the role of providing the labour for local industries. While retaining a constant economic function, Methven has undergone changes and these show up in five main phases: initial development, transition to family farms, continued growth, ski-field development, and finally, inter-industry mingling.

The first phase of Methven's development saw a predominantly estate-based farming system utilising large pools of transient labour. This labour was both accommodated and entertained at Methven. Methven also provided a transport outlet for produce from the estates. The second phase relates to the classical phase of transition from estates to family farms. This transition was slower around the wealthy Methven area, resulting in a persistence of transient labourers in Methven, with the associated businesses being present for longer than in other areas. As family farms became prevalent, tradesmen settled in Methven and small farm servicing businesses emerged. Methven also serviced the needs of the farmers themselves. The presence of farmers and their families in Methven was boosted considerably by the advent of motorcars and better roads. This led to an increase in retail trade in the town. The third phase came as the present century progressed and the farm servicing industries increased and then declined slightly as larger firms began buying out solo operators. As transport continued to improve, more farmers began shopping in Ashburton and Christchurch leading to a slight decline in the retail sector in Methven. As the 1970s approached Methven hosted distinct groups of farm labourers, blue-collar farm service industry workers, farming families, and small retail businesses.

A fourth phase began in the 1970s with the arrival of the ski-field which immediately arrested any decline in local population. Throughout the 1970s the pre-skifield population distanced themselves from newcomers and their businesses. The locals were not unfriendly to tourist and skiers' money but retained a completely separate social life. A few locals entered the tourist industry but very few actually showed any desire to be employed by the Mt. Hutt Company.

The fifth and final phase began in the 1980s with a diminished distinction between farming and tourism as some people in the traditional farming and labouring sector began to take employment in the local motels and eating places. This inter-industry mingling occurred at the height of the farming recession and was carried out almost totally by women. Local men have remained almost uniformly resistant to mingling with the ski-industry or its participators. Instead, the men have congregated in their traditional places of association: the pub and the sporting clubs. Local men have put considerable time and energy into sustaining these institutions despite the widespread departure of younger people from the community.

2.7 Conclusion

The economic and social history of Methven and the surrounding area shows that early business and social life developed in response to changing patterns of farming and changing regional relationships. Methven was founded because both wool and wheat production required transport out of the area, and the railway which provided this transport ended at Methven. Local politicians gained regional predominance and gave Methven an independent basis for its existence. With this basic economic structure in place, farm servicing businesses then developed in early Methven along with transient labourers. After 1920 there were increasing numbers of family farmers, servicing industries, and there was a continued need for blue-collar workers. Mechanisation and transport developments meant that Methven was drawn into the wider economic system and outside firms established offices there.

The trend to centralisation continued into the 1970s and in response to declining business activity, Methven then began to diversify its economic base by starting a tourist industry based on skiing at nearby Mt. Hutt. Slowly, a type of dual economy developed with Methven maintaining its role in providing services. Other changes included the continued economic pressures on farming resulting in decreased proportions of working-age men and an increase in welfare beneficiaries consistent with the national trends. Local Methven people have traditionally maintained distinct boundaries from Mt. Hutt people and successfully sustained their rural way-of-life founded on an agricultural economy. However, the recent agriculture downturn has meant that Methven women have sought additional income in the tourist economy, meanwhile most of the men have adapted and maintained themselves within the agricultural economy.

The economic changes described above have led to a class structure consisting of farmers, businessmen, and service industry or blue-collar workers. This structure has persisted with only slight modification over time. The size of Methven has been large enough to sustain a variety of clubs and associations, although these have changed over time. Among the men, at least, sports, service clubs, and drinking at the pub are popular activities.

Much of current social dynamics in Methven can be seen in the maintenance of a boundary between old and new industry. This effort is being challenged as Methven women take up earning opportunities in the ski industry. In addition, from the tourism side, the newcomers are engaged in a constant struggle to make the image of the town more suitable for tourists, an activity that does not meet with universal approval. It is in the interplay between old and new industry, and between the groups involved in each sector, that much of the social dynamics of Methven can be seen. These dynamics are complex. Most of what has happened in Methven has been a response to changes occurring throughout the Canterbury region. However, no matter what industry emerged throughout the history of the area, Methven has remained an important service centre for these industries, especially as a collecting point for labour inputs into local industry. We can now look at the smaller town of nearby Mt. Somers to see whether similar or different historical processes have been at work.

CHAPTER 3

MT. SOMERS COMMUNITY : HISTORY, SOCIAL STRUCTURE, AND COMPARISON TO METHVEN

3.1 Introduction

This chapter on Mt. Somers history has similar goals to that of Chapter 4 in providing background to our ethnography. In addition, this chapter provides a comparison between the two towns so that we can link similarities and differences of the towns to similarities and differences in drinking. In this way, it may be possible to strengthen the claims made about rural public drinking in general. The histories of Mt. Somers and Methven have striking similarities, mainly due to the fact that both inhabit the same general geographic area in Mid-Canterbury (see Figure 1). The widespread economic trends that affected the development of Methven also affected Mt. Somers. Both emerged out of the same early rural political economy, and in this political economy they both performed the same role: namely, as important rail depots. Mt. Somers, like Methven, developed a capacity to service rural industries and rural workers.

Again Scotter's (1972) history of Ashburton County was a valuable source of information and this source was enhanced by an entertaining local history of the 'Bushside' area compiled by Vance (1976) and released for the centenary of the area. These two works, supplemented by information stored in the Mt. Somers Museum, provided the historical material used in this chapter.

Within the pattern of generally similar histories there are some differences. The distinctive features of Mt. Somers history make for some changes in the dates used for sectioning this chapter. The first section describes the wide range of extractive industries in early Mt. Somers that were prominent from 1876 to 1900. The second section emphasises the acute effects of prohibition in 1902, which did not affect Methven, and the third section notes that mining was important in the immediate past of Mt. Somers. These background events are used to describe the current social structure of Mt. Somers. This structure is influenced today by the current economic activity, just as it was late in the nineteenth century when the available resources were exported to other places.

3.2 Early Extractive Industries (1876 to 1900)

It is the pattern of economic development in an area that best indicates the ensuing patterns of settlement. In Mid-Canterbury, the economic mainspring was the development of intense rural production. We have already discussed how the new town of Methven formed within an area of intense wheat production. This town was situated at the junction of the railroad intended to serve the needs of the large landowners in the area. However, around the periphery of this fertile area other industries had already emerged. It was only with the opening of the Rakaia

Bridge in 1873 that large demand for farming land emerged in Mid Canterbury. It was this demand that was the basis for transport centres like Methven. However, before large-scale farming started, the region already was extracting raw materials from the hinterland. The first of these raw materials was timber. To the south of where Methven would emerge lay a conglomerate of small settlements known locally as 'Bushside'. The main industry was sawmilling. Because of the treeless nature of the Canterbury Plains there was immediate demand for timber from the foothills. Alford Forest was the centre for sawmilling. In 1876 two sawmills worked near Alford Forest and in 1890 another sawmill opened a few miles away in Staveley. In that year it was estimated that 13,000 feet of timber was cut per month. The trade in cut timber, stakes, and fenceposts continued for decades.

Other extractive industries emerged in this area. Limestone and coal were extracted by the original owner of the Mt. Somers station. It was not until the turn of the century that large-scale coal extraction was organised. Limestone was also quarried and burnt down to produce agricultural lime as early as 1888. In the mid 1870s a diamond rush temporarily turned Staveley and Alford Forest into boom towns but the diamonds turned out to be quartz crystals and the diamond rush died.

Another major influence in the whole area was the West Coast gold rush. There was good demand for cattle on-the-hoof in Hokitika and enterprising Canterbury farmers sent off large cattle drives to the Coast. These drives passed through Mt. Somers, Staveley, and Alford Forest on their way north to the Harper Pass.

The net result of all these peripheral industries was a great demand for labourers, and the resulting rise in labour servicing industries like pubs and boarding houses. Similarly to the two Methven hotels, the Bushside area had three renowned hotels. The Spreadeagle Hotel was built at Ashburton Forks in 1862, with the Alford Forest Hotel following in 1865. In 1873 a hotel was opened in Mt. Somers which at that time was a smaller settlement than the other two more northerly sites. The Alford Forest Hotel provided for the labourers required to work the sawmill, and the Spreadeagle Hotel stood at the junction of the bullock track and the main route out of Bushside. Both these hotels benefitted from the supposed diamond strike in the area. Mt. Somers itself stood at the mouth of the Ashburton Gorge and provided a pooling centre for the labour requirements of the large stations up the gorge like Erewhon, Mt Possession, Hakatere, Lake Heron, Clent Hills, and Mt. Somers station itself. The presence of so much industry meant that Bushside was a centre for labourers in Canterbury, and while the sawmill and bullock track persisted, the hotels flourished.

All this occurred before Methven was even on the map. However the same political forces that brought Methven into being were going to work well in Mt. Somers. In 1886 Mt. Somers was selected as the logical railroad terminus for a transport route west from the coast that was south of the Ashburton River.

Before this time, access to the high country sheep stations behind Mt. Somers was through the Ashburton Gorge, after bullock tracks had wended their way up the Ashburton River to gain access across the Canterbury Plains. The finishing of the line in 1886 saw Mt. Somers established as a major transport centre, strategically located by the Ashburton Gorge some three years before Methven was even founded. There was some controversy over where the line would end up, but the powerful lobby of farmers up the Ashburton Gorge saw Mt. Somers favoured over Ashburton Forks. That decision marked the start of the decline in both Ashburton Forks and Alford Forest as major labour settlements.

The nature of the thriving town of Mt. Somers was much the same as Methven. The extractive industries in the area and the large runs and estates both required a constant supply of labour, and the new railway terminus at Mt. Somers provided access to the area and a convenient centre to cater for the needs of this labour. Like Methven, Mt. Somers had a distinct early economic role: feeding, accommodating, and entertaining the continual stream of transient labourers passing through the area. All the hotels in the area functioned as boarding establishments and a number of unlicensed boarding houses also operated.

The mining industries helped Mt. Somers during the long depression of the 1880s and 1890s. Prior to this time, landowners had arranged and patronised most social activities of a community nature. Alongside the workers' pubs, landowners formed lodges and associations but these institutions petered out as the 'Long Depression' set in. Significant community activity did not re-emerge until nearer the 1920s. And as the new community emerged, and transport improved, the town's social life would become less influenced by landowners. As the turn of the century approached, Mt. Somers grew as the new extractive enterprises of digging coal and lime were growing in size. However, 1902 was to bring a nasty shock for the prosperous hoteliers in the nearby Bushside area.

3.3 Prohibition, Transport, and Sport (1902-1950)

Through the last decades of the 19th century Ashburton, as the main centre of Mid Canterbury, had begun to change from a labour servicing centre for the entire region into a business town with a corresponding rise in the local middle class. Throughout the region the great estates were starting to sell out to a large number of family farmers. The general trend was towards fewer blue-collar workers and a generally larger number of women living in the area. These factors, combined with the governmental decision to give women the vote, saw the rise of a National Prohibition movement. Canterbury and Otago were strong centres for prohibitionist activity and in 1902 Ashburton voted to go 'dry'. The 'dry' area included all three Bushside hotels, but missed Methven and Chertsey. The Alford Forest hotel and Spreadeagle hotels went bankrupt, while the Mt. Somers hotel remained viable only as an accommodation house.

The opening of the railway had made Mt. Somers a centre for new

settlers in the area, and not only was the hotel kept viable through demand for accommodation, but the railway itself built a number of huts which were constantly in demand. The railway ensured that Mt. Somers would grow while Alford Forest and Ashburton Forks declined. A second transport development also boosted the growth of Mt. Somers. A tramway was installed to go up the Ashburton Gorge and this greatly enhanced the extraction of coal and limestone. This tramway remained in operation until the Great Depression.

Like Methven, the benefits of farm technology and marginally better transport routes, meant that by the 1920s farming families had more time for leisure activities. Correspondingly, a number of clubs and organisations formed which reflected this trend. The New Zealand Farmers' Union and the Country Women's Institute both arrived in Mt. Somers during the late 1920s. The same trends saw those with access to motorcars begin to spend more time out of the area. Gradually some local landowners shifted their social allegiance to Christchurch.

Rugby had made an early introduction to the area with an annual Ashburton Gorge versus Mt. Somers match. Sports clubs flourished throughout the 1930s with hockey and basketball (now women's netball) being popular. One of the major attractions was the skating rink which opened in 1949. It is still used today.

Throughout this time, the demand for alcohol remained constant. It is reported that literally dozens of illegal stills were set up in the bush around Mt. Somers and Alford forest (Vance, 1976). The area was renowned for 'sly-grogging' and as Ashburton was some distance away, the temperance scruples of the main centre were only vaguely enforced in the hills. One history of the region hints delightfully at the state of passengers going to and from Mt. Somers station (Vance, 1976). Apparently alcohol was carried by one of the crew and sold to passengers during train journeys. This source of alcohol dried up in 1933 when, due to improved roading, the railway closed down its passenger services to Mt. Somers. This closure was the most significant event that occurred prior to 1952 when the prohibition was finally lifted.

3.4 Mining, Pastoralism, and Tourism (1950 to 1990)

From 1950 to 1980 extraction industries continued to be the biggest employer in the Mt. Somers area, while surrounding farming drew a constant stream of shearers and shepherds through the town. Three main mining industries were present: coalmining, limestone extraction for fertiliser, and silica sand extraction for glass manufacturing in Christchurch. The Mt. Somers coal mine employed between 15 and 20 men throughout its history. In 1954 the other main coal venture, the Blackburn mine, closed down after 30 years of operation. Limestone was extracted well before the turn of the century and the limeworks remained as a major local employer during the present century. The two main limeworks ceased any significant quarrying for stone after the Second World War, and concentrated on supplying the increased demand for fertilisers throughout the 1960s. Prior to the 1970s

the limeworks operated two rotating shifts of workers and produced up to 900 tonnes of crushed lime per day. The second shift has been abandoned and production is now half of its original peak.

The third extractive industry was silica sand mining. It was in the 1920s that glass sand around Mt. Somers was identified as being of industrial potential. The resulting silica mine provided employment in Mt. Somers until 1987 when the mine was closed. A small-scale clayworks was also operated, producing clay for the new ceramics works at Temuka. This clay mine is still operated today on a very small scale. In addition to the mines themselves there were the associated transport industries, themselves undergoing change. The railway was already feeling the pinch of competition from road transport in the 1930s. Since then, trucking business survived primarily on the transport of mining products.

The mining industries led to a strong presence of blue-collar workers in Mt. Somers. Both the mines themselves and their ancillary industries have dominated full-time employment. Alongside these industries have developed an equally visible employment niche: the large farming ventures up the gorge from Mt. Somers.

The Ashburton Gorge contains a number of very large sheep runs and around Mt. Somers are many sheep farms. Thus, unlike Methven, Mt. Somers is an important servicing centre for the seasonal labour requirements of the wool industry. Large farms need a stable staff of shepherds and labourers, however the seasonal nature of shearing and mustering leads to a large number of seasonal labour contracts. Mt. Somers is a base where shearing gangs can congregate and negotiate work contracts. Similarly, musterers gather in Mt. Somers in late summer to sound out employment prospects. Both groups are a strongly identifiable presence in the town, with a number of shearers living in Mt. Somers full time. At the present time three shearing gangs work from Mt. Somers involving at least 20 shearers and many shed hands or 'rousies'. Another gang works out of Mayfield, a short distance down the road.

The three shearing gangs mainly involve permanent residents in the town, although some shearers will arrive and live in town for up to a year. For the permanent shearers there is more-or-less a constant stream of work with only three to four months of little activity. In these slower periods shearers will often go on holiday or seek work out of the district.

Shearing works on a strong networking basis. Certain men who are the heads of gangs can draw on a large pool of men from within their own gang and even from other gangs, to meet a job requirement. Shearing contracts will take one of three forms. First, the 'closed contract' which involves a farmer asking a shearing contractor to perform a certain job. Once the price per 100 sheep has been settled the farmer takes no further part in the shearing except to put the sheep in the woolshed on the

appointed day. The contractor organises every other aspect. Shearing contractors often have up to 100 shearers at their disposal and may be organising dozens of jobs at once. Only one contractor works out of the Mt. Somers region, but a number of gangs will come into the area to meet closed contracts that have been arranged from as far afield as Rangiora.

The less formal contract is an 'open contract'. With an open contract the farmer organises his own shed and provides some of the labour and food. For well-equipped farmers an open contract is a cheaper option. It also requires more co-operation with the shearers, so that farmers consider that local gangs are better suited to an open contract. Even more informal is non-contracted shearing. In this situation shearers and shed hands actually work as individuals each presenting an individual bill to the farmer. Each worker negotiates his or her rates with the farmer involved. Again this is likely to involve mainly local labour.

Shearers typically do not have a long-term work schedule. Instead, closed and open contract shearers may be contacted on a daily basis. Shearers who are low down on a gang's list may only get work a couple of times a week. Reliable and established shearers will get work each day.

In the past there was segregation between rival gangs, and this persists in other parts of New Zealand. However, in the last decade in Mt Somers there has been a tendency for gangs to swap workers and generally co-operate. Another trend of the last 25 years has been the arrival of a large number of women as shed hands in gangs. Previously only men worked as shed hands, but now over 50 per cent of local shed hands are women. Some female shed hands are permanent workers in gangs, while a large number do shed-handing as a source of casual income.

While they are on the job, shearers and musterers from out of town will be accommodated on the larger farms. Nevertheless a large number of shearers will work from the town itself. Either way, the secondary needs of this labour force are met in the town.

Over the last thirty years these two groups of labourers, the mining workers and the farm-related workers, have been the backbone of the local workforce. During this time several changes have altered the population of the town. In 1967 the railway line was closed with all the concomitant effects ensuing from such a loss. While road transport took over the carrying side of the railway, the closure nevertheless signalled a slight decline in the populace of the community. In 1986 the population of Mt. Somers locality was 241 persons and the current population wavers between 300 and 350 depending on the season. Another change has been a gradual increase in the average age of the local workers. Ten years ago most shearers would have been in their early 20s, but now the average age of shearers is around 30. With the depression in rural industry less young men have been able to get jobs in shearing. Similarly, the workforce of the mines has been gradually decreasing in number, with the

majority of workers now being over the age of 40 years.

Of the mining ventures up the Gorge only the Mt. Somers coal mine and the two limeworks remain. Some of the workers from the other mines have retired to Mt. Somers. In addition, some people from the surrounding district have chosen Mt. Somers rather than Ashburton as a locality for retirement. In addition to retired people there are workers from out of the area who buy up cheap housing and commute up to 40 minutes to Ashburton to work. A number of freezing workers from the plant north of Ashburton commute from Mt. Somers.

Like Methven, Mt. Somers is making its own entry into tourism and the holiday industry. The site of the town, at the entrance to the Ashburton Gorge, means that it is located strategically to service holidaymakers from Christchurch and Ashburton going to the popular high country lakes. Not only do travellers pass through using the store and garage, but in the last ten years they have been able to use a motel, a takeaways food and video business, and a holiday/camping park. While the bulk of holidaymakers pass through in summer rather than visit in winter as for Methven, the motel and holiday park are situated near enough to Mt. Hutt to make some business out of the ski industry. In addition, Mt. Somers has two adventure tour companies and a farm visit programme at a nearby sheep station.

The remaining service businesses in the town are the pub and a few shops. The pub is run by the Ashburton Licensing Trust, and forms the social focus of the community. With such a large body of transient community members, the clubs in the town only cater to long term locals, and the pub is an important place for both permanent and transient members to visit. Other than the pub, there is a restaurant/takeaways/video hire shop which is relatively recent in origin, a general store which is certainly not recent, and a garage. Like Methven, the town has its own primary school but no secondary school. These are the main services remaining in the town since the closure of the Post Office in 1987.

3.5 Current Social Structure

As with many rural towns, Mt. Somers is an accommodational centre for workers employed outside the town itself. Only the mine is in close proximity to the town. Otherwise, shearers, musterers, and other agricultural workers may travel many miles to work. In the town itself, the services required by workers and their families provide nearly all local employment. The shopkeepers, publican, garage owner, and schoolteachers are in this category. Alongside these rural and service industry workers are a large number of retired workers living in the town. The majority of these are miners.

As has been described above, the town has two distinct labouring groups. On the one hand, the mines and their ancillary industries, like trucking, provide most blue-collar employment for workers living permanently in the town. On the other hand,

the local sheep industry provides jobs for a large number of shearers, shepherds, and some farm workers. While a majority of rural workers are permanent residents, a number are transient, and may stay in the area for between two weeks and six months. In general, the mine workers tend to be older than the shearers and shepherds and a greater proportion of miners are married.

There are two distinct social groups in Mt. Somers: permanent residents and newcomers. The mine workers, truckies, and some service industry workers, either current or retired, are all long-term and permanently resident in the town. There are a few sheep industry workers in this category. In comparison to Methven's social structure, these long-term residents take the position of 'locals' and form the continuous basis of the community. In addition, there is one significant group of permanent residents that is low in numbers but large in influence. This is the rural elite of large landowners who inhabit the sheep stations in and around the Ashburton Gorge. The large landowners in the area are described by locals as the 'unofficial leaders' of the local community even though they have very little to do with life in the community itself, and tend to live their social lives in Christchurch. There is still a degree of deference between local labourers and the landed gentry of Canterbury.

The newcomers include those who have taken advantage of the holiday industry in the area to create permanent jobs. This group is becoming more obvious now although most do not have the roots in the town to claim real 'local' status (a few of them certainly can). In this way, the local involvement in tourism-related employment is similar to the early development of tourism in Methven. But in Mt. Somers the tourism industry has not expanded to the extent where it attracts a significant number of outsiders. While this is the case, the tourist developments occupy a historically anomalous, but unthreatening niche in the town. In addition, the service industries have provided opportunities for transient professionals to visit the community. In this category are the publican and the schoolteachers, who live for a few years in the community before moving on. Other seasonal workers are in the sheep industry. Many of these workers stay for only a matter of days in accommodation provided by the farms they are working on. Others rent accommodation in the town itself. A number stay in the area for the whole season.

As in the Methven area with economic pressure on the agricultural industry, some women in Mt. Somers have found work in the shearing gangs and in other places in Mt. Somers. While two decades ago working women were rare, now it is quite acceptable and common. However, unlike in Methven, as the agricultural economy has improved in the last year, there has been movement of women out of work into mothering roles and the birth rate has increased noticeably.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has described Mt. Somers history and social

structure, and provided a comparison to Methven. The economic and social history of Mt. Somers parallels that of Methven in that early economic growth based on primary products sustained the fledgling communities. For Mt. Somers, wood and minerals and then wool were early products needing transportation. Like Methven, Mt. Somers formed at a railhead taking products to the main north-south line on the coast. The Bushside area, of which Mt. Somers was a part, had three pubs and related services until prohibition. After that only the Mt. Somers pub survived beyond 1902. Mt. Somers continued to develop, although on a smaller scale than Methven, supported by minerals extraction and the wool industry. A significant group of miners lived in Mt. Somers alongside other blue-collar workers, the shearers. Today there is a small tourist industry to supplement the declining minerals industry.

Unlike Mt. Somers, Methven is a large rural town with two pubs and a variety of clubs and services, and with a large tourist industry. Mt. Somers is smaller, with just one pub and a few other shops. The pub is a major venue for club and other social activities. Generally, both towns have evolved slowly in response to changing economic conditions, and to technological and transport developments. Both have blue-collar workers, farmers, and some small businessmen. Mt. Somers is different in that it has both miners and retired miners to increase the relative proportion of blue-collar workers. Of interest now is the future pattern of development in these two rural towns.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHVEN AND MT. SOMERS: INTO THE 1990S

4.1 Introduction

What conclusions can we draw from the historical directions these two communities have taken? Already we have identified that an economic function of servicing local industries has dominated the history of both towns. Both towns have sustained a significant group of blue-collar workers, and both towns have a group of small businesses servicing the needs of this group. The history of each town is similar, and there was a general pattern of development away from estate-based farming to smaller family farms, with their demands for services. The confounding factors began emerging in the 1960s. Increased transport efficiency led to farmers shopping in Ashburton and Christchurch rather than in their nearest small town. This widely-recognised trend led to a decline in farm servicing businesses throughout the 1970s, and the rural depression of the 1980s extended this process. The general forecast in the 1990s was for widespread decline in the communities' activities and wellbeing.

What then are the prospects for the 1990s. The new decade brings a number of enduring problems for the community as well as some new issues. First, there are those issues pertaining to the traditional aspects of the community and which have been present in the community for some time. Prominent among these issues are: the prospects for school leavers in the community, the nature of the blue-collar working group, retirement patterns, and changes to the occupational status of women. The second group of issues pertain to those changes which have been imported into the community over the last 20 years. The two main issues here are the enduring nature of tourism, and the arrival of a number of beneficiaries into the community. The following sections examine these issues under the headings of employment, housing, benefits, and tourism.

4.2 Employment

For Methven and Mt. Somers, employment in traditional rural industries is declining. During the rural recession, farmers laid off a large number of hired labourers. The coal mines and limestone works shed labour, and some local industries, like the sand works, closed altogether. The effect was a large contraction in the local blue-collar labour market. This contraction had a number of consequences. First, men who had lost their jobs took first priority in new employment vacancies. Instead of outside workers or school leavers filling job vacancies, blue-collar workers who already had an established employment record in the town would fill the new jobs. Even though the total number of jobs available fell, the proportionate age of blue-collar workers increased markedly. Opportunities for people to enter the local blue-collar workforce declined.

The second related effect of contraction in the labour market was that male school leavers had much less chance of obtaining employment in their home town. The proportion of school leavers remaining in town declined dramatically. If this is coupled with a complete decline in the number of job vacancies for young farm workers then it explains why a demographic gap opened up in the age structure of the community. There is a marked decline in the 18-35 age group.

For the servicing industries in the towns, this decline is significant. Given that both Methven and Mt. Somers are based on servicing local industries, the decline in labour demand from the traditional rural sector has had an impact. In Methven, where labour demands are still present in the form of the ski industry, the labour servicing industries have survived. In Mt. Somers, where the tourism-related industries have not yet provided a large workforce, these industries have suffered greatly.

4.3 Housing

The decline in the 18-35 year old group has had a resultant effect on housing patterns in the area. In Methven, there has been an increase in the number of vacant houses offered for accommodation to holidaymakers. The principal increase has been outside Methven itself. The conjunction of rural decline and increasing tourist activity has led to Methven being the New Zealand tourist location which has the highest proportion of its visitors housed in casual accommodation.

4.4 Community Income Through Benefits

The second dynamic related to housing needs is the arrival of beneficiaries in the general area, facilitated by the Department of Social Welfare in Christchurch. Methven itself has only had a light influx of beneficiaries, mainly due to the fact that the tourist industry keeps house prices and rent higher than elsewhere in the area. In all the surrounding areas and in Mt. Somers there are a significant number of beneficiaries becoming resident in the communities. Given the absence of employment opportunities in the local area, these beneficiaries are unlikely to have any opportunity to change their situation in the near future. The impact of beneficiaries on the local economy should not be overlooked. The regularity of benefit payments, the likelihood of beneficiaries spending their money in the local area (unlike farmers who tend to spend out of the local area), means that beneficiaries do play a part in providing income for local service industries. Much though the presence of beneficiaries is disliked by a large number of local people, the economic contribution of this group may be one of the most constant sources of income within the community in the future.

A second source of benefit income for the communities is less obvious. This is the contribution of superannuitants to the area. Traditionally, local people have shifted to Ashburton for their retirement. However, recently the economic recession has

tarnished the image of Ashburton with crime and emerging youth problems. This may be one reason why Methven and Mt. Somers folk are tending to retire in their home community. A second reason may be linked to the characteristics of the economic recession. With a decrease in the number of hired labourers used on farms, farmers are now drawing more on family labour. One aspect of this is participation of retired farmers in their family farms. More retired farmers than in the past are contributing to the labour needs of their family farms. This tends to result in retired farmers remaining living in proximity to their original farms.

The end result of these factors is a greater number of superannuitants and other beneficiaries living in and around rural communities. The community income derived from benefits is going to be an increasing contributor to the economies of small towns in the future. This presents a problem to the communities in that current attitudes stigmatise reliance on benefits. Entrenched attitudes against even short-term unemployment are exacerbating the tendency for young men to work overseas rather than seek work for more than a token period of time in their home community. At least one rural community in Canterbury, near Waimate, has made concerted attempts to welcome beneficiaries into the structure of their community. This may show a valuable path ahead for other communities to follow.

4.5 Tourism

For Methven, tourism has provided some answers for the decline in the rural servicing role of the town. Tourism has provided added custom for retailers and services in the town, and has created a food and accommodation industry. The arrival of these new industries has not always been greeted with pleasure. Further, almost invariably, entrepreneurial opportunities and jobs offered by tourism have been taken up by local women. Almost the entire male workforce of Mt. Hutt and other tourist related businesses in Methven is made up of non-local men. Part of the problem is that work in the winter tourist industry is seasonal, taking up between four to six months of the year. For this reason, allied with a local male disdain for the ski industry, the operation of Mt. Hutt is not compensating for blue-collar job losses in the community. At the level of full-time work, Methven has a dual economy. At the part-time level, the rural recession has resulted in many more women entering the workforce. This is one of the major social changes in the community over the last three years. It has also softened the effects of the rural crisis. Methven has generally fared better than most small rural towns, and it is mainly due to the presence of alternative industry in the area.

4.6 Conclusion

Throughout Canterbury's history, Methven and Mt. Somers have retained the same basic economic role: servicing the needs of rural enterprises. With this service activity has developed additional activities to service the needs of blue-collar

workers. In the early days of settlement the worker services involved entertaining the large number of transient workers involved in large farming units or in the sawmills of Bushside. Then the industrial base changed from large estates to family farms, and although the number of labourers decreased, those that remained settled in the towns and worked as hired labour, seasonal workers, workers in the extractive industries around Mt. Somers or became solo contractors. The rising number of small farmers also used the small service towns for their immediate needs. This pattern remained, more or less, until the 1960s, when improved transport routes began draining farmer custom away from small towns and into the cities. At this time the service towns became even more reliant on the custom of the lower income, blue-collar workers for their survival. This client group slowly diminished throughout the 1960s and 1970s and continued to decline with the rural recession of the 1980s. In Mt. Somers the impact of these changes has been significant. Methven has been cushioned by the presence of the Mt. Hutt ski-field since 1973 which has opened up opportunities to service the new workforce brought in by the ski-field. Methven businesses have staked some claim to the tourist dollars spent in the area.

In the future, any strengthening of the agricultural industry, with a consequent rise in the number of labourers in the area, would revive the traditional mainstay of the service economy. This would be good news for the towns. However, the long term trend in farming is for the continual decreases in the labour inputs into farming. There are two new sectors bringing spending power back into the rural communities. First, women who have recently entered the workforce and who tend to spend money in their home town, and second, beneficiaries who also spend their money locally. The future of the service economy of these towns remains reliant on low income wage earners. In the past this was made up exclusively of blue-collar males working in primary industry. Now it involves not only this traditional sector, but also transient ski-industry workers, local women in part-time labour and beneficiaries. The sources of income may have diversified, but the central servicing role of the small rural town remains the same.

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