

*The Auckland  
Methodist  
Children's Homes  
Ladies' Committee*

*1913-1983*



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This year marks 70 years of the work in New Zealand of our Methodist Children's Homes, the first of which was known as Wesley in Mt. Albert, Auckland.

Wesley Children's Home was the joint gift of Mr. A. C. Caughey and his sister, Mrs. W. H. Smith, who made this gift in memory of their mother. The home was officially opened on December 20, 1913, by Mrs. A. C. Caughey, who was presented with a gold key. Mrs. Caughey became president of the furnishing committee which later developed into the Ladies Committee, formed to assist in providing the home's needs. She served from 1921 to 1928 as president of this committee and also became a member of the Orphanage Board, later being made a life member.

The first president of the Ladies Committee was Mrs. F. W. Wilson, who served from 1913 to 1921, and after Mrs. Caughey's term Mrs. A. Peak was president from 1928 to 1931. On her retirement, Mrs. Armitage, previously matron of the home, became president, serving until 1936 and continuing as a member of the committee until her death in 1939.

Miss Buttle became president in 1936 and was followed by Mrs. A. L. Caughey in 1938. Mrs. A. L. Caughey served 10 years as president and continued actively on the House Committee and Ladies Committee, retiring in 1962. Mrs. Caughey and her late husband provided the dining-room furniture as Wesleydale in memory of their daughter.

In 1948 Mrs. Burton was elected president and held office for 14 years. On her retirement in 1956 she had completed 28 years' work on the Ladies Committee.

In 1956 Mrs. Harris was elected and was president for nine years, being succeeded by Mrs. E. D. Grounds in 1965.

Mrs. D. Ziezler became president in 1967, serving for six years. Mrs. D. Gibson was elected in 1973 and was president until her death in 1982. Mrs. C. Malcolm then became acting-president. The notable fact which comes to light in reviewing the committee's work over the years is the length of time some members served. The secretaries and treasurers, members of House Committees and the members of the committee as a whole have clocked up amazing periods of service.

For example, Mrs. Burton had 28 years and Mrs. Wigglesworth 19 years on the House Committee alone. Miss Wagstaff, secretary from 1936 to 1962, and Mrs. J. C. Caughey, who joined in 1939, served as treasurer from 1943 until 1972 — 29 years, and 42 years of active service in child-care work. She also served on the board from the late 1950s until her resignation in 1972.

There are many other people who should be mentioned. One such is Mrs. Ivy Moir, who joined our committee in October, 1957,

and together with her late husband filled in at Wesleydale whenever there was a need to relieve staff. Mrs. Moir's story-telling is still remembered with delight. She was elected a life member on her retirement from the committee in 1980.

The Ladies Committee received donations principally from the Methodist Women's Guilds (latterly Fellowships) and held fund raising bring and buys, garden parties and concerts to raise the amount needed each year. At times donations of toys and money were received from clubs outside the church sphere and all were gratefully received.

The funds were administered in two ways. First, there was a general fund which provided for the matron's sunshine fund, clothing, Christmas parties, presents, presentations to former children when they married, supplying parcels to old boys serving during the war, and to the board on occasion when money was needed for children's holiday fares and other reasons. In recent times the Ladies Committee has contributed to the social workers' sunshine fund each year.

Secondly, there was a furnishing fund providing some of the money needed to replace furnishings, furniture, and so on. In later years this fund has been discontinued, but furnishings have been provided in part from the general fund.

From the committee, members were appointed to a House Committee for each children's home, their purpose being to visit the home and report to the executive on the needs and at Christmas time to accompany the matron on shopping excursions to select Christmas presents for the children and to organise help when needed. They also attended to the provision of replenishments to the linen, furnishings and equipment of the home. Each year the October meetings were held in the respective children's homes in order that the committee, staff and children could get to know each other.

In 1938 Mesdames A. L. Caughey and Armitage represented the Methodist Children's Homes at a meeting called by the Auckland Mayoress to organise street collections in aid of the orphanages throughout Auckland and arranged for volunteers from the Methodist Church to take part in the yearly street collections.

It has always been a challenge to meet the many needs of the Children's Homes and during the Second World War it became evident that large fund-raising gatherings had to be shelved and extra money raised by donations from the Women's Guilds. This then became the main source of revenue until supplemented by annual garden parties after the war. In more recent times the executive, with the support of some of the Women's Fellowships, held street stalls to raise extra funds.

The war period was extremely difficult for our homes as supplies



of linen and other essential materials were lost at sea, and with rationing as well it became difficult to meet the needs of our homes. At one point material for sheets was secured by approaching the Government. Clothing materials were obtained by the generosity of those who gave clothing coupons and their time to sew up children's clothing from materials bought in bulk.

Appeals for crockery, kitchen equipment and food were met. One family, Mr. and Mrs. Faulkner, provided a fish meal weekly for the Epsom Home throughout the war. Mr. Faulkner used to take his van out to a friend's apple orchard in season to get apples for the home.

In the early period each orphanage or home had a resident seamstress or dressmaker who attended to all its needs. (The children were never in uniform.) Later, clothing was bought for them and good used clothing collected for their use. Ladies Guilds and Fellowships supplied voluntary help to keep repairs of all kinds up to date.

Over the years funds have been given to the board to assist with general expenses of the homes. The policy of providing extras for the children such as pocket money, outings, tuition in the arts, sports and so on has continued. Contributions for furnishing have included floor coverings, furniture, soft furnishings, crockery, cutlery, electrical equipment and large outdoor playing equipment. In recent times in our three family homes dining tables and chairs, dressers, pictures, coffee tables, bibles and encyclopaedias have been provided.

The Ladies Committee has from its inception been comprised of representatives who have enjoyed working with the children under care and the staff of the homes. They have been ably supported by the Methodist Ladies Guilds (known now as Fellowships) who have supplied provisions, finance and support of every kind where the need arose.

Some of the highlights have been the supply of food and presents for the Children's Home Christmas parties, where from the first strawberries and icecream and Christmas cake and other provisions made them parties the children remember with pleasure. To be there and see the spontaneous joy of these gatherings, with Santa distributing the gifts and the children in turn contributing items, has given the committee great pleasure. These gatherings have continued until today.

Open days and garden parties have provided scope for not only the committee members but also church members to visit the homes and meet those under care.

During times of emergency when staffing was short the ladies found the contact with the children most rewarding. We acknowledge with gratitude those who opened their homes to the

children for holidays and who in various ways helped in making the lives of children in care happier.

One of the happiest occasions must surely have been the reunion dinner held at Pitt Street in 1962. Mrs. Butterworth spoke for all who attended when she expressed her appreciation of the arrangements made and mentioned the delight the gathering engendered.

Miss Archer, matron of the Epsom Home from 1948 to 1955, recalls that in those days staff had one day off a week and one weekend off every four. The remaining staff had to help do the work of the member away.

Laundry was done on the premises, as of course was sewing, dressmaking and ironing. A group of ladies came from Mt. Eden, Epsom, Remuera and Onehunga churches and assisted with mending.



“. . . and you shall teach them to your children.”

The house committee from the Ladies Committee came once a month to ascertain how things were and to take note of needs of the home. On the first Saturday in the month children with parents were able to go out with them and interested people could take children out if they were recommended. On Sunday all children went to Sunday School in the morning, the older ones staying to the church service.

All had a task to do and could change this once a month. Work such as helping with lunches, preparing vegetables, mopping out dormitories and caring for younger children were allotted according to age.

At holiday time children were allowed to go away when possible and in later years during the May and August school holidays they were taken to the Campbell's Bay camp for ten days. Prior to this the matron would take them to the zoo or to the beach by herself while the staff stayed and put the home in order and caught up with work needing to be done. On these outings every older child had a younger one to look after. For Sunday School anniversaries every girl had a new dress and they looked as well as any other child there.

Once a year the children staged a concert to which parents were invited. On Guy Fawkes Day the Bible Classes came and shared their fireworks with the children before a large bonfire. Bible Class members stayed for games and supper.

Epidemics struck the children down in large numbers but at least this enabled the staff to deal with the problem all at once and the children were all over their illness at much the same time. On winter nights the children sat around the fire, the girls knitting. Older girls went out on Saturday evenings with staff to Youth for Christ meetings. When children had finished primary school and were able to go to work they could stay on at the home if they wished but many left then.

The children always had good reports from school and were reasonably well behaved. On going-out days, parents would give children pocket money, which was put away, but one day a week all who wished could have money to buy sweets.

Staff did not work eight hours a day but started at 7 a.m. and with an hour or so off in the afternoon finished at 7 or 8 p.m. Senior staff finished at 9 p.m.

Mrs. Audry Glover (nee Ching), sub-matron at Buckland Road, Epsom from 1946 until 1948, recalls that one of the gardeners was Mr. Rex, father of Tony Rex of the Kiwi Concert Party. Another, known as "The Major", used to spend Saturdays at the races and on one occasion in order to look smart boiled his navy suit in the copper, with the inevitable disastrous results.

## Methodist Children's Homes in Auckland

At Wesley Children's Home in Mt. Albert, a high standard was set in child care work from its inception by Mrs Blight and her husband, Rev. J. Blight, who together with their daughter, later Mrs. Sage, provided a happy homelike atmosphere for the children. This was maintained through the years and was in turn continued in each new home. We pay tribute to all those wonderful people who comprised the staff in our homes.

In 1922 it was necessary to provide extra accommodation for children and on 9th September that year Epworth Home was opened by Mrs. A. C. Caughey, this providing care for 27 young children, with Mrs. Hutchens as house mother.

In 1924 a further property was purchased in Buckland Road, Epsom, and was opened by the Auckland mayoress, Lady Gunson, on 14th February, 1925. In July, 1926, all three homes were full. Wesley had 20 boys and 28 girls, Epworth 12 boys and 17 girls, Epsom 30 boys and 20 girls — a total of 127 children. In 1936 Epworth Home closed, the younger children going to Epsom and the older ones to Wesley.

In October, 1955, a new home, Wesleydale, was opened in Mt. Roskill, providing homes for all the children in our care. There were 63 in residence under the care of Mrs. R. Butterworth. This home provided comfort for children and staff in a beautiful setting and the work there continued until 1973.

Changing times and views on the care of children saw the development of family homes each providing for eight children with house parents. The first of these opened in Manurewa in 1973, Dominion Road (briefly) in 1974, Sunnynook on the North Shore in 1976 and New Lynn in 1979. New Lynn and Manurewa are still operating.

At the same time many children were placed with foster parents, the church maintaining a supportive role. The children participated until recently in the Christmas parties provided by the Ladies Committee.

The emphasis of child care now is to maintain as many under-privileged children as possible in their own homes, the church's social workers being there for counselling and support.

A house administered by the church at Takanini cares for short-stay mothers and children under stress, guiding and finally rehabilitating them in homes of their own.

Two notable matrons were Mrs. Armitage and Mrs. Rosina Butterworth. Mrs. Armitage was matron of Wesley Home from 1920 to 1928. She was a most loved and efficient matron who was known to her charges as Mummie Armitage. She and her husband provided a happy home-like atmosphere.

Those who pay tribute to them remember happy chatter and Sundays at Mt. Albert Church when the front two pews on each side were filled with girls in white frocks and boys spick and span in white shirts and navy shorts.

"Mrs. Armitage has still the love of all who were in her care and I cherish her love as one of the big things in my life," writes one old girls.

Mrs. Armitage became president of the Ladies Committee in 1931, serving until 1936 and continuing as a committee member until her death in 1939.

Mrs. Butterworth was appointed matron of Buckland Road Home, Epsom, in 1936, and during her seven years was instrumental in establishing an older girl's hostel.

She was appointed to the Wesley Home at Mt. Albert in 1952 and was there for three years before moving to the new Wesleydale Home, Mt. Roskill. Mrs. Butterworth was later appointed matron of Winstone Lodge, Victoria Ave., and filled this position with notable skill and efficiency. She became a member of the Ladies Committee in 1966 and when she retired in 1976 was elected a life member. She was an outstanding figure in child care and young student work, and under her care the children did well with their studies and enjoyed success in sports, notably on the football field.

One of her old boys writes: "Her record speaks for itself. Brilliant leadership in several homes, successful administration in under-staffed homes and not one failure of any of her 'children' in academic or social fields. Hers is an example we should strive to emulate."

Over 70 years we have seen the parade of hundreds of children whom we have known briefly and it is fitting that we should acknowledge our pride in their achievements.

Many have become prominent in various fields of endeavour, some shining in education, the ministry and other professional spheres.

To them all, and particularly to the many who have succeeded in providing happy homes for their own families, we say "well done". We are proud of you.

It is also fitting that the committee in 1983 in looking back over 70 years should acknowledge with joy the support it has had from the wider church and especially from members of guilds and fellowships. The unsung heroes were those who laboured in the vineyard not out of some austere call of duty but with joy for love of children in need. They sought no reward but have had it in the many hundreds of children who were given a better chance in life.