

The background of the cover is a painting of a rural kitchen. Two people are seated on the floor, facing each other across a large fire. The person on the left wears a grey hat and a checkered jacket, while the person on the right wears a pinkish-red tunic. A small dog with brown and white spots sits in the foreground. Above the fire, a large pot hangs over the flames. On the wall above the people, several items are hanging, including what appears to be a fish and some corn cobs. The overall style is that of a traditional painting.

RĒWENA AND RABBIT STEW

THE RURAL
KITCHEN
IN AOTEAROA,
1800–1940

KATIE
COOPER



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A reconstruction of a pioneer
hearth with colonial oven,
as exhibited in the Women's
Court of the New Zealand
Centennial Exhibition
(1939–1940). John Dobree
Pascoe photograph, *Making
New Zealand: Negatives
and Prints from the Making
New Zealand* Centennial
Collection, Alexander Turnbull
Library, MNZ-1867-1/2-F.

Introduction



As I look at this image of Maud Adkin, sitting alone at her kitchen table, I can almost hear the gentle scrape of the peeler as she prepares potatoes for her next meal. I imagine she is daydreaming, enjoying a moment of quiet contemplation as she carries out a routine task. In the photograph of the outdoor kitchen in Kaikohe, the faint whisper of smoke coming from the chimney brings to mind the distinctive smell of a burning fire, the cluster of people to the right suggesting a scene animated by chatter and laughter, jackets flung off as the fire heats up and work gets underway. These images, so different in composition, setting, subject and style, represent the kitchen as I hope to depict it in this book. They show cooking spaces both indoors and out, the presence of men, women and children, moments of leisure and of work, an intimate family scene and a communal gathering. They invite us to imagine what those spaces might smell, feel and sound like. These are spaces with real people in them, and they set the scene for this history of rural New Zealanders as revealed through their kitchens.

In many ways the kitchen is the perfect vantage point from which to examine aspects of everyday life, for social practices relating to food are fundamental in every household and in every society. We need food to survive, and the work undertaken in order to secure and prepare food must be ranked among the most vital of all human endeavours.¹ More than that, as human beings we make meaning out of producing and cooking food, ritualising its consumption in a ‘seemingly needless overcomplication’ that is uniquely our own.² We transform basic biological nourishment into a form of communication, using food to mark social boundaries and to cement family and community relationships.³ To borrow a phrase from anthropologists Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik, ‘Food is life, and life can be studied and understood through food.’⁴ The lives examined here are those of rural New Zealanders in the

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Preparing dinner.
Maud Adkin preparing
vegetables, Hastings,
28 December 1913.
Leslie Adkin photograph,
Gift of G. L. Adkin family
estate, 1964, Museum of
New Zealand Te Papa
Tongarewa, A.008597.

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An outdoor kitchen at
Kaikohe, April 1911.
Unknown photographer,
Auckland Libraries Heritage
Collections, 236-7504.

