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NORTHWOOD BROS.

The extract regarding ARTHUR JAMES NORTHWOOD from Florence Keene's "KAITAIA AND ITS PEOPLE" in the April newsletter prompted me to examine my own files on the Northwoods. Piecing together Florence Keene's description with data extracted from Wise's street and trade directories of the period, I have come up with the following tentative chronology.

Richard Northwood (the father) is listed as a 'settler' (i.e. farmer) at Houhora 1904-1906 and at Pukenui 1907-1909.

The first mention of any of the sons as a 'photographer' is that of RICHARD ALFRED NORTHWOOD at Pukenui from 1907 (first mention) to 1909 (last mention).

At the same time, 1907-1909, ARTHUR JAMES NORTHWOOD is listed as 'storekeeper, Pukenui'. In 1907, Arthur would have been 26.

There was probably not much custom for a professional photographer in a very small settlement like Pukenui. So around 1909, Richard moved to Kohukohu and set up in partnership there with his brother, HUBERT CHARLES. They are listed as partners in 'Northwood Bros., photographers, Kohukohu' from 1910 (the first mention) to 1918 (last mention).

How long Arthur continued his store-keeping activities at Pukenui, I do not know. The first mention of him in Wise's as a 'photographer' is in the 1917 edition. From 1917 till at least 1930 (the latest edition I have checked), he is listed as 'photographer, Kaitaia'. Florence Keene states that he ran a portrait studio there (probably the only one in town, as Kaitaia was not a large metropolis). The income from this enterprise was supplemented by regular sales of his outdoor photographic studies to leading newspapers, such as the Weekly News, the Freelance, the Christchurch Press, and the Otago Witness. She also mentions his starting the "Princess" Cinema, the first in Kaitaia, in the early 1920s, - a business which he continued to operate for many years.

The Whangarei telephone book, from the August 1927 edition, lists 'Mrs A. Northwood, res. [i.e. residence] Maunu, Whangarei'. Was this Arthur's wife? In this connection, I have noted some real photographic postcards, bearing her photographer's credit, published by F.G.Radcliffe.

The partnership between Richard and Charles at Kohukohu appears to have been dissolved soon after the end of the First World War. As stated above, the last entry in Wise's for 'Northwood Bros.' appeared in the 1918 edition.

Florence Keene states that Richard became 'storekeeper and photographer' at Te Kao. This may have been at this period. Charles departed to try his luck in the photographic trade further south. In the 1921 & 1922 editions of Wise's, he is listed as 'photographer, 113 Gladstone Road, Gisborne'. He then moved to

Auckland. In 1925 & 1926, he is listed as 'photographer, 77 Queen St, Auckland'. From the 1927 edition, the entry changed to: 'photographer, 190 Queen Street, Auckland'. Presumably, this was the location of the "Bellamy Studios" which Keene refers to.

A few questions spring to mind about the Northwoods' postcard production. Did they publish their own postcards? Or were their photographs published as postcards by others? How long did their association with postcards continue? I ask these questions because I do not have my collection with me to check!

The brothers' studies of Northland Maoris became quite well-known. Many years later, this aspect of their oeuvre caught the attention of Michael King, who took a rather jaundiced view of them in his 1983 book "MAORI: A PHOTOGRAPHIC AND SOCIAL HISTORY", from which the following extracts are taken:

"A study titled "Trials of Courtship" won second prize for the Northwood brothers of Northland in the "Auckland Weekly News" comic competition in 1906. It is totally contrived to suit the photographer's needs. The situation, and the use of Maoris to create it, is derived from American photography of the same period which lampooned negroes. It is an example of so-called 'coon humour'.

The coon pictures [...] reached new heights of technical achievement and offensiveness in the work of the Northwood brothers. The most damaging effect of these photographs arose from the fact that few Europeans encountered Maoris in their daily lives. Their experience of them and their attitudes towards them tended to be conditioned by the photographic images they saw, so that stereotypes which arose from ignorance or prejudice tended to feed further negative stereotypes and lead to subsequent instances of prejudice.

The Northwood brothers were notable for the large number of high-quality photographs they took for pictorial magazines that made Maoris look ridiculous. Most of them were carefully posed and probably used paid models. [The image created has been described as ...] 'happy-go-lucky, lazy people, mostly not too bright, suitable subjects for much lampoonery and many bad jokes'. The danger was that such photographs, contrived as they were, were the only views that many Europeans had of Maoris. They did much to contribute to stereotypes of Maori ineptness and of European cultural and racial superiority."

Can any reader provide examples for illustration of Northwood postcards of the type King refers to? It is more than likely that such studies appeared in postcard form.

- Alan Jackson