



## The Fire Bugs and Fire Brigades of Dunedin



Next year will mark the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first volunteer fire brigade in Dunedin, whose motto was 'Ready - Aye [Ever] - Ready'. It is the second-oldest brigade in the country, after Christchurch's.

The 1925 No.10 Leyland and 1935 Ford V8 on wartime patrol in Dunedin. The Ford has recently been fully restored by the Dunedin Fire Brigade Restoration Society - Otago Settlers Museum collection

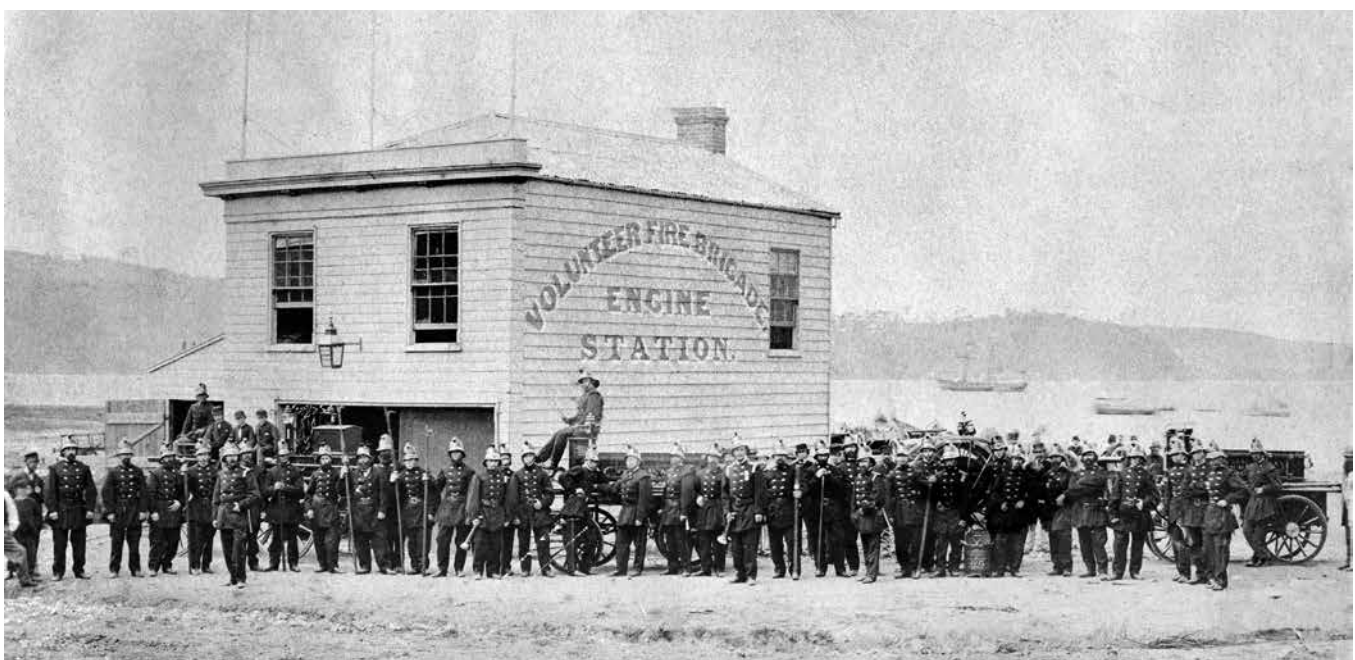
The new town's first serious fire was caused by the town's gaoler and all-round fire-bug Henry Monson. His own house near the Water of Leith accidentally burned down; then in 1855 so did the gaol as well. *The Otago Witness* reported that the fire appeared to have 'originated from Mr. Monson's (the gaoler) having thrown some ashes and lighted embers down the cess-pool, with the object of purifying it. The flames when first discovered were but a few inches high, but spread with such astonishing rapidity, that before water could be procured the fire had caught the gable end of the gaol, and passing up between the weatherboards and the lining, defied all efforts to extinguish it. In less than ten minutes about 100 persons were on the spot; whose assistance for a time was comparatively useless, the building being surrounded by a high paling, which it was necessary to remove before water could be thrown upon the burning edifice. The paling also having taken fire, the heat was so intense, and the smoke so suffocating, that for some time all efforts were unavailing ... the adjoining house was covered with blankets constantly wetted. A line having been formed to the beach, the tide being full, the public laboured hard in passing up buckets of water for upwards of an hour ... At the time of the fire there was but one prisoner confined for a petty offence, who laboured so assiduously to save the building, that he was much burned; and we understand that a representation has been made to his Honor (sic) the Superintendent, praying for his release.' (27 October 1855)

The Liverpool & London Insurance Company offered to lend the town a fire engine, which led to the formation of a volunteer brigade in 1860. The Town Board got the Provincial Council to pay for a new building to house both the fire station and the Town Board itself. Despite the purpose-built premises, the new brigade was short-lived. The lure of gold in 1861 made the firemen head for the hills, while the great influx of prospectors made fires in the town even more likely. Eighteen per cent of the dwellings in Dunedin were tents, and the remainder were wooden. An independent group soon set up a new fire

brigade, and acquired the 'Pride of Dunedin,' which survives as the oldest fire engine in the country. The bell tower built in upper Dowling Street in 1863 was used as a fire lookout post, though the watchman was not as watchful as he might have been. There are accounts of his often being drunk or simply asleep at his post.



Fighting fires in a closely packed and largely wooden settlement often meant creating fire-breaks. This entailed pulling down buildings that had not been touched by the fire, and until 1870 this left the firemen open to legal proceedings as they did not have the legal authority to destroy property. Lieutenant Robertson was sued by the owner of one such property in the 1860s. Property salvaged from fires was unprotected until the insurance companies formed a Salvage Corps in 1882.



The bell tower built in upper Dowling Street in 1863, used as a fire lookout post – Otago Settlers Museum collection  
The Brigade's second station site in Queens Gardens, 1865-1879 – Otago Settlers Museum collection

The volunteer fire brigade was in many ways like a social club for small businessmen and skilled tradesmen. The Captain had to be socially respectable and could be dismissed if his personal circumstances changed; the firemen had to apply to join as if it were a club; they paid monthly subscriptions, which went towards the provision of a library. Before 1900, the brigade did not have any horses of its own, but borrowed working horses when the need arose from cab drivers and dustmen. On one occasion when the alarm was raised, horses accustomed to being called on in this fashion were hitched to a wedding carriage. The happy couple found themselves drawn through the streets at high speed to the fire station.

The Dunedin Corporation was unhappy with the reliance on volunteers and established a dedicated professional fire brigade under its control in 1885. The new brigade was understandably unpopular with the former volunteer firemen, who turned out at fires to pelt their replacements with eggs. The new brigade was comparatively small, but was equipped with modern apparatus such as smoke jackets. Fire alarm boxes were installed throughout the city in the late 1880s, and some readers may remember later versions still in place in the 1970s. The brigade's first motorized fire engine arrived in 1909, a Merryweather equipped with a chemical cylinder to provide pressure for the hoses.



A leather-hooded smoke jacket attached to an air pump to help protect fire fighters from the dangers of smoke inhalation, 1874 – OSM collection  
The 1942 Merryweather turntable ladder in its delivery paint – Dunedin Fire Brigade Restoration Society

By the 1930s motorisation was well established, which caused problems in the Depression due to restrictions on fuel. Sometimes firemen were dispatched to minor fires on their bicycles. Fear of bombing during the Second World War led the fire brigade to disperse its facilities throughout the city. In 1942 a new turntable ladder worth £11,000 (more than a million dollars today) arrived at Wellington, bound for the Dunedin brigade. It is said that the Dunedin men sent north to meet it slept on the machine in order to prevent its being 'liberated' by envious rival brigades.



The men were obliged to remain on the station day and night when on duty, though married men were permitted to live nearby if within earshot of the station alarm bell. A new central fire station was built in 1931 to the designs of Mandeno and Fraser with extensive accommodation for the firemen and their families. Until the St John Ambulance moved into its own building in 1938, the ambulance crews were housed in the central station in Castle Street, and at night the firemen manned the ambulances.

Some of the suburban fire stations were rudimentary affairs, but a building programme in the 1950s gave the city the impressive residential stations that still exist, including the Roslyn and Lookout Point stations, also designed by Mandeno and Fraser. The wooden building that once housed the Maori Hill fire station, on the other hand, was pulled down as recently as 2008. It had latterly housed the Victorian Room shop.

The Dunedin Fire Brigade Restoration Society will soon be leaving the facilities it shares with the Museum at Green Island, and is seeking a new home for its workshops and collection of fire appliances. If any reader can help with information, documents or artifacts, the Society would be very pleased to hear from them. Contact John Ingram at the Museum on 474 2728, or by e-mail: [john.ingram@dcc.govt.nz](mailto:john.ingram@dcc.govt.nz)

This article is based on a talk given by John at the Otago Settlers Association's Annual General Meeting last year. John is Visitor Programme Co-ordinator at the Museum, and a member of the Dunedin Fire Brigade Restoration Society. Together with Paul Clements, he is preparing a history of the fire brigades to mark the sesquicentenary.



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## Exhibitions

### Chinese Treasures

中国瑰宝

From the Otago  
Settlers Museum  
and Dunedin  
Public Art Gallery



This exhibition has been developed to celebrate the opening of the Museum's new neighbour: Dunedin's fabulous Chinese Garden. It draws on 'treasures' from the collections of both the Museum and the Dunedin Public Art Gallery, extending the range of items into some interesting new areas from our existing *Windows on a Chinese Past* display. It also pushes the time-scale back to well before the settlement of Otago. The drive to acquire luxury goods from China was deep-rooted in British society from at least the eighteenth century, when the societies of Western Europe first became intrigued by the very different culture and design aesthetic of the 'Orient.' Well-heeled settlers of the mid-nineteenth century brought many such family heirlooms with them to the colonies.

The core concept of the display focuses on the notion of 'treasures' and teases out the various ways in which a range of items with a Chinese connection have been valued. Some are fine art objects with obvious aesthetic (and monetary) value, notably porcelain, ivory and furniture. Others are items that help us tell the story of our first Chinese residents, or of earlier generations of Otago people who went to China. The most notable of the latter group are the missionaries who staffed Christian missions in China in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Finally, we have included donations from New Zealand Chinese families that trace their migration and settlement and offer insights into the development of a distinct 'Kiwi Chinese' identity.

The display includes some gorgeous items of costume. The 'star' is a nineteenth-century dragon robe for the wife of a government official, richly embroidered with the symbols that were used to delineate the strict hierarchy of the civil service under the Manchu-Qing dynasty. Alongside it is a less elaborate, but still lovely, wedding coat collected by the Presbyterian missionary Maggie Reid.\* Miss Reid's collecting also provides the 'lotus shoe' in the display.

\* The little girl who Maggie Reid brought back to New Zealand grew up to become the first Chinese graduate of the Otago Medical School, Kathleen Pih-Chang. When Maggie Reid stayed behind on her furlough to marry in 1908, she received special permission from the Governor-General to keep Kathleen with her, since Chinese immigration was at that time still restricted.

These beautifully embroidered slippers were made for the bound feet that were considered a sign of exquisite female beauty in China for over a thousand years. This custom fascinated Westerners, such that we have numerous examples in the collections, despite the fact that no Chinese women with bound feet are known to have come to New Zealand.

All of the objects on display are part of the permanent collections of the Art Gallery or Settlers Museum. The only exception is a DVD presentation *thisplacement*, a documentary on Port Chalmers artist Simon Kaan's arts residency in China in 2004. Simon's Chinese grandfather went home to Guangdong (Canton) from Otago in the 1920s to get married, but no member of the family had visited his home village since. In a moving segment the film crew accompanies Simon back to his grandfather's village, where he meets relations and people who remember his grandfather. He also deposits a handful of sand from the beach at Aramoana amidst the ruins of the house his grandfather had grown up in, re-connecting in a symbolic way the family circle between Otago and China.

*Chinese Treasures* is on show until 7 June 2009.

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## Paint-box Pioneers

### Visions of the Past from the Otago Settlers Museum Art Collection

The Museum's art store is a treasure trove where many hundreds of visions of our past can be found. Selecting some that typify the collection has been an interesting and enjoyable exercise for the curators. Some are old favourites, others a little less familiar. Some are naïve paintings, others more masterly. Each shows a unique vision of the past and its people. Each has its own tale to tell and, as well as the story of the sitter or scene, a chronicle of the life of the artist lurks beneath the layers. This exhibition, the Museum's major temporary exhibition for 2009, will open in conjunction with the Dunedin Heritage Festival (20–23 March 2009) and continue until early October.



Pair of child's boots, Chinese, maker unknown, 19<sup>th</sup> Century, silk satin, cotton, leather, satin stitch – Dunedin Public Art Gallery collection  
*Chingford Estate, Dunedin* [detail], John Barr Clark Hoyte, circa 1875, watercolour – Otago Settlers Museum collection

# BATTLING DRINK AND LUCIFER



## The End of Harry Dunn

When we left world champion wrestler Harry Dunn in our September issue, he had returned to the North Island, where he, quite literally, went off the rails. In November 1892 it was reported that 'On Saturday afternoon Harry Dunn, the wrestler, jumped off the mail train when near Makino. He ran into the bush, and afterwards stripped and put his clothes on the metals. He was caught yesterday morning and brought before the Justices and remanded to Wanganui for medical treatment. He is evidently suffering from the effects of drink.'

After that bizarre episode, nothing was heard of Dunn for a long time. Perhaps he was in a mental institution. Eventually, however, he emerged from obscurity to embark on an extensive tour of the world. He was reported as winning matches against local champions in places as far afield and widespread as British Columbia, Denver, Chicago, Belfast, Suez and Ceylon. In the Sydney Opera House in December 1898 he retained his world five-styles title by easily beating famed American strong man William Lucifer.

Back in New Zealand, he met the 23-stone James Smith in a match in which he was required to throw the giant five times in five different styles within an hour. He accomplished this feat in 20 minutes.

In January 1902, in the Dunedin Agricultural Hall, he defeated RJ Scott, a promising young New Zealander, in a world championship five-styles match.

Dunn retained his world title for the rest of his life, but it was a short one, and ended rather ignominiously. Five-styles matches were going out of vogue and he was working as a miner again, first at the Paparua coal mine near Greymouth, later at the Globe Hill gold mine, Reefton. He continued to wrestle occasionally in various parts of New Zealand, but his behaviour was becoming erratic. In March 1902, according to the *Oamaru Mail*, 'The sum promised him for giving an exhibition was withheld because of his improper conduct.' The *Mail* also accused him of 'not being overburdened with modesty.'

Harry, his wife Elizabeth and brother James are all recorded in the 1902 electoral roll as living at Globe Hill, but if Elizabeth was really there she did not stay long. In 1903 she was residing at Denniston. By then Harry was drinking heavily again and his

health was in decline. Chest pains and shortness of breath were ominous symptoms. A match against RJ Scott, which was to have taken place in Reefton, had to be abandoned.

On 13 June 1903 Harry Dunn was found dead in his miner's hut. Following a post mortem, an inquest found that 'The said Harry Dunn died through failure of the heart through dilation of its chambers.' His widow travelled from Denniston and provided information for the death certificate. She got his age wrong, reporting it as 42. Harry's obituary in the *Otago Witness* was also astray, giving his year of birth as 1866 and age at death as 37. In fact he died at 41, the same age as his father.

There is no mention of Elizabeth on the headstone of Harry's grave in the Church of England section of the Reefton cemetery. The stone, which was erected by his brother James, describes Harry as a 'Native of West Cumberland, England.' A tumultuous and troubled life is implicit in the words 'His end was peace.\*' Like a beaten wrestler, the stone has taken a fall and now lies flat and broken on top of the plot.

Dunn had character flaws but, as a world champion, he ranks with his contemporary, the Dunedin walker Joe Scott. Scott's world championship belt has an honoured place in the Otago Settlers Museum and his feats have been commemorated in the Sports Hall of Fame and the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*. But Harry Dunn is a forgotten man.

\* cf. Psalm 37, verse 37: 'but His end is peace'

### Donald Gordon



Harry Dunn, champion wrestler – Allied Press  
Dunn's headstone in Reefton cemetery

# ISSUE 100!

## Triple Figures at Last

It has taken us 34 years to make it, but here we are at the hundredth issue of the *Otago Settlers News* at last. It started life in November 1975 as a three-leaf foolscap typed and cyclostyled newsletter without illustrations or even a masthead. The first newsletter was a bit of a stop-gap, as no issue of *Provincial Pride* had appeared that year and members had received no information on the Association's activities. Vastly increased production and printing costs had brought the whole question of the publication of *Provincial Pride* into question. (Newsletter No. 1 of the Otago Early Settlers' Association was the first and last to carry the apostrophe on the word 'Settlers'.)

The Newsletter quickly settled down to become a mixture of Association business and short historical articles that it remains today. The first issue contained news of the 'tremendously successful' Colonial Entertainment of 7 December 1974 organised by Shona McFarlane, and announced a new symbol (not yet a 'logo') for the Association, the *Philip Laing* enclosed in a letter 'O'. The financial report was subheaded 'The Settlers' Financial Struggle' and concluded 'It is obvious that the fight for survival becomes greater as inflation increases year by year.' By August 1976, photographs of portraits in the museum collection could be ordered for \$4 (monochrome) or from \$40 (colour) — \$40 is in 2009 the maximum price for any photographic reproduction.

The first illustration appeared in the Newsletter in 1978, but they did not appear regularly on the front page until 1979. The Newsletter grew to eight pages in 1987, which it has remained, with very occasional exceptions, ever since. In December 1991 a special fold-out edition was published on the OESM development which reproduced a photographic panorama of the Museum buildings and the NZR Road Services building. The December 1992 issue was a large single sheet, but this format has not been repeated.

In 1993 Charles Croot started the small-format 30- to 35-page magazine *Otago Before*. It contained a lively selection of longer historical articles, and appeared twice yearly (six issues in total) from August 1993 to February 1996, shortly before his untimely death. The first issue reported on the recent purchase of the former bus station.

If you have kept issues 2 or 3 of the Newsletter from 1975 and 1976 for posterity, posterity would like to hear from you. The Museum Archives and the Hocken Library both lack copies of these issues, so if you have any under the bed or at the back of the garage they would be happy to take them off your hands.

**DEAD OR ALIVE! WANTED**

For display and use in our Museum

\* a windmill

\* a merry-go-round

\* a butter churn and separator

\* a water pump

\* a hillside plough

\* a small refrigerator for our coffee bar

\* We need, for our Workshop, a sawbench, bandsaw, wood lathe, woodwork vice and a grinder.

\* flags, lifebuoys, an anchor, an old boat or yacht, flagpole and masts, early iron farm gates, ship's railing

\* an old steam boiler

\* If you can assist us in obtaining any of these items, or parts of them, please write to the Museum, 223 Cumberland Street, Dunedin, Ph 775-052

## Building Progresses!



The President and her labourers turning the first sod for the new building last year.



The new collection store begins to take shape.

'Wanted Dead or Alive! For display and use in our museum' – *Otago Settlers Newsletter* no. 26 June 1984, page 7

## Polish Connexions

The name Otago is most commonly associated in Poland with a ship rather than a distant province. The only ship the Polish novelist Joseph Conrad ever commanded was a barque of that name which had been built for Angus Cameron of Port Chalmers. A ceremony was held at the Museum on Friday 7 November to launch the temporary exhibition *Twixt Land & Sea* to commemorate the sesquicentennial of Conrad's birth. Captain Cameron's great-granddaughter Mary-Ann Cameron was among those present. The travelling exhibition was brought to Dunedin on the initiative of the Polish Heritage Trust of Otago and Southland and with the support of the Polish Embassy in Wellington. It was supplemented with items from local collections, including the Port Chalmers Museum, and with early editions of Conrad's works from the Hocken, University and Public Library collections.

The Polish Ambassador, Lech Mastalerz, opened the exhibition and conferred the Golden Cross of Merit on the Chair of POHOS, Cecylia Klobukowska, and four other founding members of the Trust: Russell Chiles, Patricia Clark, Paul Klemick and Ludmilla Sakowski. POHOS presented the OSA with a print of a painting by Margaret-Ann Howard, showing the *Otago* leaving Tairaroa Heads. It is now hanging in the Association's vestibule. The scholarly advisor to the exhibition, Professor Zdzislaw Najder, presented on behalf of POHOS one of the limited edition prints of another painting by Margaret-Ann Hayward to the newly opened Conrad Museum in his birthplace, Berdyczow in the Ukraine. It depicts the *Otago* at Port Chalmers undergoing maintenance on her masts. A letter of greeting from Professor Najder was read at the presentation.



The "Otago" Leaving Tairaroa Head, Otago Harbour [detail], Margaret-Ann Hayward, 2008

Members of the Dunedin Chinese Dance Class entertain at the Association's 2008 Christmas party.

## The Association's Christmas Meeting



The Chinese theme of 2008 was continued by the Association's Christmas party, which was held on the evening of Friday 12 December. A lavish spread of steamed buns and other Chinese specialities from the Yum Char menu of Harvest Court restaurant greeted members, all arranged by Hilary Allison and the Events Committee, who worked very hard organising the evening.

The Dunedin Chinese Dance Class under the direction of Faye Ma performed four dances: 'Let's start the dance', 'Umbrella girls', 'Spring is here' and 'Spicy girls'. Few would have guessed that they have been performing together less than a year.

Eva Ng then read three stories from her collection of reminiscences of her Auckland childhood. The first recalled a mysterious and possibly ne'er-do-well uncle; the second, a school holiday spent peeling ginger for preserving; and the third, a playground encounter with a dubious character. Her stories were in turns amusing and affecting, at several points prompting murmurs and nods of recognition from members of the audience.

At the conclusion of the entertainment the audience were given fortune cookies and invited to visit Pixie Town. The evening was rounded off with tea and coffee with Christmas cake, strawberries, chocolates and rum balls.



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## New Director for the Museum

The Association is glad to welcome the appointment of Linda Wigley as the new Director of the Settlers Museum. Since mid-2005 she has been Director of the Museum and Kiwi House at Heritage Park, Whangarei. Linda has an extensive background in museum management in Britain; she moved to New Zealand eight years ago and will take over from Grant McDonald, the acting Director, at the beginning of March.

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## For Your Diary

### Anniversary Day Dinner

The Otago Anniversary Day gala dinner will be the final event of this year's Heritage Festival. It will be a civic event, held in the Glenroy Auditorium on Monday 23 March, and all are welcome. New awards will be announced at the event to celebrate the efforts of those who have had a major influence on Dunedin's heritage. Tickets at \$75 a head are available from 16 February from DCC Customer Services by phoning 477 4000. See the Heritage Festival programme for more details of this and all other events.

### Central Otago and the Great War

The launch of Keith Scott's book, *Before ANZAC, Beyond Armistice*, based on an extensive range of letters to and from Central Otago soldiers in the First World War, will be co-hosted by the Museum and the Settlers Association from 5.30pm on Friday, 3 April. It will feature members of the RSA choir, readings from the book and an illustrated presentation by the author.

### Called to Account

The Association would be very grateful if there is any member with accounting experience (not necessarily an accountant) who would be willing to become our Treasurer.

## The Otago Settlers Museum Shop

### *First Catch Your Weka: A Story of New Zealand Cooking*

David Veart

Published by Auckland University Press

'First catch your Weka,' the explorer Charles Heaphy advised in 1842, then stuff it with sage and onion and roast it on a stick. In that simple way began a great tradition of New Zealand recipes that takes us from Heaphy, to the *Edmonds Cookery Book*, to Alison Holst and Hudson and Halls, and on to the meal on your plate today. In *First Catch Your Weka*, Dave Veart tells the story of what New Zealanders cooked through the recipes we used. Analysing the crusty deposits and grubby thumb prints on a century and a half of cook books, he chronicles the extraordinary foods that we have loved: boiled calf's head, Bill Rowling cake, Irish famine soup, tinned kidneys with mushrooms ... *First Catch Your Weka* illuminates the elements that make New Zealand cooking distinctive (our love affair with sweet baked goods, our enthusiasm for home-made jams and chutneys, the perpetual lump of protein on the plate) and how our cuisine and culture have changed (the development of a nationalist cuisine of kumara, whitebait, and mussels in the 1920s, the arrival of Asian influences in the 1950s, the television cooks of the 1970s). Throughout this history, Veart finds a people who, as Heaphy suggested, frequently first liked to Catch Their Weka – building a meal out of oysters taken from the rocks, vegetables from the garden, and a lamb from the neighbouring farm. By telling the history of what we ate, *First Catch Your Weka* tells us a great deal about who we have been.

336 pages, colour illustrations. Paperback.

Price to members \$45 (Postage and packing \$7.50)

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### General Information

The shop holds a wide selection of Dunedin- and New Zealand-made books, cards and gifts. You are always welcome to browse.



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This newsletter was produced by the Otago Settlers Association, founder and supporter of the Otago Settlers Museum. Membership of the Association is open to everyone interested in the heritage of this region. Details of membership are available from the Museum Reception desk or Otago Settlers Association Secretary, Box 74, Dunedin. Phone/fax 03 477 8677, email [otago.settlers.assn@xtra.co.nz](mailto:otago.settlers.assn@xtra.co.nz)



**Otago Daily Times**

*The Otago Daily Times supports Otago Settlers Museum*

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