



LAWSON **IN** LAWRENCE



It is a truth, universally acknowledged, that no local authority can go about the provision of public amenities, whether they be Town Halls or Public Conveniences, without objections from some quarters. Otago's history is full of examples of sometimes well-meaning but, more often than not, irate ratepayers, and councillors with a keen eye to their political future refusing to support facilities that might result in charges against rates, no matter how worthy the proposal might be.

The small Central Otago town of Lawrence was no exception. On 5 September 1868, the *Tuapeka Times* reported that Councillor Hay moved 'that tenders be called for the erection of a Council Hall, and that the Public Works Committee draw out plans and specifications for the same.' This was the beginning of a long and controversial battle to build a Town Hall.

The Mayor, Mr H Bastings, was not altogether enthusiastic about the idea as he thought that the citizens had seen quite enough of public buildings erected under the control of committees, and pointed to the Athenæum as 'a miserable structure, fit only for a catacomb – it was an abortion, and a disgrace to anybody.' On his casting vote a decision was deferred for six months. The Mayor then apparently left town for a while and at the next meeting of the Town Council, Councillor Mears gave notice that the Chairman be requested to call a public meeting to consider the introduction of the following motion: 'That the resolution passed at a former meeting in reference to the Town Hall be rescinded and advertisements be published calling for designs, and offering a reward of £10: the cost not to exceed £500.'

A letter of support for the proposal, signed by 'A Citizen,' appeared in the paper a few days after the meeting, to be followed a week later by another letter to the editor. The writer

Architect RA Lawson of Dunedin (inset) and the Lawrence Town Hall of his design – Otago Settlers Museum

of this letter left no doubt as to his opposition. 'It is well known that our able and public spirited Mayor is opposed to this measure, on the reasonable grounds of "no funds" and it does seem cowardly in its supporters, after the agreement to let the matter drop for six months, to endeavour to bring it forward as soon as his back is turned. The citizens of Lawrence may stand a good deal, but I am thoroughly convinced they will not permit this breach of fair play.'

Nothing more was heard of the proposal except a report that the Council had received letters from two architects, S A Miller from Southland and a Mr Burwill (probably Frederick W Burwell) of Queenstown, offering to prepare designs. The subject re-surfaced on 1 May 1873, when it was mentioned only briefly, and again on 15 May when the Mayor, by then Edward Herbert, announced that he was 'fully satisfied that the time had arrived for the erection of a Town Hall and a decent office for the Town Clerk.' At a Public Works and Finance Committee meeting on 5 June 1873 it was agreed that '£2,000 be borrowed for the purpose of building a town hall with offices and shops.'

Obviously someone moved quickly, as at the next meeting on 23 June 1873 the Mayor read a letter from Mr R A Lawson, architect, of Dunedin, recommending that the size of the town hall should be not less than 40 x 65 feet and should hold 400 people, and offering other practical suggestions. Lawson was then asked to prepare plans for the approval of the Council. By 10 July he submitted detailed sketch plans of a building containing a hall, Council Chambers and two shops each measuring 25 x 40 feet.

In the meantime, the Council had approved the raising of a loan of £2,000 bearing interest of 6%, redeemable in twenty years. This was to be the start of a long drawn-out project with everyone and his dog becoming an expert on design and construction.

Obviously the sketch design was the subject of much debate by the councillors but nothing was reported in the *Tuapeka Times* until 16 October, when a letter from Lawson was read to the Council. He explained: 'I have to state that I simply followed the usual course in taking your dimensions given in [your] letter of 4th September as meaning internal measurements. Therefore I adhered to them as near as I could, and had no intention to do otherwise.'

This must have resulted from an amended design, the cost of which was estimated at £3,000, Lawson stating 'It is certainly the best arrangement of the two.' The Council formally received the letter and agreed to the more costly design, though the architect was asked to curtail the costs as much as possible.

The next mention of the Town Hall was in a letter to the editor of the *Tuapeka Times* on 22 November 1873 from someone signing himself 'Builder' in which he went on at considerable length about the proposed use of birch timber for the roof structure and white pine for the joists. The letter is too long to include here but the gist of it was that as the size of timber to be used was not held in stock, it would have to be cut specially - 'in fact the timber would be growing one week and in the building the next.'

The plans and specifications were received on 24 November 1873 but it was not until 18 February 1874 that the conditions of contract were received by the Council. No details of the contract price were mentioned in the local newspaper but the contract was let to Messrs Mears and Whittet with the supervision undertaken by Mr W H Smith, Lawson's nominee.

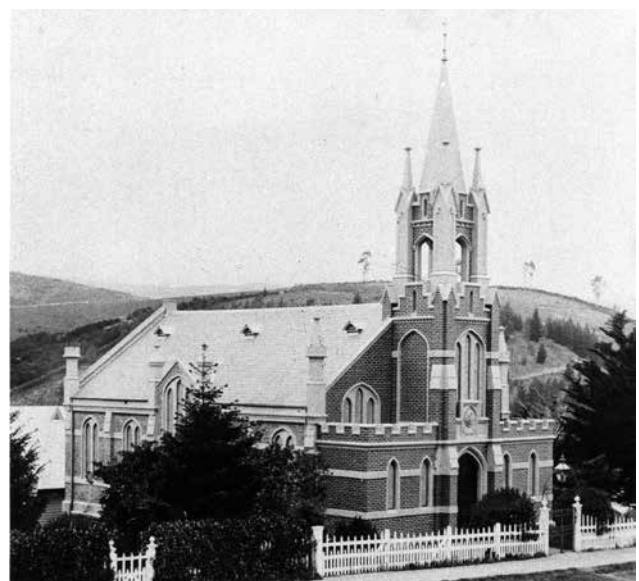
The Town Hall was not completed until June 1875 and the *Tuapeka Times* of 12 June contains a lengthy and detailed description of the new building. It was described as being in the Gothic style with the lobby, hall and two shops on the ground floor and the Town Clerk's office and Council Chamber on the first floor. The first floor of the building was later demolished and what is left of the ground floor street elevation is barely recognisable today.

Lawson's reputation was obviously secure in Lawrence as he also designed the first Presbyterian Church, a small timber building that was located behind the second Presbyterian Church in Colonsay Street. This too was designed by Lawson, and was used for many years as a Sunday School. Lawson's other buildings included the Warden's Court building on the corner of Colonsay and Peel Streets, the original Holy Trinity Anglican Church on the site of the present church in Whitehaven Street, the Roman Catholic St Patrick's School and Hall in Colonsay Street and the Bank of New Zealand in Ross Place.

It is remarkable that four of Lawson's buildings survive in almost their original condition, the exception being the former Presbyterian Church, which has had its tower and spire removed and the brickwork plastered over. It was gutted by fire but, as a result of much work by its present owners, is a wonderful example of heritage building restoration and preservation.

Norman Ledgerwood

The newspaper *Tuapeka Times* for 1868-1909 can be found on the National Library web page "Papers Past":
<http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast>



Lawson's Presbyterian Church in Lawrence with its original tower and spire – Otago Settlers Museum

KNIGHTLY KNEIGHBOURHOOD

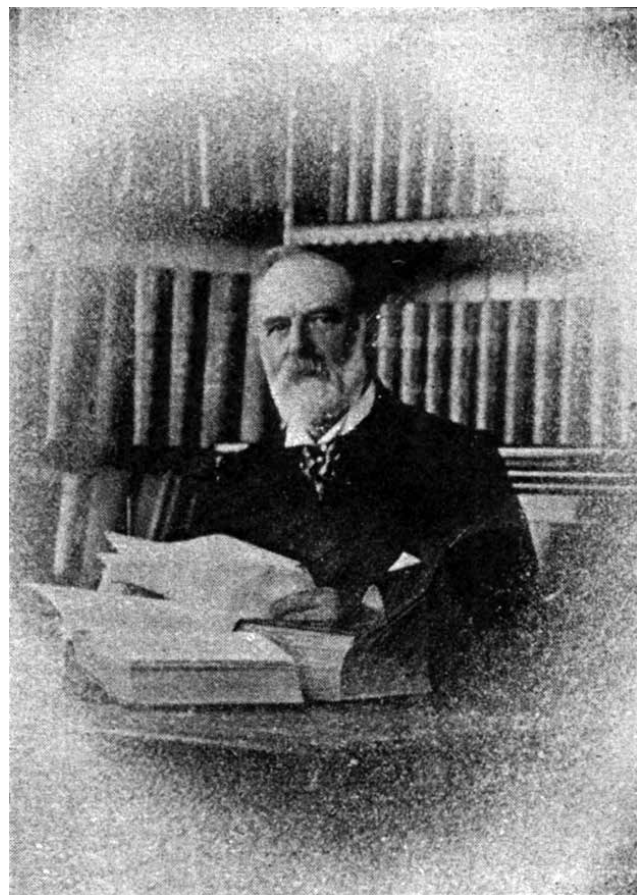
The three knighted members of the Roberts family of Littlebourne House in Dunedin were described in our previous issue. Yet there were several more recipients of knighthoods who lived at some stage within a stone's throw of that place. The first was George Fenwick. From 1886 to 1889 he and his unusually named wife Jane Atlantic (née Proudfoot) lived in a brick bungalow which, until its quite recent demolition, stood at No 9 Wallace Street.

Fenwick was born in Sunderland, north-east England, in 1847 and came with his parents to Dunedin as a nine-year-old. His education at the hands of the much-maligned JGS Grant was brief but apparently stood him in good stead. At the age of twelve, when he was still so small that he had to stand on a box to do his work, he became a printing apprentice to the proprietor of the *Otago Witness*. He was to remain in the newspaper business for the rest of his life.

As a teenager he went to Australia; in his mid-twenties he returned to Otago where he became joint owner of the *Tuapeka Press*, but was soon bought out by competitors.* In a daring move he then outsmarted a rival to set up a paper in Cromwell. This he did by printing a double final issue of the *Tuapeka Press*, the second half containing Cromwell news and carrying the masthead *Cromwell Argus*. These he rushed to Cromwell on horseback and distributed before the rival business got off the ground.

In 1877 another bold move enabled him to become one of the proprietors of the *Otago Daily Times*. A year later he was appointed managing director of the company that administered both the *ODT* and *Otago Witness* and became a fixture in that position. He was the driving force behind the establishment of the first Press Association of New Zealand. In 1891 he became editor of the *ODT*, a position he held for nineteen years.

In 1909 Fenwick travelled to London as chairman of the New Zealand representatives of the Imperial Press Conference and, at the invitation of the Imperial Government, visited Britain again in 1918.



The following year he received a cable message from British Prime Minister David Lloyd George informing him that the king 'had been pleased, on the occasion of His Majesty's birthday, to confer on him the honour of knighthood.† The investiture unexpectedly was carried out by the Prince of Wales during his visit to Dunedin in 1920, at the Dunedin Club.

Outside the newspaper world Sir George was active in many fields. He was chairman of the Dunedin Tramways Company, Standard Insurance Company and Perpetual Trustees, was on the governing bodies of the Hocken Library, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, YMCA and Rotary Club, was to the fore in numerous campaigns for social justice, raised large sums for many worthy causes, and founded the Otago SPCA. He died in 1929.

* This was a rival paper to the *Tuapeka Times* mentioned above in Norman Ledgerwood's article on the Lawrence Town Hall.

† Although this was the notorious King's Birthday honours list of 1919 in which several contributors to Lloyd George's political fund received knighthoods or peerages (the going rate for a knighthood was £10,000), there is no suggestion in Andrew Cook's recent book *King of Conmen: The True Life of Maundy Gregory* (Sutton, 2008) that there was anything untoward about Fenwick's knighthood.

Sir George Fenwick



Charles Hercus

Charles Hercus had a lot of letters after his name: BDS, MB ChB, DSO, OBE, MD and LLD. He was born in Dunedin in 1888, son of a warehouseman, but the family later moved to Christchurch. Charles was among the first intake of students to the Otago Dental School and, after graduating in 1911, went on to take a medical degree in 1914.

Having been a member of the Otago University Medical Corps, a Territorial unit, he joined the NZ Medical Corps on the outbreak of the First World War and served at Gallipoli where he is said to have gone ashore carrying a microscope! Acts of valour during the war were recognised with awards of the DSO and OBE.

On his return he was District Officer of Health in Christchurch for a time before going back to the Otago Medical school. He was capped MD in 1921 and appointed Professor of Public Health and Bacteriology the following year. In that role he put heavy emphasis on preventive medicine.

In 1923 he married Isabella Jones and the couple moved into a splendid house at No 18 Wallace Street, previously the home of architect Basil Hooper and designed by Hooper himself. The Hercuses raised a family of four.

In 1937 Charles Hercus succeeded Sir Henry Lindo Ferguson as Dean of the Otago Medical School, retaining that position until his retirement, at the age of 70, in 1958. He had been knighted in 1947 and was given an honorary LLD degree in 1962.

Achievements during his career included research into goitre which led to the introduction of iodised salt, inauguration of the Student Health Service, encouragement of the establishment of the School of Physical Education, and co-authorship of a history of the Otago Medical School. The Hercus Building of the Medical School is named in his honour.

Robert Kennedy

From the time he entered Southland Boys High School in 1901 it was obvious that Robert Kennedy was destined for an outstanding career. Besides excelling at rugby, cricket, athletics and swimming, he achieved top marks for New Zealand in both the junior and senior civil service examinations. At Victoria



College (now University) in Wellington he was awarded several scholarships and achieved MA and LL.M degrees with First Class Honours. He was admitted to the Bar in 1909 and later became President of the Wellington District Law Society.

In 1929, at the early age of 42, he was appointed Judge of the Supreme Court based in Dunedin, but was also required to attend court sessions in Invercargill and sometimes Wellington as a member of the Court of Appeal.

Although responsible for sending many people to prison he did his bit towards easing their punishment by becoming a member, and eventually President, of the Patients and Prisoners Aid Society. He was also President of the Shipwrecked Mariners Society and Mental Hygiene Council of NZ.

In 1920 he had married Alice Troup. In 1934 the couple moved into Whitelee, a large house next to Littlebourne House and at one time residence of George Roberts, one of the unknighthed sons of Sir John. Having no family the Kennedys did not need a big home but it was the grounds that appealed to them. They were both keen gardeners and in 1939, while travelling in India, collected seeds of many rare species. At Whitelee they planted no fewer than 170 varieties of rhododendron. They also had every known kind of oak and, at the entrance to the property, two towering sequoias. During the Second World War Littlebourne House next door was converted into military barracks. Judge Kennedy and the Army were not compatible neighbours. When the judge discovered soldiers using the grounds of Whitelee as a short-cut he was incensed and banned them from the property. The Army took revenge and, using the pretext that the trees might obscure view of enemy aircraft, compelled him to top his beloved sequoias.

By 1949 Kennedy had the contradictory title of Senior Puisne Judge, puisne (pronounced 'puny') meaning junior. It was in that year he was knighted. A year later he retired from the Bench. He continued to live at Whitelee for several more years but spent a lot of time at a holiday home at Waikanae. Eventually he sold Whitelee to the Sisters of the Assumption, Irish nuns who converted it into a convent. Sir Robert Kennedy died at Wellington in 1971.

Donald Gordon

Sir Charles Hercus (inset) and the Hercus Building of the Otago Medical School named in his honour.
Sir Robert Kennedy (inset) and his home Whitelee.



...Than Meets the Eye

Bruce Spittle has recently published a three-volume work detailing alleged sightings of moas throughout the country.

One of the early examples from Otago involved two gold miners, James Walker and Joseph Smith, who were camped in early January 1863 in a steep-sided gully about twenty miles north of the workings on the Arrow River. Writing in *Tales of Banks Peninsula* in 1884, Howard Jacobson recorded the story as given by Walker. One evening, after supper, they saw a large bird about 8½–9 feet high about 150 yards away on the opposite side of the gully. It had lightish grey feathers and shiny black legs below the knees as if it had a pair of officer's boots on. It looked at them first with one eye and then turned its head to look with the other eye. After a time of watching them, it left, taking large strides. They looked for it in the morning and found droppings, some cabbage trees with partially eaten hearts, and large footprints, with a span of about a foot, which they followed for two miles.

Smith was subsequently employed by Mr Rees, at Wakatipu, who tested his veracity frequently in every way he could conceive and, as reported in the *Otago Witness* on 21 February 1863, was thoroughly convinced the man was stating the truth. Smith said that they were sitting by their campfire when they saw an enormous bird about 3-400 yards away approaching the edge of the hill immediately above them. The bird seemed to perceive the camp fire and squatted down, keeping its head turned on one side, fixed on the fire. This continued for several minutes and then it got up and walked on. It had a large stride and its height was about seven feet without reckoning the head and neck. Its head was very long and flat and it carried its neck bent forward rather than carrying it back as was usual with birds of the ostrich species. The accounts of Walker and Smith differ in some of the details but both men were convinced that they had seen a moa.

Dr Spittle's illustrated account of what were believed to be moa sightings roused great interest at the launch of the book, jointly hosted by the OSA and the Settlers Museum.

Bruce Spittle's *Moa Sightings* (Dunedin: Paua Press, 2010) is available from www.moasightings.com for \$210 for all three volumes or \$70 per volume.

New Archives Database

If you have visited the Museum in the past couple of months, you might have noticed a computer terminal in the Hall of History. This is the new Archives computer, launched in February of this year. The computer holds three self-service databases covering some of the most popular material in the Archive:

1. Photo Portraits Database: over 6,000 photos and 23,000 names.
2. Debtors' Lists Database: lists of assisted passengers from 1848 to 1872 who still owed money on the loan for their passage. These lists were published in 1869 and 1872, but cover earlier voyages.
3. OSAP (Otago and Southland Assisted Passengers) Database: lists of assisted passengers to the region between 1872 and 1888.

These databases are available to visitors to the Museum. An instruction booklet is available at the computer terminal to assist you with your searching.

If you are unable to visit, staff can search the portraits database for you free of charge. Digital copies of any of the portraits can be ordered.

The passenger list databases can be searched for a fee of \$15 per family name. Send a request by e-mail to osm.archives@dcc.govt.nz or write to the Museum, 31 Queens Gardens, PO Box 566, Dunedin.

The Otago Settlers Museum Archive is currently closed for redevelopment work. From February through April, the archival collections were moved to temporary storage. Staff are now taking this time to digitise and catalogue our holdings. When the redevelopment project is finished, we will be able to offer researchers improved access to this rich material.

Jill Haley
Archivist



Darcy Christopher Bequest



The Association has received over the years three generous donations from the Darcy Christopher Trust, this year's being \$15,000. The trust makes donations to a wide variety of institutions every five years. The OSA Committee were pleased to welcome Trustees Geoff Milnes and David Beatson from Motueka to afternoon tea on 22 March, in the course of their travels in the South to disburse funds from the bequest to the various beneficiaries. After a most enjoyable chat, the Director took them on a tour of the new storage facility.

Darcy Bertram Christopher is probably a familiar name to the surf lifesavers of St Clair beach and the parishioners of St Peter's Anglican Church in Caversham, where he is commemorated by a plaque. He was born on 14 January 1914, the only son of Frederick Philip and Mary (May) Christopher. They lived in Kennedy Street in St Clair and were parishioners at St Peter's. Darcy Christopher attended St Clair Primary School and later Waitaki Boys' High School in Oamaru from 1928 to 1933. He worked for the Bank of New South Wales (now Westpac) in Dunedin on leaving school. He enlisted in the RNZAF in 1940, receiving his commission in 1941.

On one occasion the Vickers Vincent biplane he was piloting was caught in the slipstream of another aeroplane over the sea near White Island. He tried to perform a loop to dive out of it, but was too close to the water and dived straight in. He clung

to the rudder for about half an hour before being rescued by two fellow members of the St Clair Surf Lifesaving Club in a canoe. The Club still has a replica of the aeroplane's propeller. It is one of the oldest surf lifesaving clubs in the country, and commences its centenary celebrations later this year with the White Island Race on 23 October.

Darcy Christopher was a training instructor at Harewood Aerodrome (now Christchurch International Airport) for the rest of the war. He married Frances Grace Mockett in 1941 and after the war he joined Mockett's Motors in Culverden, North Canterbury. On retiring in 1963, he went farming, and eventually retired altogether in Blenheim in 1976. Frances died in 1979 and Darcy in 1995.

The beneficiaries of the Darcy Christopher Trust named on its establishment in 1995 included the Otago Settlers Association, St Clair Primary School, St Peter's Anglican Church, St Clair and St Kilda surf life-saving clubs, Southern Rugby Football Club, and Waitaki Boys' High School. The capital, which is invested in perpetuity, has paid out more than \$500,000 to its beneficiaries at each of the three five-yearly intervals since then (2000, 2005 and 2010).

With thanks to Geoff Milnes and *The Rock*, the newsletter of St Peter's Church, Caversham.



For Your Diary

The Association's Winter Meeting will be held on Tuesday 6 July. Because of the Museum redevelopment our usual venue in the concourse is not available. We will meet instead in the Burns Hall, First Church, 415 Moray Place. There is some parking in the Church grounds for those who require it and also a drop-off point at the door of the hall. Our speaker will be Elizabeth Caldwell of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

Darcy Bertram Christopher in RNZAF uniform.

Anniversary Day Dinner



'Historic Carisbrook' was the theme for the Otago Anniversary Day dinner held at Carisbrook Otago Lounge on, as always, the actual day, 23 March. It was one of the last public opportunities to appreciate Carisbrook's significance to Dunedin and to New Zealand sport, before the new stadium takes over. Iain Gallaway, the best-loved and respected rugby and (even longer) cricket commentator (and one of our oldest members), recounted the early history from James Macandrew's days to its time as the region's foremost sports ground, first for the Carisbrook Cricket Club, then for rugby, and the world-famous 'House of Pain.' Memories from his young days and experiences from a long career were expertly woven with great humour. Bert Sutcliffe was Iain's hero, and his huge presentation bat was on loan from the Otago Cricket Association, along with cricket team photographs. His ashes are buried in the hallowed turf. Time flew by and we could have listened to much more. The 101 guests enjoyed a memorable evening and a splendid buffet dinner. The response was very positive, one saying that 'it was the best Anniversary Day Dinner yet!'

Ann Barsby



Top: Iain Gallaway addresses diners at the 2010 Anniversary Day Dinner.
Above: Left to right: Ann Barsby, Iain Gallaway, Dorothy Page and Richard Higham.

Introduce a Friend to the Otago Settlers Association

Help us extend the network of support for the Otago Settlers Museum as it enters the 21st century in an exciting phase of expansion and development.

What we do:

- * Regular financial support for the Museum. Currently this is \$15,000 a year. This year's donation is earmarked for digitising the iconic ancestral photographs in the Smith Gallery.
 - * Purchase of special items for the collection when they come up. In 2009 we contributed \$3000 (together with the Burns Club, which gave \$1000) to purchase a gold filigree snuff box, believed to have belonged to Robert Burns.
 - * Sponsorship of the much-loved annual *Pixie Town* exhibition.
 - * Sponsorship of *Walk Dunedin* tours, always popular with tourists.
 - * An annual History prize, for the top second-year history student at Otago University. Our \$3000 provides an internship supervised by Museum staff over six weeks of the summer break. Some excellent projects have resulted.
 - * Volunteering, as requested by the Museum, for example when the Museum is opened after the ANZAC Dawn Service.
 - * Contribution, through the Alfred and Isabel Reed Trust, to the publication costs of selected books with a local content. The most recent included *Robbie: The Story of Dunedin's Burns Statue* by Donald Gordon and *Growing Up in Wartime* compiled by Isobel Veitch.
- ### What's in it for you?
- * An excellent programme of Members' Evenings, with outstanding speakers and the companionship of people with similar interests.
 - * Invitation to the Anniversary Day Dinner on 23 March.
 - * Occasional book launches – always popular and interesting, typically of books that have benefited from our contributions through the Reed Trust.
 - * The Tuesday Club: one morning a month, really interesting speakers and morning tea.
 - * A high-class newsletter, full of local history interest, four times a year.
 - * A complimentary copy of our history, *To Fame Undying* by Seán Brosnahan.
 - * The satisfaction of belonging to an organisation which has greatly changed with the times since it was founded in 1898, but which has always been at the heart of Dunedin.

Introduce a Friend to the Otago Settlers Association



Otago Settlers Association Membership Application Form

Please return this section with payment to
Otago Settlers Association, PO Box 74, Dunedin 9054, New Zealand

Annual Membership

1 July to 30 June. Discounts are available for those joining during the year.

Receipts for Subscriptions and Donations of \$5.00 and over may be attached to your Tax Rebate Claim.

Family and Family Life Membership include two adults and children under 18 at the same address.

Please complete personal membership details overleaf.

Subscription Category (Please tick as appropriate)

ANNUAL		LIFE	
<input type="checkbox"/> Adult	\$50.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Adult	\$500.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Family	\$70.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Family	\$700.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Over 60	\$35.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Over 60	\$300.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Two Over 60	\$50.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Two Over 60	\$450.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Junior (U18)	\$10.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Endowment	\$1,400.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Company/Firm	\$75.00		
<input type="checkbox"/> Non-Profit Organisation	\$55.00		

I/We wish to join the Otago Settlers Association Inc.

PLEASE PRINT IN BLOCK LETTERS

Family and Two Over 60 members, please give family name and first names of both proposed members.

Title (please circle): Dr/Rev/Mr/Master/Mrs/Ms/Miss

Family Name(s):

First Name(s):

Junior Members, please give date of birth:

Address:

Suburb: City:

Postcode: Telephone: (0__)

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Your reason for joining the Association:

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.....

Privacy Act Declaration

I understand that the information I have given will be used for the general purposes of Association administration and membership benefits. The Privacy Act gives the right to access this information and to correct if necessary.

Signature:

Signature:

Date:

Cash/Cheque * enclosed for \$

(made payable to Otago Settlers Association)

* EFTPOS and credit card facilities not available



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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

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