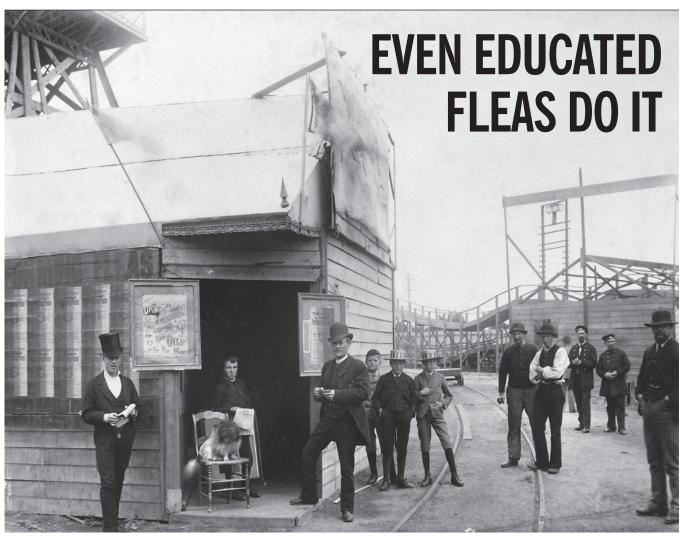


OTAGO SETTLERS NEWS

OTAGO SETTLERS ASSOCIATION proud to be friends of total Settlers

SUMMER 2016 ISSUE 131



The love-life of the stars of flea circuses may be a matter of speculation, but this photograph shows that some of them at least visited Dunedin in 1889-90 for the New Zealand and South Seas Exhibition.

It was held on newly reclaimed land between Crawford and Cumberland Streets, south of Jervois Street and north of the Oval. The main buildings housed worthy and largely insectfree cultural and industrial exhibits, while outside were the sideshows. These included a switchback railway or roller coaster, a camera obscura, the Fat Family, Jo-Jo the Russian Dog Faced Boy (who was said to resemble a Skye terrier), Unzie the frizzy-haired and gentlemanly Circassian Albino, and two replicas of the Eiffel Tower, that year's international sensation. The original Parisian tower commemorated the centenary of the French Revolution and was intended to last only 20 years. At 300 metres, it was twice the height of the next tallest structure in the world and remained the highest for the next 40 years. The Eiffel Tower's Dunedin sisters were rather less impressive. Part of the larger of the two can be seen in the background to this photograph: it was 40 metres high and built by the Austral Otis company to demonstrate their lifts: this one took 16 passengers. The smaller 12-metre Dunedin tower bore a much closer resemblance to the Parisian original, mainly because it was modelled on a souvenir Eiffel Tower of the sort that still sell in large numbers to tourists. There is no trace of either manifestation of Eiffelmania today, though near Hinds in mid-Canterbury there survives a small farming settlement founded in 1889, Eiffelton.

In the meantime, 'Professor' Upini had been travelling the country with his troupe of 'world celebrated' performing fleas, the first to visit New Zealand. On reaching Dunedin in mid-November 1889 he first set up next door to Horsburgh's bookshop at 97 George Street (near the Moray Place corner.



the site of the former Post Office) before moving to the exhibition grounds. Upini's 'Receptions' involved harnessed fleas performing feats of strength such as pulling chariots, a wheeled elephant and a Hansom cab (the dignified cabbie holding a whip with his fore-legs). The ODT reported 'even among the fleas there appear to be hewers of wood and drawers of water, for one of Mr Upini's crew is employed in drawing miniature buckets of water from a well, while another has to work a treadmill. Two of the insects, which have been named Boulanger [after the aggressively nationalist French politician] and Bismarck, engage in a fencing bout, being furnished with the tiniest of steel foils. The most wonderful feat — and the one which serves best to illustrate the strength of the genus — was the drawing by a flea of a model ship, the weight of which has been certified as being 800 times the weight of the flea. This feat is relatively equivalent to a horse drawing 1000 tons.' This miniature strongman was named Tom; all the trained fleas had names, and it was claimed that they responded to them. At a shilling for adults or sixpence for children, and with 'Polite Ushers in attendance', the performances were very popular. The *Evening Star* even tried to provide idle sideshow gawpers with a fig leaf of moral respectability, claiming 'the entertainment is attractive, inasmuch as it shows what patience, perseverance, and careful training can do.'

Very little is known about Signor Upini other than that he came from London and claimed to be the grandson of the man who had perfected the harnessing and training (or 'education') of fleas. The grandiose title of 'Professor' was at the time widely adopted jocularly by performers such as jugglers, conjurers or escapologists, but George Upini also claimed to be a fellow of the Entomological Society of London. His name does not however appear in the membership records of the Society. Spelling his name Ubini, he had shown his little troupe in many towns in England and Wales since 1874, appearing in London at the Crystal Palace and the Royal Aguarium, an entertainment complex near Westminster Abbey famous for having no fish. Local curiosity apparently sated, in 1886 Ubini tried to sell his act, then three years later he set off for Australia and then New Zealand to try his luck. Afterwards, he returned to Australia and settled in Sydney. There in 1895 he tried to patent a device for preventing punctures in pneumatic tyres, and turned his skills to making fine wire brooches. In 1901 Ubini moved into photography; he seems to have died some time after 1910.

This was the first flea circus many visitors to the exhibition had ever seen, and the ODT gave away some of its trade secrets: first, catch your flea — more easily said than done. Then, the 'usual method of training a flea is to change it from a hopping insect to one that crawls. [It is placed] in a glass container where it becomes so tired from attempts to escape that it is content to crawl. The next step is the delicate operation of collaring the flea. Then it is harnessed or dressed according to the part it is to be trained to perform. The collar consists of a very thin gold wire or silk thread which is placed around the insect's tiny neck for the purpose of easy handling. Usually it takes about two weeks to train a flea, and during this time it must be handled constantly. The fleas are then ready to step before the footlights and make their circus debut. But the trainers must always have understudies to take the place of their tiny performers. "Off Stage" the trained fleas are usually kept in little boxes with their feet entangled in cotton to prevent their escaping or getting lost.'

Despite these precautions, the enslaved fleas sometimes attempted daring escapes: with one bound, they were free. 'A gentleman, well-known in up-country circles, was standing apparently in deep contemplation of the manoeuvres of the fleas, when one of them, with a buggy attached, suddenly bolted in the direction of the gentleman, and in a second was traversing along his arm, and it was only after a diligent search that the runaway was captured'. On another occasion, Upini was reported to have offered a reward of £25 for the



capture of a runaway answering to the name Billy Robinson. Diligent Dunedin housewives were said to be wary of harming any flea they came across until they had established it had not run away from the circus. 'Every one caught is held up to the light while these words are pronounced to see the creature's guilty start, or its answered smile of recognition, in proportion as it relishes a return to captivity. Jack the Ripper has not evaded capture more successfully than Billy Robinson. Even the police haven't a clue to his whereabouts, and all over Dunedin and suburbs, in the dead of night, husbands are startled in terror from their slumbers by the cry of their better halves of "Quick, John, strike a light; I think I've got Billy Robinson." But all to no purpose — Billy Robinson has skipped.' Alas for the veracity of this report, exactly the same story was told about Auckland when Upini's show opened there in February 1890.

Another apocryphal story told about Upini's and other flea circuses did the rounds for many years. Supposedly, when Upini was showing his performers in Melbourne 'one of the fleas plunged into the privacies of a lady's dress — a rather ... delicate matter. At the Professor's anxious request she retired, and instituted a search, returning with triumph in her shining face, and handed a flea to the Professor. Upini examined it carefully, and then scrupulously handing back the flea to the lady said, "Madam, this is not my flea. Don't let me deprive you of your own pets. My flea must be still about your person. Please look again, and be careful not to hurt

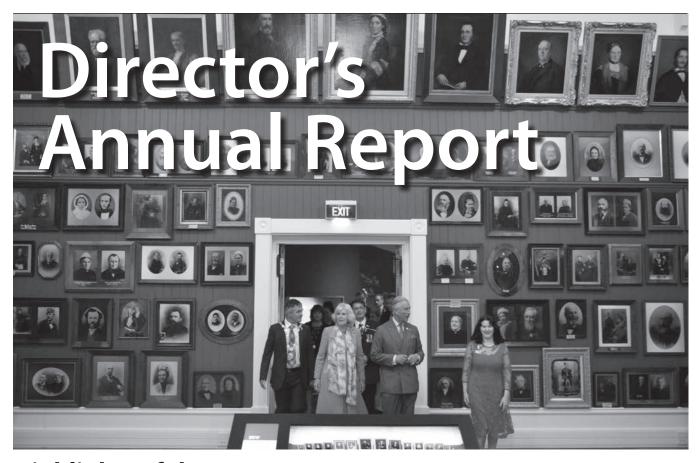


it." With true Miltonian *lèse-majesté*, the *Mataura Ensign*'s version even made Queen Victoria the heroine of this story, the event supposedly having taken place when she invited the proprietor of a flea circus to Windsor to demonstrate it to the royal children. This canard may have been prompted by Upini's claim to be 'The only Flea Tamer in the World. Patronised by Royalty.'

Puns about the fleas were naturally irresistible: it was said Professor Upini's troupe of performing insects were making his fortune by leaps and bounds —

Of all things paradoxical
That man's conception tease,
Upini's show's the queerest and
The hardest one to seize;
Whilst fleas have lived on other men,
He's living on the fleas.

With thanks to Val McAtear, Librarian of the Royal Entomological Society, St Albans, England.



Highlights of the Year

This last financial year, 1 July 2015 to 30 June 2016, has been yet another incredibly busy one for the Museum, and also for the Chinese Garden, with nearly 304,000 and over 43,000 visitors respectively. In March this year the Museum received its millionth visitor since reopening three and a half years ago. The Garden had its most successful Chinese New Year celebration yet, and continues to go from strength to strength. Visitor numbers for both remain at a very high level.

There were during the year not just one, but two 'once-in-alifetime' events at the Museum. These both took months of planning, and many rehearsals, but both special days were significant civic events which showcased both the Museum and the city. The first was as part of the royal visit to Dunedin on 5 November 2015, when TRH Prince Charles and Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall visited Toitū Otago Settlers Museum and attended a special event to meet the descendants of some of Dunedin's earliest Scottish settlers and also Kai Tahu descendants. This event attracted international media coverage and hundreds of spectators. The second opportunity was when, for the first time, a set of regimental colours was laid up in a Museum, and Toitū was chosen as the institution to care for the New Zealand Scottish Regiment's flags. With due military protocol and ceremony, accompanied by a 100-soldier guard, two Light Armoured Vehicles, the Army Band, pipers, the RSA Choir and former members of the Regiment, the colours were passed to Museum Director Jennifer Evans for laving-up and safekeeping. This event was very well supported by the people of Dunedin, who turned out in huge numbers to watch the parade and formalities outside the Museum. This event also attracted a great deal of national media coverage.

The very popular exhibition *Cats 'n' Dogs* was on show from July to September 2015. *Life on the Edge: Otago Harbour Communities* ran from September 2015 to February 2016, and *Slice of Life: The World Famous Dunedin Study* opened in March 2016 and is still showing. *Life on the Edge* was a finalist in the Museums Aotearoa 2016 Awards. In addition, the touring Scottish show *Scottish Diaspora Tapestries* ran during April 2016, with the Museum being the only New Zealand venue for this international touring exhibition. Sister city delegations were received during the year at the Museum and Garden from Otaru and Shanghai, as well as a small delegation that included the Lord Provost of Edinburgh.

The Dunedin Chinese Garden

The target of 40,000 visitors was surpassed this year, with many locals becoming annual pass holders and increasing numbers of visitors coming during the school holidays. This was helped by a long, warm summer and bumper cruise ship season. The most successful Chinese New Year celebration yet attracted 10,000 visitors and performers, including an acrobatic troupe from China. The Consul General for China, based in Christchurch, attended.



Museum and Garden Staff

New Visitor Hosts appointed during the year were Alice Waterman, Stephanie White and Gina Rocco, Staff who moved on to other opportunities were Mandy de Leeuw and Visitor Hosts Emma Shaw, Jennifer Aitken, Jo Graham, Esther Bosshard and Olivia Conroy. At the Dunedin Chinese Garden, Yuan Xue has replaced Chelsea Steen-Jones. The History Intern for the year, funded by the OSA, was Kate Tilson. This internship is awarded to the top second-year student from the History Department at Otago University, Kate worked on researching additional Smith Gallery biographies. We have also hosted students from the College of Education and the University. Volunteers continue to contribute valuable work to both the Museum and the Garden.

Collections and Exhibitions Teams

The Cats 'n' Dogs exhibition was highly successful and featured for the first time photographs from members of the public submitted through our Flickr website, as well as an extensive selection of historic images from the Museum's Archives. This exhibition ran until 6 September 2015. Following this was the exhibition featuring Dunedin's Harbour Communities, Life on the Edge. The harbour and its communities are a distinct and integral part of Dunedin's identity. Geographically, the harbour exhibition was divided up into six broad districts: West Harbour, Port Chalmers, North East Harbour, Broad Bay-Portobello, Otakou and the Halfway Islands, featuring photographs and objects from the Museum's collections as well as borrowed items such as the Armstrong disappearing gun model and a Peninsula bus.

In March 2016 the exhibition Slice of Life: The World Famous Dunedin Study was opened by Dr Phil Silva. In 1975, health researchers from Otago University began studying a group of 1037 children born in Dunedin in 1972 and 1973. This was the Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study (known as the Dunedin Study) and participants have regularly returned over the past four decades for assessments that investigate health and development factors. This study has become renowned as one of the most significant projects of its kind in the world. This exhibition features room sets from the different periods in the life of the participants, as well as



highlighting the scientific and health discoveries made along the way. Many changes have been made throughout the year to the permanent displays, with objects swapped out, and featuring new additions such as the 'Poetick' poetry machine. A new Information Station interactive, funded in part by the OSA, was installed next to *Josephine* in June 2016, featuring railway information.

Items of special interest that are moving through the process of acquisition to the Museum's collection are a 1966 Holden HR Special Sedan, the Sidey piano and the 4YC radio transmitter. A special place has been made in the textile collection to store the loan of the previously mentioned regimental colours. The Collections pages on the Museum's website now include a selection of items for visitors to explore: portraits and biographies from the Smith Gallery, information about the Museum's conservation activities and 'Staff Picks' stories.

The period over Christmas when Pixie Town was on display was, as usual, very busy, with over 32,000 visitors. A visit to Pixie Town and a photo taken with Santa is fast becoming a new Dunedin tradition.

Communications and Operations Team

This team in the Museum looks after all front-of-house activities, as well as retail and venue hire. Visitor Hosts staff the reception desk, as well as the research centre, and assist visitors with a wide range of enquiries. The Museum shop is trading well, and becoming known for its range of quirky greeting cards and unusual quality heritage gifts. OSA members receive a discount at the shop, and recently a discount has also been negotiated for members from the café. The Museum has continued to be a very popular venue for conference dinners, balls, cocktail events and meetings, keeping the Function and Events staff very busy.

Learning Experiences Outside the Classroom (LEOTC)

Schools from throughout the South Island travel to Dunedin to participate in our LEOTC programme. Local schools are also making great use of our spaces for NCEA assessments for on-site dance and drama performances. All of the Museum's



current education programmes are very popular and highly regarded by schools, and the Museum itself is valued as a treasured resource by the wider education community. The Museum's education programmes are continually evaluated by teachers. Detailed evaluation from users is carefully monitored, leading to refinements and improvements to the service. The educational experience provided is unique to the city and the Otago region, providing a mixture of immersive and authentic learning environments based on the Museum's strong social science collections and exhibitions. Toitū Otago Settlers Museum Education fully utilises the Museum's excellent facilities and resources for school groups. Education staff consistently deliver a high level of service, which is monitored and reviewed every six months.

Community Engagement

There continue to be regular meetings of the Toitū Otago Settlers Museum Board, the Dunedin Chinese Garden Advisory Board, the Toitū Otago Settlers Museum / Kai Tahu Liaison Group, and the LEOTC Reference Group. Museum staff regularly attend committee and subcommittee meetings of the Otago Settlers Association. The Director, Jennifer Evans, now sits on the board of the Gasworks Museum Trust, and staff continue to provide curatorial and conservation advice to the Gasworks on a regular basis. The Director also sits on the Otago Anniversary Day Dinner Committee and the St Andrews Day Subcommittee of the Dunedin Edinburgh Sister City Society, as well as the Otago Settlers Association Committee and its Executive and Finance Committee. Museum staff also represent it in many other organisations. Will McKee is the Museum's representative on Interpretation Network New Zealand; Emma Knowles is a committee member of the Archives and Records Association of New Zealand; Fiona McLaughlan is on the board of the New Zealand Conservators of Cultural Materials: Beth Rees is the Otago representative for the Emerging Museum Professionals Group.

Media Coverage

The Museum has made the national news several times during the year and also, with the royal visit, photographs of the royal couple inside the Smith Gallery featured on Reuters and other



international news outlets. There have been many articles over a wide range of media, including local television Channel 39 and Otago Access Radio, as well as RNZ and other national media.

Awards Received

It has been another successful year for the Museum and Garden, receiving the TripAdvisor Travellers Choice Award 2015 and Certificate of Excellence 2015. The Museum remains in the number one position out of 91 Dunedin attractions and is currently ranked sixth best museum in New Zealand on TripAdvisor. The award 'Endorsed Visitor Attraction' was achieved by both the Museum and the Garden from Qualmark for 2015 and 2016. The Garden has retained its status as a five-star Garden of National Significance, awarded by the New Zealand Gardens Trust. The annual DCC Residents' Opinion Survey has given the Museum a 96 per cent satisfaction rating, our highest yet, while the Garden has improved from 69 to 73 per cent.

The Year Ahead

Plans are under way for filming another documentary, in the style of the award-winning *Journey of the Otagos*, called *Journey to Lan Yuan*. This will trace the story of our earliest Chinese immigrants, the gold miners, from their home villages in China through the Australian goldfields to Dunedin, then to the goldfields of Central Otago, right up to more recent members of Dunedin's Chinese community. A new exhibition in the Special Exhibitions Gallery will focus on our lithographs and the stories they tell. *Sketched in Stone: Lithographic Printing in Dunedin* will also feature some of the printing technology, and is due to open in April 2017.

Jennifer Evans Director

The Annual General Meeting

Once her batteries were recharged — her microphone batteries, that is — our President Susan Schweigman welcomed 58 members of the Otago Settlers Association to their 117th Annual General Meeting in the early evening of Wednesday, 14 September. The essoins read, business was conducted swiftly: the previous year's minutes were approved and no matters arising arose from them. Susan's presidential Annual Report had already been distributed, so she talked about the people behind the report who had done much of the hard work. She encouraged members to take advantage of the discount offered by the Museum's cafe, and warned that the Association's venture into Facebook might be 'scary'. Our Treasurer, Keith Clifford, then presented his report on the Association's finances, which show a small surplus. The investment portfolio has been consolidated, and in vew of the recent public controversy, members were reassured that it is an ethical one, with no arms dealers having a hand in it. Next came the election of officers: Susan was re-elected unopposed as President, and Peter Smith became the sole Vice President. Ann Barsby was nominated to join the eight other candidates standing for election to the Committee, and they too were all returned unopposed.

The Director, Jennifer Evans, then spoke about the highlights of the Museum's year. These included the visit of TRH the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall, which entailed detailed preparations, with snipers under the floors and sniffer dogs checking for bombs. The laying-up of the colours of the NZ Scottish Regiment caused Jennifer a little nervousness as her speaking role needed to be word-perfect; she came through with flying colours, and managed to avoid a court martial. (Her formal report appears above.) Susan next thanked the retiring members of the Committee, Graham Hall, Kay Thompson and Hilary Allison. Former President Dorothy Page read a Minute of Appreciation for John Bezett, retiring after 18 years as DCC representative on the OSA Committee and 33 years as a retiring City Councillor, among his many other public responsibilities. He was unfortunately unable to be present.

Under General Business, the possibility of next year's Summer Outing being a visit to the Kuriheka Estate at Island Stream near Maheno was raised. In an attractive park-like setting, the grand, 32-room homestead was built in 1889 for Colonel Joseph Cowie Nichols. It is well known for its eclectic and eccentric collections of antique furniture, armour, paintings, books, ceramics and a variety of other artefacts. The historically significant estate buildings include a limestone stable block, woolshed, cookshop, shearers' quarters and implement sheds. The estate even has its own war memorial, which incorporates four artillery pieces.

The official business over, Professor Richie Poulton spoke about the Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health & Development Study. A full report will appear in a later newsletter.

Correction

Thank you to Mrs Annette Paterson, NZ President of the WCTU, for pointing out a slip in the article on the women's suffrage campaign in our last issue. Mary Leavitt's tour of the country founding branches of the Women's Christian Temperance Union was in 1885, not 1886. The various branches federated into a single national organisation in February 1886. The WCTU is now the oldest non-sectarian women's organisation in the world. Its mission is 'to reduce health and social problems by promoting a lifestyle free of alcohol and other drugs.' Men are even allowed to join these days, too.

The 'Old Identity' Card

The Promotions & Membership Committee would like to hear from Life Members whether they would be interested in having a plastic OSA identity card. Please contact Kylie with your thoughts on (03) 477 8677 or otago.settlers.assn@xtra.co.nz

Do get in touch about the Summer Outing to the Kuriheka Estate near Maheno as well. OSA members have been given a special invitation to tour this fascinating historic homestead with Tim Nichols on 17 February 2017. Tickets will be \$40, and there are 40 seats on the bus. Bring your own lunch; tea and coffee will be provided.

For Your Diary The Geese are Getting Fat

You are warmly invited to the Association's Christmas function, to be held in the Museum's fover beginning at 6.45 pm on Thursday, 8 December. Christmas punch will be served on arrival and there will be the chance to preview the latest incarnation of Pixie Town before it is open to the small, stickyfingered members of the public. For your entertainment and edification, Mr Wm McKee's Quiz Night will begin at 7.20. The questions have been tailored for a — ahem — mature audience. You can arrange your own team of four to six in advance, or join a team on arrival. If you are not altogether keen on being quizzed, there will be the usual convivial social event as well. Will's quiz will be followed by a raffle for a Christmas hamper, then supper if you are not fasting for Advent. Look out for the flyer for further details.



A Passion for Fashion: The Life of Lindsay Kennett, Master Milliner, as told to and written by Hilary E. Hunt

Hardback, 192 pages. \$59.95 (With OSA members' 15% discount \$50.96 plus \$5 packing and postage. Please make out cheques to the DCC.)

This biography of Lindsay Kennett is full of history, snippets of society life in Auckland, and fashion details — it is a fascinating account of one man's life. Lindsay's early days in Paradise, Glenorchy and Dunedin are well illustrated with material from several museum archives, and remembered details from his childhood show him to have been a creative and energetic boy. Wellington and later Auckland became the backdrop for his career in the world of ladies' hats. Lindsay designed and made every hat — each one was different — and they caught the eye of discerning ladies all over New Zealand. Lindsay's retirement to Dunedin in the late 1980s led to a whole new career. He rediscovered his artistic talents, presented glamorous hat shows and gave talks, all raising funds for charities. This book is full of glorious photographs capturing the essence of the glamour Lindsay embodied.

Readers are welcome to attend either (or both) of the book launches: on Thursday, 24 November from 5.30 to 7 pm in the Josephine Foyer of Toitū Otago Settlers Museum; and on Saturday, 26 November from 5.30 to 7 pm at the Lakes District Museum, Arrowtown. The author, Hilary Hunt, will also be interviewed on the radio by Kim Hill that Saturday morning, 26 November, on RNZ National.



Members of the Association are entitled to a handy discount of 15% on the cost of books and other items from the Museum shop. They also have free access to the archives, and for those living outside Dunedin an hour's free research each year by the Archivist, Emma Knowles.



Editor: Austin Gee; Designer: Tim Cornelius; Publisher: Otago Settlers Association.

This newsletter was produced by the Otago Settlers Association, founder and supporter of the Toitū 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 Otago Settlers Association Secretary, Box 74, Dunedin. Phone/fax 03 477 8677, email otago.settlers.assn@xtra.co.nz

Otago Daily Times

The Otago Daily Times supports Toitū Otago Settlers Museum

OTAGO SETTLERS ASSOCIATION

31 Queens Gardens PO Box 74 Dunedin 9016 Ph / Fax 03 477 8677 email otago.settlers.assn@xtra.co.nz

TOITŪ OTAGO SETTLERS MUSEUM

31 Queens Gardens PO Box 566 Dunedin 9016 Ph 03 477 5052 Fax 03 474 2727 email osmmail@dcc.govt.nz

Lindsay Kennett with model Tui Stevenson in Auckland 1959.