



## 'Improving' the Land Otago, 1840-1860



Here in Otago there are scenes of natural beauty that realize the conceptions of a [Claude] Lorraine, and of which without the hand of the artist I could convey to you but little idea. Indeed I feel assured that a good artist transmitting views of the country, might do more in conveying a knowledge of it to the people at home.<sup>1</sup>

Too little attention has been paid to the ways in which settlers responded in aesthetic and romantic ways to the New Zealand environment. Too much attention, perhaps, has been given to the environmental transformations that took place with the coming of European colonisation. That is perhaps inevitable given the extraordinary rapidity with which clearing, draining and planting transformed the very substance of the New Zealand landscape.

As debates over land tenure, identity and resource conflict dominate headlines almost daily, it is useful to investigate some of the responses European settlers had to the Otago environment during the early years of settlement, from 1840

to 1860. This essay looks at European ideas of land, showing how these translated into policy in Otago. A second essay will look at romanticism and early attempts at conservation in Otago during this period.

\*\*\*

Colonists attempted to recreate the environments of their own country through the introduction of Eurasian plants and animals, and with the establishment of farmsteads. Achieving this outcome required the bush to be cleared, the landscape 'improved.' They effected these changes for practical, aesthetic and intellectual reasons. Foremost among these was the notion of civilisation, which pictured fenced fields, productive agriculture and neat farmhouses as the ideal, and gave to such agricultural 'improvers' the confidence that what they were doing was not only worthwhile but also foreordained. It symbolised, equally, the ability of the labourer to become independent and wealthy through hard work. The garden typified this and the bringing of civilisation to the wilderness.

Ellen Penelope Valpy, *Forbury Farm*, circa 1857, pencil on paper - Otago Settlers Museum collection

<sup>1</sup> Letters from settlers 1; Dunedin, 5 May 1851, in *Otago Journal* 8, p. 120

---

Organised European colonisation of Otago commenced in 1848 under the auspices of the New Zealand Company, but with a distinctly Scottish, Free Kirk flavour. The settlement's founders, the Reverend Thomas Burns (c. 1796-1871) and William Cargill (1784-1860), shared a loathing of urbanism and industrialisation, and aimed to keep Dunedin a concentrated community of family-orientated, small-farming, Free Church Presbyterians. Otago grew only slowly during this period before the gold rush of 1861. In 1860, perhaps no more than 12,700 Europeans lived in Otago; probably only some 2,000 Maori lived south of Banks Peninsula.

Many settlers read the Genesis creation account, in which God gave Adam dominion over nature, as granting humans responsibility for understanding and controlling the natural world for the benefit of humankind. And, by introducing Eurasian plants and animals, agricultural techniques and land systems, most settlers thought that they were improving, not destroying, the New Zealand environment. The *Otago Colonist* in 1848, for example, urged local settlers to exercise dominion over newly-founded Otago. Waxing lyrical about the province's 'vast tracts which are waiting for the reception of man', the writer quoted from Genesis: 'The injunction and blessing ... is yet in progress of fulfilment, — "Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth and subdue it."'

Throughout the century, settlers cultivated previously unproductive agricultural areas. Their improving impulse led them to drain swamps, plant trees, cultivate land, and transform local environments. To the Reverend Thomas Burns, religious leader of the fledgling Otago settlement from 1848 to 1871, it seemed God intended the colonists to make the land bring forth its bounty. Wandering with a 'prophetic eye' over the Otago of the future, Burns envisaged 'a rustic, transplanted Scotland, with agriculture on the lowlands, pastoralism on the higher ground, and Presbyterianism as its moral glue.' He imagined

the noble plains of Otago some generations hence to mark the future herds and flocks that cover the upland pastures far away to the ranges of the snowy mountains whilst the lower lying valleys are waving with the yellow corn and the pursuits of rural husbandry, the pretty farms, 'the busy mile' and the happy smiling cottages by the way side or nestling among the trees in some 'bosky deile' or sylvan dell — and all that a God fearing people — with a bold peasantry their country's pride and an aristocracy whose highest honour it is that they are the disciples of Christ.

Many European settlers viewed New Zealand's environment as a Promised Land awaiting the hand of man to shape and cultivate it. Jane Bannerman (1835–1923), an early Otago settler and the second daughter of Thomas Burns, felt that God had brought the Scottish Presbyterians 'into a good land' of plenty and quoted verses from Deuteronomy (8:7–12) to describe her new province.

The landscape the colonists wished to fashion in Otago resembled the one they came from, that of lowland Scotland, where 'ordered fields and spaced-out farms' were the order of the day. Complementing this pastoral, Lowland idyll were

the great houses, which 'projected the civilizing ideals of the classical world'. One Otago settler described a similar scene from her childhood, recalling the 'neat little cottages, each with a garden at the back, quiet and peaceful ...' in the Scottish village she was brought up in. Tranquillity, however, was deceptive.

The improving ideals of the Enlightenment had permeated much of Scotland. With them came new systems of organizing rural labour, new systems of tenancy, and the newly-refined practice of scientific agriculture. The latter brought about improved crop species and, in conjunction with crop rotation, meant more intensive agriculture and, as a corollary, increased population. While this last factor drove many Lowlanders to cities and to areas like Dunedin, the experience of scientific agriculture influenced their anticipation of New Zealand's environment. In essence, colonists desired to re-create their home environment and, in so doing, make it support them.

One of the main means of achieving this was through acclimatisation. This often involved the replacement of native grasses with European. The Lutheran missionary on Ruapuke Island, the Reverend Johan Wohlers (1811-1885) reckoned that '[t]he wild-growing' native grasses were 'too coarse for sheep to thrive on'. They needed to be 'burnt away, and the soil sown with good European grasses and clover'. Charles Henry Kettle (c. 1821-1862), who became Chief Surveyor of Otago in 1846 and who oversaw the planning of Dunedin and the Otago area, had established experimental plots of wheat and corn when he was surveying Dunedin. Otago patriarch Burns brought with him to Dunedin seeds, a 'Bull, Cow, Newfoundland' and a cat. Most colonists, in fact, introduced Eurasian plants. Jane McGlashan's (1827-1894) diary entry typified many of the time: 'We have many of the old home favourites here. Roses, Pansies, Carnations, daisies, hedges of Sweet Briar and the "bonny[,] bonny broom" which is perfectly glowing just now.' Along with the homestead, establishing a garden was justified because it improved what many saw as an uncivilised environment.

Clearing, building and enclosing constituted the general pattern of establishing settlement. No doubt most settler families would have appreciated Ellen Valpy's (1827-1904) pencil drawing of Forbury Farm in 1857 reproduced on the previous page<sup>2</sup>. The ploughed land, well-established homestead and outbuildings, and fenced paddocks represented what most settlers aimed to achieve in New Zealand.

Yet, for all this, it would be wrong to think that settlers did not appreciate native species. Jane Bannerman 'took great pride in watching the development' of their manse through clearing bush and cutting steps to the sea, but still enjoyed the native flora. Her brother Arthur travelled by boat to collect native shrubs to plant in their garden. That Arthur deliberately collected native plants shows that native species could be adapted for the European garden. And in the next essay, we shall learn more about romanticism and early conservation attempts in Otago.

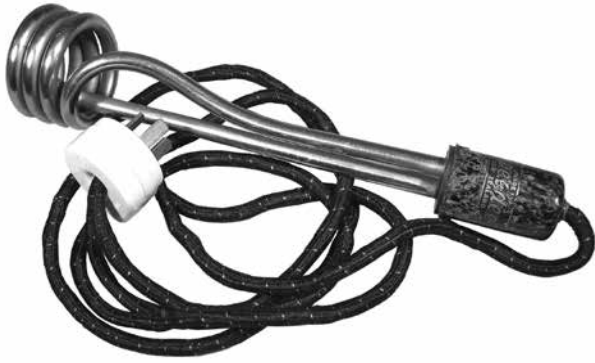
**Dr. James Beattie**

Department of History, University of Otago

---

<sup>2</sup>The eldest of the Valpy daughters, Ellen married her eldest cousin, Henry Jeffreys, in 1852. The marriage, however, was not successful and Ellen fell on hard times, no doubt disappointed at her inability to earn a living through art. Her sisters and mother were also gifted artists.

# The Appliance of Science

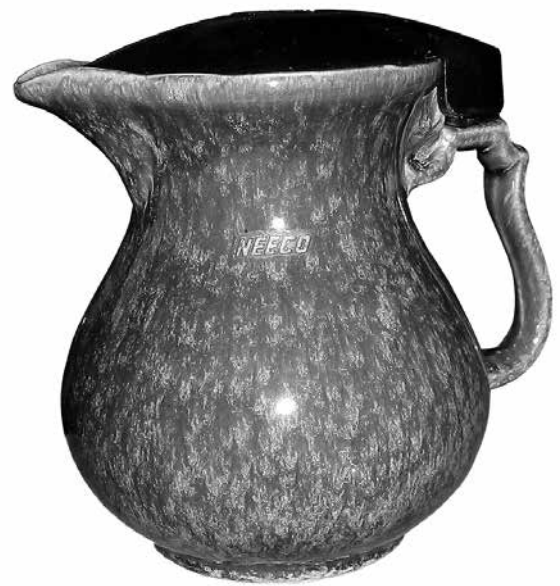


The Otago Settlers Museum has a fairly extensive range of electrical appliances, many of which were made in New Zealand. The aim of my research as an intern at the museum is to find out more about these New Zealand-made appliances and the local electrical appliance industry. I am focussing on small appliances such as radios, heaters and irons rather than larger ones like ranges and refrigerators. With over sixty small appliances in the OSM collection, and many of the manufacturers being relatively small companies that no longer exist, this is quite a daunting task.

I found that, with the exception of radios, which were manufactured here from the mid 1920s, few small appliances were manufactured in New Zealand until the mid 1930s. 'Speedee' appliances were some of the first to appear on the scene. These were made by HC Urlwin Ltd of Christchurch. The original range included an electric jug, a kettle, a toaster, an immersion heater, an iron and a heater. For some of these, like the heater in the OSM collection, most of the parts were made in Britain and put together here. HC Urlwin Ltd continued to manufacture until 1968, when the company was bought by PDL Industries Ltd. The museum has several 'Speedee' appliances. These include two irons, an immersion heater, a Speedee 'Hostess' toaster and a heater.



A prime example of a local manufacturer is the National Electrical and Engineering Company Ltd (Neeco). EW Ackland, Nelson Jones, and brothers Keith and Douglas Ramsay founded the company in Dunedin in 1906. In addition to wiring installation, the company were distributors of imported appliances. They also distributed domestically-made radios, and later manufactured their own ranges and small appliances. By the 1950s there were branches of the company in all New Zealand's main centres. The OSM collection contains several Neeco products: a 'Moderne' iron, a Temukaware electric kettle, and a radiant heater. Fisher & Paykel and Turnbull & Jones were also distributors of imported goods before they began manufacturing themselves.



Although I am not focussing solely on Otago, it has been interesting to look at those products manufactured here, or companies that have their roots here like Neeco. One significant Dunedin company is Shacklock, who began manufacturing heaters in the 1960s in addition to electric ranges, which they had been making as early as 1925. As well as several Shacklock heaters, the OSM collection contains a Pacemaker toaster, which was made by Venetta Products Ltd of Dunedin. Steelway Ltd and Rinnon Products Ltd are Dunedin-based companies that made heaters. Radio Wholesalers Ltd of Dowling Street made the Westminster Television in the OSM collection. 'Isbister' of North Dunedin made a cone heater element. Turnbull & Jones, although Wellington-based, also had a connection with Otago. RC Jones, one of the founding partners, was a dredge engineer in Otago who put the first electric dredge into operation on the upper Shotover River in 1889-90.

**Elsbeth Knewstubb**

Speedee immersion element c1935; Speedee 'Gem' iron c1937; Neeco kettle 1950s - Otago Settlers Museum collection

## Forthcoming Exhibitions

### Songs of Innocence

Photographs of a New Zealand childhood by John Pascoe  
11 March - 14 May

The wonder of New Zealand childhood is explored in this photographic exhibition from photographer John Pascoe (1908-72). He used his camera to express the joy he evidently felt in his children's presence, and to convey their joy of living.

'Songs of Innocence' focusses mainly on Pascoe's extensive documentation of his four daughters' lives from babyhood to their early teenage years through the 1940s and 50s. John Pascoe is well known for his photography documenting New Zealand for the Department of Internal Affairs between the late 1930s and the mid 1940s and for his recording of the country during the war.

The exhibition was developed by the Mahara Gallery, Waikanae, is curated by Janet Bayly and is toured by Exhibition Services Ltd. (See the museum shop news on page 8 for details of the book which accompanies the exhibition.)



### Cover Stories

Quilts old and new from the Otago Settlers Museum collection  
11 March - 14 May

This exhibition shows the very best of the museum's collection of historic quilts and patchwork. The quilts and throws in 'Cover Stories' are much more than functional necessities to ward off the cold on winter nights or hide shabby pieces of furniture. They are reflections of the skills and identities of their makers. They exemplify the techniques of traditional patchwork craft. They show a range of styles from plain and functional to elaborate and fashionable. To many, they are nothing short of works of art.

This is an Otago Settlers Museum exhibition in association with Southern Women, Southern Quilts — a celebration of 21 years of Quilters and Patchworkers of Otago Inc.



John Pascoe, *Fishy*. Sara, Whakatahuri, January 1949; John Pascoe, *Rabbit & Alice*, Spring 1946. Sara and Anna, 75 Main Rd, Eastbourne  
Patriotic patchwork quilt, 1884-1898 (detail) – Otago Settlers Museum collection

## Walk Dunedin Tours

In 2004 Val-mai Shaw (who was at this time my job-share partner in OSM Visitor Programmes) was visiting the United Kingdom. She was particularly taken with Exeter: this city has a 2000-year history and includes attractions such as the Roman city wall, Gothic cathedral and medieval Guildhall. Val-mai went on guided tours of a number of these historic sites. These tours were conducted by the Red Coats of Exeter, a group of approximately sixty volunteers. (There are approximately fifteen different tours which run daily with no need to book in advance. This is an important aspect much appreciated by visitors). Val-mai was impressed by the guides' wide range of knowledge, their enthusiasm and their dedication to their city.

On her return to Dunedin, Val-mai and I explored the possibilities of establishing a similar guided service to operate in our own inner city area. Dunedin may not have 2000 years of history but her story is exciting and unique, one that we wished to share with visitors and locals alike. After much discussion, and with the enthusiastic support of the OSM management team, we established the Walk Dunedin tours, which began in June 2005.

These tours operate Mondays to Fridays, leaving the Visitor Centre at 11 am. The focus is on Dunedin's architectural and social past. Within this context, groups visit sites such as the railway station, the Settlers Museum, the Exchange and First Church. We walk through the Octagon, the Triangle and the Square (the Oval is too far away). We even make time for a complimentary coffee en-route! Val-mai has conducted all these tours on a voluntary basis similar to that of the Red Coats of Exeter organisation.

From reasonably quiet beginnings (we expected this as the tours began in winter), the tours have grown in popularity. Over the past two months, numbers have reached their peak, and we all feel it is time to expand our base.

If you would like voluntarily to take part as a guide for the Walk Dunedin tours, we would love to hear from you! You need enthusiasm for our city, good communication skills and a reasonable degree of fitness. Apart from this, full training is given and a uniform is provided. The commitment would possibly be one day a week (11 am – 1 pm) on a regular basis, but we can negotiate.

We hope to hear from you!

### John Ingram

OSM Visitor Programmes

Telephone: 4742728 e-mail: john.ingram@dcc.govt.nz



Val-mai Shaw (left) and John Ingram (right) conduct a Walk Dunedin tour outside the Otago Settlers Museum

## Christmas Celebrations 2005

More than a hundred of our members gathered on 14 December to celebrate 'Our Very Own Southern Christmas,' beginning with a glass of summer punch and a visit to Pixie Town. This was presented even more attractively than last year, with the whole education area transformed into a magical grotto. The additional Pixie Town scenes, which the Association has helped refurbish, were of special interest. We were grateful to John Ingram, the Museum's Visitor Programmes Co-Ordinator and part-time Santa Claus, for coming in at the end of a long day to enable members to enjoy the delightful display — it was by no means only for children!

After welcoming members, Melville Carr made an exciting announcement: the first summer intern at the Museum had just been appointed, under an innovative joint venture of the OSA, the Otago University History Department and the Settlers Museum. Professor Barbara Brookes from the History Department then described the origins of the scheme. From time to time the Canadian Government had funded internships at the Settlers Museum for students interested in a career in museum work. What if something similar could be done locally? Extended discussions led to an annual summer internship financed by the OSA and supervised in a specific research project by appropriate Museum staff, which would be awarded as a University History prize to a student from a second year course, 'Packaging the Past.' Professor Brookes introduced Elspeth Knewstubb, the first recipient of the prize. (Elspeth reports on her project on page 3.)

Storyteller Kaitrin McMullan (whose moving rendering of stories of shipboard life has entranced successive groups of visitors to 'Across the Ocean Waves') then took us on a nostalgic visit to past Otago Christmases. It was a tale of contrasts, from the 'scandal' of a brawl with visiting American whalers at the local pub on the settlers' first Christmas in 1848, through years in which family celebrations were constrained by Presbyterian disapproval of frivolity at a solemn season and a general Scottish preference for Hogmanay, to the 1890s, when the joy of Christmas trees and gifts described by Dot's Little Folk in letters to the *Otago Daily Times* was set against the bleak misery of John A Lee's impoverished family in *Children of the Poor*.

Singer Anna Bowen illustrated the different periods with appropriate songs, in some of which the members, and Anna's three young children, joined. (We all knew 'Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer, do,' written in 1892 — amazing, isn't it?) The haunting sadness Anna brought to the locally-written post-war hit 'Blue Smoke' lingers in the memory.

Finally, members contributed some of their own Christmas stories, with the wit and verve we have come to expect of them on such occasions, before we broke for a festive supper and conversation. It was a happy ending to an interesting year.



# Pixie Town

Our second year and another success! The crowds flocked in again with nine thousand four hundred and forty-eight visitors! And what reactions did we get?

People loved the three new units (I think the fire fighters may have been the favourite)

*AND*

They loved the newly-painted backgrounds for each unit

*AND*

Santa felt alive and well at the end of it all because there were TWO of us

*AND*

Credit for all of the above goes to the Settlers Association.

I seem to spend a lot of my time saying thank you to the Association for your support of a wide range of Visitor Programmes activities. The Museum is extremely lucky to have such supportive friends in our endeavours to provide a wider range of educational and leisure opportunities for the people of Dunedin and the growing number of tourists attracted to our lovely city.

Our aims for Pixie Town this year are to focus on strengthening the ageing mechanical components that run each unit and (money permitting) to begin restoration of the ferris wheel. We have three units left to restore and the ferris wheel is by far the most dramatic and attractive to children. Unfortunately the wheel and many of the mechanical components are missing so this one is quite a challenge. Mind you, as you can see in the before and after views of the fire fighters unit, Donald McPherson (our expert) is up to the task!

I'm really looking forward to maintaining our partnership for future years and would like to take this opportunity to thank the Association once again.

**John Ingram**



The Pixietown fire fighters unit before and after restoration - Otago Settlers Museum collection

---

## Te Papa looks at the Scots' Contribution to New Zealand

In 2007 New Zealand's Scots will become the fifth community to be profiled in the national museum Te Papa's Community Gallery. Previous groups to feature have been the Chinese, Dutch, Indian and Italian communities. The Scots display will be the first time one of New Zealand's mainstream British groups has been the focus of the Community Gallery. The initial concept focusses on the great Scottish migration of the nineteenth century, Scottish contributions to New Zealand society and culture, and the intriguing question of just what constitutes 'Scottishness'.

Settlers Museum curator Seán Brosnahan will be involved in the display's development as a member of the Community Advisory Group that Te Papa customarily assembles to prepare its Community Gallery displays. The function of this group is to extend the consultative process into the wider community. Accordingly Seán will be looking to the Settlers Association as a potential support group and will provide us with further information as the display's development continues.

---

## For Your Diary

### The 158<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Founding of Otago Church Service Sunday 19 March, 10:00 am

The Reverend Martin Baker, Minister, First Church of Otago, extends a warm invitation to all members of the Otago Settlers Association to attend the service to mark the 158<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Otago.

### Otago Anniversary Day Dinner 23 March 2006

The Association will join the Port Chalmers Historical Society to celebrate Anniversary Day at a dinner on Thursday 23 March in the recently-refurbished Port Chalmers Town Hall. All members and their friends are welcome. The guest speaker Dougal Stevenson will talk on 'Remembering Isaac Stevenson, Port Chalmers Identity'. Tickets are \$38 per person and are available from the OSA Secretary, PO Box 74, Dunedin, the Otago Settlers Museum and the Scottish Shop in George Street. Cash or cheque only, please: cheques should be made out to the Otago Anniversary Day Dinner Committee.

### Afternoon Tea at the Savoy

A special afternoon tea for members will be held at the Savoy from 2:30 to 4:00 pm on Wednesday 5 April. It promises to be an interlude from a more leisurely, genteel time (at least for some!). Music will be provided by Vivienne McLean. Tickets are \$12 per person and are available from the OSA Secretary, PO Box 74, Dunedin.

---

## From the Otago Settlers Museum Shop

### Gifts

#### Ben Lomond lavender products

A new range available at the museum shop, Ben Lomond lavender products are hand-made from organically-grown lavender in Central Otago. Products currently in stock include:

Lavender Soap: made using palm, coconut and macadamia nut oils. Lavender and lemongrass essential oils help calm and heal dry skin and ensure a long-lasting fragrance.

Price to members: \$4.00 (Postage \$1.50)

Lavender and Lime Shower Gel (200ml): derived from vegetable and mineral sources and enhanced with pure aromatherapy-grade essential oils of lavender and lime.

Price to members: \$22.40 (Postage \$3.50)

### General Information

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

A complete list of items for sale in the museum shop is now available. If you would like a copy, please contact the OSA Secretary, PO Box 74, Dunedin.

Please make cheques payable to the DUNEDIN CITY COUNCIL and post orders to:  
Otago Settlers Museum, PO Box 566, Dunedin.



---

## Books

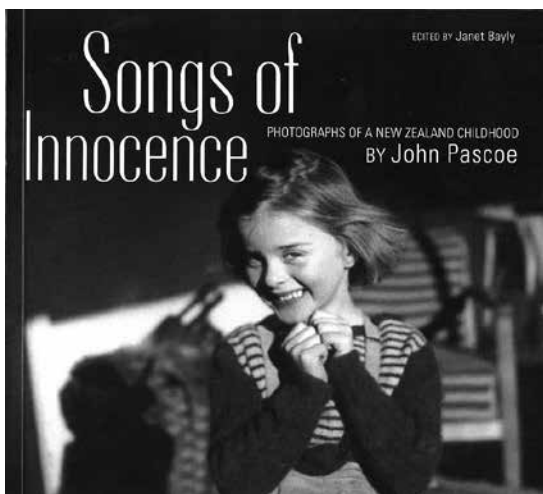
*Songs of Innocence: Photographs of a New Zealand Childhood*  
by John Pascoe, edited by Janet Bayly

John Pascoe has been described as New Zealand's greatest unrecognised photographer of the twentieth century. Yet he was the first of a handful of practitioners (including Brian Brake, Ans Westra and Marti Friedlander) who pioneered documentary photography in New Zealand between the late 1930s and the 1960s.

A poetic distillation from the Pascoe family archive, *Songs of Innocence* foregrounds Pascoe's private photography, revealing a nuanced record of the early lives of his four daughters. An intimate portrait of family life in New Zealand during the 1940s and 50s emerges from more than sixty delightful photographs, most of which have not been seen outside the family before.

Editor Janet Bayly considers this body of work alongside Pascoe's public work and gives us the most complete and insightful account yet of this key figure in New Zealand photographic history.

Price to members \$35.00 (Postage and packing \$3.50)



*Heather's Gold:*

*A Story of a Pioneer Family in the Otago Gold Fields*  
by Donald Offwood

'An historically-correct novel telling the Otago pioneer gold story.'

This historical novel picks up the Otago story from where Offwood's last novel *Oatcakes to Otago* finished, with the discovery of gold in Central Otago. Thousands of men, and a few hardy women, gave up what they were doing in California, Canton, Victoria and Dunedin and went into The Interior to make their fortunes.

The McDonald family is imaginary, but representative of real characters in the true Otago story; nearly all the situations they encounter are historically correct. This is a story of the courage, perseverance and independence of the Otago pioneer character, forged in extreme conditions of climate and deprivation.

Price to members \$31.50 (Postage and packing \$3.50)

*Moko: Maori Tattooing in the Twentieth Century*

by Michael King; photographs by Marti Friedlander

This is the moving story of a Maori art form that underwent a brief resurgence and then all but died out. It is also the story of the last generation of Maori women who wore the traditional moko.

To research this book, historian Michael King travelled thousands of kilometres through the hinterland of New Zealand to find and speak with those who were tattooed, or with people who had first-hand knowledge of the custom. He located over seventy women who had been given the moko in traditional circumstances. Only one is still alive.

Marti Friedlander's photographs illustrate with skill and compassion the moko itself, the women who wore it and the environments in which they lived.

Price to members \$31.40 (Postage and packing \$3.50)



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

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*

**OTAGO SETTLERS ASSOCIATION**

31 Queens Gardens  
PO Box 74 Dunedin  
Ph / Fax 03 477 8677

**OTAGO SETTLERS MUSEUM**

31 Queens Gardens  
PO Box 566 Dunedin  
Ph 03 477 5052 Fax 03 474 2727