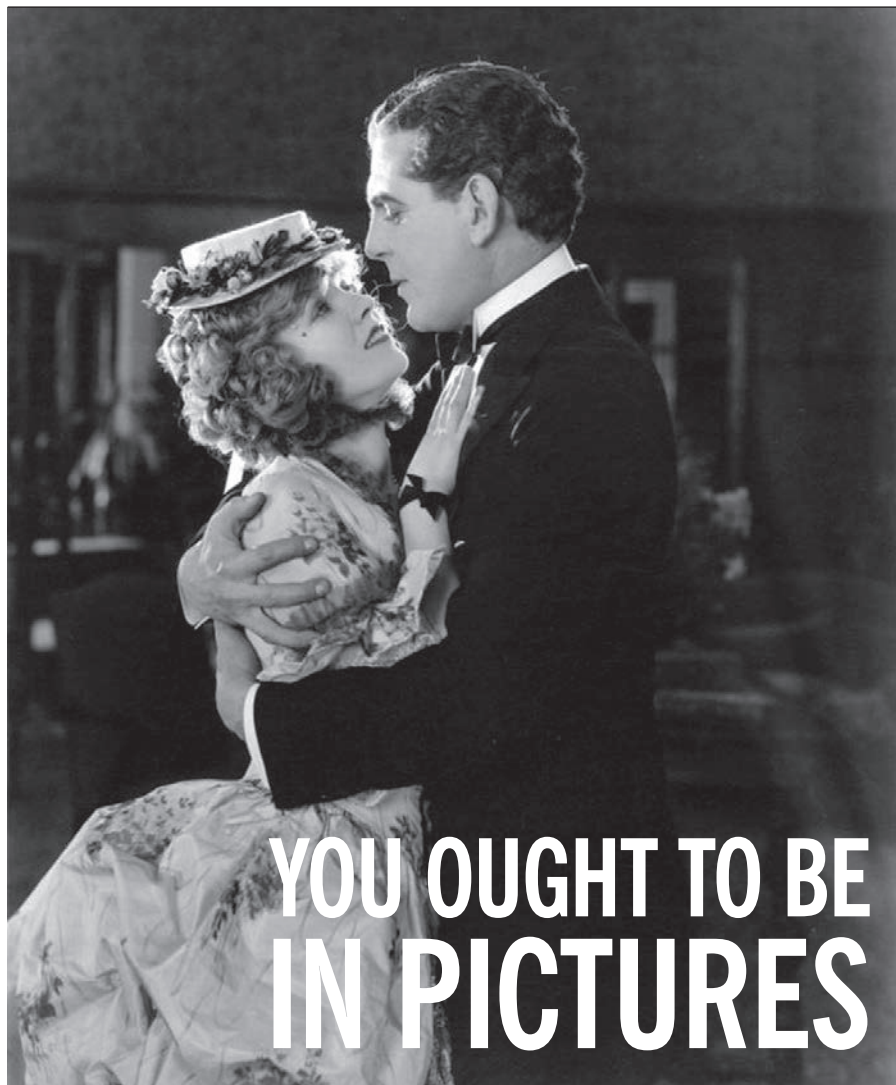


OTAGO SETTLERS NEWS

OTAGO SETTLERS ASSOCIATION *proud to be friends of* **toitū** OTAGO SETTLERS MUSEUM

AUTUMN 2019 ISSUE 140



Sam Neill springs to mind when we think of film stars who have called Dunedin their home town, but he is far from being the only one. One of the city's earliest matinee idols was Alexander ('Alick') Patrick, born in 1885. The son of a wealthy farmer, he attended Otago Boys' High School and appeared in amateur opera productions in Dunedin before leaving for London to train as a dentist. While there, he found 'his mumming proclivities were too strong, and pulled him irresistibly towards the footlights.' Alick 'stepped right into the front rank of popular melodramatic heroes.' On returning to Dunedin he practised as a dentist for about a year, but the smell of the greasepaint was too strong to resist. Against his father's wishes he went on to have a successful theatrical career from 1910 in various JC Williamson productions as a 'young beauty actor.' He was described as 'a very imposing man, and also a most capable actor.' Alick adopted the stage name Jerome Patrick and married the actress Joan Meynell in Sydney in 1912. This was to cause him problems in 1921 when she sued for divorce and it was found he had not married under his legal name. Jerome had left her behind in 1913 when he sailed for America to try his luck on the New York stage. Shortly before he left Sydney he received this advice from an old hand: 'Let me tell you, my boy, there are 10,000 actors out of work in America. I suppose you will be cast a leading man in Broadway.'

As it turned out, he was right — Jerome 'took a gambler's chance and went to Broadway' and within four days landed the lead part in a romantic drama. By 1915 he was making £60 a week (worth about \$9,000 today), though he sent next to nothing of this to his deserted wife. He became a leading man in David Belasco's theatrical company, which had nurtured the careers of, among others, Lionel Barrymore, Lillian Gish, DW Griffith and Mary Pickford (whose former stage name Dolly Nicholson prompted rumours she was in reality a Dunedin girl of the same name). The *Free Lance* columnist 'Footlight' reported in 1918 that the 'handsome

Left: Dunedinite Jerome Patrick with Mary Miles Minter in *Don't Call Me a Little Girl* (1921). **Right, top-bottom:** Cecil Scott and Dale Austen in *The Bush Cinderella* (1928) - The Film Archive, www.ngataonga.org.nz ; Colin Tapley in 1933; Ra Hould (aka Ronald Sinclair).



young New Zealand actor' had 'made a position for himself on the American stage as [a] juvenile leading man, his undoubted good looks and good breeding, allied to dramatic ability, gaining him the position. He is one of the few Austral[as]ian actors who are University men and who had moved in good social circles before he launched upon a stage career.'

As the Great War went on, Jerome began to attract criticism for avoiding military service. He responded that he was willing to fight, but only 'if anybody touched New Zealand'. Once the United States belatedly joined the fray, he travelled to Toronto and in June 1917 joined the Canadian army the day after his 32nd birthday, telling the recruiting officer he was unmarried. Jerome was assigned to the Overseas Training Company at the University of Toronto, but within a couple of months was discharged as medically unfit. He suffered intense pain in his feet when marching, but despite this was able to return to tread the boards of the New York stage. As early as 1914 there had been rumours of his having been offered roles in the 'silent drama,' that is, films. Yet he was lured to Hollywood only late in his career, in 1919. Jerome appeared in at least ten films, including *Three Men and a Girl* (1919), *Her First Elopement* (1920), *Don't Call Me Little Girl* (1921), *The Other Woman* (1921) and (posthumously) *Sinners in Silk* (starring Hedda Hopper, 1924).

To his public, Jerome did not seem to live the film-star lifestyle. *Free Lance* claimed 'In the streets he looks like a matinee idol about whom every girl in the city would rave, yet he lives the quietest and most secluded of lives in a beautiful flat surrounded by his books and pictures.' He had inherited a fortune on the death of his father 'but he still says that, if there were no stage, he would not care to live.' The reality was altogether more sordid. He had been rejected for military service because of several ailments related to his heroin addiction and a range of venereal diseases. He confessed to having suffered several nervous breakdowns, and the medical board found him given to 'Sudden fits of anger;' he was 'Rational but depressed, emotional and talkative about [his] ailments.' When Jerome revisited Dunedin in 1920 he spent the time in a private hospital being treated for an unspecified complaint. His sudden death at the age of 39 in 1923 was ascribed to heart disease.



Perhaps then it was for the best that the 'modest and unaffected' Dunedin beauty Thelma McMillan missed her chance to become a film star. She won the first Miss New Zealand contest in 1926, and part of the prize was a screen test. Her mother forbade it, so she obediently returned to her job at Arthur Barnett's. Dunedin being the seat of beauty in those days, the second Miss New Zealand was also naturally a local girl, Dale Austen. She had already won a screen test competition organised by an American film company, and her mother was all for it. In the course of ten weeks in Hollywood in early 1928, Dale was given minor roles in several dozen films, including *Diamond Handcuffs*, *The Actress* (with Norma Shearer), *Detectives*, *The Loves of Louis and Polly Preferred* (the last two seem not to have been released). She was accompanied to California by the journalist and entertainer Bathie Stuart, formerly of Dunedin, who had herself appeared on film in 1925 as the lead in *The Adventures of Algy*, an Australian production.

'It all seems too wonderful to be true,' the 17-year-old Dale told reporters in her dressing room at MGM. She was given an official reception at City Hall and met the Governor of California: 'I began to feel like the Duchess of York ... I feel just the luckiest girl in the world.' Almost seventy years later, she recalled that Louis B Mayer of MGM had warned her to look out for the predatory 'sheiks' in Hollywood: these handsome heartbreakers 'will use you and cast you aside.'

Top left: Jerome Patrick (far right) in *Three Men and a Girl* (1919) - University of Washington Libraries JWS24521.

Top right: Jerome Patrick (top right) depicted on the poster for *The Other Woman* (1921).



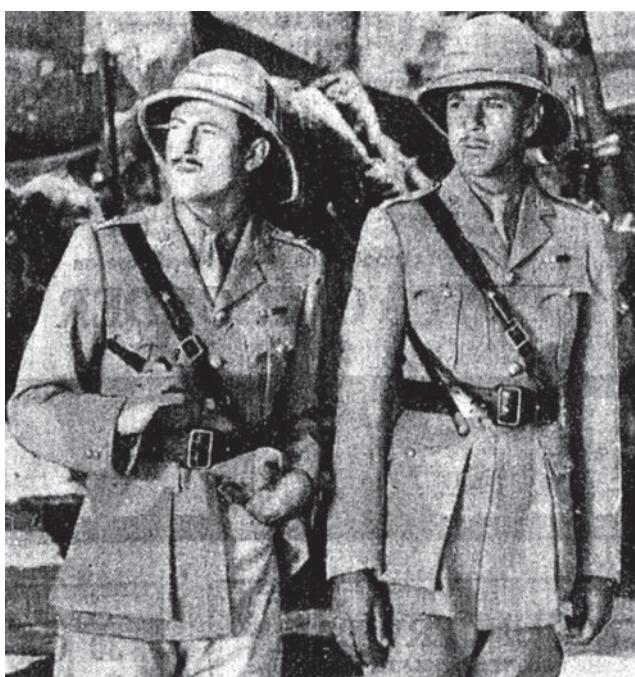
A documentary, *Miss New Zealand in Movieland*, was made for home consumption, and Dale was considered for a Laurel and Hardy film, finding the former 'a little rather wizened Cockney.' She also met Charlie Chaplin, who was 'getting old. His hair is quite grey. I was surprised to find that he spoke without any trace of Americanisms. He appeared to be very English in every way.' (Of course in the days of silent films, hardly any of his millions of fans knew what he sounded like; he had recently turned 39.) Contrary to malicious rumours, Dale was happy to report, Mary Pickford was not getting too fat for pictures, while Douglas Fairbanks was 'as brown as a berry.' Miss Austen had one starring role, as the hero's girlfriend in *The Bushranger*, which was set in Tasmania. She was offered a five-year film contract, but decided to come home: 'the Hollywood swinging scene was parties, drinking, sex ... I didn't drink; I was unprepared for the fast life, so I turned it down.'

On her return, Dale appeared in the melodrama *The Bush Cinderella* (filmed in and around Auckland) and the comedy *A Daughter of Dunedin* before retiring from her screen career of less than a year. She remained a local celebrity: when Admiral Byrd's expedition left for the Antarctic in January 1929, she presented the ship's crew with a stuffed kiwi (a real one) as a mascot. In early 1931 she was reported to be leaving for London in the hope of breaking into the talkies there. If true, this seems not to have come to anything, as she was back in Dunedin by July. Dale married Ivan Nicholson in 1933 and they moved to Australia the following year; she died in Sydney in 2007.

Talking pictures had taken over by 1933 when Paramount staged an international hunt for new talent. The 'Search for Beauty' attracted ten thousand applicants from Australasia, South Africa, North America, Britain and Ireland, and those on the short list were given screen tests. The 30 winners then were offered film contracts, among them the 'Oomph Girl' Ann Sheridan and Buster Crabbe, the original Flash Gordon, but also Colin Tapley of Dunedin and Joyce Neilson of Wellington. 'Charming, well-built and good-looking,' Colin worked for the nationwide grocery firm Oswald M Smith & Co, and was already well known in amateur theatrical circles. He was a qualified pilot, having served in the RAF in 1930-32; his father Harold



Left: Poster for *The Bush Cinderella* (1928) **Right:** Poster for Paramount's 1933 'Search for Beauty'. One of the 30 international contest winners was Colin Tapley of Dunedin who went on to establish a successful acting career in Hollywood.



was mayor of the city and MP for North Dunedin. At the civic send-off in Auckland for the prospective stars, the mayor said he knew Tapley Senior well, adding 'with a smile that a picture star could become famous in a night, and that was more than could be said of a mayor.'



Colin was certainly to rub shoulders with the famous: he co-starred with Gary Cooper and the young David Niven, and was once considered as the male lead opposite Mae West. 'An eligible bachelor,' reported the gossip columns in 1938, 'he has never met a girl who held a great deal of interest for him ... he has not developed the reputed Hollywood attitude to marriage and divorce.' Though 'love-proof,' he was a practised kisser, offering the advice that a 'film hero must "watch his angle" when kissing before the cameras,' while his leading lady 'must be careful ... not to squash her nose.' Colin was to appear in almost 80 films, among them *Lives of a Bengal Lancer* (1935). He was Captain Dobbin in the pioneering Technicolor film *Becky Sharp* (1935), and played the scientist Sir William Glanville in *The Dam Busters* (1955). This was only fitting as he had volunteered for the Royal Canadian Air Force in 1940 and was stationed in England as a flight controller. There in 1943 Flight Lieutenant Tapley married Patricia Lyon, daughter of Major General Sir Percival Hambro, and after the war they moved to Otago. They set up a launch service on Lake Wanaka, but their three-year-old son died in 1947 and the couple returned to England and the film business. Colin had a successful postwar film and television career there, often playing a policeman, and appeared on screen for the last time in 1969; he retired to the Cotswolds, and died there in 1995.

Colin Tapley was well established in Hollywood in 1936 when he took under his wing a fellow Dunedinite, the child actor 'Ra' Hould. Dame Sybil Thorndike had been impressed with the then nine-year-old Richard Arthur Hould's stage performances when he had toured the country with her a couple of years earlier, and she encouraged his parents to take him to Hollywood. So far his only film role had been in New Zealand's first locally made talkie, *Down on the Farm* (1935), made while he was still in Standard IV at the Union Street School. The eponymous farm was on the Taieri Plains and many of the actors were Dunedin amateurs. The *ODT's* reviewer generously said the romantic comedy was

Top left: Colin Tapley with Gary Cooper on the set of *Lives of a Bengal Lancer* (1935). **Bottom left:** Colin Tapley and Mamo Clark on a poster for the German release of *Der weisse Tiger*, aka *Boolo* (1938). **Right:** Colin Tapley in 1948 - Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington WA-15648a-F



a 'burlesque of the best kind' and the child actors gave 'life and laughter to many of the best scenes in the film.' The British press was less kind. *Cine Weekly* thought 'The dialogue is a joke, the acting amateurish and the photography poor. After this our colonial cousins will be well advised to restrict their exports to mutton.' The surviving fragments of the film (which can be watched at www.ngataonga.org.nz) are unlikely to make the viewer regret that so much of the remainder has been lost.

On the voyage to California young Ra captivated several prominent American passengers, so much so that they circulated a petition urging film producers to give him a major role. On reaching Hollywood, the locals 'were deeply impressed by his affability and poise,' and he 'explained to inquirers that his name signified "Sun God" in the Maori language.' (He must have been thinking of the ancient Egyptian god; his initials were of course RA.) With Colin Tapley's help, the 12 year-old was snapped up by Paramount on a seven-year contract for £20 a week (about \$2,400 today). Ra made 16 films between 1936 and 1942; he starred alongside Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland in *Thoroughbreds Don't Cry* (1937), with Laurence Olivier and Viven Leigh in *That Hamilton Woman* (1941) and with Errol Flynn and Ronald Reagan in *Desperate Journey* (1942). MGM changed his name to Ronald Sinclair in 1938, fearing the irreverent public would render 'Ra Hould' as 'Wahoo.' (The studio first suggested Ronny St Clair, after his home suburb.)

Ronald Sinclair joined the US Army during the war, but did not return to acting afterwards. He hoped to become a cameraman but instead took up editing, working with Roger Corman. He edited *The Raven* (1963), which starred Boris Karloff, Peter Lorre, Vincent Price and Jack Nicholson. Ronald also edited Nicholson's own film *The Trip* (1967), among many others. He went on to specialise in post-production sound editing; his best-known work was on the first two *Die Hard* films (1998 & 1990). A few months after a visit home in 1992, he died in California.

If the OSA's new children's video competition takes off, perhaps there will be a few more local film stars and producers in the not too distant future.

A Watching Brief

If you are inclined to complain that there is never anything worth watching on television, here is the answer: The Film Heritage Trust has more than 500 hours' worth of varied and fascinating film from Otago's past digitised on DVD. Some excerpts were shown at a recent meeting of the Tuesday Club, including film of the opening of King's High School in 1936; Lance Richdale and the early days of the albatross colony on Taiaroa Head in 1938; colour film of the Otago Mounted Rifles encamped at Sutton shortly before the war; the opening of the Waitaki road bridge in 1956; and the dancer and choreographer Shona MacTavish (happily still with us, aged 99) striking artistic attitudes on Bondi Beach in 1943. There is plenty more, and if you would like to help the Trust catalogue the collection by identifying and describing their contents, contact Maurice Hayward: filmheritagetrust@gmail.com or telephone 4739 506. Like the comedian Peter Cook, you will then be able to dodge any unwelcome social engagements by saying 'Hang on ... I'll just check my diary ... Oh, dear: I find I'm watching television that night.'

Ra Hould (aka Ronald Sinclair) top, and bottom right, had a starring role in *Thoroughbreds Don't Cry* (1937) alongside Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland.

OSA Essay Competition

Last year, Sara Hall won the Association's inaugural essay competition for an Otago migration story, closely followed by these two prize-winning compositions:

Assisted, Owing Money

Hello — my name is Jane King. I am 14 years old, and this is my story:

2 June 1860

I am with my family about to board the ship *Robert Henderson*. I am standing next to my younger siblings Adam (aged 12), Agnes and Michael (both aged 9), and Margaret (aged 7). I also have three older brothers, John (aged 16), James (aged 20) and Alexander, as well as four older sisters, Beatrice (aged 18), Mary (aged 22), Isabella (aged 24) and Helen (aged 28). My parents show us the boat we will be boarding; it has three masts and looks daunting and impressive at the same time.

Our luggage consists of four trunks containing all our clothes, bedding, eating utensils and all our belongings that we are allowed to take after they were checked by the boat owners.

All I see around me is industrial smog blanketing the city and these majestic ships. I feel scared of the unknown, especially as we will be leaving the only home I know and living with others we do not know; but I am also excited by the prospect of going to a new home where we will be going to a better life.

All I see is the dark bunks with glimmers of light coming through the top deck giving us a glimpse of the sky. I am with my older sisters as we have been put into the single women's berth, while my brothers are in the single men's berth. My younger siblings are with my parents in the married couples' berth.

My eldest sister has just come to see me, bearing sad news. She held my hand while telling me that my mother had succumbed to a fever and had passed away overnight on 14 June 1860. I then cried and she comforted me, telling me she will look after me and it will be all right. The thought of going to a new land gives us hope. My mother was buried at sea and we all said our goodbyes when she left us, together with another child I did not know.

The trip is becoming a nightmare: the cramped conditions, terrible food and vermin are not pleasant but I have this image of the new land and this gives me hope. I have also met another girl my age called Elizabeth, and we pass the time telling stories, needlework and sharing dreams.

Today is 3 September; everyone wakes to the sound of yelling. At first I thought it was another fight until I heard the word 'land,' and I knew we had made it to a new land called New Zealand. We were docked at a place called Port Chalmers and we were

then transferred to this small island due to our boat's having scarlet fever on board. We stayed here for a week and then walked to town. My brothers with my older sisters helped carry our trunks too. This was a very long walk and my father was talking to my eldest sister saying he was not sure how he was going to pay for our passage here. I was just pleased that we were no longer on that wretched boat, and looking up at the blue skies and hearing the birds sing made this trip worthwhile.

My Dad has been doing odd jobs but he has now a job as a shepherd on this farm with his new wife, and we have a better life than the one we left in Scotland.

Jemma Gordon (Second Prize)



MV Rangitane via Panama

This is the story of a life-changing journey that my grandparents made in 1967. They emigrated from a place where lots of New Zealanders came from originally, England. They lived in a small village called Barrington near Cambridge. It all started when they were newly married. Grandad had just finished his PhD and was applying for jobs. One interview would change his life forever.

Nanny and Grandad had made a deal that whichever job offer he got, they would have to take. The first interview he went to was in Birmingham. On the day, all fingers and toes were crossed in the hope that he would get the job, otherwise their last option would be moving to New Zealand. The interview was terrible; Grandad's feelings of his not getting the job ended up being correct: he didn't get the job. So it was bags packed and off to New Zealand. They were leaving behind the place where they were both born and raised. They would now take the trip that would either make or break the rest of their lives.

As they walked down to the end of the wharf, there stood the gleaming black ship that they would call home for the next six weeks, the MV *Rangitane*. The last goodbyes were the ones that brought tears to their eyes. But through the tears they saw adventure and excitement. Going on the six-week boat voyage with a son ten months old would be a struggle. As they climbed

MV *Rangitane* - National Maritime Museum, Greenwich (PAH0422)

aboard the ship there was no turning back; their little family was off on a big adventure.

Soon after they had set sail they had to pass through the Bay of Biscay. It is known for its bad weather. For them this was the scariest part of the journey: rough wind and huge waves. My Nanny recalls: 'we could see a Russian tanker on the horizon. One minute it was there, then the waves got so high it was gone.' But the trip wasn't all bad. They stopped off at Curacao, off the coast of South America, the Panama Canal, and passed through the beautiful islands of the Galapagos. They say that the most memorable part of the journey was stopping at Tahiti and lying in the hot sun on the beach and snorkelling amongst the fish and coral.

Six weeks might as well have been six years. But one fateful day their journey came to an end when they arrived in Wellington, New Zealand. When they first set foot on New Zealand ground their journey was just beginning. The same day they arrived they got on a plane and flew to Dunedin. It took a while for them to settle into New Zealand as they had no friends, so they were rather lonely; but once they got to know people and make friends, they started feeling more welcome.

Many years later, Grandad visited the University of Birmingham, the place where he had been interviewed for the job that he didn't get. He found out that the person who did get the job had died because of the asbestos that was in the office Grandad would have had. So luckily he didn't get the job, otherwise he might have died.

Nanny and Grandad had three more children eventually, and each of them had three children of their own, so there are plenty of grandchildren to tell their story to.

Two years ago they marked the 50th anniversary of their arrival in New Zealand. It was an amazing celebration with a cake that looked like the MV *Rangitane*. All their amazing friends that helped them settle in had come. It brought back all the memories of the incredible, life-changing journey they had made here, to Aotearoa.

Sophie Orchiston (Third Prize)



The dining saloon on board MV *Rangitane*.



Christmas Meeting

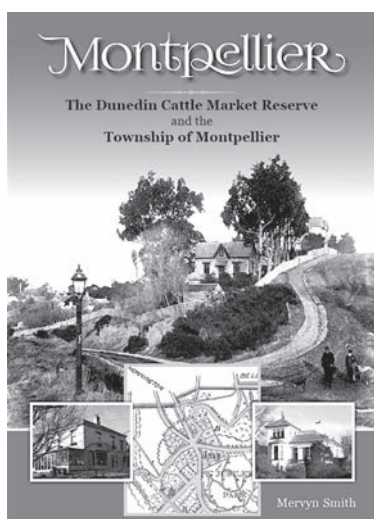
The Saints entertained a large gathering in the Museum foyer in the early evening of Friday, 14 December. A seven-piece brass ensemble, they are an offshoot of the larger St Kilda Brass band. Their leader, John McAdam, introduced a varied programme of well-loved tunes to sing and dance along with, starting with Josef Wagner's 'Under the Double Eagle' and Ivor Novello's 'Keep the Home-Fires Burning.' Then, 'to kick that First World War centenary out the door,' 'Pack Up Your Troubles in Your Old Kit-Bag,' followed by Septimus Winner's 'Der Deitcher's Dog' ('Where, Oh Where Has My Little Dog Gone?') in waltz time, which brought out the dancers. Next, Ray Noble's 'The Very Thought of You' was stylishly sung by John's son Alex (several members of the audience were later overheard remarking on his beautiful voice). After a short break the Saints returned with 'Beyond the Sea,' the version of Charles Trenet's 'La Mer' made famous by Bobby Darin. Everyone joined in for a selection of Christmas carols, though President Pete Smith, for one, confessed the 'Glo-or-or-or-arias' in the chorus of 'Ding Dong Merrily on High' were heavy going. Alex McAdam rounded off the evening with a fine rendition of Irving Berlin's 'White Christmas.'

The evening was an opportunity to thank and farewell our Administrator Kylie Darragh, who has been lured away to the University in order to bring some rigour to the administration of that institution. Her successor Gemma Murphy was welcomed, and the meeting ended with seasonal refreshments and the drawing of raffles.

The Archive

The Museum's archive is closed temporarily, but will reopen in September with the cataloguing of the collection much improved and more comprehensive. The Archivist, Emma Knowles, is busy with research and working on the backlog of archival donations that are being processed by the donation teams. However, the Research Centre, including the OASES database, remains open.

Book News



Mervyn Smith, *Montpellier: The Dunedin Cattle Market Reserve and the Township of Montpellier*, (Dunedin 2018). 84 pages, paperback. Copies available for \$25 from the author at 16 Montpellier Street, Dunedin 9016.

Charles Kettle, when he laid out the streets of Dunedin in 1846, sensibly provided for a cattle market in the town belt. From 1872, livestock driven in from the country were held on a nine-acre block at the top of Serpentine Avenue. It was never much of a success, however, and the city council eventually decided to subdivide the land for housing. In 1887–88 it sold 21-year leases for building plots adjoining Victoria Park. The area soon became known as Montpellier, though the reason for the choice of name remains unknown. Several of the houses built in the early years still stand and will be familiar to many who know this particularly attractive area on the fringes of Mornington: they include The Argoed, Pokohiwi, Wharekura, Te Ngaio, Otoitu and Alfred Tapper's house on the corner of Maori Road opposite the bowling green. Like our Museum, the grand residence Otoitu takes its name from the nearby creek, and it too was designed by JA Burnside.

OSA member Merv Smith has lived in the locality for more than half a century and has thoroughly researched the houses and the families who brought them to life, as well as the High Street School and the Kaituna Bowling and Lawn Tennis Club, the

sites of both of which are now sadly abandoned. More than 70 photographs and maps illustrate the book, which includes the adjacent part of Alva Street that disrupts the otherwise perfect symmetry of Montpellier. Many readers will recognise members of local families such as the Camerons, Malcolms, Mirams and Seelyes of Meadow Street; the Barrs, Crusts, Roberts and Sims (Queens Drive); the Sises (Montpellier Street); the Georges and Flavells (Maori Road); and the Hamer, Hazlett, Langlands and Paterson families of Alva Street. Many prominent businessmen lived in the area's grander houses, including Arthur Barnett, Robert Forsyth Barr, Henry Crust, Alexander Paterson, Charles Rattray, James Roberts and the architect NYA Wales (who did not design his own house). Prominent women residents included Jean Begg of the YWCA and Corso, and Olive Fairbairn of the Order of St John. The township even boasts a former President of the OESA, the estate agent Fred Knight who lived at Wharekura in Queens Drive.

For Your Diary

Otago Anniversary Day Dinner

This year's Otago Anniversary Day Dinner will be held on Saturday, 23 March at the Dunedin Club in Melville Street. The speaker will be Dr Royden Somerville QC, Chancellor of the University, on the subject 'The University of Otago — 150 years.' A cash bar will operate from 6.30pm for a 7pm start. Dress lounge suits. Tickets are available from the Otago Settlers Association or the Scottish Shop at 17 George Street. Since places are limited, early application is advisable.

Members of the Association are entitled to a handy discount of 15% on the cost of books and other items from the Museum shop.



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 admin@otago.settlers.org.nz

 **Otago Daily Times**

The Otago Daily Times supports Toitū Otago Settlers Museum

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