OTAGO SETTLERS MUSEUM

OTAGO SETTLERS NEWS

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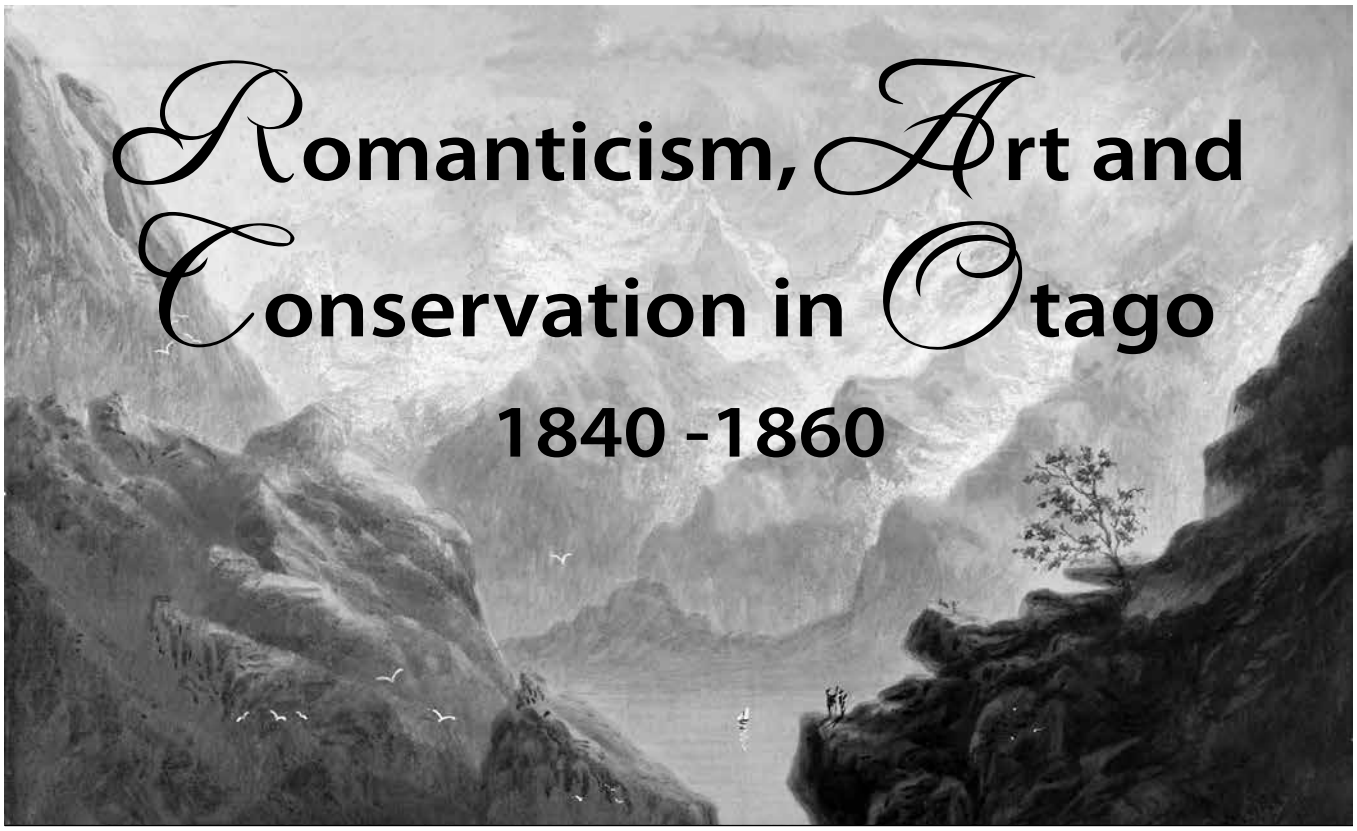
OTAGO SETTLERS ASSOCIATION

Romanticism, Art and Conservation in Otago 1840 -1860



> The promise of profit provided sufficient moral warrant in an atmosphere where human self-interest determined morality and the natural physical order was not seen as deserving of any necessary respect.*

Is this correct? Were all Otago's early settlers simply driven by self-interest, oblivious to morality and the natural environment around them? This article, the second part of an essay exploring settler attitudes to the Otago environment between 1840 and 1860, questions this interpretation. It looks at the variety of settlers' artistic responses and early attempts at conservation. The first essay demonstrated the importance of 'improvement' as a means of 'civilising' Otago through introductions of Eurasian plants and animals, and the making of farms.

*Alan Grey, *Aotearoa and New Zealand: a historical geography*, p.23.

In undertaking the arduous and dangerous journey to the other end of the world, Otago's settlers sought out their 'Promised Land.' There, they hoped to re-establish 'the organic links between nature and community, and individual and community, which had been destroyed by unfettered capitalism.' They sought to plant a Godly, pre-industrial society in what they regarded as the rich soils of southern New Zealand.

If romanticism founded their vision of society it also strongly shaped the way settlers saw the land around them. This was unsurprising because Otago's colonisation took place just when romanticism was reaching its emotional height in European society. A 'mood rather than a movement,' romanticism influenced fashions, art, writing and intellectual life – even the way Europeans saw non-Europeans. While some characterise romanticism as a reaction against the cool reason and cold objectivity of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, in reality it 'did not complicate the Enlightenment's legacy,' but accepted science as a means of exalting national destiny and of regenerating emotion. Romantics thus combined 'cool intelligence and warm, troubled emotion.'

One important way romantic thinking built on and modified Enlightenment thought took place in attitudes to landscape.

Cathedral Peaks Manapori [sic] *Lake*. Unsigned, but possibly by S H Moreton. Watercolour, 1882, Otago Settlers Museum collection

During the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, specific aesthetic conventions had developed to describe to certain landscape forms.

One form, the Sublime, elicited sheer terror. In 1688, John Dennis, climbing Mt Aiguebellette in the French Alps, stared aghast at the 'craggy Clifts' swirling in cloud that greeted him and his fellow mountaineers. Later he mused how 'in a litteral [sic] sense' he and his companions had 'walk'd upon the very brink … of Destruction.' One 'Stumble' would have thrown them to their deaths. This experience evoked 'a delightful Horrour [sic.], a terrible Joy, and at the same time, that I was infinitely pleas'd, I trembled.'

The Sublime came to inspire mountaineering. Mountains became places to revel in God's wonderful creations, and virgin forests represented God's natural cathedrals. Edmund Burke's influential book, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1756), popularised this aesthetic, providing a checklist of Sublime scenery designed to elicit the requisite emotions on the part of the mountaineer or walker. Identifying these feelings also marked out an individual's good education and sophistication for it was believed that only those with a polished education gained in polite society could appreciate such scenery. The democratisation of education in the later nineteenth century also democratised landscape views.

Otago's Southern Alps created the perfect environment in which to delight in the delectable horror of the Sublime. In 1862, surveyor James McKerrow (1834-1919) and his assistant battled against a storm on the West Coast and viewed a landscape seemingly devoid of human presence. Climbing to the top of a mountain peak to get their bearings, McKerrow noted that all they 'could see was a most dismal' range 'of snowy mountains that chilled and appalled the senses by their sterile magnificence, but no Caswell Sound' – the object of their search.

Not everyone appreciated such scenery. Unless emigrants liked the 'Sublime and beautiful,' noted an anonymous letter-writer to John Cargill's emigrant handbook of 1860, they would be faced with only small areas of cleared forest, with temporary huts set 'amid the apparently interminable forests.' While the Sublime might be appreciated by settlers, it represented country that could not be settled. Instead it often made up a snowy and precipitous backdrop to the 'smiling farms' on the lowlands.

For many settlers, aesthetic awareness of nature's beauty also revealed God's presence in the landscape. This was particularly true of the Sublime, which emphasised the smallness of individuals in the vast spaces of God's creations. To McKerrow, Lake Te Anau called 'forth the homage of reverence and awe as the ramifications of its fjords among precipitous mountains are opened out.'

Although depicting a far more benign day than that experienced by McKerrow and his companion some twenty years earlier, the dramatic watercolour, *Cathedral Peaks Manapori* [sic] *Lake* (1882) attributed to S H Moreton portrays the Sublime Southern Alps in all their grandeur. Two figures, perched on the edge of a precipice, survey a solitary tree, their presence miniscule compared to the fearsomely vertical wall of mountainside that dominates the image. The composition of the watercolour, particularly the outcrop of rocks, vertiginous aspect and solitary tree, is reminiscent of the work of Salvator Rosa. A seventeenth century Italian landscape painter, Rosa specialised in portraying wild, isolated scenery, bottomless chasms or, most famously, bandits poised atop rocky crags. His work subsequently influenced the development of the Sublime and Picturesque.

If Otago's mountains generally elicited responses drawn from the Sublime, then Otago Harbour drew from another convention: the picturesque. Originally meaning 'like a picture,' by the nineteenth century a great debate had developed around the meaning of this concept. Essayists like William Gilpin and Uvedale Price produced guidebooks for the wealthy to appreciate parts of the British Isles, labelling scenes as picturesque or not according to their own tastes. The trouble was they could not agree on common meanings. While Burke contrasted the Sublime with the Beautiful, Gilpin and Price regarded the Picturesque as closer to the Sublime, and so on. Generally, though, the Picturesque came to represent a more watered-down version of the Sublime; the rugged and negligent Sublime was contrasted with the roughness and irregularity of the Picturesque; the dark and gloomy Sublime was juxtaposed with the animated, spirited and variable Picturesque.

Settlers seem to have used 'picturesque' in its specific aesthetic sense, and more generally as simply 'like a picture.' To distinguish these meanings better, 'Picturesque' refers to what I think is its use in a specific aesthetic sense, according to the latest aesthetic tastes at the time. The same word in lower case refers to it in its more general sense: 'like a picture.'

Mrs Rhoda Carlton (née Coote), travelling to Wellington with her husband, Major Coote, described as Picturesque the 'very rugged and savage' appearance of Snares Rock, lying 'some sixty miles south of Stewart Island.' (Gilpin would have agreed with her description, though not Burke!) The Revd William Johnstone thought Otago Harbour's scenery 'most grand and picturesque,' with its trees growing 'up to the very tops of the hills' particularly appealing. The settler James Flint thought Otago Harbour 'a picturesque looking place,' again because of its wooded hills reaching right to the water's edge.

Indeed, Otago Harbour elicited gentler descriptions than the Southern Alps because it offered a more benign environment. In the 1840s, German missionary the Revd Johann Wohlers (1811–85) wrote of Otago Harbour's 'soft, wooded hills.' Its softness contrasted with Wohlers' experience elsewhere in the country. Near Moutere Valley he described 'cold steep hills and narrow valleys.' Nelson's 'stark, upright, nearly naked' hills looked to him 'as if they had only just come up out of the sea and had not yet learned good manners.' In a letter to John Sym, the Revd Thomas Burns (1796-1871) waxed lyrical about the Harbour. It presented an 'uninterrupted scene of romantic beauty' thanks to 'steep and bold headlands, and peninsulas … all … densely

clothed from the water up to their very summit with evergreen woods, [thus] presenting an unrivalled sense of the richest sylvan green and alpine beauty.'

By contrast, a delightful example by Ellen Penelope Valpy of what is termed naïve art impresses with its orderliness and tranquillity. This particular viewpoint looking up the Harbour from the corner of Manse Street and Princes Street proved very popular among settler artists of the early years of Dunedin's settlement. A gentle breeze wafts smoke from the ill-proportioned cottages in the middle ground; a ship lies lazily at anchor near the shore; two gaily-clad figures exchange gossip. The scene, in short, is one of peace and calm: the bush on the Peninsula and Mainland presents a gentle green backdrop and contrast to the sky and water.

A more romantic image of Otago Peninsula in 1866 appears overleaf from the brush of George O'Brien (1821-88). New Zealand trees frame the view from Mt Cargill down to the Harbour in which Harbour Cone (on the right hand side) and Mt Charles are clearly visible. The scene is a peaceful one, the only sense of movement coming from the steamer in the middle plane of the image, a busy contrast to the ships moored nearby.

Did these aesthetic conventions influence land use? Or were they mere intellectual flights of fancy having no substance in land use?

As I showed in the first essay, settlers came to New Zealand to take up land, establish a family and become financially independent, aiming to be prey neither to the depredations of grasping lairds and landlords, nor to the cruel hand of market forces. Most cut bush and drained swamps to create their farm and fulfil what many regarded as their Providential Destiny.

Indeed, progress was often measured in the area of land under cultivation and the amount of bush removed. In 1848, Burns walked to Ocean Beach, noting a 'great deal of burning.' Walking deep into the bush of North East Valley, Dunedin, the settler Alexander Begg (1839 -1907) observed how the 'sound of the axe in the distance' told of 'how fast this wildness is being reclaimed.' Deforestation was generally seen as a necessity in the process of 'getting on' in a new land. This did not preclude the need for conservation.

Conservation could help settlers 'get on' by protecting valuable and scarce resources. In 1848, for instance, Otago's Chief Surveyor, Charles Kettle (c.1821-1862), suggested to Colonel William Wakefield that tree-felling be prohibited on New Zealand Company land because builders employed on the Maori Reserve were using Company timber. One year earlier

John Barton's house, corner Manse Street and Princes Street, Dunedin, by Ellen Penelope Valpy. Watercolour, 1851, Otago Settlers Museum collection

Wakefield had written to Kettle of his concerns about 'sawyers cutting timber.' He suggested to Kettle that cutting 'might be regulated' through the granting of licences 'in certain spots which you can fix.' This official interest occurred before the 1854 Land Regulations of Otago were instituted, which attempted to regulate the amount of bush land granted to settlers and reserved the right to veto land applications 'if … the sale of such land would be injurious to the public interests.'

Similar concerns underlay William Shortland's (1812-93) suggestions for the conservation of whales, based on his travels in the area in 1843-44. He believed that 'unless some law be enacted to protect and encourage [whales to breed] … they will speedily be extirpated, or driven to other regions.' He advocated a closed season for part of the year and the prohibition of foreign fishing vessels in New Zealand waters. No doubt his concern had been aroused when visiting many of the South Island's coastal whaling stations, for he found that since 1841 only two whaling stations had taken average catches.

The establishment of Dunedin's Town Belt, a green girdle encircling the city, owed its origins to interest in parks as 'lungs' for cities and concerns about the loss of common land occasioned by the industrial revolution and large-scale urbanisation. In 1858, settler John Logan informed Otago's Deputy Superintendent

> that several parties have of late erected temporary houses and squatted down on a portion of the Town Belt within a few yards of my place and have already done irreparable damage by cutting down a considerable portion of the Bush on the Belt which served to beautify the place and which hitherto had been carefully preserved by Mr. Chapman and myself respectively. They have no particular interest in sparing any of the trees having only a temporary end to serve and consequently I now find that only certain portions of the trees which are cut down are used the rest being left to rot and obstruct the passage along the ground.

Logan and others had clearly taken steps to preserve the Town Belt. He argued forcibly against its destruction on aesthetic lines, an early but probably not uncommon expression of concern about deforestation.

Romantics also valued the unique and special. Surveyor J T Thomson (1821-84), who pushed for the settlement of Otago and spread of cultivation, also argued in 1858 that unique geological features be preserved. He urged that Moeraki boulders, 'though of no utilitarian interest,' must be protected because of their rarity. Natural ruins also attracted the romantic's attention. Maori terraces and ditches, as well as geomorphic and geological features, especially those looking 'architectural' became 'a substitute for cultural history.' Overcome with nostalgia, and perhaps even *Sehnsucht*, a romantic yearning for the better days of the past, McKerrow felt that 'many happy memories' clung 'to these old whares' as he passed by Maori mud-and-clay dwellings.

Later, in old age, early settlers regretted the loss of forests and birdlife. Anne Black Fraser lamented her and her fellow colonists' liking for the meat of birds. 'What a pity,' she rued, 'it was to destroy those beautiful birds, which are now so scarce.' Wohlers regretted the introduction of that 'land plague,' rabbits. Dunedin timber miller John McLay (1840–1916?), an evangelical Presbyterian, condemned 'the cruel Ruthless hand of man' for cutting down trees and 'destroy[ing] God's beautiful work — all for the lust of money that sends so many to destruction.'

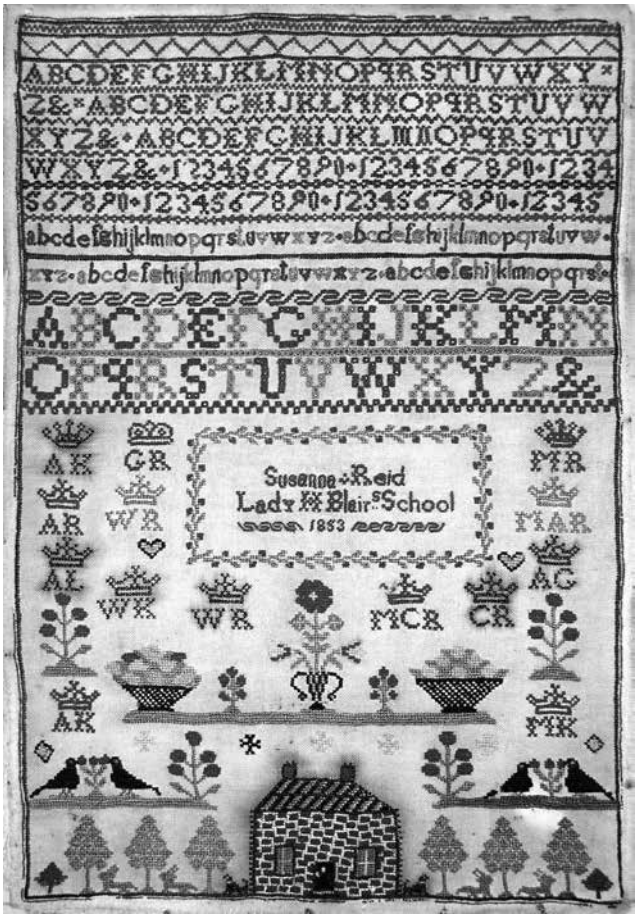
James Beattie

This article is based on research conducted in 1999 and 2006. I would like to thank Jill Haley, Archivist, Otago Settlers Museum, and Tania Connelly, her predecessor as Archivist, for their enthusiasm and help, as well as Seán Brosnahan of the Otago Settlers Museum and Austin Gee.

This continues the article in issue 88 (March 2006), and will be concluded in the next issue. Dr Beattie would welcome any correspondence on this subject. He can be contacted at the Department of History, University of Otago, PO Box 56, Dunedin, or by e-mail: james.beattie@stonebow.otago.ac.nz

View of Otago Peninsula with Harbour Cone and Mt. Charles from the slopes of Mt. Cargill, by George O'Brien. Watercolour, 1866
Otago Settlers Museum collection

Exhibitions



Stitched in Time

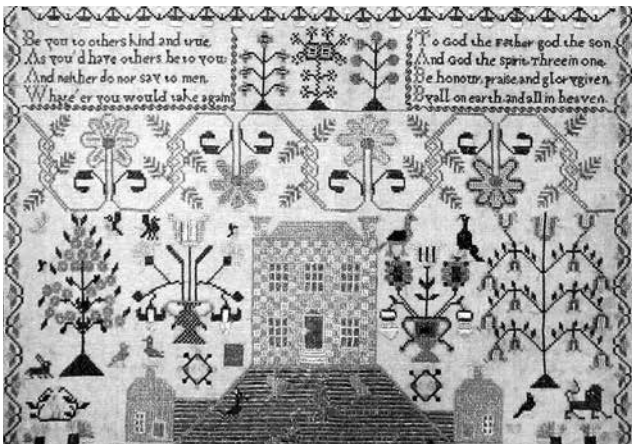
Conserving samplers from the Otago Settlers Museum collection

24 February - 24 June 2007

Samplers have a long history in embroidery but their form and function has evolved considerably over time. Originally they were developed as a record of stitches and patterns. Before printing was invented, skilled embroiderers used samplers as reference sheets for patterns and as a practice ground for new stitches. Once printed pattern books were developed, however, samplers evolved into demonstrations of the embroiderer's skill and became prized as works of art. When schools for girls began to be established in the eighteenth century, needlework was a staple of female education. Samplers then proved to be an excellent teaching tool, combining exercises in literacy, moral instruction and even subjects as diverse as mathematics and geography. For some, the sampler was simply a record of personal attainment in needlework. For others, it was a practical demonstration of skills vital to employment as a maid or seamstress. Girls could choose from a range of established patterns and motifs, but individualise their samplers according to their own personal circumstances. Samplers thus became treasured heirlooms, enriched by references to a forebear's childhood and family history.

By the nineteenth century, when women from across the British Isles were settling New Zealand, embroidery traditions were well established. Otago immigrants brought with them needlework skills as a basic component of their domestic capabilities. Many also brought a deeper appreciation of embroidery as a craft and as a favoured leisure-time activity. The decorative motifs added to the household linen and clothing of the pioneers attest to their expertise in these traditions. Many pioneer families treasured the samplers worked by immigrant women during their childhood. Over 50 examples have been donated to the Museum collection. Some pre-date the Otago settlement by a considerable period – the earliest dates from 1770 – and offer further evidence of the 'heirloom' status of samplers. Many show characteristics distinctive to Scottish samplers: the predominance of red and green threads; the use of a flat-topped 'A'; the inclusion of names or initials of family members. Others were sewn in Otago's pioneer schools and attest to a continuity in the educational curriculum for girls.

A number of the samplers have been subject to significant deterioration and soiling. Often this has been due to the method of display or to the chequered history of the sampler as it passed down through the generations. Since 1994 the Otago Embroiderers' Guild has been assisting the Museum with the care and conservation of the samplers. In 2004 the Guild decided to fund further conservation work to mark the twentieth anniversary of its renowned Wanaka Embroidery School. Funds raised by the Guild, supplemented by donations from other organisations and private individuals, were allocated to having those in the worst condition professionally conserved in Auckland. The remainder of the collection was cleaned and repaired locally by Guild members, led by Dunedin textile experts Margery Blackman and Jan Wilson. As a result, 54 samplers are now restored to their former glory, or as close to it as the ravages of time allow. This display offers a unique opportunity to see such a large group of samplers presented together.



Sampler by Susanna Reid, Lady Blair School, 1853, Otago Settlers Museum collection
Sampler by Caroline Thomson, aged 12, 1846 (detail), Otago Settlers Museum collection

Down to Business

Some of Dunedin's early Jewish business people

If you took a stroll around Dunedin's central business district at the height of the gold rushes chances are you wouldn't have to walk far before coming across the premises of a Jewish merchant, importer, jeweller, fancy goods dealer or clothier.

A trip down Princes Street in 1864, for example, would reveal Maurice Joel's merchant house and the premises of jewellers Ezekiel Nathan, Julius Hyman and Abraham Myers, to name just a few (three future presidents of the Dunedin Jewish Congregation and a member of the first committee of the congregation respectively). Branching off into the side streets you would find the likes of wholesale clothier H E Nathan in Rattray Street; Bing, Harris and Co's warehouse in High Street; and importers Henry Nathan and L H Lazarus in Stafford Street. More Jewish business people could be found operating businesses in the Arcade, including furniture, crockery and fancy goods dealer David Asher; fancy goods dealer Chapman Lazarus; clothier and outfitters Woolf Isaacs and Robert Marks; and tobacconist Morris Marks.

These 1860s Jewish business people were precursors to some of our most famous Jewish merchants, such as Bendix Hallenstein and David Theomin, who established their Dunedin firms in the later 1870s. Some moved on as the rushes faded, but many remained to foster a continuing Jewish presence and an enduring legacy.

Not all members of the Jewish community were merchants, storekeepers, jewellers and tailors. There were some well-known Jewish newspapermen in Julius Vogel, Benjamin Farjeon and Mark Cohen. Samuel Schlesinger, a veterinary surgeon who arrived in the early gold rush days and resided here until his death in 1896, was another interesting exception. Septimus Myers (or Septimus Solomon Arthur Wellington Daniel Myers to use his full name), who became a well-known Dunedin dentist, arrived as a teenager in the *Lady Egidia* in 1868. Mr Myers is remembered for his involvement in a huge number of organisations and public bodies, nearly 30 in all, and was head of eighteen of them. He was Mayor of North East Valley and a city councillor. He served on licensing, hospital and school committees and was a member of the Harbour Board.

His obituarist remarked 'It is doubtful whether any other man in Dunedin has ever been actively associated with so many bodies catering for sport and various forms of athletics as Mr Myers was.' These sports included racing, cricket, football, coursing, boxing, cycling, rowing, yachting and chess. Mr Myers was also Captain of the North Dunedin Rifles and for two years served as Master of Lodge No 622. Clearly some members of the Jewish population left their mark on much more than just the world of industry and commerce.

Take a wander around the Jewish portion of the Southern Cemetery and many of the names mentioned above can be found on the grave markers there. Delving into the lives and deaths of the people buried in this corner of the Southern Cemetery provides an interesting insight into the Jewish community. Amongst the early burials are young people whose hopes and dreams of 'making it' in Otago were dashed by their untimely deaths. Chapman Lazarus, mentioned above, was just twenty years old when he died in 1866. Tragedy struck David Asher's family in 1864 when his sons Benjamin, aged one, and Nathan, aged five, died within a day of each other. By the turn of the twentieth century the Jewish immigrants who arrived at the time of the gold rushes were beginning to disappear. Morris Marks, for example, who by the early 1900s was one of the oldest surviving members of the congregation, died in 1907 at the age of 84. He had been a resident of Dunedin for nearly half a century.

Do check out the Jewish portion of the Southern Cemetery, catch the ***Portrait of a People*** exhibition and reflect upon Dunedin's fascinating Jewish past.

Julius Hyman's shop, Princes Street, Otago Settlers Museum collection
Morris Marks's grave, Southern Cemetery

Christmas Meeting

The largest-ever meeting of the Association (more than 150 people) gathered in the former bus station foyer at the Museum on 15 December to hear Dunedin mezzo-soprano Patricia Payne sing to the piano accompaniment of La Donna Loo, and talk about her international opera career. Entertaining and enlightening anecdotes involving famous names – Pavarotti, Carreras, Domingo, Te Kanawa, Battle, Klemperer – and places – Covent Garden, the New York Met, Bayreuth – were interspersed with spirituals, arias from Handel, Ponchielli and Wagner, and, to finish, 'Danny Boy.' We learned that mezzo-sopranos always get the less glamorous roles, that singers should never read their reviews, and were let into the gum-chewing secrets of Dame Kiri Te Kanawa. Christmas cake, mince pies and strawberries rounded off a most enjoyable evening.

For Your Diary

Otago Anniversary Day Dinner

Friday 23 March 2007, 7.00 for 7.30 pm

This year the dinner will be an integral part of Dunedin's inaugural Heritage Festival. It will be a grand affair with a sumptuous sit-down meal served in the elegant Heritage Room of the old Grand Hotel (now the Southern Cross).

The guest speaker will be the well-known Dunedin-born identity Chris Laidlaw. The Mayor, Peter Chin, will be the Master of Ceremonies and there will be a very special brand of musical entertainment provided by the Tower NZ Youth Choir Dunedin.

Make up a party (tables of ten) or join with others on the night. Step back in time and celebrate our Anniversary Day in style!

The ticket price of $55.00 includes pre-dinner bubbly, and a cash bar will operate for wine and other drinks during the meal. Tickets are available from the Otago Settlers Association Secretary, PO Box 74, and from the Scottish Shop.

Numbers are limited, so book early to make sure you don't miss out.

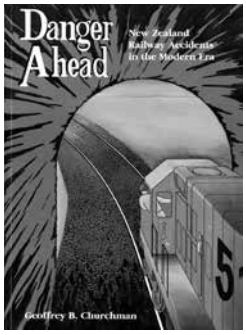
Otago Anniversary Church Service

Sunday 25 March 2007, 10.00 am

The Reverend Dr Peter Matheson extends a warm invitation to members of the Association to attend the service at First Church to mark the 159th anniversary of the founding of Otago. The committee encourages members of the Association to attend the service and join the congregation for morning tea afterwards in the Burns Hall.

The Otago Settlers Museum Shop

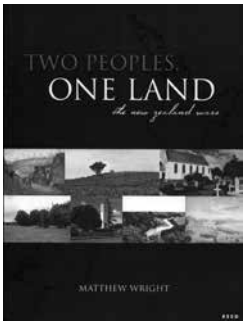
***Danger Ahead:** New Zealand Railway Accidents in the Modern Era* by Geoffrey B. Churchman



A documentary of some 120 accidents that occurred on New Zealand railways from 1946 to 1992, each illustrated with at least one photograph. Meticulously researched and copiously illustrated, this is the perfect book for anybody interested in trains, especially for those with a strong constitution who can handle looking at pictures of them crumpled, torn, tangled and totally written off.

168 pages, paperback: price to members $27 (postage and packing $3.50)

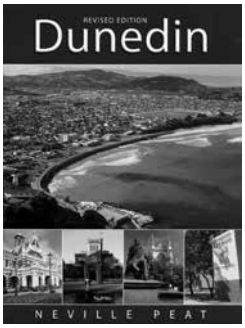
Two Peoples, One Land by Matthew Wright



Historian Matthew Wright sheds new light on the New Zealand Wars, tackling several of the theories popularised by historian James Belich head on. Though the physical conflict ended in 1872, Wright argues the issues and forces that gave rise to the New Zealand Wars are the same with which modern New Zealand continues to grapple. Wright's examination of this defining period in our history is a comprehensive and fascinating exploration of cultural miscommunication and the impact of Maori and Pakeha society on each other.

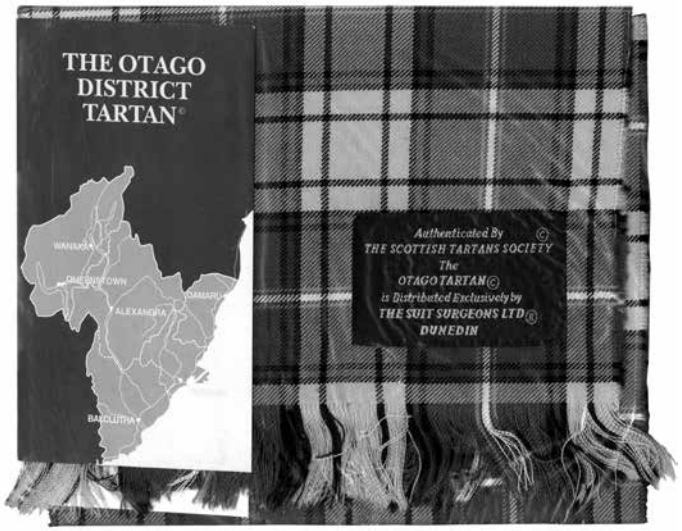
285 pages, paperback: price to members $36 (postage and packing $4.50)

Dunedin by Neville Peat (revised edition, 2006)



A photo-essay reflecting Dunedin's extraordinary range of scenery, wildlife and heritage buildings.

32 pages, paperback:
price to members $13.50
(postage and packing $2.50)



Otago district tartan scarf
100% merino wool

The classic Otago tartan scarf. Made in Dunedin and authenticated by the Scottish Tartan Society.

150cm x 28cm

Price to members $40 (Postage and packing $2.50)

Journeyman's mustard

Delicious cardamom and honey-infused mustard, made by hand in Dunedin.

200g re-usable jar with screw-top lid.

Price to members $9
(Postage and packing $3.50)

Marion Sandilands cross stitch sampler

The embroidery sampler replicated in this pack is the first known to have been acquired by the Otago Settlers Museum. It was designed and stitched by Marion Sandilands, who arrived in Dunedin on Boxing Day 1858, and died of consumption at the age of sixteen. It is likely that this sampler, with its beautifully executed and unusually painterly landscape scene, was made by her during the course of her illness.

The pack contains everything required to create an exact replica:

Charted design
Needle
100% cotton floss
28 count quality even-weave linen
Complete directions and stitch instructions

Price to members $79.20 (Postage and packing $4.50)

General Information

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

OTAGO SETTLERS ASSOCIATION

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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

Otago Daily Times *The Otago Daily Times supports Otago Settlers Museum*

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