



# NEW ZEALAND SOCIETY OF GENEALOGISTS DUNEDIN BRANCH NEWSLETTER



Issue 135

September / October 2009

Website: [genealogydunedin.co.nz](http://genealogydunedin.co.nz)

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**Meetings** are held in the Otago Settlers Museum, first Wednesday of the month unless otherwise notified. Starting time 7 pm, but doors are open from 6.30 until 9.30 for research.

**NZSG Dunedin Branch Library** at OSM: open hours Thursday and Sunday 1 – 4pm

*The Committee would like to remind members that subscriptions are due by Oct 15. This will be the final newsletter if you have not paid. Membership cards will be included with their posted newsletter. Remember if you use internet banking, to identify yourself clearly.*

## Programme

**October 7** – Dr Ian Morison will speak at the meeting on the topic "Genetic Gold from Cornish Tin Mines".

**November 4** - a research night. Members will be able to explore the treasures of the Library before the move to new premises.

**December 2** - At Knox College to visit the expanded facilities of Presbyterian Archives. We will be able to have supper and all members be asked to wear something red to celebrate our ruby anniversary.

## Library Roster

<u>OCTOBER</u>		<u>NOVEMBER</u>	
THURSDAY		THURSDAY	
1 <sup>st</sup>	Hugh Tohill 454-2590	5 <sup>th</sup>	Ian Sime 453-6185
8 <sup>th</sup>	Volunteer needed ring Margaret 455-7465	12 <sup>th</sup>	Eleanor Dowden 473-0524
15 <sup>th</sup>	Eleanor Dowden 473-0524	19 <sup>th</sup>	Shirley Smillie 464-0405
22 <sup>nd</sup>	Cath Grant 453-5192	26 <sup>th</sup>	Elizabeth Timms 467-2141
29 <sup>th</sup>	Shirley Hay 455-4169		
SUNDAY		SUNDAY	
4 <sup>th</sup>	Jeannie Gallagher 477-4543	1 <sup>st</sup>	Heather Grimwood 476-2161
11 <sup>th</sup>	Elizabeth Timms 467-2141	8 <sup>th</sup>	Jeanne Gallagher 477-4543
18 <sup>th</sup>	Trish Fleming 489-8808	15 <sup>th</sup>	Shirley Smillie 464-0405
25 <sup>th</sup>	Labour Weekend Closed	22 <sup>nd</sup>	Gerard Ellis 454-0223
		29 <sup>th</sup>	Heather Bray 487-6558

## From the Library

### Recent additions to the Library

#### **Queenstown Cemetery, Central Otago.**

Transcriptions of the Burial Records, Headstones and other Memorials. 1866 -2004.

This is another work that has been done by Eleanor Leckie. Working by herself for many years, not only has she transcribed what is on the Queenstown headstones but she has also consulted death registrations from microfiche and searched through old Queenstown newspapers to get as much information as possible. There are also cemetery plans, which will make finding the actual graves so much easier.

Eleanor has produced her work in a large boxed clearfile. She is also producing the work on disk, which will be available soon. This is such a valuable resource for those of you searching for forebears that you think were in the Central Otago region in the years covered by this well-produced volume.

#### **West Taieri Cemetery Headstones & Burial Records 1853-2007**

This large bound book has been produced by Ngaire Ockwell

It is a transcription of headstones, internments, plot purchases and plan records, together with additional information from several named sources, such as newspaper death notices. In the introduction, Ngaire tells that newspaper notices have revealed many positive and probable interments in the West Taieri Cemetery which do not appear on any of the West Taieri Cemetery extant records and headstones.

This book is well-worth looking through even if you think you have no one buried in the West Taieri Cemetery. There are coloured photographs of the cemetery in the spring and there is also the story of how the local people have landscaped and worked to make the cemetery a beautiful place to visit.

Ngaire also lists all the branch members who have helped with the transcribing of this Cemetery over the years.

We are so lucky that both **Eleanor Leckie and Ngaire Ockwell** have had the dedication and drive to produce these two latest important volumes. Our gratitude to them and to all those other members who have helped on these and other similar works cannot be adequately expressed. We do indeed thank you most sincerely for all your work.

#### **Other additions**

The following were left on the desk with just a note that just said "For the Library". Thank you, whoever you are!

"The Family Tree Detective" by Colin Rogers

"The Concise Guide to Tracing Your Ancestry" by Brian Loomis

"The Penguin Guide of Surnames" by Brian Cottle

"Search Overseas Family History sources for Australia & NZ" by Pederson

"Tracing Family History In New Zealand" by Anna Bromwell

"The Unpuzzling Your Past Workbook" Ann Emily Croom

"The Genealogists Computer Companion" by Rhonda McClure

I have just been to Ireland searching for my Cullen side of the family. I thought I had found them in the area around the Athlone, in the County of Roscommon. I was fortunate enough to be introduced to a local historian and as a result of meeting him I was persuaded to buy 3 books. They are full of local history and photographs of local people. Alas, my leads for that area proved to be false, so the books, while helping to give me some background knowledge, are not as relevant to me as I thought. So I am passing them over to our Library - hope they contain an answer to someone's Irish questions.

"Drum & its Hinterland - Its history and its people" by the Drum Heritage Group

"The Egan of Curraghboy" By Edward Egan

"Celebrating 21 years of History in Drum." Compiled by Drum Heritage Committee.

## Joy Samson NZSG # 5472....

Joy died 28 July 2009 in Dunedin, just a few weeks before her 82<sup>nd</sup> birthday. She was an enthusiastic genealogist; avid in her researching which, in the main, was done in pre-internet days. Writing interesting letters often enthused their recipients into going the extra mile in helping her locate such documents as ancient maps and early 17<sup>th</sup> century wills. In those earlier days record books



were often held at Post Offices and completely Joy (far right and friends at the Mourning Group Wake May 1993) open for inspection by the public. Joy visited cemeteries and had access to registers at sexton's cottages – which are now only a memory to most of us. Consequently she knew – and remembered - a great deal about early Otago cemeteries, Hindon and Southern cemeteries in particular.

She would welcome family members to her home, or try and travel anywhere in New Zealand to meet them, and subsequently record their stories. Joy was among the first of the Dunedin Branch members to produce quality books on each branch of her family, a project not completely realised by the time of her death; they were not little paperbacks but fully bound and impressive productions, of excellent quality and full of photos assiduously gathered. She scouted around Dunedin and Mosgiel getting competitive prices from printers and binders and gladly passed that invaluable information on to the rest of us.

Joy served on the NZSG Dunedin Branch committee for several years and invested early in computer genealogy exploring every avenue of use to her, later using her knowledge to help others as a tutor, committee member and membership secretary with Senior Net.

She loved her family, took a huge interest in them all and sometimes regaled us with photographs and tales of their growing-up and their achievements. Apart from cemetery transcribing our 'team work' with Joy began at the Family History Centre when we were transcribing the Vic-Shipping project (passengers from Victoria, Australia to NZ ports) and continued at the Andersons Bay 'burial team's' weekly sessions of which she was an enthusiastic member. Among 6 or 8 of us meeting weekly at the Crematorium, there were – and are - plenty of topics of conversation and Joy often used to remark that 'no-one would believe what we talk about up here', laughter being the main ingredient that pleased her. An important occasion was her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday when we celebrated it up there with flowers, jelly-sponge, fine china, fancy serviettes – and coffee. Joy enjoyed that immensely and felt certain it would be the only celebration of its type to have been held up there.

Her experiences with and innovative samples produced as a result of her machine-knitting qualifications always entranced us as she was a New Zealand champion exhibitor on several occasions and, in turn, was appointed a judge at various centres. Joy was always cheerful and positive even in her last illness and took part in our weekly sessions at the Crematorium office for as long as she was able.

We admire her loyalty and steadfastness of purpose and will miss her, indeed.  
Mabel Jowsey and Shirley Hay, NZSG Dunedin Branch members.

### From Papers Past

#### Humour.

Bruce Herald, Volume XXXIX, Issue 110, 6 February 1903, Page 7

Humour.

Brown : 'Are you interested in **genealogy**? Ever looked up jour ancestral tree ?'

Jones : Never did. Fact is, I'd be afraid there might be a man hanging from one of its branches.

## “TELLING TALES OUT OF SCHOOL”

It was listed as “telling tales out of school” but Danny Knudson did better than that. When he spoke to the Branch meeting on the 2nd of September he put a lot of flesh on the bones of his story about teaching.

Speaking of discipline in the 1890’s. It wasn’t tough in those days- it was brutal! Punishment with a cane (Danny had one to show) for minor misdemeanours where the strokes were less than three were not recorded in the punishment book but ten for truancy and up to fifteen for disobedience were not particularly notable.



Mind you, since the teachers were remunerated on the basis of the number of children attending school a truant not only disrupted their education, they cost the teacher money! One boy wheeling a barrow carrying a sack of chaff greeted his teacher and was subsequently punished for not raising his hat!

But teachers had it tough. The master at Skippers was directed to fill a vacancy at a school three hours walk away up the valley. Part of the journey was through the bitterly cold water of the river. He taught three days a week at each school and survived for a year and died the following Christmas.

One teacher, Miss Ellen Jane Thorne, spent thirty three years, almost her entire teaching life, at Green Island where she had the responsibility of the preparation class. As each child began school they were assessed and introduced to the basics of education. The inspector made annual visits to test the children and those who had achieved a satisfactory level of skills to pass the tests had reached the First Standard and were advanced to Standard One. If they could not attain the required standard they remained in the preparation class regardless of their age. It is recorded that this teacher actually had a class in excess of 164 children!

Children were, for the most part, keen to learn. Many travelled great distances to attend school. To cross the Clutha River and reach the school at Raes Junction the parents persuaded the Education Board to install a “wire” on which a cage ran across the deep gorge, at Horseshoe Bend. Each school day the children winched themselves across and then across several muddy fields to the road before completing a further forty minute to school. Then the return after the school-day ended. The “wire” served from 1888 until 1908.

After 20 years some parents were concerned that the “wire” needed to be replaced. None of the three engineers sent to survey the task was willing to use the cage to cross the river. Eventually it was replaced with a high level bridge, 75 feet above the river.

One family had to use the railway bridge at Henley’s Crossing to cross the river but the bridge had no side rails. A small child crawled the 400 mtrs each way each day. She was afraid if she tried to walk she might be blown off the bridge into the river



Hicks, photo. MOSGIEL DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOL PICNIC AT PURAKANUI.  
Group of picnickers having lunch.

Another family established a camp near the Bald Hill Flat School [the area is now known as Fruitlands] The children did not return home but ‘camped’ Monday until Friday afternoon. The older children had the responsibility of caring for their siblings on a day to day basis.

### **From Otago cavalcade 1901 to 1905**

Schools, as a centre of interest in the community, served as a focus for picnics.

Danny related the story of the Wylies Crossing school picnic that began early in the day with the

fathers of the children arranging drays, wagons and gigs to carry the families to meet the south bound train at Mosgiel. Their special carriage conveyed them to Henley where they changed to ride the steam launch to Taieri Mouth Beach. Lots of games and picnic food for children and mothers and some additional thirst quenchers from the fathers filled the day.

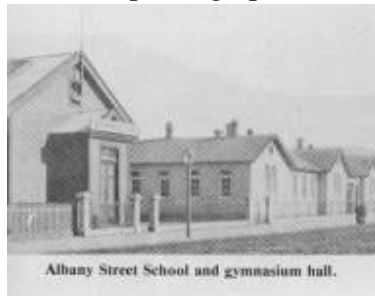
The well loaded steam launch carried the party back through the gorge towards Henley until the engine broke down. A long nervous wait followed until the captain was able to repair the engine and the journey to Henley was completed. The two hour delay meant, however, that the special carriage had passed through Henley long before its passengers arrived.

A further lengthy delay occurred until a goods train from Milton was able to add an empty carriage and gather up the weary and somewhat distraught passengers and deliver them to Mosgiel. From there it was horse and wagon back home for the tired families with the father's still facing the routine of milking the cows. It was voted a "Great Picnic"

Danny illustrated his narrative with a series of photographs of schools and scholars of historic



High Street School buildings.



Albany Street School and gymnasium hall.



Andersons Bay School buildings.

significance and he paid tribute to the parents who struggled to ensure that their children received an education.

The McPherson family lived well up the Matukituki valley too far from any established school for daily attendance so the mother took responsibility to "home school" her children. [The remains of their cottage are among the willow trees at The Otago Boys High School Outdoor Training facility]

Each year the children had to travel to the nearest school for the visiting inspector to test their level of achievement. Apparently they were being well educated but their behaviour perturbed the inspector.

When asked a question the children responded as they did at home by taking a seat on the questioner's knee. The inspector found this unexpected familiarity more than he was expecting and recorded that the children's manners needed attending to.

The mother of this family, living in isolation and facing frontier like hardships, determined that she would vote in the 1919 election. "I will vote if it is the last thing I do" she declared.

[This was the famous licensing vote that brought New Zealand almost to the point of prohibition.]

On the return journey both horse drawn vehicles were toppled over crossing the river and Mrs Jessie McPherson was drowned.

Danny Knudson's advice to genealogists:

**"You are the specialist.**

**You know more about your family history than anybody else.**

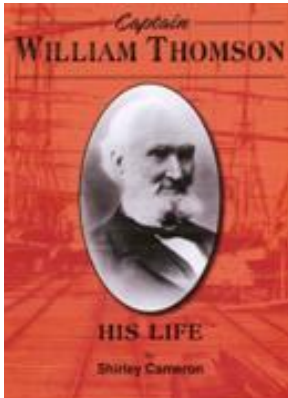
**You are the expert.**

**You have a responsibility to put what you know on paper. To pass it on.**

**It doesn't have to be perfect instantly - don't begin at the beginning of the story - start with the bit you know most about and write that up. Remember to record where you got the information from - it can save you hours of searching later.**

**Tell the rest of the story of how it leads to where you are today. Then when that is all written down go over it. Correct the mistakes. If you put it on a computer it is easy to do. Sort out the repetitions and the mistakes and put things in their right order then when its all done, as well as you can make it, then write the introduction."**





From the author of “**Captain William Thomson, His Life**”, Shirley Cameron talks about the writing of the book.

When I realized I was the last Watson family member still living in Port Chalmers, I felt I should make an effort to write down anything I could find out about their life in Port Chalmers from their arrival in 1864.

During this exercise the name Captain William Thomson cropped up, but who was he and what connection, if any did he have with my family? Eventually the answer came from an older cousin in Napier who knew more than I about the significance of this name in our family.

Captain William Thomson, then a widower with a young daughter, had in 1869 married our Great Grandmother, Catharine Rennie, a widow with five children. Not only was he my step Great Grandfather, he was the first Harbour master of Otago 1860 to 1883. His responsibilities reached from Otago Harbour to Oamaru and Bluff, including all the harbours between.

### *Port Chalmers 1867*



Research then began in interest, but produced very little in the initial few years. Obviously no one had been interested enough to write down anything of value of those twenty three years, and I almost gave up. Then, through an acquaintance, I met a young woman from Sawyers Bay, also interested in William Thomson. She was curious to know more about this Captain who had built the large villa in Sawyers Bay, way back in the mid 1870s.

We worked together for some time until her family moved to Wellington. Information was growing, and it became a project I had to finish.

Born in 1822 into a shipping family in Alloa, Scotland, William was the ninth child of twelve. He went to sea as an apprentice at the age of

thirteen, with his uncle Captain Watson Thomson, becoming a captain of his own ship at the age of twenty one. He commanded vessels trading in the Mediterranean, North America, the Philippines and Australia.

In the 1840s, during the great exodus from Ireland caused by failed potato crops, Captain Thomson carried thousands of emigrants to America in his ships. He took great care of his passengers, making them as comfortable as possible. His love of music led him to create his own ship’s band to help keep the migrants cheerful.

### *Port Chalmers 1870s*



The Thomson family were strong supporters of the “Free Church”. William’s mother, in his own words was a “godly woman” making sure the children learnt not only to believe, but to put it into action by helping those less fortunate.

From his arrival in Port Chalmers in 1855, William became an active member of the Port Chalmers Presbyterian Church, and over many years continued to serve. On his sixtieth birthday in November 1882 he laid the corner stone of the third and present Port Chalmers Presbyterian Church, which commands a striking position overlooking our Harbour.

In the book I have of course been able to cover his whole 91 years of life, before, during and after his twenty three years as Harbour Master. He was employed by the Provincial Government, and the Otago Harbour Board. After the Abolition of the Provinces Act the Chief Harbour Master was then employed solely by the Harbour Board, and was responsible for only the Otago Harbour.

Captain Thomson sold his villa in Sawyers Bay in 1908. He and Catherine moved to Port Chalmers to spend their last years with Catharine's daughter, and Williams step daughter, Helen Rennie and her husband John Watson. They were my Grandparents.

Copies of "Captain William Thomson – His Life" are available from the Port Chalmers Museum or from the author Shirley Cameron (03 4728391) Price \$45

## How Times Have Changed ....

Shirley Hay

*This is a Paper that I first presented to the Archives & Records Association of NZ during their 1991 conference at Knox College, Dunedin. (I think this was probably my first-ever public speech to a really distinguished audience).*

*1991 was a time when genealogist researchers as a whole, were new to the task and in Dunedin at least, pertinent records were few and far between if available at all - and few of us really knew where to find them.*

*Apart from Miss Helen Spooner at the Otago Early Settlers Museum and the Hocken Library's most understanding librarian David McDonald, we were regarded as nuisances by university staff and others – they didn't want to bother with us 'housewives' – they saw their task as being assistants to academics, not hobbyists.*

*In addition at that time, well before the Privacy Act had been heard of, arguments were going on as to how many and what types of vital records should be available – up till then it was usually open slather with almost all record books available being brought out from archives, schools and even post offices out with no restrictions as to what we were allowed to look at.*

*At that conference we were a panel of four with Prof Eric Olsen in the Chair. I forget what our overall subject was but I was the only genealogist. We were allowed 15 minutes each and I was on last, by which time we were running away overtime. When I told Eric that my talk would take 5½ minutes exactly, he replied fervently "Thank God for that!" and regarded me with great favour.*

ACCESS TO ARCHIVES: A VIEW FROM ALL SIDES.

Shirley Hay, Dunedin Group

#2677 New Zealand Society of Genealogists

Firstly as a Genealogist I am in complete favour of the arbitrary year of 1920 - or roughly 70-80 years previous to the present - as the cut-off date set by the Registrar-General for the release of sensitive information in generally available form. I am speaking specifically of Marriage and Baptism Indexes' information held in Public Repositories. Compilers of Indexes would do well to abide by the ruling if they wish to continue in the good graces of resource holders.

Secondly do you all (ie archivists) have prominently displayed, a list of do's and do not's for the information of all users of source records, including genealogists. Your primary care no doubt is to preserve the record and our ambition should be exactly the same. Added to that list I would like to see a finger-licking prohibition. I have been surprised at how many keepers of records as well as members of the public indulge in this unconsciously habitual, useless and dirty habit - just remind them that hepatitis could likely be the result and that usually fixes them.

Now as to genealogists as a whole when dealing with archivists - or perhaps it would be more sensitive given the present company to state that archivists probably see themselves as dealing with genealogists - I have a couple of comparisons:

Archivists are used to historians who usually read their subjects up pretty thoroughly beforehand, that is, before getting to the archivist stage they already have a good idea of what sources are available. Historians know to look at bibliographies in various books, for example district histories, and therefore they can ask for a specific source.

Archivists may therefore expect genealogists also to have precise information and in an ideal world, they would, but we're not in an ideal world as you are all very much aware.

Genealogists may not for instance, be used to the language in which old archives can be written, or they might not know what to expect to look for, or even what they are looking for. In fact what they do decide to look for may not even be in the archives and that can be a most off-putting and upsetting experience for a genealogist with no experience of academia.

Genealogists expect information to be immediately available and preferably with a few photographs thrown in. If these aren't pretty rapidly forthcoming beginners feel as if they have wasted their day. Historians would find another source of interest and look for a wider point of view.

Serious genealogists understand this and our continual aim as more experienced members of the New Zealand Society of Genealogists is to exhort newcomers to have realistic goals. You people are in a better position than I am, to tell whether we are attaining this end or not.

Added to that, even more continually, we emphasise to members that librarians do not want to know what Grandfather had for breakfast but that they are simply interested - if that is the word - in where that first gap shows up in the known facts, that gap that appears in a well-presented pedigree chart.  
(Archivists on the whole, don't really want to know even that of course).

It is an unexpected bonus for the archivist if a genealogist knows what the holdings of a particular archive contain. For instance, some museum holdings are not well catalogued. They might be stored in a series of boxes dealing with the history of early families - chatty family journals which mention other people who lived in the district. Now if the archivist knows all this, and advice is given to study some appropriate background, then the genealogist who may not have found any concrete evidence of what was originally sought, may follow up that sort of suggestion, then go away feeling that the time was well-spent.

Genealogists say "Have you got a file on this family who lived in say, Green Island?"  
Historians say "Do you have any district or family histories written about the Green Island area at such and such a time?" so that they can learn for example, about the types of dwellings and their structures, or so that they can analyse the district better by the number of local shopkeepers, trades etc.

The real point is that for genealogists, archivists could provide and indeed, some do, pointers to broadening the scope of research for the time, area, or etc.

Archivists presumably regard themselves as Keepers of Files but this can appear to be overdone. Sometimes the question arises "Why were the records put there in the first place if they are not to be used at all?"

I am sure that many archivists wish that genealogists would just go away. However, the bottom line is that we are all in this documentation and research together and all are - or should be - endeavouring to paint just a little bit more of the total picture of New Zealand's history.

Lately I see a broadening of the archivist's horizons in so far as genealogists are concerned - it is becoming apparent that with the computer expertise we have accumulated, transcribing and indexing resources is a service we can now provide. We are a source of relatively "cost-free" workers who can offer valuable assistance to harried archivists.

I hope that the trend of mutual benefit will expand and continue.

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## Archives NZ

### **IMPORTANT NOTICE GROUND FLOOR REFURBISHMENT UPDATE 4 September 2009**

The first phase of our refurbishment (the creation of the new Orientation Area and Readers Lounge near the main entrance and the finding aids area in the Reading Room) will start on **10 September** and run until **2 January 2010**.

These changes will improve your experience as a customer at Archives New Zealand and include:

A new Orientation Area near the main entrance where you can find out more about Archives New Zealand and what you can find here, carry out quick and/or preliminary research and meet our staff

- A new audio/visual area to see films from our collections
- A Readers Lounge and upgraded toilet facilities
- Improved access to the Reading Room and better facilities for readers
- Improved staff facilities to increase the efficiency of our service

We do apologise for any inconvenience that this work may cause. If you have any questions or concerns please contact Jolene Armadoros on 0-4-931 6982 or email [Jolene.armadoros@archives.govt.nz](mailto:Jolene.armadoros@archives.govt.nz)

#### **During the construction period:**

- From 21 September 2009 until 2 January 2010, the Reading Room will be open from 10.30am to 5pm Monday to Friday**
- All requests for records received before 5pm the day before will be available at 10.30am**
- The Constitution Room will be closed from the afternoon of 18 September**
- The Archives New Zealand artwork will be carefully stored**
- The most disruptive work will occur before 10.30am, however there will inevitably be more noise than usual in the building during this period.**

#### **Awatea - Recollections of a Unique Lifestyle**

Mamie Michaelis

In 1934 I spent about nine months with a family in the Catlins. Because of the effects of the *Great Depression* my parents were unable to keep me at High School and give my sister the same opportunity, so after two years I left school and went to stay with an Aunt and Uncle on a farm near Oamaru. This was in 1933. Having spent most of my school holidays there and being familiar with most aspects of farm life as it was in the late 1920s and 1930s, I was delighted. I spent a year there, then came back to Dunedin. There were no jobs for unqualified teenagers like me, but a cousin of my mother asked if I would come to help her with the children and around the house, and that was agreed.

As a 17 year old I took it all for granted, but looking back I realise the many unique aspects of the life of the family.

Travelling by train from Dunedin to Balclutha, I changed to the *slow* train to Catlins. At Hunts Road, the stop before Owaka, I was met and taken by car to Awatea. The road wound up a narrow valley. In the light of the late afternoon the hillsides were grey with fallen and burned trees, and the whole hillside moved as a mass of grey rabbits were disturbed by the car proceeding along the road. Rabbits - they ruled the lives of the family at Awatea! At the highest point of the valley was the S family's farm, worked by a father and two sons. The homestead, a plain square house with a verandah in front, stood on a rise about a quarter of a mile in from the road. Here lived Grandad and Grandma S, their son Bob, his wife Annie (my mother's cousin) and their three young children. Separated from the homestead by some bush and a pine plantation was a small cottage where lived the other son Jack, his wife Chrissie and their new baby. Something of an *extended family* as we would now recognise.

Just why it was necessary to have me assisting the family I don't know. Both women were quite capable as far as I could see, and were not required to do any outside work beyond feeding a few hens that wandered around the yard and laid their eggs inconveniently in the adjacent bush. Although both grandparents looked old and rather frail to my adolescent eyes, they must have been as *tough as nails* as I subsequently found out. I was somewhat disappointed at not being allowed to help with anything on the farm. I liked the work, and after my experience on the farm with Aunt and Uncle, could deal with cows (milk by hand, separate the milk, make butter) calves, care for properly housed poultry, rear chicks from the incubator, assist with sheep and horses. So it was just housework and assist with cooking. I spent quite a lot of time with the five year old boy, a bright little fellow, and taught him to sing quite a lot of songs as I played the piano.

The house was not large; a sitting room at the front, four bedrooms and a kitchen. No bathroom; I think we must have washed in the washhouse in outbuildings behind the kitchen, and the toilet was across the increasingly muddy road

leading up the hill to the farm buildings. Anyone desiring the luxury of a hot bath waited until all were in bed, then bathed in a tub before the still hot kitchen range. (Daily baths or showers were unheard of in most houses, town or country, maybe weekly if you had the facilities.) The house was wired for electricity but was not connected to any outside supply. Kerosene lamps were used and one of the daily tasks was to fill the lamps, trim the wicks and clean the glasses. We went to bed with candles for light. One modern amenity was a telephone in a small room at one end of the verandah. It was the telephone bureau for the district - I presume no other residence had one. I can't recall anyone other than the Ss using it. At the age of 17 years, believe it or not, I spoke for the first time on a telephone. And I was nervous. My parents were visiting relatives in Balclutha who put a call through to the Awatea telephone bureau. I could hardly utter a word in my nervousness! Strangely enough there was a wireless set (as radios were called in those days) in the kitchen, but more of this later.

During the day activities in the house centred around the big warm kitchen. In the evenings a log fire was lit in the sitting room and the evenings were spent there. I can't remember what we did in the long winter evenings. I probably read; there was quite a good selection of books in the house. I don't remember any games, knitting or sewing, and the wireless remained silent except for - but I'll keep that bit for later. Grandad often talked about his younger days at Orokonui. (Never having heard of Orokonui I just presumed it was some place in the Catlins.) On Sundays at teatime we often toasted bread over the glowing embers of the fire. A special treat.

Winter was approaching and I was quite concerned because the only footwear I had were the house slippers and one pair of shoes, neither of which would be of much use in the wet and muddy surroundings outside the house. A pair of gumboots was obtained from Owaka and these were shared by Annie and me when we went outside in the wet, eg to the toilet, to feed the hens, to hunt for eggs in the bush etc. We couldn't go out together under these circumstances.

After nine months at Awatea I weighed just on 12 stone (75kg) about 3 stone more than I do now. The reason of course was food. The grandparents were as lean as rakes; Annie was plump, but I grew into a real chubby dumpling. You just ate what there was; nobody gave any thought to diets, balanced or otherwise. There seemed to be an unending supply of potatoes grown on the farm (a blue skinned variety called *Skerry Blues*) also swedes, and they killed their own meat. Other essentials such as bread etc were delivered from Owaka. At the beginning of winter a steer (they called it a *cattle beast*) was slaughtered and salted down in a large barrel which stood in one of the farm buildings. In the same place were some large rolls of bacon hanging from the rafters. I expect we had mutton sometimes but my principal memory is of salt beef alternating daily with fresh rabbit throughout that winter, and potatoes and swedes. Potatoes were on the menu in some form for breakfast, midday and evening meals, often accompanied by great thick slices of bacon from those rolls in the shed. One pudding that remains in my memory was a milk jelly made with carageen. Grandma and Grandad went for holidays to local beaches such as Tautuku (called *Tautuck*) where they collected the New Zealand form of carageen seaweed (also known as *Irish Moss*.) This was dried and stored. To make a pudding a few branches of seaweed were put into a pot of milk which was heated gently but not boiled. On cooling a jelly was formed; somewhat different from junket.

*Diversification*, one of the current catchwords in *farmspeak*, was up and running on the S's property. I don't know the extent of the farm; it extended over what seemed like a large area of hilly bush country, the farthest reaches overlooking the Owaka Valley. Behind the homestead was a hill known to the family as *Mount Cook*, and beyond that was a valley partly cleared of bush and part in pasture. This was often referred to as *round the back*. In front of the house open paddocks sloped down to the road.

Jack S ran a small herd of Friesian cows which came into production in spring. They were machine milked and the milk separated by a curious old Belgian separator, quite different from the Alfa Laval I had been used to. I suppose the cream went to Owaka, but can't really recall this. I can't remember any sheep but probably there were some. Apart from Jack's cows the two major projects which provided income were timber and rabbit skins.

The men operated a small sawmill in the valley round the back. They produced and sold *droppers*. These were short battens used to stabilise the wire between fence posts. I don't know what timber they used or how they cut down trees (were there chainsaws in those days?) As part of clearing the land they had to remove tree stumps. One sunny spring afternoon Annie, the children and I walked round the back to see this operation in progress. Some time prior to this when I collected the mail and groceries at the gate, I had been told that there would also be a box of detonators which I must carry very carefully. I did, carried it at arm's length all the way up to the house. Sitting high up on a hillside we watched the men place explosives and one of *my* detonators under a large stump. A big bang and the stump rose out of the ground, appearing to cartwheel gracefully towards our position. However it plummeted to earth well short of us. A good afternoon's entertainment.

Rabbits. Were there Rabbit Boards in those days? Did farmers call on the government to do something about it? I don't know, but the Ss certainly put those furry pests to good use. (So did many other landowners.) Rabbit skins are at their best in winter and in the 1930s brought a good price on the market. Sales of skins were held in Dunedin once a month and the prices obtained were broadcast on the local radio that night. On the S's property the chief rabbiters were Grandad and Grandma. In the bush round the back they had a tent with all, or most home comforts: double bed, table and chairs, a fireplace with a corrugated iron and wooden slab chimney on the outside of the tent by the entrance. The

elderly couple, tough as nails, spent the whole winter here trapping and poisoning rabbits. The skins were prepared for market, the carcasses of the trapped rabbits were eaten by the old couple and by us at the house; the poisoned ones disposed of, buried? - I don't know. About once a week some of us from the house walked round to the tent taking bread and other supplies as required. The stockpile of skins eventually found their way to the Dunedin market.

Then comes the next intriguing aspect of the rabbit skin saga. From the slopes of Mt Cook and the valley round the back flowed a nice little stream. On the slopes below the house it formed a little waterfall. Just below this waterfall the Ss had installed a small electric generator in a protective housing. On a certain day once a month a battery (car?) was attached to the generator and charged for 24 hours. It was then taken up to the house and connected to the dormant wireless set on the evening on which 4YA Dunedin would broadcast the current market prices for rabbit skins. Everyone sat in silence as this information came across the air waves. For the rest of the evening we listened to whatever programme was broadcast. On one memorable occasion we heard a concert by a visiting Russian singer called Chostikov or Shostikov? We called him *chesty cough*. Next day there was usually enough power left in the battery to give us the morning programme. About midday - silence. No more wireless until the next rabbit skin sale in about a month's time.

The Ss must have been quite content with their isolation and lack of contact with what was happening beyond Awatea, or Owaka, or Dunedin. The only newspaper was Saturday's Otago Daily Times. (Did it come with the mail on Monday? I can't remember.) Only fragments of the news at a time when there were threatening events worldwide, and the depression was still causing problems.

I don't recall going to Owaka - twelve miles away - during my stay - maybe I did get there. On a few occasions we all went to church in the school at Katea down the valley. Once I went with Annie to a dance in the school hall at Purekireki up the valley at the confluence of the Owaka Valley. Annie danced but I sat out a rather miserable boring evening; asked to dance once but refused as I said I didn't know how. (Or was I too shy to shuffle round the floor with some spotty faced local youth?) I remember visiting with Annie and Grandma a Mrs T in a cottage on a neighbouring farm. I think she was a sister-in-law of Grandma.

On one occasion I went with the whole family to visit the Fs at Lochindorb Station, a large well-known sheep and cattle run in the area. (It still is, but under different owners.) The name at least must have stuck in my memory. Very many years later I read the book *Guerilla Surgeon* by a New Zealand doctor who worked with Tito's partisans in Yugoslavia during World War II. Describing the part of that country where he was working he likened it to Lochindorb Station in the Catlins. He was a friend of the Fs, his sister was one of my teachers at High School and what is more I had seen many of Tito's partisans who came across to Italy for training or *R & R*.

The only other memorable visit was again a family outing to visit the manager of a big sawmill at Tawanui further south in the Catlins bush. I have since passed through Tawanui but have been unable to spot the hill and the house, then a fine new bungalow built in a bush clearing on the summit. On that trip we stopped at a pretty waterfall on the Catlins River; again I don't know where to look for it again.

Two baby opossums were brought in by the men, their mothers caught in rabbit traps. We put the little fellows into rabbit skins, fur side in, and kept them warm by the range. They were fed(?) with milk and both survived. One remained a runt, the other grew into a fine big furry beastie. A big hutch and run were made for them. They came out of their hutch in the evenings. They became quite tame, could be handled, the only problem their large sharp claws.

I was told that around Christmas and New Year the hillside would be ablaze with crimson rata. This I awaited eagerly but was most disappointed with scattered patches of dull red in the sombre bush still clothing many of the hillsides along the valley.

Christmas was barely recognised. All I recall for dinner on this supposedly festive day was mutton stew. I received a present of a cake of soap and a facecloth. I had no money and no opportunity to buy presents for anyone.

At New Year I went with Annie and the children to a camp at Pounawea with her sister's family from Balclutha. It must have been warm weather for we swam a lot in the river. Shortly after that I returned to Dunedin.

On two occasions in recent years I have driven through the valley. The house and Mount Cook were still there, looking much the same but much of the valley is now prosperous well pastured farms with comfortable houses. The litter of dead and burned trees and the hosts of rabbits are gone.

And a postscript. Almost exactly ten years after going to Awatea I came across the name *Awatea* in very different circumstances. In April 1944 I travelled from New Zealand to the Middle East on a Dutch ship *Willem Ruys* then a troopship. Naturally all signs, directions etc were in the Dutch language, BUT on the lifeboats was the name *Awatea*! In the 1930s travel to Australia was a 3-4 day trip by ship (no 747s in those days) one of them being *Awatea*. During the war it was commandeered as a troopship and was sunk off the coast of North Africa. The *Willem Ruys* was in the same action and picked up the lifeboats from the *Awatea* and kept them. I don't know what happened to the *Willem's* own lifeboats. Most of those on board would be familiar with the name of the ship *Awatea* but I guess I would probably be the only one who knew of another *Awatea*, away down south in the Catlins bush.

Contributed by Ian Sime

Dunedin Branch NZSG

Newsletters - A Retrospective

I have searched through the first newsletters published by the Dunedin Branch of NZSG for items which provide insights of the early life of the Branch. Editor

Russel Chirnside as editor 1988 to

Newsletter No 1, 25.01.1988

" After much deliberation the committee has decided that it would be a good idea to send out a newsletter to inform you, our valued members, what is going on within the club, and to keep you up to date with coming events. .... The cost both in time and materials to produce this newsletter is not inconsiderable, and to make it a success we need the help of everyone to provide information on all sorts of things that can be included each time it is produced. We would also appreciate your comment at the next meeting, on the format and content you think it should have"



Newsletter No 2 15.02.1988

Where possible business is to be discussed in the Newsletter to save time at meetings for the subject we are all most interested in – family History"

Newsletter No 5 June 1988

"It has come to my notice that there are a few people who think that the Group Committee has become completely wrapped up in computers, to the exclusion of everything else, and that it is a waste of time to come to an ordinary meeting because all they talk about is Computers" - a recurring theme

"Apparently there is a very strong case for Dunedin to get a National Archives Repository for Government records etc"



Warning: **Genealogy Pox – Very contagious to Adults!**  
**Symptoms:** Continual complaint as to the need for names, dates, kinships and places. Patient has blank expression, sometimes deaf to spouse and children. Has no taste for work of any kind except feverishly looking through records at libraries and courthouses. Has compulsion to write letters. Swears at mailman, when he does not leave mail. Frequents strange places such as cemeteries, ruins, even remote desolate country areas. Makes secret night calls. Hides phone bills from spouse. Mumbles to self. Has strange faraway look in eye. NO KNOWN CURE.  
**Treatment:** Medication is useless. Disease is not fatal, but gets progressively worse. Patient should attend Genealogy Magazines, and be given a quiet corner in the house where he can be left alone.  
**Remarks:** The usual nature of this ..... the sicker the patient gets, the more he enjoys it.

Newsletter 6 July 1988

Please welcome our newest member. His name is Mac Fossick. He has a very searching, Scottish bent. You can see how intent he is on his main aim in life - - fossicking. His equipment is sparse only a magnifying glass and a good keen sense of the unknown. His clothing is typical, except for the unusual shape of his sporrans, which is the direct result of his stealthy fossicking. Note the purpose with which he conducts his business! I wonder if there is a family likeness – do you think he could be related?"



## From Paper's Past

ANECDOTE AND INCIDENT.

Star , Issue 5680, 26 September 1896, Page 7

BOUND TO HAVE ONE.

" John," said Mrs Croesus thoughtfully, " everybody in society seems to think an awful lot of **genealogy** these days."

"Jennie what?" exclaimed John, looking up from his evening paper.

" **Genealogy**," repeated Mrs Croesus.

"What's that?"

"I don't exactly know," replied Mrs Croesus, " but I think it's a tree of some kind; at least I heard some ladies refer to it as a family tree."

" Well, what of it ? " he asked.

" Why, it seems to be a sort of fad, you know, and everyone who is anyone has to have one."

" Buy one then," he said irritably: ""Buy the best one in town and have the bill sent to me, but don't bother me with the details of the affair. Get one, and stick it up in the conservatory, if you want one, and if it isn't too large."

" But I don't know anything about them."

"Find out, and if it's too big for the conservatory, stick it up on the lawn, and, if that ain't big enough, I'll buy the next lot in order to make room. There can't any of them fly any higher than we can, and, if it comes to a question of trees, I'll buy a whole orchard for you."

Still she hesitated. "The fact is, John," she confessed at last, " I don't know just where to go for anything in that line. Where do they keep family trees and all such things?"

"What do you suppose I know about it ?" he explained. " You're running the fashion end of this establishment, and I don't want to be bothered with it. If the florist can't tell you anything about it, hunt up a first-class nurseryman and place your order with him."

## NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

North Otago Times, Volume X, Issue 321, 19 June 1868, Page 2

**We have received a long, rambling letter from "A Miner," with reference to a case in which he figured in the Police Court the other day ; but, as we can see no earthly good which can result from inflicting upon the public a column of nonsense, which commences with "A Miner's" genealogy, gives an autobiographical account without point or interest to anybody but the writer himself, and winds-up without proving or disproving anything, we must decline to give it insertion.—ED. O. T.**

**How about this website.** It allows you to type a surname, and the site then shows the geographical distribution of the name according to 1881 census and 1998. <http://www.nationaltrustnames.org.uk/default.aspx>

The subject of the Dec newsletter will in part be a recognition of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the branch. Elizabeth Timms has been most helpful sharing records of the past. So that it is not a dry record, I would welcome contributions from members. Perhaps you have a special memory you'd like to share. I'd like it to be like a memory board for members, particularly those of you who have been members over time.

The newsletter is prepared and edited by Shirley Jack, 4731163, [shirleyjack@xtra.co.nz](mailto:shirleyjack@xtra.co.nz)  
*Deadline for copy for each newsletter is 20th of odd months. Contributions from members are appreciated.*  
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