

For the Junior Members Dunedin a Hundred Years Ago

Four years before the arrival of the Scottish pioneers in 1848, a young surveyor named Tuckett had been sent to explore the east coast of the South Island and to select a suitable site for the new settlement. After looking at Lyttelton and the Canterbury Plains he continued south to Moeraki where he left the boat and walked to Dunedin mainly through the trackless forest. He then continued his journey south almost to Bluff and back to Dunedin, walking all the way. There were no roads, and no bridges over the rivers and streams. He decided on the site of Dunedin as the most suitable location for the city to be. Two years later a party of thirty-six surveyors and workmen arrived from Wellington under another young surveyor named Charles Kettle, and set to work to lay out the position of the principal streets by cutting tracks through the forest that then covered the Dunedin hills.

A year before this, Mr. James Anderson had arrived and built a house at the bay now known as Andersons Bay and this was Dunedin's first residence. This was in 1845, three years before the arrival of the John Wickliffe.

The area now known as South Dunedin and St. Kilda was a huge swamp difficult to cross and covered with nigger-heads and other sedges, rushes, and in some parts raupo also. To reach Dunedin from Andersons Bay, one had to travel by boat, though a year or so later a walking track was prepared along the foreshore. There was another smaller swamp at North Dunedin. Near the streams sedges, rushes, toetoe and flax made up the usual vegetation.

The present foreshore, a hundred years ago, was covered by the waters of the harbour which reached as far as the Stock Exchange, and it was here that the first Scottish settlers set foot in Dunedin. The Dunedin railway station, the Oil Tanks, the Early Settlers' Museum, the Bus Depot, and the Express Company's building have all been built on land reclaimed from the harbour, some of the necessary material being pumped ashore from the bed of the harbour by a suction dredge. The water ran back into the harbour but the sand and silt settled and remained. Indeed almost all the flat land at the base of the hills was formerly part of the Otago Harbour. Where First Church now stands there was a hill, the top of which was removed, providing rock and rubble for forming the roads or for filling in the foreshore. This hill separated Princes Street from George Street and horse-drawn vehicles could not at first travel from one street to the other. The only land transport was by horses, or by carts drawn either by horses or bullocks. The motor cars and motor cycles you see everywhere today did not then exist anywhere in the world, and very few of the early settlers ever saw a motor car.

The area now known as Logan Park was at one time an arm of the harbour similar to Andersons Bay. When a road was built across it, it came to be known as Lake Logan ; but when the suction dredge filled up this area and reclaimed it as dry land, the name had to be changed to Logan Park.

A jetty or wharf was soon built by the Early Settlers to enable the vessels arriving from Wellington and elsewhere to unload their cargoes. This was built from Jetty Street straight out into deep water. All vessels at this time were sailing vessels as steamers were unknown till some years - later. Most of the first houses were built on the hills, and it was many years before the South Dunedin swamps had been sufficiently drained to allow houses to be built there.

Many of the earliest houses were built of puddled clay mixed with straw or grass. The walls were sometimes two feet thick. The windows were small because glass was scarce ; indeed many people used calico instead of glass. Roofing iron was also scarce and many people covered the roof with thatch or raupo, toetoe, or rushes. These "wattle and daub" houses were very cosy—warm in winter and cool in summer. Of course, the furniture had to be made from timber, old boxes, etc. and the floors lacked carpets or linoleum. Cooking was done on open fires, or in camp ovens in which the bread was baked. Wood for fuel was plentiful and cost nothing.

Some houses were built of wood which had first to be sawn from forest logs by hand using large "pit" saws, until a year or two later when Mr. Valpy erected a timber mill in Leith Valley, the power being derived from a large water-wheel similar to the one in the Early Settlers' Museum. Many of these houses had one or

two attic rooms between the ceiling and the roof and gable windows were built to let in the light and air. These were reached by means of a crude stairway or sometimes by a ladder.

Men who worked for wages got 4 or 5 shillings a day ; but, as money was scarce much of the trade was done by barter—a bag of potatoes for a large cheese, or a pound of butter for a dozen eggs, and so on. Wheat was grown and grew well, but had to be ground into flour by hand mills before bread or scones could be baked. A good library was available, though few books were suitable for the children.

I need hardly tell you that there were at that period no wireless sets, or gramophones, or moving pictures ; no bicycles, motor bikes or motor cars; no steamers or trains ; and no electric light ; for all of these have been invented since 1848. Neither were there any cameras, and that is why we have no photographs of any of the Early Settlers at the time they arrived in Otago, or of the sailing vessels in which they came, or of Dunedin in its earliest years ; but some paintings were made and may be seen in the Early Settlers' Museum.

As yet there were no sparrows, blackbirds, thrushes, linnets, gold finches, chaffinches, or starlings. Instead, the only birds to be seen were kakas, a few wekas, flocks of parrakeets, native pigeons, tuis, bellbirds, fantails, tomtits, robins, wrens and bush hawks. On the South Dunedin swamps pukeko and bitterns were numerous, and native ducks were plentiful on lakes and lagoons. Wild pigs, introduced to New Zealand by Capt. Cook had spread and were fairly plentiful, providing both sport and pork for the table.

The people dressed differently from people today. Boys and girls rarely wore boots except on Sunday preferring bare feet even then. The women, too, wore boots instead of shoes and their skirts reached right to the ground. They all wore their hair long, and the older women preferred bonnets to hats. Conditions, you see, have changed greatly in the last hundred years, even in Dunedin.

—W. M.