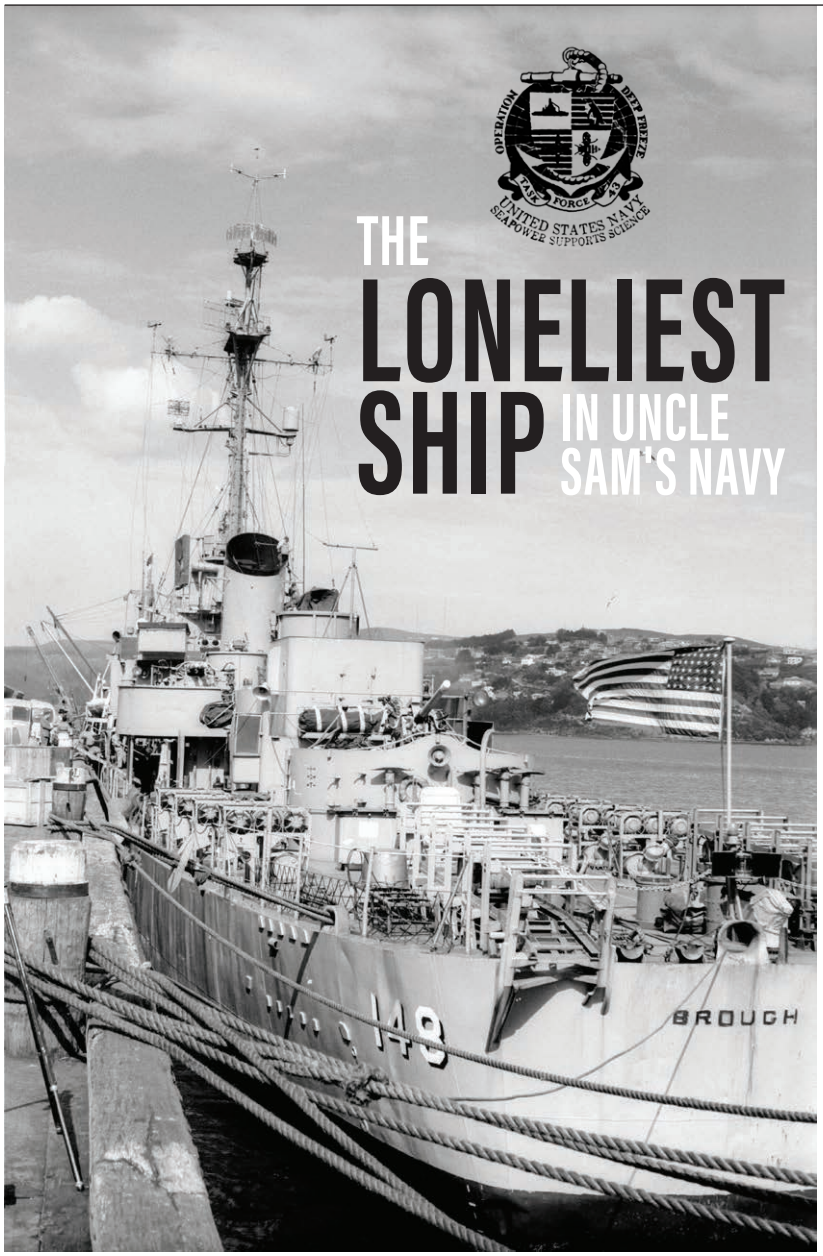
OTAGO SETTLERS NEWS

OTAGO SETTLERS ASSOCIATION *proud to be friends of* toitū OTAGO SETTLERS MUSEUM **SUMMER 2023** ISSUE 159



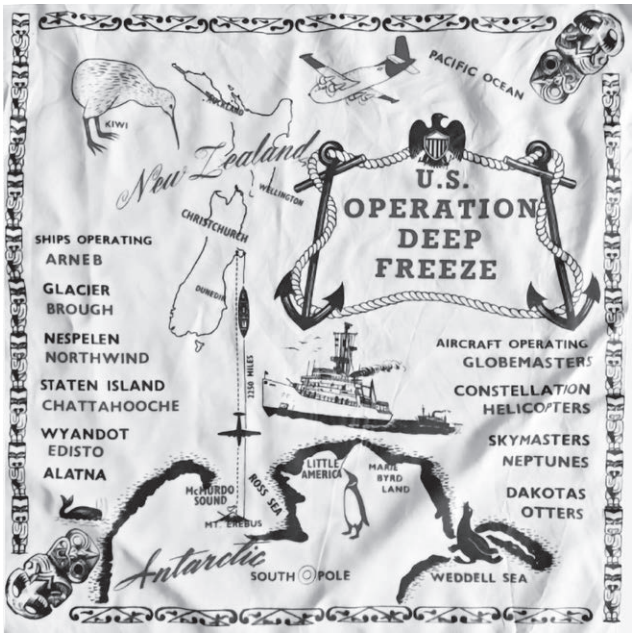
THE LONELIEST SHIP IN UNCLE SAM'S NAVY

American sailors were a familiar sight in late 1950s and 1960s Dunedin taking a break from one of the roughest and most remote duties the US Navy could provide. From 1956 to 1968, picket ships were stationed in the 'screaming sixties' of the Southern Ocean, half way to Antarctica. They were positioned precisely south of Measly Beach at 170° east, 250 miles west of the flight path between Christchurch and McMurdo Sound, so they could give advance warning to aircraft of bad weather arriving on the prevailing westerly wind. In addition to weather reports and ocean temperature readings, the ships provided navigational signals for the aircraft and acted as search and rescue vessels if things went badly wrong. These were the days before weather satellites and when aircraft engines were still sufficiently unreliable that making a long flight over open sea with fewer than four engines was a risky business. Those early Antarctic explorers who took aircraft with them had the good sense to take them there in a ship. Douglas Mawson was even more cautious, bringing a Vickers monoplane with its wings removed in 1912. It was intended to pull sledges but soon broke down in the extreme cold. In 1928 Hubert Wilkins, another Australian, was the first to fly in Antarctica, and the following year US Admiral Richard Byrd turned up with three aeroplanes. One of them, the Ford Trimotor *Floyd Bennett*, was the first to fly over the South Pole.

On the map, New Zealand covers a vast territory. The Realm of New Zealand, that is, for it has included a large wedge of Antarctica for the past century. The slices of the continental pie are assigned to the nearest states to its north, or to those with links to the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration before the First World War. James Clark Ross claimed Victoria Land for the Empire in 1841, and in 1923 the borders were defined and the claim transferred to the Dominion of New Zealand. The Governor General, Viscount Jellicoe, became the first Governor of the Ross Dependency. International rivalry over the continent flared up in the 1940s and once the Cold War warmed up, Antarctica looked as if it might become yet another scene of a stand-off between the United States and the Soviet Union. This was defused by the massive international scientific project mounted in 1957–58 as part of the International Geophysical Year. Instead of intermittent expeditions to the ice, permanent scientific bases were established under the aegis of the US Navy's Operation 'Deep Freeze,' which had begun in late 1955. The Antarctic Treaty of 1959 further promoted international scientific co-operation by setting aside territorial disputes and demilitarising the continent.

Among the five new American bases was one at the South Pole. A runway, 'Williams Field,' was constructed from compacted snow on the thick ice shelf 780 miles away at McMurdo Sound, close to where Captain Scott had based his expedition in 1902–3. Aircraft flew 2326 miles (3743 km) from Christchurch to Williams Field, the equivalent

USS *Brough* at Dunedin, photographed by Alfred M Bailey in January 1958. It flies the old 48-star flag – Denver Museum of Nature & Science BA58-685-7



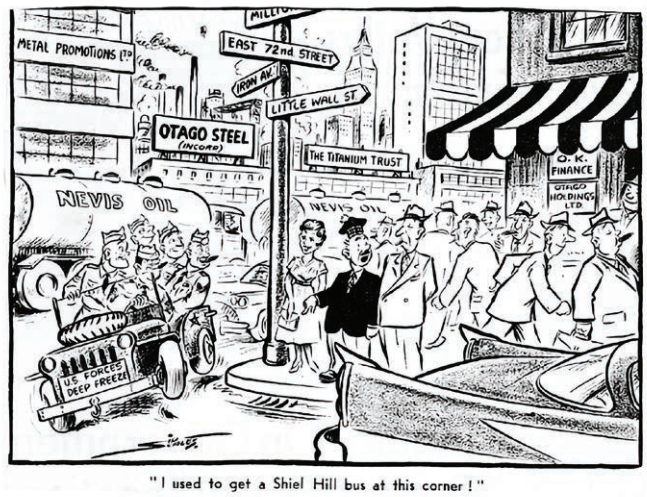
of flying to Cairns, only a lot colder. This was near the maximum range of several of the aircraft first used by Operation Deep Freeze, so encountering a strong headwind on the 14-hour flight could mean the navigator would have to calculate the point of no return and the pilot decide whether to turn back or push on. When Lockheed Hercules took over, the flight time was cut to less than nine hours. In January 1960 one of them unexpectedly encountered a headwind of 125 knots (230 km/h). 'It was a real jet stream and it was impossible to continue with any degree of safety,' said the commander, so near Campbell Island they turned back, and with the tail wind 'were really barrelling along at 380 knots' (700 km/h) back to Christchurch.

It was all a huge logistical operation. In the 1959–60 season alone, ten tubby, pimple-nosed Douglas Globemaster transport aircraft made 57 flights to McMurdo, taking a total of 453 passengers and almost 500 tons of cargo. The return flights occasionally had unusual passengers. In 1962 for example 46 penguins were flown to Christchurch, to be joined there by 30 hedgehogs, 14 opossums, 13 magpies and a solitary rook, all destined for Portland Zoo in Oregon. On Groundhog Day in Portland today, the weather prediction is made by a hedgehog, not a woodchuck.

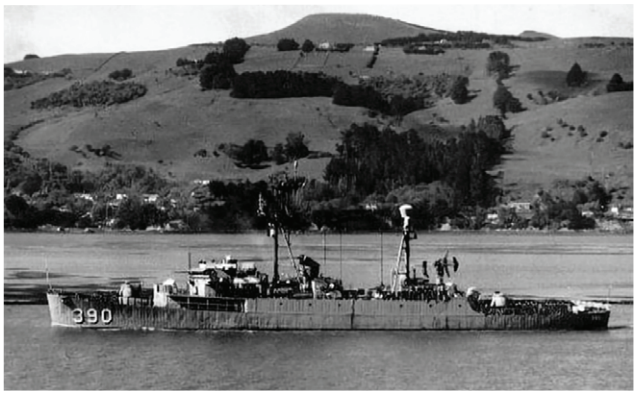
A rather more scientific approach to forecasting was needed for the Antarctic flights. A meteorological station was built overlooking Perseverance Harbour on Campbell Island in 1956. Two special centrally heated prefabricated aluminium buildings, insulated with fibreglass, were made for it by the Bristol Aeroplane Company, which a few years later was to design and build Concorde. The American weather picket ships dropped off and picked up the New Zealand personnel, equipment and mail, though sometimes the weather made the operation difficult or impossible. In January 1963 the postman from the USS *Durant* found himself marooned on Campbell Island by rough weather. The resident meteorologists showed the accidental tourist over the island, which cannot have taken long. He was collected a fortnight later. Problems were often caused by stormy weather, not just out at sea but on the surface of the Sun as well. Radio communications could be difficult at the best of times, but in November 1960 cosmic rays from a solar flare led to 'an enormous disturbance' and blackouts, with some 'extremely irregular behaviour' by the instruments. Radio communications worldwide were affected.

The picket ships were destroyer escorts and kept station down among the icebergs at 60° latitude, 974 miles (1561 km) south of Dunedin. They circled at five to seven knots, and if needed had enough fuel to keep this up for a couple of months. In practice the weather in the screaming sixties could be so rough that three weeks was more than enough: 'We bounced around like a cork in waves up to 40ft high … It was not so much a matter of sea sickness … but of sheer exhaustion' reported the officers of the USS *Brough* in November 1956. Food was running short, and 'Even with our slotted table boards, we were losing our soup and coffee when the ship rolled up to 50 degrees.' They could be forgiven for thinking the 'B' in 'Brough' was silent. On some voyages, it was so rough the crew had to sit on the floor to eat their meals. Three years later, the USS *Peterson* headed south to to moor an automatic weather station in 750 feet of water above a sea mountain. It was not long before rough seas broke the antenna. Three months later the *Peterson* returned and managed to find the buoy in thick fog using radar, but there was no sign at all of the expensive weather station. It was thought to have been 'carried away by pack ice or wrenched from its mountings by heavy seas.' The USS *Durant* was on station one evening in October 1962 when 'the seas began to get choppy … and by midnight the ship was rolling through 50 degrees. A deck officer and a lookout were injured and seamen were thrown from their bunks.' When rough seas were anticipated, the men usually strapped themselves in to their bunks. The *Durant* returned to port with 'Broken windows, bent and torn metal, and some very unhappy men.'

In contrast, HMNZS *Rotoiti*, a former Royal Navy frigate that had served in the wartime Gibraltar convoys and in the Korean War, was 'an extremely good sea boat.' In October 1961,



Top: A souvenir headscarf printed in red and blue, listing the ships and aircraft employed on Operation Deep Freeze.
Bottom: Sid Scales cartoon from the *ODT*, 7 November 1958 – National Library E-549-q-12-127





'after a harrowing 24 hours in one of the severest storms yet encountered' in which she took a 'real pounding by bad weather' – 85-knot winds and icy 30-foot waves – she sustained only slight damage. The *Rotoiti* returned to port 'liberally coated in rust because her crew were unable to attend to structure maintenance through the rough weather.' There were 30 cadets on board making their first deep-sea voyage, and they may have come to regret their rash decision to join the queen's navy. The *Rotoiti* alternated with the American ships in 1961–63 on picket duty. Like them, it released weather balloons and tracked them by radar to obtain upper-level wind measurements for weather forecasting. In 1964–65, the frigates *Otago* and *Pukaki* also spent some time on weather picket duties.

Though search and rescue duties were another important part of the picket ship operation, in practice the only sailors they had to fish out of the drink were alongside the oil wharf in Dunedin. When their skiff capsized in November 1965, six rowers were helped out of the water by crewmen of the USS *Thomas J Gary*. 'The shell was hoisted out and the wet and cold rowers invited aboard. Their clothes were dried in the ship's laundry, and they were given lunch.' Many local people were happy to return the favour. The Operation Deep Freeze servicemen met a friendly reception in both Dunedin and Christchurch. Dances were put on for them, and they came along to local hops such as the long-running Andy's Dance. Sailors were often invited home for a meal and to meet the family, or were bought a drink in a local hotel. In any case, the barmen wouldn't take their money, as it was then illegal to possess foreign currency in New Zealand. Thomas F Jaras of the *Vance* recalls that at the many formal and private gatherings he was invited to, 'One could not buy a drink nor refuse one … Their hospitality was overwhelming.' The sailors were taken hunting and fishing, and played exotic sports such as cricket with the locals. When the first ships left Lyttelton in December 1955, 'Thousands of people were at the docks cheering and waving. Bands were playing. As each ship left the dock a shower of white sailor hats descended on the people below. The harbour and estuary were filled with small craft tooting whistles and flying gay streamers.'

When regular flights began in each Antarctic summer, the weather picket ships were stationed at Dunedin. They were away for 20–30 days at a time, actually on station for 10–12 days, then back in port for rest and recreation. Some crews held beard-growing competitions while away, and judging took place when they got back to port. In the 1956–57 season, the crew of the *Brough* spent a total of 57 days in Dunedin, where they 'created a fine impression.' The sailors made an especially fine impression on some of the young ladies of Dunedin. One of them remembers they were 'very polite and clean-cut young men, [and] most had crew-cuts.' The USS *Mills* was on picket duty from September 1964 to March 1965, visiting Dunedin eight times. That was quite long enough for seven of her sailors to marry local women. In 1967 the sailors of the USS *Gary* took home another seven brides. Beverley Ratima (née Macdonald) met her future husband David McCuin of the USS *Vance* in the Hob Nob coffee bar in Princes Street in 1961, and they 'never looked back … Everything went so fast. It was the thing in those days to be seen with those sailors from the USA.' She told the *Otago Daily Times* the 'local boys hated seeing local girls dating "Yanks" … and there were lots of fights.' Vigilant parents and battleaxe landladies doubtless thwarted many other trysts.

Despite the hostility of their rivals, those sailors still unmarried were keen to stay: in 1958 five of the *Brough*'s crew elected to extend their tour of duty by 'shipping over' and signing up for another six years' service. This was seen as 'a compliment to Dunedin, which was popular with the ship's company.' Two years later, more than a third of the crew of the *Peterson* applied to transfer to the *Brough*, which was to return for the next season: 'it is not that the men want to join the *Brough* – any ship coming to Dunedin would do.' The naval links were reinforced in 1962 when Dunedin became a sister city of Portsmouth, Virginia, which is close to the huge Norfolk navy base.

The officers of the USS *Calcaterra* praised Dunedin as 'a lovely city [that] must be a pleasure to live in with its clean air and streets.' They were particularly taken with the friendly atmosphere and personal service in the local restaurants, unlike some joints elsewhere where the food was just 'slapped down.' Popular haunts for the sailors on leave in addition to the Hob Nob were the Broadway Hotel and the Diamond Grill and the Sunset Strip in Rattray Street. Occasionally, some of the crew were allowed to rent a house in town for the summer. One young member of the Dunedin Jazz Club, which met regularly to play the latest records in the Pioneer Women's Memorial Hall in Moray Place, recalls 'The American lads became regulars when they were in port and on their trips back to the States they purchased records the local boys wanted but couldn't buy here.'

Top left: USS *Calcaterra*, c 1964–65; **Top right:** USS *Thomas J Gary* c 1965–66, both in the Victoria Channel, Dunedin Harbour – www.navsource.org

The visiting ships held open days for the public, and crew members gave talks and showed American films to local organisations. As 'a gesture of international goodwill' and perhaps to set an example to lily-livered landlubbers, in November 1965 the officers and crew of the *Calcaterra* volunteered to donate to the public hospital's mobile blood bank. Starting with the captain, the sailors gave 50 pints (28 litres) altogether on 'Vampire Day.' The ODT's uncharacteristically sensationalist headline read 'Blood Flowed on Waterfront.'

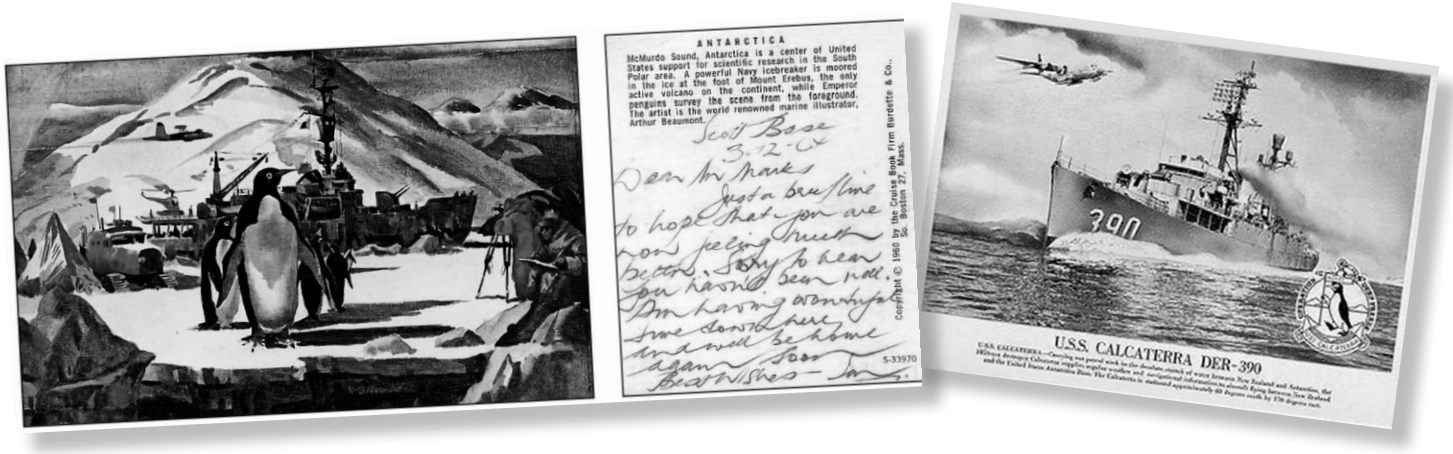
Though no blood was actually spilt, some young locals saw the American sailors as easy prey. In 1960, 'Four sailors from the *Wilhoite*, including three negroes [were] offered car rides by three men and a woman at night on two separate occasions … they [were] assaulted singly and robbed of money, watches and other valuables.' James Mawdsley, Graham Harwood and Trevor Gordon were soon caught and imprisoned for the robberies. There were hints that other nefarious activity was motivated by political protests against the Vietnam War. The USS *Gary* was tied up at the Kitchener Street wharf in November 1965 when her mooring lines were cut. The ship drifted about 70 feet (21 metres) and there were fears she might run aground. There were no clues as to the culprit, but the police were reported to have had their suspicions.

The picket ships were good for local business. They needed regular provisioning and refuelling, and the hard life in the Southern Ocean meant repairs were often required. Built quickly and cheaply during the Second World War, the Edsall class destroyer escorts were not made to last. Gene Spinelli, who served in the USS *Calcaterra*, recalls: 'We were fortunate to have the services of Sims Engineering in Dunedin. Over the years, Ted Sims became proficient at replacing major assemblies by cutting plates from the ship's hull and using hoists and cranes to remove and replace just about any item that needed attention.' The USS *Wilhoite* for instance was forced to limp back to port in November 1960 with a faulty engine. The welders had to cut a seven-foot hole in the armour plating of the hull with oxy-acetylene torches to get access to the engine room and extract the damaged parts. In 1964, the USS *Mills* was in dock to have her leaking boilers repaired. Dogged by bad luck, steaming up the Victoria Channel into Dunedin in early 1965 the Mills struck a pile and bent a propeller. Her successor, the USS *Calcaterra*, blew a gasket and she too had to be cut open to replace the boiler. While they were waiting, the officers and crew played a gridiron football game, in which one lieutenant was so badly hurt he had to be sent home. Then a few months later the *Calcaterra* had to be cut open once again to replace an eight-ton generator. In gratitude for all his work, Ted Sims was made an honorary Commander in the US Navy.

While on station in the Southern Ocean in October 1963, some alert crew members of the USS *Hissem* noticed some salt water in a fuel tank. It turned out to have come from a crack in the 20-year-old ship's keel, so they headed back to port for repairs. Only a year earlier, the *Hissem* had been one of the first ships to blockade Cuba during the missile crisis. The ship was about to leave Dunedin again for her picket station in late November 1963 when her crew heard the news of the assassination of President Kennedy. 'The initial reaction throughout the ship was one of complete shock and disbelief … The ship was unnaturally quiet as groups of men huddled round speakers and listened in silence to the details pouring in over the radio. What everyone found hard to believe was that this monstrous deed had taken place in a time of relative world tranquillity. There was no Cuban crisis, no Berlin crisis and no Vietnamese crisis to prepare us for the tragedy and it caught everyone completely by surprise … the *Hissem*'s colours are flying at half-mast.'

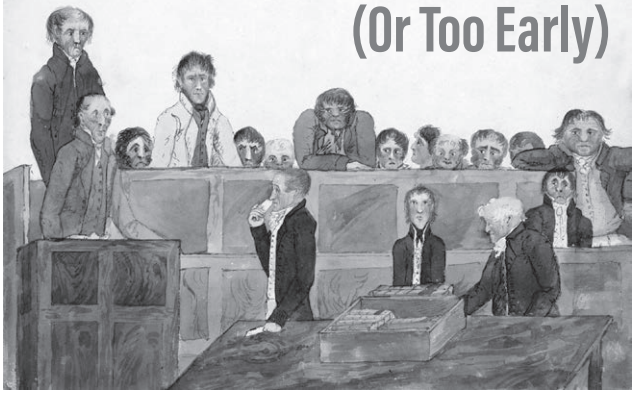
The writing was on the wall for the picket ships when the Nimbus I weather satellite was launched in August 1964. The need for a search and rescue service remained, but once flights by two-engined aircraft came to an end, the need for the ships dwindled. The summer of 1968–69 turned out to be their last. The *Calcaterra* sailed away on 25 February 1968, the last of the dozen US Navy ships that had made Dunedin home.

This article's title comes from an interview with the captain of the *Wilhoite* in the *Royal Australian Navy News* for 20 January 1961. Ian Church's *Last Port to Antarctica* (1997) includes a chapter on the picket ships. For a first-hand account of life on board the *Vance* and its visits to Dunedin in 1961–62, see Thomas F. Jaras, *In the Trough: Three Years on Ocean Station* (2013).



Left to right: A postcard sent from Scott Base in December 1964; A Christmas card sent by the crew of USS *Calcaterra*, c 1964–65.

IT'S NEVER TOO LATE
(Or Too Early)



Some well-heeled parents put their sons down for Eton at birth, and membership of the Otago Early Settlers' Association was once almost as eagerly sought. In 1955, showing great presence of mind, Janette L Martin's parents enrolled her as a life member of the Association at the age of three hours and twenty minutes. From Kaiwera near Gore, Miss Martin was a great-great-granddaughter of William Martin, who came out in the *Philip Laing* in 1847–48, and she could count several other early settlers among her ancestors.

At the other extreme was another new member, Mrs Mary Ann Josephine Arthur of Dunedin. In contrast to Janette, she had left things to the last minute, as she was 94 years old when she joined in August 1954. She was in the Nightingale Ward of the Dunedin Public Hospital and had only a few more months to live. Mary Ann Arthur became one of the only 12 early settlers remaining among the 3184 members of the OESA. When barely a year old she had arrived in 1861 with her parents in the ship she may have been named after, the *Mary Ann*. Her father, John Peter Gollar, was a Londoner, and had married Anne Yates from Bolton le Moors in Lancashire in St David's Anglican Cathedral, Hobart Town, in 1857 when he was 30 and she 19. 'About the latter part of 1859, allured by the news of the gold discovery in Otago, he left his wife to manage his business in Hobart, he brought over a shipment of Clydesdale horses in the schooner Mary Ann; and, taking advantage of his opportunity, he filled up the vessel with all kinds of domestic animals and poultry, carts, drays, harness, flour, provisions, building materials, etc. Upon arrival he found that a shipment of horses had just arrived in Dunedin before him, and rather than sell the animals at a loss he loaded up his cart and drays with flour and provisions, and, in company with his brother-in-law (Mr Yates), he set out for the Tuapeka goldfields; and arrived in due time at Gabriel's Gully, where he disposed of his horses and stock very much to his advantage. He soon tired of a digger's life, returned to Dunedin, and leased two sections in the Octagon ... Here he erected a couple of two-storey shops and dwellings, and while these were in course of construction he returned to Hobart, disposed of his business, and brought his wife and young family over to Dunedin, and opened a bakery in the Octagon premises.' This was destroyed

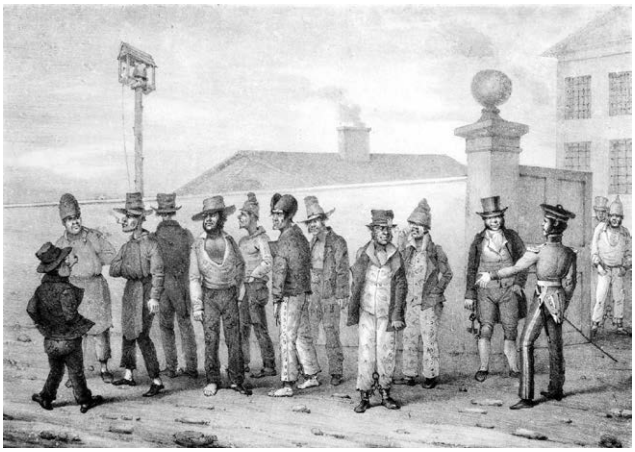


in the disastrous Octagon fire of 1865. 'Undaunted by this calamity,' the family moved to new premises at the corner of Albany and Leith Streets, where the University's Clubs & Societies Centre now stands. The business flourished, and Gollar's advertised as a baker, confectioner and grocer. John had been an active member of the Oddfellows since his Hobart days and helped found Lodge Pioneer No 1 in Dunedin. He was a racehorse owner and one of the pioneers of trotting in Dunedin. On his death in 1905 the *Otago Daily Times*'s obituarist declared John Gollar to have been 'a man of unsullied honour and integrity ... of strong force of character, powerful physique, and active temperament ... a staunch Catholic, and a staunch friend, a man of broad sympathies and wide charities; a man who was loyal and true to his friends through storm and sunshine, a man of unflinching courage and unswerving integrity.'

But what had drawn John to Hobart Town in the first place? 'Born in London in the year 1822, Mr Gollar lived there until he reached man's estate, by which time he had learnt the trade of bread and biscuit baking. Becoming fired with a desire to travel, he set out for Tasmania, and on arrival there set up in business for himself in Hobart.' Up to a point, Lord Copper, for John Gollar had a dark secret: his voyage out had been at governmnent expense and his residence there at her majesty's pleasure. With a history of theft and picking pockets, Gollar's collar had been felt. He was convicted of larceny at the Westminster Quarter Sessions in May 1837 and sentenced to seven years in the penal colony. He spent six months in a House of Correction, followed by a further half year in a prison hulk awaiting transportation. Once he arrived in Van Diemen's Land in August 1838 he did not mend his ways. He was given his ticket of leave in 1842, which allowed him to work for private employers, but within a year was caught acting as an accessory to a robbery. Four years later Gollar was caught red-handed having stolen seven sheep. He was found in a hut with a pot of mutton fat on the fire, surrounded by butchered carcasses and with branded sheepskins pegged to nearby trees; worse still, the sheep belonged to the son of the Attorney-General. Gollar was given the nominal sentence of transportation for life and was sent to Port Arthur for two years. Back in Hobart in 1851, he and a fellow servant were found drunk and gambling in a public house when they should have been at work, for which they were sentenced to six months' hard labour.

The following year, Gollar was employed by the Colonial Surgeon, John Meyer, at the Lunatic Asylum in New Norfolk, near Hobart. (Returning to England, a decade later Meyer

Top left: A courtroom scene by Edward Charles Close from his New South Wales Sketchbook (c 1817-40) – State Library of New South Wales SAFE/ PXA 1187; **Top right:** John Peter Gollar in later life – myheritage.com



became the first Superintendent of the Broadmoor Criminal Lunatic Asylum, only to die as the result of an attack by one of the inmates.) Strait jackets seem to have put John Gollar on the strait and narrow path, and he seems to have abandoned his life of crime about this time. He was granted his ticket of leave again in 1855, and set up in business as a baker in Elizabeth Street in the heart of Hobart. He and Ann had five children, among them a son who died in infancy before they left for Dunedin. Another son born in Hobart grew up to join to the Albion Cricket Club and played for Otago in a single first-class match against Canterbury in 1890–91. This was enough to earn him the distinction of a short obituary in *Wisden*, rubbing shoulders with the demigods – the next entry was for Dr Alfred Grace, brother of the famous WG. In 1881 Mary Jane Gollar married John Arthur from Invercargill. He had been born in Linlithgow, west of Edinburgh, and became a branch manager for the Loan and Mercantile Agency Co. He died prematurely in 1911, leaving Mary Jane a widow with nine children.



New Committee Members



The OSA Committee welcomes two new members, Anne-Marie Hutton and Chris Marlow MBE. Anne-Marie has lived in Dunedin most of her life, and was a secondary school mathematics teacher, most recently at Otago Girls' High School. Now retired, her interests include walking, gardening, reading, U3A, local history and home winemaking.

Chris is proud to be a fifth-generation Dunedinite whose forebears settled in the city in 1864. He is a retired lawyer with extensive board experience in numerous charitable and business organisations. Chris is committed to preserving and bringing to life the social history of our past.

Transports of Delight

Christmas Function

You are warmly invited to join us for our Christmas function, which will feature a special tour of the newly refurbished Transport Gallery, followed by a Christmas supper. The event will be held on Thursday, 7 December at the Museum: the doors will open at 6.30 for a 7 pm start. Pixie Town and the shop will be open for half an hour from 6.30 pm. If you plan to come, please RSVP Jude at the office by Friday, 1 December at admin@otagosettlers.org.nz or telephone 4778 677. Please advise her of any dietary requirements so we can make sure everyone is catered for.

Do bring along a little gold for the Christmas raffle so you can be in with a chance to win. All contributions of items for the raffle will be gratefully received. The proceeds will go towards the costs of future OSA events. The items should not be worth more than about $10; due to health regulations only ready-made items can be raffled, which unfortunately rules out home-made edibles. You can leave items at the Museum's front desk and they will be sent on to Jude at the OSA office.

Top left: Augustus Earle's lithograph depicting a Government Jail Gang, 1830; **Bottom left:** Convict love token engraved with rough stippled text and the image of two crossed keys at the base: 'From J. Gollar to his Mother May 8th 1837'; back: 'when this you see think of me and bear me in your mind.' – National Museum of Australia love-tokens.nma.gov.au/tokens/2008.0039.0188

FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE



President Moira Styles welcomed 31 members of the Otago Settlers Association to the 124th Annual General Meeting who had braved the rain to come out on the evening of Thursday, 21 September. The membership now stands at a 'pretty good' 579, many of whom are life members. Moira praised the 'absolutely excellent' outgoing city council representative Sophie Barker and welcomed her 'equally excellent' successor on the OSA Committee, Kevin Gilbert. As for her own role, Moira confessed 'even though I didn't want to be President, I've thoroughly enjoyed it.' She was re-elected unopposed, as were the Committee members Susan Schweigman, Phil Dowsett, Ann Barsby, Pete Smith and Russell Wall. Two new Committee members were welcomed, Anne-Marie Hutton and Chris Marlow. Moira thanked Carol Pike, retiring Vice President Hilary Allison and Committee member Jean Roulston for all their dedicated work for the Association over the years.

Treasurer Keith Clifford presented the financial statements, pointing out that investment income is 'looking very good,' with the newer investments making about 7 per cent. The net surplus was much lower than the previous year (when there was a large-scale sell-off of investments), but none the less, as Keith pointed out, 'a surplus is always good.' Ray Beardsmore drew attention to the 'very good' growth in the Association's funds over the past three decades. The cost of auditing has been held down by moving from the previous firm of accountants to Audit Professionals Ltd. A $5 increase in membership fees was agreed, Moira explaining that the Committee's thinking is that a small rise now would be better than putting off the inevitable and having to bring in a large increase later on.

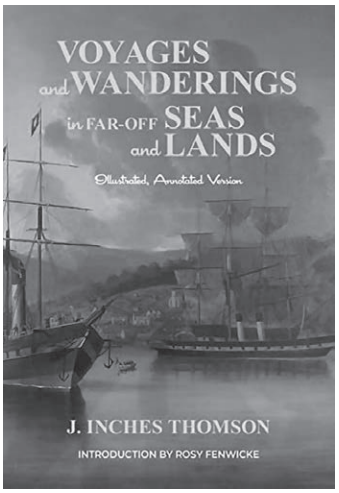
Cam McCracken, Director of the Museum, summarised his detailed annual report, full copies of which are available from Jude at the OSA office. He opened by thanking the Committee and Association for their continuing support. For Cam, the 'crowning achievement of the past twelve months' was the completion of the Journey to New Edinburgh documentary project. The gala launch at the Rialto cinema on Anniversary Day was a 'wonderful event.' The refreshing of the displays in the former NZR Road Services bus garage is progressing well, and the gallery, with several new exhibits, should be open again in time for Christmas. (The changes were described by Peter Read in the Autumn issue, no 156.) The Otago Motor Club Trust has supported the work generously. Overall, visitor numbers are gradually climbing, though 'people are not venturing out as much as they used to' before the pandemic. Pixie Town and Father Christmas however drew about 10,000 visitors last December. Among the range of collections projects, dealing with hazardous substances has been 'a really big piece of work.' Asbestos dust, for instance, poses a challenge that has to be met. Cam drew attention to the 'very useful' digitisation of the minutes of the Otago Early Settlers' Association, which can now more easily be 'mined for information on collection items.' Jane Macknight later pointed out that this benefits the preservation of the original documents, as it reduces the amount of handling they need be subjected to.

The Museum's online presence continues to grow, with many videos on YouTube. Curator Peter Read has produced dozens of 'really wonderful' short items bringing to life drawings, paintings and photographs from the collection. Two new part-time staff members, Brendan Seal and Kirsten Parkinson, have been appointed as part of the Enriching Local Curriculum programme to work with teachers and develop interactive learning experiences. Matthew Newton is the new Operations Assistant, and Ioan Bramwell a part-time Collections Technician. Though visitor numbers were down, the Museum shop had one of its best years. Cam praised Yvette Billot and the retail team, saying they 'really understand our market.' A new theatrette is to be constructed in an unused plant room behind the enquiry desk and should be ready for paying visitors next summer. It will show a ten-minute audiovisual presentation on the history of the district from the earliest times, and Cam expects it to be a 'real feather in our cap.' He concluded by conveying his sincere thanks on behalf of the Museum's staff to the members of the Association for their ongoing support; he looks forward to continuing a 'great relationship.'

The Museum's own Will McKee was the guest speaker, describing what happened behind the scenes on the Journey to New Edinburgh. A lot of hard work and careful planning went into the four-year project, but it was not entirely the 'well-oiled machine' it might have appeared. In a sort of blooper reel, the presenter Seán Brosnahan was shown confronted with hazards in mechanical, human and animal form. Astonishingly noisy low-flying RAF jets are a familiar feature of the remoter parts of North Britain. If not quite up to the drama of Alain de Cadanet's famous encounter with a low-flying Spitfire, Seán showed remarkable presence of mind when a jet fighter flew over during filming in a Highland glen. His patience though was clearly tested by infantile motorists who delight in honking whenever they pass a film crew. Despite the provocation he was not heard to swear, but had he done so the honks could have been dubbed over the soundtrack. The cat who makes a bee-line for the only person in the room who does not like cats is a familiar experience, though Seán was hounded by bounding dogs and drooling cattle as well. In one entertaining sequence, a proprietorial moggie in the garden of Lisburn House in Caversham stole the show, serenely staring down the presenter. Will himself fell victim to a much smaller menace, the feared clouds of Scotch midgies. A photograph of his much-bitten, swollen face sent a shudder of recognition and sympathy through the audience; thankfully he has long since recovered.

Seán and his furry nemesis at Lisburn House, Caversham.

Book News



Voyages and Wanderings in Far-Off Seas and Lands, by J Inches Thomson. Illustrated, annotated version, edited with an introduction by Rosy Fenwicke. 173 pages, paperback. 16 illustrations, one in colour. $45 (With OSA members' 20% discount, $36 plus $5 packing and postage.)

This very readable memoir was first published in 1912 when John Sen Inches Thomson was safely home in Scotland and looking back on his varied and adventurous career 'off the beaten track' in the South Seas and North America, 'amidst the rough and tumble of a chequered life.' The publisher of the original edition advertised it as 'very suitable for school prizes.' John's older brother Andrew and cousin William were already established in Port Chalmers when he joined them in 1862 aged 17. William was Port Chalmers' first harbourmaster. The two brothers set off for the goldfields, and meanwhile their parents arrived in Port Chalmers in late 1863 with their sister Janet and her husband James McFarlane and their children. The Thomson brothers returned from the goldfields in 1864 and set up there as general merchants and ships' chandlers, and engaged in a wide range of other ventures, including shipbuilding. 'In telling his story, [John] omits mention of his family and the day-to-day life involved in being an early settler in a new country. But we do get the full flavour of the man[:] his humour, his friendships and his search for meaning and understanding in himself and mankind.' For instance, he added 'Sen' to his name as a tribute to the Indian philosopher Keshab Chunder Sen, whose teachings he greatly admired. When John married at the age of 52 he took on his wife Margaret's maiden name Inches as well.

This new edition includes an excellent concise history of the early years of Maori–European contact, the foundation of the Free Church settlement and the early gold rush years. It is extensively footnoted, correcting minor factual errors in the original text, providing further explanations and identifying people and places. The editor, Rosy Fenwicke, is related to Thomson. She was formerly a GP and published a study of New Zealand women doctors, *In Practice* (2004); she is now a full-time writer of fiction.

The shop stocks a wide range of items, many of them New Zealand-made, ideal as gifts for adults and children. Members of the Association qualify for a 20% discount, and there are some special OSA online promotions at shop.toituosm.com

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On the Waterfront

In John Cochrane's article in the last issue recounting his father's experiences as a GP in Port Chalmers, he referred to the 1951 waterfront dispute as a strike, which was what the government of the time called the confrontation. The Waterside Workers' Union imposed an overtime ban in February and were locked out, causing the seamen's, railwaymen's and miners' unions, among others, to go on strike in support.

If you would prefer to receive this newsletter by email, please contact Jude at the OSA office. This would help with postage costs, which like many other things have risen a great deal recently.

OTAGO SETTLERS ASSOCIATION

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