

Early Dunedin¹

Emigrants on the first ships were accommodated in shelters or barracks, as they were called, situated along the beach which at that time extended from the junction of High and Rattray Streets to Dowling Street.

They were long and low, and constructed of native grass, rushes, flax, and small timber. That built by the Scotch emigrants was 60 feet in length entered by a door at one end. The single girls occupied the upper part, the married folks the middle, and the single men the lower part. The sight must have been as unique as it was busy and interesting. The Māoris helped their new comrades with all the good humour of the race; indeed, their assistance was invaluable in the erection of these primitive dwellings. The forms, tables, and other fittings brought from the vessels, composed the furniture. The cooking was done outside gipsy-fashion; fuel was abundant and to be had for the cutting. All were active, happy, and exhilarated under the new conditions and the serene skies which preceded the stormy and rainy weather. The landing of the cargo was much mismanaged and occupied two whole months. There was no recognised leader in the business, and the cases, crates, and casks were dragged up the bank from the boats by main strength.²



Figure 1 Dunedin - Otago Harbour c 1840 unknown

In the new settlement of Dunedin, surveyor Charles Kettle plans were for an 'Edinburgh of the South', with beautiful views and a dramatic harbour. He created an 'Octagon' at Moray Place and, of course, George and Princes Streets, named after the two main thoroughfares in Edinburgh.

While such developments were positive, it is important to remember the raw nature of the place and its semi-rural nature when the first settlers landed. John Mclay (of the *Mooltan* memories) recalls his first home in Rattray St in the 1850s:

The cart took us to a four roomed house with stairs up to a loft but the house did not have any lining. The house was the third one from the left hand

¹ The name comes from name comes from Dùn Èideann, the Gaelic name for Edinburgh.

² Dr Hocken, <http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-HocCont-t1-body-d16.html>

side going up from the corner of what was called Rattray St. and it has the same name today. At last we are in our first home in New Zealand and it is a wild place, bush and swamp all around us and plenty of Wild Pigs in the Bush and open country close by. In the bush plenty of Kakas and Wild Pigeons, Native of New Zealand and plenty of Wild Ducks and teal – and fish. We get plenty of Baracuda and Grouper brought to Dunedin by Maori boats. These are both large fish and we often get 4 Baracuda for one shilling and a large Grouper for 1/6d - it is a much better fish.

Settlers in Andersons Bay wrote very similarly about that area.

Economic conditions were challenging in the early years but improved from around 1853. An indication of permanence was perhaps the establishment of the Southern Cemetery in 1858, with the Northern following in 1872.

The first newspaper was the *Otago News*, first published in 1848 as a fortnightly news sheet of 4 pages. In 1849, it was enlarged and came out weekly.³

Given that so many were farming for a livelihood, it is interesting to note how expensive stock was at this point. In 1854, sheep were 35 shillings a head while horses were between 50 and 60 pounds.⁴

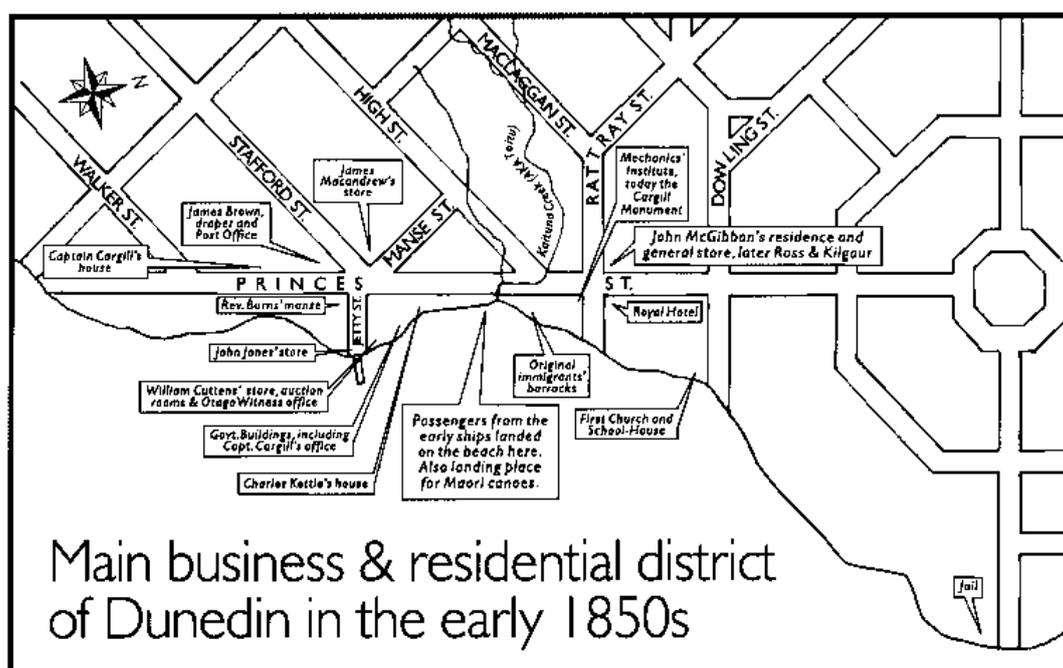


Figure 2 Dunedin Map, Ngairess.com/dunedin.htm

After 10 years, Dunedin remained a village of about 2,000 mainly Scottish settlers. By the end of the 1850s, around 12,000 Scots had emigrated to the settlement, many from the industrial lowlands but the majority lived outside the town boundaries.

³ The Settlement of Otago, the people and the press.

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/ODT19211115.2.134?page=21&query=philip+laing+passengers&title=AHCOG%2CBH%2CCL%2CCROMARG%2CDUNST%2CESD%2CLCM%2CLCP%2CLWM%2CME%2CMIC%2CMTBM%2CNOT%2COAM%2CODY%2COW%2COSWCC%2CSOCR%2CST%2CTT%2CWSTAR>

⁴ A H McIntock, *A History of Otago*, 1929, pp, 329-30.



ABOVE — 'Dunedin 1840', Thomas de Lacy, watercolour. Thomas de Lacy arrived in Dunedin in 1833. He built the first European-style house in the land on West Harbour, naming it 'Rassobourne'. His habit was to row up the 'river' each day to work at the Customs Department. In 1877 he became the first Mayor of West Harbour. Otago Society Archives, Dunedin.

In 1852, when the provinces of New Zealand were created, Dunedin became the capital of the Otago Province, which covered the area of New Zealand from the Waitaki south. It was the only one of New Zealand's original six provinces to have a Māori name - a reflection of the area's European settlement in pre-colonial times. There were squabbles between 'the Old Identity' - the Scottish, Presbyterian majority, and 'the Little Enemy' - the English, Anglican minority. Our combined family covers all sides! Dunedin developed a reputation for furious public debate which continues to the present in the letters columns of the local newspapers.

A minor example of the differences between the two groups of settlers can be demonstrated by the slow and uneven transfer of Old World Christmas traditions to the new. As Dr Ali Clarke has pointed out in her recent Global Dunedin lecture,⁵ religious festivals provide a window into cultural encounters in New Zealand – not just between British settlers and tangata whenua, but amongst the new settlers too. Dunedin, with its mixed population of Scots and English, is an excellent location to note the marked difference in their observance of Christmas.⁶

After the Reformation in England, Protestants trimmed festivals. While the Anglican calendar centred on events in the life of Jesus, Presbyterians focused instead on the week and the significance of the Sabbath. Accordingly, in England, Christmas was an important holiday; in Scotland, it was an ordinary working day. The Scots shifted their main celebrations to New Year, which was not a holiday in England.

⁵ Ali Clarke, *Holiday Seasons: Christmas, New Year and Easter in nineteenth century New Zealand*. Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2007

⁶ Jane McGabe, <https://blogs.otago.ac.nz/global-dunedin/>



DUNEDIN, FROM MATLAND STREET, 1860.

In early Dunedin, the large number of Scots arriving from 1848 continued this tradition of working on Christmas Day. In the town, however, Anglican influence was soon felt, and it became a business holiday. But farmers of Scottish origin continued to ignore Christmas until the turn of the century. As the Scots did begin to embrace this celebration, it was more about food and family than religion. Throughout the colony, new traditions developed to celebrate a summer yuletide. Strawberries and cream joined Christmas pudding as a favourite dessert, and harvesting home grown vegetables (such as potatoes and peas) in time for the

big day became an important part of festive preparations.

The 1860s brought immense change to Dunedin. In early 1861, after gold deposits were found elsewhere in the country, the Otago Provincial Council offered a reward of £1,000 to the first person to locate gold in Otago.

Gold was discovered at Gabriels Gully, south of Dunedin and the rush began. Prospectors flooded to the area and many others arrived in Dunedin, seeking associated business opportunities. There are stories of businessmen being offered five times the value of their businesses from what they had been worth before gold fever struck.



DUNEDIN, FROM BELL HILL, 1860.

The rapid influx of population saw Dunedin become New Zealand's first city in 1865. The new arrivals included many Irish, but also Italians, French, Germans, Jews and Chinese, all lumped together by the earlier settlers as 'the New Iniquity'. The Catholic church established a strong presence while the Jewish population established a synagogue. Some people made fortunes and built grand houses. Slums developed in the inner city. Dunedin and the region industrialised. Dunedin's first railway, the Port Chalmers Branch, was opened on 1 January 1873; it was the first railway built to the

newly adopted (3 ft 6 in (1,067 mm)) narrow gauge in New Zealand. The Main South Line, linking Dunedin with Christchurch and Invercargill, was opened on 22 January 1879.

After ten years of gold rushes, the economy slowed but Premier Julius Vogel's immigration and development schemes of the 1870s brought thousands more to Dunedin and Otago before recession set in during the 1880s.

The impact of the gold rush

Gabriel Read discovered gold in 1862, near the Clutha River at Dunstan, in the mountains 200 miles (300 km) away from Dunedin. Within days, two tent cities sprang up on the riverbanks. Read was an unlikely prospector. A great believer in Divine Providence, he was highly educated in the classics and literature. He was an unpretentious and likeable person by all accounts, not particularly driven by the idea of riches.

He sought his fortune, unsuccessfully, on the Californian goldfields, and then traded among the Pacific islands, where he was shipwrecked at Hawaii. He returned to goldmining in Victoria in the 1850s, again with only limited success. Dismayed at the actions of the squatters, at the lawlessness and violence on the goldfields, and at the clash between miners and police at Eureka in 1854, Read had returned to Hobart, Tasmania, by 1860.



Figure 3 Gabriel Read

In September 1860, Read learned of the discovery of gold in the Mataura River, in Otago. In January 1861, he embarked for New Zealand, arriving at Port Chalmers on the *Don Pedro II* on 8 February. Discouraged by reports of the Mataura find, however, Read prematurely terminated his first prospecting expedition in Otago. On 11 March 1861 he left for Canterbury to visit the property of his cousin, John Terry Murphy, at Cust. The Lindis discovery in April 1861 brought Read back to Otago. With the encouragement and assistance of J. L. C. Richardson, the speaker of the Otago Provincial Council, and of John Gillies and John Hardy, two farmers of Tokomairiro, he set out for the scene of Edward Peters' prospecting at Woolshed Creek (Glenore), in the Tuapeka district.

On 23 May 1861, in the gully which still bears his name, Thomas Gabriel Read discovered gold, 'shining like the stars in Orion on a dark frosty night.' It was this discovery which revealed the potential of gold in Otago, and thereby initiated the series of discoveries and rushes which were to transform the economic, social and political life of the province.⁷

The 1861 census found that approximately 50% of the entire population of Otago was concentrated in the Tuapeka area: some 11,500 people, including only 148 women.⁸

The following gives a contemporary perspective:⁹

⁷ <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/1r3/read-thomas-gabriel/sources>

⁸ J H McLintoch, *History of Otago*, 1929, p 457.

⁹ John Wilson, *Reminiscences of the Early Settlement of Dunedin & South Otago*, J Wilkie, Dunedin 1912, p270

First Cobb & Co. Coach Service runs to Otago Goldfields 11 October 1861



In its first venture from Dunedin to Gabriels Gully, Cobb & Co. reduced the time for the trip from two days to nine hours.

Cobb & Co. was founded in Melbourne in 1854 by a group of Americans, among them Freeman Cobb. In 1861 its proprietor, Charles Cole, arrived in Dunedin with a luxury American Concord coach, five wagons, a buggy, more than 50 horses, and a reputation for speed and reliability. One week later, the first 'Cobb & Co Telegraphic Line of Coaches' service began a new era in New Zealand coaching.

New Zealand was crying out for a public transport network. Though not the first coach service in the colony, Cobb & Co. it quickly became the biggest. Within a few years it had connected many of New Zealand's main centres; the 'Cobb' name was also widely adopted by independent operators who had no link with the original company.

In 1863 gold was discovered at the Tallaburn. at Manuherikia Valley, at Campbell's Creek, and at Mount Ida, and the first escort brought 4,320 ounces from the last field. For the first three years and nine months after Gabriel Read's discovery 1,699.667 ounces of gold had passed through Dunedin Custom House, and 63,970 ounces through other ports.

The news of the gold discoveries spread like wildfire, and diggers began to pour in from all parts of New Zealand and from the neighbouring colonies. All Dunedin was in a whirl of excitement, and merchants wondered if they could put their stores on wheels and transport them bodily to Tuapeka. The road, which ran by way of Waihola and Tokomairiro, soon got into a terrible state, and it was no uncommon sight to see a team of bullocks stuck fast in a deep hole, where the drivers had to wait till the next team came along, when the combined teams pulled one waggon at a time out

of the obstruction.

Laughable scenes were often witnessed, and on one occasion a party of sailors was seen en route for the diggings with a hand-cart, with a man in the shafts acting as steersman and a sail up to catch the wind. The steers-man had to run like the wind, and the various antics In-cut evoked roars of laughter from onlookers

When I arrived in the colony, in 1861, I found the capital, Dunedin, to be a little township, something like a small fishing village at home; and inhabited by a population consisting chiefly of very needy, "rigidly righteous," but whisky-loving, unprincipled Scotchmen. With these were mixed a few of the worst specimens from England and the neighbouring colonies; not omitting a sprinkling of the convict element from New South Wales.

Of course, in a community of this description, life and property were by no means safe. Swindling was rampant, and assaults of almost daily occurrence; though by far the greater number of these were committed by one man, of whom I shall treat hereafter, and who, on account of his wealth, almost always escaped punishment, nearly every individual in the place being in his debt. This man, a son of Tom Jones, a notorious convict of Botany Bay, ruled the town of Dunedin, the capital of Otago, by dint of money bags and fisticuffs. A skipper from Sierra Leone being asked to describe it, said, "It was a place where a naked nigger walked down the Bazaar, bought a water-melon for a couple of cowry shells, cut it in two, scooped out one half and sat in it, scooped out the other half and put it on his head;" and this was thought to give a very good idea of the place. In like manner I may say, that Dunedin was, in 1861, a place where the beggarly community, if it displeased John Jones, (an old Sydney waterman and sloop-seller, who had settled in Otago as a whaler,) could be punished by having its whisky raised sixpence a bottle, or its sugar twopence a pound. This latter, I

It is perhaps worth observing that not all was positive about the new settlement. The following is the view of one "Aliquis" (George Henderson) whose book entitled *Otago and the Middle Island*

of New Zealand: a warning to Emigrants was published in 1866.¹⁰ The author clearly had a very unfavourable view of the Middle Island!!

The town of Dunedin consists of a large number of wooden houses scattered over a piece of very hilly broken ground on the edge of the bay, and over an adjoining swamp. There are also a few stone houses here and there, and one compact mass of wooden buildings in the centre of the town. One long street (with a few short branches), has been formed and partially paved. Still it is a fearfully muddy place; and when not muddy, it is swept by hurricanes and clouds of dust. The climate is detestable. It is generally raining and blowing, sometimes for months together. A lady told me she had been prevented from going to church by the rain for seventeen Sundays in succession. One is never sure for half an hour that it will remain fair, however fine it may look. The high hills attract the clouds; and the somewhat funnel shaped bay at the head of which Dunedin lies, nearly meeting the sea as it does, and skirted on both sides by lofty hills, entices the winds to rave along its windings. If by accident it does not blow a gale during the day, the wind never fails to rise suddenly about four or five in the afternoon, blowing from the sea.

It used to be said in Australia, of New Zealand, that it rained nine months in the year, and blew a hurricane the other three; and a capital description it is. Altogether a more unpleasant place to live in than Dunedin, cannot be conceived, with its rain and its mud, its wind and [its dust; its rickety wooden houses, with the wind howling, and the rain pouring through them; its close packed blocks of houses, hotbeds of fever, and devoid of all water supply; its frequent fires, its dulness, its low tone of morality, its insecurity, and the impossibility of obtaining justice, its want of good society, and its generally low style of population.

The climate in the country is much better, though also blowy and wet. There is very little land in the province fit for agriculture, and nearly the whole of it has been sold. When a little is put up to auction, it fetches absurdly high prices--frequently five or six pounds, or more per acre.

¹⁰Pag4, Chapter 1, <http://www.enzb.auckland.ac.nz/document/?wid=4236&page=0&action=null> He even found Dunedin publishers!

Dunedin in the 1860s & 70s



Figure 4 Octagon 1862, unknown photographer.

By 1866, Dunedin's population reached 15,000. In this first time of prosperity, many institutions and businesses were established in the city, including New Zealand's first daily newspaper, its first



university, art school and medical school. A combination of money, good building stones and Scottish international pre-eminence in architecture saw a remarkable flowering of substantial and ornamental buildings, unusual for such a young and distant colony.

Figure 5 Princes St 1861- unpaved and difficult to negotiate

New Zealand in the 19th century strove to be a 'Britain of the South Seas' and British settlers saw non-white migrants as undesirable. The discovery of gold in California, Canada, Australia and later New Zealand attracted many Chinese men wanting to make their fortunes before returning home.

In the 1860s, the Dunedin Chamber of Commerce sought to replace European miners who had left Otago for the new West Coast fields. Chinese were regarded as hard-working and law-abiding, and they were also willing to rework abandoned claims. The first 12 men arrived from Victoria in 1866; 2000 more had followed by late 1869. Chinese women seldom migrated to New Zealand. In 1881 there were only nine women in the country, compared with 4995 men, raising fears that white women were at risk from Chinese men.

As work on the goldfields became harder to find, anti-Chinese prejudice resurfaced. Some spoke of a conspiracy to overrun the colony with 'Coolies' who were 'ignorant, slavish, and treacherous'.

Dunedin in the 1870s saw the rise of significant new companies and commercial dynasties, like the National Fire & Marine Insurance Company (1873), Colonial Bank (1873), J. Rattray and Son Limited (1874), Standard & Marine Insurance Company (1874), Union Steam Ship Company (1875), James Speight and Company (1876), Arthur Ellis and Company (1877), Donald Reid¹¹ and Company (1878), Westport Colliery Company (1878), and Kempthorne, Prosser & Company's New Zealand Drug Company (1879). The urban landscape was transformed by impressive buildings that elevated the settlement from provincial centre to city, with the building of Otago Boys' High School (established 1863), the Otago Girls' High School (established 1871)¹², Customs House, the Exchange, Telegraph Office (1874), Wain's Hotel (1878) and the University buildings (1878 but founded in 1869). Local businessmen promoted land developments to produce new suburbs like Maori Hill, Green Island, Musselburgh and South Dunedin.

Horse trams became popular public transport and with their advent, the Andersons Bay railway line closed. To support its growing population, Dunedin invested in enduring public works: the Otago Museum, the University of Otago, Otago Boys' and Girls' High Schools, the first Catholic schools, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, St Joseph's Catholic Cathedral, Knox Presbyterian and Trinity Methodist Churches were all built by 1884.



DUNEDIN, FROM MAITLAND STREET, 1860.

Towards the end of 1889, after the inlet was dredged and the bridge raised, the steamer ferry, *Pioneer*, started a regular service from Dunedin to the old Andersons Bay railway station. But the tides of the inlet regularly caused the ferry to wedge on the mudflats and passengers were late to work too often, so the business folded.

¹¹ Father in law of 1st cousin 3 times removed of Patricia Rylance. He married the daughter of John Barr who came out on the *Philip Laing*.

¹² Otago Girls 1st Principal was Margaret Gordon Burn nee Huie, mother in law of first cousin 3 x removed of the Rylance sisters,