Pioneers, Maids, and a Tragic Marriage

In the nineteenth century many women came to New Zealand from Britain, Ireland or Australia. They left crowded industrial cities to improve their lives, maybe even to have their own homes. Many, like Annie Gartly, had been servants in Britain, and the chance to run their own household would have been tempting. Marriage was an important decision; there was no option of divorce for most women. Far from being the Victorian ideal of the 'angel in the home', Victorian Dunedin women often lived physically demanding lives. Many died in childbirth. Gravestones testify that Victorian parents often experienced the death of children, sometimes more than once, as with Mary Bailes.

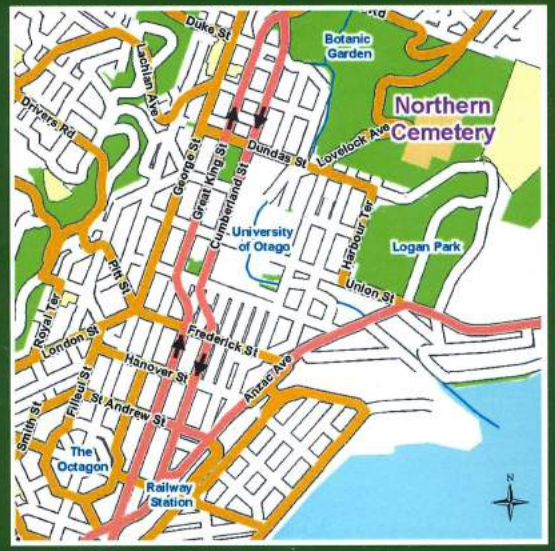
In the colony, male and female spheres were separate. Men moved in the world while women occupied the home. However, many women whose husbands had died or abandoned them had to go beyond the home to seek employment to support themselves and their children, at a time when there were few avenues for female employment. What was usually available was poorly paid factory or shop work, or better-paid but arduous domestic service. The women mentioned in this brochure lived in urban Dunedin and their work reflects this: Matilda Lo Keong was a storeowner, Anstiss Silk a hotel manager, Mary Bailes a boarding-house manager, Jane Runciman a union leader, and Emily Siedeberg a prominent doctor.

Dunedin was a good city to grow up in if you were a girl and wanted to be educated. Because of Dunedin's Scottish roots, there was an emphasis on education for everyone, including women. Otago Girls' High School was the first high school for girls in the southern hemisphere and the Otago University was the first university in Australasia to admit women to its classes. New Zealand's first woman medical graduate, Emily Siedeberg, and first woman lawyer, Ethel Benjamin, both went to Otago University.

There was a 'mourning mania' after Queen Victoria's husband, Albert, died in 1861. The Queen slept with a deathbed photo of him and wore black for the rest of her life. Widows throughout the colonies, including New Zealand, emulated the Queen, wearing black clothes and weeping veils. Brides wore grey and even girls wore black clothes; babies could wear black booties. Working-class women couldn't buy a new black wardrobe, so they would dye their clothes black. Men usually wore a black armband to show they were in mourning. Apart from going to church, widows didn't participate socially. This custom came from an older belief that a widow was shadowed by her husband's death and should be shunned.

The death of husbands brought economic and social uncertainty for women and, unlike for men, it was less acceptable for women to marry again. On some tombstones you can see widows described as 'relicts' of their dead husbands, reflecting the idea that once their husbands died they were 'left behind', waiting to join them.

Most of the women mentioned emigrated to Otago as young women. Coming to the unknown was a gamble. Some lost and met despair, others found hard but satisfying lives, and a few even prospered.



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Produced by the Southern Heritage Trust

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Front cover:

Annie Gartly's grave, photographed by Fiona Hyland

A Victorian image of women: sisters Margaret and Elizabeth Gollar, reproduced by kind permission of Deniece Gresham

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DUNEDIN CITY COUNCIL
Kaunihera-a-rohe o Otepoti

Intriguing Ladies

Southern Heritage Trust
PAST ~ PRESENT ~ FUTURE

Find out about the lives of these fascinating Victorian women buried here in the Northern Cemetery.

Annie Gartly 1848–1875 1

Block 30, Plot 8

Annie Gartly came to Dunedin in 1873 when she was 25. Possibly she came to get a husband. There was a shortage of men in Britain but New Zealand was teeming with bachelors. She may have come out on a government-assisted programme, because she became a servant when she arrived. These programmes aimed to encourage young women out to the colony to be servants for wealthy families. Domestic work was, however, back-breaking, with no chance to meet a potential husband, let alone marry one. Servants worked a long day from 6.30 a.m. until 11 p.m. with one night off a week.

OUR COLONIAL SERVANTS.—No. 1.

ENTER IRATE FEMALE SERVANT.—*Call yourself a Lady and a Christian, and expect me to do the washing.*

The demand for servants gave them bargaining power which they did not have in Britain. So colonial servants had a self-confident air often scathingly referred to as 'servantgalism'. They were thought brazen and their bright clothes shocked their employers. One habit that was annoying for some employers was when upstart maids asked the employers for references. 'I'll tell you why I left my last place, if you tell me why you dismissed your last cook.' The *Otago Daily Times* sided with the servants and wrote in 1875, 'Those whose temper ... will not allow them to conform to the new order of things will — we shudder at the thought — actually have to do their work themselves'.

New Zealand, however, was not to be a new beginning for Annie. She died two years after arriving. On her gravestone is carved a broken lily, symbolic of a life cut in its prime. Why is a servant's gravestone so grand? Perhaps she had found a wealthy sweetheart after all.

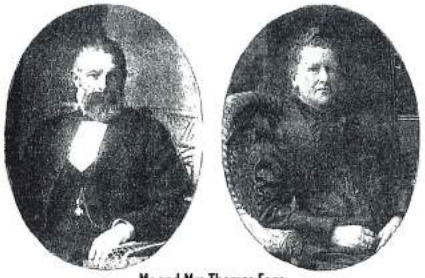
Sarah Fogo 1841?–1911 2

Block 29, Plot 6

Georgina Fogo was awoken from her sleep by her mother **Sarah** calling out to her. She ran to her parents' room where she found her father, bloody, lying on the floor with her mother standing near clasping a knife. Her mother Sarah said, 'I have done it. Had I not done it, I would have been a corpse myself'.

Sarah was charged with murder on that Saturday in 1900. She had stabbed her husband of thirty years, Thomas Fogo. London-born Sarah had married Thomas after she arrived in Dunedin as a young woman in 1869. Sarah's son and daughter gave evidence at the trial of their father's violent behaviour. He was a heavy drinker and would often hit his wife.

Sarah Fogo pleaded self-defence. But the prosecution argued that she had no injuries on her. She had used a kitchen knife to stab Thomas — proof of premeditation, they said, because she had to go downstairs to the kitchen to get it. Also, they argued, Thomas's first injury was to the back of his head, indicating that he had been hit from behind. In the end, the jury returned a guilty verdict but with a strong recommendation for mercy. Murder incurred an automatic death sentence and so the judge sentenced Sarah to be hanged. Sarah spent a month in Dunedin Gaol, waiting to die. Then a telegram arrived advising that the death sentence had been commuted to life imprisonment.



Mr and Mrs Thomas Fogo

Sarah was about sixty when she murdered her husband and was released after ten years. She died five months later. She is buried in the same grave as her husband and their son, an infant, who had died 35 years earlier. This peaceful grave gives no hint of the violent story behind the occupants' deaths.

The Ladies of Larnach Castle 3

Bock 100, Plot 4

The splendid tomb is a replica of Dunedin's First Church designed by architect Robert Lawson, who built it for William Larnach, the well-known banker and politician, for his first wife Eliza in 1880. He is buried there, also his second wife Mary, daughter Kate and son Donald.

Eliza was born in Australia into the wealthy Guise family in 1842 and was considered a beauty in her youth. Her father, Richard, died when she was two. Her mother, also Eliza, then re-married. Eliza was seven when her half-sister **Mary** was born. They became close and spent a lot of their adult lives together. This was common; sisters would often live together when one or both of them didn't marry.

Victorian girls were encouraged to marry early. Eliza had met Larnach, whose father owned the homestead near her family's, when she was fifteen. At seventeen, after Larnach became a Melbourne banker, Eliza married him. Donald was born a year later, in 1860, Kate in 1862, Douglas in 1863 and Colleen in 1865. The young couple spent a lot of time apart while Larnach went to the Victorian goldfields representing the Melbourne Bank and Eliza stayed in Melbourne.

Larnach realised that Eliza's stepfather was filching her inheritance from her father, and took his father-in-law to court in 1861. The case depleted Eliza's inheritance. Her dowry was £11,000 — substantial, but not a fortune.

Eliza's first overseas trip was to London. She had four children under the age of six, but she was only 24 and she thought London was exhilarating.

The family came to Dunedin in 1866 on William's appointment as manager of the Bank of Otago. Mary chose to live with them in what was cramped accommodation above the bank. In 1868 Eliza gave birth to her fifth child, Alice. Larnach prospered and he built Larnach Castle, a remote mansion on the Otago Peninsula. The family moved in 1874. For Larnach, the castle was a chance to get away from a hectic political life, but for Eliza, it was too far from Dunedin and she was often alone while he went to Melbourne on business. Servants found the layout of the castle strange: Eliza's and Mary's bedrooms were on either side of William's room. Eliza thought the castle was terribly cold. 'I used to have three or four hot water bottles at night as well as a great fire, the wind used to blow me almost out of bed.'

The two sisters' lives were focused on the children and their clothing, education, and ponies, the servants, and the local Presbyterian church which Eliza had paid to be built at Pukehiki.

At 36 Eliza gave birth to Gladys. She missed her children who were at school in England and so she lavished affection on her last child. She wrote about 'baby' and Mr Kitchings, a servant, '[He] will soon not be able to see out of his eyes, with all the hair on his face. Baby loves him, as long as he doesn't kiss her'. However, Gladys was only two when tragedy struck. Eliza died suddenly of an apoplectic fit. William was in Melbourne, and the older children, in England, heard of their mother's death by letter. William wrote, 'I even now sometimes cannot make myself believe, and realise that she is gone forever'.

Now William had a motherless child, and he needed a wife to whom he could make over his property as an insurance against bankruptcy. His investments were failing due to the 1880s depression, poor business decisions, and costly education in England.

Mary was the obvious person, and they married in 1882. It was a marriage more of convenience, but they had known each other for years, and Mary doted on Gladys. The older children didn't accept Mary as their mother. She missed Eliza and there were servants' rumours that she drank too much, spending time in her room 'indisposed'. Maybe Larnach felt guilty about having left Eliza alone in the castle because Mary accompanied him on his travels. Sadly, after five years of marriage, Mary died at the age of 38.

Kate, Larnach's favourite daughter, was four when the family came to Dunedin. Educated in England and Leipzig, she learnt languages and music. Her father was unimpressed that she couldn't play the piano without sheets after she returned home. 'I am sorry to think that Kate is more backward than she ought to be.' This worried him; he thought that music and languages could allow Kate to support herself as a governess if his business interests failed. She died of typhoid in Wellington, where she was working, aged 29. Larnach wrote, 'Family troubles knock me over more than anything ... the death of my dear good little daughter Kate ... has been a great blow to us all'. Eliza's other children had sad endings. Her oldest son, Donald, committed suicide, and 'baby' Gladys died in childbirth when she was 22.

Mary Bailes 1851–1939

4

Block 32, Plot 39

Mary Bailes' (née Thomson) life was one of struggle and determination. She was born in Scotland. At 23 she married Jack Bailes, a printer. A year later in 1875 they sailed with their infant daughter, Maggie, from Britain to Dunedin. The young couple settled in North-East Valley. Things were good for a while. They saved and built a cottage and ran a milk delivery service. This didn't last. Jack had begun to drink a lot and often spent all the money they made on alcohol.

There was a lot of alcoholism among men. The early whalers and goldminers had established excessive alcohol consumption as a part of the rhythm of life.

By 1885 Jack had a lot of debts and he decided to sell the dairy, house and the household goods to pay for them. Then he left the family and went to Australia. Mary now had five children; tragically, two had died in infancy.

Usually if a woman had been abandoned she could get some aid from charities. Mary was refused aid because the appeal board didn't believe that her husband wasn't supporting her. So she put her sewing skills to good use. She became a seamstress and sewed long hours. Her daughters had to leave school to help their mother. They worked for up to twelve hours a day in factories for two shillings and sixpence a week (a very small amount).

Jack eventually returned from Australia and tried to help, but was unable to get his business ideas off the ground. Mary, however, was able to stop sewing when she became the manager of a shop and refreshment rooms. By 1903 she had saved enough to build 'Fairview Cottage'. At last 'a home of our own' in North-East Valley.

Then Mary saw a new opportunity when a building in St David Street was available for rent. She signed the lease and made it into a boarding-house for out-of-town mothers. She gained a reputation for good service and her business flourished.

Eventually Mary's two daughters were married. She must have been relieved that their husbands turned out to be 'good providers'. Mary reunited with Jack, who had overcome his alcoholism and became a Presbyterian elder. They lived together in a cottage in Ravensbourne for seventeen years before Jack died in 1938. Mary died a year later.

Jane Runciman 1873–1950

5

Block 180A, Plot 55

'Are we willing to permit in our midst a system that ... threatens ... to suck the soul out of our women and girls?'

The 'system' was sweating: when women worked for long hours for starvation wages in stifling factories. In the Victorian era Dunedin was the most industrialised city in New Zealand. The clothing industry was the second-largest area of female employment. In many factories conditions were very poor. At Clarke's steam laundry in Dunedin girls and women worked for ten hours a day, six days a week. The Dunedin Tailoresses Union was formed in 1889 to improve work conditions and was the first New Zealand union for women workers. It successfully lobbied for work hours to be reduced to eight hours.

Jane Runciman came to Dunedin from Ireland in 1884 with her family, when she was eleven. When she finished school she became a tailoress. Then she joined the Dunedin Tailoresses Union and was its secretary for thirty years. The union forced employers to increase wages and had the first woman factory inspector appointed. Jane wanted to improve the lives of working women and believed that women workers should be organised so that their wages and work conditions could be improved.

Jane's concern for women went beyond politics. She was on the board of management of the King Edward Institute. She opposed girls learning only domestic skills to prepare for motherhood. Jane thought that girls should learn general skills so that they could then enter the work force and support themselves if they didn't get married or their husbands left them or died. Jane herself never married, but looked after her younger brothers and sisters when her parents died.

Emily McKinnon 1873–1968

6

Block 161, Plot 3

Otago Settlers Museum, Dunedin, New Zealand

Emily McKinnon (née Siedeberg) was New Zealand's first woman medical graduate in 1896 and was a doctor when 'lady doctors' battled for acceptance.

Emily was born in Clyde. Her father was Franz Siedeberg, a German architect who had come to New Zealand in 1861 to make his fortune in the gold rush. Her mother was Anna Thompson, an Irish Quaker. The family moved to Dunedin and Emily went to Otago Girls' High School before she entered the Otago Medical School in 1891. There were no official obstacles. The male students, however, 'would throw flesh at her every chance they got' in the dissecting-room. Emily shrugged it off, saying it happened only once and was only a small piece of flesh. Sometimes she had lectures, usually on anatomy, delivered to her alone.

In 1898 her father provided Emily with a house to set up practice. She was known for answering calls in any weather. However, for most women doctors it was difficult to set up a private practice. People thought women doctors were 'at the mercy of their nerves' and should care only for women and children. This influenced Emily's career. Few of her patients were men.

Women's health was Emily's focus. She was the Medical Officer at St Helen's Maternity Hospital from 1905 until 1938. She was opposed by other doctors but established the hospital's good reputation for midwifery. She was also Medical Officer at the Caversham Industrial School, which was probably the first time the children saw a woman doctor. She also opened New Zealand's first antenatal clinic in 1918.

Emily was influential in improving conditions for women. She argued for the raising of the age of consent, women police, factory inspections, equal opportunities for women in higher education and domestic training for motherhood for girls. She served as president of the Otago Women's Pioneer Association for many years.

Emily didn't have any children, having married Alexander McKinnon late in life at 55. She then retired from private practice, but continued to work for St Helen's until 1938. Emily was awarded the King's Jubilee medal in 1935 and CBE in 1949. She died when she was 95 years old.

Annie Heads 1851–1893

7

Block 27, Plot 9

Annie Heads (née Ireland) lived in Melville Street where her father ran a carrying business. One of his employees was Michael Heads. Annie's strict Scottish parents would have been shocked when, at seventeen, she told them that she was pregnant and that the father was Michael, a man with few prospects, and worse, who was English.

To the Victorians, an unwed mother was thought to bring shame to her family. The social stigma ruined women's lives, whereas an unwed father was regarded only as irresponsible. Annie's older brother, Thomas, had also fathered a child out of wedlock.

Annie's child was born in May 1868 and, perhaps to appease her mother, she named her daughter 'Isabella' after her.

The usual response to being pregnant and unwed was to marry, quickly. However, Annie's parents wouldn't at first give their permission, perhaps thinking that Michael was unscrupulous to have seduced their teenage daughter under their noses. Annie did marry Michael a year after giving birth. Her parents might have reasoned now that it was better that Annie be married to the father of her child than to be an unwed mother. Annie and Michael went on to have nine more children together.

Annie's story has a happy ending compared with other unwed mothers. Some paid minders, or 'baby farmers', to look after their children while they worked, hiding the fact that they had a child out of wedlock. The child would be at risk of death. Some baby farmers gave opium to make the children sleep, or starved them. Minnie Dean was a baby farmer who was hanged in 1896 for the deaths of three children.

Jessie Wheeler 1832–1901

8

Block 103, Plot 22

Jessie White, born at Airdrie in Scotland, was transported to Tasmania in 1851 at the age of nineteen for her part in a burglary in Anglesey, along with four men who were also involved. While in prison at Hobart, she bore an illegitimate son and was twice sentenced to hard labour, four months for absconding and six months for insolence. She was subsequently granted a pardon and permission to marry William Wheeler, a free labourer from Berkshire, and the couple moved to New Zealand in 1862 with their two children and Jessie's son to seek a new life.

William Wheeler worked as a labourer and also as a butcher, and the family established themselves in North East Valley, where they had six more children and their daughters regularly distinguished themselves in the local school. After twenty years in Dunedin, William Wheeler died of pneumonia in 1882, leaving Jessie as the owner of property to the value of 200 pounds. She lived for another nine years, running her own business in Frederick Street as a storekeeper and general merchant and supporting her children and grandchildren.

Her story is typical of people of humble background, deported from Britain for minor offences and branded as criminals, who nonetheless proved themselves honest and capable citizens in their new environment.

Anstiss Silk 1840–1899

9

Block 57A, Plot 4

At a time when it was believed the only acceptable area for women was in the home, some women moved in more masculine areas. One such woman was the formidable English-born **Anstiss Silk**.

At nineteen Anstiss married George Silk. They came to New Zealand in 1870 and lived in Lawrence. George mined for gold and Anstiss ran a successful bakery for seventeen years until George died in 1887. Then she moved to Dunedin and took over the licence of the Leviathan Hotel, 'which prospered wonderfully under her excellent business direction'. This was a time when pubs were rough places and only men or 'women of ill-repute' frequented them. She also invested in mining and had a display at the hotel of a 2.3 kg nugget of gold from one of her mines.

Otago Settlers Museum, Dunedin, New Zealand

Anstiss would have bewildered the early suffragettes. They were strongly anti-alcohol and saw hotels as the enemy of the home, leading men to abuse or starve wives and children, spending their wages on 'demon drink'.

Anstiss Silk and the Leviathan Hotel

Matilda Lo Keong 1854?–1915

10

Block 196, Plot 101

Matilda Lo Keong (née Kum) was the first woman Chinese immigrant to New Zealand. Chinese men often sought their fortunes overseas but Chinese wives stayed at home to look after their husbands' parents. In 1881 there were only nine Chinese women to 4,995 Chinese men in New Zealand.

Matilda was born in Baoan County near Hong Kong around 1854. She was a nursemaid to a Christian Chinese family and accompanied them to Melbourne where she learnt to speak English. At seventeen she married Joseph Lo Keong who was a fancy-goods storekeeper and 22 years older than she was. It was probably an arranged marriage. They were from feuding Cantonese groups: she from the Hakka group, he from the Poonti. But they were both Christians and so perhaps their shared Christian beliefs overrode their differences.

Matilda worked in their George Street store and brought up six children. She had a Chinese maid and so was able to devote herself to community work. She was involved in St Paul's Anglican Church and taught Sunday School and

English in the Methodist Chinese class. Matilda was described as 'pure gold'. When Chinese men from the old men's rest home attended afternoon service she would 'quietly slip' the preacher some money for each of them.

The Lo Keong business prospered. When Joseph died in 1905 Matilda continued the business until she died ten years later.

Because Matilda had assimilated to European Dunedin, the Lo Keongs became isolated from other Chinese people but were still not fully accepted by the European community, despite living in Dunedin for over forty years. This could be why none of her three daughters married. The oldest, Tilly, was the first Chinese music teacher in New Zealand, Olive was a musician and Estelle was one of the first female office workers for the Union Steamship Company.