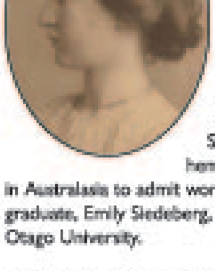
Pioneers, Maids, and a Tragic Marriage

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. Mary, 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.

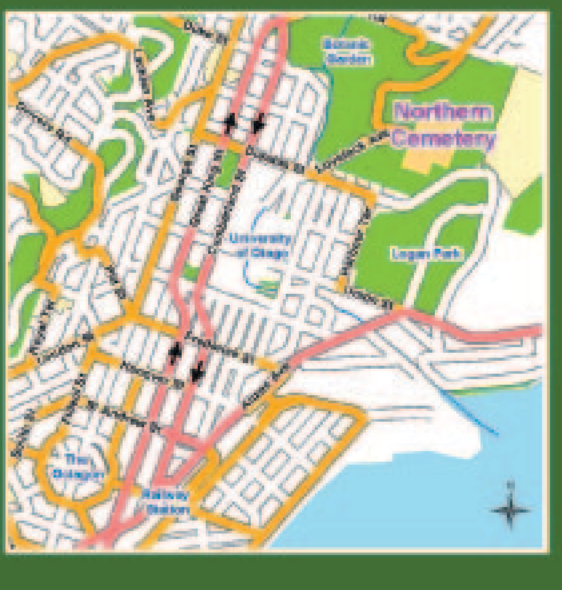


Dunedin was a good city to grow up in if you were a girl and wanted to be educated. Because of Dunedin's Scottish roots, there was an emphasis on education for everyone, including women. Otago Girls' High School was the first high school for girls in the southern hemisphere and the Otago University was 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.



Sexton's Cottage
Northern Cemetery
Lovelock Avenue
Dunedin

Telephone 03 471 8265

www.southernheritage.org.nz

info@southernheritage.org.nz

Produced by the Southern Heritage Trust

Compiled by Amanda Kennedy

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

Other photographs reproduced by kind permission of: Margaret Titchener, the Barker family, Pauline Ireland-Kenny, Andrew and Gaye Falconer, Dr James Ng, Peter Laing

DUNEDIN CITY COUNCIL

Southern Heritage Trust

Intriguing Ladies

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.

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.

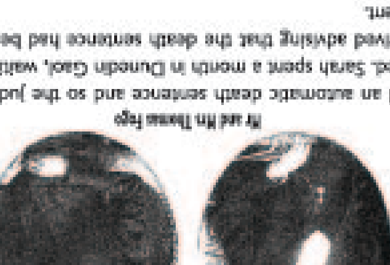
Sarah Fogo 1841?–1911 2

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.