A LOST HISTORY

Aroha Novak

Kia whakatomuri te haere ki mua

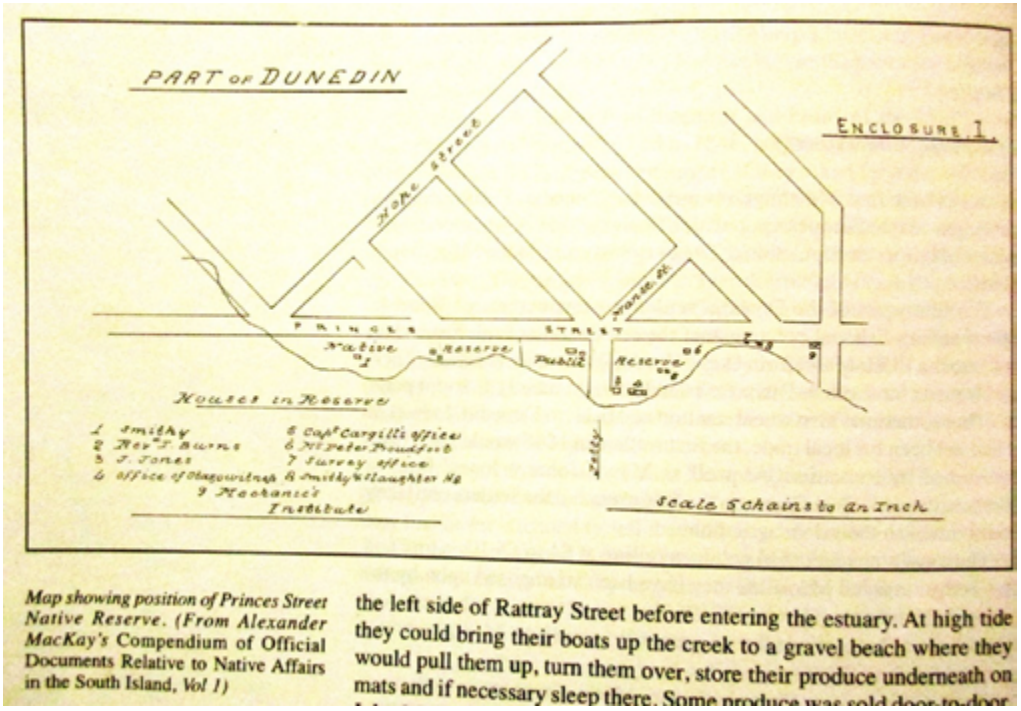
"To look into the future, our eyes must be fixed on the past"

Cracks in the concrete and a gurgling gutter that springs to life every 20 minutes are all that can now be seen of the Toitū stream, which flows underneath the Crown Hotel from near the top of Dunedin's MacLaggan Street and out to the Otago Harbour. The name Toitū can be translated in various ways: 'undisturbed,' 'untouched,' 'permanent,' 'entire,' 'kept pure,' as well as 'sustainable.' As a metaphor, water is the lifeblood of the land – the veins and arteries that flow through the body to keep it healthy, hydrated and replenished. Spiritually, water cleanses negative energy and allows thoughts to become clear: "Empty your mind, be formless. Shapeless, like water. If you put water into a cup, it becomes the cup. You put water into a bottle and it becomes the bottle. You put it in a teapot, it becomes the teapot. Now, water can flow or it can crash. Be water, my friend."[1]

Figure 1. Curing barracouta at Taiaroa Head, Otago Harbour. From *The Illustrated New Zealander*, 1867. Reproduced with permission of Toitū Museum.

Once a burgeoning place of enterprise, in the mid-nineteenth century the Toitū estuary was a favourite site for local Māori to beach their waka and sell produce to early settlers out of temporary shelters or whararau[2] – the original farmers' market. Although whararau erected by Ngāi Tahu occupied the space between Rattray and High streets up until the 1850s, Māori were eventually evicted from this site as complaints were made by settlers intimidated by "the wild Māoris dancing their war dances."[3]

After years of local iwi asking for a specific site for Māori to have accommodation in Dunedin and Port Chalmers, Governor Grey, the commissioner of Crown lands, created a designated Native Reserve[4] at the old landing place known as Ōtepoti[5], where modern-day Jetty and Princes streets intersect. In 1844, the Ngāi Tahu tribe sold the 'Ōtākou block' for £2400 to the New Zealand Company, on the basis of an agreement that the iwi would retain a tenth of all land "reserved by the company, and held in trust by them for the future benefit of the chief families of the tribe."[6] In addition, Ngāi Tahu was to keep their mahika kai (access to food), kainga nohoanga (dwelling places) and "ample" reserves.



Map showing position of Princes Street Native Reserve. (From Alexander MacKay's Compendium of Official Documents Relative to Native Affairs in the South Island, *Vol 1)*

the left side of Rattray Street before entering the estuary. At high tide they could bring their boats up the creek to a gravel beach where they would pull them up, turn them over, store their produce underneath on mats and if necessary sleep there. Some produce was sold door-to-door

Figure 2. Map of Princes Street showing the Native Reserve. From Alexander Mackay's *Compendium of Official Documents Relative to Native Affairs in the South Island*, Vol 1.

In 1861 the Otago Provincial Government coveted the land on which the Native Reserve was situated because of its proximity to the harbour mouth; it also stood in the way of harbour developments.[7] After fires gutted the Native Reserve buildings, all the records were miraculously 'lost.' This meant that there was no designated Native Reserve, local iwi did not get their promised 'tenth' and they lost their right to mahika kai and kainga nohoanga. The Otago Provincial Government reneged on the agreement made by the New Zealand Company, showing a casual disregard for the welfare of tangata whenua. Local Māori took the Provincial Government to court, pursuing their rights to a reserve. When they lost the case, they sought compensation instead.

The cultural differences between Western capitalism and the Māori attitude to land are clear when looking at the past. Whereas the new settlers imposed strict boundaries, governance on land and portioned it up, Māori – especially in Te Wai Pounamu[8] – moved freely through the landscape to gather food, giving depleted resources time to replenish. The colonisers' concept of ownership and the Māori concept of kaitiaki (guardianship) are two very distinct perspectives that are hard to marry; perhaps the Chinese approach (see below) was somewhere in between.

While the New Zealand Company was surveying the lands to be retained by Māori, they operated on the principle that:

> Natives should have only enough land to subsist on. If they had too much land they might not work for wages, and could compete with European settlers. Working for wages was seen as a part of the civilising process, for it would force them away from barbaric communal customs and into contact with civilising influences. If they had too little land they might become a charge on the state. The subsistence level decided on for Te Wai Pounamu was ten acres per head.[9]

This approach reflects the settlers' commitment to individual property ownership versus a shared ownership and respect for the land, as well as a desire to create a structured labour economy through colonisation.

As the population of Dunedin began to grow, the Toitū estuary became a stagnant site, augmenting pollution and disease emanating from open sewers and dirt roads, and was deemed a health hazard. As a result, the land on which it stood was 'reclaimed,' from the harbour to the present site of Princes Street. Concrete, cobbles and gravel were laid over water, sand and mud, covering the waterways of Toitū stream and, metaphorically, the spiritual significance of the land.

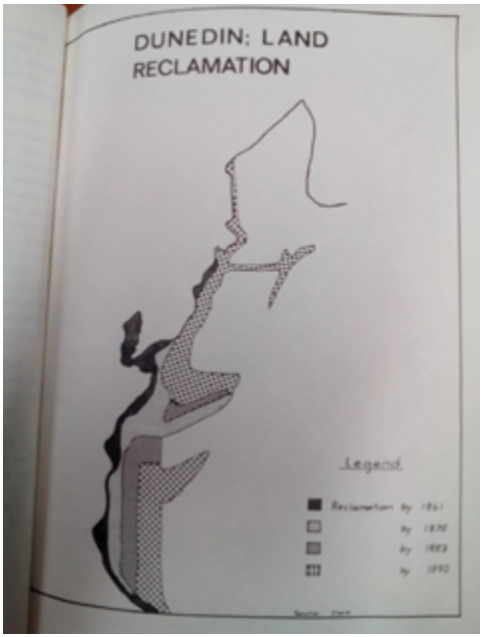


Figure 3. Map of reclaimed land from WJ Watt, *Dunedin's Historical Background* (Dunedin: City Planning Department, 1972).

Also in the 1860s, the Dunedin Chamber of Commerce invited Chinese labourers to New Zealand, as the Otago gold rush had produced a shortage of workers. This created an influx of immigrants from China, and eventually produced anti-Chinese sentiment from European settlers when the gold rush was over. A poll tax on new Chinese settlers was imposed between 1881 and 1934, starting at £10 per settler and increasing to £100 in 1896.[10] As a result, many Chinese immigrants could not afford to take their families with them to New Zealand and worked hard to save money to send back to China or visit their homeland when possible.

Chin Fooi immigrated to New Zealand and set up a laundry in Lawrence, while his wife and daughter remained in China. After a few years he went back to China to see his family, then returned to New Zealand where he settled in Dunedin and set up another laundry in St Andrew Street, a second on Rattray Street (close to where the wharerau would have stood in the 1850s), and a third on MacLaggan Street in 1929.

Chin Fooi was renowned for his dapper dress (think bow ties, waistcoats and tails) and employed many new Chinese immigrants to help them get established in their new home. His son Eddie opened up various businesses

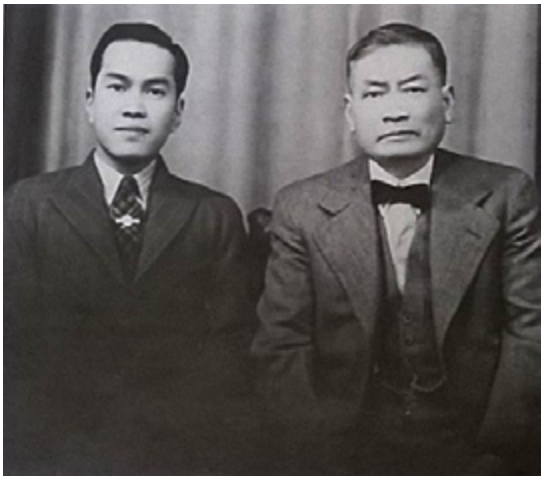


Figure 4. Eddie Chin and Chin Fooi. Reproduced with permission from *Southern People: A Dictionary of Otago Southland Biography.*

including the Sunset Strip and Tai Pei cabarets; one of these establishments hosted an infamous party for Mick Jagger and the Rolling Stones in 1965. The area near the Exchange was called 'The Strip' in the 1960s and '70s, boasting up to ten pubs within two blocks, with entertainment lasting until the early hours of the morning. The Exchange was the site of the city's major banks and was the busiest area of Dunedin from the late 1800s to the mid-1900s.[11]

Chin Fooi's children went on to own other buildings and establishments (including the Crown Hotel) in the area, creating a mini Chinatown in Rattray Street. Eventually, the city council decided that retail outlets and businesses should be encouraged to move further north and closer to the Octagon, and concentrated on making this the centre of the city. As a result, Rattray Street and the businesses and buildings the area had supported slowly faded into obscurity, much like the Toitū stream. The ebb and flow of economic highs and lows are a common theme in this story, repeated over and over.

In 2012, the Otago Early Settlers Museum rebranded itself as Toitū Otago Settlers Museum, both in order to honour the forgotten stream and landing place of the early settlers, but also to acknowledge the area's significant ties to tangata whenua. In so doing, the museum turned over a piece of history that had been lying dormant for some time, as well as highlighting the need for urban renewal in this part of the city.

In 2015, the waters of the Toitū stream are still flowing beneath the constructed cityscape, the Crown Hotel is still operating and supporting alternative music, and the Chin family are still active in the business community and in Rattray Street. Although the Native Reserve and wharerau have disappeared without trace, local iwi have been compensated with land and other commercial assets – the commercial asset base of Ngāi Tahu investments is now in excess of $809 million.[12] In 2002, a public apology was issued by Prime Minister Helen Clark to the Chinese families of New Zealand for the racially targetted poll tax they had to bear.

The Exchange streetscape has undergone a long period of neglect and change, with a number of businesses disappearing following the stock market crashes of the 1980s, and new ventures blossoming. Buildings deteriorated and broke, or burned and smoked, including the Dragon Café, which was situated on Rattray Street and owned by the Chin family. Demolished buildings replaced by car parks have become an all-too-familiar sight in this part of town.

Today, Dunedin's retail sector is undergoing another dip as a consequence of the rise of internet shopping, unachievable rents and increasing costs for landlords striving to maintain ageing buildings. It is acknowledged that a considered approach needs to be taken towards the use and upkeep of empty retail spaces. A concentrated effort is being made to upgrade the city's 'warehouse precinct' between Toitū Otago Settlers Museum and the Exchange, including a push for street art and murals.[13] All this is proving a good start to refreshing the city. Is it too much to hope that an appreciation of history can help shape the future development of the area, as well as encouraging a more open view of land guardianship that does not centre on commerce?

The story of the Toitū estuary, and the merging of Chinese and Māori cultures, are told in the mural recently painted on the Crown Hotel to create a site-specific artwork. The work was done by Stickum Co-operative artists Aroha

Novak and Guy Howard-Smith. Compositionally, the picture plane is fractured into three different background images surrounding the central figure of Chin Fooi. Māori tukutuku patterns and Chinese scalloped decorations burst out diagonally from behind his imposing figure to frame the secondary scenes: a version of John Turnbull Thomson's 1856 painting of the Toitū estuary (left); a 'waka rocket' blasting into the future (top/centre); and a Yulan magnolia which is a symbol of Shanghai, Dunedin's sister city (right). A small text box summarises the history of the site. The mural sets out to connect the missing dots of cultural history in a way that will lead contemporary Dunedinites to engage with and celebrate the many stories that have helped create Ōtepoti.[14]

Figure 5. Toitū Mural, painted by Stickum Co-operative, 2015, corner of Rattray and MacLaggan streets, Dunedin. Photo credit: Guy Howard-Smith.

After growing up in Dunedin, **Aroha Novak** graduated from the Dunedin school of Art with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in 2007, going on to complete a Master of Fine Arts with Distinction in 2013. Novak's work interrogates issues of escapism through various media, as well as the social, political and economic inequality still prevalent in contemporary society. Her work encompasses sculpture, installation, painting, sound, drawing and video. She lives in Dunedin and has been exhibiting regularly since 2008. She and Guy Howard-Smith form the Stickum Co-operative.

Guy Howard-Smith grew up in Auckland and graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Elam School of Fine Art in 2003. Howard-Smith uses painting "as a tool to mirror reality with pictorial harmony." His paintings explore the use of myth and its role in determining human perceptions of the world. The examination of constructed moral codes through experience and consciousness is central to his work. He lives in Dunedin and has been exhibiting regularly since 2003.

1 This quotation by Bruce Lee is from the 1971 television series *Long Street*.

2 A whararau is a traditional Ngāi Tahu dwelling used as a temporary shelter during food-gathering expeditions.

3 Bill Dacker, *Te Mamae me te Aroha: The Pain and the Love: A History of Kai Tahu Whanui in Otago*, 1844–1994 (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1994), 32.

4 Ibid., 32.

5 Although Ōtepoti, meaning 'a corner of the harbour,' is the Māori name for Dunedin, it was also the name given to the site where boats landed at the junction of Jetty and Princes streets.

6 Dacker, *Te Mamae me te Aroha*, 20.

7 WA Taylor, *Lore and History of the South Island Maori,* facsim. ed. (Christchurch: Kiwi Publishers, 2001).

8 Te Wai Pounamu is the Māori name for the South Island.

9 Dacker, *Te Mamae me te Aroha*, 28.

10 *Poll Tax Imposed on Chinese: 5 July 1881*, 3 June 2015, http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/a-poll-tax-of-10-pounds-on-chinese-arrivals-in-new-zealand-is-introduced.

11 Information gleaned from conversations with Jones and Sam Chin, 2015.

12 Te Pūtea: Ngāi Tahu Commercialism, 19 September 2015, http://ngaitahu.iwi.nz/investment/.

13 What is the difference between street art and murals? This is an extremely subjective distinction. In my opinion, street art is grounded in raw, off-the-cuff, non-commissioned, non-consented art in the street, usually self-funded. Murals are planned, resource-consented paintings on walls, either commissioned, publicly funded or self-funded.

14 Thanks are due to the Chin family for permission to reproduce the photograph of Chin Fooi and Eddie Chin from *Southern People: A Dictionary of Otago Southland Biography*, ed. Jane Thomson (Dunedin: Longacre Press, 1998). Thanks also go to Toitū Otago Settlers Museum for permission to reproduce the image of barracouta curing in Figure 1 from a copy of *The Illustrated New Zealander,* 1867.