



## Issue No 2

# Chatham Islands Museum News

The focus over the last three months has been on the Concept Plan for the new museum received from the designer, Sally Papps, in October. This is an excellent document but is far too large to be put up on the website. Discussions on the content with imi, iwi and the broader community were held in early December and these resulted in some suggested revision of the entrance and flow of topics. Comments have been sent to Sally and the plan is under revision. A further round of discussions will be held once a revised document has been received and more detail on each section will be sought. A short version of the revised plan will be put up on the website to allow for wider consideration and comment.

Staff and volunteers have been searching the museum's photographic collection for interesting photographs relevant to each of the Concept Plan topics, listing these and adding thumbnails, so the final selection will be quicker and easier for Sally. Photographs held at the Alexander Turnbull Library are also being checked for relevance and interest.

The museum's application to Lottery Environment and Heritage was successful. This will enable the transferring of videos to USB and the editing of audio-visual excerpts for use in the new museum to proceed and also allow information for two touchscreens to be prepared. Hamish Campbell has agreed to prepare the geological history of the Islands and Jocelyn Powell will work with mapping experts to develop the coastal chart and land mapping history.

## Chatham Islands 150 Years ago – A Snapshot of the 1870s

By 1870 the population of the Chatham Islands had been reduced considerably from the 591 recorded in April 1867 (115 Europeans and 476 Maori, Moriori and half-castes) many Maori having returned to Taranaki to claim their lands in the Native Land Court hearings. Others left after the 1867 measles epidemic and the destruction of Tupurangi village by the tsunami in August 1868. A few returned when the Land Court hearings began on the Chathams (June 1870) in order to secure their holdings there. But by the end of the decade the population was estimated at under 300 persons.

Shipping at the beginning (1870, 1871) and end of the decade (1878, 1879) was reasonably regular but the middle years were difficult for the residents with four, five or six months between a ship's arrival. Supplies were exhausted and even the hotel bars closed with no grog on offer. Trading was with Auckland, Wellington and Lyttelton - live sheep, cattle, horses, pigs and fowls, and large quantities of wool, hides and sheepskins.

Exported also were bacon, tallow, beef and butter, 1300 pounds in 1871. Overall 14 sailing vessels traded, two of which were lost off the mainland coast, the third (*Agnes*) wrecked at the Chathams but rebuilt and renamed as the *Island Lily*.

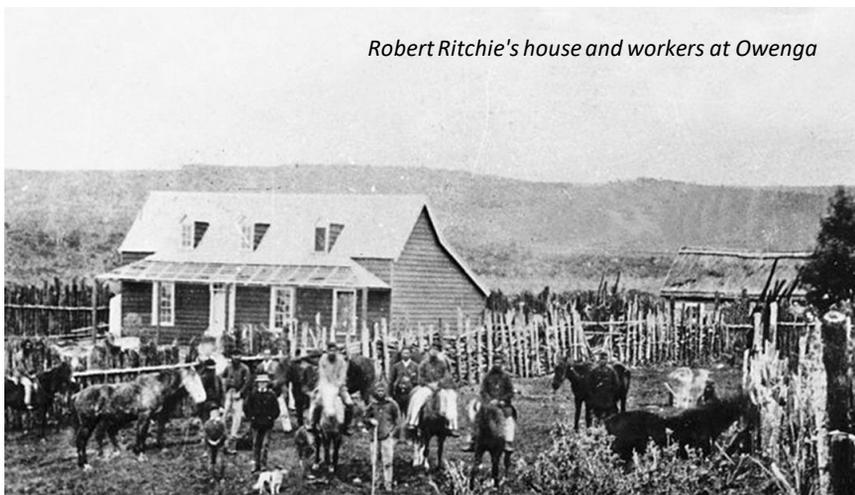
Government vessels called in 1870 and 1872 and naval ships in 1871, 1873 and 1878.

Despite the irregular shipping visitors from the mainland arrived and often stayed for months – they were always welcomed by the isolated homesteads.

In 1873 Sam Barker, a young farmer arrived and stayed for two months; as a keen photographer he took many interesting shots on both Chatham Island and Pitt Island. Visiting Owenga and Manukau he 'Saw the Moriori village ... Photo'd Morioris all morning'.



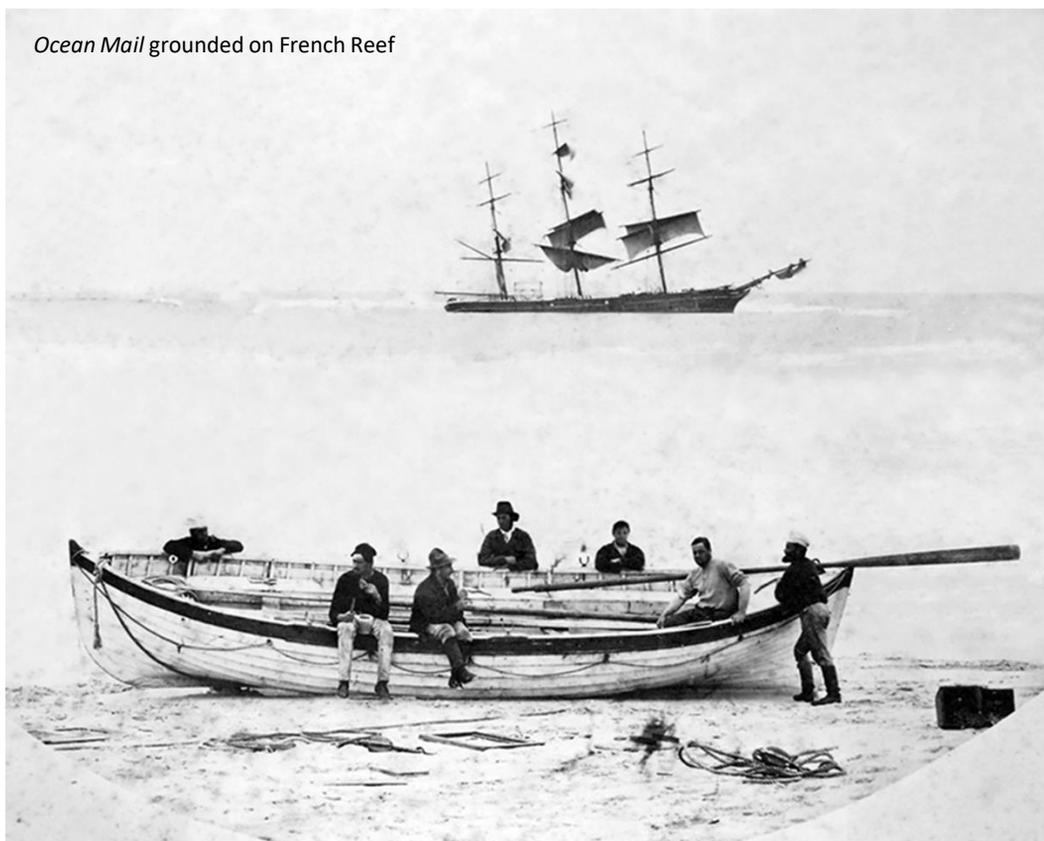
*Transit of Venus Observatory*



*Robert Ritchie's house and workers at Owenga*

In 1874 the US navy corvette *Swatara* brought a party of Americans to the islands to photograph the transit of Venus. They set up camp in Whangaroa Harbour and made some good observations of the transit despite changeable weather. William. H. Rau, as official photographer, recorded the observatory and astronomical equipment, the camp and members of the expedition, and other features of the area.

In March 1877 the brigantine *Ocean Mail*, loaded with wool, tallow and other produce destined for London struck French Reef, between Matarakau and Taupeka Point and became a complete wreck. Crew and passengers got ashore and some 400-500 of the 5000 bales of wool were saved and some barrels of tallow. Another photographer, Alfred Martin, of Christchurch, was visiting in 1876-77 and photographed the *Ocean Mail* the day after she grounded.



The Christmas-New Year period throughout the 1870s included sporting, horse racing and rifle-shooting competitions and these were enjoyed by all. The Chatham Islands Jockey Club was established and registered by Thomas Ritchie in 1873. The second registered Racing Club in New Zealand, the first being Auckland. Organised horse-racing began on the Chathams on 1 January 1866 on the lake flats at Hapupu and the following December were held on Waitangi Beach and thereafter at both Kaingaroa and Waitangi. Everyone had a horse and many were very well-bred coming from racing stock imported from Sydney in the mid-1850s by the Maori in payment for their tons of exported potatoes. The race day's events were usually followed by a sumptuous meal and social at Beamish's hotel.

Some amusing and unusual incidents are reported in the newspapers. The 'Ocean Wave Sweepstakes' for sailors of that visiting schooner created some fun: four horses started but only two reached the winning post, one bolting away soon after the start and the other turning sharp right into the spectators 'scattering them in all directions.' On another occasion passengers at breakfast on the *Island Lily* were startled 'nearly out of their wits' when a Clydesdale mare broke through the bulkhead of the cabin, her forefeet landing on the cabin table and destroying the crockery. The cabin 'which had just been tastefully done up and decorated was by no means improved by the morning visitor.'