

Henry Fox Chaffey (1868 – 1951)

Annie Selina Chaffey (1877 – 1953)

In 2012, in a revision of the forget-me-not genus *Myosotis* in New Zealand, Te Papa botanist Carlos Lehnebach described two new species, both of them endemic and restricted to the mountains of northwest Nelson. One, known only from the type locality, he named *Myosotis mooreana* in honour of New Zealand botanist Lucy Beatrice Moore, who described several species of endemic *Myosotis*; the other, *Myosotis chaffeyorum*, he named after Annie and Henry Chaffey, who lived for almost forty years in the Cobb area of the rugged Upper Takaka. Their tiny home, Asbestos Cottage, sheltered Lehnebach during his collecting expedition.

Henry Fox Chaffey was born in Somerset, England, on 18 August 1868, the son of Ellen Ann Fox and her husband Ebenezer Chaffey, a successful farmer and cheesemaker. Nothing is known of Henry's early life before he came to New Zealand, probably as a farm cadet, at the age of 17. Hardworking and saving, he became a contractor-carrier in Canterbury and eventually owned several trucks and a threshing mill in Timaru, where he met Annie Selina Best. She was born in Timaru on 5 July 1877, the daughter of Elizabeth Read and her husband Edwin Best, a tailor. After attending Timaru Main School, Annie helped at home until her unfortunate marriage on 2 August 1896 to Peter Valentine Fox, a cook and butcher. Chaffey, too, had a disastrous first marriage to Laura May Adcock in Wellington on 11 March 1903. Childless, they separated in just over a year on claims of infidelity, prostitution and drink. Divorce was granted on 7 March 1908 and Chaffey went prospecting in the mountains of remote northwest Nelson. Annie endured 17 unhappy years with her violent and abusive husband, and in 1913, with their two sons in their teens, she walked out!

After living for a few years together in a bush hut near the Arthur Stream, Henry and Annie moved into Asbestos Cottage in the Cobb region of Upper Takaka. Peter Fox did not pursue them, nor did he agree to a divorce. Only after his death twenty years later were Henry and Annie able to marry. On 5 April 1932 an Anglican and a Presbyterian minister rode in and conducted the simple fire-lit ceremony, which was followed by a hearty meal and toasts; all bunked down for the night and with the departure of the ministers next morning the Chaffeys were left to each other's company. When Henry was not away prospecting, hunting or packing in supplies, he collected and split wood for the fire, tended the garden and made home brew. He kept meticulous diaries, corresponded widely, was a tireless advocate for development of the region's asbestos deposits, and kept rainfall and river level records that became invaluable for the planning of the Cobb hydroelectric power scheme. Annie's life was even more isolated as she grew vegetables, fruit and flowers, cleaned the cottage, cooked over an open fire, cured goat and deerskins for rugs and made her own and sometimes her husband's clothes. A succession of dogs were often her only company, and she left the cottage only once, reluctantly, for medical treatment in Nelson Hospital. However, a radio, occasional magazines, and visitors gave a semblance of contact with the outside world. Henry Chaffey died in the mountains on 19 August 1951 at the age of 83, and was buried in Takaka. Annie, forced to return to Timaru, was deeply unhappy and became reclusive; she hoarded her sleeping pills and ended her life on 14 July 1953, aged 76. Asbestos Cottage is now maintained as a tribute to the unique and colourful couple who made it their home.



Myosotis chaffeyorum

Myosotis ('mouse ear') refers to the shape of the leaf. Currently, 74 species are listed from the northern and southern hemispheres. More than half of these (39 species) are endemic to New Zealand. They occupy a range of habitats from coastal cliff faces and sand dunes to forest stream banks, limestone rock outcrops and alpine scree slopes, and have an equally diverse form. Many species have a restricted distribution and very small populations, and some are known only from a single locality. *Myosotis chaffeyorum* is a perennial forget-me-not restricted to dry loose fine soil in the shelter of limestone overhangs in a small area of Kahurangi National Park.

PHOTO: Simon Walls