

# Felix Arthur Douglas Cox (1837 – 1915)

**F**elix Arthur Douglas Cox, a surviving twin, was born on 9 May 1837 and baptised at Marylebone Church, London. His father, Samuel Fortnum Cox of Sandford Park, Oxfordshire, was a captain in the Life Guards, and in the family military tradition, Arthur (as he was known) received an English boarding school education, which from age 14 was at Rugby. He, too, joined the army, and in 1857 entered the 17th Bengal Native Infantry as an ensign. He was promoted lieutenant in 1858, and for his service with the 34th Regiment during the Indian (Sepoy) Mutiny was awarded the Lucknow medal and other decorations. Invalidated with dysentery, he returned to England and in 1862 resigned his commission. A few years later he came to Canterbury, New Zealand, to see his brother Charles Percy Cox, who had emigrated in 1853 and recently bought the Mt Somers station from his brother-in-law Charles Tripp at nearby Orari Gorge. The success of his brother's Chatham Island visitors in growing and supplying food for the whalers inspired the ex-soldier to try his luck there also.

Arthur Cox landed on Chatham Island (Rekohu) in 1866 and settled in the northeast, near the home of the first resident magistrate, Archibald Shand. He married Anne, one of Shand's nine daughters, and in 1870 he and his wife's brother Alex leased 8000 acres of Pomare family land at Whangamarino, between Te One and Waitangi. Two houses were built – a large two-storeyed home for Cox and his growing family of four sons and three daughters, and a separate one for Shand, who remained a bachelor. Their woolshed was also constructed that year, to hold up to 500 sheep and accommodate eight blade shearers; today it is one of the oldest working woolsheds in the country.

Cox and Shand worked hard, ploughing (at first with bullocks and then with teams of horses bred by them), sowing and raising sheep. Whangamarino became a well-developed and productive farm, but both men were to become better known for their activities outside farming.

In addition to his farm work, Shand was engaged as Māori interpreter and clerk at sittings of the Native Land Court. He was very interested in the Mori and Māori history of the islands, and set out to record as much of this heritage as possible. Tragically, in 1910 the then elderly scholar died in a fire that destroyed his house, along with much of his valuable work.

Cox became the second Justice of the Peace on the Chathams, and was sought for his fair and unbiased decisions. Later he was one of the trustees for Frederick Hunt's estate. He was also an amateur botanist of considerable repute, and sent plants, with information on their habitat and distribution, to botanists Thomas Kirk and Leonard Cockayne. T F Cheeseman described a rare plant of the carrot family under the name of *Coxella* (now *Aciphylla dieffenbachii*), to commemorate Cox's contribution to the scientific knowledge of the Chatham Islands flora. A small-leafed matipo (*Myrsine coxii*) and a bluish-green grass (*Festuca coxii*) are also named after him.

After the lease of Whangamarino Station expired in 1912, most of the land eventually reverted to the Pomare family, and is managed today by their descendants. In 1915, with failing health, Cox and his wife retired to Geraldine, where they both died within the year.



## ***Festuca coxii***

*Festuca* (Latin *festuca* 'stem' or 'blade of grass') is a large genus from the temperate and tropical mountain regions. Three of the five native mainland species reach the alpine zone. *Festuca coxii* is an attractive species, sometimes grown as a garden plant. It is a small, densely tufted, stoloniferous grass, with soft, pliant leaves, bluish with in-rolled margins, up to 40 cm long. It flowers in a narrow, spike-like panicle, each spikelet with 3–5 lax flowers. Endemic to the Chatham Islands, *Festuca coxii* is found only on coastal cliffs and ledges, and is considered vulnerable. Browsing by stock has probably been the main factor leading to its decline in the wild.