

Frederick Hunt (1817 - 1891)

Frederick Hunt, a Lincolnshire agricultural worker, his wife Mary (née Preswood) of Hereford and their young son, along with Frederick's parents, his three brothers and four sisters, left England on the *Martha Ridgeway*, and after 130 days at sea arrived at Port Nicholson (Wellington) in mid-November 1840. Shelter was hastily built, and a few days later Mary gave birth to their second son. With the family settled, Frederick took work with surveyors cutting lines from Porirua towards the Manawatu River. He declined an invitation from Te Rauparaha to stay and teach his tribe musket skills, and after several months' absence returned to Wellington and his family.

A Māori chief had told him about the Chatham Islands, and in 1841 he checked them out for himself. Prospects looked good, and he returned to collect Mary and the children, together with stores, clothing, seeds and fruit trees. He built a hut and started a large garden at Owenga, but these were largely destroyed during skirmishes between the local Māori. After a fresh start and another setback 25 miles to the north, in early 1843 he established his family on a large tract of land on Pitt Island, reputedly bought from the Owenga chief Apitea for the price of a red jacket.

Through hard work, initiative and shrewd business sense, Frederick Hunt turned virgin bush into a prosperous farm, which he named Flowerpot, after a rock of that shape on the beach. A hut served his family temporarily until he was able to build their new three-bedroom house. Later additions were made using timber and fittings salvaged from the whaler *Franklin* that was wrecked nearby in 1859.

From the 1850s Hunt was providing fresh vegetables, fruit and meat to whalers, bartering them for other comforts of life. However, he also attracted the attention of customs officers, and was angry at being ordered to pay duty – he was king of Pitt Island, and would pay taxes to no one!

Frederick Hunt could not read or write, but wanting his six children to be educated, he built a cottage and engaged one of the German missionaries on Chatham to come to instruct them. His replacement two years later was John Amery, "an educated gentleman and lover of Shakespeare", to whom Hunt also dictated his memoirs. In the 1860s, to help him raise sheep on his steadily developing pastures, Hunt encouraged two young men (James Langdale and Matthew Gregory) to settle on Pitt Island. Both married Hunt daughters! Tragedy struck in 1866 when two of the Hunt children, Alexander (24) and Naomi (18), left for Wellington on the *Sea Serpent*, which apparently foundered and was lost.

Hunt's common sense and rough sense of humour made him an entertaining host to his many visitors, among them plant collector Henry Travers, who he periodically joined on Chatham excursions. However, to others he was a wily and sometimes unscrupulous rascal. He died in 1891, aged 73, predeceased in 1884 by his wife Mary. Both are buried in the Hunt graveyard on Pitt Island. The Frederick and Mary Hunt Memorial Reserve on the island protects a considerable number of the endemic rautini (*Brachyglottis huntii*), described in Mueller's *Vegetation of the Chatham Islands* (1864), and named after Frederick Hunt.



Brachyglottis huntii

Brachyglottis, a genus established in 1775 by the Forsters, comprises mainly New Zealand flowering shrubs, herbs and a scrambling climber. *Brachyglottis huntii*, rautini, is a tree sometimes reaching 10 metres in height. The leaves are oblong, bright to bluish green on top, grey-green below, with somewhat rolled margins, and occur in clusters near the branch tips. The bright yellow pyramids of daisy heads in summer are a striking sight, giving it the popular name of Chatham Island Christmas tree. Once more widespread on the Chatham Islands, habitat destruction and animal browsing have led to its decline. Nationally endangered, it was voted Plant of the Year in the 2006 New Zealand Plant Conservation Network poll.