

# Dugald Louis Poppelwell (1863 – 1939)

The tenth of twelve children, Dugald Poppelwell was born on 2 July 1863 at his parents' farm, Sunwick, at Tokomairiro, South Otago. His father William, a mariner from Berwickshire on the Scottish border, and his mother Catherine Robertson McLachlan, had married in 1843 in Wellington, New Zealand, and began farming Sunwick in 1853. Dugald attended schools in Milton and the Christian Brothers School in Dunedin, where he won a scholarship in 1878. He worked on the family's Mount Misery run and in a Milton legal office before studying law at the University of Otago from 1889 to 1891. Admitted to the Bar in 1892, he set up practice in Gore, and on 10 April 1894, at Gore, he married Nora Green.

Already prominent in local affairs, he was elected to the Gore Borough Council in 1893, became mayor in 1895 and served the council in both capacities until 1931. He was involved in many major public works and was also responsible for 130 hectares of Croydon Bush being set aside as a public reserve. Later additions brought the area up to 945 hectares of native bush now reserved on the flanks of Gore's Hokonui Hills. His intervention in 1924 saved the Bowen Falls at Milford Sound from being harnessed for hydroelectric power.

With the publication in 1906 of Cheeseman's *Manual of the New Zealand Flora* and Laing and Blackwell's *Plants of New Zealand*, his interest in the conservation and cultivation of native plants developed into serious botany. He corresponded with Thomas Cheeseman and sent him specimens from his garden for comment, and in 1911 read his first of seventeen papers at the Otago Institute. Between 1910 and 1923, he made botanical expeditions in the southern South Island, Stewart Island and the offshore islands, usually with friends George Biggar, James Speden and Bill Thomson, and from these field trips he distributed material to other botanists. His knowledge and appreciation of native plants was also shared on tramping trips.

He was involved in many aspects of Gore life, and during his long career held almost every public office in the town – community and cultural, sporting, social and religious. In 1935 he received the King George V Silver Jubilee Medal. He became a senior member of the Bar and president of the Southland District Law Society. Actively involved in the church, he was vice-president and then president from 1914–1919 of the New Zealand Catholic Federation, and in 1916 was awarded the Papal Cross.

His contribution to New Zealand botany is recognised by four southern plant species named in his honour: *Poa poppelwellii* (1914), *Celmisia poppelwellii* (1915) and *Pimelea poppelwellii* (1917) described by Petrie, and *Veronica poppelwellii* (1916), discovered by Leonard Cockayne on Mt Tennyson in the Garvie Mountains in the early 1900s, and described "in honour of my friend Mr D.L. Poppelwell who is doing so much to throw light on the flora near Lake Wakatipu and the arrangement of the vegetation".

Dugald Poppelwell died on 23 September 1939 at his home at Gore, survived by his wife Norah, three sons, William, Harold and Dugald, and two daughters, Moana and Mary, who became Sisters of Mercy. Two other sons died in infancy.



## *Hebe imbricata*

*Veronica poppelwellii* is now one of several synonyms of *Hebe imbricata*, a low, slender, much-branched shrub forming small yellowish-green clumps 5-15 cm tall. The branchlets are squarish in cross-section, the spikes 5-15 mm long of up to 15 white flowers. It is found mainly on the drier mountains of Central Otago, in sheltered, moist sites in low to high alpine regions.