



In Dunedin's Northern Cemetery I was attracted to an unusual grave marker for Ambrose Chiaroni, but the research has been difficult as all the players seem to be called Ambrose or Mary.

This was Ambrose (senior) who came from Germasino North Italy, because at the time there was no money to be made in Germasino, it being a very small rural village. He came to Dunedin because he had heard of the opportunity to grow a business there as it was a very popular port at the time for settlers.

Ambrogio [Ambrose] Chiaroni Senior established a business in Fine Art and marble importation and picture framing.

Ambrose junior (his nephew) and Mansueto (his brother) both worked for Ambrose senior for a while before Mansueto moved to Invercargill to establish another business under the company name of M. Chiaroni & Co. Ambrose Senior then moved to Timaru and opened another shop there while Ambrose junior ran the business in Dunedin.

Ambrose Senior used to travel back to Italy twice a year to acquire art works for the galleries to be sold in the three locations.

These art works must have been very popular because the businesses flourished and there was quite a bit of money made and nice properties bought in Dunedin, Invercargill and Timaru.

Ambrose served on many Grand Juries, and was obviously a respected person of some standing in the Dunedin community. Como St in Maori Hill is named after the area where the family came from in Italy.

The *New Zealand Tablet*, Volume I, Issue 27, 1 November 1873, Page 9 reported on a fire in Dunedin.

At about two o'clock on Thursday morning, a fire broke out in George street, which destroyed the block of wooden buildings in which it originated, namely, the premises occupied by Messrs Schmidt, Durie, Jolly, **Chiaroni**, Wilson and Morrison, and G. I. Merrie. The amount of insurance on the block was, we believe, about £1500, which must be greatly below the value of the property destroyed. The buildings on the opposite side of the street, and the Royal George Hotel had a very narrow escape; at one time, we hear, the European Hotel was actually on fire, but a hose belonging to the premises soon extinguished the fire and kept the premises safe. Some of the shops adjoining the Hotel had the windows broken. There seems to have been a delay of ten minutes in ringing the fire-bell, and the firemen were not at all prompt in attending. Fortunately, however, the fire was confined to the one block of wooden buildings. A curious circumstance is that a little shop occupied by Mr Jolly, junr., around which the flames raged fiercely, was untouched by the fire.

The NZ Tablet of 21 December 1879 carried an advertisement for “A. Chiaroni, carver, gilder, print seller, importer, picture and looking glass manufacturer. All kinds of frames made to order. Frames regilded and made to new. George Street, near Octagon, Dunedin.” Over the years he was a prolific advertiser in *The Tablet* and other local papers.

In the NZ Tablet of 16 September 1892 it was announced that “Mr A. Chiaroni has taken over the picture-framing business conducted by his uncle Mr A. Chiaroni, George Street, Dunedin. The business will be carried on as heretofore in a manner uniting taste and judgement with moderate charges”.

On 20 April 1896, in Timaru, Ambrose (junior) Chiaroni married Mary Morrison, fifth daughter of the late James Morrison, Upper York Place, Dunedin.

His first wife, also called Mary, a native of Australia, had died on 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1886. Ambrose (senior) died on 18 November 1911 aged 83. His second wife died on 14 January 1919. All three are buried in the family grave in Dunedin's Northern Cemetery.

On 6 December 1912 a newspaper article showed that the Estate of Ambrose Chiaroni (senior) was levied for Stamp Duty on the value of estate of 5343 pounds – a considerable sum for those days.

On 18 December 1912 a newspaper report showed Ambrose (junior) as a shareholder in the Paracale Gold Dredging Company of Manila, Philippines. He, like most others with spare cash at the time, had got sucked into the gold dredging boom.

The family were Catholics and gave much time and support to St Joseph's Cathedral and the local Catholic community and Ambrose appeared at the Dunedin Catholic Literary Society with readings and recitations and singing.

Prepared by the Historic Cemeteries Conservation Trust of New Zealand ([www.cemeteries.org.nz](http://www.cemeteries.org.nz)) from information supplied by the family and from the PapersPast website.