



John Orbell was one of the earliest settlers to come to Otago. In 1849, at the age of 47, he arrived at Port Chalmers in the *Mariner* with his wife Catherine and their family of five sons and five daughters. He settled in the rural district of Waikouaiti, where he was ‘cordially welcomed to the locality’ by the renowned Johnny Jones of Matanaka. Six years later he was to become the father-in-law of Jones’ eldest son, John, who married Orbell’s daughter Mary in 1855

Over the thirty years he lived in the Waikouaiti area, John Orbell took an active interest in the affairs and welfare of his community and parish. An intelligent and educated man ‘he could discourse freely and accurately on the general and specific topics of the day’. In 1863 he was appointed a Justice of the Peace, and carried out his duties on the bench, during the hectic days of the Otago gold rush. He also, along with his son Frank, involved himself in the regular meetings of the Waikouaiti Pastoral District Runholders’ Association where matters such as district boundaries and the state and passibility of roads were discussed, and represented to the Superintendent of the Province. Although he did not consider a political career for himself, John Orbell took a keen interest in parliamentary elections. He was a supporter of Julius Vogel, and campaigned vigorously on his behalf. Vogel was to say on one occasion that he had ‘always looked upon Waikouaiti as the starting point of his political life.’ In later life, John Orbell took great enjoyment in relating his early Colonial experiences, and reminiscing about the hardships of those earlier times.

John and Catherine Orbell were highly regarded by their neighbours and community. On the occasion of their Golden Wedding anniversary in 1875, they were presented with a silver cup and engraved salver to mark the event. Then, reported the *Otago*

Witness, ‘after drinking the health of the aged couple in bumpers of champagne, the company withdrew to the front lawn, and there gave three hearty cheers.’

Sadly, Catherine Orbell died shortly after this celebration, a bereavement that was ‘very keenly felt’. John Orbell lived on until, on the 13th of January, 1879, he died after a brief illness, ‘surrounded by a numerous family of children and grandchildren’, having faithfully served his community for thirty years. He was buried in the Hawkesbury cemetery (Waikouaiti), where his family erected a marble monument to his memory.

Sources:

Waikouaiti by Rev John Christie

Issues of *Otago Witness*, *Evening Post*, *Daily Southern Cross* on PapersPast website

‘Passenger arrivals at Port Chalmers, New Zealand 1848-1851’
www.ngaiopress.com/drhocken.htm