



Isaac Stevenson was born in Maybole, southern Ayrshire, Scotland, in 1851 to a farmer Thomas Stevenson and his wife Agnes (nee Henderson).

In 1857 the family emigrated in the *Carlton* to Geelong in gold-rich Victoria, and later settled in the goldmining town of Ballarat, where Isaac served his apprenticeship.

On 20 March 1875 he left Melbourne for Otago as a steerage passenger on the steamer *Omeo*, and gave his occupation as a miner.

In company with his brother Jack and some friends he sought opportunities on the West Coast but failed to find sufficient prospects.

Isaac aged 31, and brother Jack found work in Port Chalmers with the engineering firm of Morgan Cable, and both lived in Port Chalmers.

In 1904 Jack moved to Dunedin and established the Dunedin Engineering Company (now Farra Engineering)

In 1879 Isaac returned to Ballarat where he married Mary Macdonald, and went on to have a family of three sons and five daughters. Young Isaac died at age 11 of diphtheria.

Isaac Stevenson evidently valued education, music and sport.

This business was established about 1870 by Messrs Morgan and Macgregor, and on the death of Mr. Macgregor, in 1878. Mr. John Cable became associated with the firm.

In 1882, Mr. Isaac Stevenson joined, and the business was carried on under the name of Morgan, Cable and Co. In the meantime Mr. Morgan died and Mr. Cable retired from the firm, thus leaving Mr. Stevenson the sole proprietor; and in May, 1903, Mr. John Cook resigned his position as Superintendent Engineer of the Union Steamship Company, and entered into partnership with Mr. Stevenson as Stevenson and Cook.

The firm's work is of a varied character, and during 1903–1904 it included the building of two new dredges (with engines and boilers complete) for Omeo and Innemungi, Australia; forgings for a new screw steamer built at Auckland for Mr. Seager, of Wellington; and a number of shafts and other work for the Union Steamship Company.

Gold-dredging in both New Zealand and Victoria was as much the foundation of Stevenson's wealth as engineering. In September 2001 together with Henry Farnsworth of Melbourne, he set up a company in Victoria, registered in Dunedin, to dredge for gold. Twenty three of the thirty four shareholders were from Port Chalmers.

Stevenson and Cook exported dredges to Australia until in 1906 the Australian Government imposed heavy duties on such imports. Stevenson got around this by forming with Charles Ruwolt the Ruwolt Proprietary Company which became one of the largest engineering companies in Australia.

Isaac was also an investor in at least seven Otago gold-dredging companies. Reasonable dividends were paid by most companies in which he invested. The Morven Ferry and New Britannia dredges were bought by Messrs Stevenson and Cook, who sold them on to an Australian mining company. In 1904 the firm is making new boilers for the tug boat "Plucky," and the s.s. "Invercargill, and also keeping the Port Chalmers forge running. Messrs Stevenson and Cook always had the most modern machinery, and managed one of the best engineering plants in the colony.

Stevenson also found time to be Mayor of Port Chalmers from 1906 to 1908 and he was a generous public benefactor.

In 1900 he purchased four acres at St Leonards and moved into the existing house. Stevenson and Cook was sold about this time and Isaac commissioned a grander house around 1930, which in 1950, Isaac's daughter Annie gifted to the University of Otago for use as the Vice Chancellor's Lodge.

Steel minesweeping trawlers represented the peak of New Zealand's wartime [WW2] shipbuilding. They were able to sweep mines, hunt submarines and escort convoys, and were mostly built at Port Chalmers, the country's centre of steel shipbuilding.

Fletcher Construction took over the Port Chalmers shipyard Stevenson & Cook in 1942, and rapidly established an entirely new yard at Boiler Point to build the sweepers.

Isaac Stevenson died on 10 September 1946 at age 93 and is buried in the family grave beneath a very simple stone, his wife Mary having died in 1929.

Prepared by the Historic Cemeteries Conservation Trust of New Zealand ([www.cemeteries.org.nz](http://www.cemeteries.org.nz))

From the Cyclopaedia of Otago Southland, and "Haven at St Leonards" by Ian Church

