



Scottish Poets and Poetry

John Barr 1809 —1899

Son of James and Rebecca Barr, John Barr was born 24 October 1809 at Paisley, Renfrewshire, Scotland. He was the son of a manufacturer and was educated at a parish school. He became an engineer, and established the shipbuilding firm Barr and McNab that worked on large shipbuilding contracts on the Clyde, but following losses on construction contracts, his company failed

Barr married Mary Jamieson Lamb on 11 April 1844. The couple had two sons and at least two daughters. The family emigrated to New Zealand in 1852 and became farmers at Wakari and Kaihiku. John retired to Dunedin about 1861.

John Barr enjoyed popular success as a poet. He was made laureate to the Caledonian Society of Otago. He inaugurated the Burns Club and gave frequent public readings. In 1861, he published a collection of poems and song that had a strong Scottish identity. These which were reprinted with additions in 1874).

As he said:

*I sit me doun to write a sang
In hamely Scottish jingle;
...I sing o' glens and clay-built cot,
Of lassies leal and kind'.*

John Barr was lauded by the Caledonian Society of Otago and the members presented him with a gold medal and described him in extravagant terms as a "genius" upon whose shoulders "the mantle of Burns has fallen." He was awarded a gold medal by the Society in 1868.

He died at Dunedin on 18 September 1899.

