Charles Traill's "Chaff Storage" Book

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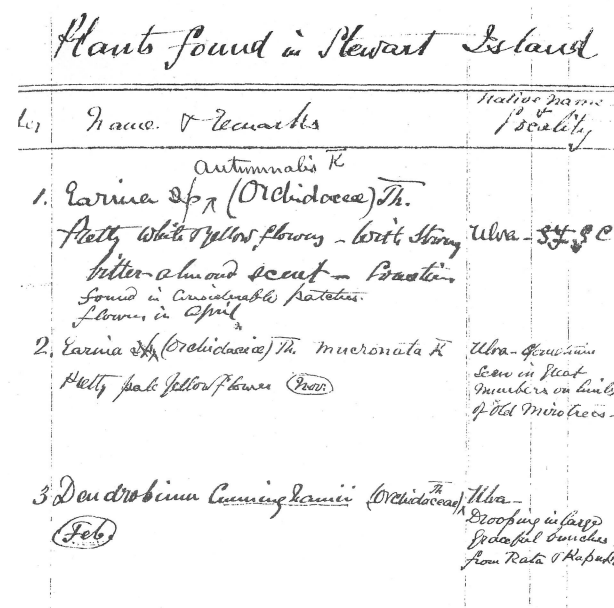
Charles Traill was born in Orkney in 1826. After an adventurous early life abroad he came to New Zealand, went into business for a time in Oamaru, and finally settled on Ulva Island in Paterson Inlet, being appointed Postmaster of Stewart Island in 1872. His Danish wife died comparatively young but he remained on Ulva, running the store and Post Office until his last illness in 1891. Younger half-brothers, Walter and Arthur William, came out later as apprentices on big sailing ships. Walter, a bachelor, carried on Charles' work at Ulva. A. W. Traill married the daughter of the Ruapuke missionary Wohlers and brought up eight children; my father, R. H. Traill, is the last of the generation left.

With the recent death at Stewart Island of one of Charles Traill's nephews, some interesting papers have come to light, including an exercise book or ledger book dated 1870, labelled "Chaff Storage" but with all the chaff pages cut out and an inner page headed, instead, "Native Plants in Cultivation at Ulva". There are Plants Wanted, nicely distinguished as "Maori" and "Pahkeha" (sic) plants — magnolia is pakeha, kowhai Maori; plants for the Heath Border (mostly pakeha, these, but *Cyathodes acerosa* sneakes in among the azaleas and cross-leaved heather); plants found on Stewart Island (136 on this list); notes on coprosmas found at Ulva (ten listed); plants sent to Mr Kirk of the *Forest Flora;* ferns and allied plants; Stewart Island ferns and phanerogams; cryptograms; monocotyledones; dicotyledones (the latter in one place divided again into "large" plants like trees, shrubs and climbers, and "smaller" plants) — for Charles, it seems, kept finding more plants, and having to insert their names out of order until he could make new lists. His obituary hints that he took honour, integrity, neatness, system and exactitude to unusual extremes; but he was also excessively good natured, supplying other botanists with "ferns and other plants, secured in Wardian cases", shipped off from Ulva after painstaking efforts of wrapping and packaging undreamt-of in these days of plastic bags. He is described as an upright man of shrinking temperament who *might* have made some noise in the world, but was content to push quietly on with his interests in his own small corner. His copy of the *Forest Flora* is not inscribed by Kirk, but contains a letter from the author telling of the progress the book was making, and remarking that Charles' copy would be sent to him as soon as possible.

His life on Ulva is described in appropriately flowery terms in the *Southland Times* of 4 December 1891:

"The portion of Ulva selected by Mr Traill embraces three


Plants found in Stewart Island

No.	Name & Remarks	Native name & locality
1.	Earina autumnalis K (Orchidaceae) Th. Pretty White & yellow flowers – Sweet Honey like – almond scent – Parasitic. Found in Considerable patches. Flowers in April	Ulva – SH, SC
2.	Earina (Orchidaceae) Th. mucronata K Pretty pale Yellow Flowers (Jan)	Ulva – Plentiful Seen in Great Numbers on Limbs of Old Mirotrees –
3	Dendrobium Cunninghamii (Orchidaceae) Th. (Feb)	Ulva – Drooping in large Pendulous bunches from Rata & Kapuka

Abbreviations

(Jan) = Flowers in January

(Authorities) K. = Kirke Th = Thomson

SC. SH = Sydney Cove

beautiful bays, two of them affording perfect shelter for sailing craft. The business of the owner's life became the beautifying of his property, already most singularly favoured by nature. After years of labour and the exercise of consummate taste, the spot grew to be one of romantic beauty — a veritable piece of fairyland, which attracted numerous visitors and was acknowledged by all voices to

be the site of the island. It is well known with what luxuriance flowers and shrubs flourish in the moisture and genial atmosphere of that favoured portion of Foveaux Straits. There the Nikau palm was seen side by side with the arbutus and fuchsia, the latter presenting a mass of blossoms, and the rich green on its leaves begotten only of such propitious surroundings; and throughout the grounds were scattered, along with the most exquisite heaths, specimens of rare plants, carefully collected from the North Island and the Chathams. While Mr Traill was possessed of considerable and diversified knowledge, his two passions were, botany and natural history. His position was acknowledged as that of the foremost conchologist in New Zealand, and the collection of shells which he possessed and has left behind is understood to be of great value. At his own cost he peopled Ulva with English singing birds which added the last charm to his delightful retreat."

Interesting as Charles Traill's "Chaff Book" must be to botanists — especially now that even Stewart Island is changing — there is much of the man himself, and the family, in his little asides. We Stewart Islanders will also recognise local dialectical differences in the Maori names: we say mako, not makomako; punaweta, not putaputaweta (or did, till the books taught us otherwise); but how many of us now think of *Coprosma rhamnoides* as mikimiki kai atua (devil food)?

Charles Traill observed with his taste buds as well as other keen senses: one of his coprosmas has fruit "like those of *C. foetidissima,* but rather smaller and lighter in colour — an ochre yellow — and not unpleasant to the taste", the kernel in cross-section showing "the shell to be uniformly thin & not blotched, the soft kernel being thus larger than of *C. fa.*" He adds: "Midrib of leaf often in a channel".

Sometimes he is tantalising: "*Loranthus micranthus* K. [Kirk, his authority]: I have only met with this on the Totara. The Maoris had certain Superstitions, beliefs and observances in connection with this plant". He does not divulge them, but he does give the local name of the mistletoe, piki raki. About kamahi (accent marked on the first syllable) he is practical: "Easily split up for firewood. Not much used for other purposes but is said to make good fencing posts". (But his nephew Roy was tanning sails with kamahi bark when I was a child.) He mentions a thicker version of *Lycopodium billardieri* (réua, phonetically rendered rae-wa), "curling at tips". *Polypodium serpens,* thick and round of leaf, "affects the miro". *Cyathodes acerosa* is inaka poriro, as distinct from ordinary inaka *(Dracophyllum longifolium);* punaweta *(Carpodetus serratus)* has "pretty white flowers with strong odour of bitter almonds". *Hierochloe redolens* is a grass with "*large* seed like Y. Fog but larger"; the orchid *Corysanthes rivularis,* common near "Dwarfie Stone" (some reminder of an Orkney landmark),

nestles violet-like to the ground. The light red fruit of stinkwood are the size of blackcurrants but taste disagreeable. Another red fruit, that of kokihi (he is not sure which of the two species of *Tetragonia*) is "used by Natives for painting the cheeks". (J. F. H. Wohlers scolded some girls for going painted to church.)

Carex virgata he describes as "coarse cutting grass". (As children we knew sharp-edged sedges as "cutty grass", a name that may have come from my aunt Mateen Traill of Ringaringa — where this book has been for many years. The word looks like "cutty" — or would, to a child's eye.)

Stewart Island's European settlers were, like their Maori neighbours, good at "making do". Charles Traill quotes Mrs Cameron (probably Sarah Ann, wife of the Centre Island light-house keeper, and daughter of Captain Howell of Riverton) in her recommendation of *Phormium tenax* fibre rather than the feeble whahariki, and outright rejection of cabbage-tree as "no-good flax". By the way, he notes that good (strong-fibred) *Phormium tenax* was wharanui, feeble *P. colensoi* was whararikí, and the two were known collectively in the south as harareke — not harakeke. Cabbage tree was ti whara-iti.

The filmy fern *Hymenophyllum dilatatum* is a "flat delicate fern depending edgewise from trees"; there is an affectionate glance at *Gentiana saxosa*— "Grows within reach of spray — a very beautiful little white flower sometimes tinged with pink — flowers in April". *Myosotis capitata* grows at Glory Cove and near A. W. Traill's boatshed near beach (probably the one at Little Ringaringa, where posts can still be seen in the sand). Charles Traill distinguishes two kinds of totara, of which "some very ancient looking trees . . . about 18 feet circ[umference]" are found on Ulva: *Taikura* is the red-wooded sort — the timber being red right thro' the tree. This is the best wood for lasting, but more brittle than the *Taitea* which is generally a smaller tree, the wood of which is white excepting sometimes a little at the very heart. The white totara is better than the red for firewood as it burns more freely and does not jump about so much".

Apparently, Moses, a Maori neighbour at Ringaringa, supplied the Maori names, or some of them; or the name Moses may mean Moses' Corner, where he kept his boat. At all events, not only *Coprosma rhamnoides* is annotated "Miki miki kai atua *Moses*", but so is the minutely described *Myrtus pedunculata*, albeit with a question mark. At a quick glance, the matted bushes do look similar. But the myrtle is carefully laid down as follows: "Pretty may-like flowers — stem slender, stiff, whitish — seldom straight. Leaves small, ovate, thick, glossy, of a pale green — often tinged with red. Sometimes strongly show white dots with transmitted light. Midrib and veins indistinct. Berry of a pale orange on ¾ inch stalks, size of red currants but longer — ripe in July".

Botanists today are moving away from "gardening" with living specimens brought from other places, let alone the introduction of foreign songbirds to add the last charm to a delightful retreat. Some transplants may perish, but too many have been known to prosper at the expense of the *tangata whenua*. Charles Traill's nikaus and beeches have never gone out of bounds, however. In his day, one of the tree daisies was named after him, but it is now recognised as a cross between tupari (as he spells it) and teteaweka. I once collected a soft-leaved seedling of one of these plants at the old Ulva (back-beach) landing, and grew it with others at Ohiro Bay, on the South Wellington coast. All my Stewart Island plants have succumbed, one by one: this climate, with its sudden and extreme changes from (and to) weeks of heavy rain, months of drought, drying gales from the north-west and cold, violent, salt-laden storms from the south, seems to have been too much for them — while a grove of teteaweka trees by the Traill-Wohlers grave was there in Cockayne's time, and still flourishes. My plant from Ulva, however, lived long enough to produce flowerheads, with the ray florets the same lovely heliotrope colour as those of the Chatham Island "aster". The *Chatham Island Chronicle* of 1867 carries a possible explanation: "Messrs Trail [sic] & Cox have returned from their exploring trip to the 'Tobacco Run' on the south coast of this island. They report having undergone many privations and encountered many difficulties and roughings in their travels; which their appearance on arrival would fully substantiate, as with garments tattered, and fragments of bush pork slung across their shoulders, they very much reminded us of the picture we remember in our youth of Robinson Crusoe". Charles Traill placed a tick in his Chaff Book beside the plants he had succeeded in establishing at Ulva: *Olearia semidentata* is on the list, but unticked. My plant had leaves like the hybrid "traillii", but what was its true whakapapa?

The "Chaff Book" is at Ringaringa, in the old Traill family home; there are copies in the Botany Division and the Turnbull Library.

Extracts from letter to *Southland Times* by R. H. Traill, dated 26 June 1978.

. . . because of my age, I have a longer memory and associations of Ulva Island where that first Post Office was established than most people living today.

My late uncle, Walter Traill, was then living alone in the old house and running the post office and a store when as young boys we would row or sail across from Ringaringa in our 20ft whale boat. Older residents used the name Cooper's Island rather than Ulva, and some maps still give that as an alternative name.

In those old days the place teemed with bird life, but not wekas which have been introduced. Now some birds are still plentiful, namely kakas, parakeets, bellbirds and lastly brown creepers which are not usually seen except at the head of Paterson Inlet.

For many years deer had not got on to Ulva, but some time in the early days days of the first Labour Government an official party made a visit. Mr Parry, Minister of Internal Affairs, Captain Yerex who was in charge of national deer control, Mr C. M. Turner and myself.

My job was to collect samples of shrubs and trees which were the deer's favourite browse, point out how plentiful it was and later to show the difference where the deer had been established for a long time.

It was on this trip across the island that Captain Yerex and I both noticed a karamu *(Coprosma lucida)* had been partly eaten.

After that I kept a close watch. At first there was not much change; then the tops of ridges showed more signs. The difference became more obvious; most of the beaches had deer tracks and finally all the whitetail deer's favourite food, including the hen and chicken fern and what were then called *Polypodium* ferns, vanished.

Several experienced men, including Mr Jack Lawn, who was then senior Ranger for the Forest Service, estimated anything up to 20 deer on Ulva.

The Forest Service have killed a lot of deer there and I don't see many tracks now but I believe there are still some deer there and the point is that once the undergrowth is greatly reduced, a few deer can prevent regeneration. Ulva will always be a popular place to visit and the tracks mostly used by visitors have been upgraded by the Forest Service. Others not used so much are still in a more natural state, but pleasant walking. On islands on the west end beaches can be found native forget-me-not and an American botanist with me recently found coastal gentian in full bloom. With a local party of New Zealand Forest and Bird Protection Society last Sunday, 25th June, we confirmed that on other islands near by the same plant was still flowering.

I am glad to say that by patrolling several islands of the Bravo group, I kept them clear of deer and they still show what was once the natural state of the Stewart Island bush.

I sometimes suggest that anyone assessing changes made by deer should first visit those places, or even some tracks in the vicinity of Halfmoon Bay, and base their judgment on a comparison of what they see.