

FURNITURE DESIGNS FROM NEW ZEALAND: THE DUNEDIN IRON AND WOODWARE COMPANY'S ILLUSTRATED CATALOGUE

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This article arises from a period of field study in New Zealand during which the author was based at the Otago Early Settlers Museum, Dunedin. The Dunedin Iron and Woodware Company were situated on Princes Street in Dunedin, New Zealand, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The catalogue (priced 10s. 6d.) is not dated but a patent date of 1886 can be seen on the 'Guidwife' washing board on page 75, (Fig. 3) and by studying the furniture designs one can approximate a date sometime in the late nineteenth century. It is to be noted that even at this period New Zealand was a country very much in its infancy, and although the Otago region on the South Island had probably been commercially settled for forty to fifty years by the time this catalogue was produced, emigrants were still arriving in droves, with few possessions, and all would be in need of furnishings, everyday household items and equipment.

Much of the furniture in this catalogue was evidently intended for middle class clients with an established household. The interior setting illustrations portray oversized rooms with tall windows and elaborately decorated plasterwork, obviously intended to give an impression of their typical customer's lifestyle and to put across a feeling of opulence, although much of the furniture is of plain and simple design with basic turning and machined carving as decoration. Towards the back of the catalogue, however, are pages dedicated to the probable majority of clients; good quality yet basic and affordable pieces of essential furniture such as iron bedsteads and cots, fold up iron beds, built in and free standing kitchen furniture, and household items such as washing machines and mangles. A note at the end of the price list states that 'In nearly every case lower qualities than those described in the List can be had of somewhat similar looking article'.

Even so there are few examples of 'budget' furniture throughout the price list such as:
193. 4-Tier Square Inlaid Whatnot, best style £2 18s. 6d. . cheaper style at 37s. 6d. each
312. Cheap French Bedstead, 1 in. tube, 3 ft. by 6 ft. 6 in..... £1 7s. 6d.
and,

489. Dressing chest of Drawers, with 18 × 14 glass, and jewel drawers at side £8 8s. 0d.
A cheaper but similar article at..... £5 15s. 0d.

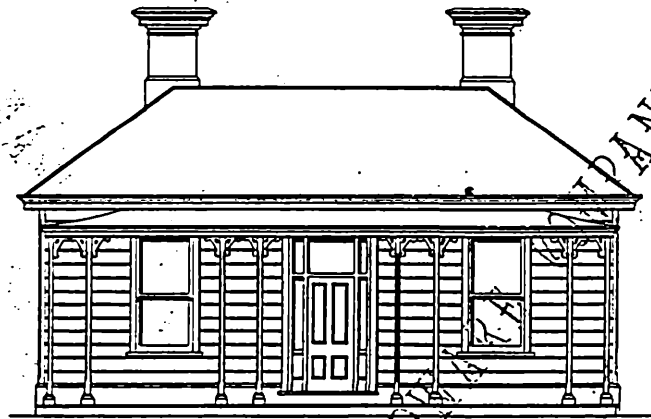
Also featured is institutional furniture, hospital beds, church and school fittings and for the newly arriving emigrants or newly weds, prefabricated housing. (Fig. 1)

The Otago region of New Zealand was primarily settled by The Free Church of Scotland and is therefore an excellent area in which to study the transmission of Scottish furniture traditions. There are some startling similarities evident in the furniture of the region and that of the makers' areas of origin in Scotland, even reaching into the realms of mass produced items. Perfect examples are the 'Scotch' chests, numbers 291, 293 and 295 in the catalogue which could at a glance be indigenous to the Lowlands of

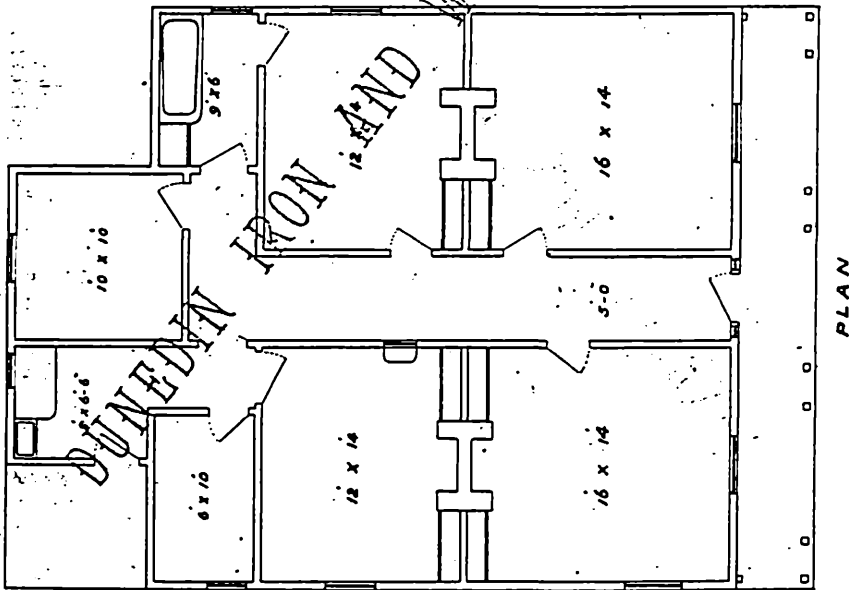
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THE DUNEDIN IRON AND WOODWARE COMPANY.

COTTAGES



FRONT ELEVATION



4

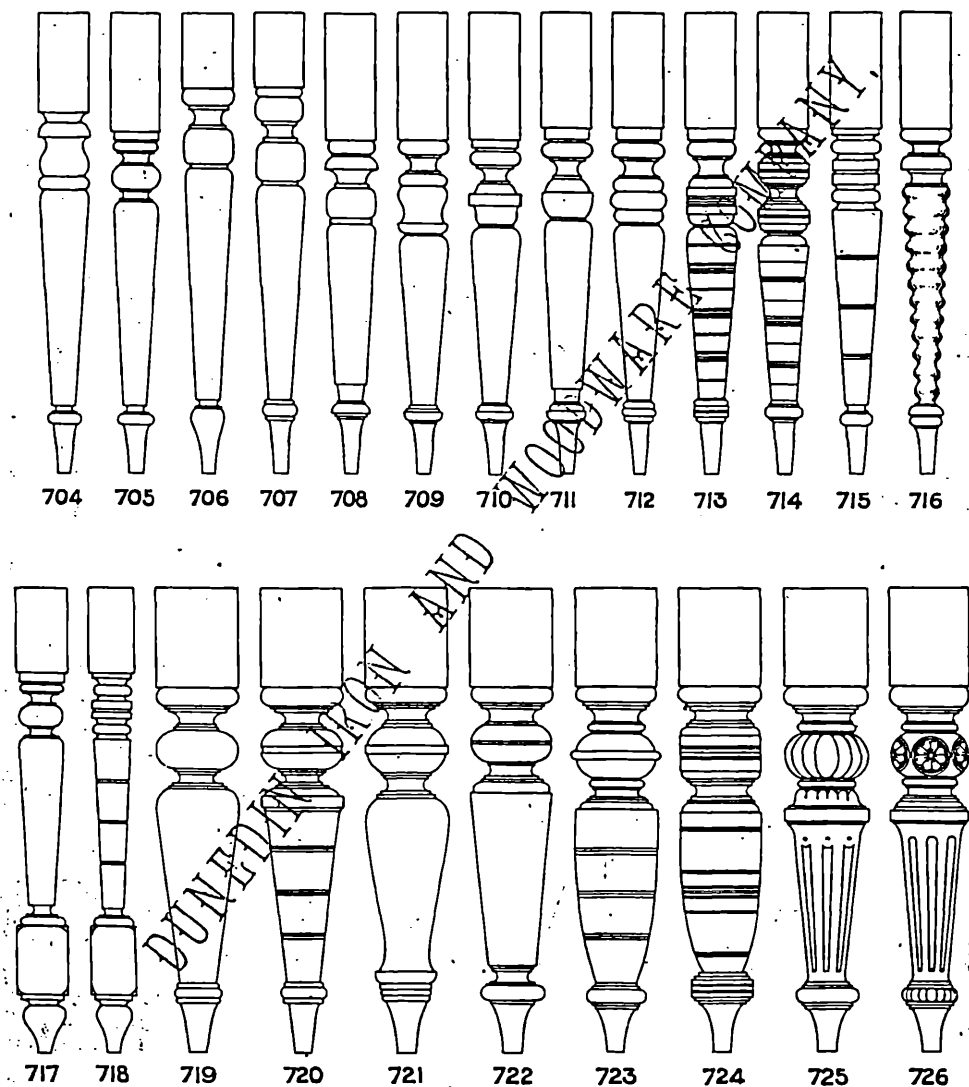
SCALE 1/4 INCH TO A FOOT

PRINCES AND BOND STREETS SOUTH, DUNEDIN.

1. Design for a prefabricated timber cottage.

Courtesy of The Otago Early Settlers Museum, Dunedin

TABLE LEGS



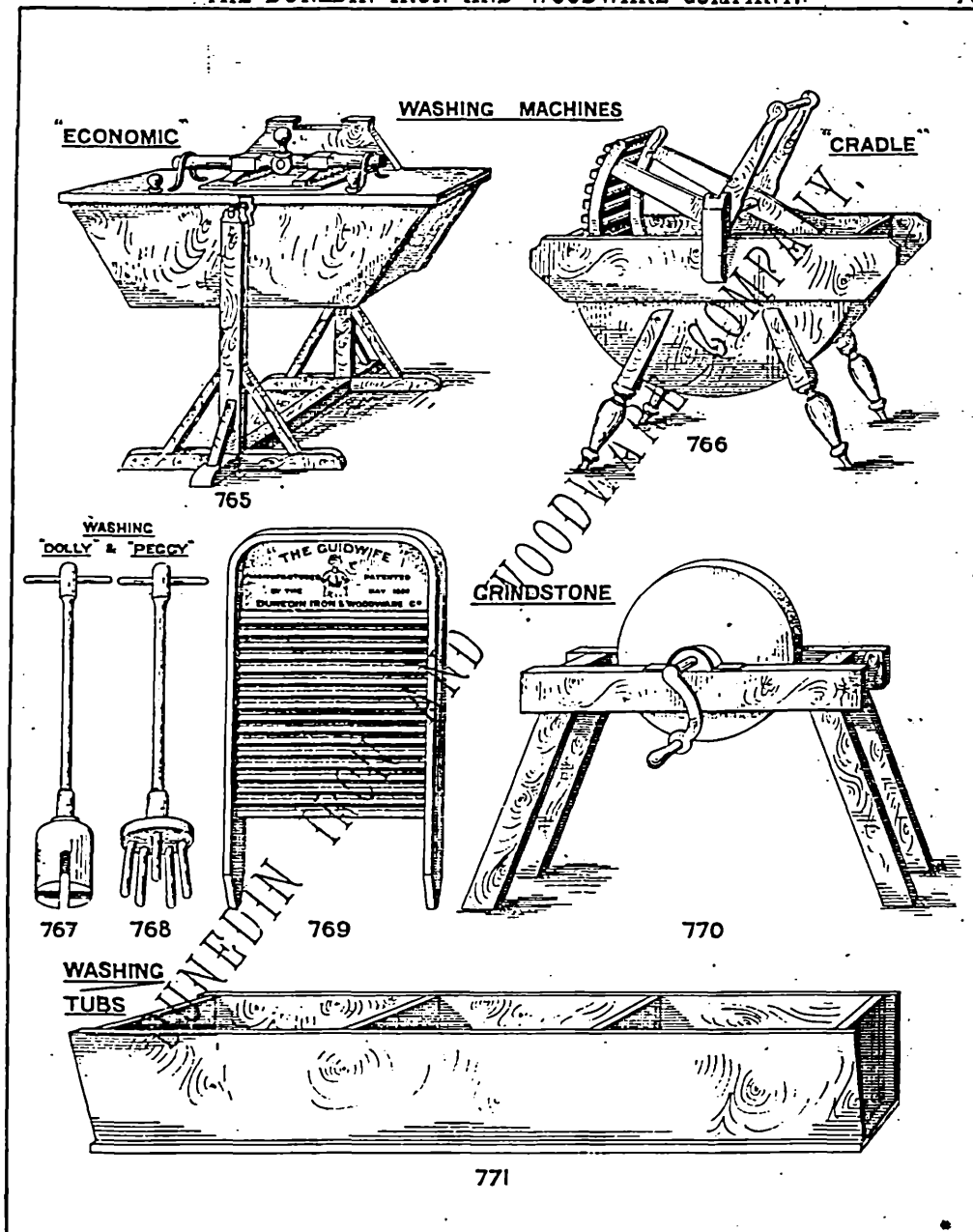
PRINCES AND BOND STREETS SOUTH, DUNEDIN.

2. Designs for turned table legs.

Courtesy of The Otago Early Settlers Museum, Dunedin

THE DUNEDIN IRON AND WOODWARE COMPANY.

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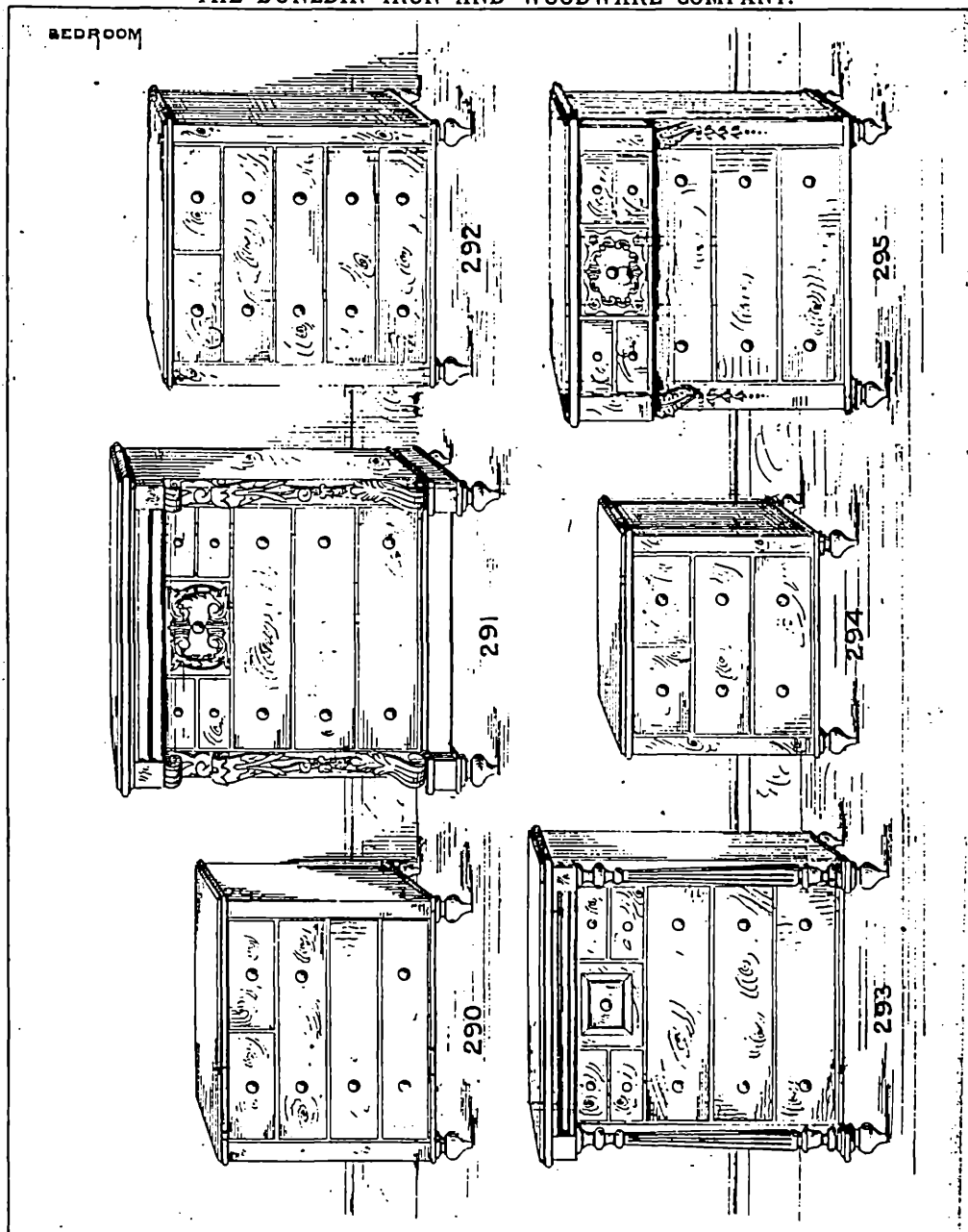
PRINCES AND BOND STREETS SOUTH, DUNEDIN.

3. Designs for wooden washing machines and related items.

Courtesy of The Otago Early Settlers Museum, Dunedin

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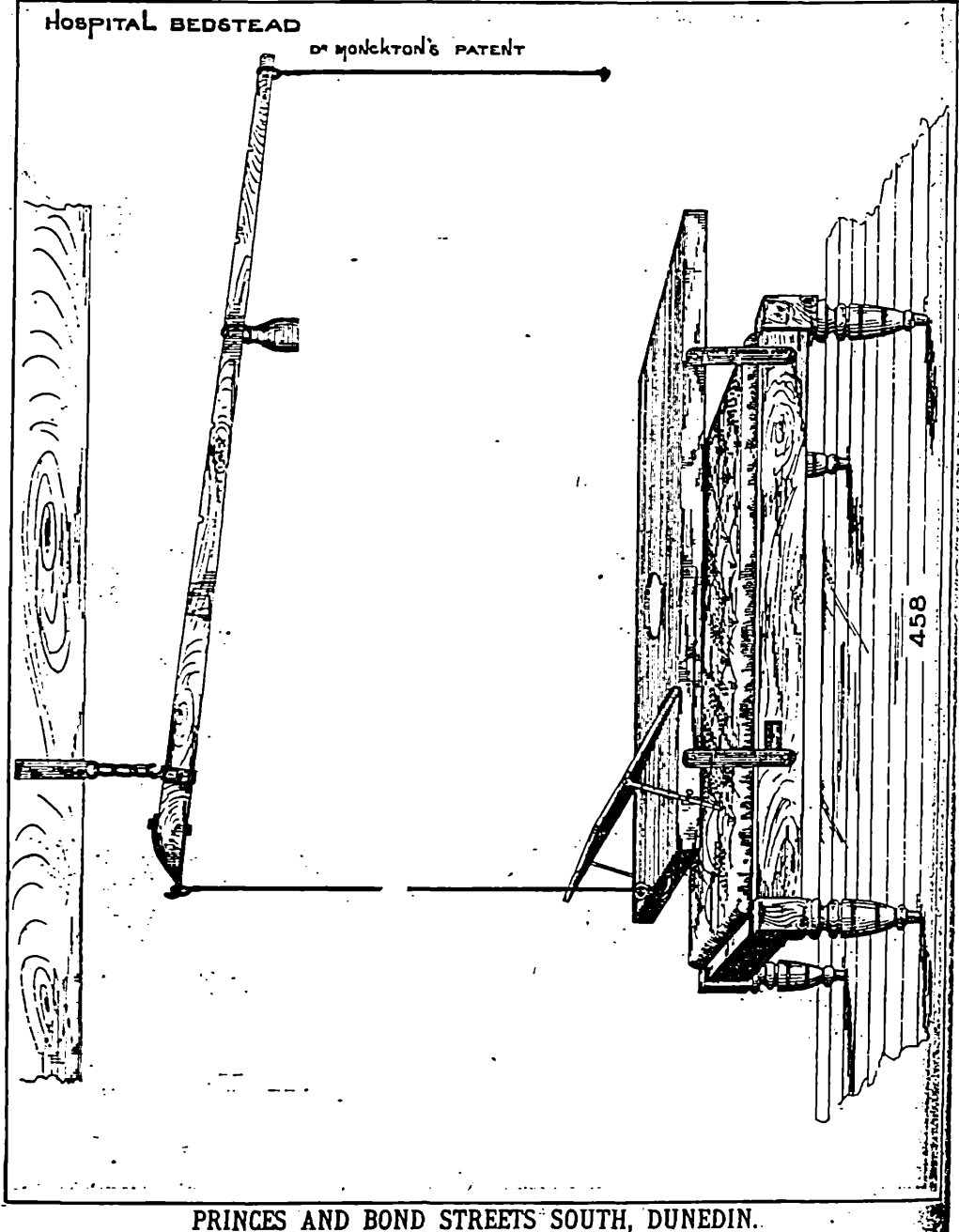
PRINCES AND BOND STREETS SOUTH, DUNEDIN.

4. Designs for bedroom chests of drawers.

Courtesy of The Otago Early Settlers Museum, Dunedin

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PRINCES AND BOND STREETS SOUTH, DUNEDIN.

5. 'Dr. Monckton's Patent' hospital bedstead.

Courtesy of The Otago Early Settlers Museum, Dunedin

Scotland.' They are constructed from a choice of Red Pine (Rimu) or Kauri, both timbers native to New Zealand.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have made use of the catalogue with the kind permission of The Otago Early Settlers Museum in Dunedin who house the original copy of the complete catalogue and price list in their archives. I am grateful for generous funding from The Waitangi Foundation and the British Council in New Zealand.

REFERENCE

1. David Jones, 'Scotch Chests', *Regional Furniture*, Vol. II (1988), pp. 38-47.