



## **Presidents report for 24/25 year**

It is with much pleasure that I write this report as our club has recently been the recipient of a windfall. So that you don't have to sit there for an hour listening to the details, I will just provide an outline but will give a fuller verbal explanation following adoption of this report, and be happy to answer any questions you will inevitably have.

It's important to understand the backstory to this matter as that provides the context.

In 1944 the various Lebanese Societies in NZ formed what was known as the Grand Society which was based in Wellington. This society was governed by delegates from the various branches and is now known as the Lebanese Society of New Zealand (Incorporated).

Each society contributed money which was used to purchase clubrooms for the Grand Society. Wellington branch cohabitated those clubrooms.

With the passage of time the Grand Society ceased to operate.

In 2018 the Auckland Society learned that Wellington branch intended to sell the land, as the clubrooms had been devastated by fire.

It further came to light that Wellington branch had changed its name to the Grand Society, thereby purporting to be the legal owner of the land.

The Auckland Society approached Wellington branch to enquire what was going on but was ignored. After countless approaches to Wellington over 4 years the Auckland Society still had not had the courtesy of as much as a reply, so they placed a lien on the property which is situated in Abel-Smith Street, in the heart of Wellington city.

Auckland had kept Dunedin informed of every action and sort our support in lodging an action to the Registrar of Lands to resolve the matter.

Fast forward to late 2023. Long story short, the Registrar found in favour of Wellington, despite the mountain of evidence supplied.

Following the Registrar's decision, Auckland then sort an opinion from a Kings Council, Felix Geiringer, as to whether we should challenge the Registrar's decision in the High Court. His reply was, we would be silly if we didn't. He put his money where his mouth was and took the action for a fraction of his usual fee with the rider that if we were successful, he would charge a 'winners fee' to reflect his standard charge out rate.

Again, to summarise, Dunedin joined the High Court action as the second appellant and Justice Churchman ordered the property to be sold and the proceeds split equally between the 3 parties with each paying their own costs. The highest bid was \$660,000.00.

✶ I will talk to this in more detail following delivery of this report and Peter will give a breakdown of the costs associated with the court action.



I would like to thank Mike Nidd for the pro bono work he did, and the guidance he gave in relation to this matter in its early stages.

The funds that we now have in hand will enable us to progress a documentary that will trace the migration of the people who left Lebanon, in particular from Bsharee and neighbouring villages, and the coastal city of Tripoli, to Otago and Southland.

The interim name of the 5-part documentary is, The Cedars of New Edinburgh, and will be made in conjunction with Toitu Otago Early Settlers Museum. Sean Brosnahan, who is known to many of you from the talks he has given to our community over the years. Sean is a prominent historian and curator with the Toitu Museum. He will be accompanied by Will McKee who is an Exhibition Developer at the Toitu Museum, and a cameraman. Together Sean and Will have made acclaimed documentaries about the Chinese and Scottish migrants who made Otago home. We began discussions with Sean and Will 7 years ago and are excited that is now going to become a reality.

The primary motivation for making the documentary was the lack of history we had about our community for the first part of the twentieth century. Apart from Matthew Farry's article in Scattered Cedars, our historical information, albeit precious, is anecdotal. For the first time we will have a factual, robust historical account of our community.

As you know, one of our dearly loved members Denis Betro passed away earlier this year. You will also know that he was an acclaimed musician and song writer working out of London. I had spoken to Denis over the years about incorporating his music into the documentary. He was very excited about the possibility.



Since his passing we have been in discussions with his partner Jane de Florez, about that possibility. She was equally as enthusiastic.



I will speak to this also, in more detail and answer any questions following the adoption of this report.

The low level of activity over the last several years has reflected the club's financial position. That said, each year we have laid a wreath at the ANZAC day dawn service. We have always had the flag of Lebanon flown from Mayoral balcony, apart from last year due to maintenance being carried out. We have posted information onto our Facebook page and website, including service sheets of those community members who have passed on, as well as a few social functions.

In addition, the committee has met on a regular basis and Peter Coory has done a fine job on updating our rules in accordance with new regulations that incorporated societies will have to adhere to from April next year.

I would like to thank Margaret Woodford, Glennys Espie, Suraya Langston, Peter Coory and Martin George for staying the course through challenging times. A special thank you to Martin for the many years of service he has given to the club, he resigned from the committee midway through last year.

Since the sale of our clubrooms in 2003, every project has been driven by a singular purpose: to forge an enduring and visible legacy for our community. The proposed documentary is the culmination of that vision, the last of the foundational projects I hope to see completed under my presidency. With its completion, I believe we will have truly honoured those who came before us, leaving behind tangible legacies that unequivocally state: The Dunedin Lebanese community was here, and we made our mark.

Warm regards,

*Richard Joseph*

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**President – Cedars of Lebanon Dunedin (Inc)**