

Michael Kenny and Jane McNab

Michael Kenny and Jane McNab are two individuals from the McNab Family history for whom we have found a considerable amount of information, documents and even newspaper reports. The following is a summary of their lives, and the full details, documents and reports are available.

“Family” - What does it mean and where do we find it ?”

From the Irish Famine To Chinese Opium Wars – From the slums and fever hospitals of Glasgow – To Tipperary in Ireland – from the Cape of Good Hope, to India and Hong Kong, and finally to the “Land of the Great White Cloud – Oamaru in New Zealand.

A tale of poverty, adventure, sadness, petty crime, and family struggles.

“I did strike the woman, Your Worship, I knocked her down”, were the words of Michael Kenny to a Judge in Oamaru (NZ) court in 1878. On another two occasions in court he would also accuse persons of assaulting or insulting his second wife Isabella and child Jane Kenny. More details later on the veracity of his claims. Michael was definitely an interesting character and we could say a product of his times and circumstances. Did he have the choices and opportunities we have today? Is life a case of “Genetics” or “Opportunity” - of “Nature versus Nurture”??

Michael Kenny was born about 1828 in Tulla Co. Clare in Ireland. We know little of his family and parentage. It was a time of famine and hardship, and many Irishmen were encouraged and even eager to join the British Army as one of the few choices for a future.

So at the mature age of 26, Michael, a labourer, enlisted in the 59th Foot Regiment in 1854, and began years of travel which included involvement in the 2nd Opium War in China, followed by quite some time in South Africa, in England and in many other exotic places. A total of 19 years, with 3 good conduct medals, but also appearing 6 times in the “default book”, including a court martial for theft – of a piece of “pipe clay”! Signs of times to come!

Meanwhile Jane McNab was born around 1837 in County Tyrone also in Ireland, as the eldest child of Francis and Mary McNab, - our “Irish Family Connection”. With 3 other daughters and 2 sons, the family were eager to escape the aftermath of the Famine, and make a decent life for themselves – which meant leaving Ireland for Glasgow Scotland at the beginning of 1864.

Within about 8 months of their arrival in Glasgow, the McNabs found themselves in dire straits. The Glasgow of those days did offer some factory employment, but also a lifestyle conducive to “Fever” - often typhus or similar, which half of the family suffered from within the first year. Social Security or Welfare did not exist, and the “Poor Law Relief” was applied for, but gave minimal support.

March 5th 1865 – Local newspaper The Glasgow Herald announced the arrival of the ship SS Himalaya, having sailed from Portsmouth to the Clyde with nearly 800 soldiers of the 59th Foot Regiment, accompanied by many wives and children.

Now we know that the McNab family lived in The Gallowgate, in central Glasgow, which was literally a hop skip and jump from the Army Barracks. Jane and her sisters were all single, and we can surmise that they were quite delighted to see these soldiers arriving, and that relationships did eventuate. Jane and her sisters Alice and Margaret would all marry soldiers, though sadly within a decade all of them would have married, had a child each and died at a young age. Therein lie further family stories.



Within a year or so, Michael was off to Ireland with his regiment – and eventually to Thurles in Co. Tipperary where Jane would follow him, and they would be married in February of 1866. A child Mary Kenney was born to them there, in August 1866.

By November 1867, the 59th Regiment was again off to Ceylon (Sri Lanka), thereafter in 1869 to India, and Jane returned to Glasgow and her family.

We know from Poor Law records and Jane's own account, she had two trips to Ireland in 1869 and 1870, reasons and destinations unknown. On her return in October 1870, she had to apply for help for her 4 year old child and again in April 1872 as Michael was still in Bombay (Mumbai), and she was living with her parents. By this time, a doctors report said that she was suffering from “disease of the lungs and dropsy”.

By 11th June 1872 Jane McNab would in fact die from “Phythisis tuberculosis, and renal disease” aged only 35.

This left her child Mary Kenny in the care of her grandparents who also tried to gain some assistance on her behalf, but this was refused as the child had been born in Ireland – had not lived in Glasgow for the required continuous 5 years, so the family were left to fend for themselves. Often they would be advised to return to their “place/parish of birth” - i.e. Ireland.

The mystery of what happened to the child Mary Kenny remains, even after a lot of research. We do know that grandparents Francis and Mary McNab do not appear in Scottish records after 1873, and we believe they eventually moved back to County Tyrone in Ireland. They died there respectively in 1890 and 1885, leaving no record whatsoever of Mary's future.

Jane's sisters all died before her – Mary Dunlevy (ms McNab), in 1869, Alice Cronan (ms McNab) in 1870 – both from Tuberculosis, and Margaret Bagnell (ms McNab) died of fever along with her 3 month old son in Karachi in Pakistan in 1870. The two McNab sons were left in Glasgow, Hugh, our direct ancestor who had just lost his 1st wife Anne Mooney in childbirth, and Patrick who was newly married.

What of our Michael Kenny? Well we could judge him harshly – because he certainly did not seem to waste time in moving on! Apparently without his child Mary!! The name “Mary Kenny” is so common, that we have failed to find any definite further record of her.

In December 1873, Michael was discharged from the Army in Burnley England, stating that he intended to reside in Limerick. And in fact, that is where we find him, just 3 months later getting married to Isabella Carter a spinster 11 years younger than him! Her father Robert Carter was a “pensioner” - in fact was a retired Sergeant in the same 59th Foot regiment so we could presume they could have met through the regiment.

Just one month later – Michael and new wife Isabella are on the ship “Caroline” sailing as assisted migrants to Otago New Zealand.!

We have an account of one of the Caroline's migration voyages, - an amazing description of a shipful of “out of control passengers, especially the women”... “ We do not think that the province is to be congratulated upon this latest accession to the population” - (Otago Daily Times 13th July 1874). This truly makes for some reading. We think that travel and migration is difficult these days!??

So – new life – new “occupation” or at least a minimal financial base as Michael was granted “Army pension” status, - new wife and even new family as somewhere possibly just after their arrival in New Zealand another daughter was born named “Jane” Kenny. Her place and date of birth are unsure, in fact may not have been registered.

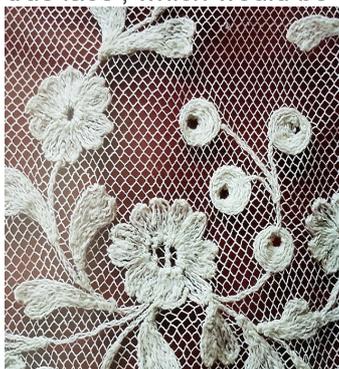
But let's not judge.. “migration to NZ “– actually seemed to have started off well enough for Michael and Isabella.

(November 18th North Otago Times -)

“LIMERICK LACE

Mrs. Kenny, who works the above, desires her friends and the public generally to know that her residence is now Coquet Street, near St. Pauls Church. Orders executed with despatch. November 16 1874. “

(Limerick lace is a hybrid lace of embroidered needle lace or crocheted lace on a machine made net base. It is a 'mixed lace' rather than a 'true lace', which would be entirely hand made.



Well, Isabella may have had skills with Limerick Lace, and Michael had been awarded regular small army pension payments to Oamaru as of June 1875 but very quickly life seems to have taken another path – which included a fair amount of petty crime :

October 1875 – Isabella in court charged with the theft of a jacket from the premises of a dressmaker for whom Isabella had done some work.

February 1876, Michael discharged from goal in Dunedin, having served one month for assault.

March 1876 Michael and Isabella “who had an infant in her arms”, were jointly charged with having no lawful means of support, found “sleeping under Bell Hill in the open air”.

1878

Michael had various episodes of “defending” his wife and also daughter Jane Kenny. Jane Campbell was charged on the information of Michael, with using abusive language to Isabella. Anne Evans was another woman Michael assaulted in defence of his wife who had been “called vile names”. (Herein the quote from Michael “I did strike the woman, I did knock her down”!!). - From newspaper reports the “name calling” was justified as both Isabella and Michael were seen to be “a perfect nuisance to the neighbourhood”.

July 1878

Michael was charged with having stolen an iron grate.... Isabella charged with having stolen a “handkerchief” which she wanted to make a pattern of!!.. Michael was cautioned and discharged whereas Isabella was sentenced to 14 days imprisonment with hard labour!!

December 1878

Daughter Jane Kenny who would have been only about 5 years of age was seemingly assaulted and beaten by a Catherine Moore who was drunk!.

January 1880

Court case in which Michael accused another woman Clara Atkins of beating his child Jane but the case was seen to be trivial, and “His Worship severely rebuked the plaintiff for the manner in which he was bringing up his child and dismissed the case”.

For a few years both Michael and Isabella seem to have had a quieter life style, or at least not “newsworthy” enough to appear in the local newspaper reports.

15 February 1887

Isabella Kenny died in Oamaru New Zealand.

Interestingly her death is registered by the Oamaru undertaker as “JANE Kenney” - though all other details are correct, re marriage to Michael etc. She was only 37 years old and died of cancer of the tongue. Is it just strange coincidence that she dies as “Jane”, and that the child she and Michael had was called “Jane” - memories of his first wife Jane McNab – or “Jane” just a common name??!

1889

Michael's daughter Jane Kenny was charged with drunkenness and using indecent language in public place and was "commencing to live an immoral life" - "The accused to be taken to the Magdalene Institute in Christchurch." It would seem that Jane's difficulties in early life followed her.

"Magdalene asylums, also known as **Magdalene laundries**, were initially Protestant but later mostly institutions that operated from the 18th to the late 20th centuries, ostensibly to house "fallen women". The term implied female sexual promiscuity or work in prostitution, young women who became pregnant outside of marriage, or young girls and teenagers who did not have familial support.[1] They were required to work as part of their board, and the institutions operated large commercial laundries, serving customers outside their bases.

Many of these "laundries" were effectively operated as penitentiary work-houses. The strict regimes in the institutions were often more severe than those found in prisons."

23rd October 1890

Michael Kenny, labourer died in Oamaru, aged 62 - of "Syncope" (heart stopped). "Born in Ireland, in NZ about 18 years".

"An inquest was held this morning on the body of Michael Kenny who was found dead in his house in Till Street..... George Carrad, apprentice, stated he lived opposite the deceased. He was in the habit of taking him meals across.. On Wednesday he took him some eggs and butter across and lit his fire. Deceased was very weak, and expressed a wish that he might die soon. While witness was there the deceased fell from his bed and he (witness) helped him back. He went to Kenny's yesterday afternoon with some dinner, about 2 o'clock and found him lying dead on the floor... his face, feet and hands marked with coal dust, and the right hand clasping a piece of coal.....Sergeant O'Grady stated deceased was an old pensioner. He had been in the hospital and subsequently in the Benevolent Societys Home....."

20th October 1892

Jane Kenny died in the "Magdalene" institute Christchurch NZ Aged 17, of tuberculosis.

What were the last few years of her life like? There seem to be no individual records available.

"The first Sisters of the Good Shepherd arrived in Christchurch from Melbourne in 1886 to staff the asylum, on the invitation of a Catholic priest. The Magdalene asylum was officially opened in Halswell in 1888, with 40 inmates. The laundry was already in full swing by then, employing most of the girls. The nuns told The Press that year that it was hard to get the women to work at first, but they soon became "expert laundresses". Those inmates not fit enough to work in the laundry tended to the gardens, did embroidery, and sewed booties for use inside the asylum.

For many years, Mount Magdala was the only home of its kind in the New Zealand and took "bad girls" from Canterbury, Auckland, Wellington, and Dunedin. The nuns told journalists in 1912 that "all who have fallen by the wayside or who are exposed to fall were welcome", regardless of religion. (By then, nearly 800 girls had passed through.)

Mount Magdala was an industrious, largely self-contained community. Bread was baked on the premises, shoes made and repaired, and the cows, pigs, and fowls provided much of the food. "We had butter on Sundays for a treat and dripping during the week".

A strict regime of work, prayer, and sleep was enforced. Girls were marched to church at 7am, before breakfast. They started work in the laundry by 8am. When a big air show or race meeting was held in Christchurch, hotels would be full and the laundry worked overtime. "Working in the laundry was more or less punishment," "It was so physical."

Unlike her parents Michael and Isabella who were buried in the Oamaru Cemetery, Jane was buried within the Magdalene Institute and her name is the first to appear on a memorial list/plaque placed there of recent years.

So, the search for "Family" and what it really means to each individual can last a whole lifetime, and it can have good or sad outcomes.

There are so many "definitions" of "Family". "Standards" of previous generations can seem way "below par" ! And conversely, the traditional nuclear family has changed so much in the last 50 years or so! Family choices and situations that would have been totally unacceptable in times past, are now normal, accepted without hesitation.

In a way no matter how different our historical and cultural backgrounds, is it not true, that "Family", its importance and whatever it means to us, is a central part of each and every life whether we are aware of it or not?