

# **CROKER PRIZE FOR BIOGRAPHY 2021**

## **2110 The Long Lost Brother and his Heirs**

**By Toni Glasson**

## THE LONG LOST BROTHER AND HIS HEIRS

Charles Skey, who was transported to Van Diemen's Land in 1835<sup>1</sup>, married – or maybe did not marry, since no record has been discovered - one Mary Anne Kirkwood, and had four children with her, one of whom was my husband's great grandmother, Fanny Skey.<sup>2</sup>

Mary Anne Kirkwood was the daughter of John Kirkwood<sup>3</sup>, a Scottish army veteran who came to Van Diemen's Land in 1826 as part of a Veteran Company employed to keep order in the colony.<sup>4</sup> He had had several daughters, but apart from Elizabeth, who appeared as a witness on the birth registrations of most of Mary Anne's children, most of the others seemed to have died young<sup>5</sup>. Another daughter, Ellen Kirkwood, appears to have neither birth nor death record, although she had married William Cordwell in 1848 in a marriage witnessed by Elizabeth<sup>6</sup>. This was the same William Cordwell who, in 1852, married Mary Anne after the death of her husband, Charles<sup>7</sup>. Ellen, it seemed, was dead by that date.

It was Ellen whom I was researching when I was scouring Ancestry records for the Tasmanian Kirkwoods. But then – lo and behold! – I discovered a John C. Kirkwood, whose existence as a son of the veteran John Kirkwood had been hitherto completely unknown to me, despite my having spent quite some time researching this family. Not only did I discover his existence, but with it a veritable trove of information contained in a series of documents entitled 'Hawaii, Wills and Probate Records'<sup>8</sup>. John C. Kirkwood, it seemed, was living in Hawaii where, over a period of years until his death in 1887<sup>9</sup>, he had amassed a considerable fortune. A Commission was established to find the living

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<sup>1</sup> Skey, Charles, Convict Record, [https://stors.tas.gov.au/CON31-1-40\\$init=CON31-1-40p146](https://stors.tas.gov.au/CON31-1-40$init=CON31-1-40p146)

<sup>2</sup> Skey, Fanny, Birth, Libraries Tasmania  
[https://libriariestas.ent.sirsidynix.net.au/client/en\\_AU/names/search/detailnonmodal/ent:\\$002f\\$002fNAME\\_INDEXES\\$002f0\\$002fNAME\\_INDEXES:1089730/one?qu=fanny&qu=skey](https://libriariestas.ent.sirsidynix.net.au/client/en_AU/names/search/detailnonmodal/ent:$002f$002fNAME_INDEXES$002f0$002fNAME_INDEXES:1089730/one?qu=fanny&qu=skey)

<sup>3</sup> Kirkwood, Mary Anne, Birth, Libraries Tasmania  
[https://libriariestas.ent.sirsidynix.net.au/client/en\\_AU/names/search/results?qu=mary&qu=ann&qu=kirkwood](https://libriariestas.ent.sirsidynix.net.au/client/en_AU/names/search/results?qu=mary&qu=ann&qu=kirkwood)

<sup>4</sup> Webb, Gwenda M, 'The Royal Veterans in Van Diemen's Land' in *Tasmanian Ancestry*, Vol 16, No 1, June 1995

<sup>5</sup> Louisa Skey, daughter of Charles Skey and Mary Anne Kirkwood, birth registration showing Elizabeth Hopkins nee Kirkwood as witness Reg no 323/1847, Hobart

<sup>6</sup> Marriage, Ellen Skey and William Cordwell Hobart, Reg no 37, 1550/1848, *Ancestry.com*

<sup>7</sup> Marriage, Mary Anne Skey and William Cordwell, Hobart Reg no 397, 1604/1848, *Ancestry.com*

<sup>8</sup> Hawaii, Will and Probate Records, 1822-1962, Case no 2531, First Circuit Court, Probate Packets, 2567-2548, *Ancestry.com*

<sup>9</sup> 'To the next of kin of John Kirkwood or John C Kirkwood, formerly of Hobart Town, Tasmania' in *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 28 Jan 1888.

heirs of John C. Kirkwood, who had died intestate. It examined many witnesses and the result was over 400 pages of evidence.<sup>10</sup>

When Jack passed out of his sisters' lives around 1847, rumored to have left on an American whaling ship, he didn't surface again until about 1873 when a childhood friend, John George Whitehouse, met him in the Sandwich Islands. Whitehouse reported this meeting to the Commission, saying that he was certain that the man he had met was in fact Jack, and Jack had told him that he was second mate on a ship<sup>11</sup>.

By the time Jack wrote in 1887 to William Jarvis, another childhood friend from Veterans Row in Hobart, all of his sisters were dead, so William passed the letter on to Elizabeth Mackay, Elizabeth Kirkwood's daughter by her second husband, James Robertson.<sup>12</sup> This letter was later to become evidence to the Commission of the relationship between John C. Kirkwood and his likely heirs: the descendants of the Kirkwood sisters, Elizabeth and Mary Anne.

In terms of confirming the offspring of John Kirkwood senior, and their descendants, the documents collected by the Commission are extremely valuable. They confirm Ellen's existence, for instance, and give details of her death.

In his evidence to the Commission, William Jarvis said that

'Ellen...was coming out of the Huon River in a vessel called the *Gumboat*, ... Ellen used to live ... on the vessel and during this trip she was knocked overboard by the boom of the vessel, and was drowned in the Derwent, the vessel having reached that river on her trip from the Huon River.'<sup>13</sup>

How Jack made his money is uncertain. Around 1872 he was still a whaler, but in an entry in the Hawaiian Kingdom Statistical and Commercial Directory and Tourists' Guide in 1880-1881 he was listed as a General Storekeeper at 170 Maui Street, Lahaina, Maui. The inventory prepared after his death and presented as part of the probate papers showed that he had owned both property and cattle and, interestingly, it is claimed there that he inherited one of the properties from his wife.<sup>14</sup> (That wife seems to have predeceased him.)

The exhaustive search for Jack's heirs culminated in 1891, when the disbursements were made from what remained of his estate after costs. This amounted to \$16,041.45, which was divided equally between his sisters' descendants.<sup>15</sup> Of most interest to me

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<sup>10</sup> Hawaii, Will and Probate Records, 1822-1962, Op. cit.

<sup>11</sup> Affidavit, John Whitehouse in Hawaii Will and Probate Records, *ibid*.

<sup>12</sup> Affidavit, Elizabeth Mackay in Hawaii Will and Probate Records, *ibid*.

<sup>13</sup> Affidavit, William Jarvis in Hawaii Will and Probate Records, *ibid*.

<sup>14</sup> Inventory in Hawaii Will and Probate Records, *ibid*.

<sup>15</sup> Order of Distribution in Hawaii Will and Probate Records, *ibid*.

was the naming of these descendants and their lineage, complete with birth and death certificates. Truly a pot of gold!

I am still not sure where Jack was born. His gravestone, in the Aloha Cemetery of Lahaina, Maui, proclaims that he was born in 1820 in Hobart Town, New South Wales.<sup>16</sup> He may well have been born in 1820 – John Kirkwood, his father, would by that time have been twenty-seven years of age - but the family didn't come to Hobart until around 1826.

No doubt Jack's relations and heirs were very pleased to learn of his existence, just as I, the family researcher, was *extremely* pleased with the information that came with the surprising revelation of his existence.

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<sup>16</sup> John C Kirkwood, Grave, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/80286904/john-c.-kirkwood>

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