



THE MASONIC HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF NEW SOUTH WALES.

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Mary Reibey. The history of Mary Reibey for presentation to the Masonic Historical Society

Mary Reibey was born in Bury, Lancashire, England on 12th May 1777. She was christened Mary Haydock (Molly) at the local church.

James Haydock and Jane Law, her parents, were sound uncomplicated Yeoman stock, living in a small village which dated back to roving Norman times. Her father died in 1779 with her mother shortly following him. She was reared by a maternal grandmother in the nearby village of Blackburn. Her local education was up to grammar school standard, judging by her later diary entries which contained both literary and historical references. Being an intelligent girl she would have been familiar with the surrounding countryside of her day, the conditions in the cities of Manchester and Liverpool and the slavery prison hulks together with the activities of highwaymen.

Possibly, after the death of her grandmother in 1791, she was placed in service at the age of thirteen. Apparently she was not happy with this situation so she fled, disguising herself as a boy, taking the name of James Barrow who had died recently and who was a couple of months her senior.

She acquired a horse which she was subsequently trying to sell at the horse market in Chester when she was arrested . She was even trying to sell the bridle and saddle separately! Horse stealing was a capital offence so Mary, under the disguise of James Barrow, was sentenced to death at the Stafford Assizes in 1791. Her story was that she had met a man with two horses, one of which he persuaded her to ride, then abandoning her/him. This was the story which was later used in a petition for her release.

She maintained her disguise until November 1791. In prison this was easy as sanitation was not segregated and she had a small flat boyish figure.

Because of her extreme youth the sentence was commuted to transportation to Botany Bay for seven years. This sentence required a medical examination which uncovered her masquerade.

As a result of trauma and fear she sought help from home. Her uncle's petition, using her previous story, signed by all her relatives from Blackburn and Bury, was unsuccessful. The local parish priest refused to sign, saying he did not know her but he said her family was respectable. If a member of her family had been prepared to come forward, guaranteeing to keep her from crime in the future, it would have been successful. No one came forward.

Mary Haydock left Gravesend on the Royal Monarch, an East Indiaman, under the command of Captain Bond in May 1792, arriving in Sydney on 7th October 1792. As a result of reports from Governor Phillip, strong measures were to be taken to make sure the convicts arrived in a healthy condition. Unscrupulous captains were withholding food from convicts so it could be sold on reaching their destination. It was a very fast trip, taking only four months and ten days. Male and female convicts were strictly segregated, with the female convicts able to exercise on deck with the free passengers. Only six men, three women and one child died on the trip, while five babies were born.

On the convict muster Molly was known as Mary Haddock. Probably the Northern accent accounted for the misspelling. On arrival all healthy female convicts were immediately transferred to Parramatta by boat. Mary was given a job as a nursemaid in the home of Lieutenant Francis Grose who was later transferred to Sydney as Lieutenant Governor. It was possible in her position at Government House that she attracted the attention of a young twenty year old officer, Thomas Raby, from the East India Company. Her small boyish stature had probably saved her from a forced marriage previous to this.

Thomas Raby arrived in Sydney on the Britannia on 7th October 1792 under Captain Raven. This ship was involved in trading in whaling to America and later bringing livestock from The Cape back to the colony. It was after a following voyage to India that he and Mary were married at St. Phillips Church in Sydney in 1794.

As a married man he was entitled to a grant of land on the Hawkesbury but not being a member of the New South Wales Corps his grant was only thirty acres with the labour of one convict and one emancipist. Their farm was situated between the Cobcrofts and the Roberts. Mary's first house, built with wattle and daub with a thatched roof, consisted of two rooms with an earthen floor. Their first animals were probably pigs. This flood prone area was very rich. The only transport to Sydney was by boat. The flood of 1795 drove many settlers back to Sydney. Thomas and Mary bought some of the unsuccessful farms, bringing their number to three.

Being an officer in the East India Company Tom was entitled to private trading concessions and also the right to carry goods free of charge. He sold his, making a good profit. He was one of the first free settlers to engage in free trade, which up till then had been the sole right of the New South Wales Corps.

Reibey was no farmer, being more interested in trade. While Mary looked after the farm and her growing family Tom formed a partnership with Edward Wills, an ex-convict, to buy a sloop, the Raven, to engage in sealing which had great potential after Bass and Flinders discovered Bass Strait.

Thomas Reibey (junior) was born on 6th May 1796 and a second son, James, followed on 2nd October 1798.

Using his sloop, the Raven with a crew of six, Tom was engaged in trade along the Hawkesbury river. Enterprises like these were encouraged to try to break the monopoly of the military clique. He gradually moved his business to Sydney where their first house was in the Rocks area. He was also able to use the Government wharf. Governor King gave him a another grant of land on the Hawkesbury at Freemans Reach which became known as Reibeycroft Farm.

In 1804 he received another land grant, Block 70, stretching from the Eastern edge of the Tank Stream to where Macquarie Place stands today. Grants of land were leased with a down payment and the rest of the money being paid at a later date.

In the 1806 Hawkesbury flood Tom performed many heroic deeds, rescuing many stranded settlers who were unable to swim.

After letting the Hawkesbury farms, the family moved to Sydney where they built a stone house called Entally House, named after a suburb in Calcutta which featured in Tom's earlier life. By mortgaging the Hawkesbury farms they borrowed one hundred and fifty pounds from Robert Campbell, a successful merchant in Sydney. They now owned three sloops, The Raven, The James and The Edwin all engaged in the coastal trade in skins, whale oil, cedar and coal. from the Derwent to the Hunter. They bought the schooner, Mercury which was later replaced with a new one built in their own yard. With this boat they were able to expand their trade as far as Tahiti and Fiji in 1807, bringing back pork, as meat was very short in the Colony.

The family now consisted of seven children, born between 1796 and 1810. There were three boys and four girls. In spite of this large family Mary was able to carry on Tom's many business interests during his absences at sea. They always kept themselves above the political happenings of the time.

At the muster of inhabitants in 1806, Mary was listed as Mary Haddock, Housekeeper, which suited her admirably as emancipists were very unpopular at the time.

Tom also obtained a spirit licence in 1809.

After Tom's many sea ventures he applied for and successfully obtained the position of Harbour Pilot so he could spend more time with his family. This did not last long as, in the year of the Rum Rebellion, he and his partner Edward Wills set off for China and India in the Lady Barlow for more trading goods for the colony. Recessions and liquidity problems would only send the two partners on another journey in order to trade themselves out of trouble.

Governor Macquarie, on his arrival, cut the number of spirit licences to twenty but Mary retained hers as Macquarie was a great friend of the emancipists.

Tom and his partner arrived home with many trading goods but alas he had contracted a fatal illness, said to be caused by sunstroke. He died on 5th April 1811 and his partner soon after. Mary bought Edward Wills' share of the business and dissolved the partnership. Wills' wife at this time was also running a shop.

Mary's sons, Thomas and James, were apprenticed at both sea and the mercantile trade to prepare them to enter the business. Now the Matriarch took over on her own and the family moved to 12 George Street next to the Post Office near the King's wharf. The new bridge across the Tank Stream brought business from Macquarie Street.

Thomas II sailed in the new Mercury to gather more trade. Mary was well and truly in the import export business, while at the same time extending her land holdings on the mainland and Tasmania.

Before Macquarie's time, there was no official currency. Rum, British, Spanish, Dutch and Guinea coins were used as well as promissory notes and bills which could easily be lost or stolen. Macquarie imported 10,000 Spanish coins. A small coin was made from the middle of the original and this was called a dump while the remainder was called a holey dollar. These coins were recalled in 1822, to be replaced by sterling. With many promissory notes and bills in circulation, the leading people of the day in 1817 decided to form a colonial bank which was called the Bank of New South Wales. Mary was a large shareholder and Entally house was let for its first premises.

In May 1817 she was found guilty of assault upon one of her debtors at Windsor. As well as being astute she must have shown no mercy with people who owed her money. It seems that nobody was going to take advantage of this lady. She was a woman of substance who was to be reckoned with.

In 1816 Mary had decided to list all her properties for sale because of the approaching marriages of her two older sons and she also had a desire to return to England with her two older daughters to visit her relatives.

Her properties consisted of:

- (1) Entally House in what is now known as Reibey Place.
- (2) No. 12 George Street.
- (3) Block of land in Cockle Bay (Darling Harbour).
- (4) Twelve farms at Hawkesbury and Wilberforce.
- (5) Forty acres at Singleton.
- (6) Reibeycroft Farm, Freeman's Reach.
- (7) Three hundred acres at Portland Head.
- (8) Land at Airds.
- (9) Schooner, John Palmer, in good seaworthy condition. (bought after the wreck of the Mercury.)

James, her second son, married a naval widow, Rebecca Breedon in 1816 while her eldest son, Thomas married Richarda Allen in 1817. Thomas and James settled on land grants in Tasmania.

In 1817 she bought a brig, Governor Macquarie, to engage in more trade.

In 1820, Mary together with her two elder daughters, Celia and Eliza, set off for England. They visited relatives in Blackburn, near Bury, in Lancashire where Celia and Eliza were confirmed in the Parish Church where Mary had been christened. She then visited Glasgow and Edinburgh where her girls attended boarding school. After arriving in London she made many purchases to take back to Sydney for business and her own use. She was awaiting the completion of the of the Mariner which was being built at Gravesend. Mary and her two daughters arrived back in Sydney on the Mariner in 1821 after a fourteen months' absence.

She next purchased a one hundred and sixty foot block in George Street which she developed before turning her attention to Castlereagh Street.

On the muster of inhabitants in 1822 she had herself listed as free person arriving on the Mariner, thereby losing her convict past.

She had been unable to sell all her properties before her trip to England. They had by now appreciated in value and she finally sold her George Street properties and Entally House to her son-in-law, John Atkinson, who married her third daughter, Penelope Jane. She gave her son-in-law Joseph Long Innes, married to her youngest daughter, Elizabeth, a block of land in George Street. in 1829.

In 1825 she was elected to be Governor of the Free Grammar School, a position of influence and respectability.

There were many divisions in the colony under Governor Brisbane with the Exclusives, colloquially known as Merinoes on one side, and the Emancipists on the other together with W.C. Wentworth and Wardell with their paper The Australian. Mary kept herself above all this.

Now she was entering what would have been the happiest time of her life but for the death of her son, George, in a tree felling accident at Entally House at Hapsden near Launceston in Tasmania. Her eldest son, Thomas, called his home after his parent's home in Sydney. She now had time to visit her children and grandchildren. Mary's three sons, Thomas, James and George formed the basis of the Tasmanian branch of the family. They set up business in Hobart and later moved to Launceston following their parents' lead in mercantile and shipping ventures.

Thomas II had three children, Thomas III, James and Mary.

James and Rebecca did not have any children. James started his career as a seaman but later became a partner with his brother as a merchant and commission agent in Launceston. He had a property next to Entally House. After Thomas' death he became a director of The Derwent and Cornwall Bank and on his death he bequeathed his property to his nephew, James.

The next son, George, who was a bachelor was accidentally killed.

Celia married Edward Wills, the son of her father's partner. She died in childbirth, with her son, soon after.

Eliza married Thomas Thomason whom she met in England and they later settled in Tasmania where they had eight children.

Penelope married James Atkinson. They had four children in Sydney, after which they went to Tasmania where they had another seven children. (Evidently her husband did not go to sea!)

Elizabeth married Joseph Long Innes and settled in Sydney. They had seven children who went on to form a family much connected with the law and the church. Her son was a distinguished member of parliament and a Justice of The Supreme Court, while another two sons were a barrister and a clergyman. Their daughter was married to John Selwyn, Bishop of Melanesia.

There was certainly a toughness in the genes, maybe natural selection!

Probably her most well known grandson was Thomas Reibey III. He was educated at Eton

and Oxford where he partially completed a degree in divinity. He married Katherine Kyle of Scotland. After returning home he entered the church becoming an Archdeacon. He later entered politics and was Premier of Tasmania for one year. Fortunately his grandmother did not live long enough to see him involved in a scandal with his goddaughter following which he resigned from the church.

Mary lived for a while in a small cottage next to where the Sydney G.P.O. now stands. Finally she retired to the country to Reibey House built on Enmore Road, Newtown. Her daughter, Elizabeth and family, also built a house in the grounds of this property and it is in the news to-day because of threatened demolition. She was much troubled by the publication of "Our Convict People", a story about a convict called Mary Catchpole, written by Rev. Cobbold. Mary Catchpole was the same age as Mary and was transported about the same time. It was proved that Mary Catchpole died in 1819 and was buried at Richmond.

The latter part of her life was taken up with charity and church work. She died in 1855 at the age of seventy-eight and was buried in the family vault with her husband and Celia's family in the Elizabeth Street Cemetery which had been transferred from George Street.

The surname Reibey was originally spelt Raby but after marriage they changed the spelling to Reibey.

Masonic History:

George Haydock Reibey, 2/12/1801- 26/10/1823.

Initiated; 3/6/1822)

Passed and Raised: 10/6/1822.) With Francis Greenway.

Passed Master's Degree: 10.6.1822.)

James Haydock Reibey, 2/10/1798-11/9/1884.

Initiated and Passed: 2/9/1822.

Resigned: 5/9/1825 to go to Tasmania.

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