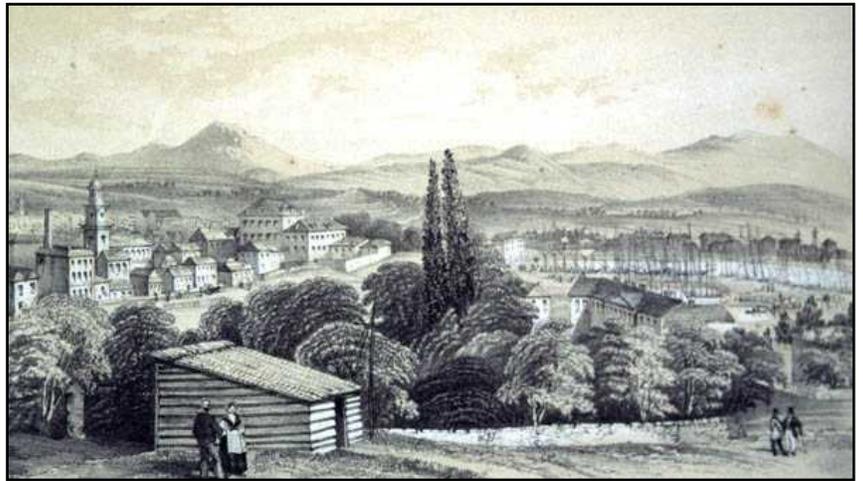


# ALEXANDER MCNAUGHTIN—TASMANIAN BENEFACTOR

On 26 November 1814, the Reverend Alexander McNaughtin and Miss Janet Blackwood were married in her parish of Strathblane, Stirlingshire. Five days later, on 1<sup>st</sup> December, they were also married in his parish of New Kilpatrick, Dumbartonshire.

**Figure 1. Hobart Town from the west, 1856.**

New Kilpatrick is about six miles north of Glasgow and was renamed Bearsden in 1863. Strathblane is six miles further north. The next year, on 28 November, 1815, they had a child, Alexander, who was christened on 17 December in New Kilpatrick. This child was going to have a big adventure on the other side of the world, in Van Diemen's Land (later renamed Tasmania), and return to die in his Scottish birthplace without any children to tell about it. He was a courageous, adventurous, generous man who made a big impact on a small island and seemed to give more than he got.



## HOBART

The Australian Dictionary of Biography (ADB) [1] relates that Alexander McNaughtan was born in Milngavie, which is about a mile north of New Kilpatrick. “Well educated, he was trained in a firm engaged in the North American trade. At 26 he joined Kerr, Alexander & Co. and was sent to Van Diemen's Land for experience in the Launceston branch. The firm bought wool, whale bone, bark, kangaroo skins, hides and other raw products, in association with Kerr, Bogle & Co., which had started in Launceston in 1834 but soon made its headquarters at Hobart Town (Fig. 1). In 1842 Kerr, Alexander & Co. was dissolved and McNaughtan became a partner in Kerr, Bogle & Co. John Bogle had returned to Glasgow in 1839 and Robert Kerr died in Hobart on 15 January 1846 aged 37. McNaughtan took charge in Hobart and on 29 March 1847 married Margaret, the sister of Robert Kerr.”

According to Adnum [2] Alexander arrived in Tasmania on 18 April 1835 aboard the brig “Ba(t)chelor” from Liverpool. But records show there were only three passengers on this ship [3] and if he was 26 at that time he would have been born in 1809. The Tasmanian News [4] says: “His father, the Rev. Alexander M'Naughtan, was one of those active-minded Presbyterians who felt it a duty to break away from the Established Church of Scotland, while his brother achieved some notoriety as a preacher in Newcastle. Mr. M'Naughtan arrived in Hobart in 1842...” This ties in better with an age of 26.

Adnum continues: “... in 1856 [he] was recorded as owning property in William Street, on the Old Wharf (Fig. 2) and in Hamilton Road, New Norfolk, namely the Steamboat Stores and Wharf. He also owned land in Battery Point and at the Falls, Huon. He was



elected president of the St. Andrew's Club on November 22nd, 1845 and on 31 March, 1847, is reported making a donation of two guineas to a fund to help the poor in Scotland. On March 29, 1847, he married Margaret Kerr also of Scotland at Mr. Dobson's home in Macquarie Street, Hobart (Fig. 3).

**Figure 2. Alexander McNaughtin owned property on the Old Wharf, 1856.**

The service was performed by the Reverend J. Lillie.” [In the International Genealogical Index this is recorded as taking place at Saint Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Hobart (Fig. 4)]. “While in Hobart Town, apart from his business interests, he is known to have been

active in public affairs and a keen churchman. He assisted with the establishment of the Gas Works, helped promote the Public Gardens and Public Libraries and was actively connected with the High School and Hutchin's School (Fig. 5). A member of the Royal Society, in June 1853 he gave a detailed report on proposals to establish a telegraph link from Hobart to Melbourne. Earlier in 1850, he had given evidence to a board of enquiry into the Marine Department, which also showed his interest in telegraphy."

**Figure 3. Alexander may have married Margaret Kerr at Mr. Dobson's home in Macquarie Street, seen here in 1859.**



The ADB continues: "By 1856 McNaughtan had carefully wound up the firm. In the next two years he became a justice of the peace, director of the Union Bank, trustee of St Mary's Hospital and chairman of the Chamber of Commerce. He helped to form the Gaslight Co., arranged the survey of water reticulation in Hobart, organized extensive searches for coal and promoted steamship services on the Derwent River and the east coast. He also made liberal gifts to the High School, Hutchins School, Royal Society, Public Library and Botanical Gardens, and helped to form groups for sponsoring emigration from Scotland. When he left Hobart late in 1858 leading citizens held a meeting to honour him and decided to found a scholarship fund named after him."

The Tasmanian News said: "Beside the conduct of a large British and foreign business, his personal acquaintance throughout the colony was large, and of a very friendly nature, much of his business success being attributable as much to personal feeling as to the facilities offered by ample means and competent management. He took an active interest in all that concerned the welfare and improvement of the colony. He arranged for the levels being taken for the water system of Hobart, before the present waterworks were thought of. He was the originator of the gasworks of Hobart and Launceston and imported all the plant required for the construction of the works, more especially at Hobart.

He promoted steam traffic on the East Coast, and on the Derwent to New Norfolk, and imported steamers for these services; he purchased a steamer for the Melbourne and Hobart trade immediately before the formation of the Tasmanian Steam Navigation Company, and was an original shareholder in that company; he aided and promoted search for coal in various localities; and was largely concerned in the introduction of immigrants under a Government grant of 200,000 pounds.



**Figure 4. Another report has them marrying at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, seen here in the 19th century.**

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## LAUNCESTON

Adnum says: "It seems that in about 1857, he must have left Hobart Town to set up McNaughtan and Co. Merchants of St. John St., Launceston (Fig. 6). A farewell presentation of money collected was made to him with which he endowed the McNaughton Scholarship at Hutchin's School. In Launceston, he was again active in public life where he donated the conservatory in the Public Gardens and supported the Mechanics Institute. He was also Manager of the Gas Company."

The ADB goes on: "In Launceston he founded McNaughtan & Co. with Thomas Brown and John Dunn junior as his partners. On 10 February 1859 the firm contracted to lay a submarine telegraph cable across Bass Strait for £50,000 [AUD 100,000], a third of which was paid by Victoria. The sections from Cape Otway to King Island and from Circular Head to the River Tamar were successful, but unfortunately, storms and rockbeds south of King Island broke the cable soon after it was laid, despite many attempts to find a sandy bottom. A few messages came through late in 1859 but the cable problem was not solved until 1868 when an English company contracted to lay a new cable from Low Head to Cape Schanck for £70,000 and to run and maintain the telegraph until 1888 for £7,000 a year, paying the Tasmanian government any excess."

Adnum's version is as follows: "On February 10, 1859, the Bass Strait cable contract was signed by McNaughton and Co. of Launceston, Alexander McNaughton, Thomas Brown of Hobart and John Dunn of London, for £45,000. This was the result of much work and correspondence by Mr. McNaughton. Opened in August, 1859, the cable never worked satisfactorily and broke down completely in January, 1861."

**Figure 5. The Hutchins School was founded in 1846, moved to this site on Macquarie Street in 1849 (pictured in 1878), and moved to its present location in Sandy Bay in 1950.**



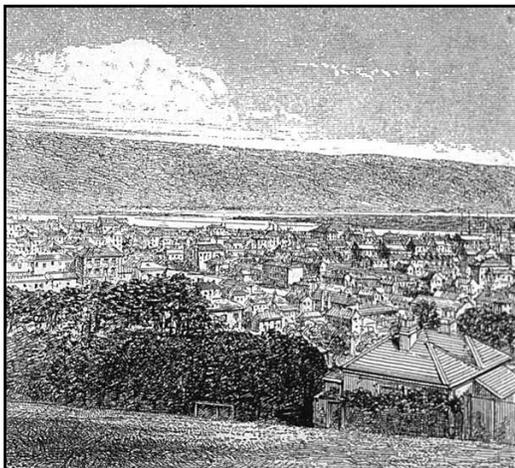
The Tasmanian News said: "Had Mr. McNaughtan possessed a hard illiberal spirit, he would have made a great fortune, as it was he who helped to make the position of others, while he frequently suffered by placing too much credence upon statements made to him, which a man of less honest and kindly purpose would have rejected. He was a Justice of the Peace for many years, but never joined the local Legislature. Mr. McNaughton was a contractor for the construction of the first Tasmanian Straits cable, and personally saw to the laying of it. The result was a failure."

The ADB continues: "A select committee in Hobart exonerated McNaughtan from any fault and he was paid for his work, but his health was undermined by exposure and worry. He helped to form the Launceston Gas Co. in 1863 and presented a neat conservatory to the Northern Horticultural Gardens. Many landowners sought his help in introducing exotic plants and animals. For some years he was a warden of the Launceston Marine Board and in 1863 gave wise counsel to the select committee on the Deloraine railway. In the depression of 1864 he went bankrupt but managed to pay 19s.6d. in the £." [97.5%] Adnum concludes: "In June, 1864, the Cornwall Chronicle announced the failure of McNaughton and Co. following a meeting of creditors on Tuesday, June 21st. The liabilities totalled £29,000 and the assets £27,000. The article praised Mr. McNaughtan and expressed the regrets of the community."

## TWILIGHT

The ADB concludes: "Eulogized as a public benefactor and fine citizen, McNaughtan returned to Hobart (Fig. 7) where he had built a pleasing and unostentatious home in beautiful grounds stretching from Montpelier Street to De Witt Street. He lived there happily with his wife until she died on 20 December 1868. She was buried in the old Presbyterian cemetery in Church Street and given an inscription on one face of the monument to her brother. With no children and his energy spent, McNaughtan returned to his birthplace where he died from heart disease on 6 August 1884."

According to his death certificate, which was signed by his nephew, Alexander McNaughtan died on 6 August 1884 of cardiac disease at Heatherbank, Milngavie, New Kilpatrick, and his father (deceased) was a United Presbyterian minister at Milngavie. The Heatherbank Museum of Social Work was founded in 1975 by Colin Harvey in his mid-Victorian house in Milngavie (Fig. 8), and moved to central Glasgow in 1993 following the death of his wife Rosemary, whom he predeceased by eight years [5].

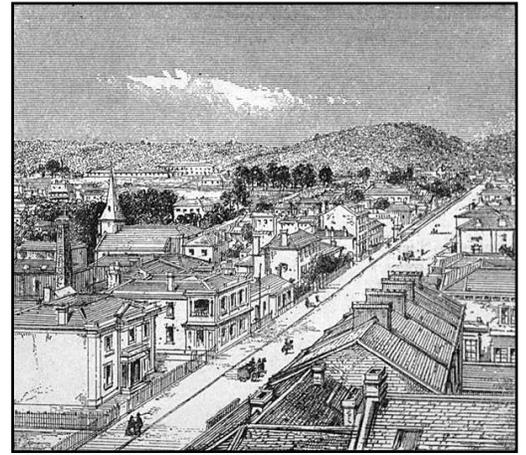


**Figure 6. Launceston, seen here in 1859, was not kind to Alexander McNaughtin.**

*The Cornwall Chronicle* [6] was lavish in its praise for Alexander McNaughtin, saying, in part: "Mr. MACNAUGHTAN has never stood before the public as a legislator and has never occupied offices in the public services, which conspicuously have placed him before the public. But his career has been one of more public usefulness, privately rendered, than that of any Member of Parliament, or of any public officer we could name. At Hobart Town, no public work for amelioration of the condition of the citizens or for raising up their social standards, ever found a more earnest advocate, or one who more liberally contributed from his private resources to its success, than it did in Mr. MACNAUGHTAN. There, the construction of the magnificent Gas Works had in

him the first to promote; the most zealous to inaugurate; and the most confident to risk.

**Figure 7. After bankruptcy in 1864, Alexander and his wife returned to Hobart, pictured here from the tower of St. David's Church in 1859.**



In him, from the moment the subject of gas was first mooted, until the auspicious day when the city was illuminated with the most brilliant of modern artificial light, there was displayed patient industry and perseverance beyond all praise. And no less, than those of Hobart Town, are the people of Launceston, indebted to Mr. MACNAUGHTAN, for the noble institution which gave them light. He inaugurated the Gas Company here, undertook its active management; canvassed the town for the sale of shares, and only retired from his labors when they were crowned with success. Of the Public Institutions in Hobart Town, there is scarcely one, that does not claim in the subject of our remarks, either an originator or a most cordial co-operator with the originators. The Royal Society; the High and Hutchin's Schools; the Public Gardens; the Public Libraries; all bear testimony to his zeal as a public benefactor and friend. In Launceston he has left his foot prints everywhere, where works of utility or of benevolence are to be seen. The noble conservatory in the Public Gardens is his munificent gift to the citizens. The Mechanics' Institute had in him a liberal contributor to its funds, a warm advocate, and a zealous friend.

And in all religious works his labor has been untiring. So impressed were the people of Hobart Town with his excellence as a man, and with gratitude for what he had done for them, that a very large amount of money was collected, to present him with a fitting tribute to his goodness upon the occasion of his removal from amongst them to this town where his residence has terminated so fatally to his interests. And nothing can more truly mark the noble character of the man than his disposal of that handsome testimonial.

He was not at that time in want of money, and we believe if he had been, its appropriation in the manner he desired would have been dearer to him, than any temporal comfort to himself it could produce. He refused to accept the large sum collected, but asked that it might be disbursed, to benefit the youth of Hobart Town, the city he had loved and served so well. And the MACNAUGHTAN scholarship at the HUTCHIN'S School, to the purchase of which his testimonial was appropriated, for years has been the tempting guerdon, to induce many an aspiring boy to struggle for excellence in learning. And whilst the institution remains, it will be always a golden monument of the excellent man —alas! now overthrown, whose virtues, and whose benevolence originated it.



**Figure 8. Heatherbank House, 163 Mugdock Road, Milngavie, 1993 (Courtesy of Heatherbank Museum of Social Work, Research Collections, Glasgow Caledonian University).**

Need we say one word as to Mr. MCNAUGHTAN'S thorough goodness of heart: thorough kindness to all who sought his aid in the hour of need and adversity. Indeed, no: it is too well known; and we much fear his desire to assist others, had led to the losses which have occasioned his [downfall?].”

## PERSONAL

Over the years, many people have asked if I am related to Alexander McNaughtin but I have not been able to trace any connection. Alexander McNaughtin was born in 1815 in Milngavie, where he also died. My great great grandfather John Ross McNaughton was born in 1814 in Edinburgh, but moved to Kirkintilloch, eight miles east of Milngavie, at the age of 14 and lived there for ten years. It is possible that John's father, James, was related to Alexander's father. John migrated to Melbourne via Sydney in 1838; Alexander migrated to Tasmania in 1842. Both men had close links with the United churches that broke away from the Church of Scotland and both were made Justices of the Peace. In 1973, V. B. Adnum sent information about Alexander to my uncle, Russell Norman McNaughton, great grandson of John, who has lived on Sandy Bay Road in Hobart for decades. In the 1950s, the Hutchins School—one of the oldest schools in Australia and the one to which Alexander McNaughtin gave the large amount of money that presumably later could have saved his business—moved to its present location in Sandy Bay.

**NOTES:** Members of the Macnachtan Clan have many ways of spelling the name but McNaughtin with an “eye” is fairly unusual. During his lifetime, Alexander McNaughtin spelled it several different ways. Figures 1-7 are reproduced courtesy of the State Library of Tasmania. This work is copyrighted and may not be reproduced in whole or in part in any medium without the express permission of the author, Ken McNaughton, 3778 College Avenue, Ellicott City, MD 21043; phone/fax: 410-418-9340; [kjmcn@comcast.net](mailto:kjmcn@comcast.net) (22 October 2008).

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