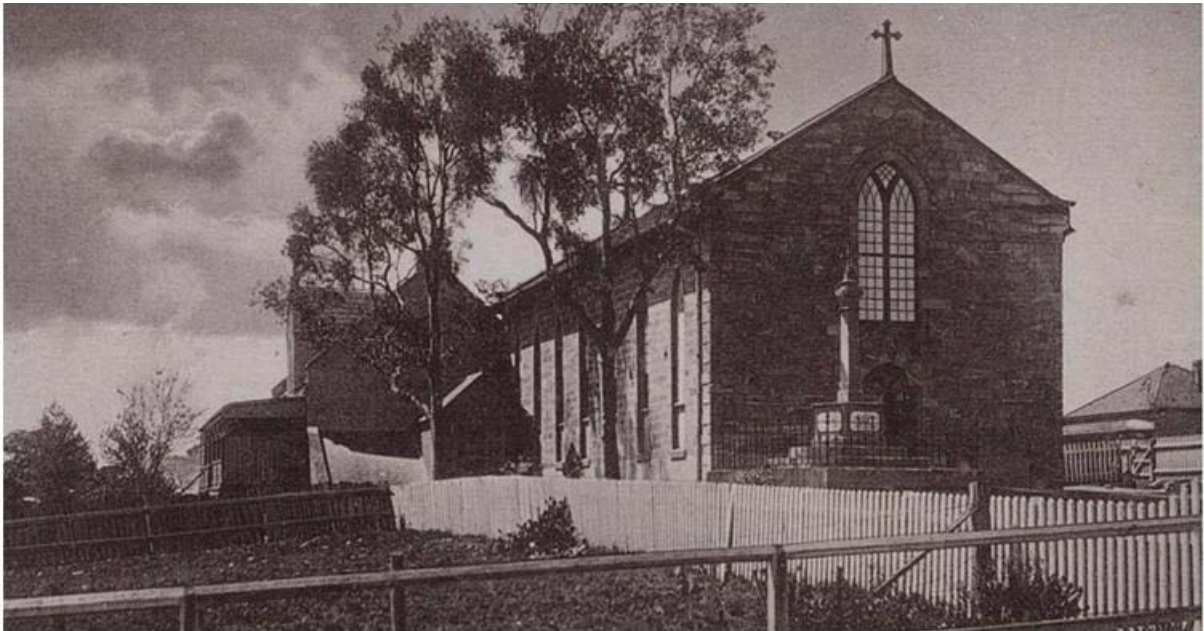


Maitland and District Historical Society Inc.

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Affiliated with Royal Australian Historical Society and
Museum and Galleries Hunter Chapter



St Joseph's Church East Maitland

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*The Aims of the Society are to
Discover, Record, Preserve, Advise on and Teach the History of Maitland and the
District*

Maitland and District Historical Society Inc.

Cover: The photo of St Joseph's Church, which was demolished in 1933, was supplied by Michael Belcher.

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Lecture meetings are held on the first Tuesday of each month from 5:30-7.00pm as a forum for lectures, talks and presentations.

Business meetings are held on the third Tuesday of even months from 5:30-7.00pm.

Committee meetings are held on the third Tuesday of odd months from 5:30-7.00pm.

Members are invited to attend all monthly meetings.

Meetings are held at the Society's rooms, 3 Cathedral Street Maitland.

Membership fees : \$20 (single) and \$30 (double / family)

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Bulletin: Vol. 27, no.1, February 2020

Editor's Notes:

In this edition we present an article by Society member Michael Belcher in which he illuminates regional attitudes towards the mentally ill in the mid 1800s, principally by focussing on the experiences of one particular woman. This article was originally presented as part of the Society's regular monthly lecture series.

A native of Maitland with family connections which go back to the 1860s, Michael Belcher was educated at Maitland Marist Brothers. He has a degree in Theology from St Patrick's College Manly, a degree in history from the University of New South Wales, and a doctorate in Australian history from the University of New England. A social historian and environmentalist, he is a member of numerous organisations including the National Trust, Maitland Museum, Australian Catholic Historical Society, Friends of the Botanic Gardens, and the Australian Plants Association.

We sadly note the recent passing of Society member Morris Graham. Morris held several degrees including a PhD in Australian political history from the University of Sydney. A retired lecturer and a prolific author, his last book was *A Toppled Labor Giant: Arthur Griffith NSW's Revolutionary Minister for Public Works & Education*. Our condolences go out to Laurel and the extended family.

HOW DO YOU SOLVE A PROBLEM LIKE MARY: INSANITY IN THE LOWER HUNTER IN THE MID 1800s

By Michael Belcher

Mental illness, and its treatment, is today still a source of much anxiety. In the 19th century, in a new colony, with a totally different understanding of mental illness, without any infrastructure and none of today's drugs it was for many a disaster. Before looking at the very sad history of Mary Johnson (nee Neville) c1820 – c1884, it is best to briefly deal with the general attitudes towards insanity and to the treatment of the insane held in her lifetime in New South Wales.

The following contemporary reports are very revealing:

DISAPPEARANCE OF A PERSON OF UNSOUND MIND.

A poor harmless fellow, known by the name of "Cranky Sam" has been missing for the last few days, and although the chief constable has made every enquiry, and sent messengers in search of him, no tidings have yet been received concerning him. The Rev. Mr Wilton had a few days before he was missed written to the Colonial Secretary, applying for him to be admitted into the asylum at Tarban Creek.

INQUEST.-An inquisition was held before J. S. Parker, Esq., coroner, on Saturday last, at the Queen Victoria Arms, on view of the body of Samuel Reynolds, otherwise known as Cranky Sam, from his being of unsound mind, whose remains were found on Thursday, the 16th inst., at the "Folly," near Mrs. Tighe's farm about three miles from Newcastle. The disappearance of the unfortunate deceased was noticed in the Mercury a few weeks back. The body, as it lay at the lower hospital, presented a very emaciated appearance, and the beard had grown to an unusual extent. The poor fellow was well known in this town as a harmless insane being, and many of the inhabitants occasionally supplied him with food and clothing, in return for his services in drawing water and chopping wood. The jury, after a patient hearing of the evidence, returned a verdict that the deceased died of hunger and exposure to the weather. The enquiry commenced at two o'clock, and terminated at half-past six.

Samuel Reynolds does not appear to have had an obvious history of mental problems until this incident, unlike a significant number of those sent as convicts to the colony with underlying instability exacerbated by colonial conditions and convict treatment. He does not make many appearances in the official records, especially court records, but where he does it is for blatant, almost stupid, actions indicating a certain level of backwardness. He was born in Birmingham in 1804 (or 1806) and was a locksmith. He was charged with house robbery

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(money) in 1822 and sentenced to seven years, arriving on the “Princess Royal” in 1823.

There is other evidence that he was not insane at first but dull witted. He was illiterate which was unusual for English convicts, most of whom could at least read. On arrival he was accused of pilfering his bed linen, a misdemeanour impossible to conceal, but claimed it was stolen. In 1829 he was granted a Certificate of Freedom, a very important document which had to be kept at hand all the time to avoid constant police harassment. By 1831 his had been torn and mutilated and replaced by another. In May 1836 he was given permission to marry Ann Lee (alias Mary Ann Lee or Mary Chandler), 25, who arrived on the Burrell in 1832. The marriage never took place because Ann and Samuel had tried to pull the wool over the eyes of the officials:

On Friday last, a woman was brought before the Bench under the following circumstances - She is an assigned servant to E. C. Close, Esquire, of Hunter's River, and obtained a pass from her master to get married to a publican of Sydney. She applied to Mr. Vincent Williams, the Clerk of St. James' Church, to have her banns published, and gave her name in as Ann Lee, spinster. It, however, turned out that she came out in the ship in the name of Mary Chandler, and stated she was a married woman. The Bench sentenced her two months in the third class of the Factory, and to be returned to service at the request of her master.

There does not appear to be any evidence that Samuel was ever a publican, or at least a recognised one. Mary had a long history of appearances before the bench in both Sydney and Maitland so it is possible that she had met Samuel in Sydney. It's more likely this was an “arranged marriage at first sight” which did not come to fruition. She went on to have numerous more charges levelled against her, although she still received her Certificate of Freedom in March 1839.

Whether the failure of the marriage offer was a turning point or not is impossible to judge but another incident in July 1842 may have been the real catalyst. He was sentenced to six months in gaol (as far as can be seen his only prison sentence) for acting as a lookout for three others who violently robbed a Sydney hotel. He turned informant but his appearance as a witness was less than impressive. His involvement is another indication of poor choices or, possibly, being taken advantage of because of his dullness. He was given a more lenient sentence for his cooperation with the prosecution.

The circumstances surrounding Cranky Sam are a classic illustration of the attitude towards, and the treatment of, those of unsound mind in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. There are three aspects worth noting. The first is that lunacy was tolerated and those of unsound mind were left to look after themselves with the aid of those of a charitable nature, if necessary, but without any assistance from the state. The second is that this tolerance extended only to the “harmless insane” who posed no threat to themselves, others or the good of society. The third is that the process of gaining institutional care for the insane was a daunting and prolonged one with no local resources available.

These circumstances mirrored those of the Home Countries at both government and societal levels. Very little law dealt with the insane except that dealing with inheritance or other property issues which were peripheral to the majority of the population and the mentally disordered. Insanity was seen as a moral issue (not an illness) capable of being resolved or controlled under family or other trusted carers. It was usually “private” or hidden and only became a problem when an “outburst” of an anti-social nature occurred.

“Outbursts” could be dealt with by immediate restraint until normality returned. These restraints could be imposed by the caregiver if the act did not have a criminal element (locking up at home or in a private or public institution, tying up, removing “temptations” etc), or by the courts if it was criminal and the person was caught. Here the court could use custodial punishments or return the

person to the caregiver if proper supervision could be promised. These outbursts were frequently seen to be brought on by catalysts such as drink, “women’s problems” (especially at crucial times such as puberty, childbirth and menopause), melancholy (evident in attempted suicide) and indigency (chronic poverty, neglect, vagrancy, hunger and ill health).

In a sort of forerunner of Electric Shock Therapy, some people at the time thought a taste of the “lash” could be a good thing. Many caregivers hoped a regime of arrest, court and short-term internment would be enough to “cure” the insanity. There was also a belief amongst the working poor that government or parish institutions could be used temporarily to relieve the burden of care on the family. In Ireland, for example, a family member who proved to be too hard to handle was sometimes committed by the family to an institution. Even a trivial issue such as “being disobedient to parents” could lead to a person being sent to a petty sessions court and then to a period in gaol before being transferred to an institution. This was evidently also the case with some employers. They, too, used the criminal justice system to rid themselves of troublesome employees, a proportion of whom were suffering mental illnesses. In England, the Poor Law and Workhouses were used equally to “cure” and to relieve caregivers of the expense of care. A number of convicts (especially young Irish girls) show clear evidence of the Government fobbing off the care of mentally disturbed people to the colonial authorities by transportation. This, as we shall see, was the case with a group of under-15 year old girls transported on the Roslyn Castle in 1836. One was our Mary Neville.

Similar attitudes were evident amongst Colonial parents who committed children to the Orphan Schools when in strife and then claimed them back when circumstances improved. This, along with the lying-in facilities at the Factory, were very early examples of state sponsored social welfare even if the State did not want to see it that way. This social welfare did not extend to the insane. The accent on the moral causality of insanity and the policy of short-term detention meant that they did not see the need for such welfare. But they were also unable

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to provide it, for in NSW the Poor Law did not exist and neither the government nor the churches were in a position to provide assistance in any way to the insane outside of gaol and/or hospital. Governor Phillip had been given the power to detain convicts and settlers who were thought to be insane, a power he quickly delegated to JPs and magistrates, but in a convict colony, where control was paramount and responsible caregivers totally lacking, gaol or hospital were the only possible recourse.

Eventually, the 20 bed Castle Hill Asylum was opened in 1811 but this hardly scratched the surface and was overcrowded within months. Even after the opening of the Tarban Creek Asylum in 1838 and the re-assignment of the Female Factory to an Asylum in 1848, overcrowding continued. These Asylums were not seen as hospitals for the curing of the insane but separate detention facilities to allow the moral order of the individual to be restored without interference or contamination from the criminally interned. Governor Gipps therefore said, in 1839, that within the Asylums there was no need for medical supervision or for any visiting doctors except for clear medical conditions.



Tarban Creek Asylum

Mr Wilton's problem finding a local institution capable of providing a minimum of care was widespread in country areas. Another example is that of Mary Sawyer: Mary Sawyer was indicted for stealing a jacket, the property of James Kingsbury, at Singleton, on the 12th March, 1843. A jury was empanelled to try the prisoner's sanity, and after the evidence of Mr. Kingsbury, the prosecutor, Mr. Horne, the chief constable of Singleton, and another constable had been taken, they returned a verdict of not guilty, on the ground of insanity, and the prisoner was ordered to be kept in custody at Newcastle gaol until the pleasure of the government was made known respecting her.

DESTITUTION.- A most deplorable object has been for some time walking about this town, namely, a poor woman in a state of insanity, and almost of nudity. It appears she was some time ago sent to Newcastle hospital, but was returned, in consequence of that institution having been broken up by government. It is a great pity that some place has not been provided where such unfortunate creatures might be taken care of; at all events, as this poor woman has a husband, he ought to be made to keep her in a decent manner until such time as something could be done for her.

Of particular note are the concerns first, about the husband not looking after her and second, about the lack of local facilities for such people. Mary Sawyer (nee Barnes) married John Sawyer at Whittingham in 1842. He was an ex-convict ploughman who arrived on the John in 1827. By 1842 he would have been 49 years old. She, a convict, arrived on the Mary Ann in 1839 aged 24. She had already spent a couple of periods in prison before the marriage.

These incidents occurred about the time the Colonial government was finally acknowledging the need for some legislation to deal with lunacy. The Dangerous Lunatics' Act (1843) was, however, mainly in reaction to claims that people were being committed for improper reasons, usually to avoid the expense of care or to "settle" disputed property or inheritance issues. In this Act the emphasis

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remained on the “dangerous”, not on the ill, and institutionalisation only took place when no other form of care and control could be found. It required the person:

- to be arrested for threatening suicide or a criminal act;
- to appear before two JPs; and
- to be certified insane by two MDs.

The person could be sent to an asylum, gaol or hospital for an indefinite period but could be released by and to a relative. This was the first legislation anywhere in the world to introduce medical opinions into the equation and was closely examined by the Home country and other nations.

The effect of this legislation can be seen in the commitment of Mary Brandon.

A Lunatic.- An unfortunate woman, named Mary Brandon, was brought before the police bench on Tuesday last, on a charge of misdemeanour, when it was found that she was perfectly insane, as she continued talking in a most incoherent manner, and from her behaviour at the time of her apprehension the bench considered her to be unfit to take care of herself. Drs. Sloane and Edye having certified that she was of unsound mind, the bench ordered her to be forwarded to Sydney.

Note the two medicos and the immediate referral to Sydney.

There is strong evidence that Mary was a free emigrant and this may also have affected the outcome. A Mary Brandon aged about 30 arrived on the Argyleshire in 1840 with her husband and six month old son, both named Thomas, from Ashton under Lyne, near Manchester. She was a dairy woman and he a sawyer, both Protestants and both literate. They had a second son, Joseph, in 1842. It's interesting that the court did not insist on the husband caring for her. Possibly the doctors decided she was beyond family care and the immediate passage to the Asylum under the new legislation would avoid many of the previous problems. Her free immigrant status probably influenced this thinking.

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Unfortunately her passage to the Asylum was not as smooth as it should have been as she was at first denied entry to Newcastle Gaol, then went to Darlinghurst before finally arriving at Tarban Creek. She was diagnosed as having Melancholy. A Mary Brandon, with a father John like our Mary Brandon, died in Sydney in 1858 presumably having spent all that period in institutional care.

This case also demonstrates the problems confronting courts and caregivers in country areas. The practicalities of commitment meant that in country areas there was a continuance of the previous regime of arrest, court and internment even when a magistrate was aware of and sympathetic to the Lunatics' Act. For them handling the case under the criminal law was much easier. As well the cost of transfer had to be covered by local finances and was considerable. Finally, in country areas there were no facilities for the separation of the insane person from the criminal at any stage in the process and this mixing could have a most injurious effect on the insane.

Clearly the Government was aware of some of these issues. The Governor in 1844, in response to "Cranky Sam's" death, requested the Maitland Benevolent Society to widen the criteria for entry to its Asylum to cover the indigent from a radius of 20 miles. Clearly this was an attempt by the Governor to institute a sort of Poor Law Asylum that would care for the poor and the insane at the expense of the local community with financial assistance from the public purse. The Benevolent Asylum Committee's response is most informative:

...the committee gave a short list of persons who had been relieved by the asylum, though coming from great distances, one or two of them from not less than 300 miles; and stating that persons coming from a distance from the town had hitherto been the greatest burthen on the institution. That the committee had been acting on an arrangement with the Sydney Benevolent Asylum, by which persons who, from the nature of their disease or of their circumstances, required aid for a longer period or to a greater amount than the Maitland Asylum could afford, were sent to the Sydney Asylum at the expense of the committee; [7/6d]

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which arrangement had been made with a view to leaving their funds to meet urgent cases requiring relief on the spot. That though the committee had not hitherto been in funds to support the indigent in the house, yet no case of indigence had been brought before them which had been allowed to go entirely unrelieved, whilst some of the parties had been sent to Sydney. That had the committee restricted admissions to persons within a circuit of 20 miles, their funds for this latter purpose would have been more ample; but that Maitland being the outlet of a vast extent of country the committee feared it would be impossible to confine the admissions within that distance, and trusted his Excellency would consider this fact in granting them aid. With respect to the poor man, .Samuel Reynolds, named by his Excellency as having died in the bush near Newcastle of starvation, while there was a correspondence going on with the government about him, the committee begged to state that the case was entirely unknown to them until the poor man's death was noticed in the papers; had application been made to them they would at once have forwarded him to the Sydney Benevolent Asylum, having no accommodation for insane persons themselves.

In essence the Committee informed the Governor that they concentrated on medical relief, that the request was way beyond their ability to satisfy but they provided outpatients relief where possible, and that they did have arrangements with the Sydney Benevolent Asylum to forward those requiring long term relief to that asylum at the expense of the Committee. They then counterpunched with a request for more money and better accommodation in Maitland. Clearly it was all too much for both Government and Asylum and the request faded into nothing but it may have influenced the establishment of Maitland Hospital under the aegis of the Society opened in 1849.

By the mid 1860s, however, the mixing of the criminal and the insane was being severely criticised – especially the temporary locking up before transfer to an Asylum. In country areas it was obvious from the arrest figures that most “mad” people were still being handled under the criminal system using charges of

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vagrancy, drunk and disorderly and other breaches of the peace. The Police and the magistrates were not bound by any medical opinion so persisted in using the Criminal Code in preference to the Lunatic's Act. As a consequence of this criticism the Lunacy Amendment Act (1868) legislated the introduction of reception houses, before transfer, to be located throughout the colony. The additional hope was that many could be sobered up and cured in these houses for rapid discharge without the need for longer prison terms. Only one, the Darlinghurst Reception Area, was ever established and no evidence seems to exist to indicate any approach for one in the Lower Hunter.



The Newcastle Asylum

Eventually the Hunter did get its first asylum, in 1871, when the Newcastle Military Barracks became an Asylum (now James Fletcher). Even then, in its early years, it provided overflow relief for geriatric Sydney inmates. Only from the 1890s did it finally begin to care for those, mainly women and children, with mental disorders including local committals.

All of these issues weighed heavily on those tasked with judging the arraigned lunatic. They essentially had four options to deal with a person charged with a crime but who was clearly insane. The first was to proceed as if the person was sane and find them guilty with all the consequences of gaol or hanging. The second was to find the person guilty but insane again involving a prison sentence and possibly hanging. The third was to find the person not guilty because of insanity which would lead to internment in an asylum or a gaol, possibly for life. The last was to find the person not guilty with no reference to

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whether the person was insane or not which would allow the person to go free. The last was especially an option if the suspect had a caregiver who could offer support and ensure another “outburst” did not occur.

The example, par excellence, for all these approaches can be found in Mary Johnson (nee Neville). Mary Neville was born c1820 (more likely 1822) in Omagh County Tyrone of unidentified parents. Her records show a great deal of confusion about her religion, literacy and age which indicates she may have been orphaned or abandoned to her employers at a very early age. She worked as a nursery maid in Armagh aged around 10-12 years. She was tried in Armagh in October 1834 for stealing stockings and sentenced to seven years. She arrived, along with six other under-15 year old girls, on the Roslyn Castle in 1836 after spending almost twelve months in an Irish prison awaiting transportation. All but one of these girls had histories and experiences that indicate they may have been considered lunatics by the authorities. Most were convicted in 1834 yet not transported until late 1835 which one may charitably put down to a search being made for suitable caregivers. Today no evidence of parents could be found for any of these girls. Most were involved in the care of children where vigilant parents would have been on the watch for any deviancy. All were on the verge of puberty or into early puberty. Their crimes were personal (not for gain) and easily fabricated. Only two had previous but still the sentences were severe. Finally, given their subsequent problems with drink, maybe they had already become tipplers of the mistress’s sherry.

By contemporary standards, most exhibited signs of insanity. Removing them as a burden on their family, employer and the state would have been a priority, so what would normally have been easily managed behaviour became transportable crimes. It is also worth noting the general comments on all the convicts of the Roslyn Castle’s Surgeon, John Edwards:

“many of them had been sent from the hospitals incurable.... The women had a morbid longing for potatoes....The other numerous cases scarcely admit of remark – they were almost all of a chronic character; with few exceptions – one

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half of the convicts laboured more or less under some chronic pain or tumor – not fewer than forty of them, and those young, applied for emmenagogues to relieve long standing catamenial seizures.”

If they were already exhibiting signs of mental instability, their experiences of the court system, gaol, transportation and extended colonial convictism no doubt tipped them over the edge.

On arrival Mary was available for assignment, despite what the *Sydney Herald* thought:

“The convicts per Roslyn Castle, are reported to be the most infamous and useless women that have been consigned to Botany Bay; and that there is not one amongst the whole batch fit for recommendation as a servant.”

It would appear the Colonial authorities had some awareness of Mary's problems if not immediately then quickly into her convict life for reasons mentioned below. Initially, however, they persisted in assigning her to families with young children (Bloomfield in Sydney, Hoddle in Paterson, Peattie in Woodville), no doubt because of her nursery experience. In every one she was very quickly into trouble for stealing and insubordination. Other indications that the authorities had concerns about her mental instability are found, for example, in the fact that her Certificate of Freedom was not granted until very late in 1843, two years after it was due. This was an almost unprecedented occurrence as colonial sentences did not affect the provision of a CF. As well her ship's indent includes the following:

“2yrs, 2months, 8 days additional for particulars see letter 43/1714, 14th Feb 1843 –CFR 3 March 43”

This note could not be found but one suspects that the delay was caused not by colonial crimes but concerns over her mental instability and the lack of a proper caregiver, especially when she was still in her minority and unmarried. Doubts about her age could only have prolonged this delay.

Much damage had already been done, however, and her internments in the Factory and local gaols was the start of a fifty year history of periodic incarceration. It is impossible to estimate accurately but at least two thirds of her colonial life (she died c1884 in an asylum) was spent in prison. Mary's life was plagued with charges for drinking, language, vagrancy (or stealing to support herself), prostitution or keeping a disorderly house, and she had frequent recourse to violence and underwent many severe delusional episodes. Most of these were inconsequential (victimless) but a number of her acts were severe and deeply troubled those judging her.

A key to how she was treated in court was the availability of a caregiver, or lack thereof. It did not change her behaviour but it changed the consequences of that behaviour. On New Year's Day, 1844 she married Jonas (Joseph, Jonah or James) Johnston (Johnson, Johnstone, Jonson), and became Mary Johnston. The marriage has many signs of being an instrumental marriage including a disparity in age (he was 42 she around 23), disparity in economic standing (he was a small farmer and labourer she still a house servant) and disparity in civil status (he had a Ticket of leave she was free but the paperwork hadn't caught up). Most importantly she was pregnant. There are a number of anomalies in the marriage. For example no application for a convict marriage could be found, he had been married in England (but the seven year rule could have applied), and she had been in the colony for eight years (the vast majority of convict women married within three years of arrival). This last anomaly is a standout. No applications for marriage involving her could be found in her convict years, which could indicate either that the men of NSW recognise Mary as a powder keg, or that the authorities, because of her instability, were protecting her from such approaches until she reached her majority and they could do no more to protect her (or both). Her subsequent history also seems to indicate that Jonas was the meeker of the pair and may have been "enticed" back into a relationship first developed during one of her assignment to the Dunmore and Largs areas. He was clearly inadequate to the task of looking after her, indeed one wonders whether anyone would have been up to that.

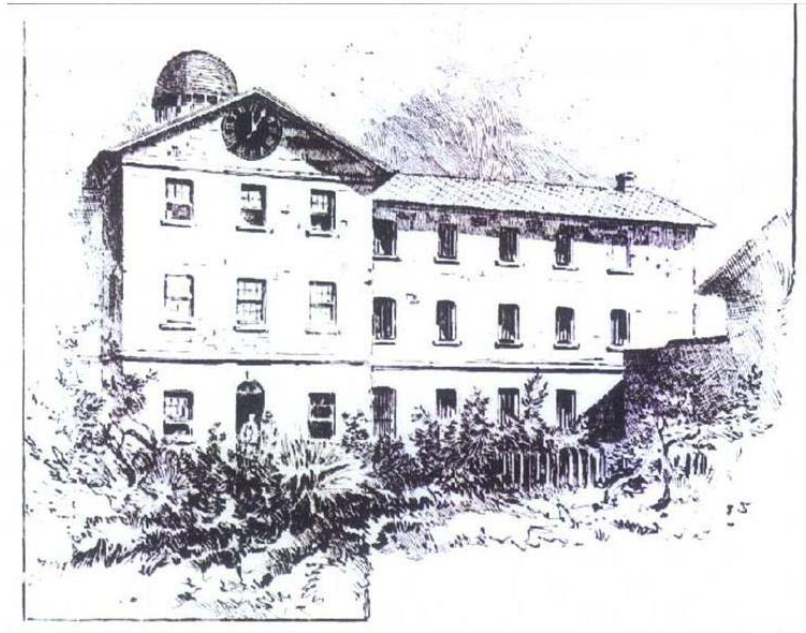
They had five children that can be identified (the fate of those that survived childhood cannot be traced – their names are just too common and spelling variants make it impossible to track them), although a late prison entry (1869) lists her as a widow (she wasn't) with seven children. Her maternal experiences sharpened and exacerbated her underlying mental illnesses for it was in the first couple of years of this tempestuous marriage and after childbirth that major incidents occurred. These best illustrate the problems faced by jurors and judges in deciding her fate and the total lack of any successful treatment of mental illness.

The first was the manslaughter of Walter M'Indoe on the 7/6/1845 for which both Jonas and Mary were charged. A group from Narrowneck had been drinking in Morpeth then retired to the Johnston home where a mild argument took place. Mary slapped M'Indoe with her hands and a towel and he rose to defend himself. She armed herself with a knife while Jonas and M'Indoe tussled. She relinquished the knife to another witness but then grabbed a pair of scissors and stabbed M'Indoe three times as the tussle continued. M'Indoe died the next day. Almost immediately after the act she realised its severity and expressed contrition and remorse. A coronial inquest was held immediately and at the inquest a doctor described the act as "maniacal excitement". Jonas was released. At the court hearing Dunmore Lang and the doctor gave evidence that Mary was "not always being of sound mind" and the doctor also stated that Mary *"... had laboured under a complaint called puerperal mania, which had become periodical with her, and which had the effect of causing insanity during its continuance,"*

which presumably meant that she presented no symptoms normally but heightened circumstances, such as the fight between Jonas and M'Indoe, caused the symptoms to manifest themselves.

Mary "appeared to suffer much at intervals during the trial, and while the jury were considering their verdict, she implored the Judge not to send her to

Parramatta Factory – she was sure both herself and her child (a young infant at her breast) would die in such a horrid place.”



THE FEMALE FACTORY AT PARRAMATTA.

The jury brought in a verdict of Not Guilty “not because of alleged insanity but general one of not guilty” which caused a degree of consternation on the Bench and amongst the attendees. The Jury was clearly unwilling to convict and/or declare her insane because of the potential custodial outcome (at the very least) and the effect those may have had on the child. As well the involvement of Jonas in the initial fray and his ability (and presumably willingness) to provide care for both mother and son probably helped persuade the jury to reach its verdict.

The outcome of the next case is an interesting variation resulting from the perceived inability of Jonas to control his wife. In October and November 1847 Mary was involved in a paternity case with a neighbour Peter O’Brien. Mary gave birth to a daughter on the 18/9/1847 (there is some confusion over her name). The newspaper reports indicate that she was living with her husband up until a very short time previous so at the time of the birth it would appear that

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Jonas had deserted her. She was clearly desperate for support, however, and in October Mary took out a maintenance case against Peter, her Dunmore neighbour, a single man who was a very involved parishioner of the Maitland Catholic community. In November, on the same day the court case was heard, she had the child baptised as Mary O'Brien at St Joseph's East Maitland, clearly avoiding Dean Lynch at Maitland who would have known Peter. Peter was listed as the father and a notation was added to the Register, which was redacted and is now illegible, but Mary stayed in O'Brien's name. This baby Mary must have been the Jane Johnston who is registered in the BDM and born at the same time. No doubt Peter's standing weighed in his favour in the case but the claim was officially thrown out of court because she had been living with her husband when she fell pregnant. Mary did not give up and continued to pursue Peter by attempting to gain entry to his house at 10pm, first through the door then down the chimney. He was in fear of his life (she must have been a formidable lady – in one instance it took four men including two constables to restrain her) and sought police assistance. This went to a Magistrate's court but by this time Jonas was back and was able (forced?) to provide support. Although Mary was found guilty by the magistrate, she was not confined under the Lunatic's Act but merely bound over to keep the peace. Peter moved to Long Point (outside Singleton) almost immediately where he was later joined by Jonas after he again deserted Mary in 1851.

There followed three quite serious assaults (amongst other charges) on people where trivial disputes had escalated into delusional paranoia. In one case Jonas was present and only intervened when abused by a Good Samaritan who came to Mrs Corrigan's assistance. By now any sympathy towards her was quickly dissipating with the *Mercury* describing her as "A Dangerous Woman" and it must have become clear to any jury or magistrate that Jonas was useless as a caregiver and unable or unwilling to control her "outbursts". In all cases she was given a custodial sentence despite the victim in the second case interceding on her behalf on the grounds that she was scarcely sane. The first two were served in Maitland Gaol but the third involved two months in Newcastle. This last

must have been when Jonas left her for good because the Prison Entry Book notes that she was accompanied by three children.

Jonas did leave her a parting gift, however. She was again pregnant. The child was born in January 1851 in less than auspicious circumstances. Mary went on a binge for days following her release from prison. She was arrested, and the child was born in the lock up. When released from the lock-up she was reported to have had a period of strange behaviour revolving around attempts to find Jonas who was still living locally. No action was taken because there was no suspicion that she would harm her children:

'Mrs Johnson has long been known as a woman of violent temper at times, but has always appeared an affectionate mother, having three other children'.

One day, however, she called a doctor saying she had killed her child and threatened to destroy herself. The recently born infant was found to be dead from 'inanition' (starvation). Another child was also found in a state of neglect lying outside the house. Mary pleaded in her defence that she was destitute, lacked any sympathetic help and had always been a good mother. All these were correct but no mechanisms existed to remediate any of them, so the Jury had little option other than to return a guilty verdict with a recommendation to mercy, presumably in the hope that a stint in gaol would help. She was given 18 months but 'his Honour promised to recommend mitigation at the end of nine months, if he was certainly informed that her conduct was good'.

The trials of her children were not yet over, in fact they were probably just beginning. At least until 1850 one or more of the parents was around to provide some support but with Jonas's desertion (he took up with another woman in Singleton and had further children) and Mary's imprisonment they must have been left in the care of others or went into orphanages, although no evidence of the latter could be found. In August 1852, upon her release from gaol she clearly took over responsibility for the children again and was residing at Lochend. A doctor was called to attend to her eight year old son, William. The child was admitted to hospital, the doctor reported her to the police and she was charged

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with beating her son's head on the floor, with an iron bar, with throwing him into the fire and then into the lagoon.

In defence the prisoner put in a written statement, to the effect that she was chastising her child in a proper manner for using bad language, after her having been away from home, and was not aware, till told by one of the other children, that he had already a severe cut in his head caused by falling from the pigeon-house; she denied having hurt him, and said the charges against her were all from spite.

It's notable that Mary, and this was not the first time, began to use the defence of being a victim of spite. She had used that defence against the accuser in earlier, lesser charges of assault but in this case the spite was broadcast, directed towards numerous people who appeared in the case. Again the jury tried their best by returning a verdict of guilty of assault without the intent (a much less serious charge). She received 18 months with hard labour. No information on what happened to the children could be found.

There followed a thirty year history of prison sentences and wanderings looking for Jonas and her children. The end came in 1881. She was arrested in Newcastle for evading the fare on the Sydney to Newcastle steamer. She clearly had by then become so institutionalised she realised she could not survive outside prison or an asylum:

"Yesterday, at the Police Court, ... Mary Johnson, an aged vagrant, who had given herself into custody for protection, and asked that she might be locked up for three months, was sent to gaol for four weeks, the P. M. undertaking to have communication made with the authorities of the Benevolent Asylum as to her future reception."

Two Mary Johnstons died in Parramatta, one in 1883 and another in 1884 in the Asylum. It is presumed the latter is our Mary.

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In summary the characteristics of Mary's behaviour were:

delusional paranoia;

instant rage and violence;

followed initially by immediate remorse and contrition;

this then lost its effectiveness for her and she resorted to excuses and denial;

a recognition of her own needs;

a recognition that her immediate caregivers and state institutions had failed to support her which, in justice to both, could not have been done without the aid of modern medicines; and

an underlying desire for reconciliation and re-establishment of family support.

In line with contemporary attitudes to insanity and the reliance on non-institutional caregivers, there were significant changes in sentencing once Mary lost Jonas (regardless of his effectiveness). There was, however, some recognition by her peers that she was unable to control herself, that the system was useless to rectify these problems so the only solution available to them was straight out isolation and containment. That meant, for the most part, prison. By the 1880s some attempts were being made to "medicalise" madness and to provide more sympathetic care and treatment, but it was all too late for Mary.



Parramatta Asylum in the mid 1880s