

McKECHNIE, Neil Johnston

Born 1 February, 1826, Aberdeenshire, Scotland. Died 22 June, 1888, Clarendon Hotel, Durban.

Mercantile clerk, farmer, tutor, clerk, thatcher, merchant, company director.

- 1826c. b. Woodside near Aberdeen, parents Neil McKechnie and Janet Johnston. (MHG 0/14390 Tv1)
- 1826c. b. Cotton Parish, son of Revd Neil McKechnie, Presbyterian minister, and Janet Johnston. His siblings were Margaret who m. a Mr Wright, Jessie who m. a Dr Grant, Donald whose wife's name was Marion and Jean [*sic*] who m. a Mr Clark. (Creed). Son of a Congregational minister in Aberdeen. (Dixon).
- 1826.02.01 b. Old Machar, Aberdeenshire, son of Revd Neil McKechnie of Aberdeen. After schooling at Aberdeen's Grammar School he graduated at the University there. (Steytler p. 289)
- 1850.00.00 m. (CSO 56 no. 221). He m. Elizabeth Reid Walker. (MHG 0/14390 Tv1). She was an orphan, brought up by an uncle and aunt who did not approve of her marriage. They emigrated to Natal where his college education did not help him. (Dixon)
- 1850.10.10 McKechnie, Neil, farmer. Arrived at Port Natal on the *Emily* with Elizabeth. Granted 100 acres. (NW.18.10.50). [Natal wanted practical people and emigrants were encouraged to comply with this requirement – hence McKechnie's claim to being a farmer.]. His educational qualification of M.A. Aberdeen is noted on Prof. Hattersley's transcribed copy of *The Natal Witness* list of arrivals. (NW 18.10.50). Hattersley also recorded that McKechnie kept a diary on board the *Emily*. (Hatt. Papers). A farmer, came aged 24 with his wife Elizabeth R. (JCB). Allocated a plot (2 roods) in Block T in diamond 3, Richmond village, and an agricultural allotment, Lot 127 (100 acres) of *Harmony*. (NGG 08.03.81)
- 1851.06.00 Graduate of King's College, Aberdeen, acted as a tutor in Natal. (BSN 327)(NW 06.06.51)
- 1851.11.07 Deposed that he was a temporary clerk in the Commissariat Dept, Fort Napier. (AGO I/4/2 p. 49)
- 1853.00.00 Clerk at the Commissariat Dept, residential address [Erf] 23 Burger St, Pmb. (DDP 1853)
- 1853.12.19 Son Neil Malcolm b. Pmb. (Tomb HGC)
- 1854.05.30 Clerk Commissariat Dept, [Erf] 23 Greyling St, Pmb., proprietor. (NGG 30.05.54)
- 1855.09.07 Together with Richard Vause* was elected as auditor for Pmb. (NW 07.09.55)
- 1855-1856 Were in Pmb. and "living on the Vlei". [Greyling St bordered on the Vlei.] Their dau. Christine d. and is buried in Pmb. They were very friendly with E.R. Dixon [Edward Ross Dixon*] and his wife. (Dixon)
- 1856.11.17 Wrote to Govt from Pmb. asking for employment. Was 30 years old. Had completed his education 11 years previously at King's College, Aberdeen,

receiving the A.M. diploma. Being without resources he could not enter any professional studies and so from 1845-1850 was a mercantile clerk. In that year he m. and came to Natal. After struggling, he became a temporary clerk in the Commissariat Dept. under Assistant Commissariat General Bovell and continued as such for 3 years. During part of this time he acted as tutor to the family of D. Moodie [Donald Moodie*]. “In 1854 Mr Anstie [Paul Anstie*], late resident here and once a friend, opened business on an extensive scale and induced me by prospect of more active and remunerative employment to leave the Commissariat and become his clerk. The total ruin of Anstie left me, a few months ago, disengaged and since then I have not found a job deriving an adequate support for my family”. Was an auditor for NFA & TC. Answer: No prospect of Govt employment. Name entered on application list. (CSO 56 no. 221). [In May 1854 Anstie opened his *Belvidere* flour mill. It was the largest mill yet to be built in Natal and was a water mill situated on the outskirts of Pmb. on the north bank of the Umsinduzi River. It was too ambitious an undertaking for the Natal of the 1850s. In Nov. 1855 Anstie left for Cape Town, ostensibly to buy wheat, giving McKechnie his P/A. In Feb. 1857 Anstie’s estate was declared insolvent. He never returned to Natal. (SO’BS)]

- 1857.02.02 Writing to Govt from Umhlali [Natal, north coast] asks again for any opening. At present he is acting as temporary clerk in charge of the Commissariat at Umhlali, but this doesn’t interfere with his desire for Govt. employment. Answer: he will be borne in mind in event of a vacancy. (CSO 56 no. 252)
- 1857.07.03 Accountant, collector and general commission agent, Pmb. (NW 03.07.57)
- 1858.06.19 Was he the Mr H.J. McKachulle [*sic*] whose infant son d. at Dbn.? (NM 24.06.58)
- 1858.08.10 Dbn, clerk, landowner. (NGG 10.08.58)
- 1858.10.15 Owned Erf 23, Greyling St, Pmb. – unoccupied. (NW 15.10.58)
- 1858 The McKechnies had moved to Dbn where they had really hard times. He had learned to thatch for a living. In 1858 they passed through Pmb. on their way to Nelson’s Kop in the O.F.S. At this time their only children were Jessie and Neil. They later moved to Harrismith. (Dixon)
- 1859.08.31 On the voters’ roll for Borough of Pmb. – clerk, [Erf] 33 Greyling St, proprietor. (CSO 113 no. 457/1859)
- 1860.08.14 Nelson’s Kop, clerk, landowner. (NGG 14.08.60)
- 1860s? Travelling through Harrismith in the very early days my mother had received great kindness from the McKechnies and had learned to respect and esteem Mrs McKechnie. (Gray). [Josiah Tyler, father of Mary Tyler Gray, was an American missionary who spent 40 years of his life working among Zulu people. (SO’BS)]
- 1862.02.00 Natal immigrant living at *Woodside*, Klipriver, Harrismith. (Dickson)
- 1862.06.00 We lodged with the kind McKechnies at Harrismith. (Letter to J. F Churchill*)

- 1862.06.03 Given P/A by A.W. Evans* to demand from Thomas [J.] Bowes* of O.F.S., trader, or of and from the said Thomas Bowes in his capacity as attorney for his wife Louisa, for recovery of £85 due on promissory note made by Bowes as attorney for his wife. (RSC IV/7/19 no. 732)
- 1862.09.00 Was a member of the parliamentary debating society of 12 members which was established by Dr Golborn of the *Harrismith Times*. It used the Volksraad debating rules. (Steytler p. 117)
- 1865.10.28 Was one of three signatories of a letter from Harrismith to *The Friend* asking that the great kindness and liberality of the subscribers to the Free State Relief Fund at Dbn – three wagon loads of goods valued at £500 had been forwarded – be acknowledged. These three signatories plus F.W. Reid of Potchefstroom and Mr Pulleyn of Dbn (both members of the Dbn Committee who accompanied the wagons) have been chosen to conjoin with them in the distribution of the articles in the Cronstadt and Harrismith divisions. (*T of N* 11.11.1865 in English)
- 1867.02.20 Of Harrismith, apply to him or A.W. Evans of Dbn and Pmb. if hamels or ewes required from Harrismith (from the farms of Pringle, Grobler and Barnard). (*T of N* 20.02.67)
- 1869.04.26 When L.W. Odell was returning to Pmb. from the Tati goldfields he stayed over in Harrismith for a while with the Putterills [James Putterill*] – then he left and caught up with the wagons. Mr and Mrs Blencowe and Mrs McKechnie were travelling at the same time. (Odell)
- 1870.01.30 We called on Mrs McK who very kindly sent us peaches and delicious butter. She has lived 10 years in this unendurable lodge in the wilderness, and her pretty daughter might as well be in a convent as in a dead place like Harrismith. (Blaine)
- 1870s Was one of the trustees of the first Methodist church built in Harrismith. He, James Putterill and Henry Spilsbury* invested in erven in Harrismith and at one time owned most of the town. (Putterill)
- 1872.06.19 Of Harrismith, trader, he acknowledged indebtedness to William Gordon Clark and James Pulleyn, trading in Dbn under the style of Clark & Pulleyn, merchants, on the sum of £2 000 for goods supplied and money lent, and to be lent, interest to be at 8% p.a. for 5 years. Hypothecates all his right to his movable property and effects, including wagons, and oxen and other livestock and his stock-in-trade, book debts and his household goods. Witnesses: Richard Taylor Goodricke and Arthur Henry Downard. (RSC IV/7/8 no. 124). Deed of hypothecation dated the same day. (Ib no. 125)
- 1874.00.00 Was on Harrismith's Committee of Public Safety to see that the town did not lose the 6 000 odd morgen, including the water source, [which the Volksraad wanted to take away]. (Steytler p. 106)
- 1875.00.00 He and Mandy were early shopkeepers in Harrismith. In this year he built a new shop. (Ib 110)

- 1875.01.00 Chosen at first election for town council. Two of the five elected – Brandon and Jones – resigned straight away so that the council could not operate. [This because of the dispute with the Volksraad]. The Landdrost wanted to call a public meeting to fill the vacancies, but through Raaff, Forster, McKechnie and Macfarlane it was postponed again and again. (Ib pp 107-8)
- 1875.06.00 The above protest had its effect in that the Volksraad decided that the town could keep the 6 328 morgen. (Ib pp 107-8)
- 1875.07.00 The Landdrost called a meeting to fill the two vacancies, but the question then arose as to whether the three councilors who had not resigned should retain their seats? Raaff maintained that as the council had not met since January it had lapsed and all five should be elected. The Landdrost did not agree. (Ib pp 107-8)
- 1875 .08.05 The council to meet for the first time. The Landdrost would not allow the public to attend and this caused much dissatisfaction. It was felt that he was determined to keep the seats on the council for his own family. An altercation over the admittance of the public developed between the Landdrost and McKechnie and in the end McKechnie brandished his fist under Boshof's nose and shouted "I defy you". The affair was reported to the Volksraad and a commission of inquiry was appointed. After its report the Volksraad notified that a new election was to be held, that the Landdrost must allow the public to attend and that McKechnie's language had been too strong. (Ib pp 107-8)
- 1875.10.25 A new election was held, McKechnie was again successful and was chosen as mayor. This was Harrismith's first Town Council, (Ib pp 107-8)
- 1878.00.00 He retired from business and was succeeded by his sons Neil and Donald. (Steytler p. 239)
- 1881.05.23 Of Harrismith. Second dau. Elizabeth Reid, at her father's residence, m. Percy Whitehead Esq. (News-cutting in K M's bb.)
- 1881.06.00 Served on the five member committee formed to make plans for the establishment of a company to erect bridges in the Harrismith district. (Steytler p. 144)
- 1882.00.00 A Railway Promotion Association was established in Harrismith under the leadership of Landdrost van der Riet and Neil McKechnie. (Ib p. 99)
- 1883.00.00 When water pipes were laid in Harrismith there was an argument as to whether iron or steel ones should be used. Luckily McKechnie had advocated iron ones and these were used, whereas Ladysmith used steel ones which proved a disaster. (Ib p. 197)
- 1883.04.00 The concept of forming a Presbyterian congregation in Harrismith originated with the Presbytery of Natal. Revd James Gray went to Harrismith and for a time held service in the Good Templars' Hall. McKechnie was one of the first elders of the church. (Ib pp 126-7)
- 1884.00.00 A founder member of the newly established Harrismith Chamber of Commerce. (Ib p. 111)

- 1885.06.01 He signed the Imperial Hotel Visitors' Book for himself and Miss McKechnie. [The hotel was the best in Pmb. (SO'BS)]. (IHVB p. 15)
- 1886.04.01 Signed the Imperial Hotel Visitors' Book. (IHVB p. 41)
- 1887.06.20 Jubilee week brings all our friends to Durban from far and wide. Mrs McKechnie is ill and weak, poor Maggie is uncertain if she will come down this winter. (Churchill)
- 1887.06.30 Made will. Lives in Harrismith. Wife is Elizabeth Reid McKechnie and they have five children – Jessie Johnston, Neil Malcolm, Mrs Elizabeth Reid Whitehead, Donald Hector and Margaret. (MSC 68/1888). Wife gets 1/3 of his estate and the remaining 2/3 is to be divided between his children. (MHG 0/14390 Tvl)
- 1887.07.08 In an agreement made at Harrismith, Neil J. McKechnie disposes of his business in Harrismith, the assets of which in June 1887 were £15 664.6.7d, to his sons Neil Malcolm and Donald Hector McKechnie on the understanding that they pay off the liabilities of the business which include a bill due to James Pulleyn of £2 000; a claim by Jessie McKechnie for £955; a claim by Margaret McKechnie for £800 and a claim of £6 671 by Neil J. McKechnie representing the stock in the business. Neil Malcolm and Donald Hector McKechnie accept the offer and enter partnership for at least three years. They hire from Neil J. McKechnie erven 103 and 104 in Harrismith. (MHG 0/14390 Tvl)
- 1888.00.00 Was a director of the Pigg's Peak Gold Mining Company, Ltd, when it was a Durban-based company and before its reconstruction in London. (Jones p. 360)
- 1888.06.22 Neil Johnston McKechnie d. aged 62. (Dove's). A few months before his death he went to live in Dbn. Death sudden. (Steytler p. 239). Died at Clarendon Hotel, Dbn, aged 62. Occupation merchant. Wife is Elizabeth Reid Walker. Children are Jessie Johnston McKechnie, Neil Malcolm McKechnie, Elizabeth Reid McKechnie m. to Percy Whitehead, Donald Hector McKechnie and Margaret McKechnie, all majors. The death notice was signed by Neil M. McKechnie. (MHG 0/14390 Tvl)
- 1888.08.14 Date of certified copy of his will from OFS Orphan Chamber. (MSC 68/1888)
- 1905.08.30 Widow Elizabeth Reid d. (Tomb HGC). Elizabeth Reid McKechnie d. aged 80, senile decay. (HMBR)

CHILDREN

Jessie Johnston (11.03.1851c. –)

- 1851c.03.11 b. [Year of b. presumed, month and day taken from bb (BMS)]. (KM's bb)
- 1889.02.00 Still alive at this time as she is named as a sister-in-law in the will of Percy Whitehead. (MSC 21/1899)

Neil Malcolm (19.12.1853, Pmb.– 27.02.1930, Harrismith)

- 1853.12.19 b. Pmb. [Full date of birth plus place taken from tomb. Month and day confirmed in bb (BMS)]. (Tomb HGC)(KM's bb)
- 1863.12.07 Wife Margaret Thomson (née Holmes) b. Bloemfontein. (Tomb HGC). She was an 1820 Settler descendant. (Creed)
- 1930.02.27 d. Harrismith. (Tomb HGC). d. aged 76. (HMBR)
- 1949.08.26 Wife d. at *Mollisima*, Dalton. (Tomb HGC)

Elizabeth Reid (15.02.1860c. – 00.09.1935, Paington, England)

- 1862c.02.15 b. [Year of birth calculated from age at death in 1935, month and day given in bb.(BMS)]. (KM's bb)
- 1865.01.00 Was Elizabeth Reid's [future] husband one of the two Mr Whiteheads who were at or near the Wilge River, OFS, or Nelson's Kop – one was just up from Natal with his sheep and stock? (Child pp 28,30)
- 1881.05.23 Second dau. of Neil J. McKechnie, Harrismith, at her father's residence m. Percy Whitehead Esq. (News-cutting in KM's bb)
- 1886.07.23 Robert Jameson of Barberton, a mineralogist, stated that in consideration for £1 000 he ceded all his interest in the property Pigg's Peak to John James Grice of Dbn and Percy Whitehead of Moodie's Goldfields. This property is part of the concession sold to him by Thomas McLachlan and Walter Carter. (RSC IV/7/12 no. 597)
- 1889.02.00 Percy Whitehead made his will. He was formerly of Harrismith OFS, now of Brentwood, Essex. He has a coal farm known as *Lennoxton*, Newcastle, Natal. He was b. in Dromohin? England. (MSC 21/1899)
- 1897.02.00 Percy Whitehead d. (Tomb WSC).
- 1897.02.13 Percy Whitehead died in Johannesburg aged 62. (MSC 21/1899)
- 1935.09.00 Elizabeth Reid d. aged 75 at Paington, England. (Tomb WSC)

Donald Hector (29.10.1861 – 12.08.1926.)

- 1861.10.29 b. [Year of birth taken from tomb, month and day from bb. (BMS)]. (Tomb HGC) (KM's bb)
- 1926.08.12 d. aged 64 of apoplexy. [Year, month, day and cause of death given in burial register. Only year given on tomb. (BMS)]. (HMBR)(Tomb HGC)

Margaret (

- 1881.04.18 Mr and Mrs Slatter, Clark and Maggie McKechnie drove up and spent a few hours. (Macleroy). [The Macleroy's lived in Pmb. just above present day (2014) Cordwalles School. (SO'BS)]
- 1885.06.01 Possibly she was the Miss McKechnie who was included by her father when he signed the Imperial Hotel Visitors' Book. (IHVB p.15)
- 1887.06.20 Jubilee week brings all our friends to Dbn from far and wide. Mrs McKechnie is ill and weak, poor Maggie is uncertain if she will come down this winter. (Churchill)

- 1887.08.16 Of Harrismith, she signed the Imperial Hotel Visitors' Book. (IHVB p. 92)
- 1889.04.27 Possibly the Miss McKechnie who was included when Mrs McKechnie signed the Imperial Hotel Visitors' Book. (IHVB p. 160)
- 1893.12.01 Possibly the Miss McKechnie of Harrismith who signed the Imperial Hotel Visitors' Book. (IHVB p. 367)
- 1889.02.00 Still alive at this time as she is named as a sister-in-law in the will of Percy Whitehead. (MSC 21/1899)
- 1850s? According to Ann Dixon they had a dau. Christine who d. and was buried in Pmb. (Dixon)
- 1858.06.19 It is possible they had an infant son who d. in Dbn on this day. (NM 24.06.58)

References to N.J. McKechnie's sister Jane Miller McKechnie.

- 1869.11.18 Married at the Congregational church, Peckham Eye [Rye], London, by the Revd Luis Horsebell, assisted by the Revd R. Johnston, Mr William Clark*, merchant of Natal, to Jane Miller youngest dau. of the late Revd Neil McKechnie, Aberdeenshire. (NM 00.01.70)
- 1871.11.27 At Dbn, Mrs W.G. Clark, a son. (NM 28.11.71). Clark, Douglas b. in Dbn, son of William Gordon (merchant) and Jane Miller (formerly McKechnie). (?)

NOTE

*After a surname indicates that person as the head of a family and therefore qualified for an entry in Shelagh Spencer's biographical register.

QUERIES

- 1864.06.16 Who was W. McKechnie of Harrismith who consulted Dr Aldridge, Pmb. Only visit? (Aldridge entry 408)
- 1872.09.03 Who was William McKechnie who applied for a licence to m. Mary Thomson? Both b. in Aberdeen. (CSO 2285)
- 1872.09.04 Who was William McKechnie, bachelor, General Agent Kronstadt, OFS, who m. Mary Thomson, spinster, late of Old Machar, Aberdeen, Scotland? Witnessed by G. Lindsay Bowman M.D. and Elizabeth Gordon Dalzell. (R. St A. Dbn)
- 1875.01.20 Who was William McKechnie referred to in a notice that appeared in the OFS Govt Gatette stating that he was a member of the first Kroonstad local council and a Commissioner for the town? (Kroonstad Centenary Bk p. 54)
- 1887end Who was J. McKechnie, tailor, Umgeni? (DNA 1888)
- 1894end Who was J. McKechnie, tailor, Greyville? (DNA 1895)
- 1932.07.07 Who was J. McKechnie whose wife Alice d. aged 63? (Tomb PGC)
-

McKECHNIE, John

Born c. 1810

1850.03.08 Aged 40 he came on the *Ina* with John aged 7. (EI 64). In J. C. Byrne's *Ina* passenger list which was sent to John Moreland*, the entry for John aged 7 is crossed out. (JCB). He was allocated 45 acres of what were known as the Cotton Lands on the Natal North Coast. (Clark p. 272)) Nothing more known.

SOURCES

Books and Directories

BSN – Hattersley, Alan F. *The British settlement in Natal: a study in imperial migration*.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950.

Child, Daphne, editor. *Portrait of a pioneer: the letters of Sidney Turner from South Africa. 1864–1901*. Johannesburg; Macmillan, 1980.

Clark, Dr John. *Natal Settler-Agent: the career of John Moreland, agent for the Byrne emigration-scheme of 1849–50*. Cape Town: Balkema, 1972.

DDP – *Directory of Durban and Pietermaritzburg*. Pietermaritzburg: Lumb, 1853.

DNA – *Natal almanac and yearly register*. Pietermaritzburg: P. Davis, 1863–1905.

Jones, Huw M. *A biographical register of Swaziland to 1902*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1993.

Kroonstadt Centenary 1855–1955. Kroonstad: Centenary Committee.

Steytler, F.A. *Die geskiedenis van Harrismith*. Bloemfontein: Nasionale Pers Beperk, 1932.

Cemeteries

Tomb HGC – Tomb Harrismith General Cemetery.

Tomb PGC – Tomb Pretoria General Cemetery.

Tomb WSC – Tomb West Street Cemetery, Durban.

Church Registers

R. St A. Dbn – Register St Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Dbn

Manuscripts

Aldridge, Dr C.M., Ledger. (Alan Paton Centre, UKZN, Pmb.)

Blaine, Letitia Sophia Jessie. *Lady's trip to the Transvaal and back in 1870*. Typescript. (Pmb. Archives Repository).

Churchill, Isabella P. *Letter to Marion Mason, Dbn, 20.06.1887*. (Killie Campbell Library, Dbn).

Dixon, Ann. *Notes on some Byrne and other settlers* (KwaZulu-Natal Museum).

Dove's – Dove & Co [Undertaker's, Dbn]. *List of burials, 1875-1922*.

English, Dr B.D. *The story of the Royal D'Urban Rangers*. Typescript, 1954, 3 Vols. (Private Ownership).

Gray, Mary Williams Tyler. *Account of Travels*. (Private ownership).

Hatt – Hattersley, Alan F. *Papers*. (Pmb. Archives Repository).

IHVB – Imperial Hotel Pietermaritzburg. *Visitors' Book, Jan. 1885 – Dec. 1893.* (KwaZulu-Natal Museum).

JCB – Byrne, Joseph Charles. Correspondence addressed to Moreland in *Moreland papers* v. 21.

KM bb – Middleton, Kate. *Birthday Book.* (Private ownership).

Macleroy, Margaret. *Diary: 1879 – 1884.* Typed copy. (Private ownership).

Odell, L.W. *Tati goldfields diary.* (Private Ownership).

Putterill, James. *Papers.* (Killie Campbell Library, Dbn).

Newspapers

NM – Natal Mercury

NW – The Natal Witness

T of N – Times of Natal

Personal Communication

BMS – Brian Mitchell Spencer

Creed, Mrs Gillian

SO'BS – Shelagh O'Byrne Spencer

Unpublished Official Papers

AGO – Attorney General's Office

CSO – Colonial Secretary's Office

EI – European Immigration

HMBR – Harrismith Municipal Burial Register

MSC – Master of the Supreme Court

MHG – Meester van die Hoog Geregshof, Tvl

NGG – Natal Government Gazette

RSC – Registrar Supreme Court

Words 3 467