

CROKER PRIZE FOR BIOGRAPHY 2023

2309 Jean's Hero Uncle

by Catherine Philps

Jean's Hero Uncle

Who wouldn't want to be related to George Moodie, first captain of the famous clipper ship the 'Cutty Sark'? Her survival into the 21st century was attributed to Captain Moodie as he insisted that only the best timbers be used in her construction.ⁱ Our family of tall ship enthusiasts, descended from Jean Falconer Macaulay (nee Anderson), revelled in the fact that George Moodie was Jean's uncle.

Born to Alexander Anderson, shipwright, and Margaret Fullerton on 3rd September, 1867ⁱⁱ in the grey granite city of Dundee, Scotland, red-headed Jean spent her life surrounded by ships, sailors and the work of busy ports. In the early 1870s Alexander Anderson obtained work at the docks in Birkenhead, so Jean moved with her family to England where her brother was born in 1875.ⁱⁱⁱ

Letters from Jean's Uncle David, extolling the virtues of life in Australia led to Jean's family boarding the "Aldergrove", sailing for Adelaide in 1883. Jean was '*amazed to see such a small sailing ship*'. As she was sixteen, she was separated from her parents and brother and quartered at one end of the ship with other unmarried girls.^{iv}

Once in Adelaide Jean worked for the next four years, first as an assistant in a confectionary shop and then as a carer for the children of the Reverend Dr David Paton, Presbyterian Minister. During those years her parents and younger brother moved to Warrnambool where her father found work at the busy port.^v

Jean finally moved to Warrnambool in 1887 where she met and was courted by a young Assistant Lighthouse Keeper, Murdo Macaulay.^{vi} They married on 3rd September, 1888,^{vii} the same date as both their birthdays. Jean and Murdo had their first two children in the Assistant Lighthouse Keepers stone cottage.

In late 1891 Murdo transferred to Melbourne to become a watcher in the Customs Department^{viii}. The family lived in Footscray expanding from two children to seven, four more girls and one more boy.^{ix} Jean's hospitable, gregarious nature and organisational skills ensured that the Footscray home quickly became a hub for all visiting sailors of Scottish descent. The connection with ships and the sea continued, with one of Jean and Murdo's sons becoming a shipwright like his maternal grandfather.

Fast forward to the 1950s when a preservation society was set up to return the 'Cutty Sark' to her former glory. She was the only famous clipper ship from the days of the China tea trade and the Australian wool trade to survive. George Moodie's wife launched the ship in 1869 and he was the captain for the ship's first three voyages to China.^x

At this point, Jean Macaulay decided to make a donation to the restoration fund, which was sponsored by Sir Dallas Brooks, Governor of Victoria. The Age, complete with photograph, reported this event on 29th January, 1954.^{xi}

Donations for the appeal to preserve the Cutty Sark have passed the £65,000 mark, but few have thrilled the sponsor, the Governor, Sir Dallas Brooks, more than the £5/5/- he received from a dear old lady with a flair for sailing ships.

Well known Footscray identity, 86- year- old Mrs J F Macaulay, came to Australia 70 years ago in the three masted wind-jammer Aldergrove, but her love for sail started years before that as a little girl in Dundee, Scotland.

Her hero was her uncle, first skipper of the famous tea clipper which ship lovers in many countries are seeking money to preserve.

Yesterday Mrs Macaulay put the clock back four decades when she showed Sir Dallas Brooks a model of the stately ship.

The old lady left smiling. Her cheque would help to preserve the ship her childhood hero had once commanded.

You can't argue with The Age. Since the 1950s generations of Jean's descendants have visited the 'Cutty Sark', sat in the captain's cabin, held the steering wheel glorying in the fact that our ancestor was that gracious ship's first Captain.

The story might have remained unquestioned had not a pesky great-grandchild, with a penchant for genealogy, started to wonder exactly how the family was connected to this great man. In the family story, the connection was simple. Jean's father, Alexander Anderson, had a sister who married George Moodie and it was she who launched the 'Cutty Sark'. First step to verification was searching for George Moodie's marriage certificate.^{xii} Consternation when it showed that George Moodie's wife's name was Janet Cassels, not Anderson. Did this mean that one of George's or Janet's siblings had married into the Anderson family? How to untangle this Gordian knot? Alexander Anderson, Jean's father, had numerous siblings so following the path of what was known seemed the appropriate course of action. The genealogist found that Alexander had a sister called Elizabeth who married a seaman who became a Master Mariner^{xiii}. This sea captain's name was George but his surname was Mudie, not Moodie. These two families lived in Scotland, but whereas George Moodie and Janet were married in Wemyss on the Firth of Forth in 1854^{xiv}, George Mudie and Elisabeth Anderson were married in Dundee on the Firth of Tay in 1857^{xv}. Sadly, the hero uncle of the '*dear old lady*' was not the first captain of the 'Cutty Sark'.

When did this family myth start? Jean would have been about six when her family moved from Dundee to Birkenhead^{xvi}. She would have seen her hero uncle in Dundee and his ship may have sailed into Birkenhead for a visit. The 'Cutty Sark' was on the wool run in the 1880s when Jean was in Australia. It is obvious that Mudie and Moodie could be confused, but surely Alexander would have known that his brother-in-law had not been the captain of the 'Cutty Sark'. Alexander Anderson died in 1917^{xvii} so it must have been some time after this event that the story took on life.

Some very disgruntled family members are quite cross with that pesky great-granddaughter. The great-granddaughter herself was not very happy to have destroyed the myth of the hero uncle.

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- ⁱ Villiers Alan (1971): *The Cutty Sark Last of a Glorious Era*. London, Hodder and Stoughton, p24
- ⁱⁱ Births, Deaths and Marriages (Scotland) 1861-1965: Birth of Jean Falconer Anderson (35187)
- ⁱⁱⁱ Macaulay J F (1962): *Diary of Jean Falconer Macaulay, 3 September 1867 to 11 November 1962*. Philps Family Papers p 1
- ^{iv} Ibid p 1, 2
- ^v Ibid p 5, 6
- ^{vi} Victoria Government Gazette: No. 91, Friday 30 September, 1887, p 2832
- ^{vii} Colony of Victoria Certificate of Marriage (Schedule D. 28 Vict. No. 268). Marriage of Murdo Macaulay and Jean Falconer Anderson.
- ^{viii} Douglas Elizabeth (1998): *Leading Lights*. Warrnambool, Covell Publications, p 53
- ^{ix} Op.cit. p 11, 12
- ^x Website: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cutty-Sark>
- ^{xi} The Age: *Daily Doings*. 29 January, 1954 p 2
- ^{xii} Ancestry.com. *Scotland, Select Marriages 1561-1910*. Marriage between George Moodie and Janet Cassels
- ^{xiii} Ancestry.com. *UK and Ireland, Masters and Mates Certificates, 1850-1927. Certificate No. 12.716*. Shows George Mudie had a Masters Certificate.
- ^{xiv} Op. cit.
- ^{xv} Ancestry.com. *Scotland, Select Marriages 1561-1910. Marriage between George Grey Mudie and Elizabeth Duncan Anderson*
- ^{xvi} Op cit p 1
- ^{xvii} NSW Births, Deaths and Marriages (1917/006552). Death of Alexander Anderson