

'A HAT FULL OF STONES AND RUBBISH'

By Margaret Schmidt

Oh, I lament my youth - why are my days so long and dreary? My thoughts are muddled, my hands and feet are like ice as I stand here in the Laundry scrubbing, my hands red raw and bleeding! My name is Mary Ann Lowe, 55 yrs old, an inmate at 'New Norfolk Hospital for the Insane'. The year is 1885 and soon they will come to drug me again and order me to my cold, mousy smelling, flea ridden mattress of straw. No rest, only nights of tortured memories darkened with forbidding nightmares.

How I dread this abusive environment. My name in Convict records is **'Mary Ann BRAYLEY alias Mary Ann RISLEY'**, but my real name is **MARY ANN BRILEY** Convict number 981

Born in 1828, the youngest child of George and Sarah (Chant) BRILEY of Bethnal Green Middlesex, one of the poorest slums in London. I had four brothers and a sister.

Orphaned at the age of 10 when my Mother Sarah died in March, 1838, two weeks later my father George also died. I could read and write.

As a Nursery Maid I also took to wandering bustling streets in London Town. It was a noisy, exciting place where one could always grab an apple or a loaf of bread from a barrow.

My memory has been clouded by the years. I was a beggar on the streets with long black curls and dreamy grey eyes. I resorted to stealing and 'being on the town', so some nights at least I had a roof over my head. I survived through wit and cunning

I worked for Wm. Makinson in Shoreditch. I stole 20 pounds from my employer which he reported. Sent to trial at the Clerkenwell Quarter Sessions Middlesex, I was sentenced to 7 years transportation and sent to the other ends of the earth.

The convict ship 'Stately' sailed from Woolwich on 16 May, 1849. There were 163 people on board and like me they thought "would we ever see land again"?

Finally, I landed in the Port of Hobart, Van Dieman's Land, aged 22. My convict description. I was rather small - **'4 foot, 9 inches, physical traits - small scar on my forehead, left foot shorter than the other, fair complexion, grey eyes, round visage with small mouth and nose'**.

When called before the Court, I called myself 'Mary Ann Brayley' and other fanciful names to try and confuse the Authorities, so my aliases were Mary Ann Risley, Mary Ann Bailey, Ann Selina Bearley, Mary Ann Braidey and Mary Ann Raisley.

I was appointed to serve out some of my sentence to Master Atkinson in Hobart. How on earth was I supposed to endure 7 years of penal servitude? I absconded but was caught and sentenced to two hard months at Cascades Female Factory where I experienced indescribable pain, abuse and conditions that were to affect the rest of my life!

There I worked as a Laundress which was the coldest, smelliest job ever. I was hungry and near freezing as the mountain spilled its chilly waters from the snow down into the tubs for the washing. Cold stones under my feet, I had to bind them in rags. Surely God this was punishment indeed! Even our cell oozed with rank smelly water.

Finally, in 1851 I was freed and placed in the service of Mr. Marks, Pawnbroker of Liverpool Street. That did not suit my adventurous nature at all. I bolted on 27 April.

Strolling through Hobart Town I saw a 'posh Pub' full of likely looking gents. At this time I called myself **Mary Ann Braidey** and was popular amongst the men. I caught the eyes of a **Mr. Thomas Riley** and **Mr. Henry Pearce**. We caroused for the rest of the night, and hatched up a plan. We concealed ourselves on the *ship 'Cacique' in May, 1851* which was **sailing for Port Phillip** but unfortunately, were discovered in the '*live freight*' section of the ship. We were **civily requested to leave** as we were under '*an unexpired engagement*'. We had no choice but to agree with the law and were escorted to '**Sharp's Hotel**' in the city.

"Tired of the Colony" or so our escapade was titled in Newspaper "**Brittania and Trades' Advocate**" on 12 May, 1851. "**Intending Emigrants**" was printed in the "**Hobarton Guardian**" I was stated to be "*well attired and rather prepossessing in appearance*" so I took that to mean I was quite a beauty and attractive to men.

We were sentenced into Her Majesty's Service again. This time 9 months imprisonment in Cascades Female Factory! I again started to become insolent and disorderly. Days spent as a Laundress were troublesome!

My next master was Mr. R. Clerk at "Malahide", Fingal which was a small farming and mining area where there was a Probation Station. My occupation once again was as a Laundress.

It was at Fingal that I met Convict labourer, William Lowe 34. convict no. 5305. He was originally from Halifax, Yorkshire. His first sentence was hard labour toiling at the Coal Mines at Saltwater River in souther Van Diemen's Land. He spent time in Campbell Street Gaol, and other assisgned places before being sentenced to work at 'Bona Vista' at Avoca.

We were married in the Anglican Chapel at Fingal on 10 January, 1853 and my name was recorded as 'Mary Ann Brailey' - I gained my Certificate of Freedom on 13 April, 1853. Will and I prospered slowly, made a home in Fingal, and we had 3 sons. When my son, Henry James was born in 1871 my name was registered on his Birth Certificate as "Ann Selina Bearley".

Hard times abounded. We had a roof over our heads and plenty of rabbits and kangaroos to eat.

Sadly, disaster struck again 7 months after our last son, William Charles was born. He passed away with complications from measles. My husband died on 22 September, 1879. My tormented mind started to deteriorate from that date onwards.

I battled on raising the boys. During that time, I started to argue with my neighbours and toss words of abuse at them. They complained of being scared of me. Early in March 1884 the ongoing complaints by neighbours came to a head. I was arrested by the Police Constable at Fingal.

It was stated that I had a '**Mental Disorder - Delusional Insanity**' in a report on **10 March, 1884**. Committed to '**New Norfolk Hospital for the Insane**'. The charges were "**Mary Ann Lowe was a person of unsound mind, not under proper care or control. and at war with herself! She had threatened others and herself and was suffering from Monomania**" "

The medical report states "**In fairly good bodily health. Is suicidal and dangerous to others.**"

I died on 2nd August, 1902 from "**general debility**" and there my story could have ended.

Buried in a mass grave for paupers and inmates of 'New Norfolk Hospital for the Insane' at North Circle Cemetery, and I was gone forever until records were discovered in 2018, and my final resting place was revealed!

"I was re-united with my family - they had found me at last after 116 years!"

*St. Matthew's Church, New Norfolk Burial Records, states that I was an insane patient who was laid to rest on 5th August, 1902. **at 72 years of age.***

This story was written by two of my Great Great Granddaughters - June (Lowe) Sargent and Margaret (Lowe) Schmidt.

THE FINAL CHAPTER IN THE LIFE OF MARY ANN LOWE HAS BEEN TAKEN FROM A FEW SCARCE CASE BOOK RECORDS OF HER TIME AT 'NEW NORFOLK HOSPITAL FOR THE INSANE' THESE COVER HER MEDICAL CONDITION FROM 1884 TO 1886.

"MARY ANN LOWE (Mrs.) LACHLAN PARK ASYLUM, NEW NORFOLK. FOLIO 147

Age 54 - Widow. 11 March, 1884

Mary Ann Lowe was admitted from Fingal on a Justice Order and Medical Certificate. The records state "It is not known if she is subject to epilepsy, but is suicidal and dangerous to others."

Poor Mary - incarcerated again - reports tell of her being **"excited and roaming about the grounds, clapping her hands and crying out! Can't settle at night."** Dosed with **Potassium Bromide and Morph Tincture** to better manage her. It was noted in her Case Book that **"her mind was beginning to deteriorate rapidly."**

Next report states **"confined to her room for a few days suffering diarrhoea and general debility."** Who can imagine what the conditions must have been like? The following report at the end of April, 1884 states **"She has been very excited at times, especially at night - shouting and singing"**.

Oh, our poor darling Great Great Grandmother Mary Ann - how you are suffering, like a caged bird locked up in the prison of your insane mind!

Further physical damage added to her woes - According to Mary's case book notes - **On "30/4/1884 she has had a blow on the face,"** but had enough of her mind left to identify her attacker - it was **Nurse Mary Kerr'**. Authorities had other reports about the cruelty of Nurse Kerr and she was finally discharged by the Hospital Board.

Mary Ann's next monthly report stated **"Noisy at night, wanders about the grounds to gather stones and rubbish and fills her hat with them. Sometimes runs about the place, clapping her hands and shouting out"**

On 29 June **"There is no improvement in her mental condition. She received a slight injury to her hand, inflicted by another patient"**.

In September, 1884 her report stated **"Has been very excited all the month. It has been necessary to remove her to the 'Refractory Division'.** This must have been dreadful to be locked in solitary confinement.

From October, 1884 her reports for the next few months read **"has been very excited for some time"** and month after month her report reads **"No improvement in anything" "The same as last reported", "No change" until July 27th, 1885.**

It is stated in August 1885 **"No change mentally. Very often step dances to the annoyance of other patients, one of whom threw her down over this episode, cutting her head"** From this time onwards her reports until December 23, 1886 just state **"Identical" or "The same".**

No further official reports have yet been found for the next 15 years until her death on 2nd August, 1902. Mary Ann was 72

The Medical Case Book reports that: **Mary Ann Lowe** died of **'general debility'**.

I am so saddened by the thought of this poor little old lady - our darling Great-Great Grandmother imprisoned, miserable and just left alone with an unsound mind. And today it is hard to imagine what other inhumane treatment she may have endured during the rest of her time at New Norfolk Asylum.

Buried and lost as a Pauper, placed in a mass grave at North Circle Cemetery in New Norfolk, 1902, with no headstone or markers until 2018!

A loving farewell to our dear Great Great Grandmother who loved filling her "Hat with stones and rubbish, singing and step dancing" May you lay peacefully in your eternal slumber. No more suffering from pain, sorrow and a tormented brain.

Today your generations live on and are filled with respect and awe at the life you lived, our memories of you will be everlasting and we shower you with the love you would have given to us!

This History of our Great Great Grandmother, Mary Ann (Brayley) Lowe has been written by two of her Tasmanian GG Granddaughters, sisters June (Lowe) Sargent and Margaret (Lowe) Schmidt. October 2019 Tasmania.

Acknowledgements

Mary Ann (Brayley/Risley) Lowe's Descendants are indebted to:

The Female Convict Research Centre

Archives Office of Tasmania

Libraries of Tas (LINC records)

Female Convicts in Van Diemen's Land Database - 'Mary Ann Brayley, ID NO. 11654, Police No, 981.

The Derwent Valley Council in assisting with Cemetery and burial records

Peter Oakley, member of New Norfolk Genealogical Group (who found a page of Mary Ann Lowe's Case book report from New Norfolk Hospital for the Insane

'Trove Newspapers'

Elizabeth Russell-Arnot – Editor, who is also a GG Granddaughter of Mary Ann (Brayley) Lowe

Chris and Lewa Sierzant (Chris is a 3rd Great Grandson of Mary Ann (Brayley) Lowe

A very special thanks to June (Lowe) Sargent (my sister). June's perseverance in searching for a photo of Mary Ann (Brayley) Lowe led to the important finding of records from 'New Norfolk Hospital for the Insane'

You have helped us immensely to put together the story of Mary Ann. Thank you one and all!