FIVE MONTHS AT SEA

By Ken McNaughton

On 17 May 1838 a boy who had turned 24 only five days earlier sailed out of Greenock, Scotland, with his 21-year-old wife and one-year-old daughter. What were they thinking as they sailed down the Clyde that day and entered the Atlantic Ocean?
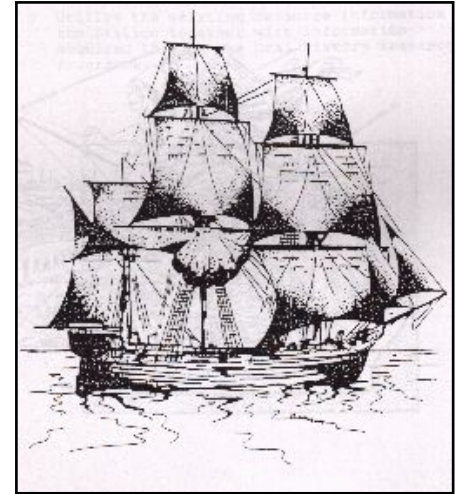

Figure 1. A typical barque.

John Ross McNaughton was born in Edinburgh on 12 May 1814 and was baptized at St. Cuthbert's Church on the 23rd. His father, James, was a coppersmith living in the suburb of Portsburgh. His mother, Christian, from Dalkeith, was the daughter of James Ross, a mason. On 27 January 1804, James and Christian had given up their names for marriage in the parish of Canongate. Their first child, Lauchlan Ross McNaughton, was born on 29 February 1810 and baptized at Old Grey Friar's parish church on April 7th. John, the second child, apparently moved to Kirkintilloch about 1828, when he turned fourteen. Many years later, in Australia, he took laboring jobs and, in 1874, when he would have been sixty and was not feeling well, his letters, although coherent, included quite a lot of spelling and grammatical errors. So he probably did not have extensive schooling and did not pursue a professional career. Agnes Stirling was born in July 1816 to William and Jane Stirling. When John and Agnes set out on their marathon journey in 1838, their daughter Jane was one year old.

At the end of 1835 the British government introduced a new method of assisted immigration known as the Bounty System: "a pecuniary aid … will be granted to those Settlers who shall be at the charge of bringing Emigrants to Sydney." The sum of 30 pounds was paid toward defraying the expense of passage of every married man and his wife, neither of whose ages should exceed 30, and five pounds for each of their children, whose age should exceed 12 months. Immigrants had to produce testimonials of their good character. John McNaughton brought two of these, from churchmen in Kirkintilloch.

Lloyds Register for 1838 shows that the barque *William Rodger* was built in Quebec in 1833, weighed 497 tons and was sheathed with yellow metal (two parts copper and one part zinc). It probably had a bowsprit and three masts, the fore and mizzen masts being square-rigged with a lower, top, and topgallant sail (Fig. 1). These barques, the workhorses of the golden age of sail in the mid 19th century, needed smaller crews than a full-rigged ship, as there were fewer of the labor-intensive square sails. The clipper route was the traditional route sailed by ships between Europe and Australia. It ran from west to east through the Southern Ocean to make use of the strong westerly winds of the Roaring Forties. Many ships and sailors were lost in the heavy conditions along the route. The clipper route fell into commercial disuse with the introduction of steam ships and the opening of the Suez (1869) and Panama Canals (1914). However, it remains the fastest sailing route around the world and is still used for some yacht races.

The route from England ran down the east Atlantic Ocean to the Equator, which took about 21 days, but an unlucky ship could spend an additional three weeks crossing the doldrums. The route continued south through the western Atlantic, passing close to the easternmost portion of Brazil, then curved south-east to cross the Greenwich meridian at about 40 degrees south, 6,500 miles from Plymouth. A good time for this run would be 43 days. Once into the forties, a ship was also inside the ice zone, where there was a significant chance of encountering icebergs. The Great Circle from Cape of Good Hope to Australia curves down to 60 degrees south, where the winds are also strongest, so ships' masters would go as far south as they dared.

The *William Rodger* sailed for Sydney from Greenock on 13 May 1838 with 71 men, 65 women, 68 children between 7 and 14, and 92 children under 7 years, making 296 passengers in all [1]. There were fifteen ships dispatched for New South Wales by the Government in 1838. The selecting officer in Greenock for the *William Rodger* was Dr. Boyter, but the count was made by the surgeon superintendent, J. Reid. The owner of the ship was D. Gilkison & Co, which also acted as broker/agent. It had been engaged by the Emigration Department on 24 March 1838 at the rate of £4-17-6 per ton, or £2,423. The ship touched the Cape of Good Hope in August and was at sea 137 days, arriving in Port Jackson on 26 September. Returns were made for each vessel and the number of deaths was recorded by J. D. Pinnock, the agent for emigrants in Sydney. The return for the *William Rodger* showed 60 deaths (more than 20% of the passengers), the largest number of any of these fifteen vessels, the next largest number being 39 deaths on the *Maitland.* On board, 6 adults and 10 children died and, in quarantine, 26 adults and 18 children. There were four births.

PIRATES
The eldest son of John Ross McNaughton, also called John, made extensive historical notes about Melbourne, perhaps for a speech on the occasion of his Golden Wedding celebration in April 1922. His entry for the year 1838 reads as follows:

> *1838. My Father & Mother arrived from Scotland being 5 months on the voyage encountering a pirate ship, flying a black flag & a skull & X bones nailed to the mast— all the women & children were ordered below, & all the men ordered on deck & armed. After hovering about for a day & a night cleared out! Typhoid fever* [actually typhus] *broke out & most* [sic!] *of the Passengers died. My father & mother…being a hardy Scotch couple escaped!*

We family historians took this entry with a grain of salt, especially because of the apparent exaggeration about the number of passengers lost. However, many years later, I found this post on the Web, from a descendent of another family on board the *William Rodger.*

> *The Butine Family*
> *The "William Roger" from Scotland arrived in Sydney on the 26th September, 1838, with typhus on board. More than 40 passengers from this ship died either on the way or whilst in quarantine. The Butine family—Hugh Butine, his wife, Mary, and 5 children, were among the 295 passengers on the "William Roger" which was carrying early settlers to Australia. Mary gave birth to a 6th child during the voyage but contracted typhus and had to be carried ashore when the ship was quarantined. Mary died within a few hours of arriving in Manly and was buried in quarantine. The baby died of malnutrition and is buried in Manly. On their voyage to Australia, another experience to add to their anxiety*

was an encounter with pirates who sailed threateningly around their ship for three days. They were persuaded to desist only when the passengers succeeded in making them believe that the ship carried convicts under military supervision. Hugh Butine and others who had military experience, appeared on deck in military uniform and played an important part in a successful game of bluff.
"Family of Butine," M. Arnold Butine, M.A., Ph.D.

Figure 2. Manly Quarantine Station, Spring Cove, Sydney Harbor.

TYPHUS

The story about the pirates seems to be true and should not be surprising. The typhus was much more deadly. Epidemic typhus—also called camp fever, jail fever, hospital fever, ship fever and famine fever—is transmitted by the human body louse. Feeding on a human who carries the bacillus *Rickettsi prowazekii* infects the louse, which excretes the bacillus in its feces. The disease is transmitted to an uninfected human who scratches the louse bite, which itches, and rubs the feces into the wound. Symptoms develop after two weeks and include severe headache, a sustained high fever, cough, rash, severe muscle pain, chills, falling blood pressure, stupor, sensitivity to light and delirium. The bacterium was not identified until 1916 and a safe vaccine was not widely available until 1943.

On 22 November 1838, a full two months after the *William Rodger* arrived in Port Jackson, Sir George Gipps, Governor of the colony of New South Wales 1838-46, wrote to Lord Glenelg, the Scottish Politician who was Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, that the Buildings at the Quarantine ground (Fig. 2) were all occupied by the people of the *William Rodger* [2]. Then on 20 January 1839, two months later, Gipps wrote:

> "I have not judged it proper to issue Gratuities [as was the common practice on conclusion of a successful voyage] to the Surgeon of the *William Roger* … though as the Master of the *William Roger* died in Quarantine, I have not withheld his Gratuity from his Widow … the enterprise in which they engaged has been signally unfortunate."

On 4 January 1965 there was an historical article on page 13 of the *Sydney Daily Mirror*, which reminisced:

> On November 22, 1838, Governor Gipps wrote in a dispatch to London: "The sickness and mortality at the quarantine station is unexampled, no fewer than 140 persons having been attacked with typhus of the most malignant kind."

The *Daily Mirror* went on to say that the quarantine station, which was at Spring Cove, consisted of a couple of wooden shanties, a surgeon's cottage and a cluster of tents pitched among the scrub and sand-hills.

Six gravestones bear mute testimony to the disaster, although this count may have been premature (Fig. 3). We can see portions of Stones 1 and 4 with the names of some of the victims. Two other stones read as follows:

Fig. 3. Number 1, 2, 3 & 4 Stones ERECTED IN MEMORY Of the Deceas'd Passengers BY THE SHIP Wm. RODGER Which left Scotland 13 May & Arrived here 26th Sept. 1838. 6 Adults 10 Children Died during the Passage. 24 Adults & 5 Children Here in Quarantine. Cut by Thos. Wing.
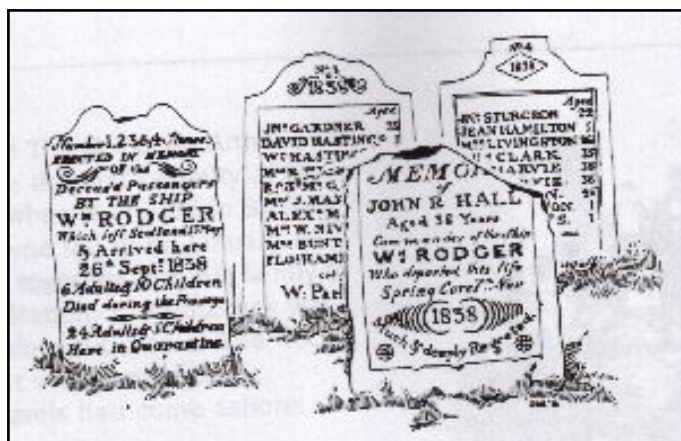
MEMORIAL OF JOHN R. HALL Aged 36 Years Commander of the Ship Wm. RODGER Who departed his life Spring Cove 7th Nov. 1838. Much and deeply regretted.

The name of this ship is spelled differently in various references. My second cousin Don McNaughton [3] searched microfilm and other documents on Australia's east coast and found it spelled Roger, Rogers and Rodger. He said Lloyd's Register listed it as *William Rodger*. The gravestones of those who died and are buried at the Manly Quarantine Station show the same spelling, so I have used that unless I am quoting someone who uses another spelling. The North Head Quarantine Station operated from 1832 to 1984 and is now home to a hotel, conference centre and restaurant complex known as Q Station, which has a gift shop, educational programs and even ghost tours. Twenty percent of the money spent is reinvested into long term conservation of this historic site.

RELEASE
When immigrants arrived in New South Wales they appeared before a Board appointed by the Governor to examine the testimonials of character they had to bring with them. If the documents were in order and the Board was satisfied that the immigrants would be useful members of society, certificates to that effect were granted. The certificates entitled settlers to the sums due to them under the assisted immigration scheme. The Agents' Immigration Lists provide name, age, sex, calling, marital status, native place and education. Agents had the responsibility of finding eligible immigrants, and a list of the immigrants was made before they sailed.

The certificates for the McNaughtons read as follows [4]:

> [Joh]n McNaughton, married male immigrant, Arrived by the Ship William Rogers. Brought out by Government. A Native of Edinburgh, Scotland. Son of Christian Ross of Dalketh, House keeper [Storekeeper?]. Calling Gardeners Labourer. Age on Embarkation 25 years. State of bodily health, strength and probable usefulness: Very good health. Religion: Church of Scotland. Remarks: Can read and write. Complains of shortage of water and sugar and general inattention of the Surgeon to their wants.
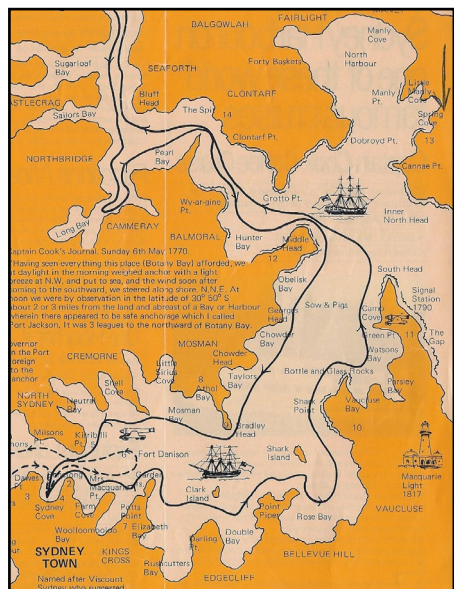>
> Agnes McNaughton married female immigrant. Arrived by the Ship William Rogers. Brought out by Government. A Native of Glasgow, Scotland. Daughter of Wm. & Jane Stirling of … Calling House Servant. Age on Embarkation 22 years in July 1838. State of bodily health, strength and probable usefulness: Very good health. Religion: Church of Scotland. Remarks: Can read only.
>
> Female, exceeding one and under fifteen years, Jan [1838?] 18 months.

Figure 3. Part of Port Jackson, showing Spring Cove (top right) and Sydney Cove (bottom left), from a flyer by Captain Cook Cruises, Sydney.

THE FIRST FLEET

On 13 May 1787, fifty-one years before the McNaughtons sailed from Greenock, Captain Arthur Phillip led a fleet of eleven ships out of Portsmouth, England, on what was to become one of the world's greatest sea voyages. On board were 16 officials and passengers, 324 crew, 247 marines, 46 marines' wives and children, 579 male convicts, 193 female convicts and 14 children of convicts. One month later they anchored off Tenerife to take on supplies before crossing the Atlantic to Rio de Janeiro, where they stayed a month. After stocking up at the Cape of Good Hope, they crossed the Southern Ocean and headed north around Van Diemen's Land.

The fleet arrived in Botany Bay between 18th and 20th January, 1788. Eleven vessels, carrying more than 1,400 people had traveled over 250 days for more than 15,000 miles (24,000 km) without losing a ship. Forty-eight people died (compare this with the voyage of the *William Rodger*—sixty people died from one ship). Arthur Phillip went exploring and discovered Port Jackson, 12 km to the north, "the finest harbor in the world, in which a thousand sail of the line may ride in the most perfect security." And so, on 26 January 1788, the settlement at Sydney Cove was started (Fig. 4).

The British Empire was riding high. A harsh penal code had created an unmanageable hoard of evil doers in England—such as poor people who would steal a loaf of bread to feed their families. The landed gentry came up with a brilliant scheme. Steal the largest island in the world from its indigenous inhabitants, scare off the acquisitive French and Dutch colonial powers, and use convict labor to build a new world.

Francis Greenway, an architect from Bristol, became bankrupt in 1809, and, in 1812, plead guilty to forging a financial document. He was sentenced to death, but this was commuted to fourteen years transportation. Admiral Arthur Phillip, retired in nearby Bath, recommended Greenway to Lachlan Macquarie, the governor of New South Wales. Greenway arrived in Sydney in 1814 and went on to design many significant buildings in the new colony, including the Hyde Park Barracks, which was built 1817-19 to house convicts. The building still exists, at the southern end of Macquarie Street, near Bent Street (Fig. 5).

Figure 4. Hyde Park Barracks, formerly Bent Street Barracks.

PORT PHILLIP

There was no convict settlement at Port Phillip, 600 miles to the south. This area had been claimed by two groups of businessmen from Van Diemen's Land and, although some convicts had been used and some freed convicts had arrived, there was a lot of opposition to such a presence. In May of 1837, Lord Glenelg directed that the sale of Crown lands at Port Phillip should be applied to the introduction of free emigrants, who would supply the demand for labour without the use of convicts [5]. In Port Phillip, average annual wages, in pounds, with board and lodging, were high—shepherds 35, hut keepers 30, bullock drivers 40, gardeners 40, storekeepers 35, boatmen 35 (John McNaughton worked at five of these six). Female servants were very much required as nurses, cooks, house servants and laundresses. On 1 October 1838 Sir George Gipps wrote Lord Glenelg that the settlement at Port Phillip was rapidly advancing, and that the first sale of land for agricultural purposes had taken place on September 12th. He recommended that two emigrant ships should be sent as soon as possible. The first such vessel was the barque *Hope*, owned by Daniel Egan.

The immigrants on board had been living in the Bent Street Barracks for more than a month after their arrival from Britain, but had been unable to find work in Sydney. James Denham Pinnock, the Government Immigration Agent, was instructed to offer them passage on the *Hope* to Port Phillip, and to evict from the barracks any who refused. Twenty families and three single men accepted the offer, making 103 in all, selected with "scrupulous attention to their health and physical fitness for work." It was not possible to get more because of the antipathy toward a second voyage, and many family members were still in quarantine. The list included John McNaughton 24 gardener, Agnes 22 servant, and Jane 1-1/2 child. The Immigration Office in Sydney issued a list on 16th December of those who had been inspected by Dr. Mollison M.D. and found to be in sufficient health to proceed by the *Hope* to Port Phillip.

The *Hope*, a 273-ton barque, had arrived in Sydney on 2 October 1838 under the command of Captain Hart. George Augustus Robinson was Chief Protector of Aborigines and was allocated four assistant protectors—James Dredge, Edward Parker, Charles Sievwright and William Thomas—who were appointed in England in 1838 and came on the *Hope*. It sailed from Sydney on 17 December and arrived in Port Phillip on 3 January with H. H. Greaves as master. The *Hope* was the same style as the *William Rodger*, but only 54% the tonnage.

This is not an easy passage. Even with all our modern technology, the 1998 Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race, on a similar route, ran into a disastrous storm. Only 44 of the 115 starters completed the race. Five boats sank, six sailors died, and 55 others had to be rescued by helicopter. Lloyd's Register shows seventy vessels named *Hope*, but only one at 273 tons. This was a barque built in 1827 in Dumbarton, on the northern bank of the Clyde, across from Greenock. Its owner and master was M'Cull'm. It belonged to the port of London and was destined for the Liverpool to Hobart Town voyage.

On 12th January 1839, John McNaughton was engaged by Thomas Watt, a carpenter, to be paid by the week. Early in 1838, Watt, a builder, constructed a punt to transport stock across the Yarra River at Melbourne (Fig. 6), apparently some distance upstream from the Falls at Queen Street (This was probably where Punt Road now crosses the Yarra, just east of the Royal Botanic Gardens) [6]. There was no Yarra bridge until 1845, and this was the first punt service, operated by ropes tied to trees on both banks. After some weeks, Watt asked permission to institute a regular service, and two other applicants followed—John Walsh and John Hodgson. All three were approved. William Lonsdale, who supervised the official founding of the settlement at Port Phillip, withdrew the permit to Watt in March 1839 after incidents of drunkenness. It is likely that John McNaughton operated the punt for Watt between January and March. Walsh took over Watt's punt, so McNaughton may have stayed on.

Figure 5. The first punt across the Yarra was operated by Thomas Watt, who gave John McNaughton his first job in Australia (W. F. E. Liardet watercolour, 1875, State Library of Victoria).
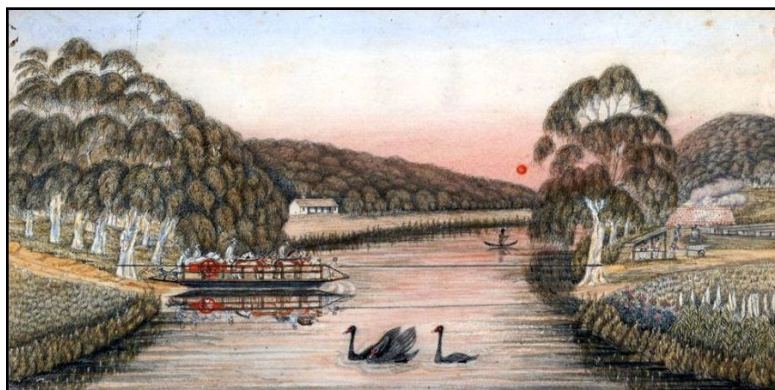
We hear that John McNaughton "first wrought at Heidelberg, then an agricultural settlement, supposed to be far in the bush, but he soon went further into the interior, and engaged in the service of Mr. (afterwards Sir Wm.) Mitchell, who was then making his place at Barfold, on the Campaspe. Mr. M'Naughton invested in working-horses. He was his own carter, and by the time that gold was discovered, in 1851, he had a good team, and was thus in circumstances to make money. Unlike many others, who threw away their all on a venture, this careful Scotchman carted to the goldfields, and at a time when teamsters received £1 per ton per mile in taking goods to Bendigo, his means steadily increased" [7]. When some of their children were baptized on 22 June 1851, John described himself as "Waterman," which may have meant he delivered water to the settlers. When his son Peter was born on 12 September 1857, John described himself as a carter.

CONCLUSION
John, Agnes and Jane McNaughton left Kirkintilloch, Scotland, on 17 May 1838, spent four-and-a-half months on the *William Rodger*, survived surveillance by pirates and a typhus epidemic, lived in a tented encampment at the Manly Quarantine Station for some weeks, transferred to the convict barracks at Bent Street for over a month, took another perilous sea voyage to Port Phillip, and started a new life. John helped raise eleven children, was a major fundraiser for the West

Melbourne Presbyterian Church and became a Justice of the Peace. He started a dynasty and has hundreds of descendants, many still living in Melbourne.

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