

James McNAB (1830-1890)

Evening Post 28 Dec 1869 Birth

On the 23rd inst., at Brook-street, the wife of Mr James McNab, of a son.

Wellington Independent 02 Apr 1873

To Let – Houses in Hobson street. Apply to James McNab, Gardener, Brook-street.

Wellington Independent 15 May 1874

City Council. The ordinary fortnightly meeting of the City Council was held last evening at the Provincial Chambers. The members present were The Mayor (in the chair), Councillors Moss, Barrett, Ramie, Greenfield, Krull, McKirdy, and Dransfield. Tenders for planting. The tenders for planting Kent and Cambridge Terraces were opened and referred to a committee to report upon them. The following were the tenders sent in: - Mr Budden (for the whole work), £210 14s; F. Mountier (for the whole work), £298; F. Cooper (for the whole work), £481 5s 6d; C. K. Jeffs, £75 for the plants and £6 per 100 for trenching and planting; J. McNab £49 30s (for planting trees only).

Evening Post 09 Apr 1879 Notice

James McNab begs to inform his Friends, Patrons, and the Public generally that, having purchased the Estate of the late Mr Ludlam, known as "Newry," and situated at the Lower Hutt, the same will, on and after Friday, the 11th inst., be opened as a public garden and recreation ground. Admisson, one shilling. Special arrangements with large parties.

Evening Post 01 Aug 1890

Mr James McNab, a colonist of some 30 years standing, died at his residence, Newry – better known as McNab's Gardens – Lower Hutt, shortly after nine o'clock this morning. The deceased, who was 60 years of age at the time of his death, was a native of Scotland, and landed at Port Nicholson some 30 years ago and started in business as a nurseryman on the site where now stands the Thorndon State School. About eleven years ago Mr McNab sold this Thorndon Nursery to the Government and purchased the gardens at the Lower Hutt, now known as McNab's, but which formerly belonged to the late Mr Ludlam. Mr McNab was stricken with paralysis about two years ago, since which time he has been almost a confirmed invalid. It was not, however, until about ten days ago that the illness which ended fatally today necessitated his taking to his bed. The deceased was an unassuming man, but he possessed many sterling qualities which attracted the friendship of most persons with whom he came in contact. He leaves a widow, a son, and a daughter to deplore their loss.

Evening Post 02 Aug 1890

Funeral Notice. The Friends of the late Mr. James M'Nab are respectfully informed that his Funeral will take place tomorrow (Sunday), 3rd August, 1890, to leave his residence, 'Newry', Lower Hutt, for the Presbyterian Church-yard, Blackbridge, Hutt, at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. Joseph Hall, Undertaker. Lower Hutt, 2nd August.

Wanganui Herald 01 May 1891

Thorndon, March 20... Have you ever been to McNab's? If not make a point of seeing these fine gardens on your next visit here. A railway ride of half-an-hour brings you to the Lower Hutt station, where a coach is always in waiting. Then a ride, or, if you prefer it, a walk of about a mile through quiet country roads, and you are at this famed resort, where, in a certain octagonal summer-house, you may read the names of all the vandals in the country. (Not content with scoring their ugly hieroglyphics on every inch of space in the summer-house, these pests have actually begun their ravages on the lovely old Nikau palms, bad scran to them!)

You will find little to note on the way, save that the valley seems very fertile, and the bridge which spans the driblet they call a river (they are hard up for rivers here) is much in need of fresh planking; but the gardens will repay you. Originally the property of the late Mr Ludlam, M.L.C., they passed, many years back, with the picturesque and commodious residence, into the possession of the late Mr James McNab, the figure being, I believe, somewhere about £6,000. The new proprietor devoted them to the use of the public, and though, unhappily, he is now no more, his genial widow carries on his projects, and the humblest member of the community may still regale his eyes and nostrils for the modest sum of one shilling sterling. The gardens are beautifully laid out, and, even at this late season of the year, are gay with colour and rich in perfumes. They are very well kept, and the newest varieties of flowering plants and shrubs blent in sweet profusion under the shade of spreading nikaus, punga ferns, and other graceful plants of semi-tropical origin, while beautiful trees – native and imported – effectively disposed, offer abundance of shade, which, however, never becomes somber. Oh! visit these gardens, by all means, and don't forget to call at the house for a cup of tea.

You will find it new-brewed, nicely served, and very refreshing; and, what is more, you may have the luck – as we had – to be shown into a room where hangs a genuine "Rembrandt!" Yes, really! Such was our good fortune, a slice of luck I certainly never could have anticipated there. While enjoying the "cheering cup" my friend and I noted and discussed the portrait of a youthful-looking lady adorning the centre of the opposite wall. She was clad in a terra-cotta robe of the fashion of two or three centuries since, worn over a snowy chemisette.

Over the shoulders a dark cloak had been carelessly thrown, and in the shadow of its heavy folds two tiny hands nestled. The figure was turned half away from the light, which however streamed over the left shoulder, just touching the rounded chin, and gleaming redly on the terra-cotta edge of the wide-brimmed hat. The face, in profile, showed regular features, a tiny mouth, and a sweetly serious blue eye. The chestnut hair was (so far as we could see for the hat) coiled about the crown, the short hair by the neck, and about the small ears forming soft little curls. The colouring was at once rich and mellow, the shadows deep and the lights high; the rays which shot athwart the figure making the white dazzling, and the dull terracotta rosy red, seeming veritable shafts from the living sun. The painting was evidently the work of a master: but though the date – 1631 [sic] – was plain enough, we could not make out the



Wife of Rembrandt - Saskia van Uylenburgh
Painting attributed to Carel Fabritius, a student of Rembrandt

signature. Later on, when I complimented the mistress of the house on her good fortune in owing such a fine picture, she, apparently not displeased at our interest, gave us, with pardonable pride, the name of the illustrious painter, and we instantly returned to the room to verify the information. The name was plain enough now, with the addition of "Fme." It was a portrait of Rembrandt's wife, and the canvas bears his own stamp on the back. It appears the picture and its companion (a portrait of Rembrandt himself), were disposed of in a raffle here many years since, and Mrs McNab was so lucky as to draw the wife, while the husband fell to the lot of a Southern gentleman, and so the illustrious pair were divorced.

Fortunately, Mrs McNab is a very intelligent woman, who is quite aware of the value of her treasure, for in the Old Country she had opportunities of viewing noble galleries, and noting how they were esteemed by their patrician possessors. And here I may mention a curious example of picture renovation, which seems to afford indubitable proof of the painting's genuineness. It appears that in the great gallery to which Mrs McNab at one time had access (I forget now whose, although she did mention the owner – perhaps Earl Dudley, with whom her late husband was sometime gardener), she had often seen a painting exactly like the one she was lucky enough to win, save that in the latter the broad lights which characterize the works of Rembrandt were wanting, the whole being dark as with a thick coating of smoke-grime. She knew the former was an original work, and knew her own bore the master's stamp; but what had become of the lights? She pondered the question long, and inspected her new possession closely, and at last one day, placing it face upwards on the floor, she took yellow soap, a nail-brush, and a pan of hot water, and, baring her arms, prepared for a wrestle with the dust of ages. After a "thorough scrubbin'," to use her own phrase, she wiped it dry, and beheld, to her joy, the 'fde simile' of the portrait she had known so well of old. The "restoration" process does not seem to have injured the painting, which, despite its mellowness of tone, looks as fresh as it executed fifty instead of two hundred and fifty years ago. Madge."

Evening Post 22 Feb 1896

Auction sale of the celebrated McNab's Gardens, Lower Hutt. Important to the Government, Public Bodies, Speculators, Capitalists, and the general public. The most valuable, scientific, and ornamental garden and grounds in the Colony. In the Exchange Auction Room, No. 84, Lambton Quay, Wellington, on Monday, 9th March, 1896, At 2.30 p.m. T Kennedy MacDonald & Co. (Limited) are favoured with instructions from Mrs. M'NAB, in consequence of her health necessitating her retirement from business, to sell by public auction, as above - The magnificent property at the Lower Hutt so long and well-known as McNab's Gardens. This grand property contains some thirty-four and a half acres of the richest and Most Fertile Land in the celebrated Hutt Valley, having frontages to the Waiwetu road and White's Line, and a small tributary of the River Hutt known as the Opahu, or M'Nab's Creek. It is divided as follows Nine acres as Scientific and Ornamental Garden Two Acres as Orchard One Acre as Kitchen Garden One Acre in Original Native Bush And nearly Twenty-two Acres of Grass Paddocks, generally utilised for Picnic, Cricket, and Football Parties Fronting the Magnificent Lawn stands the Family Residence, upon which over £1,000 has been recently expended. It is built in the Elizabethan style, and with its Cathedral glass, leaded windows, and quaint gables, has a delightful old-fashioned look. It contains 20 rooms, including drawing-room, two large and lofty dining-rooms, capable of dining 80 guests, breakfast-room, bedrooms, &c. Attached to the residence is a large conservatory, beautifully furnished with rare plants. There is also a vinery, filled with special varieties of vine; complete and compact Stables, containing 17 loose boxes, harness rooms, coach-house, dairy, cottage, wash-houses, photographic-room, and all the necessary conveniences for so large an establishment. A splendid artesian well, 68ft deep, gives an unlimited supply of the purest water. The stables are greatly used in connection with the meetings of the Wellington Racing Club, whose grounds are within a short distance of the property. The history of the property is an exceedingly interesting one. The land was selected by the late Mr. Ludlam, M.H.R., some 50 years ago, as the most choice spot on which to establish a unique home. For some 30 years he devoted a large capital and the best experience to creating a Great Scientific and

Ornamental Garden. Every country was laid under contribution for trees, shrubs, and plants. No botanist in Great Britain, Europe, America, Africa, and India, but was acquainted with Mr. Ludlam and his desires. Every collector was pressed into the service with the happiest results. The rarest and most beautiful of Nature's treasures were transferred from distant climes to the lovely property in the Hutt Valley, until the reputation of the Gardens as one of the most extensive and valuable botanical collections of living plants became world-wide. Each succeeding year has shown how completely this work of collection was done, because no year has yet passed without the Garden displaying some new floral attraction - a rare tree or plant flowering for the first time in 30 or 40 years.

It is stated that the late Mr. Ludlam spent some £25,000 upon the property. After Mr. Ludlam's death, the property was purchased by the late Mr. James M'Nab for use as a public garden. Mr. M'Nab's experience as a high class practical horticulturist enabled him to greatly improve and beautify the property. Since his death his widow has continued the management, which has, however, now overtaxed her strength and compels her to retire, hence the sale. No public garden in the colony is so well known as M'Nab's. Thousands of persons visit it every year, and none without the profoundest admiration. Nowhere else is seen the same giant rhododendrons and camellias, in hundreds of varieties, with their magnificence of bloom, while the orange and lemon trees, in fruit and flower, stand side by side with the rare Brachychitor (the Flame tree), the Jacaranda Mimosaefolia, the Strelitzia Regina, the Erythrina Crystagalli, the Macadamia Tenuifolia, the sweet-scented tropical Magnolias, and the thousand and one rarities in flowering shrubs which make the Gardens the most delightful of places to visit. Suggestions have been made to Mrs M'Nab to subdivide the property, and some 15 acres of the grass paddocks could be sold without detriment to the beauty and usefulness of the Gardens, but to cut up a property like this, and risk the destruction of a single one of the rarities it contains, would be a national loss, which should not be permitted.

This magnificent Property would make a fitting home for a great University, while in the gardens would be found one of the most valuable adjuncts in connection with the scientific Botany of such an institution, or of a great State Forest Department. No greater boon could be conferred upon the community than the purchase of such a valuable estate as this by a public-hearted citizen, and its presentation to the people. To the ordinary Investor the Property appeals strongly from another standpoint. The gross receipts from the sale of flowers and plants, and the charges paid by visitors represent an income of fully — 31000 per annum, while the value of the Property, taken in hand and run on Continental or American lines, would be enormously increased. It must always be remembered that M'Nab's is the favourite outing, not only for all tourists visiting the Empire City but that on holidays, Sundays and week days it is always a source of enormous attraction to a large proportion of the 40,000 people of Wellington. Easy terms can be arranged for the purchase money, and a large proportion of it can lie on mortgage, if desired, at a low rate of interest. For further details, cards view, and conditions of sale, apply to Messrs. Brandon & Hislop, Solicitors, Featherston Street.

Evening Post 26 May 1896 Death of Mrs McNab

We regret to announce the sudden death, at the age of 53, of Mrs McNab, relict of the late Mr James McNab, who established the well-known gardens at the Lower Hutt. The deceased had suffered from heart disease for some years. When she retired on Sunday night she was in excellent spirits, but she was found lying dead on the bedroom floor at an early hour yesterday. Mrs McNab was born in Perthshire, Scotland, and arrived in Wellington 28 years ago, being shortly afterwards married to Mr McNab, who died in 1890. Deceased was a lady of many estimable qualities, and was widely esteemed. A son and a daughter, both grown up, survive her. An inquest is to be held.

At an enquiry held yesterday afternoon by the Coroner concerning the death of Mrs McNab at the Lower Hutt, evidence was given to the effect that when deceased retired to bed on Sunday night she was apparently in good health. Next morning her door was found to be locked, but, as she was in the habit of remaining in bed when she did not feel well, no anxiety was at first felt. Towards evening Mr R. A. McNab, son of the deceased, entered the room by means of a duplicate key, and found his mother dead, lying face downwards on the floor. Dr Purdy stated that death was due to failure of the heart's action, and that deceased must have been dead some 12 or 18 hours before she was discovered. The jury returned a verdict accordingly.

Funeral Notice. The Friends of the late Catherine M'Nab are respectfully invited to attend her Funeral, which will leave her late residence, M'Nab's Gardens, Lower Hutt, on Wednesday, 27th May, 1896, at 2.30 p.m., for the Knox Church Cemetery. Joseph Hall, Undertaker, Lower Hutt.

Evening Post 28 May 1896

The remains of the late Mrs McNab were interred yesterday in the Knox Church Cemetery, Hutt. There was a large attendance of mourners, including a number of Wellington residents, and several beautiful wreaths were sent. The Rev Messrs Gray and Thompson read the burial service.

Evening Post 11 Jun 1896

Messrs A. G. Taine & Co. announce an important sale in the estate of the late Mrs McNab, having been instructed by the executors to offer the whole of the household furniture and effects at the residence, McNab's Gardens, Lower Hutt. The sale takes place on Monday next at 11 o'clock, and as the estate has to be wound up every article will be disposed of.

Evening Post 12 Jun 1896

Monday 15th and Tuesday 16th June at 11 o'clock each day. Important sale of first-class household furniture at McNab's, Lower Hutt. In the Estate of the late Mrs McNab - A. G. Taine & Co. have received instructions from the Executors in the Estate of the late Mrs McNab to sell at the house, McNab's Gardens, Hutt, on above date the whole of the household furniture and effects, which are in capital order and condition, including:- Drawing-room: Velvet pile carpet, piano by Broadwood, dining and card tables, rugs, mats, couches, curtains, chairs, ornaments, &c., &c. Breakfast-room: Brussels carpet, oval table and chenille cover, couch, patent invalid's chair, occasional and Austrian chairs, pier-glass, curtains, automatic theatre, pictures, skin and other rugs, mats, ornaments, &c. Hall: Good hall-stand, swing lamp, linoleum, barometers, pictures, ornaments, stair carpet and rods Dining-room No.1: Telescope and other tables, horsehair suite, Austrian and other chairs, mahogany sideboard, writing desk, workboxes, linoleum, handsome mirror, pictures, ornaments, hearthrug and coal scuttle &c. Dining-room No.2: Good table, Austrian chairs, Scotch chest honeysuckle front, octagon tables, curtains, ornaments, pictures, cheffonier, glass, crockery, &c. Contents of 11 bedrooms comprising: Brass-mounted and other bedsteads, spring and wire mattresses, chenille, lace, and art curtains, Brussels, tapestry, and Kidderminster carpets, 30 pairs blankets, sheets, counterpanes, pillowslips, pillows, linoleum, &c. Kitchen: Good table, linoleum, Austrian chairs, pots, pans, crockery, &c. Cottage: Mattresses, sheets, blankets, counterpanes, &c. Stock &c. 5 cows, good; double-seated buggy, 2 horses, harness, 30 pairs fowls, 20 pairs ducks, 2 monkeys, opossum, 3 tons hay, tools (garden and otherwise). Conservatory: Rare plants and blooms of all sorts - a good lot. Also a quantity of preserves, eating and cooking apples, and a miscellaneous lot of goods, too numerous to mention.

Evening Post 16 Jun 1896

Messrs A. G. Taine & Co. report that they held a large and very successful sale of the furniture and effects at McNab's Gardens yesterday (in the estate of the late Mrs McNab). The attendance was enormous. Mr Taine, who wielded the hammer got through over 400 lots at prices that could not but be extremely satisfactory to the executors.

Evening Post 18 Jun 1896

McNab's Gardens. Preliminary Announcement. Mrs W. F. Ross, Proprietress. This popular resort is now open to receive visitors. Afternoon Tea as usual. Admission, 6d.

The Press 12 Apr 1907

The discovery of neglected art treasures in New Zealand threatens to become epidemic. News of the Dunedin Watteau and Turner is followed by intelligence of a Christchurch Rembrandt. A picture which is thought to be a genuine work of the great Dutch painter of the seventeenth century is in the possession of Mr R. A. McNab, of this city. It is a portrait of a lady, and bears the signature "Rembrandt," and the date "1631." The picture measures about 2ft by 3ft, and is in a good state of preservation. Mr McNab states that the picture was bought by his mother at a sale of furniture and effects of a gentleman who resided in Fitzherbert terrace, Wellington. This was thirty-six years ago, when the present owner of the picture was an infant. His father, the late Mr James McNab, founder and proprietor of the well-known McNab's Gardens at the Hutt, was annoyed when he learnt the price his better half had given for a dusty and neglected old painting, but when its former owner offered him £20 on his bargain he decided to keep it. The picture remained for many years at the late Mr McNab's residence in the famous gardens, and on his death it passed into the possession of his son, who brought it to Christchurch with him some years ago. The family always recognized that the painting might be of considerable value, but having no pressing reason for investigation, they left it hanging quietly on their walls, first at the Hutt and afterwards in Christchurch. Recently Mr McNab invited Mr A. A. Longden, the superintendent of the British art exhibit at the International Exhibition, to inspect the picture. Mr Longden, after a careful examination, stated that the picture was of considerable value. For purpose of insurance he valued it at from £250 to £300, but added that it might, on investigation, prove to be worth a much larger sum. The picture has been removed by Mr McNab to a place of safe keeping, but he has not yet decided what to do with it. It has been seen by a number of local artists, and the Canterbury Art Society has offered to hang it in its exhibition in May and June. There can be no doubt that, if the picture is a genuine and original Rembrandt, it is worth thousands of pounds. By the courtesy of Mr McNab, a representative of this journal was enabled to see the picture yesterday afternoon. It is a portrait of the head and bust of a young woman, with regular and beautiful features, a fair complexion and blue eyes. The face is seen in profile. The dress is soft red and is partly covered by a dark brown cloak. Some white linen or silk, forming a portion of another garment, partially covers one shoulder. This material is deeply pleated, and the paint may have been laid with a palette-knife – an occasional habit of Rembrandt. A hat of sombrero shape of the same shade as the dress, and decorated with a feather, completes the costume. The lady holds a small flower in her hand. The colouring, though not bright, is clear, and does not seem to the ordinary observer to bear evidence of the supposed age of the picture. Nor can the picture have suffered much from the soap and scrubbing brush which were vigorously applied to it by the late Mrs James McNab in trying to make her purchase more acceptable in the eyes of her canny husband. The present frame was put on several years ago, to the order of the owner, the old one having become almost rotten. Mr Longden, when seen by our reporter, had nothing to add to these statements. He declined to commit himself in regard to the value of the picture, but said that Rembrandts, when offered at the regular picture sales, had sometimes fetched thousands of pounds, and sometimes only hundreds. Rembrandt Harmens van Rijn, the chief of the Dutch school of painting, and one of the greatest painters the world has seen, was born in Leyden in 1607. He began to learn painting in his twelfth year, and continued to labour unremittingly in his art throughout his life. He was great in portraits, in landscapes, and in Biblical subjects, and was very industrious and successful in etching. His high position in European art rests on the originality of his mind, the power of his imagination, his profound sympathy with his subjects, the boldness of his system of light and shade, the thoroughness of his modelling, his subtle colour, and above all, the intense humanity of the man. He has been called the 'Shakespeare of Holland.' He painted numerous portraits of himself, his mother, his sister and his wife, and in the forty long years of his incessant activity as an artist, about 700 pictures are known to have come from his own hand. He took up his residence in Amsterdam about 1631, and was married to his first wife three years later. His life has few incidents, and these only personal, as he seems to have been absorbed in his work and to have moved only among the two classes of burghers and artists to which he belonged.

Although he must have gained a considerable income by his art, he became a bankrupt in 1656, from what causes is not clearly known. He died in 1669, having outlived his popularity, as a new style of painting had come into vogue.

The Truth 19 Apr 1907

Mr R. A. McNab, of Christchurch, who is the lucky possessor of a picture said by competent critics to be a real Rembrandt, is naturally very pleased with himself, as well he might be. A Christchurch "Press" representative who viewed the picture describes it as follows: - "It is a portrait of the head and bust of a young woman, with regular and beautiful features, a fair complexion and blue eyes. The face is seen in profile. The dress is a soft red and is partly covered by a dark brown cloak. Some white linen or silk, forming a portion of another garment, partially covers one shoulder. This material is deeply pleated, and the paint may have been laid with a palette-knife – an occasional habit of Rembrandt. A hat of sombrero shape of the same shade as the dress, and decorated with a feather, completes the costume. The lady holds a small flower in her hand. The colouring, though not bright, is clear, and does not seem to the ordinary observer to bear evidence of the supposed age of the picture.

The Star 18 May 1907

The Friends of the late Robert Alexander McNab are invited to attend his Funeral, leaving the Criterion Hotel, Gloucester Street, on Sunday, the 19th inst., at _ p.m., for interment at Linwood Cemetery. J. Lamb and Son.