

Extract from ‘Mary MacKillop & Flora, Correspondence between Mary MacKillop and her mother, Flora McDonald MacKillop’, pages 180-189, edited by Sheila McCreanor. Rewritten with permission.

Part five – Flora’s death

Newspaper reports

The following extract is from a booklet published after Flora’s death which collected various media reports related to the incident. ³².

**DEATH AND OBSEQUIES OF
MRS. MACKILLOP
Drowned in the wreck of the “Ly-ee-Moon”
30th May 1886
AGED 70 YEARS
A DISTRESSING CALAMITY**

(The Sydney Freeman’s Journal, June 5.)

The wreck of the Ly-ee-Moon has brought sorrow and woe into many a home in Sydney. The loss of life is simply appalling, and the death by drowning of Mrs. MacKillop, the mother of the amiable and saintly head of one of our city convents, is a peculiarly sad feature of the deplorable disaster. Mrs. Flora Hannah MacKillop (one of the drowned saloon passengers), whose maiden name was McDonald, was a native of Invernesshire, Scotland, and arrived in Victoria in 1839, and married the late Mr. Alexander MacKillop. There were eight children by the marriage, and three are living –viz., Mother Mary, Superiores of the Sisters of St. Joseph (St Joseph’s Providence), Sydney; Father Donald MacKillop, SJ, at present in England, and Miss MacKillop, residing in Victoria. Sister Mary, of the Sacred Heart, who died three years ago at Abbotsford, Melbourne, was also a daughter of the deceased lady. Mrs. MacKillop was on her way to Sydney to assist at the Caledonian stall in connection with the bazaar now being held at the New Masonic Hall in aid of the Providence Home for destitute old and infirm women and destitute children. She was bringing with her parcels of work to be disposed of at the stall at which she would have assisted for the benefit of the cause. Though within three days of the 70 years of age, Mrs. MacKillop was still active, and her amiable and self-sacrificing disposition endeared her to all who knew her. When the

³² This document (Unknown 1886) is held in the archives of the Sisters of St Joseph North Sydney.

news reached Sydney, on Monday, Mother Mary was at the Masonic Hall preparing for the opening of the bazaar.

Several Sisters, hearing of the calamity, and knowing Mrs. MacKillop was among the lost, devised means by which Mother Mary might be taken back to the institution and thereby be spared the shock that the sudden news must have caused.

On arriving at St. Joseph's Providence, Father Murlay, S.M., tenderly revealed the sad facts, the Very Rev Dr. Carroll V.G., the Very Rev J. Dalton, S.J., of Riverview College, the Very Rev Dr. Sheridan, V.G., and many others, including many Protestants who were acquainted with Mrs. MacKillop and her family, called to offer sincere sympathy and condolence. Mother Mary, who was anxiously awaiting the arrival of her poor dear Mother, bore the terrible news bravely, and she is now being sustained in a terrible ordeal by her own Christian resignation and by the tender sympathies and consolations of friends of all denominations. The deceased lady was a worthy member of one of the good old Scots families – the clan McDonald – who kept the faith in the land of Bruce and Wallace.

Those who knew her well speak of her as a sweet, amiable, good-natured creature, charitable in thought, word, and deed, intensely devoted to her religion, and withal a truly lovable woman, who ruled her life by the strictest principles of virtue, self sacrifice, and integrity. Among those who are most deeply concerned the grief and sorrow inspired by the awful calamity are naturally, intense, and even outside those circles which have felt the touch of this affliction keenly and personally, there are few who, with a knowledge of the distressing circumstances of her death will withhold that sympathy and charity so tenderly and so beautifully expressed in the familiar prayer of our Church, "Eternal rest grant unto her, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon her".

Extracts from an article in the Sydney Freeman's Journal June 12 [1886]

...It was only natural that those nearest and dearest to the deceased lady should have been disturbed and troubled beyond human expression by the thought of her lifeless form being tossed about in the wild cruel sea, and it is not difficult to imagine how great must have been the joy even in the midst of so much sorrowing, when the telegram came from the scene of the wreck, telling not only of the realization of a loving prayer, but of the wonderful finding of the body with the fondly cherished Scapulars around the neck, and of the still more wonderful preservation of it from disfigurement of any kind...

Mrs. MacKillop's was the only body recovered by the pilot steamer Captain Cook last week ... and when Constable Davis brought the remains to Eden, and before there had been any identification, a good Catholic woman, Mrs. Power, whose attention was attracted by the Scapulars, immediately made a request to be allowed to take care of the remains....

Captain Webber identified the body the day it was brought to Eden, and the next day it was identified by Mr. John McDonald, a nephew of the deceased lady, who had gone down from Sydney. ...Mrs. McDonald affectionately watching over his precious burden, reached Sydney on Sunday morning in the S.S. Allowrie, the steamer coming up the harbour with her flag "half-mast," as a tribute of respect. Mr. Fogarty, Mrs. Charles O'Neill. Mr. Morrissey, and other friends received the remains on behalf of Mother Mary, and had them carried to St Joseph's Providence, where a loving watch was kept all day in one of the large rooms, specially draped and festooned for the occasion. In the evening the remains were taken into the adjoining church, St. Michael's, it having been arranged that the requiem and Office should be celebrated there on the following morning.³³

...The Absolution having been pronounced, the coffin, with all its wealth of flowers, including all those brought with the remains from Eden, was borne through the church and through two lines formed of the children of the Providence Home, neatly dressed in white with black badges, to the hearse which stood in the street. The funeral, which was under the direction of Mr. Dixon, moved on immediately afterwards for the picturesque burial ground adjoining St. Charles' Church, Ryde, and which, being the cemetery of the Sisters of St. Joseph, was appropriately selected as the last resting place of the venerable lady whose life was good and beautiful, in virtue, humility and sacrifice.

³³ This would probably have been the 7th June 1886

1 June 1886 – Mary to her sister, Annie

JMJ

St Joseph's Providence
Sydney

May Jesus and Mary be praised.

My dearest Annie,

God help us all. The hand of God is heavy upon us, but His holy Will must be done. Oh, Annie, I had so yearned to see her again, and all the Sisters were planning to make her visit a bright and happy one. Poor, dear, long-suffering Mamma. I am sure she has gone to a well-deserved rest and will no longer have to feel her dependent position.

She has had no end of Masses today and more will be continued during the week. Father Dalton came to break the news to me. Neither the present Vicar nor the late one, could do it, so they got the dear old man to come instead. But another priest had been before him. Today so many of them have been calling, also nuns and kind lady friends. God grant our darling mother's body may be recovered. Captain Trouton telegraphed at once to the authorities to spare neither care nor expense in trying to recover it, and if they succeed, Jack will go for it. Poor dear Mamma. Oh, I do hope we find her body yet.

How are you, my poor Annie? I hope you will bear up under this severe affliction. Was it my letter to you that decided her to come? I fear it was, and this adds to my bitter sorrow. We are trying to keep it from Uncle who has gone home with Aunt, but poor Flora and Maggie had to remain at their post (the Bazaar opened yesterday.)

The sisters got me home, and then got good Father Murlay to break the sad news to me. I am like one in a dream since. A telegram has just come from Fr Haggerty and Fr O'Donoghue, Sale. Poor Mamma saw them lately.

Father Cummings was here this morning. I think he said he would write to you. How are Uncle and Aunt? Give them my love.

Now, my own dear Annie, accept this heavy bitter trial as our dear departed mother would counsel were she alive. Write and tell me how you are. I shall send news as soon as it comes. All I can say is that I hope for the best.

With fondest, love. My dearest Sister, ever believe me

Your poor sister in JMJ

Mary of the Cross

3 June 1886 – Annie MacKillop to Mary

Wynwould

My dear Mary,

It is so hard to write yet when everything is so miserable, but you must be consoled. Our dear Mother was most anxious to go over on account of poor Uncle Donald, and the same evening that your letter came, one came from Flora, and it too had a great deal to do with deciding her. I also thought that the change would do her good, and Uncle Donald also encouraged her. I know how you must feel, but am sure that you need blame nothing but her great love for you and Uncle Donald and her wish for the success of the Bazaar. She was bringing a lot more of her own work. I cannot say how I feel, only my head seems to be getting stupid, but it would be some little consolation if her dear body was found, no matter how. Nothing can ever console me if it is not and I would give anything to be able to go to the place myself. I need not say more; you must know and feel the same. The suspense before I heard from you was terrible. If John could only see the man who got through the porthole, and hear if he had seen her³⁴. I know how calmly she would commend her soul to God, but keep seeing it happen so many different ways.

Poor Uncle Peter heard it in town; it was dreadful for him, poor Aunt Julia told me, and afterwards, the servants thought she was going too. It is so hard, and I was always praying that she would have some comfort in her old age, and sometimes dreaded so that anything should happen to her. I pity Donald so much. He has not written for so long. I know that she will have many prayers, but don't feel she could require much, she was so good and holy. I can only pray for the recover of the body in any way. Please thank the Sisters for all their kindness. I know how they will try to cheer you. Ask them to pray for

Your fond sister
Annie MacKillop

³⁴ This reference is to their cousin, John McDonald who went to Eden to identify the body and bring it to Sydney for burial.

A continuation of the same letter

Thursday evening

Dear Mary

I could not write yesterday and am so sorry if I seemed unmindful of you. Your telegram³⁵ has relieved me of the great horror I had, and makes me more resigned to God's holy will. I feel more sure of our dear Mother's being in Heaven than I did even of Lexie's. It will be dreadful for you these few days to come, even though a comfort. I feel I can pray now. All our friends are so kind. I shall write very soon and feel sure that you will keep up bravely. I wish I were there but will be in spirit. It is terribly sad, too for poor John. Pray a lot when you can for dear Aunt Julia who is terribly upset but always thinking of me and others. I fear for the effects of the shock on her. It has been hard on her and poor Uncle Peter. I have been spared everything and know I have been selfish. I have had so many kind messages and letters. Everyone loved her but she is happy though we must suffer. Forgive my neglecting you for so long and pray for

Your fond sister,
Annie MacKillop

PS Father Cahill has just come. Don't think my letter or messages cold, dear Mary.

I can never write as I feel

³⁵ *This must have contained the news that Flora's body had been recovered.*

17 June 1886 – Mary to her brother, Donald MacKillop SJ

JMJ

St Joseph's Providence
Cumberland Street
Sydney

May Jesus and Mary be praised.

My dearest brother,

How can I write? You must ere this have heard from Adelaide of our sad, our terrible loss. Everything was to bewildering at first, then the efforts to recover the dear remains, the funeral, and then came the reaction. Between all, you, for whose sorrow my heart ached, have been seemingly neglected by me. But don't think so, dear Donald. Our darling unselfish mother, true to her character to the last, has gone to receive her well-earned reward. It was sad, very sad, that she should go as she did, but we must hope that her reward is great in proportion. I cannot now attempt to describe the dismay with which I heard the sad news. It was too terrible to be true, but its truth was too soon proved. Fortunately, John was here, and he went down. He found the dear remains awaiting him. Hers was the only body picked up by the pilot boat, and the only body found anywhere without being injured by either the rocks or the sharks. The scapular she had so loved was on her neck. How it remained on seems miraculous and is, I believe. John says she looked as if she were asleep.

I had sent lead down with John, so he was able to have a proper coffin prepared, and all that remained of our darling mother was brought back to us. The Office for the Dead and the Requiem were beautiful. 40 priests attended and did all the singing. I had to break the news to dear Uncle Donald, only telling of her death and that John had gone to bring her to us to be buried in our own ground. His mind is now so weak that he does not ask questions. I believe the knowledge of the true kind of death she had would kill him. He felt what he did hear terribly, but bore up well – was able to attend the Mass and funeral (we took him out during the sermon) and has visited the grave one since. A Sister tells me that, when Mamma was over last, she told this Sister that she liked Ryde cemetery so much that, if she could have her such, she would be buried there. It is a dear little Catholic cemetery; some day you will see it and dear mother's grave.

I have been very ill and only up to write this, but next mail will tell more. The account in the "Freeman" is very good - I send you and Father Christie on each. Not being sure of your address, I send this to his care. Annie has had a terrible shock. I send her last letter. Uncle Peter will be back in a month.

Now, my dear Donald, bear up. You have a sweet consolation, you can offer the Holy Sacrifice for her. I don't think she needs prayers; still, we won't forget them. Longing to hear from you and with fondest love, believe me.

Your fond sister in JMJ

Mary of the Cross