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State Records of New South Wales, Australia

# ‘A theatrical meteor,’ Francis Nesbitt McCron (c.1807-1853) and his travels from the Old World to the Australian colonies and the San Francisco goldfields

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*“A theatrical meteor, shooting about between the colonies,” so was Francis Nesbitt McCron described. Nesbitt rose from being a stock actor in England and Ireland to becoming the leading tragedian of Australian colonial theatre in the 1840s. His wanderings commenced in 1843, taking him to Launceston, Hobart, Melbourne and Adelaide. In 1849 they led him to the Californian goldfields and back again. Though his successes were many his flaws plagued him. In 1853 Nesbitt, the “great tragedian,” died suddenly in Geelong in tragic circumstances. Nesbitt’s career shows the up and downs that actors faced as touring players in an emergent global theatrical circuit, and the rather controversial position of the theatre in mid-nineteenth Australian society. Janette Pelosi is a professional archivist, historian and a director of the Society of Australian Genealogists. She has worked at State Records NSW for over 20 years where she became interested in colonial theatre history.*

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“**A** theatrical meteor, shooting about between the colonies, of no steadfastness of purpose, bothering himself little as to what the morrow would bring forth, a good fellow and well liked, it was regrettable that one of his undoubted ability was sadly deficient in the brain ballast so necessary for a fortunate trip through the world.”<sup>1</sup> So wrote Edmund Finn, better known as

'Garryowen', one time Melbourne theatre critic, of Francis Nesbitt (*nom-de-théâtre* of Francis Nesbitt McCron).<sup>2</sup> Born in Manchester but raised in Ireland, Nesbitt rose from being a stock actor in the English theatre to being hailed in Sydney as "the best tragic actor in the southern hemisphere".<sup>3</sup> He excelled as Rolla, William Tell and Othello as well as appearing in many popular roles. His theatrical travels took him to Sydney in 1842 from where he toured to Melbourne, Hobart, Launceston and Adelaide. In 1849 he sailed to San Francisco to make his fortune – not on the goldfields, but in the theatres being established there. He returned to the Sydney stage in 1851 and died suddenly in 1853, aged in his 40s, while performing at Geelong in Victoria.

Nesbitt's story is one of highs and lows, of a man who was hailed as the great tragedian of his day but whose own life ended tragically. Following the death of Joseph Wyatt in 1860 it was said that Nesbitt "might well have shone as 'a bright particular star' even on the stage of 'old Drury'" and "had he taken care of himself might now be Brooke's rival".<sup>4</sup> He enacted Shakespeare "with the happiest conception of the great author whom he interpreted".<sup>5</sup> He appeared much like William Macready

but it was only when surrounded by scenery, in the glare of the footlights, and dressed in Shaksperian attire that the resemblance was perceptible, but in a room and in his ordinary apparel all likeness ... vanished ... a highly intellectual man was all that you observed, although, he trod the carpet, much as he did the stage, and talked in a deep tragedy tone. Nesbitt, however, poor fellow flung away his opportunities and expatriated himself.<sup>6</sup>

Brewer tells us Nesbitt's stage "presence was good, his voice very full and telling, and his knowledge of stage business and vocal inflection was beyond the ordinary standard" but he was not original in his conception, sticking closely to conventional character interpretation and carrying away his audience "more by vehemence than by subtlety of acting".<sup>7</sup> He was a "great favourite with the public; although, latterly, he often disappointed them by not appearing when announced."<sup>8</sup> Nesbitt's "bright particular star" was to both rise and fall during his career in the Australian colonies.

### ***A Transnational Life***

Francis Nesbitt's transnational story links with the theatrical story not just of the old worlds of England, Scotland and Ireland but the new worlds of New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia and also California. Speaking of George Coppin, Desley Deacon spoke of mind maps and theatrical circuits in Australian transnational history. The mind map of our early actors placed Australian theatres firmly within a global community. Theatrical circuits of performance in the nineteenth century linked Australasia to the United States, Britain, and Asia. Likewise Deacon spoke of the mind map of gold. Its discovery in California in 1849, in New South Wales and Victoria in 1851, and later in Otago, New Zealand in 1861 led our theatrical pioneers to travel both from the old world to the new and from the new world to the gold fields.<sup>9</sup> These two mind

maps of the theatre and of gold apply equally to the life of the actor Francis Nesbitt. Transnational history emphasises connections and these may be seen through Nesbitt's life.<sup>10</sup>

### *Early Life*

Scant details are available of the early life of Francis Nesbitt McCron. Much of what we know was told in response to a query by 'Dramaticus' in the *Australian Town and Country Journal* in 1871, by the biographer J. Henniker Heaton in 1879 and by 'Garryowen' in 1888. The *Journal* tells us Nesbitt's father was Captain McCron who had served in the Welsh regiment of horse, under the command of Sir Watkyn William Wynne. This appears to have been the "Ancient British Fencibles" regiment, raised on 14 March 1794 and disbanded in early 1800, which took part in suppressing the Irish rebellion in 1798.<sup>11</sup> From the *Journal* we learn that Nesbitt was born in 1807 at "Ardwicke Green", Manchester, England.<sup>12</sup> This year appears to be confirmed by census records giving his age as 43 in November 1850.<sup>13</sup> Indeed John McCron and his wife Jane had settled in Manchester by 25 October 1803, when their 14 day old son James McCron was buried at the church of St Thomas, Ardwick, adjoining Ardwick Green.<sup>14</sup> Another son, Edward Nesbitt McCron, was born on 27 October 1801 and christened on 19 November 1801 at St George's, Manchester.<sup>15</sup>

According to the *Journal* in 1822, John McCron and his family moved to Drogheda, County Louth, in Ireland, living at the west gate, Drogheda, where Francis "was educated by a clergyman, and the study of surgery commenced and for some time continued but he became weary of hospital experiences."<sup>16</sup> Choosing the stage as his profession, Nesbitt "became one of its brightest ornaments".<sup>17</sup> Due to his Irish upbringing Nesbitt was later recollected by 'Garryowen' as "an Irishman by birth".<sup>18</sup> Brewer tells us that "when off the stage" Nesbitt "spoke with a brogue 'you might cut with a tomahawk,' yet when acting it was scarcely perceptible" but on stage "his pronunciation was nearly as English as that of an educated Londoner."<sup>19</sup> 'Garryowen' recorded that Francis Nesbitt had been "a stock actor in the Mother Country" for many years, and "previous to emigrating his last home engagement was in Glasgow".<sup>20</sup> Heaton adds that "After travelling through England, and filling a leading engagement with Mr. Alexander, of Glasgow, his friends persuaded him to leave the stage, and he returned to Ireland in 1840."<sup>21</sup> Nesbitt was later billed in the Australian colonies as "Mr Nesbitt from the Theatres Royal Edinburgh, Glasgow, Liverpool" or "Mr Nesbitt, formerly of the Theatres Royal, Dublin, Glasgow, and Liverpool".<sup>22</sup>

Nesbitt's future wife, Annie Mills was born Cork, Ireland in 1823, the daughter of John Mills, a cattle breeder.<sup>23</sup> Heaton tells us she was "the daughter of an old and respectable family" with whom he eloped.<sup>24</sup> Francis and Annie were married in 1840/1841 by Reverend Stuart at the Abbey Street Presbyterian Church, Dublin.<sup>25</sup> Annie would thus have been around 18 years old at the time of their marriage while Francis was around 33.

### *Australian colonies, 1842-1849*

The theatre of the Australian colonies was in its infancy in the 1830s to 1850s. Though Sydney's first performance had taken place in 1789 it was not until 1832 that merchant Barnett Levey was able to obtain a licence for theatrical performances. Levey's Theatre Royal opened in 1833 with its leading actors including Conrad Knowles and Eliza Winstanley. Following Levey's death in 1837 the theatre was closed down by its lessee, haberdasher Joseph Wyatt in 1838, before being destroyed by fire in 1840. Wyatt's Royal Victoria Theatre, which opened in 1838, operated as the pre-eminent Sydney theatre, later also being destroyed by fire in 1880. Short-lived attempts were made to open rival Sydney theatres with Dalle Case's Olympic Theatre in 1842, Joseph Simmons' Royal City Theatre in 1843 and Malcom's Amphitheatre in 1850.

From the 1830s Sydney theatres were limited to performing plays already licenced in London and convicts were not to be employed. In the 1840s locally written plays were licenced although the content was predominantly English. Melbourne was part of New South Wales to 1851 so the licensing laws applied there too. By contrast Tasmanian theatres were not limited by licensing laws. Theatres opened in Hobart and Launceston in the 1830s operated under the direction of Samson and Cordelia Cameron, Anne and Michael Clarke, John Meredith and F.B. Watson. The pool of available actors in the colonies was limited so they would travel between Sydney, Melbourne or Adelaide bringing theatrical performances to nearby colonies and founding their first theatres. Theatres opened in Hobart from 1833, in Adelaide from 1838, in Launceston and Melbourne from 1841 with rival companies emerging and then merging in the financially insecure 1840s. Among these actors and theatre managers was the comedian George Coppin. In 1843 Coppin met Nesbitt at the Victoria in Sydney subsequently employing Nesbitt at his Adelaide and Geelong theatres. Coppin later became a respected Victorian parliamentarian.<sup>26</sup>

While Nesbitt may have been running away after eloping with his young bride he was also seeking new opportunities in a world where great distances were overcome by increasingly faster sea travel. On 12 September 1841 Annie and Francis Nesbitt McCrone set sail from Liverpool on the *Marchioness of Bute* for Sydney.<sup>27</sup> The McCrone's new life in the Australian colonies began on 7 January 1842 as the *Marchioness of Bute* arrived at Sydney, in the Colony of New South Wales.<sup>28</sup> It was said that Nesbitt "brought letters of introduction to Governor Gipps and others" and that he "tried unsuccessfully to gain employment in commercial houses."<sup>29</sup> Brewer says Nesbitt had "obtained a situation of a very subordinate kind in the Government service".<sup>30</sup> Nesbitt had applied to the Royal Victoria Theatre but was initially refused an engagement. He was said to have joined the police "but never went on duty" because his friends "induced the manager of the Victoria Theatre to allow him to appear".<sup>31</sup> Joseph Wyatt had opened the Royal Victoria Theatre in Sydney in March 1838 but in 1842 was away recruiting actors and actresses from England and elsewhere to his company.<sup>32</sup> Following his unexpected arrival 'Garryowen' tells us that it was Nesbitt who

interviewed Mr Joseph Simmons, the stage manager of the Victoria Theatre. Simmons, who ... asked the applicant what he could do, and the reply was any leading part, but he should like to open in Rolla in the tragedy of *Pizarro*. Simmons, somewhat scoffingly rejoined that Rolla being one of his own specialties, the Sydney public would not recognize any one else in it. It was decided, however, that the tragedy should be put up, Nesbitt to play *Pizarro*.<sup>33</sup>

So on Monday 3 March 1842 the *Australian* stated: "This evening a Mr. Nesbitt appears as *Pizarro*; he is well spoken of by those who have witnessed his rehearsals."<sup>34</sup>



Figure 1. Mr. Francis Nesbitt, "the Actor", *Heads of the People*, 1847 (sketch by J.S. Prout) (State Library of NSW)

Sydney critics soon warmed to Nesbitt. Following his Sydney debut the *Australian's* critic was satisfied by Nesbitt's performance with his good voice, effective declamation and conspicuous stage tact leading to "a hope that in Mr Nesbitt, we have an efficient actor in (to speak technically), heavy tragedy and melodrama, which, are clearly his line".<sup>35</sup>

It was Nesbitt's portrayal of Richard III, on Monday 7 March 1842, which gained his place in Australian theatrical history. The *Sydney Gazette's* critic wrote that "Mr. Nesbitt has a commanding figure for the stage" and his handsome person had immediately won over the female portion of the audience. The critic continued,

His dark complexion and black hair suit the tragic line of acting which is his forte. His voice is full, rich, and mellow, and particularly pleasing in some of its inflections. His action is easy and unaffected, and appropriate in every point. His countenance is particularly expressive, and portrays [sic] the working of the various passions he represents, in the most distinct manner.<sup>36</sup>

Nesbitt's individual acting style had never been seen before by the critic who had seen "many in that character – many who have failed – many who have succeeded, but like bright meteors, have shone but for an instant and then disappeared".<sup>37</sup>

The reviewer recorded Nesbitt's successful début and the delight and cheers of his audience who called upon him to address them, thus:

"LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, This reception thus given to a stranger, and in a far stranger land, is most unlooked for, and cannot but be gratifying to me. Suffice it for me to say, ladies and gentlemen, that you are both my judge and my jury, and I humbly await your verdict."<sup>38</sup>

Nesbitt then retired "amidst the loudest plaudits."<sup>39</sup> The *Australian* recorded this as "the first time in this Colony, the practice of calling for a favourite actor on the fall of the curtain to receive in special manner the commendations of the audience was adopted towards Mr. Nesbitt".<sup>40</sup> Nesbitt's "bright particular star" was on the rise!

Nesbitt was not received uncritically and his flaws were soon to appear. On 18 March Nesbitt appeared for his first time in Sydney as Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* which one critic called 'a complete failure'.<sup>41</sup> The *Examiner's* critic noted Nesbitt's chief defect as "the studied modulation of his voice which. . . fell upon the expectant ear with a painful and unsatisfying uniformity" but recognized that "Such a man as Mr. Nesbitt must be painfully aware of the disadvantageous contrast which his own expressive acting presents to that of the less distinguished characters."<sup>42</sup> His first appearance as Macbeth took place on Monday 4 April but on Saturday Nesbitt was "indisposed" and Joseph Simmons played the role "very respectably".<sup>43</sup> This was the first of many occasions when his "indisposition", a euphemism often used in the press for drunkenness, caused last minute changes to the cast.

Despite this, his success continued. On 2 May 1842 Nesbitt played Othello, with Mrs Ann Ximenes as Desdemona. The *Free Press* recorded his success in the role: "His soliloquy in the murder scene was touching in the extreme, and at the fall of the curtain, so triumphant was the impression produced on the audience, that Nesbitt was enthusiastically cheered and was loudly called for."<sup>44</sup> On Saturday 21 May 1842 Nesbitt played Rolla in *Pizarro* with Albert Spencer taking the role of Pizarro. According to a critic a competition took place between Spencer, Nesbitt and Mrs Thomson "in a trial of the strength of their respective lungs" when the "great actor," as he was facetiously called, "clearly won, thus proving that he can halloo louder than any performer on the stage!"<sup>45</sup> Nesbitt informed "the patrons of the drama and the public generally that his first benefit

in Australia” in “Shakespeare’s tragedy in five acts, entitled Macbeth” would take place on Monday 18 July 1842. Nesbitt played Macbeth with Conrad Knowles as Banquo, Grove as Macduff and Mrs Thompson as Lady Macbeth.<sup>46</sup> At this time the *Sydney Gazette* said of Nesbitt he was “without doubt the Roscius of the Australian stage”.<sup>47</sup>

Nesbitt played numerous popular roles such as Glenalvon in *Douglas*, William in *Black Eyed Susan*, the title roles in *Rob Roy* and *Luke the Labourer*, Sir Edward Mortimer in *The Iron Chest*, Sir Giles Overreach in *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*, Octavian in *The Mountaineers* and Sir Edward Enfield in *The Falls of Clyde*.<sup>48</sup> On Monday 3 June 1842 he played multiple parts all in the one night. The *Examiner’s* critic complained that “in the course of a few hours, the spectator cannot help perceiving that it is neither Richard, nor Overreach, nor Rolla, nor Shylock, nor Othello, who is before him, but simply Mr. Nesbitt ... in no single instance, losing his personal identity, as far as the spectator is concerned.”<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless it was said in early August 1842 that Nesbitt had “the good feeling and respect of every person in slightest degree conversant with the drama, to which he is the most distinguished ornament in New South Wales”.<sup>50</sup>

After five months on the stage Nesbitt appears to have suffered a breakdown. On 30 August 1842 Nesbitt was “attacked that morning with a severe chronic disease, which rendered him incapable of moving from his bed” and Simmons again took the role of Macbeth.<sup>51</sup> According to Helen Oppenheim, Nesbitt “was defeated by exploitation and by too many great parts – the most demanding of all that of Nesbitt, the great actor.”<sup>52</sup> He had not “yet recovered from his indisposition” by the time Joseph Wyatt’s new actors, Mr and Mrs Torning, Mr and Mrs Gibbs and Mr and Mrs James (known as Madame Louise), arrived from England on the ship *Trial* on 21 October 1842.<sup>53</sup> Shortly after this, on 7 November 1842, Nesbitt’s daughter Jane Nesbitt McCron was born. She was baptized on 30 November 1842 in the Parish of St Lawrence when her parents’ abode was given as “Pitt St., Sydney”.<sup>54</sup>

Nesbitt re-appeared “for the first time since his long protracted indisposition” on Thursday 11 November 1842. He appeared in a new role of William Tell “which he sustained with his usual ability, and secured to him loud and enthusiastic applause from all parts of the house”.<sup>55</sup> Nesbitt’s benefit on 13 February 1843 was *Ravenswood*, a play said to be “dramatised by Mr. Nesbitt himself”, but most likely written for him by his friend the convict Edward Geoghegan due to the theatrical licensing laws.<sup>56</sup> The *Herald* wrote of him: “We need hardly say that Mr. Nesbitt’s talents as a tragic actor have placed him in the front rank of his profession.”<sup>57</sup> Shortly after this, on 27 February 1843, Nesbitt’s daughter Jane Nesbitt McCron died aged only 4 months. She was buried in the old Sydney Burial Ground.<sup>58</sup>

Just as the shipping routes between England and Australia had opened up theatrical circuits of performance between nations so now did those circuits and ships allow Nesbitt to commence his “Australian wanderings.”<sup>59</sup> It may have been the death of his daughter as well as dissatisfaction over his salary that led Nesbitt on 29 March 1843 to leave Sydney on the *Seahorse* bound for

Launceston.<sup>60</sup> It appears he called at Melbourne, attempting negotiations “but as his tariff was £20 per night, the management could not afford to have anything to do with so dear an article, and he went over to Launceston,” arriving there on 4 April.<sup>61</sup> It seems he did not join F.B. Watson’s theatre there, possibly demanding too high a fee, and he returned to Sydney on the *Seahorse*, arriving on 18 April 1843.<sup>62</sup> These appear to be the first occasions when Nesbitt’s demands for a substantial salary were not met. Nesbitt then returned to the Victoria Theatre.<sup>63</sup>

Nesbitt now joined Joseph Simmons’ rival Royal City Theatre. On Saturday 20 May 1843 Nesbitt read the prize opening address, written by William à Beckett, the Solicitor-General, before performances of the *Balance of Comfort*, the *Painter of Ghent* and *Magnetic Influence*.<sup>64</sup> On Tuesday 30 May he played Othello with Simmons as Iago.<sup>65</sup> Yet the Royal City’s would not long survive as both its tragedians Conrad Knowles and Nesbitt with their wives boarded the *Australasian Packet* for Launceston on Monday 19 June 1843.<sup>66</sup> They had “the intention of playing at Launceston, Hobart Town, and, probably Melbourne, before they return to Sydney”.<sup>67</sup> Nesbitt now made his first appearance in Launceston “drawing the best house of the season” as Othello, with Gustavus Arabin as Iago. Nesbitt’s “performance was all that had been anticipated, confirming his “high reputation” as “an actor of the superior class”.<sup>68</sup> Nesbitt and Arabin received great applause and were called in front of the curtain, but the critic noted, “We regret that the stay of Mr. Knowles and Mr. Nesbitt will be but short, the theatre being too small to allow of their being engaged at the salaries they have been accustomed to receive, with any reasonable prospect of remunerating the proprietor.”<sup>69</sup>

In November 1843 Nesbitt made his Hobart début at Mrs Anne Clarke’s Royal Victoria Theatre. Nesbitt exceeded expectations as Rob Roy and the *Colonial Times* critic said “upon the whole, we do say, that the evening’s performances would have done credit to the first provincial theatre in England. There really is now something worth seeing.”<sup>70</sup> He played his favourite characters of Othello, Rolla and William Tell.<sup>71</sup> The *Courier* critic described Nesbitt’s performance as Tell,

. . . he shadows out well the character of the brave and intrepid mountaineer; the spirit-stirring address to the cloud-capt mountain peaks of his native country ... is given with the most chaste and rigid adherence to the rules of elocution; the motion of the arms and fingers, in this latter passage so difficult to be adopted, he gives so truly that one totally forgets he is uttering the language of an author, and fancies he is speaking extemporaneously.<sup>72</sup>

Nesbitt’s Edward Mortimer in *The Iron Chest* with “the hidden feelings, the racked conscience, and the death scene” was never more perfectly seen in that colony and “we may ne’er look upon his like again.”<sup>73</sup>

Nesbitt’s drinking continued in Hobart and a new flaw of professional jealousy emerged. Nesbitt “having recovered from his recent indisposition” in February 1844 was announced in the role of Macbeth.<sup>74</sup> When a newspaper



suggested this would allow his acting to be compared with that of Mr Arabin in that character, Nesbitt refused to act at all and the role was played by Arabin.

And, may we ask, what does Mr. Nesbitt now think of the silly pettishness which induced him thus to quarrel, like a sulky schoolboy, with his bread and butter? Is his opinion of the public so contemptuous as to persuade him to imagine he has injured them by so foolish a proceeding? Doubtless, Mr. Nesbitt was, for these colonies, rather a superior actor. . . but he was paid for so doing, and it was no less his duty than it ought to have been his desire to behave with ordinary decency at least, towards the public who supported him. We say nothing of his conduct towards the lessee, as no doubt sufficient care has been taken in that quarter to punish such impertinent presumption.<sup>75</sup>

As a result on 9 February 1844 it was reported Mrs Clarke had discharged Nesbitt for refusing to play *Macbeth*.<sup>76</sup>

Having been discharged from the Hobart theatre for his drunkenness and hubris, Nesbitt returned to the Royal Victoria Theatre in Sydney in April where it was noted “his playing has decidedly not improved in his absence”.<sup>77</sup> He was advertised as Cressford in *Ellen Wareham* on 17 April 1844 but was indisposed.<sup>78</sup> On 6 May 1844 he was well-received as Walter Lynch, the Warden of Galway, in the tragedy of *The Hibernian Father*, playing the role on seven occasions. The tragedy was written by Edward Geoghegan, later known simply as ‘The Author of The Hibernian Father’ due to his convict status and the licensing laws prohibiting the employment of convicts in the theatre. This title role had been written for Nesbitt by his friend. The play was initially “received with great favour” but caused quite a sensation due to allegations of plagiarism of Rev. Edward Groves’s play *The Warden of Galway*.<sup>79</sup>

The demands placed on Nesbitt were many and he again grew restless. In three months he played 19 parts on 49 nights, including Richard II, Othello, *Macbeth* and Cardinal Wolsey in *King Henry VIII*.<sup>80</sup> The first Australian production of *Coriolanus* was to be performed on 11 November 1844 with Nesbitt as the lead but J.G. Griffiths played it as Nesbitt had “ceased to be connected with the company” with no cause known.<sup>81</sup> But on 26 November news was received in Sydney of a new theatre to be opened on 1 January at Melbourne.<sup>82</sup> On 16 November 1844 Nesbitt and his wife boarded the *Waterlily* schooner for Hobart, making his first appearance there on Friday 6 December in *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*.<sup>83</sup> On 11 February 1845 he appeared at Hobart as Douglas in *Mary Queen of Scots* before heading to Melbourne. On 3 March Nesbitt performed as Othello in the first Shakespearean tragedy to be performed in that city. Mrs Cameron played Desdemona.<sup>84</sup> He then performed as Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* on 20 March in Melbourne’s first Shakespearian comedy and followed with *Virginius* for his benefit on 31 March.<sup>85</sup> His daughter Anna Maria, born 16 February 1845, was baptised on 15 June 1845 in Melbourne.<sup>86</sup> Coppin had become manager of the Launceston Theatre on 3 March 1845 and engaged his company to visit Melbourne. Soon there were two companies in Melbourne with Nesbitt’s at The Pavilion and Coppin’s at the new Queen’s Theatre. The

Launceston company was eventually merged with Nesbitt's with Nesbitt as stage manager at the Queen's Theatre. In August 1846 Coppin left Melbourne for South Australia.<sup>87</sup>

On 24 December 1845 Nesbitt returned to Sydney on the *Johnstone* from Port Phillip.<sup>88</sup> In January 1846 he was back at Sydney's Royal Victoria Theatre. He played Prospero in May 1846 but it was said "there is too much austere declamation – too frigid an elaborateness in the delivery. . . the impersonation was one of unbroken monotony."<sup>89</sup> He again played *The Hibernian Father* on 9 February and again on 17 September 1846 as a benefit for the Irish Relief Fund. Edward Geoghegan wrote to the Colonial Secretary from Nesbitt's home, 16 Domain Terrace, Sydney, on 2 October finally claiming its authorship (though not that of *Ravenswood*).<sup>90</sup> Nesbitt's daughter Isabella was born on 24 December 1846 and was baptised at the Parish of St Lawrence, Sydney, in January 1847 but his daughter Anna Maria was buried on 16 March 1847.<sup>91</sup>

Nesbitt clearly had a following among his audiences as well as his critics. In July 1847 Nesbitt's forthright and fearless personality was depicted in a sketch, by John Skinner Prout, personifying "The Actor" in *Heads of the People*.<sup>92</sup> As the classic tragedian Nesbitt wears "a full-length coat, glengarry cape, holding a tall stove-pipe hat, a full head of dark brown hair, clean-shaven except for side whiskers".<sup>93</sup> The magazine's critic wrote, "In this colony, where there is a great dearth of available histrionic talent ... Mr Nesbitt is undoubtedly an actor of merit; and we, who are his admirers, regret we do not see him more frequently", attributing this to "the want of sufficient talent to support him in the impersonation of any character of excellence."<sup>94</sup>

Nesbitt yet again proved himself as unreliable. On Tuesday 10 August 1847 Nesbitt was advertised to play Guido Fawkes, the gunpowder plotter, but the supposed "infliction of a stiff neck" prevented his appearance.<sup>95</sup> Was Nesbitt drunk again? On Saturday 20 August "the abrupt secession of Mr Nesbitt from the Company" was announced. The *Australian* reported "Mr Nesbitt had coolly insulted his Sydney patrons by unwarrantable disappointment and unjustifiable desertion." Nesbitt, it was claimed had been at a steeple chase instead of on the stage!<sup>96</sup> But *Bell's Life* revealed there had been no steeple chase held on Tuesday.<sup>97</sup> The *Chronicle*, swamped by correspondence from Nesbitt's supporters though believing the management had good reason, revealed that on Saturday Nesbitt had been fined for his non-attendance on Tuesday and feeling it undeserved, he resigned from the theatre, and considering himself at liberty went out to view the steeple chase, with *Bell's Life* also berating the *Australian* for its "angry thunder".<sup>98</sup> But the *Australian* fought back revealing he had not been fined but mulcted by manager Joseph Wyatt of his Tuesday salary having been seen speaking to him earlier that day. The *Australian* called Nesbitt a "Thespian Oligarch" and listed several incidents, including that of *Coriolanus*, when he had failed to perform. However "the comet" Nesbitt had already departed from Sydney.<sup>99</sup>

In Adelaide Coppin was suffering from losses and needed an actor to draw the crowds to his Queen's Theatre. Nesbitt demanded the high fee of £100 for only six nights but Coppin accepted. Nesbitt took off for Adelaide arriving on 10

September 1847 on the *Joseph Albino*, appearing for the first time at Coppin's theatre on 27 September, being "the star of the evening".<sup>100</sup> But on 15 October 1847 the management had to apologise for the tragedian's absence. Nesbitt had been re-engaged but the benefit for his first engagement had been thinly attended. "Mr Nesbitt must remember he has a duty to perform ... he will not escape the censure he justly deserves."<sup>101</sup> His wife and daughter joined him in Adelaide on 11 December and on 22 they all sailed for Sydney on the *Dorset*, arriving on 4 January 1848.<sup>102</sup>

Yet Nesbitt was back at the Royal Victoria Theatre Nesbitt from 10 February 1848 playing his favourite roles including his first appearance for three years as Rolla in *Pizarro*.<sup>103</sup> Nesbitt announced that a performance at the City Theatre on 2 May would not take place.<sup>104</sup> Nesbitt hit the road for Maitland, north of Sydney. On 12 May 1848 Nesbitt was to give a lecture on elocution at Maitland, illustrated with his favourite passages from *William Tell*, *Brutus*, *Othello* and *Pizarro* as well as reading the poem by Erasmus Darwin's *The Battle of Minden* but it was not delivered due to a rumour he was suffering from rheumatism causing a poor attendance.<sup>105</sup> On 31 May and 1 June he appeared with amateurs at Maitland as William Tell with Emma played by Mrs Arabin.<sup>106</sup> By mid-July he was back at the Victoria.<sup>107</sup> On 6 April 1849 in Sydney Nesbitt's daughter Helen Nesbitt McCron was born.<sup>108</sup>

### ***Californian gold and theatres, 1849-1851***

The mind map of gold now came into play in Nesbitt's life. News of the discovery of gold in California reached Sydney on 23 December 1848.<sup>109</sup> On 8 October 1849 an auction was announced of all Nesbitt's household goods: he was leaving for California. Among his possessions were a portrait of William Tell by Opie and a portrait in watercolour of Nesbitt himself in the role by Monsieur Constantin.<sup>110</sup> Nesbitt gave his last performance on 9 October and together with his wife and daughter sailed on the *Duke of Roxburgh* from Sydney on 13 October, arriving at San Francisco on 14 January 1850.<sup>111</sup> In December 1849, prior to Nesbitt's arrival, fire had devastated the heart of San Francisco and a second fire in January 1850 brought out looters. It was suspected that the fires had been set by ex-convicts from Australia. This maligned group lived in an area notoriously known as Sydney Valley and became known as the 'Sydney Ducks'.<sup>112</sup>

Just as later Australian actors would look to California to advance their careers so did Nesbitt take his opportunity in an emerging theatrical scene.<sup>113</sup> Nesbitt was engaged, along with the Australian actors Mr and Mrs Hambleton and Mr and Mrs Batters and the American Mrs Sarah Kirby, to join Joseph Rowe's Olympic Circus company in San Francisco which opened on 4 February 1850.<sup>114</sup> He was billed under his real name of "Mr. Nesbitt McCron" as "the leading tragedian" of the Olympic Amphitheatre in San Francisco, making his first appearance in California as William Tell on 20 February 1850 though "ever since his arrival he has been suffering from illness and is not even now perfectly restored to health."<sup>115</sup> Though initial reaction was favourable ("Mrs. Kirby and Mr. McCron are nightly gaining upon their audiences") this was not to last long.<sup>116</sup>

Nesbitt's "indisposition" and his dislike of comparisons with other actors continued while he was in California. While performing as Richard III he "forgot what is due to the dignity of the character, to the profession in which he is engaged and to the public, and presented himself before the audience in an improper condition." Nesbitt McCron was hissed by the audience and removed from the stage when a difficulty occurred between him and the American Mrs Kirby and "the dreadful question of nationality raised".<sup>117</sup> The nature of this "question" is unclear but may have referred to Nesbitt's Australian colonial background and the unsavoury behaviour of the 'Sydney Ducks'. (Indeed, by August 1850 Nesbitt had joined a vigilance company in Sacramento.<sup>118</sup>) Nesbitt McCron made a public apology after the melodrama of *Two Drovers* on Monday 4 March. John Hambleton said he and his wife "would never appear again if McCron was allowed to return to the stage" though Nesbitt did appear.<sup>119</sup> Nesbitt McCron attributed the problem "to professional jealousy on the part of his brother actors" and he continued to appear with Hambleton.<sup>120</sup>

In late March 1850 Nesbitt joined the Tehama Theatre in Sacramento under the management of J.B. Atwater and Mrs Sarah Kirby (later Mrs James Stark).<sup>121</sup> The company consisted of Mr and Mrs Francis Nesbitt McCron (at a salary of \$250), Mr and Mrs Hambleton (with a salary of \$400), Tench Fairchild, H.F. Daly, C.E. Bingham, W.S. Fury, Sophie Edwin, Mrs. Lynes and Mr. Alexander. Productions included *Othello*, *Richard III*, *The Rent Day*, *The Iron Chest* and later *Macbeth*, *Venice Preserved*, *Virginus*, *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*, and *Brutus*.<sup>122</sup> On 26 March 1850 Nesbitt McCron appeared in *William Tell*. The part of Albert was represented by Mrs. Nesbitt. The audience was "convulsed with delight" when Mrs Kirby congratulated the hero

on being "the parent of a boy like that," . . . Curiosity was excited to its utmost pitch, when Tell asked "to see the apple" he was to shoot; on the substitution of a most diminutive orange, their indignation became intense, and was only relieved when the arrow had passed with unerring aim through its very core.<sup>123</sup>

On 14 June 1850 the Olympic was destroyed by fire and Rowe's company moved to the Pacific Theatre in Sacramento.<sup>124</sup>

There were tensions within the Californian theatre community. On 14 January 1851, while employed at the Jenny Lind Theatre, Mrs. John Hambleton committed suicide by taking cyanide. It was said that her jealous husband had been brutally mistreating her and she had sought the support of the actor Mr. Coad. Her confidant Sarah Kirby was styled by Mr. Hambleton as a "fascinating serpent". Two weeks later Madame Duprez, who had played Desdemona to Nesbitt's *Othello*, also attempted suicide with Mrs Kirby vaguely accused as the cause.<sup>125</sup>

By March 1851 Nesbitt McCron had joined the Jenny Lind Theatre back in San Francisco under the management of C. Edward Bingham. He played William Tell, *Othello*, Colonel Damas in *The Lady of Lyons*, and Richard III.<sup>126</sup> In April he returned to the Tehama Theatre in Sacramento under the management of Mrs

Kirby and James Stark.<sup>127</sup> In May James Stark played Iago to Nesbitt McCron's Othello and Nesbitt McCron played Macduff to Stark's Macbeth.<sup>128</sup> He also performed at the Pacific Theatre in Sacramento in May, playing *Othello* and *The Stranger*.<sup>129</sup> Back at the Tehama he was the Ghost to Stark's Hamlet and Kent to Stark's King Lear.<sup>130</sup> In June he played Rob Roy Macgregor and, as a benefit for Sacramento's Fire Department, Sir Thomas Clifford in *The Hunchback* "being peculiarly happy in his personation of that character".<sup>131</sup> By 16 June Stark and company had opened in Maryville with Nesbitt McCron as Othello entitling him to "great praise" though the critic could not say that he admired McCron's Col. Damas in *The Lady of Lyons*, "though it was nevertheless well rendered."<sup>132</sup> These were his last Californian reviews. On 23 July 1851 Nesbitt with his wife and daughter departed from San Francisco for Sydney.<sup>133</sup>

While Nesbitt's acting style and stage voice proclaimed him as a product of the English theatre it was probably his Australian colonial connection which determined his return to Sydney. Troubling events within the San Francisco community had occurred by July 1851. In February 1851 two Australians were arrested for robbing and beating a San Francisco merchant and calls were made for them to be hanged. Earthquakes and further fires occurred in 1851 during which several theatres were destroyed and later rebuilt in San Francisco.<sup>134</sup> The 'Sydney Ducks' were blamed for the fires and robberies. In July 1851, after the formation of a Committee of Vigilance, an Australian was hanged in San Francisco and anti-Australian feeling was high.<sup>135</sup> That was when Nesbitt left. News of the discovery of gold in New South Wales did not reach California until August 1851.<sup>136</sup> Gold was discovered in New South Wales and Victoria by Australian miners who had returned from California. Now it was the turn of both Californian miners and thespians to flock to the Australian goldfields.<sup>137</sup>

### ***Return to the Australian colonies, 1851-1853 and beyond***

Nesbitt was welcomed following his return with his family on the *Cameo* to Sydney on 21 September 1851.<sup>138</sup> On 11 October 1851 "Mr. Nesbitt the Tragedian, lately of the San Francisco Theatre" made his appearance on the New South Wales goldfields at Sofala.<sup>139</sup> His first Sydney appearance was as Othello on 27 November with Nesbitt called before the curtain responding:

Ladies and Gentlemen, after an absence of two years, the reception you have awarded me is indeed flattering. Words fail me in endeavouring to express the sentiments which my heart dictates; but, believe me, that your kindness is there registered, and will there remain as the brightest retrospect my future life may own.<sup>140</sup>

He followed this success in December with *Pizarro* and *Brutus* and for his benefit, *Macbeth*.<sup>141</sup>

Nesbitt's drunkenness continued. In March 1852 Nesbitt recovered from "his recent illness".<sup>142</sup> He played in Maturin's *Bertram* but was unfavourably reviewed. It was said Nesbitt was "too often all violence of tone and gesture" and that he was in "utter ignorance of the grandeur and the beauty – the solemnity

and power that reside in repose." For "want of discipline and study from real life" his "really great powers were suffered to run waste".<sup>143</sup> In late April he made "his first appearance since his late severe illness" as Rob Roy.<sup>144</sup> Nesbitt's final appearance at the Royal Victoria Theatre in Sydney was on 29 July 1852 in Francis Belfield's original play *The Outcast, or The Irish Maniac*.<sup>145</sup> On 22 September 1852 his son Frank William McCron was born and was baptised in Sydney on 15 February 1853. Another son, Henry McCron, would be born in 1853.<sup>146</sup>

George Coppin invited Nesbitt to come to his Geelong theatre for a series of five performances, opening on 14 February 1853 with *William Tell*, with afterpiece the apt *Spirit of the Gold Field, or Avarice, Intemperance and Ruin*. This was to be followed by *The Merchant of Venice*, *Richard III* and two more Shakespearian plays. Nesbitt's name was printed in large type on posters measuring 18 by 21 inches and the first night was packed.<sup>147</sup> However news of a "Distressing Occurrence" was announced on 25 February 1853, news which was quickly spread,

Mr. Nesbitt, the celebrated tragedian, is now, we are sorry to say, in such a condition of mental aberration through excessive indulgence in drink as to require his personal confinement in the watchhouse until he either recovers or is deemed a fit object for the asylum at Melbourne. The unfortunate man appears to be entirely destitute of all the conveniences of life, and is allowed to lie on the bare boards of the North Geelong watchhouse.<sup>148</sup>

Nesbitt was to have taken to the stage for his second performance. In March 1853, it was said, "while acting in Geelong as William Tell [Nesbitt] was carried from the stage in an almost insensible condition and conveyed to the hospital".<sup>149</sup> A notice was placed on the doors of the theatre that Nesbitt had suddenly taken ill. The angry crowd shouted, "Too ill? Too drunk" but Coppin assured them Nesbitt really was ill.<sup>150</sup> So ill, in fact, that Francis Nesbitt McCron died suddenly on 29 March 1853, with Coppin paying for his burial and holding a benefit performance for his widow and family.<sup>151</sup> On 2 April 1853 the news of Nesbitt's death was published in the Melbourne *Argus*.<sup>152</sup> By 9 April this news had reached his widow Anne Nesbitt McCron in Sydney. A family notice recorded "Mr. Nesbitt, late of the Royal Victoria Theatre Sydney, and long known to the colonist as one of their most popular tragedians", had died at Geelong, aged 44.<sup>153</sup>

His widow's grief over his public drunkenness and untimely death was now to be exacerbated. In June 1853 Mr and Mrs James Stark (formerly Mrs Sarah Kirby) arrived in Sydney. Now it was anti-American feeling that was high with the master of their ship, the *New Orleans*, a member of the Committee of Vigilance. A rumour had spread of their treatment of Nesbitt.<sup>154</sup> Annie Nesbitt McCron wrote to repel the charge "of having injured my dear departed husband while in California" with the "unmerited opposition" to the Starks "a pang to my widowed heart." Annie wrote the Starks as managers had been "uniformly generous and forebearing in all his infirmities" with his talent "duly appreciated

and recompensed by them." She wished "to allow the weaknesses of my departed husband to be buried in his grave."<sup>155</sup>

A benefit for Mrs Nesbitt by Malcom's equestrians and the actors of the Victoria was held at Malcom's Royal Australian Amphitheatre on 5 July 1853.

The inhabitants of Sydney are too well acquainted with the talent, that is now no more. . . and every person who has witnessed the inimitable impersonations of Mr. Nesbitt, will not fail to attend ...when, it will be considered, that it is devoted to a truly charitable purpose, that of aiding the now destitute Widow and Orphans of our First Great Actor in Australia.<sup>156</sup>

Following this Mrs Nesbitt acknowledged "the sincere sympathy and liberality she has met with from Mr Malcom, Mrs Guerin, and the gentlemen from the Victoria Theatre" and deemed "it unnecessary to say more, than that to one and all she feels deeply indebted for the one drop of honor poured into her cup of affliction."<sup>157</sup>



Figure 2. Francis Nesbitt's headstone, Geelong, 2006 (Courtesy of Pam Jennings)

Poor Nesbitt had been buried on 30 March 1853 at the Geelong Eastern Cemetery with no headstone. In 1856 Coppin took G.V. Brooke to visit Nesbitt's grave. Brooke paid for a headstone, topped with a medallion of Shakespeare, in memory of Nesbitt "erected in memory of Francis McCrone Nesbit [sic] who departed this life 29 March 1853 aged 42 years by his fellow countryman Gustavus V. Brooke as a last tribute to the genius of a brother tragedian".<sup>158</sup> Brooke styled Nesbitt "his great predecessor".<sup>159</sup> Brooke himself perished in 1866 in the wreck of the *London* steamer in the Bay of Biscay on his return voyage to Sydney and so, in November 1895, Nesbitt's tombstone was re-erected by a few of Brooke's admirers in his own memory.<sup>160</sup> Coppin never forgot Nesbitt and Brooke and at a performance in 1896 at the Princess Theatre, celebrating the

first Melbourne pantomime in 1845, “the only anecdote was the incident of G.V. Brooke putting a headstone over Nesbitt’s grave in the Geelong Cemetery”.<sup>161</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Francis Nesbitt McCron’s life was full of promise but ended before its time. He expatriated himself from the theatres of the old world, bring his remarkable talents as a tragedian to the theatres of the Australian colonies and also to those of the Californian goldfields. His wanderings show the global reach of nineteenth century theatre and its actors. Nesbitt did not look after himself and his career well. It was Nesbitt’s flaws of hubris displayed by his claims for extraordinary fees and his professional jealousy, his gambling at the races, and above all his drunkenness which plagued his career and brought about his untimely death in Geelong in 1853. Despite this he deserves a place in Australian theatrical history as one of its great tragedians, even “the best tragic actor in the southern hemisphere” as Coppin, Brooke and others of that time recognized. He truly was its “brightest ornament,” a “theatrical meteor”, but one who “like bright meteors, have shone but for an instant.”

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Early Days of the Stage in Australia. Francis Nesbitt.’ *Otago Witness*, 3 July 1890, 32, available online at Papers Past Accessed June 22, 2011. Article reproduced from ‘Garryowen’ (Edmund Finn), <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz>. *The Chronicles of Early Melbourne, 1835 to 1852, Historical, Anecdotal and Personal*. Centennial ed. (Melbourne: Ferguson and Mitchell, 1888). Vol. 1, Chapter XXXV, 477 (republished by Archive CD Books Australia, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> His family name is variously recorded as McCron or McCrone in contemporary sources and by theatre historians, eg. H. L. Oppenheim, ‘McCrone, Francis Nesbitt (1810–1853),’ *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/mccrone-francis-nesbitt-2393/text3069>, published in hardcopy 1967, Accessed July 10, 2014 (hereafter Oppenheim, ADB). I have used McCron except when quoting.

<sup>3</sup> *Sydney Gazette*, Tuesday 24 May 1842, 2. Most of the Australian newspapers cited may be found online on the National Library of Australia’s *Trove, Digitised Newspapers and More* <http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/>.

<sup>4</sup> “N.N.”, ‘Letter to the Editor of the Empire’, 23 July 1860, *Empire*, 25 July 1860, 5.

<sup>5</sup> “N.N.”, ‘Letter to the Editor of the Empire’, 23 July 1860, *Empire*, 25 July 1860, 5.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> F.C. Brewer, *The Drama and Music in New South Wales* (Sydney, Government Printer, 1892), 11 (digitised item at State Library of Victoria <http://handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/144614>. Accessed January 16, 2015.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Desley Deacon, ‘Location! Location! Location! Mind maps and theatrical circuits in Australian transnational history: Presidential Address, July 2008’ *History Australia*, 5:3, 2008, 81.1 to 81.16. doi:10.2104/ha080081.

<sup>10</sup> Desley Deacon, Penny Russell and Angela Woollacott, eds., *Transnational Lives: Biographies of Global Modernity, 1700-present* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 3.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Answers to correspondents. ‘Dramaticus’,’ *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 12 August 1871, 8 (answering an unpublished query noted on 5 August 1871) ; J.H. Heaton, *Dictionary of Dates and Men of the Time: containing the History of Australasia from 1542 to May, 1879*. Sydney, George Robinson, 1879, 270, (republished by Archive CD Books Australia, 2007), q.v. “Theatrical Stars: Francis Nesbitt McCron”; “Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn, 5<sup>th</sup> Baronet”, Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sir\\_Watkin\\_Williams-Wynn,\\_5th\\_Baronet](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sir_Watkin_Williams-Wynn,_5th_Baronet) Accessed July 10, 2014, and List of British Fencible Regiments, Wikipedia,



[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_British\\_fencible\\_regiments#Welsh\\_fencibles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_British_fencible_regiments#Welsh_fencibles). Accessed July 10, 2014.

<sup>12</sup> *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 12 August 1871, 8; J.H. Heaton, *Dictionary of Dates*, 270, gives his birthplace as Manchester and year as 1809. Ardwick Green is a public space in Ardwick, Manchester, England. Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ardwick\\_Green](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ardwick_Green). Accessed March 21, 2013, identifies the Church of St Thomas, on the north side of Ardwick Green.

<sup>13</sup> The US 1850 Census taken at Sacramento on 15 November 1850 gives his age as 43 making his birth late in 1806 or in 1807. The Census data is likely to have been given by McCron (q.v. 'McCrone') or his wife. (Ancestry.com. 1850 United States Federal Census [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com. Operations, Inc., 2009. Original data: Seventh Census of the United States, 1850; (National Archives Microfilm Publication Year 1850; Census Place: Sacramento, Sacramento, California; Roll: M432\_35; Page: 185A; Image: 364); Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29: National Archives, Washington, D.C.

<http://search.ancestry.com.au/search/db.aspx?dbid=8054>. Accessed January 5, 2014). At his burial in 1853 (see below) his age was noted as 42 making his birth year 1810 or 1811. Heaton records his age at death as 44, making his birth year 1808 or 1809.

<sup>14</sup> Ancestry.com. Manchester, England, *Baptisms, Marriages and Burials, 1541-1812* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2013. Original data: Anglican Parish Registers. Manchester, England: Manchester Libraries, Information and Archives, q.v. James McCron, <http://search.ancestry.com.au/search/db.aspx?dbid=2959>. Accessed July 8, 2014.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, q.v. Edward Nesbitt McCron, <http://search.ancestry.com.au/search/db.aspx?dbid=2959>. Accessed July 8, 2014. Francis Nesbitt McCron's baptismal record has not been located in this database nor in that for Manchester Cathedral's baptismal records.

<sup>16</sup> *Australian Town and Country Journal*, Saturday 12 August 1871, 8.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> 'Garryowen', *Chronicles*. Vol. 1, 477.

<sup>19</sup> F.C. Brewer, *The Drama and Music*, 11; partly quoted in *Freemans Journal* (Sydney), 6 August 1892, 16.

<sup>20</sup> 'Garryowen', *Chronicles*. Vol. 1, 477.

<sup>21</sup> Heaton, *Dictionary of Dates*, 270.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Oppenheim, *ADB; Maitland Mercury*, 10 May 1848: 3. While British and Irish newspapers for the period are available online no specific reference to his appearances in these cities has yet been located.

<sup>23</sup> GenCircles website <http://www.gencircles.com/users/gtimmins/2/data/40>. Accessed February 27, 2013. Information from Gail Timmins (née Burcher). NSW Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages (BDMs), Death Certificate, Annie McCron (1890 No. 6918).

<sup>24</sup> *Australian Town and Country Journal*, Saturday 12 August 1871, 8.

<sup>25</sup> Heaton, *Dictionary of Dates*, 270; Death certificate, Annie McCron (note above). Informant son; Marriage records of the Abbey Street Church (one of three in that street) do not survive. Email from Hilary Fairman (Abbey Church) to author, 20 June 2013: "the church was completely flattened in the Easter Rising in 1916 and all their records were destroyed."

<sup>26</sup> Elizabeth Webby, 'From First Settlement to the Gold Rush (1788-1853) summary of theatrical events', Harold Love, ed., *The Australian Stage: a documentary history* (Kensington, NSW, NSW University Press, 1984), 1-8; Eric Irvin, *Theatre comes to Australia* (St Lucia, Qld, University of Queensland Press, 1971), vi ; Eric Irvin, *Dictionary of the Australian Theatre 1788-1814* (Sydney, Hale & Iremonger, 1985), 14, 75-76, 177-179, 274-275, 277-278.

<sup>27</sup> *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 12 August 1871: 8; SRNSW: NRS 1291 Reports of vessels arrived, [4/5221] *Marchioness of Bute*, arrived 7 January 1842. Heaton had given the same day but in 1841.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Heaton, *Dictionary of Dates*, 270. I have found no evidence at State Records NSW (SRNSW) of a letter of introduction in the Letters received (NRS 905) by the Colonial Secretary to whom correspondence to the Governor was addressed.

<sup>30</sup> F.C. Brewer, *The Drama and Music*, 11.

<sup>31</sup> Heaton, *Dictionary of Dates*, 270. I have found no evidence of his employment in the police records held by SRNSW.

<sup>32</sup> Philip Parsons with Victoria Chance, eds. *Concise Companion to Theatre in Australia* (Sydney, Currency Press, 1997), 317.

- <sup>33</sup> 'Garryowen', *Chronicles*, Vol. 1, 477.
- <sup>34</sup> *The Australian*, 3 March 1842, 2.
- <sup>35</sup> *The Australian*, 5 March 1842, 2.
- <sup>36</sup> *Sydney Gazette*, 10 March 1842, 2.
- <sup>37</sup> *Sydney Gazette*, 10 March 1842, 2.
- <sup>38</sup> H.L. Oppenheim, *Colonial Theatre: The Rise of the Legitimate Stage in Australia*. [Unpublished Typescript] (Mitchell Library ML Mss 3266, Microfilm reel CY 854 (hereafter *Colonial Theatre*), 355, quoting *Australian*, 10 March 1842.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>40</sup> Oppenheim, *Colonial Theatre*, 355, quoting *Australian*, 10 March 1842.
- <sup>41</sup> Oppenheim, *Colonial Theatre*, 355, quoting *Examiner*, 28 May 1842.
- <sup>42</sup> Oppenheim, *Colonial Theatre*, 356-357, quoting *Examiner*, 27 April 1842.
- <sup>43</sup> Oppenheim, *Colonial Theatre*, 358, quoting *Australian*, 5 April 1842.
- <sup>44</sup> Oppenheim, *Colonial Theatre*, 364, quoting *Free Press*, 5 May 1842. Mrs Ann Ximenes was the sister of Eliza O'Flaherty (née Winstanley).
- <sup>45</sup> Oppenheim, *Colonial Theatre*, 366, quoting *Sydney Herald*, 23 May 1842, 2.
- <sup>46</sup> *Sydney Gazette*, 16 July 1842, 2.
- <sup>47</sup> *Sydney Herald*, 16 July 1842, 2.
- <sup>48</sup> Oppenheim, *Colonial Theatre*, 358 and 373.
- <sup>49</sup> Oppenheim, *Colonial Theatre*, 374, quoting *Examiner*, 15 June 1842.
- <sup>50</sup> *Sydney Gazette*, 9 August 1842, 2.
- <sup>51</sup> Oppenheim, *Colonial Theatre*, 384, quoting *Gazette*, 13 August 1842.
- <sup>52</sup> Oppenheim, *Colonial Theatre*, 397.
- <sup>53</sup> Oppenheim, *Colonial Theatre*, 397; *Sydney Morning Herald (SMH)*, Saturday 22 October 1842, 2.
- <sup>54</sup> NSW Registry of BDMs, 1842 (Vol. 47 No. 2218), Baptism of Jane Nisbett McCron [sic].
- <sup>55</sup> *Australian*, 14 November 1842, 2.
- <sup>56</sup> *Australasian Chronicle*, 14 February 1843, 2; Oppenheim, *ADB*; Gay Lynch and [Author], 'Lost and Found – Reinstating Playwright Edward Geoghegan (1813-1869) and his Most Controversial Play, The Hibernian Father (1844),' 181-203 in Anders Ahlqvist and Pamela O'Neill, eds. *Language and Power in the Celtic World: papers from the Seventh Australian Conference of Celtic Studies, The University of Sydney, 30 September-2 October 2010 (Sydney Series in Celtic Studies)*. (The Celtic Studies Foundation, The University of Sydney, 2011), 181, 197.
- <sup>57</sup> *SMH*, 13 February 1843, 3.
- <sup>58</sup> NSW Registry of BDMs, 1842 (Vol. 47 No. 2218) Burial of Jane N McCron. *SMH*, 3 March, 1843, 3; The headstone of Nesbitt's daughters Jane and Ann [Hannah] McCron were removed from the Presbyterian section of Devonshire Street Cemetery to Bunnerong (now Botany Cemetery), prior to the building of Central Station in 1901. Keith Johnson and Malcolm R. Sainty, *Sydney Burial Ground 1819-1901 (Elizabeth and Devonshire Streets) and History of Sydney's Early Cemeteries from 1788* (Sydney, Library of Australian History, 2000), 154 Appendix 2, Ref 853B: McCrone Jane and Anna Bunn[erong] Section 3S Nr 54 and *ibid.*, 380 Appendix 3 Bunnerong (1969) Ref 1994: 'Jane, eldest dau. of Nesbitt & Anne McCrone, died 27<sup>th</sup> February 1843, aged 4 months'.
- <sup>59</sup> 'Garryowen', *Chronicles*, Vol. 1, 477.
- <sup>60</sup> *SMH*, 30 March 1843, 2.
- <sup>61</sup> 'Garryowen', *Chronicles*, Vol. 1, 458; "Australian shipping 1788-1968", OzShips website <http://www.blaxland.com/ozships/>. Accessed March 19, 2011.
- <sup>62</sup> *SMH*, 18 April 1843, 2; *Australasian Chronicle*, 18 April, 1843, 3.
- <sup>63</sup> *Australasian Chronicle*, 22 April 1843, 3.
- <sup>64</sup> *Australian*, 22 May 1843, 2; *SMH*, 22 May 1843, 2.
- <sup>65</sup> *SMH*, 30 May 1843, 2.
- <sup>66</sup> *SMH*, 19 June 1843, 2.
- <sup>67</sup> *SMH*, 21 June 1843, 2.
- <sup>68</sup> *Launceston Advertiser*, 13 July 1843, 3.
- <sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>70</sup> *Colonial Times*, 7 November 1843, 3.
- <sup>71</sup> *Courier*, 27 October 1843, 3; *Colonial Times*, 28 November 1843, 3; *Courier*, 1 December 1843, 1.
- <sup>72</sup> *Courier*, 17 November 1843, 2.
- <sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

- <sup>74</sup> *Courier*, 2 Feb 1844, 1.
- <sup>75</sup> *Colonial Times*, 6 February 1844, 3.
- <sup>76</sup> *Courier*, 9 February 1844, 3.
- <sup>77</sup> *SMH*, 8 April 1844, 2; *SMH*, 12 April 1844, 2 and Oppenheim, *ADB*.
- <sup>78</sup> *Australian*, 17 April 1844, 2; Oppenheim, *Colonial Theatre*, 478.
- <sup>79</sup> *Australian*, 6 May 1844, 3; *Australian*, 21 May 1844, 3; *SMH*, 16 November 1912, 7; Brewer, *The Drama and Music*, 12; Lynch and [Author], 'Lost & Found', 182.
- <sup>80</sup> Oppenheim, *Colonial Theatre*, 477.
- <sup>81</sup> *Australian*, 11 November 1844, 2; *Australian*, 12 November 1844, 3; John Golder and Richard Madelaine (eds.), *O Brave New World: Two Centuries of Shakespeare on the Australian Stage* (Sydney: Currency Press, 2001), 259.
- <sup>82</sup> *SMH*, 26 November 1844, 2.
- <sup>83</sup> *Australian*, 16 November 1844, 2; Ozships website, q.v. McCron/e; *Colonial Times*, 3 December 1844, 1.
- <sup>84</sup> *Argus*, 24 May 1890, 13.
- <sup>85</sup> *Argus*, 24 May 1890, 13.
- <sup>86</sup> GenCircles website <http://www.gencircles.com/users/gtimmins/2/data/40>. Accessed February 27, 2013. Information from Gail Timmins. Victorian Registry of BDMs, 1845 (1845 No. 10097) Baptism of Hannah Maria McCron [McCron in index].
- <sup>87</sup> 'Garryowen', *Chronicles*, Vol. 2, 469.
- <sup>88</sup> *SMH*, 24 December 1845, 2.
- <sup>89</sup> Quoted in Oppenheim, *ADB*; Oppenheim, *Colonial Theatre*, 521 quoting *Atlas*, 23 May 1846.
- <sup>90</sup> Lynch and [Author], 'Lost and Found', 197; SRNSW: NRS 905 [Letter No. 46/7249 in 4/2731.2] SR Reel 2265.
- <sup>91</sup> GenCircles website <http://www.gencircles.com/users/gtimmins/2/data/40>. Accessed February 27, 2013. Information from Gail Timmins. NSW Registry of BDMs, 1846 (Vol. 49 No.49), Baptism of Isabella Nesbitt McCron. NSW Registry: V1846/49 49/1846 McCron Isabella N Francis N Ann [no 'e']; Johnson and Sainty, *Sydney Burial Ground*, 154 Appendix 2 Ref 853B and *ibid.*, 380 Appendix 3 Ref. 1994: 'Anna Maria, their 3<sup>rd</sup> Daughter, died 16<sup>th</sup> March 1847 aged 2 years'.
- <sup>92</sup> *Heads of the People: An Illustrated Journal of Literature, Whims and Oddities*, 24 July 1847, 113 'The Actor' (portrait facing 113, sketch by J.S. Prout) (State Library of NSW: Mitchell Library Q059H).
- <sup>93</sup> Alec Bagot, *Coppin the Great: Father of the Australian Theatre* (London: Melbourne University Press, 1965), 90; *Courier*, 17 November 1843, 2 gives Nesbitt's hair colour as black.
- <sup>94</sup> *Heads of the People*, 24 July 1847, 113.
- <sup>95</sup> *Australian*, 10 August 1847, 2 and 14 August 1847, 3; *Bell's Life in Sydney*, 14 August 1847, 3.
- <sup>96</sup> *Australian*, 20 August 1847, 3.
- <sup>97</sup> *Bells Life in Sydney*, 21 August 1847, 3.
- <sup>98</sup> *Sydney Chronicle*, 25 August 1847, 3; *Bell's Life in Sydney*, 28 August 1847, 2.
- <sup>99</sup> *Australian*, 27 August 1847, 3.
- <sup>100</sup> Bagot, *Coppin the Great*, 127; *South Australian Register*, 11 September 1847, 2; *South Australian*, 24 September 1847, 2, 3.
- <sup>101</sup> *South Australian*, 15 October 1847, 3.
- <sup>102</sup> *SMH*, 5 January 1848, 2.
- <sup>103</sup> *SMH*, 10 February 1848, 2; *Sydney Chronicle*, 16 March 1848, 2.
- <sup>104</sup> *SMH*, 2 May 1848, 3.
- <sup>105</sup> *Maitland Mercury*, 10 May 1848, 3 and 13 May 1848, 2.
- <sup>106</sup> *Maitland Mercury*, 31 May 1848, 3.
- <sup>107</sup> *SMH*, 13 July 1848, 2.
- <sup>108</sup> GenCircles website <http://www.gencircles.com/users/gtimmins/2/data/40>. Accessed February 27, 2013. Information from Gail Timmins; NSW Registry of BDMs, 1849 (Vol. 50 No. 389) and 1849 (Vol. 139 No. 144), baptismal records of Helen Nesbitt McCron (indexed as McCrown).
- <sup>109</sup> Charles Bateson, *Gold Fleet for California: Forty-Niners from Australia and New Zealand* (Sydney: Ure Smith, 1963), 23.
- <sup>110</sup> *SMH*, 8 October 1849, 4. Monsieur Constantin was probably Constantin Guys.
- <sup>111</sup> *SMH*, 13 October 1849, 2; Bateson, *Gold Fleet*, 156.

- <sup>112</sup> 'Gold Rush Chronology 1850-1851,' San Francisco Museum, <http://www.sfmuseum.org/hist/chron2.html> . Accessed January 14, 2013; Sherman L. Ricards and George M. Blackburn, 'The Sydney Ducks: A Demographic "Analysis", *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 42 No. 1 (February 1973), 20-22, from JSTOR <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3637740>. Accessed April 21, 2013.
- <sup>113</sup> Eg. Judith Anderson: Desley Deacon, 'Becoming cosmopolitan; Judith Anderson in Sydney, Australia, 1913-1918,' in *Transnational Lives*, 238-251.
- <sup>114</sup> Albert Dressler, ed. *Joseph Rowe, California's Pioneer Circus: Memoirs and personal correspondence relative to the circus business through the Gold country in the 50's* (San Francisco, Printed by H.S. Crocker Co., c1926), 10; *Sacramento Daily Union*, 5 April 1865, 2.
- <sup>115</sup> *Daily Alta California*, 24 February 1850, 2. Californian newspapers can be found online in the *California Digital Newspaper Collection (CDNC)* <http://cdnc.ucr.edu/> at the University of California, Riverside.
- <sup>116</sup> *Daily Alta California*, 28 February 1850, 1.
- <sup>117</sup> *Daily Alta California*, 4 March 1850, 2.
- <sup>118</sup> *Sacramento Transcript*, 21 August 1850, 2. F N McCron was in Company A in Sacramento, upholding law and order and obeying the principles of patriotic duty.
- <sup>119</sup> *Daily Alta California*, 6 March 1850, 2; George R. MacMinn, *The Theater of the Golden Era in California* (Caldwell, Io.: Caxton, 1941), 84.
- <sup>120</sup> *Daily Alta California*, 9 March 1850, 2.
- <sup>121</sup> *Daily Alta California*, 28 March 1850, 2 and 2 April 1850, 3.
- <sup>122</sup> Jane Kathleen Curry, *Nineteenth Century American Women Theatre Managers* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1994) (*Contributions in Women's Studies*; 143), 36-37; *Sacramento Daily Union*, 5 April 1865, 2; Helene Wickham Koon, *Gold Rush Performers: A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Singers, Dancers, Musicians, Circus Performers and Minstrel Players in America's Far West, 1848-1869* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1994), 111 (I am indebted to Mark St Leon for Dressler, Coon and McMinn.).
- <sup>123</sup> *Daily Alta California*, 2 April 1850, 2.
- <sup>124</sup> Dressler, *Joseph Rowe*, 11.
- <sup>125</sup> MacMinn, *The Theater of the Golden Era*, 68-70.
- <sup>126</sup> *Sacramento Transcript*, 15 March 1851, 2; William Tell: *Daily Alta California*, 17 March 1851, 3; Othello: *Daily Alta California*, 18 March 1851, 3; Lady of Lyons: *Daily Alta California*, 19 March 1851, 3; Richard III: *Daily Alta California*, 25 March 1851, 3.
- <sup>127</sup> *Sacramento Transcript*, 21 April 1851, 2.
- <sup>128</sup> *Sacramento Daily Union*, 2 May 1851, 3 and 5 May 1851, 2.
- <sup>129</sup> *Sacramento Daily Union*, 15 May 1851, 3; *Sacramento Transcript*, 20 May 1851, 3.
- <sup>130</sup> *Sacramento Transcript*, 26 May 1851, 3; *Sacramento Daily Union*, 9 June 1851, 3.
- <sup>131</sup> *Sacramento Daily Union*, 6 June 1851, 2.
- <sup>132</sup> *Maryville Daily Herald*, 19 June 1851, 2.
- <sup>133</sup> SRNSW: NRS 1291 Reports of vessels arrived, [4/5240] *Cameo*, arrived Sydney 21 September 1851.
- <sup>134</sup> 'Gold Rush Chronology 1850-1851,' San Francisco Museum, <http://www.sfmuseum.org/hist/chron2.html> . Accessed January 14, 2013.
- <sup>135</sup> Sherman L. Ricards and George M. Blackburn, 'The Sydney Ducks: A Demographic "Analysis", *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 42 No. 1 (February 1973), 20-31, from JSTOR <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3637740>. Accessed April 21, 2013.
- <sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.
- <sup>137</sup> Bateson, *Gold Fleet*, 143; E. Daniel Potts and Annette Potts, *Young America and Australian gold: Americans and the Gold Rush of the 1850s* (St. Lucia, Qld, University of Queensland Press, 1974), 7.
- <sup>138</sup> *SMH*, 22 September 1851, 2.
- <sup>139</sup> *Empire*, 14 October 1851, 2.
- <sup>140</sup> *Bell's Life in Sydney*, 29 November 1851, 2.
- <sup>141</sup> *Bell's Life in Sydney*, 13 December 1851, 2; *Empire*, 19 December 1851, 3.
- <sup>142</sup> *Empire*, 1 March 1852, 3.
- <sup>143</sup> *Empire*, 13 March 1852, 2.
- <sup>144</sup> *Bell's Life in Sydney*, 17 April 1852, 2 and 24 April, 2.
- <sup>145</sup> *Empire*, 29 July 1852, 2.

<sup>146</sup> *SMH*, 24 September 1852, 3; NSW Registry of BDMs, 1852 (Vol. 52 No. 53) baptism of Francis William McCron (indexed as McCrawn) (Index checked but no baptism was found for Henry McCron.); GenCircles website <http://www.gencircles.com/users/gtimmins/2/data/40>. Accessed February 27, 2013. Information from Gail Timmins.

<sup>147</sup> Bagot, *Coppin the Great*, 164. The *William Tell* poster is reproduced in Love, *Australian Stage*, 312 from the Coppin Collection (MS 8827), State Library of Victoria.

<sup>148</sup> Humphrey Hall and Alfred John Cripps, *The Romance of the Sydney Stage*, by "Osric" (Sydney: Currency Press in association with the National Library of Australia, 1996), 147; quoting *Geelong Advertiser and Intelligencer*, 25 February 1853, 2; repeated *Courier*, 4 March 1853, 2; *SMH*, 14 March 1853, 2; *Maitland Mercury*, 16 March 1853, 4.

<sup>149</sup> Heaton, *Dictionary of Dates*, 270.

<sup>150</sup> Bagot, *Coppin the Great*, 164.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*; Victorian Registry of BDMs, 1853 (1853 No. 24713). His burial was recorded as Francis Nesbit [sic] McCroan [sic] in the Parish of Christ Church, Geelong, Died 29 March, Buried 30 March. Age 42 years [sic]. Quality or Profession 'Theatrical performer'.

<sup>152</sup> *Argus*, 2 Apr 1853, 4.

<sup>153</sup> *Bells Life in Sydney*, 9 April 1853, 3.

<sup>154</sup> Potts, *Young America and Australian Gold*, 124.

<sup>155</sup> *SMH*, 24 June 1853, 1.

<sup>156</sup> *Empire*, 5 July 1853, 1.

<sup>157</sup> *Bell's Life in Sydney and Sporting Reviewer*, 9 July 1853, 3.

<sup>158</sup> The inscription can still be read. Thanks to Pam Jennings of the Geelong Family History Group for her photograph of his headstone. The stone was carved by Cumming Brothers, stonemasons of Yarra Street. Bagot, *Coppin the Great*, p.191.

<sup>159</sup> *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 12 August 1871, 8.

<sup>160</sup> J. Shanahan, 'Reminiscences of an Old Playgoer: Gustavus Vaughan Brooke, *Weekly Irish Times*, 13 May 1905, 9 (ProQuest Historical Newspapers). Accessed April 4, 2013. The tribute to Brooke himself is also recorded on the headstone.

<sup>161</sup> 'Theatres and Entertainment', *Argus*, 20 January 1896, 7.