

**The Brocklebank Family**  
**Johnstone, Scotland to North Grafton, Massachusetts**  
*Stories by Jane Brocklebank Arnstein*

**John McGowan**

“John McGowan learned the manufacturing of linen thread in the Linen Thread Mill in Johnstone, Scotland which was managed by Robert McAulay, and John, too became the manager of linen thread mills.

John McGowan moved his family from Johnstone, Scotland to Leeds, England, where he accepted a position as manager of a linen thread mill owned by another company. This was apparently a step up for him, was a well paying job, and one that carried prestige in the labor market.

In 1890-1891 John McGowan accepted the position of manager of a model flax-spinning mill in North Grafton, Massachusetts owned by the Finlayson family, owners of the Johnstone, Scotland mill where he had learned the business.

It was a really prestigious move and included not only a high salary but also living quarters and other benefits. The house furnished them was the main house on a “working farm” owned by the company and rented out to the farmer who lived in the caretaker’s house.

As this was not a transfer within the Finlayson organization, but from another company, the immigration authorities considered it “importing labor,” and the family had to move back to Johnstone, Scotland for a year.

He left Scotland in November 1891 for North Grafton, Massachusetts, and landed 29 December 1891; his wife and five children, Barbara 21, Mary 19, Lizzie 17, Rachel 14, and Robert 13 followed, landing 20 April 1892. Their furniture traveled with them in the hold of the ship.

Barbara used to chuckle about the girls landing in New York in the middle of a heat wave all wearing three piece British woolen suits. “Long years after, I well remember the cape to my Mother’s suit being used to cover the pan in which homemade bread was set to ‘rise,’ or else wrapped around one of us kids on cold winter nights.”

**Death and the Mills**

It was quite common for whole families to be wiped out almost overnight due to poor sanitary conditions, poor nutrition, or poor living arrangements with several families sharing two or three rooms. The problem in linen manufacture was dampness as the flax has to be retted (soaked, as in flax, hemp and lumber) and the mills were always cold and damp. Jimmy Brocklebank was but 6 years old when his father John died in 1877.

**Young “Jimmy” Brocklebank**

“James did have five years of schooling before necessity required his going to work in the Finlayson Flax Spinning Company in Johnstone, Scotland when he was ten years old. He would go to work in the dark, stop work after an hour and have a breakfast, and after his day’s work would go home in the dark.

Once young James did the job of the foreman, who was out sick for an extended period. When he asked to be paid the higher wage he was told, ‘Gang away wi ye, yur only a lad,’ and his answer, ‘Aye, I’m only a lad, but I’m doing a man’s work.’

Over the years he was trained in the whole manufacturing process. John McGowan was managing the Finlayson Flax Spinning Company in Johnstone, Scotland, taking up that position prior to emigrating to North Grafton, Massachusetts and thus was ‘boss.’ Then romance stepped in, and the families were joined.”

## **A Bit of Romance**

“After the move from England back to Johnstone, Scotland, and before the move to America, my Mother’s [Barbara McGowan] brother John had plans to be married and his sister Mary McGowan was to be the Maid of Honor, with one of his friends coming from England to be the best man.

The ‘bride’ did not like the color of Mary’s dress, considering green an unlucky color at a wedding, so Barbara McGowan, whose dress was maroon, was delegated to fill the post.

At the last minute, the Best Man couldn’t come from England. Said John to Barbara: ‘Don’t worry, Mother, I’ll get young Jimmy Brocklebank, you know Bella Munn’s son, to be best man.’ Since it was the boss making the request, how could James refuse?”

Thus did fate take a hand: the girl friend was thrown over and James Brocklebank followed Barbara McGowan to America in August 1892, and they were married 16 August 1893.”

## **James Brocklebank**

“Although James had a pretty good job when he and Barbara McGowan were married in August 1893, his pay was \$13.00 per week. The following week the Mill went on half time, and they had three children before they had a full week’s pay.”

Appearing at the Central District Court of Worcester, Massachusetts on 06 June 1899, James Brocklebank became a citizen of the United States of America.

“Eventually James became manager of the North Grafton Mill, and in 1922 he was transferred as the manager of the Paterson, New Jersey Mill – the same position that had been held by Grandfather, John McGowan. This Mill covered a city block, and James was in complete charge of the whole plant, machinery and personnel. My Mother never allowed us to forget that our Father was the manager of the Mill, and that we had a position to uphold.”

Massachusetts Birth Certificates requested father’s occupation: for Daniel’s in 1896 Laborer, James’s 1897 Mill Operative, Barbara’s 1899 Overseer, William’s 1905 and Mary’s 1906 Manager, Isabella’s 1907 Foreman, Jane’s 1910 and Robert’s 1916 Superintendent.

“Textiles are always hit early and hard in any business slump, and the business had already been hard hit by rayon and nylon. And so, after working 49-1/2 years for the Finlayson Flax Spinning Company and the Linen Thread Company, my Father was retired on January 1, 1930, at age 59 years and 6 months, with his employment life brought to an end by the Depression.”

## **Linen Thread Mill**

“The finest quality of flax came from Ireland or Belgium. During World War I the two men [James Brocklebank and John McGowan] talked of the poor quality of the flax they were getting from Russia, shipped from the Port of Riga, war conditions not allowing import of flax from Ireland or Belgium.

My Mother took pride in the fact that she was the third ‘Barbara’ married to the manager of a Linen Thread Mill owned by the same Scottish family – the Finlaysons:

- Barbara Black, wife of Robert McAulay
- Barbara McAulay, wife of John McGowan
- Barbara McGowan, wife of James Brocklebank

Aunt Mary [McGowan] Wilson had a photograph of her McAulay Grandparents taken with Sir Archie Finlayson.”

**J**OHNS BROCKLEBANK (William<sup>2</sup> Brocklebank, John Brocklebank<sup>1</sup>) was born about 1824 in Lancashire, England. He lost his first wife and “several” children to TB in a very short period of time, and John moved to Johnstone, Scotland.

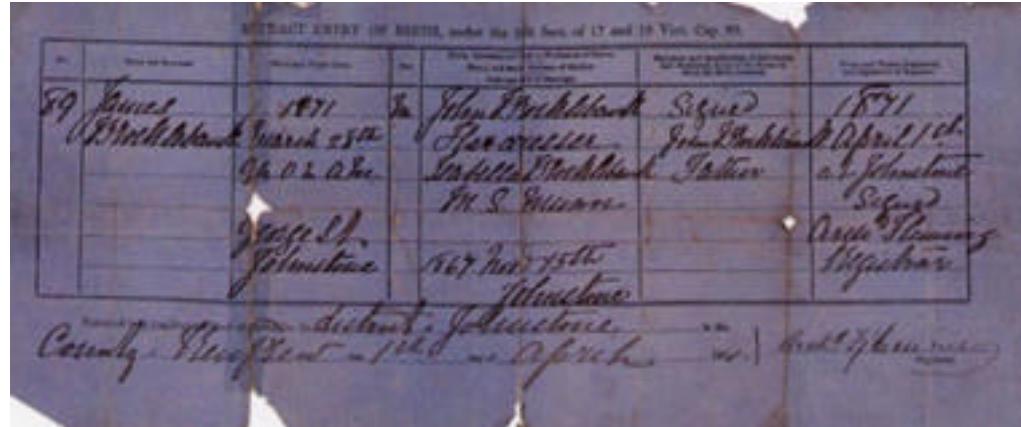
John died at 10:20 a.m. on 04 September 1877 in Johnstone, Scotland. It was Janet McQuilton who registered John Brocklebank’s death in 1877. At the time she was living at Marquis Street, Glasgow, Scotland.

“On the 15<sup>th</sup> day of November 1867 at the Manse Johnstone, after Banns according to the forms of the Church of Scotland, Widower John Brocklebank, Flax Dresser, 43 years old, residing at 51 High Street, Johnstone, married ISABELLA MUNN, Flax Mill Hand, 31 years old, residing at McDowell Street, Johnstone. William Goff was the Minister and witnesses were James McColl and Jane Brown.” Isabella was the daughter of James Munn, a Flax Mill Overlooker, deceased at the time of her marriage, and Jane Chalmers.

Isabelle Munn “Bella” was born in Dalry, Renfrew, Scotland. To her Grandchildren she would always be “Granny.” Isabella lived to be 89 years old and died in the home of her son-in-law, William Boyd, at 6:30 a.m. on 03 August 1925 at 4 Hagg Crescent, Johnstone, Scotland. William Boyd registered her death.

Children of JOHN BROCKLEBANK and ISABELLA MUNN:

1. AGNES BROCKLEBANK was born 09 September 1868 in Johnstone, Renfrew, Scotland, and died 20 June 1928. She married WILLIAM BOYD on 27 September 1889 at St. John’s Church, the Scottish Episcopal Church in Johnstone.
2. **JAMES<sup>4</sup> BROCKLEBANK was born 28 March 1871 in Johnstone, Renfrew, Scotland, and died 25 March 1950. He married BARBARA M<sup>C</sup>GOWAN on 16 August 1893 (daughter of Barbara McAulay and John McGowan).**



3. JOHN BROCKLEBANK was born 18 May 1873 in Johnstone, Renfrew, Scotland. He died 22 February 1895 at the age of 21 of Phthisis Pulmonalis, i.e., Tuberculosis. He was an Assurance Agent.
4. WILLIAM HARVEY BROCKLEBANK was born in 1875 in Johnstone, Renfrew, Scotland. He married CATHERINE NISBET of Lockwinnoch, near Johnstone in July 1904. He was an Iron Turner, and died at the age of 40 at 26 Ellerslie Street on 28 October 1915 of Tuberculosis Bronchial Pneumonia.



James Brocklebank

**JAMES<sup>4</sup> BROCKLEBANK** “Jimmy” (John<sup>3</sup> Brocklebank, William<sup>2</sup> Brocklebank, John Brocklebank<sup>1</sup>) was born 28 March 1871 in Johnstone, Renfrew, Scotland. He had beautiful blue eyes. He died 25 March 1950 in Wyckoff, New Jersey, and rests in the “Brocklebank Plot” at Pine Grove Cemetery in North Grafton, Massachusetts. His children called him “Pa”.

“Thus did fate take a hand, the girl friend was thrown over and James followed Barbara McGowan to America in August 1892, and they were married in a Presbyterian Church on 16 August 1893 in Worcester, Massachusetts.” Witnesses listed on the Marriage Certificate were William McQuilton and Mary McGowan.

Barbara McGowan (daughter of Barbara McAulay and John McGowan) was born 30 May 1871 in Johnstone, Renfrew, Scotland. “She was seven years old when the McGowan family moved to Leeds, England, and she received all her education in England.” She died 18 May 1939 in Paterson, New Jersey, and is buried in the “Brocklebank Plot” at Pine Grove Cemetery in North Grafton, Massachusetts.

Children of JAMES BROCKLEBANK and BARBARA MCGOWAN:

1. JOHN BROCKLEBANK “Johnnie” was born 08 July 1894 in Grafton, Massachusetts. John was baptized 08 October 1894 at St. Andrew’s Parish Church in North Grafton, Massachusetts. Sponsors were Thomas Liversidge and Mary McGowan. His Confirmation was at St. Andrew’s Parish Church in North Grafton, Massachusetts, 1908. He had dark hair and eyes, but was said to be the picture of his Grandfather John Brocklebank. He married ANNE MCGREGOR “Audrey” in 1918.

John died April 1931 from complications of wounds sustained in World War I. A military funeral was held in North Grafton the afternoon of 20 April 1931 when he was brought from Paterson, New Jersey for burial and so joined his younger brother James in the “Brocklebank Plot” at Pine Grove Cemetery in North Grafton, Massachusetts.

2. DANIEL BROCKLEBANK “Dan” was born 11 April 1896 in Grafton, Massachusetts, baptized 10 May 1896, and confirmed 29 September 1909 at St. Andrew’s Church in North Grafton. He married VIOLA S. HOFT (daughter of Winfield Scott Hoft and Alma Louise Smith) on 26 September 1925 in Melrose, Massachusetts. He inherited the fair complexion and sandy hair, though with more red in the hair.

He died suddenly Monday 21 August 1972 in Boston, Massachusetts at the Massachusetts General Hospital, and was interred at the East Cemetery in Hollis, New Hampshire.

3. JAMES BROCKLEBANK was born 22 October 1897 in Grafton, Massachusetts and died of Meningitis on 27 June 1901, 3 years, 8 months and 5 days. James was the first in the “Brocklebank Plot” at Pine Grove Cemetery in North Grafton, Massachusetts.

James purchased the “little house” for his wife Barbara, so she could be near her baby son. It was near Pine Grove Cemetery. Here the family lived for many years.

4. BARBARA M<sup>C</sup>AULAY BROCKLEBANK was born 11 June 1899 in Grafton, Massachusetts. She had blue eyes, as did her Father. She married KENNETH HILL “Ken” and lived in Breton Woods, Iselin, and Tom’s River, New Jersey. Barbara died 04 February 1980; she and Ken are buried in Pine Grove Cemetery, within the “Brocklebank Family Plot.”

5. WILLIAM BROCKLEBANK “Billy” was born 21 January 1905 in Grafton, Massachusetts and died 17 June 1971. He married ADELAIDE LOUISE WINANS (daughter of Frank James Winans and Ella Sophia Kron) on 03 November 1922. “Billy was the only one that looked like my Mother; she had deep set brown eyes and slightly curly brown hair.” He died 17 June 1971 in California.

6. MARY BROCKLEBANK was born 05 July 1906 in Grafton, Massachusetts and was named for her Aunt Mary McGowan Wilson by the suggestion of her Granny, Agnes Munn Brocklebank. She married WALTER STEWART DIVER (son of James Diver, Jr. and Margaret Dewart) on 20 October 1926. Mary died on 07 January 1962.

Mary and Walter met at a Valentine's Day Dance at St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Paterson, New Jersey – she was 17 and he 24 years old.” They were married three years later at James and Barbara Brocklebank's home.

Mary and Walter are buried in the Brocklebank Plot at Pine Grove Cemetery.

7. ISABELLA BOCKLEBANK “Isabelle” was born 20 October 1907 in Grafton, Massachusetts. Isabelle married FRANK GOETTE in November 1950. Isabelle was a “true ash blonde and had hazel eyes.”

Isabelle was a born nurse, knowledgeable and compassionate. Isabelle worked at Hackensack Hospital as a nurse in Hackensack, New Jersey. Aunt Isabelle, as well as her mother and sisters, crocheted beautifully. Isabelle died in 1984, and joined sister and brothers in the Brocklebank Plot at Pine Grove Cemetery.

8. JANE BROCKLEBANK was born 11 July 1910 in Grafton, Massachusetts, and is named for Jane McGowan [Aunt Jeannie Liversidge]. She married MELVILLE ARNSTEIN (son of William Morris Arnstein and Bertha “Birdie” Marks) on 02 August 1936.

“Your records will show that I was the youngest girl, and am now the sole survivor of the Brocklebank ‘clan.’ I have turned out to be the keeper of the personal stories of the older generation, my parents and the Aunts, Uncles and Cousins that were always a part of our life.”

9. ROBERT BROCKLEBANK “Bob” was born 01 August 1916 in Grafton, Massachusetts. He married DOLORES FEATHERSTONE (daughter of Thomas Featherstone and Isabel Morrell) on 08 June 1940.. He inherited the fair complexion and sandy hair, though with more blonde in the hair.

Bob died on 25 October 1980. He is buried in the “Brocklebank Plot” at Pine Grove Cemetery in North Grafton, Massachusetts.

**“The House on The Hill”  
21 High Street  
North Grafton, Massachusetts**



“In 1915 my parents built the house we came to call “The House on the Hill.” My father was by this time the manager of the North Grafton Mill, and we had a very comfortable way of life.”

The dining room had two tables – one for adults and one for children, and we would fill them both.

James had a darkroom at the house, and made postcard photos.

The hedge along the path was Scotch Hawthorne, brought back by Pa on a visit to his mother in Johnstone, Scotland.”

(quoting Jane Brocklebank Arnstein)



**May 2001  
Scotch Hawthorne on the left, with the path hidden from view.**