

The Mystery of Charles Briscoe

Reputed son of George IV

Beacon

Nov. 16, 1905

Royal Secret Revealed

**King George IV was Married Secretly and Had a Son
Was That Son the Late Charles Briscoe of St. Andrews?**

London, November 11. By permission of King Edward, the *Daily Chronicle* asserts a package of papers consigned to the care of Coutts' Bank, by Mrs. Fitzherbert (Maria Anne Smythe), under the stipulation that it was not to be opened for a long period, has now after seventy years been opened and proved to contain the marriage certificate and other indisputable proofs that George IV was actually married to Mrs. Fitzherbert. Mrs. Fitzherbert became the wife of the Prince of Wales, afterward George IV, in December 1785. The marriage of the Prince was invalid under English law, though it was sanctioned by the Roman Catholic Church, of which Mrs. Fitzherbert was a member. It was expected that the papers in Coutts' would settle the question which has agitated the British public for over a century, as to whether there was issue from the marriage, but there is nothing in the foregoing despatch to indicate that the question has been solved. It has long been reported that there actually was a male child, and that this child emigrated to the United States and settled in Washington, where he died some years ago, after living quietly, but in good circumstances.

Did the King's Son Live and Die in St. Andrews?

The above paragraph may furnish a clue to the mystery surrounding the life and death of Mr. Charles Briscoe, who resided in St. Andrews for many years and was commonly reported to be the illegitimate son of King George the Fourth. Mr. Briscoe was connected with the

Imperial customs while here. He left several daughters as issue, one of whom was married to the late David Shanks Kerr, of St. John. It was thought that before he died he would clear up the mystery connected with his birth, but he carried the secret to the grave with him, leaving directions that after the lapse of many years his grave should be opened, when the secret would be found revealed. His wishes were carried out a few years back, but the papers that were supposed to contain the hidden secret had crumbled into dust.

The Grave Refused to Reveal Its Secret

In the issue of the *Beacon* of July 24, 1902, the following article bearing upon the opening of the Briscoe grave was published. The names of those who were present at the exhuming of the body were the deceased grandson, Mr. John Kerr, of St. John, the late Rev. Canon Ketchum, and the late Dr. S. T. Gove:

1842

Here awaiting the final resurrection rest the mortal remains of Charles Joseph Briscoe and Elizabeth Ann his wife. To whose memory this Tablet has been erected by their children.

In a sheltered corner of the ancient burial ground of St. Andrews, protected by narrow wooden palings, stands a plain white marble table, which tells the above simple tale. Weather-beaten and moss-grown the stone is, but it still stands erect - in marked contrast to many others about it. The inscription is plainly discernible. To the wayfarer who knows nothing and cares less of the early history of St. Andrews and of the occupants of this humble tomb, the story told by the marbled page has little of interest, yet beneath the grave there lies hidden from mortal eyes a romance of real life such as the novelist's pen has seldom written - a romance in which no less a personage than a king of England is alleged to have played a leading part.

The story has been closely guarded for many years, but with the death of the immediate members of the family the necessity for further concealment has been to a great extent removed.

Grave of
Charles and
Elizabeth
Briscoe.
Loyalist
Cemetery



Charles Joseph Briscoe was an Englishman by birth and was the reputed son of King George IV, his mother being said to be one of the ladies of the court with whom he had fallen in love. In order probably that he should be out of the reach of gossips of the court - for there were gossips in those days as there are now - he was appointed to a position in the Imperial Customs at St. Andrews, Capt. Grant being at the same time the chief officer here.

There are a few people now living who can remember Mr. Briscoe and who can recall him riding around the streets of St. Andrews in his scarlet hunting coat. He was a tall man, of an autocratic disposition; would brook no interference and kept himself aloof from the common people. His wife was a lady of much culture and refinement and had been at court in England before coming to this country. Upon her husband's demise she was under the necessity of supporting herself by teaching school. Some of the old people of the town were among her pupils. They can easily recall the stately,

dignified figure of the old lady as she appeared in her schoolroom, with a white ruffed Elizabeth collar about her neck and gold-headed cane in her hand.

It was generally expected that upon Mr. Briscoe's death the mystery surrounding his life would be revealed, but the secret was hidden in the grave, where so many secrets are hidden. In his will, he left instructions that upon the death of the last of his children his grave should be opened, when papers would be found upon his body which would reveal the history of his life and make clear all that was doubtful concerning his birth.

It was nearly sixty years afterward that the last of the name passed from earth. Then, in the presence of two St. Andrews gentlemen, who have died within a few years, and a grandson of the deceased - who holds a responsible position in St. John - the grave was opened. But the precaution of enclosing the papers within a metallic or other suitable casket had not been taken, so that when the light touched them they crumbled into dust, and the secret that had been so jealously guarded still remained the property of the tomb.

A medallion portrait of the deceased's wife was found in the coffin and is now among the priceless treasures which the deceased's grandson has in his possession. It is somewhat dimmed by its long imprisonment in the grave, but the features are still recognized by those who knew the old lady.

Standard

March 21, 1840

Literary and Scientific Club

Mr. Briscoe's lecture on Electricity, last Monday evening, came off with great *éclat*. More than one hundred and seventy persons were present, being a much larger attendance than there has been at any previous lecture. Notwithstanding the crowded state of the room, and the consequent humidity of the air, the experiments succeeded very well. The lecturer gave a comprehensive and lucid view of the science generally, and an accurate explication and comparison of the two theories upon which Electrical Phenomena have usually been explained. The care with which the lecture was evidently compiled, and the number and variety of the illustrations, shew that, in this



Saltbox, 107
Queen St.
Mrs.
Briscoe, with
Elizabethan
ruff and gold-
headed cane,
taught a girl's
seminary
upstairs in
1837.

instance, no pains have been spared to promote the improvement and pleasure of the society, and reflect no small credit upon the indefatigable exertions of the lecturer.

Standard
July 6, 1864
St. Andrews Businesses

Mrs. Briscoe's Seminary for Young Ladies. 1837

St. Croix Courier
Feb. 15, 1978

Salt Box House Heritage Feature - History of building on Queen St. - School for Girls Once - Gladstone Smith Saltbox House

It is very probable that this house was erected by Joseph Crookshank, ship's carpenter, who bought the land on May 9th, 1785. A search of the deeds reveals that during the late 18th and early 19th centuries the property very likely served as a



combination residence and place of business. Mrs. Charles Briscoe ran a school for girls upstairs during the 1800's. After Crookshank, the house passed to the ownership of 11 other persons and was acquired by Gladstone Smith in 1938. In 1975 Heritage Canada bought the house from Mrs. Smith, with the agreement that she live in it at a nominal rent as long as she wished. When she moved out in 1976 the planning for the rehabilitation of the house began.

Home of Jeremiah Pote, brought to St. Andrews from Castine, 1784. Since demolished. Courtesy Barry Murray

[Given the dual slant of the rear roof, it is possible that the house was not originally a salt-box but is the product of an addition. Without the addition, it would resemble very closely the Pagan house at the corner of Queen and Frederick. On the other hand, the home of Jeremiah Pote, above, brought to St. Andrews from Castine, 1784, was a true saltbox.]