



**Mathieson, Catherine** 1818 - 1883  
Cheese and butter maker, community leader

According to family information Catherine Johnstone was born at Lochmaben, Dumfriesshire,

Scotland, on 11 December 1818, the eldest of six children born to Thomas Johnstone and his wife, Jean Bryden. She married John Mathieson of Mid Calder, West Lothian, on 3 June 1851 at Lochmaben; their children were Janet (Jessie), James and Mary Jane.

In 1851 John Mathieson leased land near Kirknewton and here the family lived comfortably for seven years, before deciding to emigrate to the Free Church settlement of Dunedin, New Zealand. After careful packing of their belongings, which included 'butter boards, churn and tubs, fiddle and spinning wheel', they sailed from Glasgow on the *Jura* on 1 June 1858, arriving at Port Chalmers on 23 September.

Within a fortnight the Mathiesons were conveyed by dinghy and barge to the big stone house at Vauxhall, which had been built in 1849 by the Reverend Thomas Burns for his son, Arthur. John Mathieson had been granted a seven year lease of the Grants Braes farm. He bought 20 cows, and Catherine began to sell milk and butter across the harbour in Dunedin twice a week. After six months she was making cheese also, and parcelling up pork and beef for relatives who had lodged with the family before establishing themselves. As well as farming, John bought and sold cattle and invested in property. He and Catherine, were for three years communicant members of First Church, Dunedin, and transferred to Andersons Bay Presbyterian Church in September 1862, when services began to be held there.

On 6 July 1864 John Mathieson drew a plot of land at Pukehiki, on Otago Peninsula, in a ballot, but until 1866 the family lived in a new twin-gabled stone house on the hilltop of Grants Braes, before moving to the grand new seven-roomed home, Springfield, built for Mathieson at Pukehiki. Catherine continued making butter and cheese for Dunedin buyers. John Mathieson, the richest local landowner, gave good support to the new Pukehiki parish, supervised the library, and took office on the road board. His chief interest, however, was in developing his property. In 1871 Catherine and John Mathieson decided to ask their neighbours to form a co-operative cheese factory. At a historic meeting at Springfield on 22 August 1871, eight men formed the Otago Peninsula Co-operative Cheese Factory Company Limited; it was the first such venture in New Zealand. Mathieson offered the use of his home to make the cheese, saying that his wife would heat the whey in her kitchen and teach the manager the methods she had used for years. Cheese making began within a fortnight; but the new factory did not make a large profit. In 1874, as John admitted later, 'the notion seized him that sheep farming would pay better than dairying' and he withdrew from the project.

No longer tied to the production of cheese, Catherine, 'always warm and agreeable', could enjoy the social life of the close farming community at leisure. She may have featured more than her husband in a neighbour's assessment that 'the Mathiesons were interesting people - literary people and musical.' Numerous cousins and neighbours' children visited, dressmakers came to stay, and there were parties and balls at nearby Larnach Castle. The one extant photograph of Catherine Mathieson shows her elaborately dressed, with straight, fair hair beneath her bonnet, an oval face and solemn expression. In 1878 she and her husband hosted the first Peninsula Agricultural and Pastoral Show, and in that year also the Springfield farm returned to dairying, the sheep venture having been a failure. The Mathiesons' butter won first prizes at Dunedin shows. Catherine Mathieson died on 14 September 1883 and John Mathieson on 27 August 1887.

Both are buried in the Andersons Bay Cemetery (Lot 40 Block 11)

**JANET C. ANGUS**

Angus, J. C. 'John Mathieson'. In *The advance guard*. Series 1. Ed. G. J. Griffiths. Dunedin, 1973

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