



# photodetective

(BY MAUREEN A. TAYLOR)



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## Mother or Daughter?

Posted by [Maureen](#)



Winston Cochrane sent in this lovely portrait of a young woman. Her hairstyle and dress date from the mid to late 1880s. He wanted to know if the item on the studio prop to our left is a hat. It is! It's a tiny topper that would rest on the top of her head. I love that's covered with spring flowers.



On her left wrist is a ribbon bracelet.



His big question was about her identity. Could this be Elizabeth (Gourlay) Rae (1840-1921) or her daughter Mary Jane (Rae) Bell (1869-1934)? The woman depicted here is probably only in her 20s, so it's likely the daughter. Mary Jane's brother James immigrated from Scotland to the United States in 1886.

It's the back of the image that made me think about who and where.

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This imprint reinforces my belief that being quick to judge can lead to mistakes. When I first glanced at it, the "N.B." stood out. Could it stand for New Brunswick? Many immigrants to the United States first stopped in Canada, but Dumfries, New Brunswick is a rural community even today and it's not near the coast. So what does the N.B. represent?

I called Fred Farrell, the photo archivist at the New Brunswick Provincial Archives for a little clarification. He confirmed that it was unlikely taken in Dumfries, New Brunswick. Turns out that Scotland was often referred to as North Britain even into the 20th century.

This photo was definitely taken in Scotland.

Solve your family photo mysteries with these books by Maureen A. Taylor:

- *Preserving Your Family Photographs*
- *Fashionable Folks: Hairstyles 1840-1900*
- *Finding the Civil War in Your Family Album*

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## detective

[BY MAUREEN A. TAYLOR]



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**Scottish Photographers**Posted by [Maureen](#)

Last week, I discussed Winston Cochrane's family photo taken in Dumfries, Scotland.



Late in the week he emailed me to say he had new information.

The image of Mary Jane Rae was taken at a photo studio in the Jubilee Buildings at the Queen's Photo Co. According to Richard Torrance's *Scottish Studio Photographers to 1914* (Scottish Record Societies, 2011), Thomas A. Moryson operated the Queen's Photo Co. in the Jubilee Buildings from 1893 to 1900. The building opened in 1887.

Now Winston thinks the photo was taken to commemorate an engagement. Mary married on Aug. 7, 1894.

The clothing clues are the epitome of the late 1880s. Clothing from the early 1890s usually features fuller upper sleeves, so I have questions regarding this image being taken in the early 1890s.

Not everyone kept up with the current fashion. When I look in my own closet, I see clothing I wore several seasons ago. Perhaps Mary didn't have the means to buy a new dress or this one was her favorite.

I'm not sure of the source used to establish the work dates for Thomas Moryson. He bought his photo business from a James Rae, who might be a relative of Mary Jane's. It's possible that Rae also called his business the Queen's Photo Co. and that Moryson bought the name and the equipment.

This photo remains a little bit of a mystery.

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