

# Granny Cheyne

## A Shetland Knitter in New Zealand

MARGARET STOVE

*In 2005, the owner of a damaged shawl asked Margaret Stove to restore the family heirloom as closely as possible to its original state. The shawl was likely more than 100 years old and had been knitted by “Granny Cheyne.” Stove, who describes the restoration of the Cheyne Shawl in *Wrapped in Lace: Knitted Heirloom Designs from Around the World* (Loveland, Colorado: Interweave, 2010), here explores the history behind the shawl and its maker.*

—Editor

**I**N THIS AGE OF INSTANT COMMUNICATION and air travel, it is difficult to imagine how hard life must have been to prompt several thousand intrepid inhabitants of a group of tiny islands lying between Norway and Scotland—the Shetlands and Orkneys—to travel literally to the ends of the earth to settle in a similar island environment not far from the Antarctic continent. Their months-long journey would be fraught with hardship, and there was no guarantee that they would ever return.

Because many immigrants from Shetland were erroneously recorded as being Scottish, it is difficult to know who among them was the first to arrive in New Zealand. An Andrew Cheyne, the master of the brig *Bee*, is known to have called in to the far north of New Zealand in 1841. This Andrew could well have been a member of the family of Granny Cheyne’s husband, also Andrew, who was born in Dunrossness, Shetland, in 1840.

In 1871, Sir Julius Vogel (1835–1899), who later became prime minister of New Zealand, introduced an assisted immigration scheme. This coincided with the land clearances in Shetland, and as the inhabitants of Shetland and Orkney were perceived to be best suited to settle on Stewart Island, an isolated and inhospitable location off the south coast of New Zealand, they were specifically invited by the provincial government to settle there. As

The view from Sumburgh Head at the southern tip of the Shetland mainland near Dunrossness, where Granny Cheyne married and lived before immigrating to New Zealand in 1874.

Photograph by Paula Fisher © Shutterstock.



priority was given to farm laborers and carpenters, many of the male prospective immigrants, who were primarily fishermen, listed one of these as their occupation on their application for assistance. Women claimed to be domestic servants even though no one on Shetland at the time was in a position to employ domestic help.

Although grants of land, boats and lines, and provisions for six months had been provided, the settlement did not flourish. Writings of the time suggest that the new settlers, whose homeland had no trees and whose buildings thus were built exclusively of stone, lacked the skills for building houses of timber.

A planned fishing industry to provide smoked and dried fish for the goldfields in Victoria, Australia, also failed despite an abundance of fish in the sea, as the settlers found the waters of the Foveaux Strait, which separates Stewart Island from the rest of New Zealand, far too rough (the strait is notorious for changeable and extreme weather blowing up from Antarctica). Consequently, most settlers moved from Stewart Island to Invercargill near the South Island harbor of Bluff. It was to Invercargill that the spinner and knitter known as Granny Cheyne eventually arrived to join members of her family who had become established there earlier.

Margret Thomson, born in 1837, married Andrew Cheyne in Dunrossness in 1862, and in 1874, Margret, Andrew, and their three children, along with nineteen other family members, migrated to New Zealand on the *Jessie*

*Readman*. They arrived at Port Chalmers, Dunedin, on October 26 and then sailed on to Bluff on the *Koomerang*.

Margret and other family members brought their spinning wheels with them: Shetland wheels are held together with wooden pegs and can be dismantled easily. There is no record of their having brought wool. Because Andrew Cheyne gained employment as an inspector with the Invercargill City Council, Margret did not need to earn a livelihood like her grandmother, Granny Thomson, in Shetland, who had had to walk for miles to sell her knitting. In fact, there is no record that any of Margret's extended family in New Zealand sold their knitting; the shawls that they spun and knitted were all gifts for family and friends.

The wool that Margret used came from Woodlands Station, which had been established as a cattle run in 1858. Romney sheep were kept on the property in 1862, but feral Merino sheep grazed on adjacent lands. Malcolm Mouat (dates unknown), who bought Woodlands, used to put aside fine, blade-shorn fleece for his cousin Margret, who knitted him woolen spencers (a type of thermal underwear) and long johns, which were dyed pink. Her exquisite shawls were spun from these fleeces, as well.

The wool for the shawl that I repaired was spun in the Shetland yarn tradition for fine shawls: a two-ply worsted with little twist. Having had the opportunity to spin Shetland wool from a flock in Unst, one of the North Isles of the Shetlands, that provided fleece for fine shawls, I have



Mason Bay on Stewart Island's west coast near the Foveaux Strait, which separates the island from the South Island of New Zealand. It was here that Shetland immigrants fleeing the land clearances in their homeland first settled.

Photograph by falk  
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been able to compare that wool with fleece grown here in New Zealand. Fine crossbred wool crossed with Merino is similar indeed to the native Shetland wool, and it is understandable why Margret would have chosen it for her shawl. Although the designs that Margret used were traditional patterns from her homeland, I learned when working out the patterns for repairing the shawl that she had made adaptations to accommodate the number of stitches and rows in each element of the design, especially in the borders, so that they all worked in harmony.

Shetland lace patterns fit Mary Walker Phillips's definition of "creative lace" perfectly: They are excellent examples of using knitted lace (pattern every row resulting in a single thread between the holes), lace knitting (pattern on alternate rows resulting in two twisted threads between the holes), and eyelet lace (in which the holes are separated by knitted fabric). These variations give the knitter the freedom to make the elaborate designs that we see in these shawls.

The patterns depict the natural environment, but how they came about has been a puzzle that may never be re-

solved with certainty. In my travels and research in many countries, I have been intrigued by the many similarities in patterns wherever lace is knitted. Two points are of particular interest: The first is that early patterns were knitted by knitters "reading" the knitting itself, translating what they saw and not relying on pattern books. The second is that most of these knitting communities were associated with seafarers who no doubt would have brought home souvenirs or gifts of knitwear to wives and sweethearts, who in turn would have read and adapted the lace designs for their own use. I accept that most patterns could be arrived at independently; still, the Estonian Twig patterns and the Print of the Wave patterns of Shetland are so similar that I wonder if this is an example of a shared reading.

Granny Cheyne died in Invercargill in 1936, leaving a legacy of shawls whose complex patterning and exceptional workmanship are the equals of the best of the lace spun and knitted in Shetland. I regard it as a great privilege to have been involved in the restoration of one of them, and I hope that it now can be enjoyed by many more generations here in the Antipodes. ❖

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## A Granny Cheyne Scarf to Knit

MARGARET STOVE

I adapted this scarf from patterns used in the border of the shawl Granny Cheyne made in the nineteenth century (see the preceding article). The scarf was knitted in Artisan Gossamer Lace Merino, a two-ply yarn available online from Holland Road Yarn Company. Two skeins are

required to make the scarf; a shorter cravat-size scarf may be made from one skein.

### INSTRUCTIONS

#### Scarf

With crochet thread, use the provisional method to CO 20 sts. Work Set-Up Row of Beginning Edging Chart. Work Rows 1–16 of Beginning Edging Chart 9 times. Work Row 1 of Corner Chart as foll: Work 19 sts in patt, pick up and k 72 sts along the straight edge of edging back to the provisional CO, unravel the crochet thread, and place the 19 sts onto the dpn, work in charted patt to end—110 sts. Work Rows 2–22 of Corner Chart—114 sts. Work Rows 1–114 of Body Chart once, then rep Rows 99–114 eleven more times—47 points total around edge; 9 along bottom edge, 1 at each corner, and 18 along each side. Place all sts on st holder.

Work a 2nd piece the same as the 1st and then graft the 2 pieces tog, matching the shapes of the patt. *Notes:* As the pieces are knitted in different directions, compromises

#### MATERIALS

Artisan Gossamer Lace Merino, 100% merino wool yarn, laceweight, 547 yards (500.2 m)/18 gram (0.6 oz) skein, 2 skeins of Natural; <http://hollandroad yarn.co.nz>

Needles, size 0 (2 mm) or size needed to obtain gauge, and 1 double pointed, size 0 (2 mm), for grafting

Crochet thread, small amount for provisional cast-on

Stitch holder

Tapestry needle

Finished size: 48 inches (121.9 cm) long and 12 inches (30.5 cm) wide, after washing and blocking

Gauge: 38 sts and 56 rows = 4 inches (10.2 cm) in garter st, blocked

See page 62 for Abbreviations and Techniques

The charts for this project are available in PDF format at [pieceworkmagazine.com/Charts-Illustrations](http://pieceworkmagazine.com/Charts-Illustrations)





Margaret Stove's elegant Shetland lace scarf inspired by an original Shetland shawl knitted by Granny Cheyne after she immigrated to New Zealand.

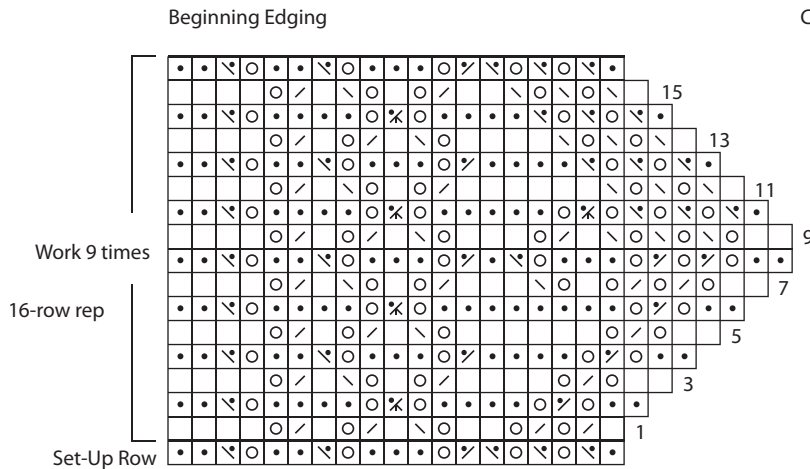
*Photograph by Joe Coca.*

will need to be made while grafting the two pieces together. It is important to keep the garter stitch correct and to ensure the lace edges create the illusion of the pattern being continuous.

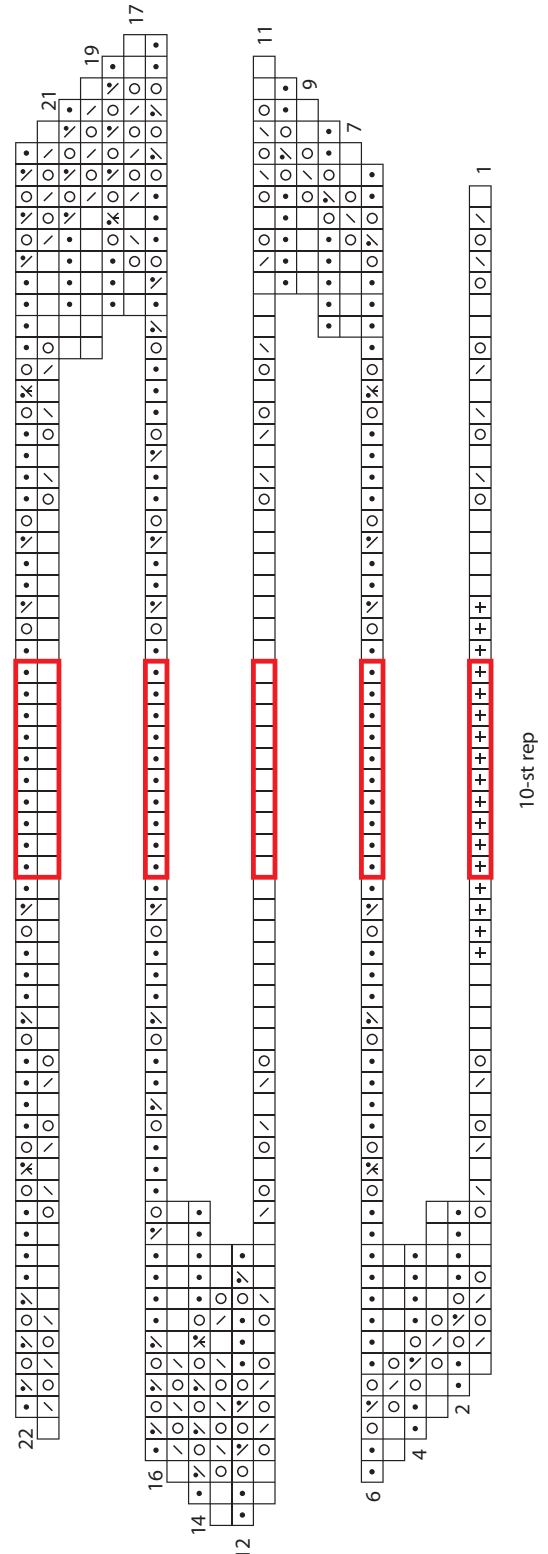
### Finishing

Weave in ends. Wash gently by hand in hot water with pure soap or neutral wool wash. Rinse and pin out while wet with sufficient tension to open out the lace. Steam lightly and unpin when completely dry.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND DESIGNER. *Margaret Stove lives in New Zealand and uses the skills that she has acquired in figuring out the structure of knitted lace to create new designs and, more recently, to conserve and restore heritage lace. This latter interest gives a new life to the creations of expert knitters of past generations and ensures that their work will continue to give pleasure. Her books Creating Original Hand-knitted Lace (Berkeley, California: Lacis, 1995) and Wrapped in Lace (Loveland, Colorado: Interweave, 2010) detail the results of her research in this area.*



### Corner



### Key

- k on RS; p on WS
- p on RS; k on WS
- yo
- k1tbl
- k2tog on RS
- ssk on RS
- k2tog on WS
- ssk on WS
- sl 1, k2tog, pssso on RS
- sl 1, k2tog, pssso on WS
- k3tog on WS
- pick up and k 1 st from straight edge of edging
- no st
- patt rep











