

THE RITCHIE (RITCH) BROTHERS – A Possible History

They had no strength left – but they kept swimming. They could still hear the screams of their comrades. Drowned soon for sure. Locked in the ship's hold by that monster - after he anchored the ship too close to its rocky shores during the storm.

The ice cold waves were enormous and they had swallowed too much seawater, but they had to keep swimming, else slavery. Torture and death were just as likely.

Pat and Tommy were lucky. The hold they were in was locked too – but the rocks made a hole big enough for escape. They were with the first ones through – less than half of them made it. The rest drowned within minutes.

Their captors made it to shore on the ship's mast. They were dragging the surviving prisoners from the beach – likely to a fate worse than death. So Tommy and Pat kept swimming. The screams eventually stopped – silenced by death or distance. After what seemed like hours, and the last of their energy was gone, they headed to shore – hoping they had enough distance to avoid detection and re-capture.

They crawled onto the beach and hid behind some rocks. They needed rest. Their freedom was hard won, but could they keep it? How long could they put slavery in America on hold? This island seemed large enough – one of the Orkneys, they had heard the night before – those godforsaken northern isles only Vikings could tame. Maybe if they lived long enough they could find a way home? They were terrified, but had their first sense of hope in months.

The Ritchie brothers never did make it home, or so the story goes. These Covenanters stayed in the Orkneys. One headed west to Hoy where he and his family planted its roots, and Ritchie became Ritch. Several generations later, in 1865, after mixing it up with the resident Gunn's and Sinclair's, Mary Ann Ritch was born in Rackwick, a small town on Rackwick Bay on the Orkney Island of Hoy.

This is a possible history. According to the Whitton and Ritch Geneology the Ritch family line has been traced back to a Patrick Gunn with an estimated birth year of 1670, who had a son named Thomas born on May 31, 1697 in Stromness. Also noted in the book by John Bremner, "Hoy- The Dark Enchanted Isle" the Ritch's are stated to be descendants from the Ritchie brothers who escaped from the December 10, 1679 wreck of the prison ship 'The Crown' at Deerness on the Mainland isle of Orkney (http://www.ivanlea.net/sub_pages/ritch.htm). The Crown was headed to the Americas to sell its cargo of prisoners into slavery. The prisoners were the remnants of the Covenanters (Presbyterian Scotsmen) who had lost the Battle of Bothwell Bridge against Charles II (Church of England).

