

Charles Knight (1808 – 1891)

Charles Knight, the third son and youngest child of James and Ann Knight, was baptised at Rye, Sussex, England, on 14 July 1808. His father died a month after his birth and in 1810 his mother married Thomas Godfrey of Hawkhurst, Kent. Charles grew up there, and in 1828 began medical studies at University College, London. In the decade 1830–1840 he practised medicine in the United States and gained membership of the Royal College of Surgeons in 1840. Deciding to join his brother William who had migrated to Australia, Knight left England in 1841 as surgeon on the *Lord Glenelg*; also on board, George Grey was going to Adelaide to assume the governorship of South Australia. Soon after landing, Grey offered him work as a copying clerk, and by 1843 he was in the private secretary's office compiling statistics for the home authorities. Knight was interested in botany and joined the governor on several expeditions into the interior. He married Caroline Symes at Adelaide in 1844, and had a family of three sons and two daughters.

In 1845 Grey became governor of New Zealand; Knight went with him to Auckland, and in 1846 was appointed auditor-general. Ten years later, when the position terminated with the granting of responsible government, Knight became manager of the Colonial Bank of Issue. From 1858, as auditor of the public accounts of the general government, he dealt with the development of flax processing and the setting up of meteorological stations. In mid-1865 he moved to Wellington where he chaired a civil service commission, and in 1866 brought the Post Office savings bank scheme into operation. He went with Grey to England in 1868, and in 1869 he accompanied Julius Vogel to Australia to negotiate a mail and customs agreement.

In his spare time Knight worked on his botanical interests. In 1852 he sent drawings of Auckland mosses to the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, and from 1856 he began his study of lichens. He was elected a fellow of the Linnean Society in 1857, and went on to publish twenty papers on lichens, mosses, zoology and palaeontology. As opportunities arose, he made trips to the Nelson mountains with David Monro and William Travers, and in the late 1860s spent time at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. He exchanged information with European lichenologists, corresponded for over 30 years with Joseph Hooker at Kew, and in 1863 obtained a government commission of £600 for him to prepare a *Handbook of the New Zealand Flora*. Concerned also with philosophical matters, he was an active member of the Wellington Philosophical Society and of the New Zealand Institute.

After retiring from government service in 1878 Knight devoted himself to woodwork (he was a skilled craftsman on the lathe) and to lichens. After several visits to Australia, he published his results and also sent 300–400 specimens to Swiss botanist Johannes Müller Argoviensis who in 1886 proposed the genus *Knightiella* for a small, foliose, terricolous lichen collected from the Grampian Mountains. Occurring in Tasmania, Victoria and southern New Zealand, it was first described as *Parmelia splachnirima* by Hooker and Taylor in 1844. Several lichen species, including the New Zealand endemic *Pseudocyphellaria knightii*, now a synonym of *Pseudocyphellaria lividofusca*, also honour the work of Charles Knight. He kept his interest in botany until he died at his home on Wellington Terrace on 3 September 1891.

Pseudocyphellaria lividofusca

Pseudocyphellaria (Lobariaceae) is a genus of about 170 species of large, leafy lichens with a wide, south temperate distribution. All species have conspicuous pseudocyphellae (tiny spore-like structures) on their lower surface that can aid identification. *Pseudocyphellaria lividofusca* fungus is nearly always associated with a green alga. However occasionally, in very damp places, the same fungus associates with a cyanobacterium. Until DNA sequencing showed that the fungus was identical in both cases, the cyanobacterial form was thought to be a different species, *Pseudocyphellaria knightii*, so the synonym refers only to this and not to the more common green algal form.



PHOTO: Allison Knight