

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE TASMANIAN HISTORICAL RESEARCH
ASSOCIATION HELD IN THE ROYAL SOCIETY ROOM, TASMANIAN MUSEUM
AND ART GALLERY, ON TUESDAY 10 MARCH 2009.**

Present: The President, Dr Alison Alexander in the chair, and about 65 members and friends.

Apologies: Dianne Snowden.

Minutes: The minutes of the previous ordinary meeting were read, and confirmed as a true record.

Business: The President spoke of the highly successful excursion over the previous weekend, thanking Margaret Glover, Margaret Cameron, and especially Mary Ramsay.

The next excursion would be to 'Runnymede' on 28 June. The annual 'M.D. McRae Memorial Prize', financed by the Association, had been awarded to Jennifer McFarlane.

Speaker: The President welcomed not only the speaker, John Carter, but also several other Canadian visitors. The topic for tonight's presentation was 'Uncertain Future in an Unknown Place: North American Political Prisoners in Van Diemen's Land'.

Dr Carter began by emphasising that his subjects *were* "North Americans" rather than "Canadians", as often said; their background was various. He outlined the major episodes of rebellion against British rule in Canada through 1837-8. Then Governor of Upper Canada was George Arthur. On the defeat and capture of protestors in his domain, Arthur had two hanged, while 92 suffered transportation to Van Diemen's Land. Most travelled on the *Buffalo*, which enjoyed a relatively pleasant passage before arriving at Hobart Town 12 February 1840.

Sections of the local press disparaged the arrivals as Americans of the lowest order, adventurers who had sought rapine and plunder. Their initial posting was to the Sandy Bay road gang; on Sunday mornings they marched down to St George's, while a Methodist preacher came to the station in the afternoon. The men next moved to Lovely Banks in the lower Midlands. Among them feeling was always strong that the treatment they suffered was harsh and unjust, and desire for escape prevailed. When two attempted to bolt, Lieutenant-Governor John Franklin was enraged, and ordered them into 'magpie' garb. Later the Americans worked at Green Ponds, building the Church there, and on the Bridgewater causeway. Then they were broken up into small parties, variously going to probation stations at New Town Bay, Jericho, Jerusalem, Brown's River, Saltwater River, Rocky Hills, Marlborough. In several of these places they actually built the stations, that at Saltwater River being most impressive in its extent and structure.

Most of the men received tickets-of-leave in 1842. Common employment thereafter was on the bigger Midlands estates. They worked as fencers, smiths, shingle-splitters, and even inventors of agricultural machinery. Robert Kermode was one employer to speak of the Americans with particular enthusiasm, and others of his kind evidently sympathised with the men's situation. Here prevailed paradox, for people like Kermode comprised much the same kind of colonial elite as the rebellion of 1837-8 had sought to overturn.

By the end of 1844 there was a general award of Pardons. Almost unanimously, the men immediately sought to return to America. The saddest case was that of Elijah Woodman, old and going blind, who died on the homeward passage; remarkably, his diary had survived. In conclusion, Dr Carter stressed how the North Americans' story had a particular place in the history of both Canada and Tasmania; he hoped that this would be recognised by governments in both places, enabling appropriate recognition of the episode.

In the course of many questions, such points were made as that Masons in Hobart had given help to members of the group, and that the men's departure was often aboard American whaling vessels. The President thanked Dr Carter for an address that put local affairs in a broader perspective, and the meeting closed at 9pm.

Michael Roe, for Secretary

Alison Alexander, President