

CONVICT SCHOOLMISTRESSES IN VAN DIEMEN'S LAND

A paper presented at the Female Convicts Research Centre seminar, "What the Convicts Brought With Them – and What They Left Behind", Hobart, 7 November 2015.

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1. OBJECTIVE AND SCOPE

The aim of this research was to determine whether the skills, abilities and experience of convict schoolmistresses transported to Van Diemen's Land (VDL) between 1812 and 1853 were of help to them in the colony.

Of the 14,000 (approx.) female convicts transported to VDL during this period, only five stated upon arrival that their trade or occupation was 'schoolmistress'. All of these were included in the study. In addition, another twenty-four women stated that their trade or occupation was 'governess'. Of this group, only five specified subjects that they were able to teach. As all of the subjects specified were relevant to schools of the day, these five women were also included in the study.

Thus, the study encompassed an examination of the lives and experiences of ten women in total.

The five schoolmistresses were: Mary MARTIN (*Canada* to NSW, 1810; *Emu* to VDL, 1815); Mary KELLY (*Alexander* to NSW, 1816; *Kangaroo* to VDL, 1816); Sarah LEGGATT (*Providence*, 1826); Elizabeth FRANKLAND (*Sovereign*, 1826) and Mary STEWART (*Lord Auckland*, 1849).

The twenty-four governesses were: Sarah SLOW (*Westmoreland*, 1836); Julia StClair NEWMAN (*Nautilus*, 1839); Jane PHILLIPS (*Gilbert Henderson*, 1840); Beatrice McBARNETT (*Emma Eugenia*, 1842); Louisa GRANGE (*Margaret*, 1843); Margaret SOMERVILLE (*Woodbridge*, 1843); Elizabeth Ann EARNSHAW (*Tasmania*, 1844); Hannah Augusta HIPSLEY (*Tasmania*, 1844); Mary Ann JOBLYNS (*Tasmania*, 1844); Elizabeth GOTTLIEB (*Tenasserim*, 1844); Sarah HAY (*Tory*, 1845); Mary Ann BROWN (*Tory*, 1845); Caroline THOMPSON (*Emma Eugenia*, 1846); Hannah Mary ANSON (*Emma Eugenia*, 1846); Sarah Susannah CRICKMER (*Tory*, 1848); Charlotte HUGHES, (*Cadet*, 1848); Eliza Downe WILLIAMS (*Cadet*, 1848); Mary STEWART (*Lord Auckland*, 1849); Sarah KEMP (*St Vincent*, 1850); Ann MATTHEWS (*St Vincent*, 1850); Susan WHITBURN (*St Vincent*, 1850); Hannah Amelia JONES (*Aurora*, 1851); Helen Elizabeth MACKAY (*Templar*, 1852) and Elizabeth WEIR (*Duchess of Northumberland*, 1853). [Note that Mary STEWART's name appears on both lists; she stated her trade or occupation as both 'schoolmistress' and 'governess'.]

2. FINDINGS

The findings of the study reveal that, of the ten women in the study, only Mary MARTIN (schoolmistress) and Louisa GRANGE (governess) were able to use the skills, abilities and experience of their stated trade or occupation to their advantage in the colony.

(a) Schoolmistresses

(i) Mary Martin

She is an outstanding example of a female convict who was able to bring her skills, abilities and experience as a schoolmistress with her to the colony. Between 1815 and 1824, she taught with great success in Hobart, becoming the first woman in the colony to be officially recognized by the government of the day for her services to education. [An account of her life and work is attached to this paper as Appendix 1.]

(ii) Mary Kelly

Although very little is known about her life in the colony, it is thought unlikely that she taught in schools there. She was 53 years of age when she arrived in 1816.

(iii) Sarah Leggatt

It is possible that she taught in schools in VDL but no evidence of her doing so has been found. She was a somewhat troublesome convict and her record shows that she was frequently punished by the authorities.

(iv) Elizabeth Frankland

She arrived in VDL in 1827, received a free pardon in 1840 and died in 1861. It is thought possible, therefore, that she taught in the colony but no evidence of this has been found.

(v) Mary Stewart

Like Sarah Leggatt, she was often in trouble with the authorities and gaoled several times for various misdemeanours. Again, it is possible that she taught in the colony but no evidence of this has been found.

(b) Governesses

Of the five governesses included in this study there is evidence of only one – Louisa GRANGE - having taught in the colony.

(i) Louisa Grange

Although no evidence has been found to prove conclusively that she taught in either government-sponsored or church-run schools in VDL, it is thought highly likely that she conducted private lessons in the colony. After receiving a certificate of freedom in 1852, she left VDL for New Zealand where she is known to have placed advertisements in newspapers offering her services privately as a teacher of Music, French, Italian and Needlework. These advertisements bear a striking similarity to advertisements which appeared anonymously in newspapers in VDL between 1847 and 1852. Born Mirabeau DIMONTCASSIER in France about 1817, she was a convicted jewel thief and confidence woman, but a lady of great charm, accomplishment - and intrigue. Changing her name frequently, she travelled the world throughout her life, spending time in Mexico and the United States before returning to her native France where she died in 1901. Her remarkable story has been well told in Douglas Wilkie's book, *The Journal of Madame Callegari: The True Story behind Alexandre Dumas's 1855 Le Journal de Madame Giovanni* (Melbourne: Historia Incognita, 2015) and his article "How Louisa La Grange became the narrator in Alexandre Dumas's *Impressions de voyage: journal of Madame Giovanni*" in Frost and McAlpine (eds.) (2015). *From the Edges of Empire: Convict Women from Beyond the British Isles* (Hobart: Convict Women's Press).

(ii) Julia St Clair Newman

Another remarkable and intriguing woman, she was born in Trinidad about 1818 and convicted of theft in London in 1840. In VDL, she was a strong-willed, unruly prisoner, often in trouble with the authorities for her unorthodox behavior. However, after her marriage to John JEPSON, the station overseer at Ross, in 1844, and the birth of her four children between 1845 and 1850, she seems to have settled down and lived happily. She died in Hobart, aged 51, in 1864. It is possible that she taught in schools in VDL but no evidence of that has been found. Her story has been well told by Colette McAlpine and Margaret Lindley "Unruly women: Julia St Clair Newman and Annette Meyers", a chapter in Frost and McAlpine (eds.) *From the Edges of Empire: Convict Women from Beyond the British Isles* (Hobart: Convict Women's Press, 2015.)

(iii) Ann Elizabeth Earnshaw

It is unlikely that she taught in schools in VDL. Arriving in VDL at the age of 36 in 1844, she was granted a ticket of leave in 1849 but died of apoplexy in that same year.

(iv) Hannah Augusta Hipsley

She arrived in the colony at the age of 34 in 1844 and lived a long life in the colony and so it is possible that she taught in schools there at some time - but no evidence of that has been found. In 1848, she married a shoemaker. She died at the New Town Pauper Establishment in 1885.

(v) Mary Ann Brown

A well-educated and very competent person, she was the daughter of a vicar. Transported to VDL on *Tory* in 1845, she was described in the surgeon's journal as 'exemplary and accomplished'. She was single – and stated that she could teach French, Italian and Music. Unfortunately, nothing is known of her life in VDL except that she married Robert DOBSON in 1849 and received her certificate of freedom in 1859. It is possible that she taught in schools in VDL but no record of that has been found.

3. WIDESPREAD OPPOSITION

Two factors made the finding of evidence for this study particularly difficult.

The first was the difficulty of tracing the women after they had married and changed their surnames – in some cases more than once. This difficulty is compounded by the fact that details of their lives and whereabouts were no longer recorded after their release from the convict system.

The second difficulty was the fact that there was increasing opposition to the employment of convicts and former convicts as schoolteachers in the colony during and after the 1830s. From 1849, in fact, the employment of convicts and former convicts as teachers in government schools was banned. Thus, while it is known that there were quite a number of female convicts and former convicts teaching in schools in VDL in the period, their names are not easily discovered.

Here are some random extracts from contemporary newspapers which attest to the increasing opposition:

One of these more-educated men amongst the convicts might, perhaps, be usefully employed in the capacity of schoolmaster to his station, provided he confined his efforts to the imparting of mere secular knowledge; and then the minister of religion might undertake the spiritual instruction of the men; a far better plan, in my opinion, than that of mixing up the two characters of minister and schoolmaster in one, I would, however, employ the convict as school-master, even among his fellow-convicts, only in the event of being unable to procure a more desirable person ... [Extract from a dispatch from Sir John Franklin to Lord Glenelg, 7 October 1837 in *Hobart Town Courier*, 28 December 1838, p.4.]

*One of the greatest curses Sir William Denison has inflicted on this community, is the patronage bestowed on probation schoolmasters. He has annihilated that system of general instruction which secured the services of respectable teachers, and established a scheme by which the children of the poor are confided to the care of pass-holders. The effects will be deplorable. It requires no prophet to predict the consequences of such tuition: many of the young will be trained to vice, fitted for crime, and pursue and terminate their career in misery. [Editorial: *Launceston Examiner*, 23 December 1848, p.3:]*

*That it is ... the deliberate opinion of this Council that no individual who now is, or who ever has been, a transported offender, should hold the important and sacred office of public schoolmaster or schoolmistress; and that the system which has suffered that office to be held in many instances by individuals of that class cannot be too strongly deprecated and condemned ... A division then took place, when there appeared "Ayes", 12; "Noes", 2. [A proposal by Mr Gregson to Legislative Council in *Colonial Times*, 4 September 1849, p.2:*

*Every well-wisher to his adopted country must feel grateful to Mr. Gregson for his successful attempt to wipe away a foul stain from the reputation of the colony. He moved in council that convicts should not hereafter be employed as teachers in public schools, and his proposition was carried. In no other country on the face of the earth under no other government than that of Sir William Denison could the monstrous evil have been permitted or perpetuated. [Editorial: 'The Pagan Scheme of Education' in *Launceston Examiner*, 5 September 1849, page 2.]*

*That persons who are, or who have been, convicts should under any circumstance be employed as teachers of youth is ... open to the greatest objections. It brings the name of crime ... into dangerous association in the minds of the young, with those whose character and example it is their duty to respect, and thus it tends directly to confound the distinctions of right and wrong in the budding thoughts of youth. [Editorial: *Colonial Times*, 7 September 1849, p.2.]*

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study suggest that there is very little evidence to indicate that the female convicts schoolmistresses were able to bring their skills, abilities and experience with them to VDL and to use them to their advantage.

5. DIRECTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

An intriguing question which emerged during the course of this investigation is this: Why did some women who had teaching skills and experience – especially as teachers aboard the convict vessels on which they were transported to VDL – seem to prefer to state their trade or occupation

upon arrival as 'cook' or 'servant' rather than as 'schoolmistress'? Two very noteworthy examples of this phenomenon were Ann PHILLIPS (*New Grove*, 1835) and Ann CHRISTOPHERSON (*Garland Grove*, 1843). Is it likely that they believed that their opportunities in the colony would be better as cooks and servants than as schoolmistresses? Was that belief justified?

APPENDIX 1:

CONVICT MARY MARTIN

First ‘Officially-Recognised’ Schoolmistress in Van Diemen’s Land

by

Don Bradmore and Judith Carter

Convict Mary Agnes MARTIN nee HALLETT is believed to have been born in Surrey, England, about 1776.¹ Little is known about her life prior to her conviction.

On 1 June 1797 she married Abraham MARTIN, a Royal Navy surgeon, at the Church of St Matthew, Bethnal Green, London.²

At the Surrey Assizes on 9 August 1809, she was convicted of ‘larceny in a dwelling house’. A sentence of death was recorded but later commuted to transportation for life. On 23 March 1810 she left England as one of 122 female prisoners aboard *Canada* and arrived at Port Jackson (Sydney) on 8 September that year. She was 32 years old. She brought with her an infant son, William Joseph MARTIN.³

Whether Mary had been a schoolmistress in England before her conviction is unclear. The convict muster of 1814, however, lists her as a ‘schoolmistress’ at Toongabbie, now a suburb of Sydney, about thirty kilometres west of the CBD.⁴ There, she was obviously thought of highly for when, in mid-1815, she requested permission to marry Thomas FITZGERALD, a schoolmaster visiting from Van Diemen’s Land, and to go with him to Hobart, her application for a transfer was strongly supported by Rev. Samuel MARSDEN. In giving his approval, Gov. MACQUARIE wrote to Lt.Gov. DAVEY warmly recommending her employment as a schoolmistress.⁵

Within two weeks of her arrival at Hobart aboard *Emu* on 30 July 1815, she and FITZGERALD were married at St David’s by Rev. Robert KNOPWOOD. The marriage produced two children, at least.⁶

FITZGERALD had been in Van Diemen’s Land since January 1804.⁷ Two years earlier, then a clerk in London, he had been convicted of embezzlement and sentenced to transportation for seven years. Leaving a wife (Betty Ann nee CHILTON) and son (Henry) behind in England, he had arrived in the Australian colonies aboard HMS *Calcutta* as one of 300 convicts in the expeditionary party (which included free settlers, marines and civil administrators) led by Captain David COLLINS who had been charged with establishing a settlement at Port Phillip.

During the voyage, FITZGERALD had conducted lessons for the children of the convicts and free settlers.⁸

When the settlement at Port Phillip failed after a few months, and COLLINS had been forced to move his party across Bass Strait to a site on the Derwent (which later become Hobart Town), FITZGERALD was made a clerk in the Lieutenant Governor's office, responsible for the payment of salaries and serving the Bench of Magistrates.⁹

By 1807, however, he had also begun Evening Classes at his home in Hobart Town. In June 1812, he was appointed Government Schoolmaster on a salary of £10 p.a. By 1815, this had been increased to £25 p.a. in remuneration also for his services as Magistrates' Clerk.¹⁰

In Hobart, Mary was immediately successful. Between them, the FITZGERALDs taught reading, writing, spelling, 'figures', grammar, geography and history in a room at the back of their house in Davey Street. In addition, the girls had instruction in sewing and needlework. By 1817, on the recommendation of Lt. Gov. SORELL, who had replaced DAVEY in 1816, Mary was receiving some financial assistance – the first female to be officially recognized in this way - for her role as schoolmistress because '... she pays much attention to the female scholars.'¹¹

However, in June 1817, SORELL saw fit to dismiss FITZGERALD from the Bench of Magistrates, informing MACQUARIE that it was because of '... repeated complaints of his drunkenness and neglect ... his absence continuing for several days.' Interestingly, he added that he felt FITZGERALD was still '... well-qualified to remain a schoolmaster'. In response, MACQUARIE expressed sorrow that FITZGERALD had turned out such a drunkard but felt that it was right for him to have been dismissed from the Bench. He agreed that FITZGERALD was '... very fit to remain a schoolmaster, if he could be kept sober.'¹²

Whether FITZGERALD was treated fairly in the matter of his drinking is debatable.¹³ Although the Rev. KNOPWOOD testified before Commissioner John BIGGE in April 1820 that '... FITZGERALD's conduct has been pretty good although he is sometimes guilty of excess in liquor', there is no other evidence that he was anything else but hard-working and conscientious.¹⁴

Whatever the case, the FITZGERALD school was flourishing. A return of schools and scholars in the colony which KNOPWOOD provided to BIGGE in 1820 showed that Thomas had thirty-five scholars and Mary twenty-four.¹⁵

Later that same year, Peter MULGRAVE, who had been appointed superintendent of schools in Van Diemen's Land in October 1820, informed SORELL that he was pleasantly surprised to find that education in the colony had been '... so well laid and widely extended'. He reported that, of the 236 children aged between four and seventeen in Hobart Town at that time, the FITZGERALDs had partially educated, or were in the course of educating, two hundred.¹⁶

In 1818, SORELL had notified MACQUARIE of the need for a new school in Hobart Town to cater for the children of poorer free settlers. He explained that, while the school run by the FITZGERALDs was the best, it was also expensive. Although a few children were educated there free of charge, most parents were paying between 1/- and 1/6d weekly. In 1820, MULGRAVE had reported that the FITZGERALDs, in addition to their government funding, were receiving about £3.8s.0d per week from parents.¹⁷

From about 1817, through hard work and enterprise, the FITZGERALDs had been able to lease land at Black Snake, near Hobart,. There, they ran sheep and cattle, the property tended by two convict labourers who had been allocated to them.¹⁸

For the next few years, all went well. In April 1824, Mary received her certificate of freedom – but tragedy was about to strike.¹⁹

In the previous year, Henry FITZGERALD, Thomas's son from his first marriage, had arrived from England. To help the young man get established, Thomas had acquired a run-down inn near his Black Snake property, intending to refurbish it and have his son manage it while he himself continued with his teaching and farming interests. The opening of the inn, which he called 'The Golden Fleece', was planned for 22 October 1824.²⁰

However, on 5 September 1824, just six or seven weeks before the opening, Thomas passed away. He was 47 years old.²¹

No longer able to keep the school going, Mary struggled financially from that time. Although Thomas's Will shows that he left all he had to her, she was forced to surrender her Davey Street home – over which there was a mortgage - in August 1826 and to move to cheaper accommodation in Goulburn Street. It is thought that she might also have inherited debts associated with 'The Golden Fleece' when it was sold in May 1825.²²

This situation worsened dramatically when, on 25 September 1826, Henry, Thomas's son, was drowned in a boating accident on the Derwent. Shortly after arriving in Van Diemen's Land he had married, and Mary, who still had two young children of her own at home, was obliged to support his young widow and her two infants.²³

During the next couple of years, Mary tried hard to re-establish herself as a schoolmistress. In late 1826, she advertised in Hobart newspapers that she was about to open a Day School and begged for the support of those who knew of the difficult circumstances in which she had been left – but the attempt was unsuccessful.²⁴ Her days as a schoolmistress were over.

In late December 1829, now 53, she accepted an offer of marriage from William NICHOLLES (also seen as NICHOLS and NICHOLLS) a Clarence Plains cabinet-maker and farmer who,

interestingly, had also come to Van Diemen's Land with the COLLINS expedition in January 1804, but as a free settler rather than convict.²⁵

The marriage was to bring little joy to either of them. Within twelve months, both husband and wife were imprisoned for non-payment of debts which Mary had incurred before the marriage. At their trial in January 1831, both claimed to be utterly destitute. During the trial, Solicitor-General STEPHEN urged Chief Justice PEDDER to discharge Mary on the grounds of her age and ill-health. NICHOLAS was imprisoned for a short period, certain allowances having been made for his circumstances.²⁶

Within six months Mary was dead. Sadly, her death certificate shows her 'quality or profession' only as "house-builder's wife".²⁷

NOTES

1. Mary Agnes Hallett in 'Ancestry.com'.
2. 'England Marriages, 1538-1973' via IGI Family Search.
3. See 'Mary Martin' in FCRC database. (It is indicative of her personality that a book of poetry was among the items she stole.)
4. Carol Baxter (ed.) (1987). *General Muster of New South Wales, 1814*. Sydney: ABGR/SAG.
5. As for Note 3. Fitzgerald family sources relate the story of Thomas visiting Sydney to find a wife but no record of him ever visiting Sydney has been found. Is it possible, therefore, that Marsden, who was also responsible for schools in VDL, took it upon himself to arrange her transfer to VDL to assist Fitzgerald?
6. Marjorie Tipping. (1987). *Convicts Unbound: The Story of the Calcutta Convicts*. Ringwood: Viking O'Neill. Tipping seems to suggest that Thomas and Mary had more than two children but no confirmation of that has been found.
7. *Ibid.*, p.20; pp.273-4.
8. *Ibid.*, p.115.
9. *Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*
10. *Ibid.*, pp.273-4.
11. *Ibid.* pp.152-3; p.182.
12. *Ibid.* Sorrell and Macquarie as quoted by Tipping, *op. cit.* p.182.
13. Some commentators have suggested that Lt.Gov Sorell wanted the post of Magistrates' Clerk for convict William Adams Brodribb whom he had met on his passage to VDL.
14. Tipping, *op. cit.* p.182.
15. *Ibid.* pp.152-3.
16. *Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*
17. *Ibid.*, pp.152-3.
18. *Ibid.*, p.152; p.273.
19. *Hobart Town Gazette and Van Diemen's Land Advertiser*, 9 April 1824, p.1. Mary's surname is shown as 'Fitzgerald'.
20. *Hobart Town Gazette and Van Diemen's Land Advertiser*, 22 October 1824, p.3.
21. Death - Thomas Fitzgerald via LINC: RGD34/1/1, no. 849.
22. The exact amount and cause of Mary's debts are still a mystery; sale of house: *Hobart Town Gazette*, 20 August 1825, p.3 and 12 August 1826, p.3.

23. Henry Fitzgerald - boating accident and death,: *Hobart Town Gazette*, 28 October 1826, p.2. See also LINC: RGD34/1/1, no. 1288. Henry's marriage: 4 December 1824 via LINC: RGD36/1/1, no. 748. His wife was Harriet Downey.
24. *Colonial Times*, 17 November 1826, p.1; 24 November 1826, p.1.
25. Marriage - Mary Fitzgerald/William Nicholes: 23 December 1829, St David's, via LINC 36/1/1, no. 1382.
26. Trial: see Macquarie University Colonial Law Cases, Peters v. Nichols:
http://www.law.mq.edu.au/research/colonial_case_law/tas/cases/case_index/1831/peters_v_nicholls/
27. Death - Mary (Hallett) Martin/Fitzgerald/Nicholes: Reg: 2662/1831, Clarence.