



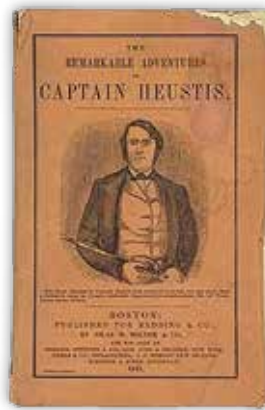
## *An Attempted Mass Escape From Wauks Boat Harbour Fact or Fiction?*

BY: JOHN C. CARTER

It was all the result of rebellious acts. Between December, 1837 and December, 1838, more than 1,000 men were arrested and charged with piratical invasion and treason. They had been part of at least 14 unsuccessful armed efforts to overthrow the government of Upper Canada. Ultimately 92 of these rebels would be transported to Van Diemen's Land as political prisoners. These men were shipped to Van Diemen's Land in three batches, and by mid February of 1840, most were assigned to work at the Brown's River and Sandy Bay Probation Stations. Thought of escape was paramount in the minds of many of the Patriot exiles. Both Brown's River and Sandy Bay seemed conducive to this goal, as many American whaling ships were often docked nearby in the Hobart Town harbour and surrounding waters.

On May 10, 1840, prisoners Horace Cooley, Michael Morin, Jacob Paddock and William Reynolds were the first to successfully abscond. Their flight and subsequent recapture were recorded in the "Police Report," published in the [Hobart Town] *Colonial Times* for June 9 and 16, 1840. As second offenders, they were tried in court on June 9, convicted and sentenced to serve two years' of hard labour at the Port Arthur Penal Settlement. To frustrate further escape attempts, Lieutenant-Governor Sir John Franklin ordered that the group to be moved inland to the Lovely Banks Probation Station, where the Patriots arrived on June 20, 1840.

Working and living conditions did not improve and after much soul searching and preparation, Joseph Stewart and Linus Miller fled on August 29, 1840. Their freedom was fleeting, as they gave themselves up to authorities at Bagdad on September 11, and were also sent to Port Arthur. Lieutenant-



*An image of Daniel Heustis on the cover of the 1847 first edition of his narrative. He and Robert Marsh wrote and published details about the planned escape from Waub's Boat Harbour. Credit: Susan Smith, Ottawa*

Governor Franklin was so incensed at this second escape attempt, that he ordered the remaining Patriots to be dressed in magpie. These men were then moved to the Green Ponds (now Kempton) Probation Station, arriving there on September 12, 1840.

Between this date and early 1844, Samuel Chandler, Benjamin Wait and James Gemmell were the only Patriots who were eventually able to effect successful escapes, and make their way back to the United States aboard whaling vessels. By then most of the North American political prisoners had received their tickets of leave, but a cumbersome process to get free pardons and Lieutenant-Governor Sir John Eardly-Wilmot's decision to use his discretion to grant pardons in stages, meant that not all prisoners were given their freedom when pardon warrants were received from England. This resulted in a high level of frustration over the utility of the system. For the Patriots, unkept promises of being gazetted for free pardons weren't good enough, and resulted in skepticism about the prospects for their release. Many regarded the promise of a full pardon as being a cruel hoax. Robert Marsh echoed this frustration: "...for as yet there appeared no hope, we having been so often deceived and disappointed, and the prospect still very gloomy of our ever getting our freedom, and no prospect but of lingering out a miserable life between hope and despair in that little prison island."

In addition, ticket of leave men no longer qualified for government rations or lodging. To make matters worse, there was a severe economic depression at the time in Van Diemen's Land. This situation resulted in too many former prisoners competing for a paucity of low paying jobs. Even if they were



freed, how could enough money be saved to pay for their journey back home? The Patriots were placed in a position which was dire, and something drastic had to be done to ameliorate the situation!

## THE PLANNED MASS ESCAPE

It is unclear about when plans for a mass escape began to be formulated. However in a cryptic message in a February 22, 1844 letter to his father, Patriot exile Elijah Woodman noted that he knew of a place where a ship could be sent to pick some of the prisoners up. Because of his poor health, Woodman added that; "I may not be able to receive any benefit from such an occurrence...but I leave it to others who are not as well calculated to obtain passage as I." (Landon, *Exile*, p. 223.). Woodman, who at the time was living in Hobart Town along with colleagues Henry Barnum, James Aitchison, James D. Fero and Robert Marsh, was in a good position to know of any escape plans being hatched. This was especially true, as Fero and Marsh would later be identified as 2 of the 4\* ringleaders in the plot, and probably had included Woodman in their initial planning.

Daniel Heustis' narrative account indicates that in February of 1844, Garrett Hicks and Riley Whitney had obtained passes to move to the Swanport District to take up farming near Waub's Boat Harbour (now Bicheno). Robert Marsh added that James D. Fero also succeeded in obtaining a ticket for that district, went there for two weeks, returned with a favorable account, and immediately went back

to Swanport to avoid suspicion of authorities. The three commenced to clear land and began growing potatoes and turnips, which were expected to be ready to harvest at the time the prisoners would make their attempt to leave Van Diemen's Land.

Daniel Heustis noted that at the end of March of 1844, several whaling ships had anchored in the Hobart Town Harbour. He suggested that this is when the ringleaders went to Hobart Town "...with the view of making an arrangement with the captains to take twenty\*\* of us off." Robert Marsh confirmed this arrangement: "After much trouble, one or two succeeded in getting to Hobart town, and managed to see the captain of an American whaler, and agreed with him to come to a certain point on the opposite side of the Island."

Patriot exiles from Campbell Town, Hobart Town, Oatlands and Swanport made their way to the farm near Waub's Boat Harbour. Daniel Heustis noted; "We had to notify them, and then, by marches that would appear altogether incredible, were I to give particulars, we made our way to the coast." Robert Marsh added details related to this undertaking: "Scattered about the Island, one, two, and three in a place having no money, not allowed to leave our districts; being closely watched, and of course some one or two, would have to take burthen or responsibility of making arrangements, and attending to getting them together at the appointed time, because some who would not be able to get their tickets changed, would be



*Period pencil sketch of Elijah Woodman by an unknown artist. Woodman recorded the first mention of the planned escape in his diary. Credit: Western University Local History Archives, London, Ontario*

*Period drawing by New York State artist Salathiel Ellis, depicting the Battle of the Windmill. A number of those planning to escape from Waub's Boat Harbour were captured at this battle. Credit: St. Lawrence County Historical Association*

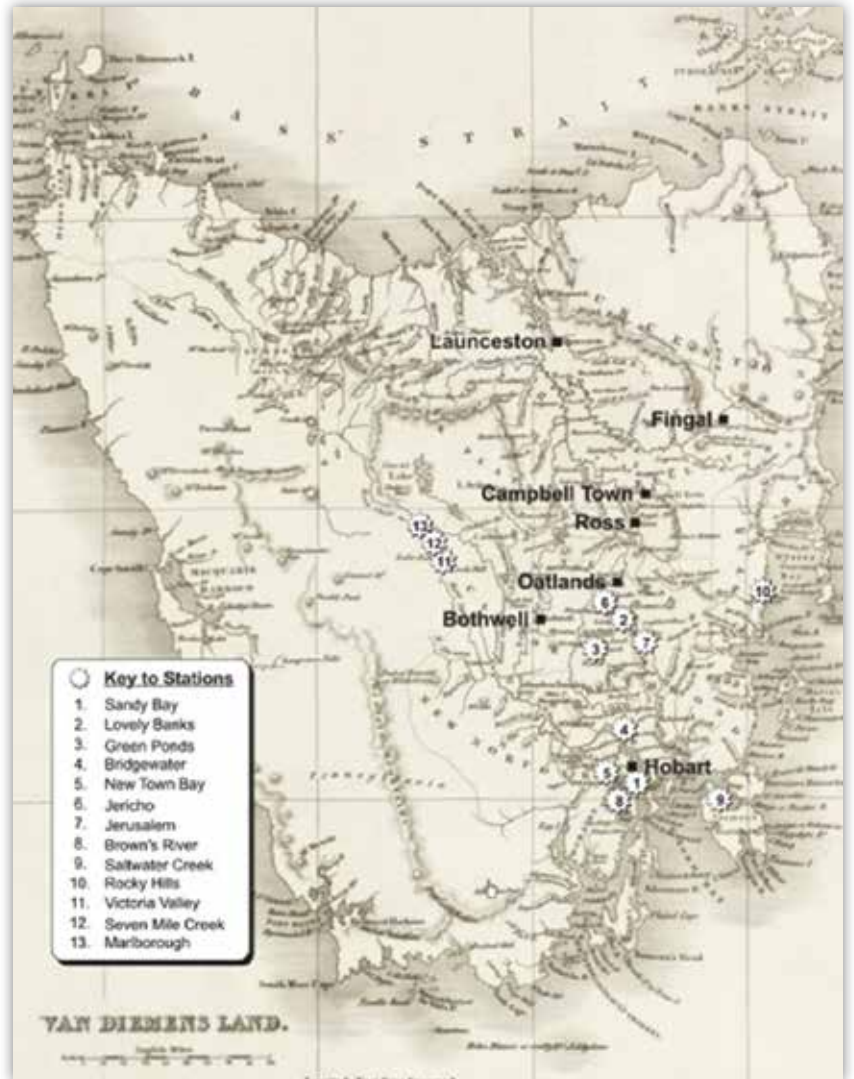


obliged to take Paddy's leave; and would be liable to be taken on the way." The narratives written by Marsh and Heustis, provide quite similar details of the events.\*\*\*

While waiting for the appointed day agreed to for the rendez vous, the Patriots dug more than two tons of potatoes, put them in sacks made of kangaroo skin and hauled them five miles to the beach. This and a supply of firewood would be used as payment for the escape. A fire was maintained near the designated pick up spot, as a signal for the captain as where to put in with his vessel. After some delay, the whale-ship made its appearance, and the captain came ashore in two small boats. Only three of the Patriots were there, as the other seventeen were hiding in a hut some five miles distant. The captain agreed to lay off until four o'clock that afternoon, when he would return to pick up all the men. Not more than an hour later, an armed man of war in the service of the government appeared off the coast, and remained in that quarter for several days.

Daniel Heustis expressed the disappointment of the Patriots; "Thus were our hopes again blasted! The whale-ship occasionally hove in sight, for many days, but the presence of the armed vessel prevented us from communicating with the noble-hearted captain, to whom we owe many thanks for the persevering though fruitless efforts he made to get us on board." Robert Marsh added; "Now what should you think our feelings must have been. After making as it were, this last desperate attempt-after doing all in our power, undergoing many and severe difficulties which you can have but faint if any conception of... We held our ground at great disadvantage, four days from the time of the appearance of the armed vessel, in hopes she would leave and give our own vessel a chance to return." Unfortunately such would not be the case.

The prisoners remained on the coast for ten days, still hoping that the American whaler might return. During this time they hunted and fished. After about eight days, three constables arrived from Swanport and endeavoured to elicit information about the designs of the Patriots. They left after finding nothing contrary to the exiles' explanation about hunting and fishing. Two days after this occurrence, constables again arrived and summoned the prisoners to appear in front



of the Police Magistrate (A.P.M. William Taylor Noyes), in Swanport. The Patriots were charged with leaving districts without orders, attempting to escape, and trying to abscond.

## AFTERWORD

Charges had to be proven. Witnesses against the Patriots told different and very contradictory stories. The Magistrate tried to have the prisoners make a statement that he could send to the Governor, but to no avail. The Patriots confessed to no wrong doing. Daniel Heustis said of the proceedings; "After exhausting all his cunning, in unavailing endeavors to get some kind of confession out of us, the magistrate said, notwithstanding there were strong grounds for suspecting the charge to be true, he could not prove it, and should therefore discharge us, and send us back to our respective districts." The enquiry ended without convictions being handed down. A relatively lenient judgement for the ticket of leave men to resume their efforts of finding

*Map of Probation Stations in Van Diemen's Land where North American Patriot Exiles worked during their incarceration. Credit: Graham Ryrice, Colebrook, Tasmania*

work in groups of 4–5 men was levied. Robert Marsh described the final pronouncement: “Sentence was passed, which was: that we should be separated four in a district, with strict orders for magistrates, constables, policemen, and all in authority, to keep a strict watch over us, and not allow us on any consideration to leave the district allotted to us, and we should be mustered in our respective, districts at the police office therein, every Saturday night; and if we failed in so doing should be immediately reported as absconders, or bush rangers, and punished accordingly.” Yet again, freedom had not been realized.

The Patriots remained as ticket of leave men in various districts of Van Diemen’s Land. However things drastically changed in October of 1844, when word of the first Royal Warrants of Absolute Pardon\*\*\*\* arrived from England. With the start of 1845, the long awaited exodus of the Patriot exiles from Van Diemen’s Land began.

**Conclusion:**

What can be concluded about this singular chapter in the penal history of Van Diemen’s Land? Curator of Swansea’s East Coast Heritage Museum, Maureen Martin Ferris, has carefully searched existing records. She has uncovered no documentation or official recording of the escape attempt and associated events. This finding is not unexpected. If the charges did not come to trial, and as an arrest did not necessarily generate a Magistrate’s Bench (Lower Court) Record, then any details about the event would not be summarised in Prisoner Conduct Records. Due to lack of evidence, the case was dismissed, and no legal documents about the planned mass escape officially exist. While two of the published Patriot narratives detail the occurrence with similar details being provided, any official government records of the event are probably non-existent. Certainly this is another curious but forgotten story, in the shared histories of Australia and Canada. We can conclude that this chapter in Tasmania’s penal history is unusual but true – more fact than fiction!

Woodman). It would make sense that representatives from both groups would work together to formulate plans for a mass escape.

\*\*There is some confusion about how many escapees were actually involved. Period narratives note 20–22 men, but no complete record has been found to verify all names and actual numbers. Existing documentation list the following individuals as those involved: Garrett Hicks, Riley Whitney, Daniel Heustis, Robert Marsh, James D. Fero, David House, Orlin Blodgett, Leonard Delano and James Pierce.

\*\*\*For the complete descriptions about the proposed mass escape, which were included in the 2 narratives published after pardons were granted and on return to the United States, see Heustis, *Narrative*, pp. 126–29 and Marsh, *Seven*, pp. 144–53.

\*\*\*\*It was somewhat ironic that these pardons had to be signed by James Ebenezer Bicheno, Colonial Secretary of Van Diemen’s Land. Waub’s Boat Harbour where the planned escape by the Patriots exiles was to take place, was named after him!

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**Acknowledgements:**

The author would like to thank Maureen Martin Ferris, Peter Huttemeir, Dr. Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, Dr. Stephen Petrow, Graham Ryrie, Susan Smith and John Thompson for their assistance in writing this article. Dr. John C. Carter is a Research Associate, History & Classics Programme, School of Humanities, the University of Tasmania. He can be contacted at [djohncarter@bell.net](mailto:djohncarter@bell.net). completed article will be published in volume 37, number 1 of *Tasmanian Ancestry* in June 2016.

Following completion of these articles, the intention is to produce a document examining in greater detail the main clustered settlements that German and Scandinavian immigrants established at Collinsvale (known as Bismarck) near Hobart, Bruny Island, south of Hobart, Falmouth on the East Coast, St. Marys (known as Germantown) in the Fingal Valley, Lilydale (known as German Town) and Harford (known as Heidelberg) in northern Tasmania. Other small clustered settlements that German and Scandinavian immigrants established, such as Swansea and Pyengana, will also be covered in the document.

Contact details – Interested readers, unable to access the articles in *Tasmanian Ancestry*, can contact the author to obtain the articles. Postal address: 316 Churchill Avenue, Sandy Bay, Tasmania 7005, Australia Phone: 03 6225 1335 E-mail: [michaelgwatt@internode.on.net](mailto:michaelgwatt@internode.on.net)

**Endnotes:**

\*James Pierce and Daniel Heustis had been captured at the Battle of the Windmill at Prescott, Upper Canada. James D. Fero and Robert Marsh were captured at the Battle of Windsor (as was Elijah





An 1839 drawing of Port Arthur by an unknown artist. Seven Patriot prisoners were sent there as second offenders. Credit: Beattie Collection, University of Tasmania Library, [eprints.utas.edu.au/6393/](http://eprints.utas.edu.au/6393/)

## *Tasmania Fatalities in War*

from The Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902)

by **Reg A Watson**

Tasmanian historian, Society member and author, Reg A. Watson's latest work to be released on the State's military history will be a collation of Tasmania's fatalities in wars in which participated.

The work, 425 pages long, will be available in PDF file.

"This way," said the author, "any corrections and additions can easily be done and need not wait until a printed version in book form can be published."

"And," he adds, "It is a lot cheaper."

The work deals not only with Boer War fatalities, but has a chapter on Tasmanian Boy Soldiers, Tasmanian Gallipoli deaths and buried in Gallipoli; an additional quick reference to those deaths, WWI names, WWII names, including Army, Navy and Air Force, those who went down on HMAS Sydney, those who died at Tobruk, North Africa and honour roles for those Tasmanians who died in Korea and Vietnam.

The work finishes with a list and comment on the 14 Tasmanians who were awarded the Victorian Cross from three different wars.

"The work, I hope, will be a valuable tool, not only for broad Tasmanian history, but for schools, families, museums, historical societies, indeed for any type of research," said Mr Watson.

Mr Watson said "it has taken more than twenty years to collate the work".

"The majority of Tasmanian families would have some member included in the work, whether it be a direct relative or a collateral one, or a friend.

"It is an unique work; one that can be easily used as reference material," he said.

The work in most cases contains basic material, name, rank, when enlisted, where and how died and where buried, although some chapters do contain substantial extra information.

The work is available to be downloaded in pdf file by contacting Reg Watson direct:

Email: [reg@regwatson.com](mailto:reg@regwatson.com)

Phone: 0409 975 587

# The Mitchell Family

John Mitchell was born in St German's, Cornwall in 1812, in 1837 he came to Van Diemen's Land as a surveyor. Shortly after his arrival he was offered a government post as superintendent of the boys at Point Puer.

His fiancée Catherine Augusta Keast also from Cornwall, arrived in the colony in 1839. Her voyage was an eventful one and she recalled it as being particularly unpleasant, with storms, a drunken captain and a shortage of food. Catherine enjoyed sketching and was an accomplished artist, her needlework was some of the finest in the area.

Catherine and John married at Holy Trinity Church, Hobart in October 1839 before settling at Point Puer, here children Francis Keast, Henry John and Frederick Keast were born. Both Francis and Henry died young, and are buried on the Isle of the Dead, Port Arthur.

John left his government post and purchased a farm at South Arm then moved to the estate of Villeneuve (now Twamley) near Buckland. When the opportunity arose to purchase the estate of Lisdillon on the East Coast, John jumped at the challenge and once again the family moved to what would be their last residence.

Lisdillon was a farm of about 900 acres, James Radcliffe had been leasing the property from Mr Champ. Lisdillon grew into a small village with Cornish workers employed as tenant farmers. John built a school/church, teachers cottage (Rose Cottage) which also became the post office.

Miss Allen was appointed school mistress and postmistress. Small cottages popped up everywhere.

By 1854 the family had grown, with John and Catherine having a further eight children: Frederick, Frank, Catherine, Edwin, Paul, Mark, Sarah & Amy.

Upon the death of his neighbour Thomas



John Mitchell (left),  
Catherine Augusta  
Mitchell (below)



Buxton in 1865, John purchased the estate of Mayfield and expanded his holdings. Workers cottages were built and an impressive oast house. The mill at Mayfield was a major asset to the estate.

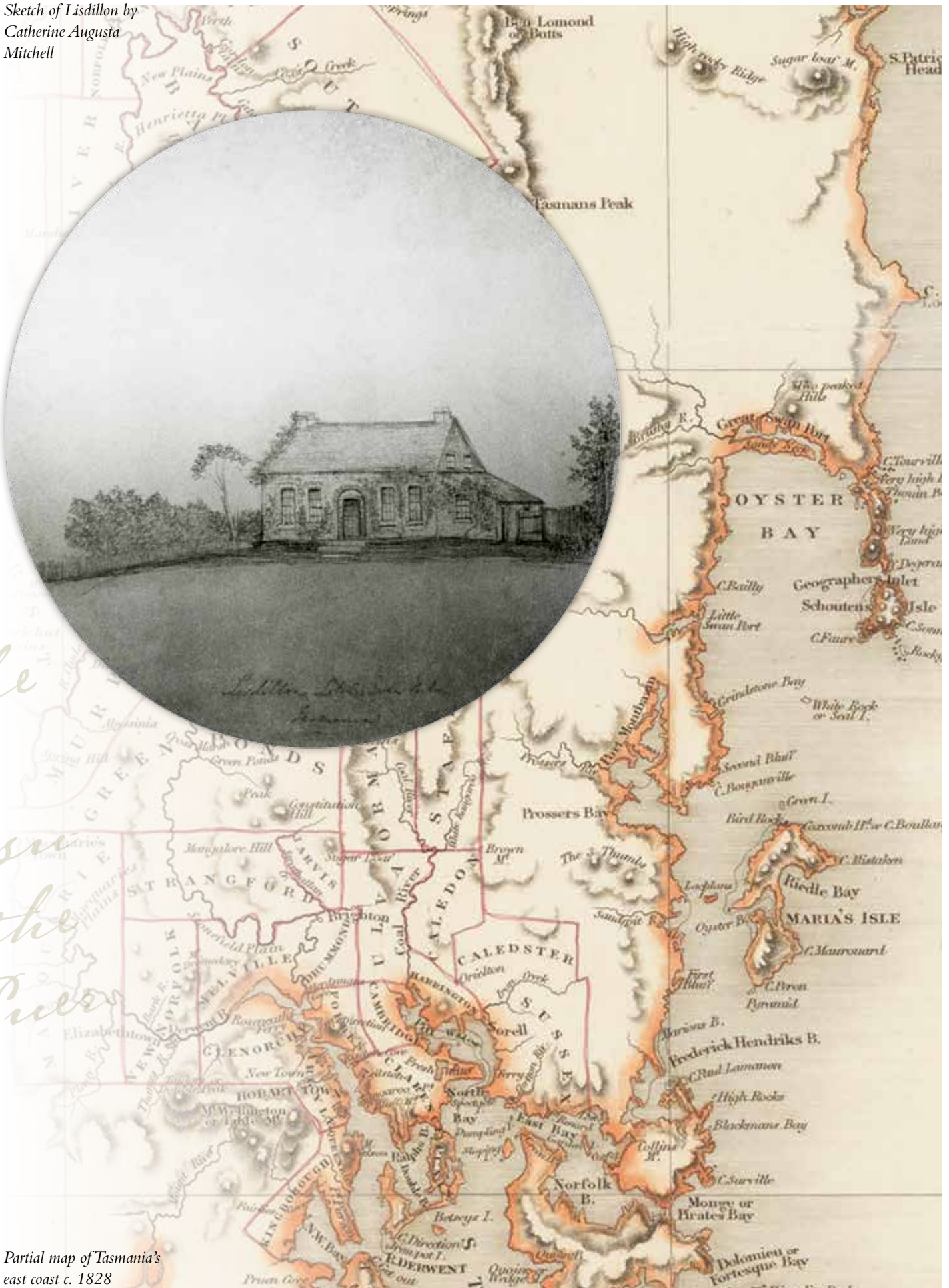
One of most notable events was the Hop Fest, this was widely reported each year in the newspaper with – “a merry time being had by all”. Dancing, feasting, singing, a church service and games were enjoyed by all who attended.

John Mitchell represented the municipality of Glamorgan as a M.H.A. for 11 years and was a highly respected member of the community.

Please come and see the Mitchell Family Exhibition, it will be on display at the East Coast Heritage Museum, 22 Franklin Street Swansea, running through to the end of December.



Sketch of Lisdillon by  
 Catherine Augusta  
 Mitchell



Partial map of Tasmania's  
 east coast c. 1828

## *Membership Matters*

As is usual for this time of the year the Society is undergoing the “stress” of annual membership renewals. The good news is that currently membership sits at 84 and we thank all those who have been prompt in sending their fees in. You all should have received your new year’s membership cards by now. The Society very much appreciates your ongoing support, and we trust you will continue to get a great benefit from belonging to the Society.

We welcome new members since our last Newsletter: David Bevan of Sandy Bay, Kerry Edwards of Hobart, Sheila Webb of Little Swanport. Diana Terry of Swansea and Susan McCrae of Point Cook (Vic).

The bad news is there are a number of now former members who have not renewed. Per the Society’s Constitution, as from the AGM, they are no longer financial. Lets hope they come to their senses and realise what they are now missing out on.

## *Annual General Meeting*

The Society’s AGM was held on 30th September and I am please to announce the Committee and other non Committee positions for the new year:

President - Diane Bricknell  
Senior Vice President - Judie Hastie  
Vice President - Maureen Martin Ferris  
Treasurer - Noel Stanley  
Secretary & Public Officer - Peter Huttemeier  
Committee Members - Gloria Willis & Malcolm Ward.

In addition, according to Society’s Constitution Life Members not otherwise elected to Officer position are also deemed members of the Committee, these are: Grace Freeman, Suzanne Lester, Ray Lewis, Jim Morris.

Non Executive Committee positions:

1. GSB Council: Bertrand Cadart
2. Newsletter Editor & Webmaster: Diane Bricknell
3. Publishing Committee: Noel Stanley, Maureen Martin Ferris, Judie Hastie, Peter Hüttemeier, Di Bricknell, Jack Hardcastle and Malcolm Ward.
4. Research Officer: Maureen Martin Ferris.
5. Data Base Manager: Maureen Martin Ferris.
6. Heritage Festival Committee: Noel Stanley, Deane Smith, Deirdre Monk and Maureen Martin Ferris, Diane Bricknell.

As usual we thank them very much for having the time and energy to devote to the Society. Like most small non for profit enterprises the Society is always on the lookout for more people to put their hand up and help in the administration work. Please consider for next year, how you may be able to help.

It is worth noting that our previous President Craig Johnston chose not to nominate for any Committee position for this year. Craig has been President of the Society since 2012, I am sure you will all join me in thanking Craig for his help and service to the Society over these years.