

BOOK REVIEW

Journals of the Land Commissioners for Van Diemen's Land 1826-28, edited by Anne McKay, Research Assistant, Department of History [University of Tasmania] ... Hobart, University of Tasmania in conjunction with the Tasmanian Historical Research Association, 1962. [Multilith] (Price £1.10. 0) pp i - xxv, 1-151, folding map.

The Commissioners of Survey and Valuation, as they were called at the outset, were appointed with four objects in view:-

Firstly, the division of the whole Island, into Counties, Hundreds, and Parishes; - secondly; - a General valuation of Waste and unoccupied Lands throughout the Island; - Thirdly, the reservation of Lands for Roads, scites for Towns and various other public purposes; - Lastly, the appropriation of Lands for the support of the clergy, and the education of youth ... *

To what extent they achieved these objectives, I will leave to the reader to judge, after he has read Mr Eldershaw's thoroughly enjoyable Introduction, and the text of the Journals themselves. What they did achieve, however, was a splendidly written Journal, not fettered by the normal restraints which circumscribe the public servant in the preparation of his reports. In the process of writing the Journals, they also compiled a damning indictment of the system of free land grants, or at least of the ways in which the settlers had managed, for the most part, to set at nought the various safeguards, incorporated in the land grants to prevent the establishment of large land holdings which could not be economically worked, and the growth of the absentee landlord class.

Miss McKay, in a brief preface, states:-

These Journals are probably unique and certainly far more important than their immediate Tasmanian content would suggest.

She then sets out to justify this statement, and does so, at least to the satisfaction of the present reviewer. A reading of the Journals themselves provides further confirmation.

As a source-book for political and sociological study, this publication is certainly not without value. Roderic O'Connor was, it appears, the principal author of the Journals. In his writings, he showed his own native humour, his appreciation of the comedy of manners acted out in the life of the Colony, his indignation at the mercenary tendencies displayed by the settlers, publicans, pound-keepers and (his pet aversion) ferrymen. In the midst of a report on pastoral land in the Clyde and Shannon

* Executive Council Minutes, 29-30 Dec 1825, as quoted in the Introduction to the work under review, pp xiii - xiv

River Valleys, he is capable to embarking on a long aside respecting the problems confronting a Colony which did not have effective provisions in its land regulations concerning fencing. This takes him into a discussion of the larger question of improvements generally. In the course of this he writes:-

A Settler in the interior exclaims, How can the Government be so cruel as to compel me to cultivate when I have no market for my produce? Our answer is, fence your land, rouse yourself from your drunken Couch, send no more for Rum, attend to your Men, instead of dosing away your existence in so brutal a manner, get up early, look after your affairs, if you cannot cultivate largely, clear, fence, and cultivate as least as much as will supply your family, if you have an overplus, you can always obtain Slops and shoes for your ragged, bare footed Men, give them enough to eat, how can they work, if you do not feed them, if you expect your Horse to work you must feed him well, or he will not last long, your Men require your care to the full as much, and by attending to them and their triffling wants, they would work double tides for you, and you would not be under the necessity of repairing weekly to the Magistrate with some saucy fellow or other to have him flogged or put into the Chain gang for insolence, which you have brought on yourself by your brutal disregard and total want of feeling towards a human creature.

The Journals themselves come from a few files in the Colonial Secretary's Office general correspondence (CSO 1), and have been reprinted with a minimum of editorial comment. On a few occasions only, Miss McKay has supplied words in square brackets, and marginal notes, made by the Chief Commissioner, or the Colonial Secretary, have also been incorporated in the main text within square brackets. The index acts as an appendix of reference notes as well as an index, and is an invaluable tool in the understanding of the Journals. For instance, if one comes across the surname Bostock in the text, one has only to turn to the index, to discover Bostock's christian name (Robert), his approximate life span (c.1783-1847), the date of his arrival in the Colony (26 Feb 1821), his occupation (apart from farming), the names of any estates acquired other than as an original grant (A.P. [i.e. acquired property] "Vaucluse", Epping), and the location of his original grant (South Esk R.). Then follow references to the various pages on which Bostock is mentioned. The making of this index is the most significant part of the editorial work, and it will doubtless serve as a useful reference aid for all sorts of enquiries the Tasmanian State Archives may receive in the future. A rather formidable list of Corrigenda and Addenda has been supplied with the volume under review, but almost all of these relate to the index, and this is understandable, in view of the magnitude of the work Miss McKay has undertaken.

Mr Eldershaw's introduction is an admirable piece of work, well documented, and extremely readable. As a final offering, the

producers of this book have provided a very useful folding map, showing that part of Tasmania (most of that part of the State lying to the east of a north-south line which bisects the Central Highlands) with the locations of landholders shown by the printing of their names in the approximate position of their holdings. The map also shows the names of landholders prior to the period of the Journals, a good many place-names, both contemporary and superseded, and the positions of roads, taken from Arrowsmith's map of 1831.

The binding of the book is about the only point with which the present reviewer can find fault. It does not open out neatly, but of course any consideration of this aspect must be made with the extremely low price charged for the book in mind. All told it is a commendable piece of publication, for which the University of Tasmania and the Tasmanian Historical Research Association deserve our congratulations.

R.C.S.

SOUTH AUSTRALIANA; a journal for the publication and study of South Australian historical and literary manuscripts. Vol. 1 Nos. 1 & 2. Libraries Board of S.A., Adelaide.

The first two numbers of this new publication of the Libraries Board of S.A. prove the worth of the venture. If the present standard both of articles and presentation is maintained we are sure that the hope expressed by the Chairman of the Libraries Board of S.A. in the Foreword to the first number that the publication will encourage a more lively interest in South Australian history and literature will be fulfilled.

The first number includes the first of two articles dealing with the letters of Governor Hindmarsh to George Fife Angas and a brief study of the C.H. Souter papers recently received in the Archives Department. The second number is devoted almost entirely to the remainder of the Hindmarsh letters.

As Mr. Fischer points out in his introduction to the Hindmarsh letters the true spirit of past events is best evoked by a study of contemporary documents and these letters from the Angas Papers are important on two counts - they help us estimate the importance of Hindmarsh in South Australian history and they also shed some light on the importance of his short term of office in the Governor's long career. While, as Mr. Fischer states, his term of office in South Australia was brief and was undoubtedly not as important in his life as was their sojourn in the State to Colonel Light or Eyre or Grey yet the tone of the letters would suggest that he regarded it as more than "simply a duty to be discharged". The first letter gives some indication of Hindmarsh's desire for the appointment and from then on his interest in and grasp of every facet of the colony's life is quite apparent. It appears obvious that Hindmarsh misunderstood the peculiar relationship that existed between the South Australian