



Tasman Peninsula Historical Society Inc.

Newsletter

Volume 3. Issue 2

March 2021

Happy Autumn!

We held our AGM on 1st February with election of the following office bearers and committee members:

President: Anne Hoyle

Minute Secretary: Anni McGinniss

Secretary: Anne Courtney

Distribution Officer (Chronicles): Fay Odell

Treasurer: Keith O'Hara

Distribution Officer (Convict Trail maps): Anne Courtney

Public Officer: James Parker

Historical Research Officer: Denise Jeffrey

General Committee: Graham Speight, Ted Leeson, Roseanne Heyward, Anni McGinniss.

Discussion at the AGM centred around a review of our constitution to align it with the Model Rules of Association, whether our name should be more inclusive of the Forestier Peninsula, and whether our aim and scope should be revised. James Parker led further discussion at our March meeting to refine our ideas and our April meeting will be a **Special General Meeting** to vote on proposed changes. Please note that this meeting falls on **Easter Monday**.

A serious topic of discussion at our March meeting was the lack of inclusions in the draft *Tasman Council Local Provisions Schedule* for the Tasmanian Planning Scheme. Many places in our local government area are recognised at state level via listing on the Tasmanian Heritage Register. However there are many more places and precincts that have local significance that remain vulnerable to development pressures if not recognised in the planning scheme. I will be making a representation to Council on behalf of TPHS, pointing out that a considerable amount of data in the form of heritage studies already exists (Skeggs, Parker, Truscott) and that the Society would willingly provide any support we can. If you would like to make your own submission, the closing date is **Monday 15th March**. Information online at tasman.tas.gov.au/developmentservices/planning/draft-local-provisions-schedule-consultation/

Our first history walk for members and guests this year will be to visit Point Puer and Safety Cove Farm on **Saturday March 20th**. This one is special because neither sites are generally accessible to the public. Information about the walk is included on page 2.

We conclude with the story of Chauncey Sheldon, a farmer from Michigan who, after trying to overthrow British tyranny in 1838, was transported to the British colony of Van Dieman's Land. He worked on the construction of the Saltwater River Probation Station. The author, Dr. John Carter is a historian based in Ontario, Canada, and is a Research Associate at UTAS. His article is a great read.



In case you missed it when aired on ABC TV News, find the summary of an interview with Dorothy Hallam and James Parker online here: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-02-07/pioneering-abc-camera-operator-dorothy-hallam-work-preserved/13120280>

Anne Hoyle
President

Dates to remember:

Sat 20 Mar Point Puer & Safety Cove Farm walk

Mon 5 April TPHS Special General Meeting, 7 pm

History Walk

Point Puer & Safety Cove Farm
20 March 2021

By Graham Speight

In 1834 in correspondence to the private secretary of the Secretary of State for the Colonies in London Governor Arthur noted:

You are aware that by the last two or three vessels a most unusual number of boys were sent out: it is utterly impossible to imagine a more corrupt fraternity of depraved little felons...all are objects of compassion – to assign them is impossible and I, therefore, caused about 100 to be removed to Tasman's Peninsula.

This was how it all began. Many people think they know the Point Puer story. For many locals it is the backdrop to their fishing expeditions and a place to walk their dog and you will often hear people say, 'it is a lovely place, but there is not much out there'. Nothing could be further from the truth. There is an extraordinarily rich history to be found and there are some amazing sights to explore. You just have to know what you are looking at!

The reality is that very few people really know what actually happened at Point Puer and few know it well. The myth making of books like *For the term of his natural life* have given rise to a narrative that bears no relation to the real story. And this is further confused by what you see when you get there. There is little in the way of interpretation and the formed tracks do not take you to where the action is.

The fabric of the boy's prison is all still there – it is an archaeological site of outstanding heritage value – a World Heritage site. Even without its extraordinarily rich history it is visually stunning with great vistas and some of Australia's most pristine beaches.

This tour is not the same as earlier tours of the Point - it is more detailed and takes you to different places over a different time frame.

The tour is unique – the story combines the cast of *Oliver Twist* with the script of the *Lord of the Flies*. It is shocking, confronting, sad and funny.

To get a sense of what we are talking about you have to conjure up the world's worst boys' school. Eight hundred of Britain's finest thrown together on a barren and wind-swept rock supervised by a staff of misfits (mad, mercenary, missionary, and drunk) backed up by a group of sullen British soldiers who could not believe that they had been sent to the end of the earth to chase little boys.

Point Puer is a treasure trove of the most amazing tales and an extraordinary place to discover.

In 1833 in London a ten-year old boy was hanged for the theft of tuppence worth of printer's ink. Ten years later nine-year old James Lynch, another Londoner, was transported for seven years for 'stealing three boxes of toys'. In this era the age of criminal responsibility was young (seven years old) and children as young as ten years of age could be transported. About 7,000 of them came to Van Diemen's Land and 3,400 of them passed through Point Puer. Each one of those boys has a story and each one of those stories is known to us.

In an added bonus we will also be taking in a visit to Safety Cove farm which was planned as the new boy's prison, but never used as such.

This is the third of the tours that Graham Speight has hosted for the members and friends of the Tasman Peninsula Historical Society.

The first segment of the tour will take two and a half hours with most of the walking on formed pathways or sandy tracks. There are some slight gradients. The Safety Cove Farm segment will take approximately one hour. The tour will conclude by 2.30pm.

Chauncey Sheldon's Odyssey

Contributed by Dr. John Carter

Between December, 1837 and December, 1838, there were at least 14 recorded armed incursions from United States into Upper Canada. These unsanctioned invasions were undertaken by the "Patriot Army," and were intended to overthrow what was seen by some as "British tyranny." While none of them were successful, over 1,000 men who were involved or participated were arrested. Many were charged with piratical invasion/high treason, and one of those men was Chauncey Sheldon. This is his story.

Background:

Sheldon was a widowed, 57 year old ploughman and farmer from Utica, Michigan. On December 4, 1838, he participated in the last incursion, the Battle of Windsor. He was captured, tried by court martial, and along with 17 others participants, sentenced to transportation in Van Diemen's Land. He was the oldest of these prisoners to suffer this fate.

Sheldon and the other Patriots were shipped there aboard *H.M.S. Buffalo*. After departing from Quebec on September 28, 1839, and stopping only once at Rio de Janeiro to re-provision, the *Buffalo* anchored off Hobart Town on February 12, 1840. The journey took 137 days, with the ship travelling over 16,000 miles. Fellow Windsor prisoner Elijah Woodman made a diary entry about the trip, saying that; "The commander of this ship has treated us with every degree of generosity and is making us comfortable as we can expect. His officers and the Surgeon spare no pains to our health and fare. The food is much better than we expected. Our passage has been very agreeable."

The Probation System:

On arrival, each prisoner was given an official number. Sheldon's was 2776.

They were not sent to the Hobart Town Prisoners' Barracks, but were marched directly to the Sandy Bay Probation Station. As political prisoners, these men were separated from "the usual class of thieves," following directions from Lieutenant-Governor Sir John Franklin. Franklin ordered the Patriots to "...be placed on the roads by themselves and landed direct

at a place selected under a superintendent of experience and selected overseer."

The prisoners were to build a 9 mile stretch of road from Sandy Bay to Brown's River. Another Windsor colleague, Elizur Stevens, explained the daily routine; "Our work consists of pecking stones and earth, shoveling, hauling with handcarts, &c. We have to work 11 hours in the day, for 5 ½ days in the week." Prescott prisoner John Gilman added that; "Our labour is of the hardest-mending roads. We have no teams of any kind, and have to do all the carting ourselves." This is what Chauncey Sheldon and the rest of the North American political prisoners would experience for the next 2 years.

After an escape attempt, these men were moved inland on June 17, 1840, to the Lovely Banks Probation Station. They stayed there until

September, and then were transferred to the Green Ponds Probation Station, remaining there until May, 1841. Another unsuccessful escape attempt resulted in the group being sent to the Bridgewater Probation Station. On May 29, dispersal from Bridgewater resulted in smaller groups of prisoners being sent to several different Probation Stations. These included New Town

Bay, Jericho, Jerusalem, Brown's River, Rocky Hills, Constitution Hill, Marlborough, Victoria Valley, Seven Mile Creek, Mount Dromedary, and Saltwater Creek/River stations. Chauncey Sheldon would be in the group which was sent to the Saltwater Probation Station on the Tasman Peninsula.



Jerusalem Probation Station, where some of the Patriot prisoners were sent to build in 1841. Credit: Graham Ryrrie, Colebrook.



An image of the completed Saltwater River Probation Station (1876). Chauncey Sheldon was sent here in 1841, prior to receiving his ticket of leave. Credit: Graham Ryrie, Colebrook.

This site was chosen by the Commandant at Port Arthur, Charles O'Hara Booth, to help accommodate the huge influx of convicts being sent from England. Built on a low hill overlooking Norfolk Bay, construction began in March of 1841. Nine Patriot prisoners including Chauncey Sheldon, Robert Marsh, James D. Fero, John Berry, David House, Joseph Leforte, Patrick White and two others, were re-located from the Hobart Town Tench in June. They became a part of a corps of 300 convicts employed in building permanent structures. In ten months, work had progressed favourably. Journalist David Burn described what he saw there on a January 12, 1842 visit; "This is a remarkably fine locality, with extensive penitentiaries accommodating about 400 convicts...Roads have been formed, piers constructed, land broken up and cleared; upwards of 50 acres luxuriantly cropped with cabbages, potatoes, turnips etc." Known for their axe skills, the "Canadians" contributed greatly to this development.

Many of these prisoners received tickets of leave on February 10, 1842, including Chauncey Sheldon. As a form of probation, this allowed the men who were granted this indulgence, to live and work in the districts of Fingal, Campbell Town, Oatlands, Bothwell, Hamilton and Swanport. The Saltwater men were shipped back to Hobart Town, and then went

out to work on their own and to await receipt of their pardons. Chauncey Sheldon received his on December 6, 1844. He was 1 of 58 prisoners pardoned on an application to the British Government by the U.S. Ambassador Edward Everett. On January 29, 1845, Sheldon left Van Diemen's Land aboard the whaling ship *Steiglitz* with 26 other pardoned prisoners, bound for Hawaii.

The Final Chapter:

On reaching Hawaii, only 6 men continued on to America aboard the *Steiglitz*. Chauncey Sheldon was one of 20 who remained, trying to find other ways to return home. A circuitous route would unfold for him for this quest. Following four months in Honolulu, Sheldon took passage on the American sloop-of-war *Levant*, bound for Monterey. There he boarded the *Warren* for Panama, then took the American war schooner *Flirt* to Cuba, before sailing to New York City aboard the barque *Mudara*. Articles in American newspapers have him there, before going to Le Roy, Genesee County, New York to search for family members. He was 60 years old, but "in good health and spirits." One report noted that; "Mr. S. has many friends and relations in this and adjoining towns [Warsaw, N.Y.], who will be most happy to take by the hand a father and brother."

Like most of the returned Patriots, Chauncey Sheldon would live out the rest of his life in relative obscurity, but his odyssey had finally ended!

Dr. John C. Carter is a Canadian historian, and a Research Associate at the University of Tasmania. He can be contacted at: drjohncarter@bell.net

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Preserving yesterday's history for tomorrow's generations

President: Anne Hoyle
Phone: 0458 290 521
Email: swrhoyles@yahoo.com.au

Secretary: Anne Courtney
Phone: 0437 995 923
Email: anne.courtney@me.com

Historical Research Officer: Denise Jeffrey
Email: tasmanhistory@gmail.com

Other committee members:

James Parker (Public Officer), Anni McGinniss, Roseanne Heyward, Ted Leeson, Graham Speight

Treasurer: Keith O'Hara
Phone: 0429 190 367
Email: keith.ohara@hotmail.com

Chronicle Distribution: Fay Odell
Phone: 6250 3500
Email: fayodell@yahoo.com.au

Tasman Peninsula Historical Society Inc.
1 Jones Road
PREMAYDENA TAS 7185
Website: tphs.org.au
Email: tasmanhistory@gmail.com