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‘As Much as They Can Gorge’: Colonial Containment and Indigenous Tasmanian Mobility at Oyster Cove Aboriginal Station

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In 1803, the British began to expropriate Van Diemen’s Land (now Tasmania) principally as a repository for convicts. They did this without prior negotiation with the estimated 6,000 Aboriginal people residing there, whose ancestors’ custodianship of country dated back at least 40,000 years. As increasing numbers of free settlers arrived, the British settlements in the north and south of the island, and the pastoral frontier, expanded. Consequently, Aboriginal mobility became severely constrained. Conflict over space, mobility, bodies and resources led to sustained warfare between Aboriginal people and colonists throughout the latter half of the 1820s and the early 1830s. The Vandemonian War was ultimately resolved by the exile of Aboriginal survivors to islands in Bass Strait. This was achieved by diplomatic negotiations between Lieutenant

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Governor George Arthur and Kickerterpoller (known to colonists as Black Tom), and by Conciliator of Aborigines George Augustus Robinson's 'friendly mission' in which Kickerterpoller was a participant.²

While there are any number of possible terms that could be used to describe this 'negotiated exodus' of Tasmanian Aboriginal people from the Tasmanian mainland in the 1830s, I have chosen to use the word 'exile' to encapsulate this process. I also refer to those who were removed from their homelands as 'exiles'. In doing so, I am following the example of Edward Said who defined exile as 'the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home'. This descriptor is particularly apt for those Tasmanian Aboriginal people who were removed to the Bass Strait islands.³ In 1847, Lieutenant Governor William Denison decided to repatriate the exiles to mainland Tasmania. This decision was made to overcome the problem of the concentration of exiles at the Aboriginal Establishment on Flinders Island in Bass Strait having been 'delivered over to the caprice of a single individual' (a controversial commandant), and because of rising expenses and a falling Aboriginal population.

This chapter considers the role that ideas about, and practices of, Aboriginal mobility played in the second removal of Aboriginal people to Oyster Cove. It considers constraints on Aboriginal mobility as a key aspect of systems of control and surveillance. This mid-nineteenth century shift in the ways that nation states deployed power to manage their populaces has been theorised by Michel Foucault. According to Foucault, spectacles of power—such as the scaffold—were giving way to new disciplinary regimes that produced docile bodies. In this case, Aboriginal bodies were to be trained to internalise colonial society's norms with the aim that they would become self-governing through constant processes of self-surveillance. This would ultimately negate the perceived need for white protectors, overseers and instructors.⁴

2 Brodie 2015; Brodie 2017; Johnson and McFarlane 2015; Clements 2014; Lawson 2014; Ryan 2012; Harman 2009; Reynolds 1995. After being removed to several islands, the exiles were housed at the Aboriginal Establishment on Flinders Island, which has since become commonly known as Wybalenna, a Tasmanian language term that translates as black men's houses.

3 Said 2002.

4 Foucault 1991 [1977].

Colonial authorities not only managed Aboriginal mobility, they also orchestrated some Aboriginal travel to Hobart for colonial purposes. Initially, this was to show colonists that Aboriginal people were no longer a threat. Later, when viewed through a romanticised lens of a dying race, it became part of a valorisation of Aboriginal 'status'—in both instances a form of entertainment and spectacle for colonists to enjoy. This chapter also traces the relaxation of restrictions on the mobility of Oyster Cove residents in an attempt to mitigate the effects of mistreatment and cost cutting in relation to their health and wellbeing. It shows that, as the health of residents was declining and people were dying, the resumption of some mobility was a colonial strategy designed to improve health, and perhaps restore a degree of wellbeing to the ageing and infirm Oyster Cove residents.

In response to Denison's plan to repatriate the Aboriginal exiles, 'A Colonist' observed in a letter to the Launceston-based *Examiner* that the lieutenant governor 'intimates his resolution to fill up the cup of our calamities by the restoration of a horde of savages to these shores from whence it was naturally hoped that they had been forever most providentially removed'.⁵ From a colonist's point of view, Tasmanian Aboriginal mobility was thus constructed as inherently dangerous and undesirable when placed in a mainland Tasmanian landscape that British colonists had expropriated for themselves.

On Thursday 30 September 1847, 200 colonists attended a public meeting in Launceston to discuss their opposition to the repatriation. They shared the *Examiner* correspondent's concern about Denison's proposal that Aboriginal people 'might be allowed to reassume their old habits of life without any risk to the colonists'. Attendees believed that allowing Aboriginal people to return to the Tasmanian mainland would be dangerous, not only to colonists, but also to the exiles. Within living memory, Tasmanian Aboriginal mobility had led to numerous encounters with colonists, some planned and others accidental, which had resulted in death. It was difficult for colonists to believe that those returning to the Tasmanian mainland would no longer pose the risks to property and person that had been a feature of the colony's Vandemonian War. Some colonists would also have remembered the risks posed to mobile Aboriginal people by armed colonists. The dangers considered inherent

5 'A Colonist', *Examiner*, 25 September 1847: 4.

in Aboriginal mobility stand as testament to the effectiveness of the Aboriginal campaigns waged a decade and a half earlier, the longevity of colonial memory of the Black War and the willingness of at least some colonists to shoot Aboriginal people on sight.⁶

Despite the settlers' mounting concerns, Denison was determined to forge ahead. In November 1847, a government notice announced the repatriation of the exiles to the mainland. In an accompanying editorial, the *Examiner* observed that while the exiled Tasmanian Aboriginal people had been allowed to 'roam without restraint at Flinders', on their return to Tasmania they would 'be subjected to a surveillance and constraint they have never before experienced'.⁷ As Aboriginal mobility was clearly still feared within the colonial community, the newspaper was at pains to stress that, while Aboriginal life in exile may have been characterised by freedom of movement (albeit across a small island contained by the sea), at Oyster Cove those who returned would be subject to unprecedented surveillance and restraint. The Tasmanian Government was committed to taking extraordinary measures to contain the remnant population, in so far as was possible, within the boundaries of the Oyster Cove Aboriginal Station. Nevertheless, those who were repatriated gradually regained a measure of mobility. A coercive form of mobility occurred at the behest of colonial authorities who orchestrated a range of public appearances and staged events in which the repatriated Aboriginal people were key participants. Those Aboriginal people who returned also undertook numerous journeys of varying type and length at their own volition, re-establishing old networks and forging new ones. This practice received tacit colonial endorsement as the ageing Aboriginal population's health and numbers were seen to be in severe decline.

Oyster Cove is south of Hobart, adjacent to a small bay on the D'Entrecasteaux Channel. In 1844, it was chosen as a site for a female penitentiary that never eventuated. Approximately 120 male convicts were sent there to construct buildings and perform labour. When reporting on Oyster Cove to the Secretary of State for the Colonies in May 1847, Lieutenant Governor Charles La Trobe informed Grey that the decision had been made to 'break up the establishment', which had become

6 'Releasing the Aborigines: Public Meeting', *Examiner*, 2 October 1847: 4. On the apparent willingness of some colonists to shoot Aboriginal people on sight, see Harman 2009: 16.

7 'Editorial', *Examiner*, 17 November 1847: 3.

'expensive and unprofitable'.⁸ The government sold the vacant land and buildings to Henry Stevenson Hurst for approximately £200.⁹ Just months later, when a site was being sought to which Tasmanian Aboriginal people at Wybalenna might be relocated, the government settled on Oyster Cove. The buildings, which La Trobe had described as 'small ... and very slight', remained intact. Aside from the superintendent's quarters, which were constructed of brick, the built environment was fashioned from sawn timber or slabs and comprised of two mess rooms (one of which also served as a chapel), some huts, a cooking and bake house, hospital and a dozen wooden cells formerly used for solitary confinement.¹⁰ Hurst had the upper hand in the negotiations over Oyster Cove, making a handsome profit when, just months after the government had sold him the site, Hurst sold it back for £400.¹¹

In the same public notice in which the government formally announced the return of 45 'Aboriginal inhabitants of Van Diemen's Land to their native country', it reassured readers that only 13 adult men were among the group; of these, two had been brought up by Europeans from early childhood, three had been educated at the Queen's Orphan Schools, one was a farm servant who had been reared by a European and two were incapacitated. The remaining five adult males included four older men who worked with a 'steadiness which would have been praiseworthy in a man bred to labour'. Further, the governor reminded colonists that all of the Aboriginal people had 'lived about fifteen years in civilised habits', and that the women had been living 'in the practices of civilised life for a period even longer than the men'.¹² This strong emphasis on the exposure of the adults to civilising influences is consistent with colonial discourses that equated savagery with irrational violence and civilisation with measured responses to provocation. The transition from Indigenous mobility to more 'settled' lives was seen as an essential precursor to Aboriginal people becoming 'civilised'.

8 La Trobe to Grey, 31 May 1847, cited in Brand 1990: 190–91.

9 Plomley 1987: 171.

10 La Trobe to Grey, 31 May 1847, cited in Brand 1990: 190–91.

11 Plomley 1987: 171.

12 *Colonial Times*, 12 November 1847: 4; 'Editorial', *Examiner*, 17 November 1847: 3.

Prior to their arrival, Denison informed the colonial secretary that he 'approved' of a plan that involved 'parading them [the repatriated Aboriginal people] before the inhabitants of Hobart Town'.¹³ This planned appearance echoed the way in which Robinson had triumphantly paraded the remnants of the Big River and Oyster Bay tribes through the streets of Hobart in January 1832, after arranging their removal to Wybalenna.¹⁴ When the survivors returned, a street parade was orchestrated by government officials to visually underline the fact that the numbers of Tasmanian Aboriginal people (particularly men) had greatly diminished, meaning they now lacked any real capacity to re-engage in warfare with the colonists. How such parades were experienced by those subjected to the colonists' 'lively curiosity' remains a matter of conjecture.¹⁵ Such events highlight the ways in which Tasmanian Aboriginal mobility could be coerced by government to fulfil its agenda of appeasing and/or entertaining its colonial populace.

By the time colonists were reading about the repatriation of the exiles, the 45 Aboriginal people had already been relocated to the Oyster Cove Aboriginal Station where they arrived in mid-October 1847.¹⁶ As had been the case at Wybalenna, white protectors were the cornerstone of the colonial policy of containment that sought to constrain Aboriginal mobility and to refashion Tasmania's Indigenous people (particularly the children) in the image of the British colonisers. Dr Joseph Milligan was putatively in charge of the station at Oyster Cove, yet he opted to live in Hobart. Daily responsibility for overseeing the station's residents fell to the catechist, Robert Clark, who, like Milligan, had accompanied the Aboriginal group from Wybalenna. The government also appointed a visiting magistrate to the station.¹⁷ Conforming to a pattern established across other British settler colonies, and at Flinders Island, Aboriginal children were separated from their parents and inculcated with 'those habits of obedience and industry which will ensure their becoming at all events quiet and orderly members of the community'.¹⁸ Of the 10 children, three boys and four girls were sent to the Orphan School. The eldest boy, Charlie, was apprenticed out (off the station) to learn a trade, while the

13 Denison to Colonial Secretary 23 October 1847, CSO 24/32/922, Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office (hereafter TAHO): 87–88.

14 *Hobart Town Courier*, 14 January 1832: 2.

15 *Hobart Town Courier*, 14 January 1832: 2.

16 Plomley 1987: 150–63.

17 Plomley 1987: 172.

18 See Armitage 1995; *Colonial Times*, 28 January 1848: 3.

youngest, George, and the eldest girl, Fanny Cochrane, were boarded with Fanny's half-sister, Mary Ann, and her husband, Walter George Arthur, at the Oyster Cove Aboriginal Station.¹⁹

By dint of their mixed descent, Christian marriage and previous occupation as teachers at Wybalenna, the Arthurs were considered by the colonial authorities to be of sufficient standing to act as guardians to these children. The government's willingness to release Tasmanian Aboriginal people into the care of mixed-descent relatives whose living arrangements conformed to white expectations was not without precedent. For example, in 1841, Dalrymple Briggs, the daughter of sealer George Briggs and Woretemoyetyenner, successfully petitioned for her mother to be released from Wybalenna into her care.²⁰ Such arrangements were sometimes entered into by the state depending on its public servants' perceptions of the applicants. As Clare Anderson has explained in relation to another part of the British Empire, in the first half of the nineteenth century race was 'a category forged at least partially through broader cultural distinctions, most especially of religion, class and education'.²¹ The relative fluidity of racial thinking saw people less bounded by this category than later in the century, and those Aboriginal people whom the colonists perceived to be conforming to their social expectations were granted some concessions.

When the remaining children were transferred to the Orphan School in December 1847, they were accompanied on their one-way journey by their parents. They were packed uncomfortably into two carriages; however, they stopped en route to join the vice-regal couple at New Norfolk (beyond Hobart) for their Christmas festivities. Lady Denison empathised with her husband's plans to 'bring parties of them [the Aboriginal people] up to Hobart Town and the neighbourhood, in order to let people see how perfectly inoffensive they are' and expressed her hopes for the children to be 'trained into civilised and Christian beings'. The Aboriginal group, which was hosted in a separate tent from the Denison's servants, was given food and baubles. They later played games that were seen to provide a visual display of their physical dexterity. Lady Denison described how 'the black tent was evidently the great attraction', as their white visitors and other townsfolk flocked to see the Aboriginal people for themselves.

19 Plomley 1987: 173.

20 CO 280/133, 171-171a, TAHO.

21 Anderson 2012: 82.

Despite having become colonial curiosities, coerced into a form of mobility that would see them separated from their children and gazed upon by colonists, the Aboriginal people apparently enjoyed themselves.²²

A further opportunity to parade the Aboriginal adults before the Hobart citizenry presented itself on the evening of 26 December when they occupied the vice-regal box at the theatre with Milligan and the artist, John Skinner Prout. The antics of the clown 'surprised' them; the Aboriginal group reportedly thought him akin to a supernatural being.²³ Their animation and enthralment stood in marked contrast to their behaviour at Oyster Cover Station. When Lady Denison visited them the following year, she described their 'usual conduct' as 'apathetic'. They only became energetic after they were asked to demonstrate their traditional skills in tree climbing.²⁴ The burden of continued captivity appeared to be weighing heavily on the repatriated Aboriginal people.

Consistent with the Wybalenna experience, the white staff overseeing the Aboriginal people continued to attract controversy, particularly the catechist Robert Clark who managed the station on a daily basis. Clark had difficulty containing the residents within the boundaries of the station at Oyster Cove. This aspect of colonial oversight was considered fundamental to the 'civilising' process. Early on, tensions arose over Aboriginal mobility (and the unrestrained movements of their dogs). Within two months of their arrival, altercations arose over station dogs attacking neighbouring sheep and goats, and Aboriginal people fraternising with workers in the district.²⁵ The workers, being from the lower class, were considered to be a bad influence. Aboriginal people's mobility contradicted Denison's 'guarantee for their future good behaviour', which was based on Aboriginal people 'having acquired a taste for settled habits and industrial pursuits, and in their appreciation of the comforts and advantages of domestic life'.²⁶ Unrestrained mobility not only threatened the governor's credibility and the colonists' peaceful existence (by posing a psychological, rather than a physical, threat), but was also believed to negatively affect Aboriginal morality and wellbeing.

22 Davis and Petrow 2004: 72–78.

23 'The Theatre', *Courier*, 29 December 1847: 2.

24 Davis and Petrow 2004: 102–03.

25 CSO24/39/1197 (January–June 1848), TAHO.

26 'The Natives', 4 November 1847, Government Notice No. 109, Colonial Secretary's Office, 4 November 1847; *Colonial Times*, 12 November 1847: 4; 'Editorial', *Examiner*, 17 November 1847: 3.

To assuage colonists' concerns about the repatriation, Denison offered assurances that 'they [Aboriginal people] are almost all addicted to gardening. They raised at Flinders' Island, in gardens fenced by themselves, peas, beans, turnips, cabbages, ear rots, onions, parsnips, and pumpkins, besides cultivating fruit trees'.²⁷ The increasingly controversial Clark endeavoured to turn Aboriginal attention to domestic tasks. In doing so, he redeemed himself (up to a point), as their proposed activities accorded with Denison's vision for the captives. Despite the reported infertility of the soil, Clark encouraged Aboriginal men and women to grow vegetables with a view to marketing the crops in Hobart.²⁸ Such activities conformed with the notion of Aboriginal people being contained within the confines of the station. Rather than hunting and foraging (and the mobility implicit in these activities), the idea was that they would become tied to the land and their crops, caught up in a cycle of reaping and sowing. Marketing their crops had the potential not only to draw Aboriginal people further into an engagement with the colonial economy in a productive and 'civilising' way, but also to reduce the costs involved with maintaining the Oyster Cove Aboriginal Station.

Clark also encouraged the women to take up needlework and the men to engage in making baskets and mauls (large hammers used to split wood).²⁹ Unlike many white overseers in charge of Aboriginal people, Clark was familiar with the languages spoken by Tasmanian Aboriginal people. This was important, as a large number of station residents spoke little or no English. Being able to converse with them, he was well placed to understand and appreciate their concerns and to encourage them to adopt the attributes and attitudes consistent with 'civilised' life. However, by 29 March 1850, Clark was dead and a new overseer was required for the remaining 35 residents. Nearly a quarter of the Aboriginal residents died during the station's first three years of operation.³⁰

27 'The Natives', 4 November 1847, Government Notice No. 109, Colonial Secretary's Office, 4 November 1847; *Colonial Times*, 12 November 1847: 4; 'Editorial', *Examiner*, 17 November 1847: 3.

28 Clark to Colonial Secretary, 3 May 1848, CSO 24/85/1684, TAHO: 84–107.

29 Clark to Manley, 23 April 1848, CSO 24/47/1637: 412–15; Colonial Secretary to Clark, CSO 24/47/1637: 416; Clark to Colonial Secretary, 8 May 1848, CSO24/47/1637: 417–20; Clark to Milligan, 16 June 1848, CSO 24/85/1684, TAHO: 154–56.

30 Milligan to Colonial Secretary, 30 March 1850, CSO 24/132/4445, TAHO: 329–32, TAHO; Plomley 1987: 178.

Over the following half decade, Milligan ran the station from Hobart with several white staff living on site. The surrounding neighbourhood was changing. More white settlers were taking up land, living alongside a burgeoning population of sawyers and wood splitters. The encroachment of settlers curtailed Aboriginal mobility, yet it also offered opportunities for (sometimes illicit) interactions with settlers. Aboriginal lives were changing considerably over this period too. While Aboriginal people had enjoyed line fishing at Wybalenna, at Oyster Cove they discovered the joys of being at sea and commenced fishing from rowboats provided by the station.³¹ Some of the Aboriginal station residents began to travel much farther afield, spending lengthy periods at sea. As Lynette Russell has shown in *Roving Mariners* and in her chapter in this collection, several of the Aboriginal men and boys from Oyster Cove crewed on whaling and sealing vessels. This followed a government order in 1855 that all able-bodied residents should work away from the station. The purpose of the order was to reduce running costs and to encourage station residents to assimilate into wider colonial society. Russell has suggested that for those such as Walter George Arthur, 'life at sea ... provided an escape from oppression on land'. William Lanné, who became the last surviving Aboriginal man from Oyster Cove, also went to sea and is thought to have sailed on the *Aladdin*, the *Jane*, the *Runnymede* and the *Sapphire*. The latter travelled extensively across the Southern, Pacific and into the Indian oceans. As Russell has observed, 'this must have seemed a world away from the disease and despair, rations and regulations of the Oyster Cove settlement, where his kin were confined'.³² According to the visiting magistrate, James Woodhouse Kirwan, in January 1857, Lanné was on board the whaling vessel the *Jane* with another youth from the station, Adam, and Jack Allen, an adult station resident. Perhaps travelling together in a small group smoothed the transition from land to sea, particularly for the younger men who were presumably under Allen's guidance.³³

Going to sea of their own volition was not an option for the Aboriginal women and girls at the station; although, as Russell shows in this volume, some Tasmanian Aboriginal women did travel. Even in situations of

31 Milligan to Colonial Secretary, 30 March 1850, CSO 24/132/4445: 329–32; Milligan to Colonial Secretary, 17 February 1854, CSO 24/241/9498, TAHO.

32 Russell, 2012: 73–78.

33 Kirwan, 31 January 1857, 'Aboriginal Establishment, Oyster Cove, Reports made by Visiting Magistrate, Surgeon and Chaplain when making calls to the Establishment' (hereafter 'Visitors' Book'), CSO 89/1/1, TAHO: 18.

coerced mobility, we can see their agency in the way they managed the situations in which they found themselves. Together with some of the men left behind, several Aboriginal women at Oyster Cove women adopted behaviour that was viewed by some colonists as inappropriate. In 1850, Milligan raised concerns about Aboriginal women and men obtaining alcohol from their white neighbours and from a nearby public house. Milligan's moralising tone notwithstanding, his writings attest to women travelling beyond the bounds of the station and utilising their bodies as they pleased.³⁴ By April 1855, the number of Aboriginal residents at Oyster Cove had fallen to five men and 11 women. Kirwan reported to the governor that they were living in 'filthy' conditions and that their onsite overseer was unfit for his role. According to Kirwan:

For a long time past the natives have appeared to me to be under no control or superintendence whatever, being allowed to wander about the country by themselves wherever they pleased.

Kirwan complained that this had led to a small group frequenting a public house some miles away in Kingston, where 'scenes of disgusting immorality' had been taking place.³⁵ Such revelries reportedly culminated in the death by drowning of (an allegedly inebriated) Mathinna. Mathinna, a young woman kept at Government House in Hobart 'as a sort of pet' by Lady Jane Franklin, was left at the Orphan School when the Franklins returned to England.³⁶ Kirwan's paternalistic concern was consistent with nineteenth-century views of Indigenous peoples across the British Empire; they were seen as childlike and in need of protection and instruction, as demonstrated by an offer made a fortnight later by Reverend Edward Freeman to visit the station regularly to teach Christian morals to its Aboriginal residents.³⁷

Adverse reports about the lives and living conditions of Oyster Cove residents resulted in the governor appointing a new superintendent, John Strange Dandridge. Dandridge took up residence in July 1855 and spent the rest of his life there. His wife, Maria, was the daughter of renowned colonial artist Prout, whose watercolour landscapes of Wybalenna,

34 Milligan to Colonial Secretary, 30 March 1850, CSO 24/132/4445: 329–32; Milligan to Colonial Secretary, 17 February 1854, CSO 24/241/9498, TAHO.

35 Kirwan to Colonial Secretary, 17 April 1855, CSD 1/18/703, TAHO.

36 'The Aborigines', *Mercury*, 20 February 1857: 2.

37 E. Freeman to Governor Henry Young, 1 May 1855, CSD 1/18/703, TAHO.

the Orphan School and Oyster Cove are particularly evocative.³⁸ Nearly eight years earlier, when Denison had first announced the repatriation of the exiles, he had stated that ‘respectable persons may visit the establishment; and, on doing so, they will be required to write their names in a Visitors’ Book kept there’. This highlighted both the government’s segregationist agenda and that Aboriginal lives were on show for ‘respectable’ colonists.³⁹ The only surviving visitors’ book dates from when the Dandridges took over; it sheds light on a number of aspects of life there, including ongoing issues over the rations and built environment that were meant to contain the Aboriginal residents.⁴⁰

According to Tim Rowse, rationing was ‘an institution of the colonial order’ that colonists engaged in for various reasons. It involved ‘providing food, clothing, and other goods (such as blankets and tobacco)’ to Aboriginal people. The process of rationing was such that ‘Indigenous recipients could preserve their own understandings of why they were rationed, of what their entitlements were, and of what were the proper uses of the received goods’.⁴¹ At Wybalenna, Aboriginal people ‘performed little labour’, as they firmly ‘believed it was their right to be kept well supplied with food’. This expectation was conceived in their negotiations with Robinson prior to going into exile. Henry Reynolds has explained how ‘such expectations militated against the European desire to encourage the Aborigines to learn labour, which was seen as a vital step in their progress towards “civilization”’.⁴² The issuing of rations to the repatriated Aboriginal residents was underpinned by a much more straightforward agenda, that of containment. Denison instructed the colonial secretary that ‘they may as well be given as much as they can gorge to keep them at home ... let Mr Clark be warned that his main object should be to keep them at home by any inducement he can hold out to them’.⁴³

The government followed the same tender process to source beef and mutton for the station as it did with its other institutions. Contractors were also asked to tender for transporting all necessary supplies to Oyster

38 ‘Marriage’, *Courier*, 31 March 1847: 2.

39 ‘The Natives’, 4 November 1847, Government Notice No. 109, Colonial Secretary’s Office, 4 November 1847; *Colonial Times*, 12 November 1847: 4; ‘Editorial’, *Examiner* 17 November 1847: 3.

40 Visitors’ Book, CSO 89/1/1, TAHO.

41 Rowse 1998: 3, 5.

42 Reynolds 1995: 160–61.

43 Denison to Colonial Secretary, 23 October 1847, CSO 24/32/922, TAHO: 87–88.

Cove by sea from Hobart.⁴⁴ The meat rations that formed the basis of the Aboriginal diet were of variable quality. The mutton observed by visiting magistrate Kirwan in January 1856 was of 'good quality'; however, in June of the same year, Reverend Freeman found that the 'beef & mutton supplied to Est ... was exceedingly bad' and speculated that this was attributable to the low costs involved. Early the following year, when Aboriginal residents complained of the poor quality of the meat, Freeman found their complaints to be 'well founded'. He thought that 'in future, provisions should be supplied at market price'. The issue persisted to the point that, in April 1857, Freeman sought the governor's intervention. If this transpired, it did not result in the issue being satisfactorily addressed. In January 1858, Dandridge returned 80 pounds of poor-quality beef to its supplier. The difficulties inherent in sourcing quality meat for the station were such that, by mid-winter, none had arrived, leaving Dandridge little option but to issue extra flour to the residents.⁴⁵ The poor-quality rations coincided with a marked increase in respiratory disease, the colonial cure for which was mercury containing calomel. No one at the time was aware of the severe health risks posed by mercury. As Peter Dowling has suggested, it seems probable that the Aboriginal patients were unintentionally hastened to their deaths by the doctor who was trying to assist them.⁴⁶

The inability of the colonial administration to provide adequate care and sustenance for the station residents gave rise to the view that allowing them to resume their traditional hunting practices 'would probably do more to renovate and re-establish their health than almost any other plan that could be devised'.⁴⁷ Accordingly, various groups of Aboriginal residents sought permission to go into the bush for days, or even weeks, at a time. Richie Woolley has suggested that such trips may have had their inception with the positive response from Aboriginal people to a trip to Flinders Island in 1850 that was organised by Milligan to obtain 'Killiecrankie diamonds' (topaz) and other Tasmanian minerals to be displayed at the 1851 Great Exhibition in London.⁴⁸ Aboriginal residents' mobility was constrained by the need to receive permission for travel from

44 See, for example, 'Office of Stores', *Mercury*, 7 November 1862: 4. See also 'Colonial Annual Contracts', *Mercury*, 21 November 1865: 2.

45 Visitors' Book, CSO 89/1/1, TAHO: 9, 13, 19, 20, 27, 29.

46 Dowling, 2006: 59–68.

47 Milligan to Denison July 1851, CSO24/864/6314, TAHO.

48 Woolley n.d.: 335; Oyster Cove Correspondence File, TAHO.

the governor or the overseer. However, it seems they complied, for as Dandridge explained, 'they always ask leave to go upon these excursions, and take with them their bedding, pots and pans, etc., and as many rations as they can carry'.⁴⁹ In addition to these frequent hunting excursions of several days or weeks in the vicinity of the station, and numerous visits to the adjacent Huon Valley, in mid-winter 1860, a group of six residents (Augustus, Flora, Emma, Tippo, Patty and Sophia) undertook a two-month excursion to Port Davey in the island's far south-west.⁵⁰ A short newspaper article printed in November 1856 revealed that 'four of the natives' were on board the *Cobra*, a vessel conveying missionaries and a large number of residents of Hobart to Oyster Cove to visit the Aboriginal station. The unnamed Aboriginal expeditioners 'had been ... according to their customs, to Victoria to hold a corrobory [sic]'.⁵¹ It is possible that they were renewing acquaintances made with Victorian Aboriginal people, whom they had met when they accompanied Robinson to the Port Phillip District in 1839, following his appointment as Chief Protector of Aborigines. In this way, we see that Oyster Cove residents were allowed, even encouraged, to resume some degree of former mobility to mitigate the effects of their treatment by colonial authorities.

The Aboriginal residents at Oyster Cove experienced a severe population decline in the 1860s. During this time, the Tasmanian Government regularly displayed them in Hobart. This was consistent with its earlier practice of allowing controlled Aboriginal mobility to show colonists that Aboriginal Tasmanians were not a threat, while also providing a spectacle. However, the ways in which such visits were orchestrated by the authorities and represented in the media changed. In 1860, Dandridge's complaint about the station residents trading their clothing and blankets for alcohol gave rise to a suggestion that 'clothing made particularly for the blacks' ought to be issued to them, and their 'blankets be branded before issue'; in other words, that Aboriginal people's clothing and blankets ought to be similar to, and as distinctive as, those formerly issued to convicts.⁵² Dandridge's claims about Aboriginal people's propensity to dispose of goods to obtain alcohol were later supported by Joseph Russell of

49 'Tasmania in 1882, Aborigines', *Mercury*, 11 April 1882: 2.

50 CSD 1/121/4338, TAHO. Unfortunately, those who remained at the station contracted influenza in their absence, an illness that was later contracted by, and killed, three of the expeditioners shortly after their return.

51 'Local News', *The Hobartian*, 28 November 1856: 2.

52 Visitors' Book, TAHO: 45.

Geeveston in his reminiscences of life at the Oyster Cove. Russell, a child of one of the government employees working there, recalled in his old age how 'the natives were addicted to drink' and, 'besides spending the money they raised from the sale of fish and shell necklaces' on alcohol, also 'disposed of the blankets from their bunks to buy rum'.⁵³ It is evident that station residents had established a substantial trade network that relied not only on their traditional practices of shell necklace making and fishing, but also on colonial-issued supplies to procure alcohol. This illicit trade disturbed colonial authorities, both in terms of its outcome (i.e. more alcohol for Aboriginal people) and Dandridge's lack of oversight. However, such exercises of agency went beyond the bounds of station propriety as imagined by Dandridge and his wife.

In 1866, just a few short years after Dandridge's proposal to brand the station residents' blankets, new ball gowns were being sewn for 'Mary Anne, and her countrywomen', as the names of Mary Ann Arthur and four of her Aboriginal companions appeared on an invitation to Government House. Accompanied by Dandridge and greeted by the governor's wife, Mrs Gore Brown, the Aboriginal guests—who excited the interest of other attendees at the ball—were reportedly 'pleased with the attention paid to them'.⁵⁴ In 1858, Walter and Mary Ann Arthur had attempted to remove themselves from the constraints of Oyster Cove and establish a farm, but had not been successful. However, their former ward, Fanny, achieved a degree of independence they may well have envied. Given permission to marry, she eventually relocated with her husband to nearby Nicholls Rivulet. According to a newspaper report, Fanny Cochrane Smith ought to have been invited to Government House along with 'the others showed off their white kid gloves and enjoyed the sherry and tarts'. Yet, according to the newspaper, 'having married a gentleman following the lucrative industrial employment of a sawyer, she is out of the pale of the haut ton [people of high fashion] of the city'.⁵⁵ Apparently Fanny's marriage to an emancipated convict precluded her from being on the guest list alongside her kin who, towards the end of their lives, were represented as royalty (of sorts).

53 'Old-Timer's Memories, Taught to Smoke by Truganini, Life with Natives', *Mercury*, 25 July 1939: 8.

54 'The Birthday Ball', *Mercury*, 25 May 1866: 4.

55 'Tasmania in 1882, Aborigines', *Mercury*, 11 April 1882: 2.

Jakelin Troy has explained how, as the nineteenth century progressed and Aboriginal populations (and the perceived threat they posed to settlers) dwindled, 'nostalgia developed among the colonial population for Aboriginal traditions'.⁵⁶ The way in which the few surviving Aboriginal residents from Oyster Cove were paraded and feted in Hobart during their final years is consistent with a pattern of nostalgia for those considered to be the 'last' of an apparently 'dying race'. Nowhere is this repositioning of Aboriginal people more apparent, in Tasmanian history at least, than in the way in which William Lanné—tellingly also known as 'King Billy'—was dressed in 'a blue suit, with gold lace band around his cap' to be introduced to Prince Alfred, the Duke of Edinburgh, in 1868. According to a later report, 'the two of them strolled on the Hobart Town regatta ground, conscious that they alone were in possession of Royal blood'.⁵⁷ Despite not being included among Tasmanian Aboriginal 'royalty', Fanny may have lived content in the knowledge that she had regained sufficient freedom to traverse the lands of her ancestors, and to pass down some of their cultural knowledge and language to her descendants.

In colonial Tasmania, the potentially unrestrained mobility of Aboriginal people incited fear and unrest among the predominantly white settler population. Such fears were not altogether misplaced, and stand as testament to the effectiveness of the campaigns waged by Aboriginal warriors following the incursion onto their ancestral lands of white settlers and their sheep. Such fears mirrored concerns about the mobility of the burgeoning society's underclasses of convicts (particularly those being transferred from Norfolk Island—known as a place of ill repute). The repatriation of less than 50 of the Aboriginal exiles from Flinders Island to Oyster Cove Aboriginal Station saw a continuation of the government's policy of segregating Aboriginal people, with a view to training them in preparation for their eventual integration into the lower rungs of colonial society. The cornerstone of this policy involved severe restrictions on Aboriginal mobility, while allowing particular, highly controlled forms of coerced mobility that were designed to allay settlers' fears; for example, by parading visibly non-threatening Aboriginal people through the streets of Hobart.

56 Troy 1993: 35.

57 *The World's News*, 19 June 1954: 21. Note that Trucanini, wrongly understood by her contemporaries to have been 'the last of the original inhabitants of Tasmania', was likewise known as Queen Trucanini in her final years. *Mercury*, 12 May 1876: 2.

After the removal of most of the Aboriginal children to the Orphan School, the increasingly ageing and unwell adult population at Oyster Cove experienced mixed success in subverting colonial attempts to contain them. Attempts at containment included appointing an onsite overseer to manage the station and its residents, rationing and instituting a system of official visitors to instruct the Aboriginal people in Christianity; such visitors also attended to matters of health and material comfort. Over time, and in response to the colonial system's failure to secure residents' health and wellbeing, restrictions on the station's adult residents' mobility were eased; although, in most instances, residents still required permission to travel beyond the confines of the station. Those who achieved the greatest success in loosening the constraints over their mobility were, perhaps, the men and boys who crewed on sealing and whaling vessels and who enjoyed the relative freedom of being at sea for months at a time. On land, groups of adults ventured into the bush on hunting expeditions and possibly to conduct ceremonies; indeed, some travelled as far as Victoria to engage in ceremony with their Aboriginal counterparts. By conforming to colonial ideals through contracting a Christian marriage, Fanny Cochrane Smith managed to negotiate a life for herself beyond the boundaries of the Aboriginal station. Born in captivity on Flinders Island, Fanny, through marriage, gained access to the mobility that had been the right of her forebears. As the Aboriginal population at Oyster Cove aged and diminished in number, colonial fears faded and were replaced with nostalgia. This involved romanticising the few (known) remaining Tasmanian Aboriginal people who, while they continued to be physically contained within the boundaries of the Oyster Cove Aboriginal Station, were once again paraded through Hobart. These people may have experienced social mobility of sorts when titles such as 'King' and 'Queen' were bestowed upon them. Further, they may have viewed such titles as a somewhat belated acknowledgement of their significance as leaders within the Oyster Cove community; however, such a conclusion must remain speculative.⁵⁸

58 Troy 1993: 41.

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