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NOVEMBER 1992

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# THE AUSTRALIANA SOCIETY

PO BOX 322, ROSEVILLE 2069



## — SOCIETY PROGRAMME —

### MEETINGS – 1992

**THURSDAY,  
3 DECEMBER**

**CHRISTMAS PARTY  
“SHOW and TELL”**

Please bring along your treasured items of Australia for discussion

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**1993**

**TUESDAY,  
26 JANUARY**

**ANNUAL AUSTRALIA DAY DINNER**

Guest Speaker: PETER WATTS, Director of the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales  
Venue: Darling Mills Restaurant, Glebe

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### SOCIAL OUTING – 1992

**SUNDAY,  
29 NOVEMBER**

An afternoon tea-party at a Balmain waterfront Victorian villa, the residence of John and Jocelyn Morris.

An ideal opportunity for Society members and friends to enjoy congenial company in ideal surroundings.

Society meetings are held at 7.30pm at the Glover Cottage Hall, 124 Kent Street, Sydney. Convenient street parking.  
Drinks served 7.30 - 8.00 pm, followed by Australiana Showcase (bring your Australian treasures for general discussion).  
Lecture will commence at 8.30 pm.

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# Young America and Young Australia: 200 years of US Trade

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John Wade

Five hundred years ago, in 1492 Christopher Columbus sailed three small Spanish ships across the Atlantic into the unknown. He introduced a startled Europe to a New World, which he thought was Asia, and rekindled the passion for exploration and discovery.

Three hundred years later, exactly 200 years ago, the first ship from the "New World" arrived in New South Wales. The British colony was almost four years old when the brig *Philadelphia* opened trade between the USA and Australia.

Early British settlers at Sydney and Hobart brought as much as they could with them when they arrived, some of the convicts even bringing a small chest containing their possessions<sup>1</sup>. As people prospered, they imported more chattels from Britain.

Our first merchants were keen to trade with Asia and the Pacific, something contemporary Australians have just re-discovered. Following the arrival of the first ship, *Atlantic*, from India on 20 June 1792, British India became a source of food and textiles, while tea and other imports occasionally arrived from China. A smattering of commodities and native artefacts came from the Pacific Islands, brought back by traders, whalers and missionaries. Some goods were even imported from the newly independent United States of America, and not all of them were perishable.

Firmly committed to excluding foreign and colonial trade competition where it could, Britain imposed barriers on trading by its colonies and with Asia. However, after King George III was forced to recognise US independence in 1783, Americans were freed from these

restrictions, and able to circumvent the Asian trading monopoly given to the East India Company.

The American brig *Philadelphia* was the first foreign trading vessel to reach Sydney with a cargo mainly of meat and liquor, arriving on 1 November 1792, closely followed by the trader *Hope* from Providence, Rhode Island.

On the other side of the continent, the American whalers *Asia* and *Alliance* of Nantucket had already called into Western Australia's Shark Bay<sup>2</sup>.

Yet none of these was the first American ship in Australian waters. That honour goes to the brig *Alliance* from Philadelphia, which even before Sydney was founded, had sailed around Tasmania and up the east coast in 1787, seeking a new route to China<sup>3</sup>. Wary of possibly hostile natives, Captain Thomas Reid found the coast inhospitable, and the route he pioneered was not subsequently exploited.

These vessels illustrate two of the three main activities of our early American visitors – trade, whether with the Australian colonies or China, and whaling<sup>4</sup>. The third was sealing, which often involved the trade with China, as Canton was a major market for the pelts. American ships, particularly those out of Boston, had already built up a flourishing trade in the Pacific, collecting furs on the Northwest Coast of North America.

Several Americans had already been there. Three Americans were with Cook on *Endeavour* when he sailed along the east coast in 1770: Lieutenant John Gore, Midshipman James Mario Matra and seaman James Thurmond were all born in

the North American colonies. In the First Fleet, Jacob Nagle<sup>5</sup> was one of six Americans in the crew of the flagship *MHS Sirius*; his diary is a refreshingly informal record of early colonial life at Sydney Cove.

Thomas Patrickson – probably British-born with American connections – was at the Cape of Good Hope in July 1791. Maybe he was on the way back home from a voyage to Canton, as the Philadelphia trader *Empress of China* had been six years earlier, in March 1785, after pioneering North America's trade with China. Patrickson learned about starving Sydney's need for supplies from newly appointed Lieutenant-Governor Philip Gidley King, who was heading back to Sydney as a passenger on board *HMS Gorgon*.

Under the command of Captain John Parker,<sup>6</sup> at Cape Town *Gorgon* picked up the belated supplies to relieve the Colony, salvaged from the iceberg-damaged *HMS Guardian*. Parker also bought 66 sheep, 28 cattle, 11 pigs, 16 rabbits, 20 pigeons and 200 fruit trees. The transports *Active*, *Queen*, *Albermarle*, *Barrington* and *Britannia* were in port on their way to Port Jackson with supplies. Captain Vancouver was passing through the Cape at the time in *HMS Discovery*. There was much to talk about among the captains.

David Collins<sup>7</sup> reports that King encouraged Patrickson to bring a speculative cargo to Sydney. King was well aware of the precarious position of the colony's stores. In spite of some successes, such as growing a 27-pound (12kg) cabbage at Rose Hill<sup>8</sup>, droughts, poor farming techniques, and defective agricultural tools meant the Colony

lacked an assured future.

Governor Arthur Phillip has long been pointed out the need for imported stores in his letters to the officials in London, seeking food, clothing and tools. The bureaucrats in Whitehall responded with typically infuriating caution to the request from their man on the spot.

King was equally aware of the Colony's need for an ocean-going vessel of its own; the First Fleet's flagship, HMS *Sirius*, had been lost in March 1790 on the reef at Norfolk Island. King's first-hand but outdated advice to the entrepreneurial Patrickson was reinforced by news from Sydney carried, via China, by the convict transports *Neptune* and *Lady Juliana*, which replenished at the Cape while *Gorgon* was in port.<sup>9</sup>

King reported his activities to Evan Nepean, Under Secretary of State in the Home Department, in a private letter written at the Cape on 6 July, and forwarded on *Lady Juliana*. It appears there was also an unladen American vessel at the Cape in July:

*Application has been made by an American to be freighted with the Guardian's provisions and stores, and to have 1,500 guineas for the run, but as that is a step too delicate for such subalterns as Parker and myself to have anything to do with, we declined it. There is a Whitehaven man who, on his own head, intends going immediately to America and carrying out two vessels (sic) — one of 100 or 120 tons, a Marble Head schooner, and the other a brig of 150 tons — both of which he means to load with salt beef and pork, which he can afford to sell in the colony for 7d per pound. He wished encouragement from me; but anything of that kind being out of my power to give him, he has taken a decided part, and means to run the risque.<sup>10</sup>*

The "Whitehaven man" sounds like Patrickson — and the White Haven is more likely the seaport in Cumbria, England rather than the

tiny hamlet in upstate Pennsylvania, 80 miles NNW of Philadelphia. When *Gorgon* reached Sydney on 21 September, Governor Phillip would have been heartened to learn from his Lieutenant-Governor of the transports following, and the possibility of the arrival of an American ship.

Over a year later, King reminded Phillip of his dealings with the American at the Cape, in a letter written from Norfolk Island on 6 September 1792:<sup>11</sup>

*Respecting the enclosed, I refer you to my Conversation with you, on the Subject at Port Jackson. But should it have escaped your Memory, I will again relate it.*

*When I was at the Cape, and had heard the Account of the Colony from the Neptune and Lady Juliana, I sent for the Person who is mentioned in the enclosed, and recommended to him to take a Cargo, on his own Account, and take it to Port Jackson from the Cape. He could not do it, being obliged to return to America with a smaller Schooner he commanded, but asked my Advice what to do, if he could get a small Vessel freighted there for the Colony, whether I thought there was a Chance of his getting it off, and added to that, he was almost persuaded by the Masters of the Neptune and Lady Juliana to do it. I told him it was out of my Power to say that it would be received but that, from any information I could collect about the Colony, I thought a Cargo of the Kind that he could get in America very cheap might be purchased but that I could by no Means authorize him, telling him that if it was my own Case, I should not hesitate a Moment doing it — He has formerly been an Officer in the Army.*

*All this I acquainted w. Nepean by the Warren Hastings, which sailed from the Cape for England before the Gorgon.*

Patrickson had resolved to put together a cargo for Sydney, bank-

ing on being able to buy provisions cheaply in America, and sell them at a good price in Sydney. First he went to London — where he probably picked up a copy of *The Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay*, with its charts of the Australian coast and Port Jackson, published in late 1789. Then he sailed to the new capital of the United States, Philadelphia, which had already passed its centenary.

For the voyage to Port Jackson, Patrickson selected a different vessel, the brig *Philadelphia*. His tiny, two-masted vessel — at 73 feet (22.25m) a bit longer than a cricket pitch — had been built in Philadelphia in 1787. It was owned by the Philadelphia merchants Philip Nicklin and Robert Eaglesfield Griffiths, displaced 162 tons, and measured 22 feet 9 inches (6.9m) in breadth. These details are given in the "Proof of Ownership", which also states that "Thomas Patrickson", the present Master, is a Citizen of the United States" (Plate 1).

It is probably identical with the brig of the same name, commanded first by Silas Foster and then by William Waters, plying the coastal rice trade between Charleston SC and Philadelphia during 1791<sup>12</sup>. Unfortunately, this is all we know about it, as no plans nor illustrations of it survive<sup>13</sup>.

Freud from the restrictive British trade laws, a decade earlier American captains had opened up trade with China. American traders had experimented with various cargoes before settling on commodities which found a steady demand in Canton.

In pioneering American trade with Australia, Patrickson was lucky to have had King's advice before setting sail, but that advice would be 18 months old by the time *Philadelphia* arrived in Sydney. Nevertheless, Patrickson adopted the cautious strategy of spreading the risk by taking a mixed cargo, as the Americans did in their initial

trade with China, though it consisted of run-of-the-mill exports rather than the specialised goods

traded to China.

Governor Phillip had constantly complained to London of the Col-

ony's dire need of salted meat and staples such as flour and rice for the rations; agricultural tools such as iron saws, axes, hoes and picks; and clothing. Phillip was more cautious in asking for more spirits, although they were part of the garrison soldiers' ration "without any deduction being made from their pay".<sup>14</sup>

The sailing manifest dated 31 March 1792, shows that *Philadelphia* sailed with a mixed cargo "bound for the East Indies". Perhaps this was subterfuge. Perhaps it was just an approximation of a destination too difficult to explain to Customs officials who had never heard of New Holland or Botany Bay, although news of the arrival of the First Fleet in Port Jackson had been announced in *Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser* in 1791. Perhaps Patrickson did intend to sail on to the East Indies after unloading at Port Jackson.

Salt meat, wine and spirits filled up much of the hold. Patrickson added tobacco — undoubtedly American, the premium type — butter and cheese, tar and pitch, and furniture. Salt fish, flour, barrel staves and lumber<sup>15</sup> were missing from the usual US export goods.

The manifest (Plate 2) lists the cargo as:

- 588 barrels of Beef
- 3 hogsheads Hams
- 1 tierce of Smoked Beef
- 2 hogsheads of Tobacco
- 3 Casks & 2 Kegs manufactured Ditto
- 3 puncheons of Rum
- 20 Quarter Casks Teneriffe Wine
- 40 Cases Gins
- 6 Casks Porter (beer)
- 33 Cases Shrub (run and lemon juice)
- 12 Hampers Cheese

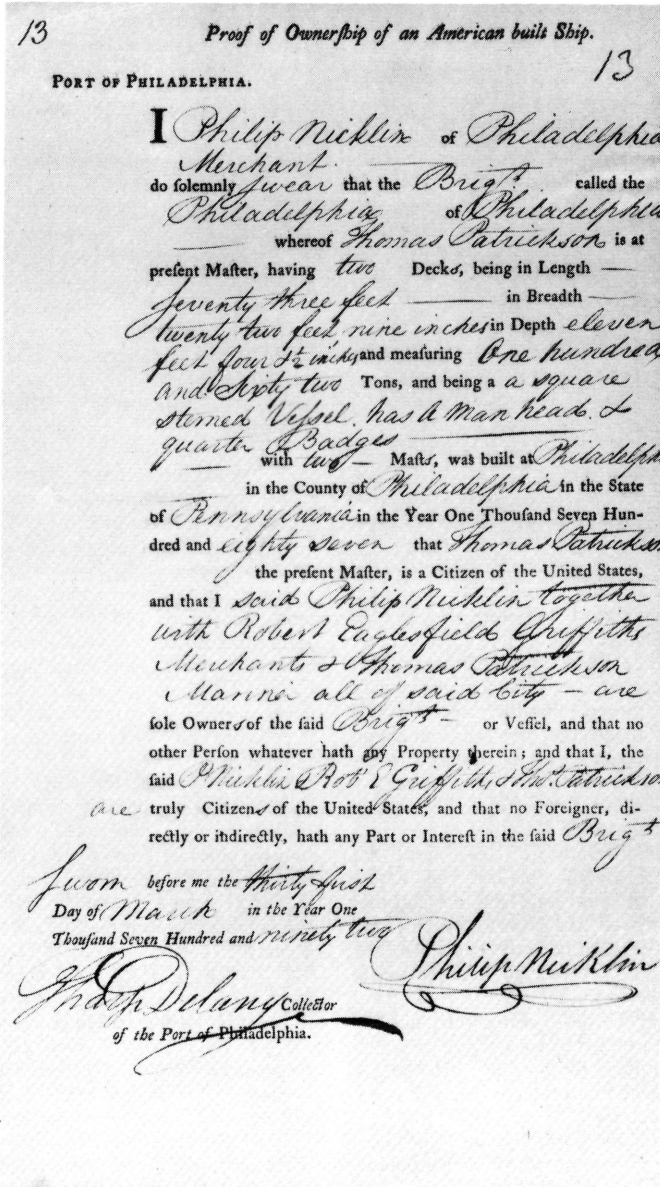


Plate 1. Record Group 36, Records of the Bureau of Customs; Records of the Collectors of Customs; Philadelphia. "U.S. National Archives Washington."





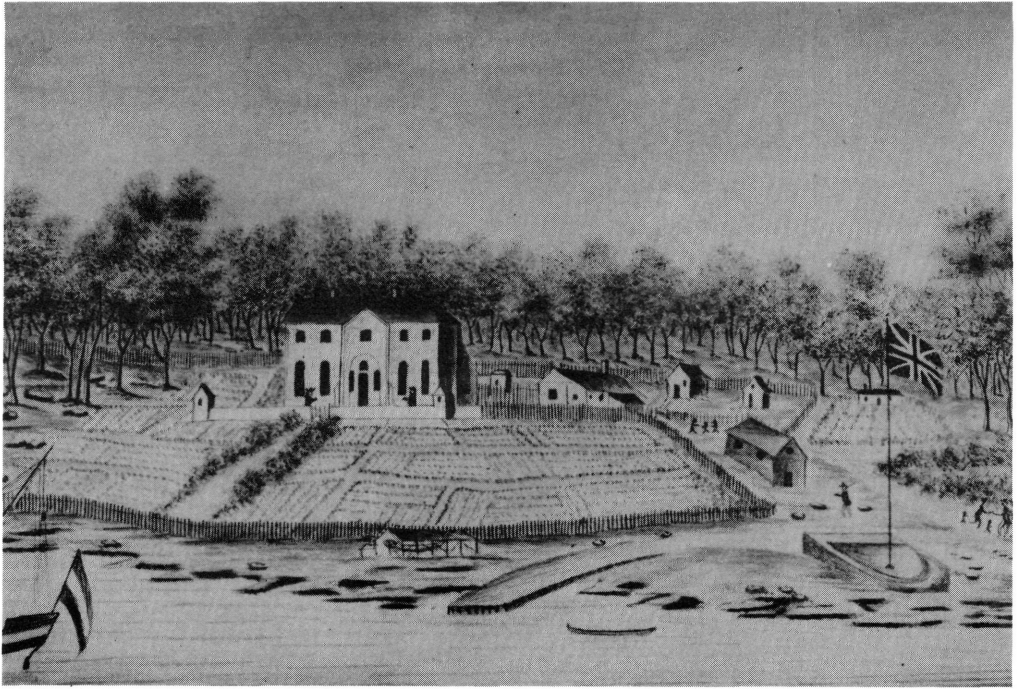


Plate 3. Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW.

The hospital stood out by its size, down on the western shore, where there was a second wharf. On the tip of the eastern arm of Sydney Cove, a small hut with a chimney was the home of a black family. None of the buildings had yet developed the shady verandah, soon to be characteristic.

Blacks, mostly women, fished from bark canoes, tied together at the ends, and remarkable for the smudges of smoke rising from hearth fires on board. Native men occasionally came down with long, barbed spears to fish from rocks. It would be wise, in this convict town, to keep a careful watch.

Patrickson was relieved to find that most of his cargo reached Sydney without spoiling (a little was consumed along the way), where stores were running low. Even after the arrival of *Gorgon* and the transports, on 2 October

the Governor had reported to Home Secretary Dundas that provisions in store consisted of:<sup>18</sup>

flour & rice	96 days
salt meat	70 days
pease & dhol	156 days

Fortunately, the transport *Royal Admiral* had arrived five days after Phillip wrote, replenishing the stores, and bringing news from Europe. Its master sold £3,600 worth of speculative goods. But with his communications to England taking up to a year to be answered, the Governor never knew when a ship might come. Indeed, the loss of HMS *Strius* and near-loss of HMS *Guardian* emphasised how perilously fragile the links to Mother England were.

Governor Phillip eagerly bought *Philadelphia's* provisions to feed the starving convicts and their guards — 569 barrels of beef each containing 193 pounds (a total of 109,817

pounds, just under 50 tonnes, which must have fetched between 5d and 6d per pound),<sup>19</sup> and 27 barrels of pitch or tar, at a total cost of £2,892.11s to be paid on the British Treasury in London. Commissary Palmer drew "One set of bills in favor of Mr Thomas Patrickson" for £2,829.11s on 21 November for "Provisions and stores ... for the use of the Colony".<sup>20</sup>

Obviously aware of the Colony's situation through King, Patrickson had no doubt planned that the liquor and tobacco would appeal to the officers of the New South Wales Corps, although the military was already entitled to a spirit ration.<sup>21</sup> The officers and "others of the settlement" bought the rum according to Collins<sup>22</sup>, probably together with the tobacco.

Patrickson managed to find a different market for some of his 20 quarter-casks of Teneriffe wine. On



Plate 4. An American Federal mahogany inlaid card table, 1790-1810 Christie's.

Saturday 1 December, John Palmer noted in his ledger "By purchase of 6 quarter casks of Teneriffe wine for the use of the Hospital of Mr Thomas Patrickson Master of the *Philadelphia* brig at £10 per cask £60."<sup>23</sup>

Listed at the end of the bill of lading are the luxury items, the pair of mahogany card tables and three casks of particular wine. They are clearly differentiated from the rest of the foodstuffs and supplies for the colony, and separated from the former by the tar and pitch for the ships. The manifest shows the tables were shipped by Philip Nicklin & Co with the rest of the cargo, while the "particular wine" was shipped on behalf of Philip Nicklin himself.

For whom were these intended? Did Patrickson plan to sell them to the officers and gentlemen in a Colony ostensibly more concerned

about the supply of food and essential tools? Good wine and fancy card tables might help to bridge the cultural and geographic gap between Port Jackson and home.

As *Philadelphia* had left its home port with the pair of card tables aboard, we can assume they were of American manufacture, probably from Pennsylvania. If they were up-to-date examples, we can visualise them as typical of the Federal period, in Neoclassical style with folding top — probably D-shaped with fine square tapered legs and perhaps decorative inlay in lighter coloured timbers (Plate 4).<sup>24</sup>

But why just bring one pair of tables for trade, especially in a colony made up mostly of single roomed huts with thatched roofs, and rudimentary furnishings?<sup>25</sup>

This seems more in the nature of a diplomatic gift, especially if we consider the three-quarter casks of

particular wine, similarly listed at the end of the manifest. Admittedly, the manifest lists these casks as the property of Philip Nicklin himself, while the card tables are not distinguished from the rest of the cargo.

Patrickson's earlier encounter with King had taught him the hierarchy of British society at Sydney. As in China, to trade it was first necessary to gain the sympathy of the government officials, and the Governor had the final say. The card tables would be perfect for the Governor, while the three casks of superior wine might have been split between him, King, possibly Major Grose who had served in New York, or another helpful official, such as John Palmer the Commissary.

Phillip's Government House, completed in June 1789, had solid floors and walls. There are references to engravings and drawings on its walls. It must have been furnished with both imported and locally made timber furniture in Phillip's time for, on the death of Phillip's second wife Isabella at 19 Bennett Street, Bath in 1823, her estate contained "specimens of Botany Bay Cabinet Manufacture".<sup>26</sup>

The early Governors furnished the two Government Houses — one in Sydney and another in Parramatta — with a mixture of their own and Government furniture. The Bigge Report contains an inventory of the Government-owned furniture at Government House Sydney as well as Government House Parramatta in 1821. In Sydney's Little Dining Room, it mentions "2 card tables — old".<sup>27</sup> Locally made furniture is distinguished by its timber, e.g. "beefwood" or "Cedar". Could these be the American mahogany card tables, now at least thirty years out of fashion and hence described as "old"?

Alternatively, at Government House Parramatta in 1821 there were "2 small round tables, made

to fold" — probably card tables — in the Front Hall.<sup>28</sup> The Governors generally sold their private possessions at auction on their departure. All the remaining official furniture at Parramatta was sold at auction in the 1850s.

Any remaining old pieces from First Government House, Sydney, most likely were sold, as all the present furniture at the new Government House in Sydney seems to date after 1845. The single piece pre-dating 1845 has been bought more recently as an antique, as it bears a BADA sticker.

Patrickson at first was not concerned that he could get no return cargo in Sydney. Having "formed some expectation of disposing of the vessel in this country,"<sup>29</sup> no doubt as a result of his encounter with King, Patrickson offered to sell his vessel for local colonial use. Phillip — who had sought permission<sup>30</sup> from England to obtain a vessel in order to get cattle from India, but was refused — declined the offer, but did hire Patrickson at £150 for a short run to the second convict settlement at Norfolk Island with provisions.

After four weeks of Sydney, most of his cargo sold, his ship repaired and provisioned with fresh citrus and vegetables from Rose Hill, his crew stronger, Patrickson began taking on board the provisions for Norfolk. Like other visitors, some crewmen would have made acquaintance with the population of Sydney; some would have bartered with the fringe-dwelling natives for spears and clubs — the same kinds of weapons which periodically struck down staying Britishers.

Two days before *Philadelphia* sailed, a massive fire encircled the town, which was in grave peril. With everyone fighting the flames despite the heat and danger, only one house was burnt down. Some thought the natives were responsible.<sup>31</sup>

Five weeks after arriving, *Philadelphia* left Sydney with a light following south wind for Norfolk

Island on 7 December, carrying those officials, four convict artisans, stores, provisions, and 1,000 silver dollars.<sup>32</sup> The colony had not yet developed export industries, the first of which would be whale oil and seal skins.

A few days later, in the evening of 10 December, Phillip boarded the ship *Atlantic* — together with "various specimens of the natural productions of the country, timber, plants, animals and birds",<sup>33</sup> comprising at least two natives (Benelong and Yemmerrawannie), four kangaroos, and several native dogs. Phillip and his latter-day Ark left the Colony and returned to England, where he died in 1814. Lieutenant-Governor Francis Grose, Commandant of the NSW Corps, took charge while Whitehall made up its mind about choosing Phillip's successor.

At Norfolk, Patrickson's ship was sighted early on 22 December. Once more he met up with Philip Gidley King, and maybe rewarded him with a quarter cask of particular wine. King gave him permission to sell:<sup>34</sup>

*a small quantity of Rum, Porter, Shrub and some other articles ... as we had not forgot that this was a Season of Festivity ... as every person was quiet and orderly, I had no reason to be sorry for this Indulgence, which they paid for sufficiently as the Rum was Thirty and the Porter Eight Shillings a Gallon.*

*Philadelphia* stayed for the holidays which King declared on Christmas and New Year's Day. Patrickson probably joined King for their memorable Christmas Dinner:

*All the Officers did me the Pleasure of their Company to dinner, and the good things which were purchased from the Philadelphia enabled every one to pass this Festival with much conviviality, and regular Behaviour.*

From Norfolk, carrying three

emancipated convicts and a soldier drummed out of the company for theft, Patrickson sailed in ballast to India on 3 January, where he would have sought a cargo for England or the United States.

Captain Patrickson may have returned to Sydney in 1797, for the master of the British ship *Ganges* was also named Thomas Patrickson.<sup>35</sup> He was almost certainly the same Thomas Patrickson who was part-owner with its master J.E. Farrell of the brig *Fair American* (one of several vessels of this name) of Philadelphia, which on 28 May 1804 brought 1,175 gallons of Bengal rum and 1,45 gallons of gin for sale in Sydney.<sup>36</sup> By then the trade in spirits was endemic.

New South Wales' second American visitor, the whaler *Hope* of Providence, Rhode Island, soon followed *Philadelphia* into port. Captain Benjamin Page arrived on Christmas Eve 1792, when the temperature was recorded as 106°F (41°C) in the shade, to take on "wood and water", or re-provision. As yet, we do not know what prompted his speculative voyage.

By the next Friday (28 December) of his two-week stay, Page had sold £2,957/6/6 worth<sup>37</sup> of provisions, spirits and seal skins before setting out for Canton with the rest of his cargo of seal skins. He also carried a despatch from Lieutenant-Governor Grose to the Home Secretary, Henry Dundas, referring to the ship's activities.

Page had insisted that Acting Governor Grose buy both his spirits and the other provisions.<sup>38</sup> Collins lists them as "200 barrels of American cured beef, at £4 per barrel; 80 barrels of pork at £4.10s per barrel; and 7,597 gallons of (new American) spirit at 4s.6d per gallon".<sup>39</sup>

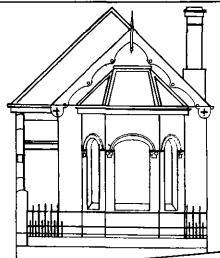
Most of these imports were perishable commodities leaving no trace today. Some might leave archaeological remains — the gin bottles, probably Dutch; the wine bottles, maybe Spanish or French. But the card tables would now be lost.

## Acknowledgements

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## References

- 1 A.J. Gray, "Social Life at Sydney Cove in 1788-1789", *JRAHS* 1958, vol 44, 385. One of these convict chests, dated 1813, survives in the collection of the Australian National Maritime Museum.
- 2 Wace & Lovett, *Yankee Maritime Activities and the Early History of Australia* (Canberra, ANU, 1973) pp2, 14, 43-44. Early US trade was all from the ports of the north-east United States. Lew and Clark did not cross the continent until 1805, and California was not ceded to the US by Mexico until 1848.
- 3 *Op cit* 2. *Alliance's* log is preserved in the Library of Congress, Washington DC; the Australian National Maritime Museum has a microfilm copy.
- 4 See Gordon Greenwood, "The impact of American whalers, sealers and adventures with the NSW settlement" *JRAHS* vol 29, pt3, 137ff.
- 5 John C. Dann (ed.), *The Nagle Journal. A Diary of the Life of James Nagle, Sailor, from the Year 1775 to 1841* (New York, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1988), 79ff.
- 6 For an account of the voyage and of some of their activities at the Cape, see Mary Ann Parker, *A Journey around the World, 1795*, (facsimile edition Sydney, Hordern House, 1991). Gorgon arrived at the Cape on 21 June and stayed until 31 July.
- 7 David Collins, *An Account of the English Colony at New South Wales 1788*, (re-print Sydney, 1975), 204f.
- 8 Lt Fowell to his father 31 July 1790, *HRNSW* I, ii, 376.
- 9 Mary Ann Parker, *op cit* 51f.
- 10 *HRNSW* I, ii, 498.
- 11 King to Phillip 6 September 1792; Mitchell Library C187, p108.
- 12 Dr Philip Lundeberg, searching *Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser*, found many ship notices for the vessel, which seems to have cleared Philadelphia around 8 February, 6 April, 2 June, 26 July, 16 September and 12 November 1791 for Charleston. The next year *Philadelphia* under Patrickson is reported on 2 April as cleared for the East Indies, while there are no further references to a vessel of that name trading with Charleston. Dr P.K. Lundeberg, *pers comm*.
- 13 Rob Napier, "The Brigantine *Philadelphia*", 1991, unpublished report for ANMM.
- 14 *HRA* I, i, 376.
- 15 P.C.F. Smith, *The Empress of China* (Philadelphia 1984), p31 lists these and rum as marketable goods carried by US ships to places other than China, where initially ginseng root and silver, and later sea otter pelts and furs, were supplemented by edible Fijian sea slugs and Pacific sandalwood.
- 16 Collins, *op cit* p53.
- 17 Atkins gave the temperature as 70°; John Copley, *Sydney Cove 1791-92*, (Sydney, Angus & Robertson 1965) 331. The rapid contrasts of Sydney weather soon made impressed themselves on the Americans; by Saturday it was raining with a violent wind (*ibid* 332), and on 5 December, "the country ... was everywhere on fire", and one house was burned down; Collins *op cit* 216; Copley *op cit* 347f.
- 18 *HRA* 371f.
- 19 Collins *op cit* 217 reports in December 1792 the price of beef as 4d per pound; later p245 he reiterates the list of imported purchases.
- 20 Copley *op cit* 339f.
- 21 *HRA* I, i, 376.
- 22 Collins *op cit* 204. However he did not sell all his cargo at Port Jackson, since he still had some to sell at Norfolk Island.
- 23 Copley *op cit* 346.
- 24 For American card tables of the period see Patricia E. Kane et al, *The Work of Many Hands: Card Tables in Federal America 1790-1820*, New Haven, 1982.
- 25 A.J. Gray, *op cit* 384-6 details the dwellings and their furnishings mentioned in hearings at the Criminal Court. James Tennyhill for instance had a thatched single room house with a door locked by a key, containing "a bench or table, a bed, and chests, the number not specified" (*ibid* 385).
- 26 G. Mackness, *Admiral Arthur Phillip* (Sydney, 1937) 459f; "Governor Phillip at Bath", *JRAHS* vol 39, 203.
- 27 Bigge Report Appendix, BT box 27 p61906. My thanks go to Joy Hughes for providing this reference.
- 28 Quoted in K. Fahy, C. Simpson & A. Simpson, *19th Century Australian Furniture* (Sydney, David Ell Press 1985), p41f.
- 29 Collins *op cit* 205.
- 30 *HRA* I, i, 375.
- 31 Collins *op cit* 216f. The practice was well known, e.g. Phillip wrote "the natives so very frequently setting the country on fire" *HRNSW* I, ii, 554.
- 32 Copley, *op cit* 347, 349, 350; Collins *op cit*.
- 33 Collins *op cit* 211; Copley *op cit* 352.
- 34 P.G. King, *Journal of Transactions on Norfolk Island 1791-4*, pp99-100 (ML A1687).
- 35 The 700 ton Indian-built ship *Ganges* arrived 2 June 1797 carrying 200 male convicts, 121,289lb of beef and 40,522lb of pork; *HRA* I, i, 582; *HRA* I, ii, 32, 563; *HRNSW* III, 97 & 140f.
- 36 *Sydney Gazette* 1 July 1804, 1.
- 37 Copley *op cit* 355. It comprised 38,600lb beef and 15,600lb pork; Collins p245.
- 38 *HRA* I, i, 414.
- 39 Collins *op cit* 215; Copley *op cit* 359.



ABERDOUR

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# A Relic of The Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery's Past Returns to Tasmania

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*Peter Mercer*

Recently the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery was given an important relic that was associated with a landmark in its development. The object is a polished wooden stonemason's ceremonial mallet that was made especially for the ceremony of the laying of the cornerstone of the Macquarie Street extension of the original 1863 museum building.

The ceremony was performed by the then Administrator and Chief Justice of Tasmania, Sir John Stokell Dodds before a large gathering of official guests and other citizens interested in the future of their museum.

According to the *Hobart Mercury* at the conclusion of Sir John's speech he was handed a silver trowel 'with which he spread the

mortar for the reception of the stone. The stone was then lowered, and having been given the customary taps with the polished mallet, Sir John said, "I have tested the laying of this stone with the level, and pronounce it to be well and truly laid."

Both the ceremonial silver trowel and mallet were suitably inscribed as presentation pieces to him on the completion of his duties. The inscription on the mallet reads: "Presented to / HIS EXCELLENCY / THE ADMINISTRATOR / SIR JOHN STOKELL DODDS / on the occasion of his / laying of the corner stone / of the new wing of the / TASMANIAN MUSEUM / AND ART GALLERY / HOBART / March 20th 1901."

This auspicious event in the Museum's history took place 91 years ago on Wednesday 20 March 1901, just a few weeks into the new century.

The beginning of the twentieth century was a time of great change and renewed confidence in the future after several years of financial depression. Queen Victoria had recently died and for the first time in living memory there was a new monarch, King Edward VII, on the throne. The federation of the former colonies was now a fact, the new Commonwealth of Australia having been proclaimed on 1 January 1901.

Everywhere in Hobart there were signs of civic progress. Behind the crowd, that had gathered to witness the laying of the cornerstone of the new wing of the Museum, was a grandly proportioned new customs house in course of erection in Davey Street. Other ambitious public edifices, such as a new post office

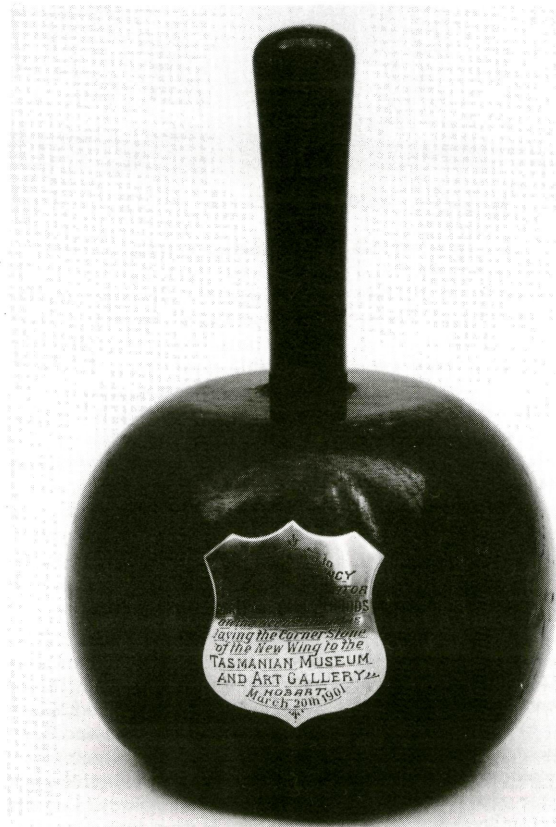


Plate 1. The presentation mallet, 18.5 x 11.5cm.



Plate 2. The ceremonial laying of the corner-stone of the new wing of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, 20 March 1901.

and a new public library, were soon to be under way and new gardens were being created in front of Parliament House in place of unsightly timber and marshalling yards.

The Tasmanian Museum had been part of that civic progress. Expansion over the past decade had been rapid. In the mid-1880s the development of the collections warranted two new display galleries and only about ten years later a major expansion project was under way again this time to accommodate in particular the steadily growing art collection.

For any organisation enthusiasm and influence are the basic ingredients for expansion. At this time in its history the Museum was in a fortunate position. As a symbol of emerging nationhood it even had Ministers of the Crown as Trustees and was probably as close to the seat of power as it had ever been and has ever been since.

Prominent among the Museum's supporters was Sir James Agnew, a leading member of the Hobart establishment, former medical practitioner, former politician and a staunch and devoted patron of the Arts.

In his speech before the ceremony Sir John Dodds paid tribute to the unselfish efforts of Sir James in the promotion of the Museum over a long period of time. Sir James was 86 years old and too frail to be at the ceremony to receive the tribute. In fact, he died in November that year before the addition was completed.

Irish by birth James Wilson Agnew's association with the Tasmanian Museum began as a young man with his early interest in the Royal Society of Tasmania in the 1840s. Agnew witnessed the development of the Royal Society's natural history collection and its move in 1863 into premises of its

own where it is today. Twenty-two years later, as a member of the Council of the Royal Society, he played a leading role in the transfer of the Society's Museum to the ownership of the Colonial Government late in 1885. Subsequently he became the first Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Museum and Botanical Gardens and only a year later, then also as Premier of Tasmania, he had the honour of laying the foundation stone for two new galleries facing Argyle Street.

Although the 1890s were a period of severe financial depression in the Australian colonies the impending federation and nationhood manifested itself in optimistic if not very financially successful ventures. One of these enterprises was the Tasmanian International Exhibition which was held on the Domain at Hobart during the summer of 1894-95. This event had as



Plate 3. The Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery showing the 1901 extension.

a major attraction an impressive exhibition of oil and watercolour paintings from the British Royal Academy. Works of this stature provided additional inspiration to the art-lovers of Hobart to support the development of their own art gallery. The major boost came towards the end of the International Exhibition when the Museums indefatigable Curator, Alexander Morton, successfully negotiated with the Academy the extended loan for twelve months of more than ninety of the paintings.

The new gallery on the first floor in Argyle Street was set aside to exhibit the Paintings and it was officially opened on 14 June 1895. After the period of loan elapsed local benefactors purchased some of the paintings for the Museum's permanent collection while other Paintings were purchased by mainland galleries.

As the century drew to a close it

was obvious that a much larger art gallery space would be needed particularly for the art collection and in 1900 the funds were voted by the Tasmanian Parliament to carry out the work. The 1901 extension in Macquarie Street included a new art gallery which is now the Colonial Gallery; a gallery the same size below now the Royal Society lecture room, the museum library and the Zoology Gallery. This almost doubled the size of previously existing display space.

By the end of 1901 the constructional work was practically completed, and the Trustees of the now greatly enlarged Museum and Art Gallery looked confidently towards further expansion within a decade or two. But world wars and depression intervened and it took another 65 years for further expansion to be realised with the opening of the Argyle-Davey Street extension in 1966.

A descendant of Sir John, Mr Michael Dodds of Melbourne, inherited the mallet and decided that its rightful place was in the collection of the Museum. To do this he made a special trip to Hobart with his family to hand it over.

Local silversmith and artistic jeweller, A. Butterfield, is recorded as the designer and maker of the ceremonial silver trowel and it is reasonable to believe that if he did not actually make the mallet, he made and inscribed the mallet's commemorative silver plaque. Where the silver trowel is at present nobody knows but perhaps the trowel might one day also be united with the mallet in the Museum's collection.

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#### Photographs

Supplied courtesy of  
Simon Cuthbert

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# Roller Skating in Australia

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Marjorie Graham

On 10 July 1849, the ballet "Les Plaisers de l'Hiver, ou Les Patineurs" (Winter Pastimes, or The Skaters) was first performed at Her Majesty's Theatre, London. The critic from *The Times* was much impressed. The stage, he said, was covered with "a sheet of some smooth material", to represent the frozen Danube River. But what captured his attention was the elegance and ability of the dancers "who dart along on skates fashioned with small wheels at the bottom". Praise was accorded the music; which, said the critic, was "even imitating the sound of gliding on the ice". Well, nothing is ever entirely new, and in the 1870s, Paolo Giorza did much the same thing, when he composed "The Geelong Skating Rink Gallop". As this was meant to evoke roller skating, parts of the music suggest not gliding, but whizzing along, and even a sudden slide. Roller skates were rather noisy too.

Australia was not endowed with frozen rivers, lakes and ponds, so the all-seasons roller skating was enthusiastically taken up. Generally referred to as "rinking", as it was in America and England, rinks were set up as commercial propositions. It is said that George Coppin (1819-1906) first saw roller skating when he visited America in 1865. The innovation which appeared in the 1849 ballet in London, may or may not have crossed the Atlantic and taken root. Whatever the position, some people in some parts of America were familiar with roller skating in the 1860s; if not earlier. Anyway, the wily Coppin secured the rights for the Australian colonies; but it seems certain that rinking was under way in Melbourne by c.1866.

An interesting entry in the Inter-colonial Exhibition of Australasia,

held in Melbourne, 1866-7, is recorded in *Australian Furniture* (Fahy/Simpson/Simpson: 1985), and this is worth quoting as evidence for dating the introduction of this entertainment, pastime, or whatever roller skating was. (In Australia, it was never seriously regarded as a sport.) Leopold Burmeister, 27 Post Office Place, Melbourne, exhibited "Roller Chair-Sleigh for skating rinks. Invested by the exhibitor." Plain enough, again — nothing is completely new — just adapted. Old Master paintings depict winter scenes in the Netherlands, with happy throngs out on the ice. You'll find such an armchair type: but set on blades, not rollers, to enable it to be pushed across the ice; presumably by a friend of the less able one, who can so join in the outing. Whether Burmeister was anticipating a demand, or simply trying to create one, we don't know; but, if there was no rink in Melbourne, or say, in Sydney — who would want to order a "Roller Chair-sleigh" from Mr Leopold Burmeister? The evidence that something was on the way, or already happening, is pretty strong. As to chairs on rollers; the impression gained, is that rinking in Australia was left to the able-bodied.

So in Australia, rinking, once started, became almost a craze. True, we did have ice-skating, but on a limited scale, and in comparatively modern times; governed by the requirement or refrigeration to create the ice covering on a solid floor. In Sydney, the well know, lit up Glaciarium was the venue for winter entertainment. To the best of the writer's knowledge it did not outlast World War II. And the rinks had gone too.

When roller skating took hold in the 19th century, almost any

own could have a rink, as citizens would support it, and the proprietor could make money on his investment. Rinks could be simple or elaborate. Skates were hired, or regular skaters might have their own. Sydney, then the suburbs, had rinks; as a similar pattern applied in Melbourne and Adelaide — not to mention the larger country towns. It did not happen all at once, but followed demand.

In 1873 when the Melbourne-based Lyster Opera Company was to stage "Le Profète", William Lyster sent his "supers" (non-singers) off to Mr Lowe's skating rink in Stephen Street. The opera had an ice-skating scene, which could be abridged, but not be omitted. With some help from Mr Lowe, the scene would be more realistic as being on ice. The interesting part of this is that there was a city rink in Melbourne, where instruction was available.

In 1878 Perth's Town Hall was the venue for a "costume skating soirée"; an evening entertainment; which, we suppose, included some dancing. Guests wore fancy dress; Oriental and past royalty were popular choices. For instance, the Mayor of Melbourne and his lady gave a costume ball in the Town Hall in 1877 — quite an evening that was. The difference was, that in Perth, the guests were on roller skates! The Town Hall, with chandeliers, was a rink for the occasion far in advance of any commercial rink, and the scene must have gained a certain grandeur: although one may wonder as to the ability of all the skaters. A drawing done by Henry Charles Prinsep, shows the costumed guests, and is reproduced in *Dictionary of Australian Artists* ..., edited by Joan Kerr (1992).

As a social activity, rinking was most fashionable; and, for a while

was considered “elite” — and sometimes it wasn’t. In London, members of both sexes had the marble floor of the Prince’s Club to skate on. Ladies attended in elegant gowns, carried muffs, and on their heads were perched chic little hats. Skating alone was the norm, until the later skating in pairs, with arms crossed and linked, became the way to do it. This seemed to be the progression in Australia too. Earlier, mixed couples, and “getting too close together” was seen as lacking in decorum. But wait a while — rinks and rinkers shed decorum, and some mothers voiced concern.

In 1879 *The Australasian Sketcher* (Melbourne) published drawing with such titles as “How a Country Friend Spent His Holidays”, and “At the Rink”. Maybe the friend’s home town didn’t have a rink. Males, who fancied themselves as skaters, might be shown sailing along on one foot — a feat just a bit awkward for skirt-wearers of the period. Girls had to move their feet to “get along”, but the raised foot is usually barely peeping from beneath their skirts. The timid ones could settle for a delicate shuffle. Strangely, for recognised

sports, women’s clothing was gradually modified: skaters missed out to a great extent. They wore their day dresses.

Reflecting the popularity of rinking, Gibbs, Shallard & Co., Sydney printers and publishers, had one card in their Christmas 1884 list which did show skating, but with a difference. Printed in colours, this most rare card, was No 304, (see Plate 1) and described as “Overland to England”: “Kangaroo on Skates. Sunrise. Plain Is.; Fringed 2s.” — and more expensive than many imported greeting cards. (G.S. & Co. did not issue another skating design). Incidentally, the kangaroo’s skates appear to be rollers, not wheels, about right for the date.

In the United States, racing was part of the skating “game”; professionalism developed; the Australian scene was not so organised. Press reports were not usual, possibly because rinking was not perceived as being of interest, except to the participants. That is why a cup presented as a prize in Ipswich, Queensland is important for the documentation it supplies. In Ipswich, there was the “Assembly Rooms”, where rinking and other

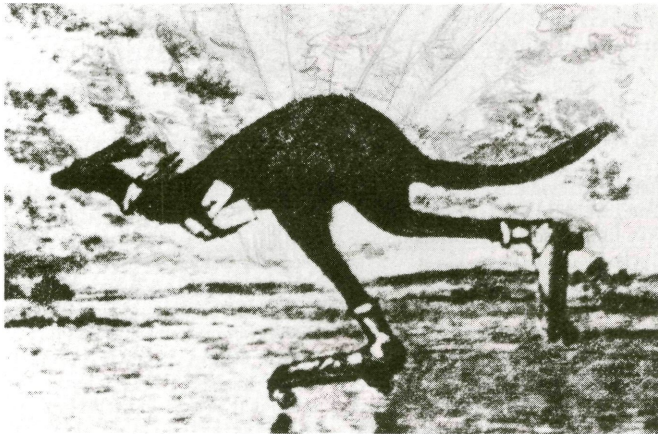


Plate 1. Gibbs, Shallard & Co., Sydney; No. 304 – Design for Christmas Card – 1884. Described as: “OVERLAND TO ENGLAND”: Kangaroo on Skates. Sunrise. Plain Is.; Fringed 2s.



Plate 2. “The Queensland Times”, 10 March 1971, Ipswich, Q.

gatherings were held. The building was timber, of hall-like, practical design, and sufficiently spacious to allow a number of skaters “on” together, and was privately constructed in the late 1870s. On 25 October 1888, a “Three-mile Skating Contest” was won by a 14-year-old boy, W. Rollo, whose name and the details were engraved on the front panel of the silver cup (see Plate 2). (Plated silver could be suggested.) In 1971 the cup was in private possession and time has been kind to it, except that fate had dealt a cruel blow to the miniature skate which forms the finial. But what a memento for roller-skating in Ipswich! What more could the researcher ask for. The existence of this prize-cup argues the existence of others — maybe in the attic!

Skating rinks were put to other uses, quite unconnected with skating. In Sydney, on 18 September 1888, The United Grand Lodge of NSW hosted a function for His Excellency the Governor, Lord Carrington, to be inducted as Grand Master. We were told that “this will be at the Exhibition Building, Prince Alfred Park”; we also learn there will be “covers laid for 1,170 brethren” at the ensuing banquet. With hall decorations and electric light, the Sydney-siders were doing their utmost to



Plate 3. "Wheels and Woes".

make a fine show. Carrington was a new governor, and it was Centennial. So how was this considerable concourse of gentlemen accommodated? By reading on, we know that the banquet was held in the Elite Skating Rink, in Prince Alfred Park. The chances were, that the Elite Rink would never again so well live up to its name. In fact, as time went on, the whole building languished.

Around this time, and onwards, another skating rink in York Street, did occasional duty as an art gal-

lery, housing exhibitions. Perhaps the most interesting use of a disused skating rink was at Bondi. Indoor scenes for "On Our Selection" (released 1932) were filmed there. Settings were put up, and the makers could get on with the job, without the worry of skaters knocking on the door — there were none!

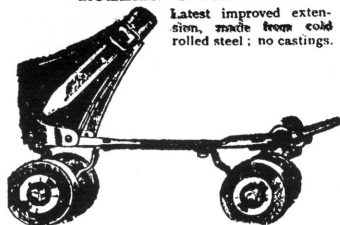
There is some indication that children played at skating in the early 1930s. A rag book, c.1930, English, and much pre-loved by the Sydney child whose it once was, showed a skating picture (see

Plate 3). The little girl stands confidently on her skates, the young male is literally out of the picture — only his legs are seen, as it is he who has taken a fall. Was this an unconscious revenge on the part of the artist? During the Edwardian era, women skaters were frequently depicted as figures of fun. The English postcard publisher Bamforth, whose cards came to Australia, issued a skating set. One showed the young woman falling on her back, skirts and underskirts flying, her male companion stands grinning. The title was "I Had My Girl Down at the Rink". Another thing noticed is a group of girls "sitting it out" on the floor at the edge of the rink. Mother would have said "Tut Tut".

By the 1930s roller skates were, so to speak, an "act", George Wallace did a comic act on skates in the Australian film, "His Royal Highness" (1932).

Where did skaters procure their skates? Australia did not develop an industry for skating equipment. Around 1900, American skates were stated to be "improved design", "no castings", and bearings were introduced. Prices for "side-walk skates" were as low as 50c a pair: "racing skates" were taken seriously — as were the prices. English skates sold as "Griptite" (see Plate 4) had aluminium wheels: not usual. One look at Anthony Horderns' sale catalogue for 1917, when skating had a new lease of life (short lived), has a long list of skates of "named" brands. A good quality pair at 22/6d, say \$2.25, was more than a week's pay for young would-be skaters. The hopes held by Lassetter & Co., 417 George Street, Sydney, had faded away. At the Melbourne International Exhibition, 1880-81, Lassetter's goods were shown in the NSW Court: "Rollers Skates" (and) "Indian Clubs, Skittles of Colonial wood". If anyone has roller skates of this period, they would be best advised to nurture them. Old cricket bats and golf clubs are being

### ROLLER SKATES.



This illustration shows the ball bearing 1/2-clamp Roller Skates.



This illustration shows the plain bearing and all-clamp Roller Skates.

Latest improved extension, made from cold rolled steel; no castings.

Ladies' size, 1/2 clamp, extends from 8 in. to 10 in., bright finish, boxwood rollers, plain bearings.....pair 5/6

Gentlemen's size, all clamp, extends from 10 in. to 12 in., bright finish, boxwood rollers, plain bearings .....pair 5/6

Ladies' size, 1/2 clamp, extends from 8 in. to 10 in., bright finish, boxwood rollers, ball bearings .....pair 12/6

Gentlemen's size, all clamp, extends from 10 in. to 12 in., bright finish, boxwood rollers, ball bearings.....pair 12/6

Ladies' size, 1/2 clamp, extends from 8 in. to 10 in., bright finish, aluminium wheels, ball bearings .....pair 18/6

Gentlemen's size, all clamp, extends from 10 in. to 12 in., bright finish, aluminium wheels, ball bearings .....pair 18/6

### THE ELITE ROLLER SKATES



With ball bearing, aluminium wheels, half clamp, for ladies.....pair 30

Do., do., all clamp, for gentlemen ..... " 30

Plate 4. Advertisement, 1907.

collected; why not skates? — if any are still around.

In Australia, rinking had its ups and downs; even before 1900. William Anderson (1870-1940) — later to rival Bland Holt — as a young man in Bendigo, took over the Bendigo Centennial Elite Skating Rink: he lost money. He tried something else, and was on his way to staging his famous melodramas; and Sydney beckoned.

There was, in Dellview Road, Bondi, the "Royal Aquarium and Pleasure Grounds". About 1906

Anderson assumed proprietorship, and late in 1907, or early 1908, his "Wonderland City" (see Plate 5) burst forth on the public. It was something between a Luna Park and a Disneyland. There were the latest attractions: "Lingard's Flying Machine", "The Hall of Laughter", "American Ball Game" and more — there was a skating rink. Prices were "popular" and the people came. The location was really overlooking Tamarama Bay, and the hills and hollows of the site were bridged by walkways as required.

As a good publicist, Anderson had many photographs taken around opening day. Briefly, in case eastern suburbs readers are perplexed, in February 1917 a plan was in hand for Waverley Council to buy "Wonderland City". It is now a park, with not even a skating rink in sight.

Some rinks remained longer, like that at Cooks Hill, on the edge of Newcastle, NSW. This was the "Royal Rink De Luxe" (see Plates 6 & 7), and it could well have been the nearest to that city, and easily reached by a short tram ride. Nothing grand — timber framed walls of galvanised iron — but electric lights were at the entrance to give a touch of glamour for after-dark skaters. The notice in the "open" rink says, "We Accept No Responsibility". You'll notice that two of the photographed people have not donned skates. The girl in the white kid boots may have been a visiting "theatrical"; her escort was a local businessman. The photographs were probably taken in 1916 (but possibly 1915). The rink's days were numbered, so the photographs are a record of social history and, as such, have become collectable.

In 1917 Anthony Horderns issued a little book as a guide to

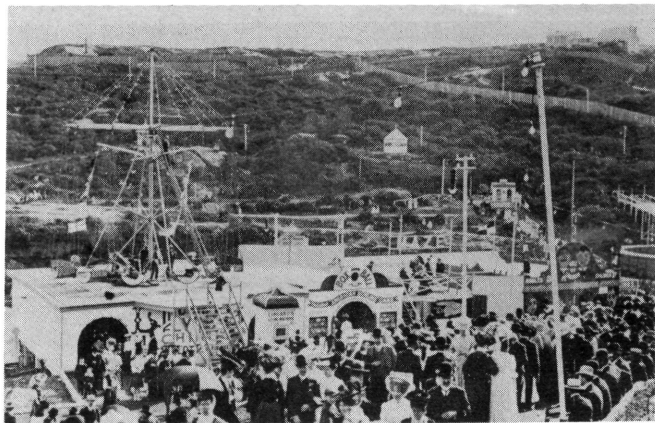


Plate 5. William Anderson's Wonderland City.



Plate 6. The Royal Rink De Luxe, Cooks Hill, Newcastle, NSW, c. 1916.



Plate 7. Roller skaters at the Royal Rink De Luxe, Cooks Hill, Newcastle, NSW, c. 1916.

Sydney. Listed were live and film theatres, streets, ferries and a good array of sporting clubs and venues, but no skating rinks. Those that were still operating had moved to the suburbs and held on a while longer. Yet in 1909 a Sydney girl could write: "I am living up at 96 Chalmers Street, opposite the skating rink ...". In April 1991, Redfern residents held a meeting in Chalmers Street park to press for the demolition of a disused ice skating rink, and the released land to be planted with trees. So even ice skating rinks were out of fashion and not wanted. Fashions do change, don't they?

The writer is told that roller skating is gathering adherents among youngsters in parts of Sydney, and a lady is planning to publish a book on the history of roller skating in New South Wales. So where did it end — or will it start all over again?

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## RECENT MUSEUM ACQUISITIONS OF AUSTRALIANA:

# Liebentritt's Cumberland Pottery and Arthur Rice

## A Collection with Great Research Potential Goes to the Powerhouse

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*Dr David Dolan, Senior Curator, Powerhouse Museum*

Liebentritt's Cumberland Pottery, which operated from the 1860s almost to World War Two, at Enfield NSW, is one of the most famous of Australia's nineteenth century potteries. Liebentritt wares are well known to private collectors, feature prominently in the Mint Museum, and adorn many older Sydney gardens. Until the vandals got to them, the original landscaped gardens at Rookwood cemetery sported a great number of Liebentritt urns, but now only the bases remain.

The story of Liebentritt's Cumberland Pottery begins with immigrant Paul Liebentritt and his wife Henrietta, who brought their craft, business skills, notes and books from Germany to Australia. They had their own pottery operating here by 1863, bought land in 1865, and were winning prizes in local exhibitions in 1868. Paul taught his skills to his son John Frederick, who continued the firm into the next century as F. Liebentritt and Sons Cumberland Pottery and Tile Works. (The family tree is a trifle confusing, with a John Frederick who was known as Frederick, and a Frederick William who was called William not Frederick.)

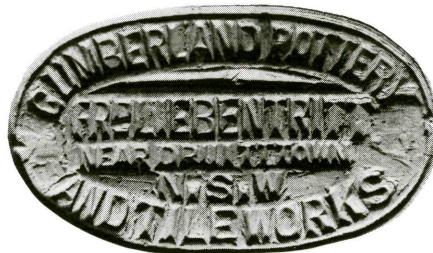
Ever since its foundation in 1879, the Museum which is now the Powerhouse (Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences) has had a special interest in New South Wales ceramic manufacturing. Liebentritt's Cumberland Pottery and Tile Works has a unique sentimental place within this institutional his-

tory, as they made the decorative terracotta tiles on the old Museum building in Harris Street, which carries the date 1891. It was first occupied in 1893, and housed the Museum's collections and displays until the 1870s. By using Liebentritt's tiles on its building, the Museum — then known as the Technological Museum — practised what it preached by giving a prominent demonstration of the merits of local resources, materials and manufacture, which it actively promoted.

tives for the Arts Scheme, by Edna L. Rice, through the good offices of her nieces Jeanette Deane and Verna Rice.

The Powerhouse already has an extensive representation of Wunderlich designs, products and marketing paraphernalia, so the material relating to Arthur Rice extends and enriches this specialisation.

Actual examples of ceramic products make up only a fraction of this remarkable Liebentritt-Rice collection, which includes books on technique and decoration used



*Plate 1. Mark of Cumberland Pottery & Tile Works.*

One of Frederick Liebentritt's daughters married Arthur E. Rice, who judging by the many prizes for design he won, was a star student at the Sydney Technical College in the 1880s. From 1902 until the late 1930s, Rice worked for Wunderlich, another prominent Sydney manufacturer of ceramics and architectural decoration. Now, a family-held collection of some 100 items spanning three-quarters of a century of Liebentritt's Cumberland Pottery and Arthur Rice, has been donated to the Powerhouse under the terms of the Taxation Incen-

by the potters, designs and models for specially adapted engines, medals and certificates, mortgage documents, photographs, working notes, advertising leaflets, invitations, business cards and much more. It is a tribute to the family that so much ephemeral material has been retained. Items which might seem of little importance individually attain greatly increased significance in the context of other related items, and the study value of the whole collection increases exponentially with its size. The full research potential of this collection can scarcely be gauged yet.

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# Advance Australia:

## C.H. Wood, Embellisher of Sea-Shells, Ox-Horn and Whale-Ivory

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Stuart M. Frank<sup>1</sup>

In June 1845, on the occasion of the maiden transatlantic voyage of Isambard Kingdom Brunel's revolutionary steamship *Great Britain*, an obscure English engraver named C.H. Wood produced an elaborate presentation piece expertly incised in the manner of whalemens' scrimshaw on the luminous, pearl-like surface of a large seashell. Featuring

portraits of the *Great Britain* and *Great Western* (another of Brunel's ocean-going leviathans, launched in 1837), the shell is dedicated to Queen Victoria and her consort, Prince Albert, to whom Wood presented it as a gift. Whether or not his generosity was ever actually acknowledged at Windsor Castle, the artist was able to parlay the

implication of royal patronage into a thriving souvenir business. His entire subsequent career and what little we know of him today are inextricably tied to the fame and ill-starred fortunes of Brunel's controversial ships.

Wood produced numerous replicas of his original *Great Britain* shell, which he advertised as exact

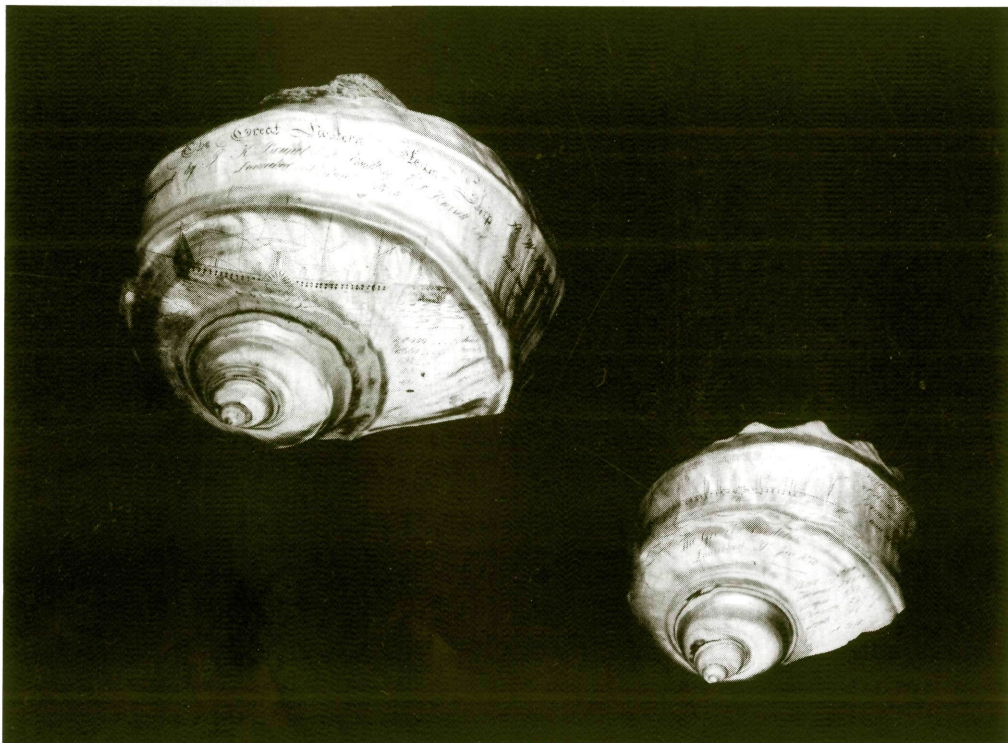


Plate 1. **The Great Eastern (launching).** Souvenir shell engraved by C.H. Wood, featuring a ship portrait inscribed "The Great Eastern Steam Ship / A.W. Ramsden / Dec 1, 1858 / Designed by I.K. Brunel Esq. Built by J.S. Russell Esq / Bank House / Hamm / Launched 31 Jan 1858, and with a table of the ship's vital statistics. 17 x 15 x 12cm.

**The Great Eastern (maiden voyage).** Souvenir shell engraved by C.H. Wood, featuring a ship portrait inscribed "The Great Eastern / Launched 31 Jan 1858 / Purchased on board 4 July 1860 / by Jas McQuillan ..." with a table of the ship's vital statistics. 11 x 7 x 12cm.

Collection: Kendall Whaling Museum.

duplicates of the one presented to the royal family in 1845.<sup>2</sup> Without ever actually employing the prestigious and jealously protected official designation “By Appointment to ...”, he regularly, promoted himself as supplier to the royal household. While many of his pieces are not signed, on some of his larger pieces the signature “C.H. Wood” is accompanied by such self prompting epithets as “embellisher”, “engraver”, or “pearl engraver”<sup>3</sup> to HRH Prince Albert and Her Most Gracious Majesty the Queen.

When Brunel’s *Great Eastern* was launched amidst enormous public fanfare in 1858, Wood repeated his earlier successes in a series of commemorative shell portraits inscribed with the date of the launching. Two years later, when the *Great Eastern* finally made her maiden voyage to New York, where she attracted throngs of tourists and dignitaries to marvel at her gargantuan size and unprecedented grandeur, Wood turned up on the Manhattan waterfront peddling his souvenirs aboard “the great iron ship” herself.<sup>4</sup>

In two separate transactions, one on each side of the Atlantic, the Kendall Whaling Museum (Sharon, Massachusetts, USA) recently acquired representative specimens of the two *Great Eastern* types. One, obtained at auction in London, is a large shell commemorating the launching, inscribed to the purchaser, “A.W. Ramsden, Bank House, Hamm[ersmith?!]”, and dated 1 December 1858. The other, a much smaller specimen from a source in New York City, commemorates the maiden voyage and was originally purchased aboard the ship itself on the Independence Day holiday, 1860. Here the inscription is to the patron and his entire family: “Purchased on board 4th July 1860 by Jas. McQuillan, to his beloved wife Jane Quillan, of Ramses [?] Point, N[ew] Y[ork], and Emma Frances and Mary Jane.”



Plate 2. *The Horn of Australia* (obverse side detail).



While neither piece is signed there is no doubt of the authorship, as both bear the unmistakable hallmark or C.H. Wood's distinctive style and meticulous technique, and both are cast in the mould of the original *Great Britain* shell presented to Prince Albert.

It is not surprising that, in recent years, the innate beauty and intricacy of Wood's highly skilled, verisimilitudinous representations of famous ships have attracted the attention of a few scholars, collectors, and auctioneers. He was one of the most innovative and perhaps the best of a small group of English carvers and engravers of shells who popularised the medium in the nautical souvenir market;<sup>5</sup> also, the innate analogies between these shellworks and contemporaneous whalermen's scrimshaw are also compelling. Of particular interest in Wood's case are two mysterious pieces he is known to have produced in other media.

Around the same time that he was making shellwork souvenirs Wood was evidently also engaged in engraving bovine horn, work

that he also promoted with his tenuous royal family connection. Most of it was evidently patriotic in character, such as a "pair of English ox horns dated 1857. Each horn engraved with the English Royal Arms within the Order Of the Garter outlined in brass studs and between inscriptions and poems, one signed by the engraver C.H. Wood, horn embellisher to HRH Prince Albert and Pearl Engraver to Her Most Gracious Majesty the Queen."<sup>6</sup> However, two of his pieces are not so easily categorised and present an intriguing mystery about the artist's travels and his whereabouts at the time of engraving, as they imply that at one point he served in the Yankee whale fishery and on this or some other occasion may have visited Australia.

One is a large, signed powder horn adorned with American patriotic paraphernalia in the collection of the Kendall Whaling Museum and currently on long-term loan to the Australian National Maritime Museum in Sydney. Incised in a fine graver's hand,

it has an Australian pseudo coat of arms, ship portraits, nautical scenes, and an elaborate inscription implying that the artist made a South seas Whaling voyage in the American vessel: "This Horn Carved and Engraved On Board the *Ector* Whale Ship from Boston, USA by C.H. Wood/Emeu [sic] and Kangaroo/1828/Advance Australia/R. Gooden, Birmingham." However, no ship *Ector* or *Hector* of Boston has been identified, no record of C.H. Wood in the American whole fishery has been located, and it is not clear to whom "R. Gooden" refers. The plug or stopper is full-round carved in the shape of a fist. There is also an inscription of convivial verse referring to the hunt and, in symbolic terms, to the "horn of Australia" itself:

The Horn of Australia,  
It's now in your hand,  
Let's all drink a health to our  
native land,  
May the land that we live in  
flourish with plenty,  
That the Horn of Australia may  
never be empty.

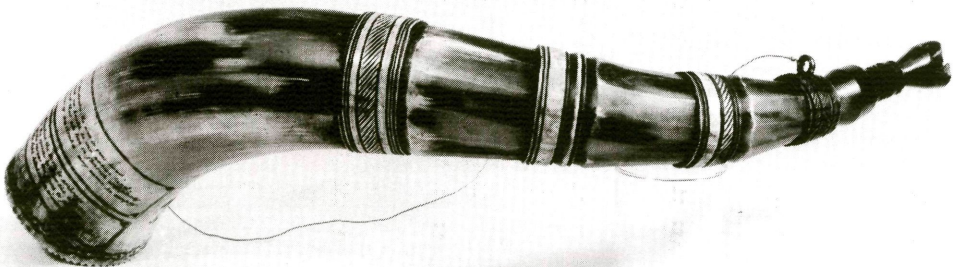


Plate 3. *The Horn of Australia* (reverse side). Collection: Kendall Whaling Museum. Now on loan to the Australian National Maritime Museum, Sydney.

Arouse jolly Bacchus the Horn to embrace,  
'Twill cheer up the spirits to follow the chase,  
It will brace up the nerves the game to pursue,  
And cause the bold huntsman to sound the hulloo.<sup>7</sup>

The other piece is a large sperm-whale tooth on which the engraving incorporates similar themes: the motto "Liberty & Equality/E Pluribus Unum/Advance Australia/Emue and Kangaroo" and the rhyme "Monstrous whales I did pursue,/On the Pacific Ocean;/ From One of them I got this tooth,/I present it as a token."<sup>8</sup> Though unsigned, it is confidently attributed to Wood on the basis of unequivocal similarities to the distinctive style, iconography, calligraphy, and orthography of Wood's known work, especially the powder horn, the veracity of the inscriptions on the scrimshaw remains unsubstantiated.

Despite the extremely high quality of Wood's craftsmanship, which vividly suggests formal training as an engraver (and particularly as a graver of metals), Sotheby's glibly reports that he was not a professional carver. Carson Ritchie refers to him as "a genuine working class artist and the last caver of Nautilus shell worthy of attention,"<sup>9</sup> and Dr Janet West suggests that Wood "was a professional in that he must have done at least some of his work for sale rather than just a hobby, but he was not a trained engraver."<sup>10</sup> However, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, had he in fact been trained as an engraver, perhaps in the gunsmithing industry of Birmingham? If not, where did he learn the advanced engraving techniques so richly in evidence in his work? Had he been, as one of his inscriptions claims, the inmate of a Yankee blubber-hunter on a South Sea whaling cruise to Australian waters? Is that where he learned to do sperm-whale scrimshaw? Could he have been, like

N.S. Finney,<sup>11</sup> a member of that rarest species of whaleman-artists, a scrimshander-turned-professional artisan who actually earned his living by engraving the ivory, shell, and bone by-products of marine animals?

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#### Photographs

Supplied courtesy of the Kendall Whaling Museum, Sharon, Mass., USA.

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#### References

- 1 Dr Frank is Director of the Kendall Whaling Museum in Sharon, Massachusetts, USA, serves on the editorial boards of *The American Neptune* and the *International Journal of Maritime History*, and is the author of the books *Herman Neville's Picture Gallery* and *Dictionary of Scrimshaw Artists*. He has been an advisor and consultant to the Australian National Maritime Museum and has lectured and presented concerts at museums in New South Wales, Victoria and ACT. The present article is expanded from "Wood and Shells", published in *The Kendall Whaling Museum Newsletter*, 10:2 (summer 1992), pp3-4.
- 2 Richard A. Bourne Co., Hyannis, Massachusetts, 23 August 1969, No 324; also Louis Joseph Auction Galleries, Boston, 10 November 1971, No 95; Dietrich American Foundation, Chester Springs, Pennsylvania (from Bourne, 1 March 1969, No 137); advertisement in the *Maine Antique Digest*, March 1985, 22B.
- 3 "Pearl engraver" is a reference to the pearl-like surface of the shells.
- 4 James Dugan reports in *The Great Iron Ship* (New York: Harper Bros, 1953) that on the occasion of the *Great Eastern's* maiden voyage to New York in 1860, while the ship was at Quayside and opened to the public view, "an artist named Wood nammed a booth where he sold seashells engraved with the ship's picture" (68), and "a special train brought a thousand [tourists] from New Haven" to see the ship (p70; citation was provided by Raymond A. de Lucia, who obtained his specimen of Wood's shell-work in New Haven). Other examples have been sold at

Sotheby's Belgravia (London) and elsewhere.

- 5 Another was Robert Woodward (born c.1804), an expert British carver of intricate designs on nautilus shell who was working at around the same time and whose work is similar to that of Wood. Little is known about either artist apart from what may be inferred from their surviving work. Sotheby's, London, 5 June 1985, No 345.
  - 6 Sotheby's, New York, 1 April 1978, No 17.
  - 7 Ironically, the horn was acquired neither in Australia nor the USA, but in Aberdeen, Scotland in 1960. The purveyor indicates in his certificate of authenticity that "The lower inscription 'R. Gooden, Birmingham' was added later", however this is not necessarily the case; in fact, under microscopic examination the graver's lines and pigmentation appear as though the entire piece may have been engraved by a single hand, presumably all at one time. Any further provenance is entirely absent. Why Wood may have falsified the name and circumstances of the alleged American whaleship, and how or why the horn wound up in one of Scotland's leading whaling ports, are suitably provocative questions as yet unanswered.
  - 8 Acquired without any provenance in Boston, Massachusetts and transferred from the Kendall Whaling Museum to the Australian National Maritime Museum in 1990.
  - 9 Carson Ritchie, *Shell Carving*, nd, np Citation provided Dr Janet West.
  - 10 Private communication, 1990, also cited in S.M. Frank, *Dictionary of Scrimshaw Artists* (Mystic, 1991), 150.
  - 11 Nathaniel Sylvester Finney, born at Plymouth, Massachusetts in 1815, served in the American whale fishery where he advanced at least to the rank of second mate in the 1840s. By the late '60s or early '70s he was settled at San Francisco, where by 1873 he is listed as an artist in the *City Directory*. See Stuart M. Frank, *Dictionary of Scrimshaw Artists* (Mystic, Connecticut: Mystic Seaport Museum, 1991).
- EDITOR'S NOTE: The reader is referred to the article "The Shell of the S.S. Great Britain" by Ian Rumsey, *The Australiana Society Newsletter* No 2, 1984, pp18-23.



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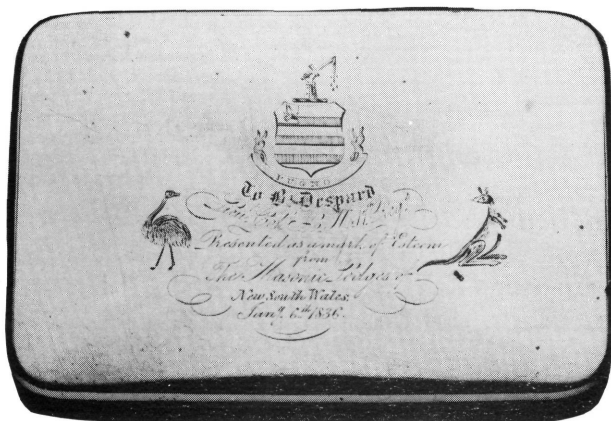
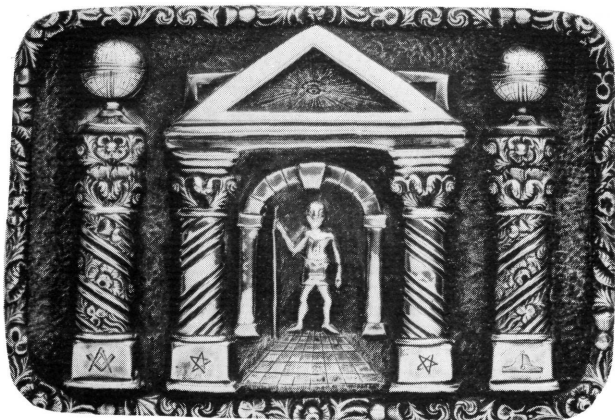


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