

○ HISTORY AND MEMORY IN THE TASMANIAN PUBLIC LIBRARY

THE CURIOUS CASE OF *THE HERMIT IN VAN DIEMEN'S LAND*

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Although public libraries have been generally characterised in academic literature as repositories of public memory along with museums and archives, little specific work has been undertaken in Australia into how the public library performs this role, and how the public library influences – or responds to – the development of historical consciousness and the vicissitudes of social memory within its community. This article considers these questions through a case study of the Tasmanian Public Library in Hobart, and a particular culturally significant text, *The Hermit in Van Diemen's Land: From the Colonial Times* (1829), by Henry Savery. The circumstances surrounding the acquisition and subsequent disposal of a copy of *The Hermit* by the Tasmanian Public Library are examined, in the context of the contested and changing value placed on the text by the institution and members of the community through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

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The relation between memory and history has received increasing attention both from historians and literary critics in recent decades. The ways in which social memory is formed, disseminated, institutionalised and negotiated through artefact and text has been examined in the context of the museum particularly, though principally in the context of museology and memorial sites. Although public libraries have been generally characterised as ‘repositories of public memory’ along with museums and archives, little specific work has been undertaken in Australia into how the public library performs this role, and whether it is valid for all institutions and for all times (Lake 2006: 1–2).¹ How might a public library influence, or respond to, the development of historical consciousness within its community? How might it act as a vehicle for collective memory, or, in Pierre Nora’s conception, as a *lieu de mémoire*? This paper will consider these questions through a case study of the Tasmanian Public Library in Hobart, and a particular culturally significant text, *The Hermit in Van Diemen's Land: from the Colonial Times* (1829), by Henry Savery. The circumstances surrounding the acquisition and subsequent disposal of a copy of *The Hermit* by the Tasmanian Public Library are examined, in the context of the contested and changing value placed on the text by the institution and members of the community.

SITES OF MEMORY AND THE HISTORY OF THE BOOK

Pierre Nora’s conception of ‘sites of memory’ has proved attractive – and controversial – to scholars of historical consciousness and collective memory since the publication of *Les Lieux de Mémoire* from 1984 to 1992.² Initially focussed on the construction of the French nation via

collective memory, Nora eventually broadened the conception of a *lieu de mémoire* to 'any significant entity, whether material or nonmaterial in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community' (Nora 1996: xvii). Nora's formulation can embrace both a particular text and an institution such as a library, and has been used to conceptualise both. In Australian historiography, a number of scholars have tested the concept against local conditions and local institutions, finding it functional or intractable in different ways. Michael Bennett, for example, has found Nora's theorisation difficult to apply to nations in the English speaking world, finding that 'it is hard to locate a time when collective memory alone sustained nationhood' (Bennett 2006: 89). Chris Healy (1997) considers that Nora's conception of a *lieu de mémoire* is too formalised and abstracted, and has instead formulated *lieux de mémoire* as sites of local forms of history and social memory. In this context, Healy argues, sites of memory can be more vital, affective and inspirational.

Joanna Sassoon's study of collective memory within the Public Library and State Archives in Western Australia is one of the few examples in which such an investigation of local forms of social memory in the public library has been undertaken (Sassoon 2003). Sassoon's article politicises the cultural functions of archival institutions as sites of memory within a particular community, offering a 'critique of the way archival memory is created and preserved' via documentary records (40). Sassoon's article demonstrates that the Public Library did not have a passive memorial function, but in fact actively shaped public perception of the past through its selective acquisition process, particularly relating to convict records.

This paper explores similar phenomena at the Tasmanian Public Library. The paper will, however, use evidence of the Public Library's changing attitude to local literature collections, rather than to archival records, to measure its role in the formation of historical consciousness and its role as a site of social memory. In focusing the examination on literature collections, the paper draws on conceptual approaches within the discipline of the 'history of the book'. This discipline offers ways to examine social memory within the public library via the sociology of texts: 'the ways texts resonate through the social order and across the ages' (Darnton 2007: 506). Among the interpretative models offered within the history of the book, Thomas Adams and Nicolas Barker's model for the study of books 'considered as historic artefacts and as a function of social history' is a particularly useful framework for tracing the phenomenon of collective memory through responses to a text (Barker and Adams 2001: 5). Barker and Adams consider that 'the function of the book as text, as a vehicle carrying information within it, is obvious, but the information that it provides by virtue of its mere survival and existence is not less important because less obvious' (37).

Barker and Adams' model is cyclical, consisting of the stages of publication, manufacture, distribution, reception and survival. The final stage of the cycle, survival, provides the principal model for the discussion in this paper. Survival is divided into three phases. The first phase is the book's creation and initial reception and distribution; the second, the period during which it comes to rest without any use or at least intensive use (normally on a private or institutional bookshelf). The third phase (if it survives the second) is 'when it is discovered that it is a book desirable as an object, either in its own right or because of the text it contains', as it 'documents the age that brought it into existence and thus enters the world of collecting and scholarly research' (Barker and Adams 2001: 32). In this final phase we could conceptualise the book as taking on the characteristics of a *lieu de mémoire*, when not only scholarly interest is attached to it, but

also a wider social conception of its value in recalling and memorialising the ‘age that brought it into existence’. This paper will consider the text in the second and third phases where it intersects with the institution of the public library, and its survival is predicated on the attitudes and actions of that institution.

The Hermit in Van Diemen’s Land has been chosen for this investigation because of the existence of a significant body of evidence that can be called upon to illustrate stages of the book cycle. The marginalia present in most copies of the book also attests to the prominent intervention of readers into its life cycle. Roger Chartier (2007) has noted the growing significance attributed by historians of the book to handwritten marginalia as evidence of readerly appropriation of texts. While David Hall has warned that such ‘episodes of reader response are not easily converted into general arguments’, in this case the marginalia in copies of *The Hermit in Van Diemen’s Land* reveal a continuity of response by readers over a number of generations that has direct implications for the text’s role as a *lieu de mémoire* (Hall 1997: 540). Finally, *The Hermit in Van Diemen’s Land*, as text and as artefact, offers itself as a signifier of the memorial heritage of the Tasmanian community: not only is it a story of origins, colourfully describing an early period of white settlement in Hobart, but it is also an Australian incunabulum, the first printed book of sketches in Tasmania.

HENRY SAVERY’S *THE HERMIT IN VAN DIEMEN’S LAND*

Van Diemen’s Land was invaded by white British settlers and turned into a penal colony in 1803. Convicts formed a large proportion of the population, smaller numbers being occupied in farming and managing the colony and its incarcerated residents. Henry Savery, author of *The Hermit in Van Diemen’s Land* and *Quintus Servinton* (credited as the first novel published in Australia), was transported for forgery to Tasmania in 1825. Because he was an educated convict, his skills were exploited in the small colony. He served his sentence as a clerk in the Colonial Secretary’s office and later that of the Colonial Treasurer, and in these roles Savery had unusually wide access to the small community of free settlers and administrators of Hobart. Savery’s insights into Hobart society provided rich material for his venture into satirical journalism.

The Hermit in Van Diemen’s Land, Savery’s first published work in the Colony, was originally presented in print as a series of thirty sketches published over a period of six months in 1829 in the anti-establishment paper, the *Colonial Times*. The sketches were printed under the pseudonym of Simon Stukeley, as an official order forbade convicts to write for the press (Hadgraft 1964: 28). The sketches about ‘Manners, Society, and Public Characters’ together contained thinly disguised descriptions of some 150 people encountered by the author in Hobart. They were gathered together and published in book form by Savery’s friend and editor Henry Melville in 1830. The book immediately attracted libel action, criticised for its ‘cowardly and abominable attack upon domestic life’.³ Damages were claimed and only a small number of copies were released. Savery himself was later imprisoned again as a recidivist forger, and died in the infamous Port Arthur penal prison in 1842.

It seems that *The Hermit in Van Diemen’s Land* was well read in its serialisation. The format of *The Hermit* as an encoded satire invited readerly appropriation, and an ‘attached’ reading experience.⁴ *The Hermit* was written from within a familiar trope – reading as game playing – that offered readers decoding opportunities and challenged the reader to ‘penetrate into secrets

hidden between the lines or beneath the text' (Darnton 2007: 506). H.J. Jackson observes that 'when satires were published with fictional names or blanks to disguise living subjects, readers rushed to fill them in. Very often they did so not on the basis of personal knowledge but on the authority of published "Keys" or of other annotated copies, which might themselves have relied on Keys' (Jackson 2001: 271). Not only did this type of satire promote readerly intervention in books, it also encouraged a communal reading experience through consultation on character identifications and the copying of keys. Tasmanian readers did indeed 'rush to fill ... in' the real names of the characters in *The Hermit*, and passed copies of the key amongst themselves to aid further disclosures.⁵ None of the keys found in the extant copies of *The Hermit* are exactly alike. Differing interpretations of the identity of characters fuelled ongoing attachment to the text. This shared reading experience ensured that the book became part of social memory in Hobart in these decades.

Henry Melville confirmed Savery's authorship of both *The Hermit* and *Quintus Servinton* in 1869, in a lengthy description of the book's early history that he placed in the front of his own copy of *The Hermit*, along with his key to the identity of the characters depicted, satisfied that his revelations would harm no one as 'all the parties mentioned except myself are in spirit land'. Melville's key marks a point at which *The Hermit* ceased to function as contemporary satire; from this time *The Hermit* would offer itself as an artefact, a signifier for early Hobart, and a mnemonic device for varieties of interpretation of the past.

THE TASMANIAN PUBLIC LIBRARY AND THE CONVICT STAIN

The Tasmanian Public Library began as a middle-class subscription library in Hobart in 1848, run by the Trustees, 'who were ever "gentlemen", largely for their own' (Levett 1988: np). Forced to close in 1867, it reopened in 1870 as a free public reference library with government funding. Its collections reflected the cultural pretensions of the genteel Trustees, and promoted a national discourse firmly rooted in Britain, one that made little concession to the local environs or literary culture. The majority of the Tasmaniana and Australiana that entered the collections was acquired by donation, or by purchases of large private collections.⁶ A single copy of *The Hermit in Van Diemen's Land* slipped into the collection of the Public Library in this way in the 1870s or 1880s from the collection of Justin McCarty Browne. Browne, renowned as a 'most diligent collector of papers and books connected with the history of Tasmania' had inserted a key on notepaper into the copy, but had not annotated the details throughout the volume.⁷

Although the Public Library's lack of interest in local literature at this time can be ascribed to the cultural pretensions of the managers and trustees, the vigorous denial of the convict past and a prevalent lack of interest in local history were also responsible. Although aging convicts continued to form a large proportion of population until the end of the century, Tasmanians practised widespread social amnesia in regard to their penal past, generally colluding in an attempt to 'erase ... its sad history from our memories'.⁸ The association of the penal past with degeneration was closely allied to the lack of interest in preserving written records. Many convict records were deliberately destroyed, others lost through neglect or inaction. Many believed that to 'revive reminiscences of the past history of Tasmania [was] by no means consistent with the progress of intellectual refinement'.⁹ This had direct implications for the Public Library, where the goal of intellectual refinement and self-cultivation was facilitated by the provision of 'works of a high-

class literary character',¹⁰ which would not have readily included local productions, and certainly not those written by convicts. It was not in the best interests of the Public Library to be seen to be promoting 'past history'.

RETRANSMISSION OF *THE HERMIT*

The degree to which *The Hermit in Van Diemen's Land* was read or remembered in the late nineteenth century is uncertain. It did, however, capture the interest of a few dedicated local historians and collectors of Tasmaniana, who bucked the general trend of avoidance of the past in the Tasmanian community. These men were fascinated by artefacts and documents of early Hobart, and were conscious of the loss of papers that might contribute to an understanding of the penal and colonial periods, although their interest in these materials tended to be antiquarian and nostalgic. James Bonwick (1817–1906) was one of the first of the new historians and researchers to discover *The Hermit*. Bonwick devoted a section of his history of the early Australian press to a description of the *Colonial Times*' serialisation of the text, including a full transcription of Melville's notes on the identity of the 'unfortunate Hermit himself' (Bonwick 1890: 46). Bonwick found *The Hermit*, its intrinsic puzzles and the growing mythology to which he was contributing, an irresistible 'bit of Press Romance' (47).

Prominent Hobart solicitor James Backhouse Walker (1841–1899), a man described as 'the leading authority on the history of early Tasmania', also took a keen interest in *The Hermit*.¹¹ Walker, a renowned collector of Australiana, was also a trustee of the Tasmanian Public Library. Walker undertook research on *The Hermit*'s authorship and the provenance of three extant copies of the book he could locate in Hobart in private and public collections. In 1892 Walker corresponded with Bonwick in England about the British Museum copy of *The Hermit*, requesting Bonwick to send a transcript of Melville's notes, writing '[w]e have here two annotated copies, but Melville may give better or fuller information'.¹² Upon the receipt of Bonwick's transcript, Walker annotated the Tasmanian Public Library's copy of *The Hermit* with biographical details about Henry Savery. He also inserted the numbers throughout the text from Browne's key, and added additional information that he had gained by interviewing an 'old-timer' called Donald Macmillan, who had lived in Hobart since the 1830s.¹³ Walker signed and dated his annotations 'JBW Sept 1899'. Significantly, he removed the key that had been inserted in the volume by Justin McCarty Browne, possibly with the intent of saving descendants of the persons depicted in the book from any embarrassment.

J.B. Walker's manuscript notes on his researches found their way to the Mitchell Library where, around 1911, William Walker (1861–1933) transcribed them in full.¹⁴ William Walker, a retired engineer and like fellow Hobart resident J.B. Walker a keen collector of Tasmaniana, added to his transcription of J.B. Walker's notes a transcription of the entire text of *The Hermit*. William Walker made a pilgrimage in 1912 to the British Museum to view the Melville *Hermit*. At the British Museum he copied out Melville's annotations and revelations on the true identity of 'Simon Stukeley', as well as consulting other early Tasmanian publications and documents. William Walker's compilation of data on *The Hermit* – from Melville, Bonwick, and Walker, and his own observations – was recorded into four notebooks, now held by the State Library of Tasmania.¹⁵ Walker also wrote in 1911 to the Mitchell Librarian, Hugh Wright, with information about Savery's authorship of *The Hermit*.¹⁶

William Walker was probably influential in the decision of the Hobart newspaper, the *Critic*, to republish the *The Hermit in Van Diemen's Land* in serial form over six months in 1914–15. The *Critic*, which had been established in 1911, had a format in which local history received a prominent place. Its writers promoted 'the local past as an enjoyed and valued possession', negotiating the 'morally tricky' task of 'recovering both "good old days" and "bad old days"' (Ely 2002: 62). Fundamentally nostalgic in tone, the history in the *Critic* acknowledged the liberating rupture that distanced the current Tasmanian generations from those who had experienced the penal period, and allowed the past to be 'constituted as past' (Fritzsche 2004: 64). The nostalgic mode of the *Critic* allowed *The Hermit* and other serialisations of the early years of the Colony, such as the convict narrative 'Transported for life', to be safely interpreted by readers in ways that were tenable to a society still wary of the taint of the past. How much interest the reprint evoked is difficult to establish. But it is likely that readers of the *Critic* reprint who were interested in the identity of the characters and perhaps in establishing genealogical connections may have sought out the copy of the book in the Tasmanian Public Library, and consulted the annotated key.

THE DISPOSAL OF *THE HERMIT*

In 1916 a member of the public offered £5 to the Tasmanian Public Library to purchase its copy of *The Hermit in Van Diemen's Land*. Although the £5 was refused – presumably because the sum was too small – it had disastrous consequences in drawing the Trustees' attention to a market for the book. Finances had been a persistent concern for the Tasmanian Public Library since its inception, as governmental grants barely met the costs of building maintenance and wages. Funds for book purchases were almost entirely raised by internal programs such as public lecture series and, on rare occasions, sales of books from the collection. Ironically Walker's research on and promotion of *The Hermit* now provided the Trustees with economic ammunition for its disposal, the Trustees noting that 'this pamphlet is now very rare and there are probably not more than half-a-dozen copies known of it'.¹⁷

The Hermit's disposal committee arranged for it to be exchanged for £25 of new books from a local bookseller. The Chairman of the Committee concluded that these volumes 'would be of much more service to the Library' than *The Hermit*.¹⁸ The action of the Trustees was approved by the Librarian, A.J. Taylor, who considered the exchange in utilitarian terms: the exchange 'thus enabled to add to the institution a few of the many books which are required to bring it up to a proper condition of usefulness to the public'.¹⁹ Taylor claimed professional sanction for the action, noting that 'the best authorities on libraries laid down that it was a great mistake to retain one or two articles of literary value, when their value might be expended upon books for the general use of the public'.²⁰ By mid-1918 the book had gone, sold into private ownership on mainland Australia.

Few voices have been recorded as being raised against the sale of *The Hermit*. The Hobart *Mercury* newspaper reported the disposal dispassionately, in March 1918, and there is no evidence of any public outcry, either in the Trustees' records or correspondence, or in the local press. William Walker was reported later as having 'cease[d] to have confidence in the Public Library Board', but appears to have made no official complaint at the time (Miller 1954: 22). The single recorded dissenting voice was that of Mitchell Librarian Hugh Wright, to whom the Trustees

wrote in 1916 asking for advice on an appropriate price for the book. Wright, who as Mitchell Librarian was responsible for building upon that Library's extensive collections of Australian documents and books, responded to the Trustees' query with dismay: 'I sincerely hope that circumstances will not compel your Library to part with your copy. To Tasmania it is of particular interest and as years go on its value will increase.'²¹ Wright identified – as the Trustees did not – the material heritage value of *The Hermit*, as an artefact and as a cultural signifier.

THE TASMANIAN PUBLIC LIBRARY: THE WILL TO FORGET?

The disposal of *The Hermit* by the Tasmanian Public Library in 1918 confronts our deeply-held assumptions about the duty of public museums, libraries, and archives – traditional vehicles for the formal preservation and memorialisation of the past and collective memory – to conserve material and cultural artefacts, documents and written heritage for posterity. It also helps to identify the temporally-specific nature of our assumption and to recognise that this was not always true for all places and times. This sale of rare books to raise funds for the Tasmanian Public Library was not unique. Housing difficulties for books became acute in the 1890s, and numbers of 'valuable old books' were sold, raising funds for new shelving for the remaining collections (Rennie 1953: 3). In 1905 the Library trustees sold a set of John Gould's multi-volume *Birds of Australia* (1840–48) for £100. These sales suggest that the Tasmanian Public Library consistently acted in a manner commensurate with its founding utilitarian ethos. Decisions on disposal were based upon the utility of the overall collection, rather than preservation of particular facets of the collection. The disposal of *The Hermit* demonstrates that the library had not yet developed a concept of 'local heritage' to guide how it shaped and developed its collection. Barker and Adams' observation, that the chances of the long-term survival of a book that has come to rest in a library are improved if those managing the library consider the books to be 'a coherent entity with a collective significance', gives further credence to this claim (Barker and Adams 2001: 34).

In failing to formulate a 'heritage' role at this time, the Tasmanian Public Library was conspicuously out of step with other state libraries in Australia. From the early twentieth century most mainland State public libraries had made policy provision for separate Australian collections and actively collected local and national heritage materials. The national association for librarians, the Library Association of Australasia, had also promoted the preservation of local heritage in both state and regional libraries from early in the new century, addressing a tide of nationalist sentiment associated with Federation (Gaunt 2008). While assessing the Tasmanian Public Library's disposal of *The Hermit* as a symptom of its not having yet formulated a conception of itself as a heritage collection, it is also important to consider how the disposal of *The Hermit* might constitute an act, in Tony Bennett's words, of 'institutionalised forgetting', a product of a deliberate 'practice of erasure' (Bennett 1993: 232). The conservative Trustees, members of an establishment that participated in a general amnesia about the convict past, could be accused of such a charge, given that their treatment of *The Hermit* can in no way be ascribed to ignorance of its rarity or its status as one of the earliest examples of Tasmanian printing. Barker and Adams have observed that the 'character and effectiveness of a publication must ... be judged in relation to the nature and effectiveness of official control. At the same time the moral and political climate of the time may affect censorship no less effectively because it is indirect or commercial in its operation.' (Barker and Adams 2001: 24) In this context the actions of the Trustees of the Tas-

manian Public Library can be interpreted as a form of indirect – commercially justified – censorship.

A CHANGE OF ATTITUDE

The sale of *The Hermit* was significant for the Tasmanian Public Library because it was to be the last of such disposals of outstanding local heritage material, except in the case of duplicates. The sale of *The Hermit* had a decisive effect on William Walker, who ‘ceased to have confidence in the Public Library Board [as it] ... did not seem to him to show an enlightened interest in the acquisition and preservation of early Australian books’ (Miller 1954: 22). Convinced that the Tasmanian Public Library should hold a copy of the text of *The Hermit*, Walker pasted the press cuttings of the *Critic’s* 1914–15 serialisation into a volume and presented it to the library in late 1923. A month later Walker informed the Trustees that he would present his entire collection of Tasmania and Australiana to the Public Library, a gift of over two thousand volumes that materially reshaped the library collection, on the condition ‘that no more works dealing with Australia and Tasmania should be permitted in the future to pass from the possession of the library’.²²

The 1920s has been identified as a signal period in changing attitudes to the past in Tasmania, in which ‘Tasmanians eventually felt the need to effect a reconciliation with the past instead of persisting with denial’ (Young 1996: 94). David Young identifies two events that occurred in the late 1920s as hastening this process. These were the filming of the convict drama, *For the Term of His Natural Life*, which screened with great success in Hobart in 1927, and the acquisition by state institutions of James Watt Beattie’s popular private ‘museum’ of artefacts and photographs of early Tasmania. Launceston City Corporation purchased the first part of the Beattie collection for its museum in 1927. William Walker purchased the second part, in order to donate it to the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery in Hobart, in 1933. Young has highlighted the importance of the official approval implied by the purchases of the two Beattie collections, which ‘ensured that those who wished to neuter the penal past could no longer achieve their aim by the time-honoured tactic of denial; the penal past was too palpable, its contribution to the state’s economy [via tourism] too important to ignore’ (Young 1996: 102). The *Mercury* opined in 1933 that the Beattie collection was of ‘practically incalculable value as a link with the early history of the State and the mode of life and customs of its inhabitants’.²³ These collections of artefacts and documents gave Tasmanians an institutionally sanctioned means of indulging in what Peter Fritzsche has formulated as ‘nostalgic memory work’ using fragments of the past, where ‘memory and materiality reinforce each other’ (Fritzsche 2004: 144).

In this climate, and with the reception of the Walker collection of Tasmania in 1923–24 as a major stimulus, the Tasmanian Public Library undertook a rapid and profound reconceptualisation of itself as a collector, protector and promoter of local literature. A new chief Trustee, mainlander E. Morris Miller, and a new librarian, A.J.D. Collier, an ex-journalist from the *Mercury*, actively capitalised on the new focus for the library in the late 1920s and 1930s. They promoted the collection as a resource for the general community (‘Tasmania’s own literature in Tasmania’s own library’, which ‘all Tasmanians should read’²⁴) and as a research collection, Collier noting that ‘[b]ooks were yet to be written on all branches of Tasmania’s history, and

the library had the necessary material'.²⁵ Collier also seized upon its value within the tourist economy, publicising the Library to this market in the press in 1926:

The first thought of many of our visitors having read in some of the tourist literature about Port Arthur and the bad dark old days, is to hurry about Hobart trying to buy books about Tasmania. They do not always succeed because much of what has been written of the little Island is now very rare, and obtainable if it all, only at fancy prices. Then it is that they think of the Library. They may have seen the name 'Tasmanian Public Library' on the big brick building in Argyle Street, Hobart, but generally it is only when they have felt the atmosphere of the place taking possession of them ... that they get the itch to learn more about this eventful history of ours ... The gift of [William Walker's] valuable collection of early Tasmanian and Australian works has placed the Public Library in a fortunate position in regard to books, documents, maps, and drawings relating to the early history of this State. It possesses now many rare and exceedingly interesting historical treasures.²⁶

The Tasmanian Public Library's Tasmaniana collections were presented not only as valuable resources for the past, but also as artefacts that could be accessed by the public in similar ways to the Beattie artefacts in the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery. The Tasmaniana had become a 'prestige' collection of rarities that could raise the public profile of the institution. The Tasmanian Public Library, in the wake of the loss of *The Hermit in Van Diemen's Land*, had – too late – discovered the complex value of such books.

The Hermit in Van Diemen's Land's value as both artefact and text, as a 'first' and as a story of origins, was rekindled in the second half of the twentieth century. The aversion to convict history has, of course, reversed in recent decades: Bruce Bennett asserts in his assessment of the significance of Savery's convict fiction that 'Australia's origins as a convict settlement have become as important a defining element in versions of "the Australian story" as Puritan settlement has been in "the American story"' (Bennett 2000: 28). E. Morris Miller published the first scholarly assessment of Henry Savery's *Quintus Servinton* in 1958, conceptualising both *Quintus* and *The Hermit* as historically important Australian incunabula and complaining of the tendency in Australian literary scholarship 'to mark down our pioneer writings and to treat them merely as passable in a historical sense' (Miller 1958: 2). Cecil Hadgraft edited a reprint of *The Hermit* in 1964, allowing the text to reach a wider audience beyond the few copies in state libraries. Hadgraft included a copy of the key to the characters in the reprint, with brief biographical data on each person. The discovery of another key at the Archives Office of Tasmania prompted Michael Roe to publish further on this aspect in 1997. Roe considered the new biographical evidence increased the value of *The Hermit* to the Tasmanian community by 'giving insights into Van Diemen's Land' (Roe 1997: 91).

The State Library of Tasmania was fortunate to regain for its collections a copy of *The Hermit* in 1964, donated by Dr William Crowther. A second copy came to the Library with the donation of the collection of Henry Allport in 1965. The Tasmanian Public Library's copy of *The Hermit*, sold into private ownership in 1918, was bequeathed to the National Library of Australia in

Canberra in 1973 from the estate of J.A. Ferguson, compiler of the seminal *Bibliography of Australia*.

CONCLUSION

This article has used the ‘survival’ of *The Hermit in Van Diemen’s Land* to illustrate aspects of changing historical consciousness in Tasmania. Placing a book at the centre of the investigation, the article has sought to demonstrate how, as a signifier of early Hobart, *The Hermit* offered itself as text and artefact to succeeding generations for symbolic re-use, forming part of the complex memorial heritage of the Tasmanian community. The Tasmanian Public Library’s early failure to recognise the value to the local community of *The Hermit* suggests that the general characterisation of the public library as a ‘repository of public memory’ is not always accurate, and that societal changes, particularly relating to maturing historical consciousness, have an active influence on such public institutions. The Tasmanian Public Library’s rapid reconceptualisation of itself as a ‘memory institution’ from the late 1920s and its recognition of the inalienability of its local literature demonstrate how it responded to an increasing need within the community to access its own history and find its memorial heritage.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ See Griffiths (1996) and Healy (1997) for examples of this conceptualisation in Australian historiography.
- ² A number of English language editions of parts of the seven-volume French original exist. Notes in this paper refer to Nora (1996).
- ³ Editorial from the *Tasmanian*, quoted in Hadgraft (1964: 29).
- ⁴ For a summary of approaches in book history to this aspect of reading, see Chartier (2007).
- ⁵ See evidence of this practice in notes by William Walker on *The Hermit* and its key, in William Walker’s four notebooks on *The Hermit in Van Diemen’s Land*, Allport Manuscripts, box 46, folder 13, State Library of Tasmania.
- ⁶ The bequest of 2,500 books from the estate of James Ebenezer Bicheno in 1851 is the single outstanding example.
- ⁷ ‘Justin McCarty Browne Obituary’, *Mercury*, 22 July 1889.
- ⁸ Editorial, *Mercury*, 21 July 1876, quoted in Young (1996: 31).
- ⁹ G. Hawthorn, letter to *Mercury*, 25 March 1890, quoted in Young (1996: 46).
- ¹⁰ Tasmanian Public Library Trustees to Andrew Carnegie, 13 August 1902, in Minutes of the meetings of the Board of the Trustees of the Tasmanian Public Library, 12 February 1895–10 March 1903, AA 827/1/3, Archives Office of Tasmania (hereafter AOT).
- ¹¹ ‘Death of Mr. Backhouse Walker, F.R.G.S.’. In Papers and Proceedings of the Royal Society of Tasmania, for the Years 1898–1899 (Hobart: Davies Brothers, 1900), lix.

- 12 J.B. Walker to J. Bonwick, 28 May 1892, J. Backhouse Walker papers, W9/C2/4, University of Tasmania Special Collections.
- 13 D. Macmillan's notes on *The Hermit* are part of the J. Backhouse Walker papers, W9/C4/11(5), University of Tasmania Special Collections.
- 14 J.B. Walker, 'Notes on Tasmania and Van Diemen's Land', MLMSS A587, Mitchell Library. I am very grateful to Mark Hildebrand for locating this manuscript.
- 15 W. Walker, notebooks, Allport Manuscripts, box 46, folder 13, State Library of Tasmania.
- 16 W. Walker to H. Wright, 1 May 1911, AS 91/2, Mitchell Library.
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