



ANZAAB Aspects of Book Collecting *Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania)*

Astrolabe Booksellers

Background: The prominence of printed material relating to Van Diemen's Land – that is, Tasmania before 1855 – amongst desirable Australiana is not at all surprising given that it was the second of the Australian colonies to be established (some three decades before Port Phillip/Victoria or South Australia). Furthermore, the island was known to European navigators from as early as 1642, when the Dutchman Abel Tasman sighted its shores and partially charted them, and was much visited – and well documented – by French and British expeditions in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Printing in the colony itself began at a very early stage: the first lieutenant-governor, David Collins, bought with him a printing press, although the supply of paper was a problem for several years.

Range: The earliest printed material can be found in the accounts of the maritime expeditions, with Van Diemen's Land (or the lower half of its coastline) appearing in maps from the 1660s and short versions of Tasman's account about a decade later (although his complete journal was not published until 1898). Perhaps the fullest accounts of the island before European settlement can be found in the published accounts of the French expeditions led by D'Entrecasteaux and Baudin (who visited in 1792–93 and 1801–02 respectively). The earliest printed items in the British colony founded in 1803 were ephemeral government orders; gazettes and newspapers soon followed, and the earliest privately issued book came in 1818 when the sometime government printer Andrew Bent issued *Michael Howe: the last and the worst of the bushrangers of Van Diemen's Land*, of which only three copies are known to have survived. Early printings of Bent and his fellow printers/editors include almanacs, the first appearing in 1824. The earliest books about the colony, but published in London, were descriptive accounts written for the benefit of prospective emigrants. Van Diemen's Land was primarily a penal colony, yet relied upon free emigration to make the system work, and most contemporary publications concerning the colony related to one or other of these functions. (Unpublished material – such as convict documents and early settlers' papers, is also an area of great interest to collectors.) It should not be forgotten, however, that Van Diemen's Land was not without its creative side, producing the first novel written, printed and published in Australia: Henry Savery's *Quintus Servinton* (1831). And the Van Diemen's Land period was perhaps symbolically brought to a close by the 1852 publication of John West's majestic and deliberately named *History of Tasmania*, which sought both to describe the colony's rather dark past and to usher in a more glorious future.

Availability: Early maritime exploration and colonially-printed material is quite scarce, but items such as the London-printed emigrants guides are reasonably easy to obtain, and may be found amongst the stock of many ANZAAB members.

Price-range: While scarce maps and books relating to the early maritime exploration of Van Diemen's Land command prices of tens (and on occasion hundreds) of thousands of dollars, and early colonially-printed material can run to the thousands, it is possible to obtain VDL material for relatively modest sums in the low hundreds.

Footnote: The Tasmanian publisher Blubber Head Press will be publishing in 2009 an authoritative book on collecting Tasmaniana, written by a leading contemporary collector.