

SYMS COVINGTON'S DIARY (AUSTRALIAN SECTION)

Source: Covington, Syms – Diary of visit to Australia. p. 3 Linnean Society of NSW Records, 1826–1941, VII, Papers of Syms Covington, 1831–1836, 1839. ML MSS 2009/108 item 5.

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(3') Left New Zealand December 30th; the 30th and 31st, blew very heavily. After a long passage which was occasioned by headwinds and calms, we moored ship in Sydney Cove, New South Wales, January 12th 1836 (a passage very often made in five days by the traders).

Port Jackson (Sydney), where the first settlers landed IN 1788. THERE IS A lighthouse on left hand side going in. The harbour, I think, is one of the finest and most beautiful I have yet seen. About here the land is low, even lower than New Zealand, a fine harbour, two forts, town large and populous, situated rather on side of hill. Hot, or sirocco-like, winds are frequent here, AND THE weather very precarious. When sun's out, there appears TO BE a very strong glare, which I think injures the sight as I saw many Whites here with weak eyesight.

Here the country is complete forest, with, as is well known, some of the most beautiful birds in the world; a the kangaroo, kangaroo rat, opossum, wolwar (great many), very large venomous snakes, and a most curious lizard: half snake, half lizard, about six inches long, and very easy to be caught on the mountains. I went in TO A museum while here.

THERE ARE but few natives in or about town; The chiefs wear A brass plate suspended to a chain round the neck to denote what tribe they belong to. (4') Here a stranger must take care with whom he associates, as the place consists principally of convicts, or the most notorious characters of England; and a place I must say I was heartily happy to leave. Paramatta, the town or village where the female convicts are kept, about eighteen or nineteen miles from Sydney. Sailed January 30th, 1836. (5') After a moderate passage anchored in THE harbour of Hobart Town, February 5th. The town is situated up the River Derwent on the slope of hill, and very much scattered about suburbs, AND well cultivated. Here for the first time in four years I've had the pleasure of seeing the wheat in sheaves, etc. Here, as at Sydney, are great numbers of convicts, BUT this place, I think, is far preferable in every respect to Sydney. The harbour is fine, when at anchor SHIPS being landlocked. A lighthouse IS on A small island TO THE starboard hand going in. Here, as at Sydney, are hot winds.

The land IS high and mountainous, Mt. Wellington the highest near town. I Went up to the summit its summit, February 11th. FROM the town to the top IS about eight or nine miles, I should suppose, but ON very intricate roads. Its top IS rugged, with low bushes and fresh water in small pools. The lake that is said to be there, is merely a small pool. Snipes ARE to be shot on summit occasionally or in season. The land here is much higher than at Sydney.

(6') Steam ferry-boats cross the river Derwent almost every hour of the day; that is from Hobart Town to Kangaroo Point, which is nearly opposite. Sixpence the fare; WE went there during our stay. though the ferries, made in the colony, crossed the river frequently.

A lighthouse IS situated on a small island in the river between THE entrance and THE place for shipping.

HOBART TOWN now has 15,000 free subjects. Colonel G. Arthur superseded, Colonel William Sorell as Governor IN May 1824, A POST which he retains at this period. Van Diemen's Land, was in the first place, a penal colony for the Sister Colony, or New South Wales, in 1803 -- or a large jail, as it was termed -- until 1817 when Colonel William Sorell was appointed governor by our home government. On his arrival the population amounted to about 2000 souls, and depended on themselves and the Mother Country alone for every article of food and clothing. Under him every thing thrived in the island. At THE close of his governorship, which was about seven years, the exports were large and valuable. Under him free emigration was greatly forwarded, under which POLICY he found the colony quickly thrived -- as before nearly all the population were convicts.

(7') Sailed from Hobart Town February 7th, February 19th doubled the southwest cape of Van Diemens land. Here we felt the cold. (*Infermo aqui*). Anchored in King George Sound, March 6th. Three islands ARE in the mouth of the entrance, with A flat on each side, which makes it narrow. The settlement is small AND very scattered. This colony belongs to New South Wales; Sir Richard Spencer IS the present Governor. The country at large IS sterile and very sandy, yet a few potatoes, pumpkins, etc. grown; salt provisions are used here, except when the kangaroo and wolwar can be caught, the latter very small. Kangaroo flesh sold at eight pence per pound. Great numbers of Indians here and the most miserable and meagre set of beings I have yet seen. No tattooing among natives, but gashes with sharp stones, knives etc., which they inflict on themselves, (on their breasts), said to be done out of bravado, to see which can stand the most pain without crying out.