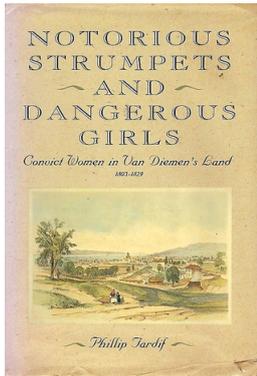


The Female Factory



When looking at historic documents, there are certain items that serve as indicators of a potential story lurking within its pages. Certainly, a reference to the Cascades Female Factory associated with my son's 4th great-grand aunt, Eleanor Owens, qualifies as being worthy of investigation.

As a servant, born in Wales around 1801, Eleanor was caught stealing from her mistress, Jane Jones of Pentrevoelas, the sum of 40 shillings (or 2 English pounds). She was sentenced to death but pardoned on condition of transportation for life. She was 23.

Transportation was the practice of "deporting" criminals out of the country and into a penal colony that existed elsewhere. Eleanor was sent to Van Diemen's Land, later to be renamed Tasmania. She apparently met and married another convict, Edward Littlehales, who was serving a sentence of 7 years transportation for his larceny conviction.

Rehabilitation was apparently not in the cards for these two. While often female prisoners would be hired out to serve in people's homes, Eleanor was accused of neglect, impertinence and of having an "improper relationship" with convict William Elliott. This is what sent her to Cascades Female Factory and labeled as "Crime Class" which was the lowest class at the factory. Conditions were harsh and unforgiving. Two of her children born there did not survive infancy.

Meanwhile Edward was not faring much better. He was convicted of sheep stealing and was being investigated for a murder charge.

Somehow, they managed to emerge from their nefarious ways and, in the 1840s, received pardons and settled in Hobart Town in Tasmania. Eleanor has the dubious distinction of having an entry in Philip Tardiff's "Notorious Strumpets and Dangerous Girls."

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