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## 'A Land Not Exactly Flowing with Milk & Honey': Swan River Mania in the British Isles and Western Australia 1827-1832

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**'A Land Not Exactly Flowing with Milk & Honey': Swan River Mania in the British  
Isles and Western Australia, 1827-1832**

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of the College of William and Mary in Candidacy for the Degree of  
Master of Arts**

**Department of History**

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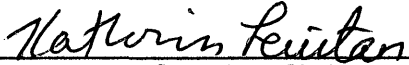
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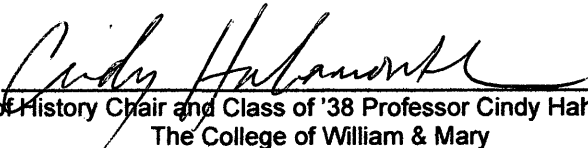
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## ABSTRACT

Despite two centuries of overwhelmingly negative appraisals of Western Australia by Dutch, French, English, and American mariners, the British Colonial Office in 1828 approved a scheme by private investors to send 10,000 free British migrants and 1,000 head of cattle to Swan River, Western Australia within four years. This dramatic shift with its concurrent "Swan River Mania" within the British public can partly be explained by the growing demand within Great Britain for emigration and the relative ease with which wealth and prosperity seemed assured through this settlement scheme. This project seeks to look at the critical months that fomented this mania, analyzing why British citizens from the lower classes (both urban and rural) to the upper echelons of society (both landed gentry and industrialists) were so attracted to the idea of settling halfway around the world to a place never before settled by Europeans. This work will contribute to a better understanding of the acceleration British diaspora during this period and will link often separate local Western Australian and British imperial and social histories.

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This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Sue and Jerry Niendorf. No love could support my pursuits more than theirs.



*"Farewell, Australia! you are a rising child, and doubtless some day will reign a great princess in the South: but you are too great and ambitious for affection, yet not great enough for respect. I leave your shores without sorrow or regret."*<sup>1</sup>

-Charles Darwin upon leaving Western Australia in 1836

## Introduction

For over two centuries, from 1616 to 1826, Dutch, English, and French sailors negatively appraised the western portion of Australia as a barren wasteland surrounded by a dangerous shore and inhabited by scattered barbaric peoples. Yet in 1829, enthusiastic British and Irish settlers sailed to the site of present-day Perth and Fremantle in the midst of what British newspapers called "Swan River Mania." This thesis looks at this sudden shift in the perception of Western Australia through the first group of British migrants, those who came between 1829 and 1832. Who did this new British colony attract? How did information about Swan River circulate and which parts of the planned colony received the most attention? Newspapers, one of the impetuses for Swan River Mania, will form a good deal of the primary sources. This study can help to explain why an undertaking such as the settlement of Western Australia was done so enthusiastically and how that enthusiasm contributes to a better understanding of British emigration.

The importance of this study is not obvious because the Swan River Colony is an example of a colonial misfire. It failed to meet its expectations as an agriculturally-based and family-centered settler colony, and only succeeded years later after the introduction of convict labor and with the discovery of gold and other metals

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Darwin, "The Voyage of the Beagle," Literature.org. Accessed April 7, 2014. <<http://www.literature.org/authors/darwin-charles/the-voyage-of-the-beagle/chapter-19.html>>, Chapter 19

(resources that still dominate the Western Australian economy). Yet the annexation of Western Australia was not a small colonial venture. It was a larger land claim than the Louisiana Purchase and an ambitious project: 10,000 settlers were officially slated to embark for Fremantle and Perth within four years. Such large free migration schemes were only just becoming feasible and the one to Swan River was especially bold. Other destinations in the British colonies had similar numbers of incoming migrants. However, migrants to these places could expect to find well-established settlements, towns, or cities. Meanwhile in 1829, Western Australia had only a few dozen white settlers at Albany: 2,000 miles southeast of Swan River. To believe that a colony of 10,000 could be established within four years on an as yet unsettled (by Europeans) and relatively unknown land would have required supreme confidence (or delusion). The Swan River Colony exemplified a poised attitude in the British government, parts of the press, and some of the British public in reaching, taming, and harnessing far away landscapes and, sometimes, peoples.

In addition, the lengths, both in distance and in risk, settlers to Swan River were willing to take demonstrates a dissatisfaction amongst some Britons with other colonies and destinations. Even though these alternatives to Swan River had established societies that were cleared of the dangers colonists to a land that has not been Europeanized would encounter, in one way or another they all had disadvantages that the Swan River appeared not to have. More established colonies seemed to have far fewer opportunities for owning land, and some had convict or slave labor tainting them. By looking more deeply into the foundation of this colony,

we can better grasp the rationale of a bold swath of the British public and its government at the time. Finally, Western Australia is now the now the fastest growing state in Australia in terms of population and economic output. Half of Australia's exports come from Western Australia. Though this prosperity took many years to realize, Western Australia's current success warrants a better understanding of its foundation.

### **Background**

Western Australia is massive, covering 965,000 square miles of diverse environments, from tropical savannah in the north to hot desert in the interior.<sup>2</sup> Today, the vast majority of Western Australians live in the southwestern corner of the state, which has a Mediterranean-type climate. This climate is shared by central Chile, southwestern South Africa, California, and, of course, much of the Mediterranean. These regions receive intermittent rain with very dry and hot summers and cool, rainy winters. While it can be harsh with its poor soil and only seasonal rain, the southwest is by far the most hospitable part of Western Australia.<sup>3</sup> It was inhabited for tens of thousands of years by aboriginal tribes like the Nyungar, who relied on hunting and foraging, although evidence of some regular harvesting does exist in northern parts of the southwest, near present-day Geraldton.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> "Climate of Western Australia," Australian Government: Bureau of Meteorology accessed September 13, 2013, <http://www.bom.gov.au/lam/climate/levelthree/ausclim/ausclimwa.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> W.M. McArthur and E. Bettenay, *Development and Distribution of Soils of the Swan Coastal Plain, Western Australia* (Melbourne: Commonwealth and Industrial Research Organization, 1974): 6.

<sup>4</sup> Geoffrey Bolton, *Lands of Vision and Mirage: Western Australia since 1826* (Crawley, WA: University of Western Australia Press, 2008), 6.

Dutch sailors knew of Western Australia by 1616 at the latest and their presence was constant for the next century due to their dominance of the nearby East Indian trade.<sup>5</sup> During this century, the Dutch East India Company learned that the Western Australian coast was not only dangerous (they lost a considerable amount of shipping on its coasts) and its land devoid of any immediately obvious extractable riches, but also that its inhabitants offered little opportunity for trade.<sup>6</sup> No other European power considered Western Australia for settlement in the face of the Dutch regional dominance in the seventeenth century. English and French explorers visited Western Australia in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but returned with disappointing reports. These negative appraisals, along with burgeoning colonies and trade markets in the new world, dissuaded English and French colonial strategists from taking real interest in Western Australia.

It would not be until 1826 that Europeans finally settled Western Australia.<sup>7</sup> First, Major Edmund Lockyer established a minor outpost at Albany, 1,600 miles southeast of present day Perth, under direction from New South Wales. Three years later, in 1829, Captain James Stirling founded the Swan River Colony. The British decision to finally settle Western Australia came as part of the larger shift towards the

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<sup>5</sup> Henry Major Richard [ed.]. *Early Voyages to Terra Australis, Now Called Australia: A Collection of Documents, and Extracts from Early Manuscript Maps, Illustrative of the History of Discovery on the Coasts of that Vast Island, from the Beginning of the Sixteenth Century to the Time of Captain Cook* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, originally published in 1859): lxxxi.

<sup>6</sup> D. Markey, *More a Symbol than a Success* (Mt. Lawley: Mount Lawley College of Advanced Education, 1976), 16; Glyndwr Williams and Alan Frost [eds.]. *Terra Australis to Australia* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press Australia, 1988), 109; Henry Major Richard [ed.], *Early Voyages to Terra Australis*, 89.

<sup>7</sup> Reginald Thomas Appleyard and Toby Manford, *The Beginning: European Settlement and Early Discovery of Swan River, Western Australia* (Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press, 1979), 33.

Second British Empire, when colonial policy focused more on the Indian than on the Atlantic Ocean. British holdings by 1815 formed a partial ring around the Indian Ocean, from the Cape to Mauritius and the Seychelles to India and Ceylon.<sup>8</sup> The establishment of Singapore in 1819 and Van Diemen's Land in 1825 further solidified this ring.<sup>9</sup> Western Australia remained notably absent from this *mare nostrum*. In the late 1810s and 1820s, a resurgent French colonial power, looking to reassert itself abroad and to solve a growing penal problem at home, sent several expeditions to Western Australia to evaluate its potential as a prison colony.<sup>10</sup> In 1827, Scottish Captain James Stirling convinced the Governor of New South Wales, Ralph Darling, to let him explore the area in the face of renewed French interest in the area. By late 1828, after a glowing report of the land and some tenacious lobbying, Stirling convinced the Colonial Office to support a colony at Swan River.<sup>11</sup>

What followed has been described as Swan River Mania, a frenzy of excitement surrounding the idea of a new colony, and the focus of this research. It was a free colony, unlike New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land, which had large convict populations. This prospect attracted many. Media outlets reported on the colony in a flurry of articles, pamphlets, and guides, often exaggerating wildly.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Lawrence James, *The Rise and Fall of the British Empire*, 133.

<sup>9</sup> Auguste Toussaint, *History of the Indian Ocean* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 188-189.

<sup>10</sup> Leslie Marchant, *France Australe*, 221-5.

<sup>11</sup> Pamela Statham-Drew, *James Stirling* (Crawley: University of Western Australia Press, 2003), 102-107.

<sup>12</sup> Ian Berryman, *Swan River Letters: Volume 1* (Glengarry: Swan River Press, 2002), 2.

Optimists predicted and the government planned that 10,000 settlers would arrive at Swan River by 1832.

By 1850, however, Western Australia's European population was only 5,000, compared to the more recently settled South Australia's 50,000.<sup>13</sup> The Swan River Colony seemed a failure. In the following pages, I will attempt to explain why the founding of the Swan River Colony is historically important to migration history, despite its early setbacks. Perhaps because it grew so slowly, and because it fell so short of expectations, historians have been prone to overlook and ignore Western Australia's early migrant history. In my historiographical section, I will discuss what historians have focused on, how my approach is different, and where I fit in this field of study. I will then devote considerable space to summarizing and analyzing the demographics of the migrants of the colony's first four years. We can start to understand the widespread appeal of this colonial scheme in the British Isles by looking at the diversity exhibited within the first wave of settlers. Noting the overarching trends of the group will also be illuminating. Following this analysis of underused census data, I will explore the different forms of print through which Britons learned about Swan River. We will notice several things by doing so. First, the Swan River scheme was widely talked about in the press. Second, the way the settlement was written about shows general optimism for large-scale free emigration from Britain. Third, that publishers and advertisers talked about Swan River and the United States side-by-side may show a brief moment where Western Australia

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<sup>13</sup> Hal Colebatch, *A Story of a Hundred Years* (Perth: F.W. Simpson, Government Printer, 1929), 58.

competed with the US as a destination for crowded Britain's citizens. Overall, by engaging with these first years of the Swan River Colony, I hope to make a case that this scheme was a dynamic part of free British migration to not only Australia, but other parts of the world as well in the mid-nineteenth century. Doing so will more tightly tie the histories of social stress in 1820s and 1830s Britain with the history of early emigration to Western Australia—which has been largely ignored—while hopefully encouraging authors on both sides of this exchange to consider further connections.

### **Historiography**

The historiography of the settling of Western Australia is elusive. Relative to other British colonies, even ones in Australia, little is written on James Stirling's Swan River project of 1829. Interest in the colony comes in waves, usually around anniversary celebrations. Australian writers dominate the literature. Though histories of the Swan are rare, they almost always follow this pattern: 1.) Dutch, English, and French explorers evaluated and dismissed Western Australia. 2.) In the 1820s British colonial policymakers began to fear a French revival. 3.) Captain James Stirling, a careerist, took advantage of those fears to promote settlement at Swan River, suggesting himself as first governor. 4.) After some political maneuvering by Stirling, the Colonial Office approved his scheme. 5.) The colony floundered. This model needs to be revised, or at least broadened. The existing historiography lacks sufficient consideration of imperial, environmental, migration, and social histories. I hope to

broach the latter two by examining the first group of migrants: who they were and what may have convinced them to leave Britain for Western Australia. The history of the Swan River colony needs to be placed in a larger historical context in order to be fully appreciated. By doing so, we can how many were dissatisfied with life in Britain and with the preexisting alternatives to which many others had migrated. Moreover, by seeing how some settlers, newspapers, and the government envisioned Swan River, we are able to understand what many Britons thought society should and indeed could be.

The historiography can be traced back to the first newspaper and government reports on the colony's founding. British and international papers, many of which had popularized Swan River in the public eye, heavily reported on its immediate struggles. British newspapers like *The Courier*, *The Times*, *The Morning Chronicle*, and *The Morning Journal*, which often dramatized the difficulties in Western Australia, helped to dissuade thousands of would-be colonists.<sup>14</sup> Soon after the initial press notices came the official government reports. Secretary of the Admiralty John Barrow, who had supported Stirling's proposal, gave one of the earliest of these reports in 1830, where he acknowledged the colony's troubles and the poor preparations leading up to settlement.<sup>15</sup> The Swan River Colony did not stay atop the British news or at the forefront of the government's interests for long. From around

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<sup>14</sup> Ian Berryman, *Swan River Letters: Volume*, 17-20.

<sup>15</sup> John Barrow, "State of the Colony of Swan River, 1st January, 1830," *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, Vol. 1, (1831), 1-16. Published by: Wiley on behalf of The Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers). Article Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1797655>.



1831 to the present, interest in the Swan amongst Australians has been infrequent and fleeting, and almost nonexistent internationally.

The first revival of writing came in 1879 for the colony's fiftieth anniversary. Newspapers in Perth, Fremantle, Albany, and Geraldton published short pieces focusing on local history. These histories often latched on to issues of convictism (transportation came to Western Australia in 1850), which was, and still is in some respects, a controversial issue. Thus, the actual settling of Swan River was only ever briefly mentioned.<sup>16</sup> The first major historical piece on Western Australia came from James Stirling's son, Edmund, in 1894. However, authors like Geoffrey Bolton, W.B. Kimberly, and J.S. Battye criticize this work for its overemphasis on conflict with Aboriginal people and for its focus on local economics. There certainly was conflict with Aboriginal peoples, with massacres like the one at Pinjarra serving as reminders of some of the brutality. However, Stirling's telling of the conflict romanticized frontier warfare, made it appear as though the combatants were evenly matched, and largely ignored the non-martial elements that contributed to the massive depopulation of Swan River's native peoples: disease and the destruction of local environments.

Interest in Western Australia increased at the turn of the century, and historians like Kimberly and Battye wrote in a more professional style, but still neglected or chose not to consider why Britain in particular settled Western Australia when it did.<sup>17</sup> Such a consideration first came during the centenary celebration of the

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<sup>16</sup> G.C. Bolton, "Western Australia Reflects on its Past," in *A New History of Western Australia* (Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press, 1981), 678.

<sup>17</sup> "Western Australia Reflects on its Past," 679-681. Kimberly published a *History of West Australia: A Narrative Of Her Past Together With Biographies Of Her Leading Men* in 1897 and Battye wrote

Swan River Colony in 1929, when Sir Hal Colebatch edited a volume of the state's achievements. He wrote, "Above all, it was the Imperial aspect that appealed to the British statesmen, and stirred the imagination of the people."<sup>18</sup> While the statement was rife with jingoism, it was, and in many ways still is, original. Geoffrey Bolton, one of the only historians to look at Western Australia in a broader context, wrote that Colebatch "must be allowed the merit, rare at any time in Western Australian historians, of trying to link local history with a wider international perspective."<sup>19</sup> Apart from admirable efforts from Bolton, this history still lacks international connection. By looking at the makeup of the first settler groups and why they chose the Swan River for settlement over other colonies, this void can be better bridged.

While the 1930s and 40s saw an increase in the availability and organization of historical resources by the University of Western Australia, the Historical Society of Western Australia, and the state government, more studies on the state's history did not equal greater interest in the Swan River Colony. Indeed, the recent past dominated the period's historical research efforts. In 1960, a rarely seen "comprehensive" history appeared by F.K. Crowley, and it remains a standard history of the state. *Australia's Western Third* too, however, focused on recent events, especially the world wars.<sup>20</sup> Any mention of the foundation of Western Australia in

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*Western Australia : a history from its discovery to the inauguration of the Commonwealth Oxford in 1924.*

<sup>18</sup> Sir Hal Colebatch [ed.], *A Story of a Hundred Years: Western Australia, 1829-1929* (Perth: F.W. Simpson, 1929). While the entire collection of essays comes from historians, and is considered historically "suitable" by Bolton, the writings of Colebatch are the most notable features of the book.

<sup>19</sup> "Western Australia Reflects on its Past," 683.

<sup>20</sup> F.K. Crowley, *Australia's Western Third: A History of Western Australia from its First Settlements to Modern Times* (London: Macmillan, 1960).

new histories during the post-war seemed to be made out of necessity rather than desire. Crowley helped the University of Western Australia become one of the premier historical research schools in the country, and his students and their students have tended to emulate his style and emphasis on the recent past.<sup>21</sup> 1979, the state's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary produced many works on Western Australia, and even some on the Swan River, but they all failed to place the subject in a larger context. Pieces on the Swan have been rare since 1979 and have done little to broaden the topic.

General Australian histories are often successful in linking British and Australian histories. A description of the First Fleet is often the opening section of such works. But general works tend to overlook the Swan River Colony. It is rarely entirely neglected, but it is even more rare for it to be examined in any great detail. Readers can expect to find a brief narrative of the colony's early struggles, but then authors quickly move on to the other Australian colonies. Barbara A. West and Frances T. Murphy's 2010 *A Brief History of Australia* is a good example. In the section titled "Colonial Expansion: 1800-1831," the Swan River Colony receives just one paragraph. It is also the last paragraph and it begins, "The other important event in this period..."<sup>22</sup> Unsurprisingly, this short paragraph does not mention Swan River Mania, instead focusing more on the French threat to Western Australia. While French ambitions on the west coast warrant attention, there is more to tell. When connections between Western Australia and Britain are made in general histories,

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<sup>21</sup> "Western Australia Reflects on its Past," 688.

<sup>22</sup> Barbara A. West and Frances T. Murphy's *A Brief History of Australia* (New York: Facts on File, 2010): 53.

they are almost always brief and focus on the political dimensions behind the colony's founding. The settlers themselves are largely absent. Robert Hughes, who, in *The Fatal Shore: The Epic of Australia's Founding*, described Western Australia as "A colony with a body the size of Europe and a brain the size of a child," does give a brief mention of settlers and their great hopes for a new Arcadia.<sup>23</sup> In an exceptionally long (five pages) description of the Swan River Colony's founding, only one sentence is given to the thoughts and attitudes of settlers before they embarked. Thomas Keneally's *Australians: Origins to Eureka* does devote some time to what initially attracted Britons to Swan River. Though he does that through a single source (an advertisement reprinted in various newspapers), Keneally deserves credit for mentioning why Britons wanted to go to Western Australia, rather than simply describing the venture as an imperial power move.<sup>24</sup>

### **Chapter One: Western Australia's First Settlers, 1829-1832**

For a variety of reasons, it is difficult to discern the makeup of those who considered migration to Western Australia. For one, it is impossible to know how many saw advertisements or reports on the new colony, and then how many of those readers actually thought migration might be for them. Some may have been vaguely interested, while others may have actually had discussions with their families about emigration. Therefore, I will instead summarize, more accurately, the makeup of who

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<sup>23</sup> Robert Hughes, *The Fatal Shore: The Epic of Australia's Founding* (New York: Random House, 1988): 574-575. Stuart Macintyre's *A Concise History of Australia* follows a very similar pattern, albeit shorter, in describing the Swan River Colony.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Keneally, *Australians: Origins to Eureka* (Crows Nest, New South Wales: Allen & Unwin, 2009): 376.

actually made it to Swan River between 1829 and 1832, analyzing the demographics of the earliest settlers.

The settlers can be divided into five main categories of demographic qualification: sex, age, status (whether they came alone or with family), origin or nationality, and occupation. I chose these mainly out of convenience and source availability. My counts rely almost exclusively on Ian Berryman's "A Colony Detailed," a 1979 publication in which he edited the Swan River Colony's first census, made in 1832, by corroborating it with muster rolls, ship logs and lists, and land applications. The result is a detailed look into who lived in Western Australia after around four years of settlement. Yet Berryman wrote, "I have not attempted any detailed analysis or interpretation of the census; instead I have restricted myself to editing it and collating it with other contemporary records..."<sup>25</sup> Few continued what Berryman started, and his invaluable work has gone mostly unused, partly owing to the lack of early Western Australian migration history. This project partly seeks to find out what can be gleaned from Berryman's work, and also can hopefully pose some useful questions for others' and my own future research.

Berryman did not analyze the data provided by his research. Unfortunately for the researcher, he also did very little to organize it, so finding patterns and trends required some effort and much more can be done. Berryman organized his edited census in two ways. First, he sets up the names of the settlers as the original census taker or takers did, by location, with eight unique areas (Upper Swan, Guildford,

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<sup>25</sup> Ian Berryman, *A Colony Detailed: The First Census of Western Australia* (Fremantle, WA: Creative Press, 1979): 9.

York, Rottnest, Perth, Fremantle, Rural land grants on the Swan River, and Rural land grants on the Canning River).<sup>26</sup> Each resident has a number that falls into a range designating one of the eight areas. For instance, Mary Summerland, a servant from Lancashire, and #717 in the census, falls between 708-1071, meaning she lived in Fremantle, the colony's port.<sup>27</sup> For the second ordering, Berryman simply alphabetized the names. Both organizations are helpful in their own ways. Geographical sorting helps to see how many people and which ones lived where, while alphabetization helps the researcher, especially the genealogist, find surnames or particular individuals. However, both these methods do a poor job of illuminating the dynamics of migration to Swan River, which have a great deal to teach historians.

Berryman and the original census taker(s) used 9 categories. They are number (the ones used for demarcating place of residency), name, age, condition (married or single), place of birth (by country), country or town (where they lived before their most recent migration), profession or calling, ship (the one on which they sailed), and with whom (a category marking those who came as indentured servants).<sup>28</sup> For the purpose of this study, one of getting a sense of who came to Western Australia and why, these unorganized categories need to be examined as a whole.

I did not reorganize Berryman's list by every category. This would take digitization of all the first migrants to Swan River, something that has surprisingly not

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 17. Berryman goes into further detail about how this census was taken. The passive here is appropriate as Berryman admits that we have no idea who actually took the census. He speculates how the census might have been taken by looking at methods used in British censuses, seeing if there are similarities in their note taking.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 56.

been done by any historian or researcher, but a task I or somebody more capable will take up in the future. For this paper, I used a simple tally system to get a sense of the numbers within each of my five categories (sex, age, status, origin or nationality, and occupation).<sup>29</sup> However, before going into my findings, it should be noted that these numbers are only estimates. Berryman's research on the 1832 census found many errors and omissions, and he explains that some of the information regarding individuals is simply lost. While Berryman's work vastly improved what we can learn from the 1832 census, it cannot be regarded as complete.<sup>30</sup> Add the fact that trying to tally approximately 1,300 people is a mistake prone process, and the reader can be sure these numbers are imperfect.<sup>31</sup> However, I do believe that the information Berryman provided and the numbers I give are good estimates. For instance, I counted 968 English migrants. This number could perhaps be 971 or even 963, but regardless of the potential errors, the count unequivocally shows English men, women, and children were in the colony's majority, with the next two largest migrant groups, Scots and Irish, numbering a mere 45 and 51, respectively. So while the numbers that follow are not exact, they do demonstrate definite patterns and trends within the population of the Swan River Colony from 1829 to 1832: trends I believe historians have left largely unexamined.

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<sup>29</sup> My tally system was exactly as it sounds: me looking at each individual record and marking which category that person fit into.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>31</sup> I will use 1300 as Swan River's 1832 approximate population from this point forth. However, it is not the number of people who had arrived by 1832, but the number of people living there in 1832. There were at least 59 people who were born in Western Australia, and in addition, a good number of migrants died in Western Australia. Still, looking at the 1300 gives a sense of the migrant demographics.

*Sex*

For this category, there were three options for tallying: male, female, and unknown. I marked 20 people unknown for several reasons. They could have a name like Francis, usually a male name (Frances being the general feminized version in this census), but since I found a case where a wife had the name Francis, I could not assume Francis always meant male. Therefore, for such names, unless the census marked them with a gender specific occupation (i.e. wife, farm girl, etc.), I had to mark them as unknown. Another cause for marking someone as unknown was when a first name was simply unavailable. Finally, there were certain foreign or perhaps antiquated names for which I could not discern a sex, so marked unknown. Despite the occasional difficulty in assigning male or female, most of the individuals were easy to categorize and trends were obvious. By my count, in 1832, out of around 1300 residents, 803 were male, 478 were female, and 20 were unknown. That means there were around 35 women for every 65 men, very close to a 1:2 female-male ratio. So while men were clearly in the majority here, the female population was not negligible. What is more, since there were only around 59 people born in Western Australia by 1832, and assuming half of those were female births, the female population of the Swan River Colony was largely a result of migration and not natural birth. This is important because although there were more men, women still make up a significant demographic group. In contrast, in New South Wales and Van Dieman's Land, which were populated mostly by convicts, there were four men to every woman, a much more unequal ratio than Swan River's.<sup>32</sup> In further study it would be



useful to find comparative numbers from other colonies. South Australia was a colony made for free settlement and many British families came as a result, and its numbers would possibly run similar to Western Australia's. However, the Swan River Colony receives less attention because it struggled to attract more migrants after early setbacks and also because of its eventual adoption of transportation. However, as the female population shows, along with other characteristics I will describe in the next sections, the Swan River Colony was a family settlement before South Australia was. Western Australia, despite its later transformations, deserves recognition as the first family centered colony in the antipodes.

#### *Status*

For this category, there were two options for tallying: solo or with a family member. I marked people as solo if they arrived, according to the census, without an obvious family member. Anyone who I marked as "with family member" arrived with or later joined one or more family members at Swan River.<sup>33</sup> Approximately 348 of the first settlers to Swan River came without any relations, making up slightly more than a quarter of the migrant population between 1829 and 1832. Many of these solo sojourners did not come alone, however. A good deal of the first migrants, both with and without family, arrived as indentured servants. While indentured servitude is not explored deeply in this paper, further study, with the help of a digitized census, would yield illuminating results on colonial labor. Though I did not quantify the

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<sup>32</sup> Clemens Fritz, *From English in Australia to Australian English: 1788 to 1900* (Frankfurt am Main: In English Corpus Linguistics, 2007): 18.

<sup>33</sup> Births that took place within the settlement are counted in the "with family member" category.

number of indentured servants, it seems the number of settlers who arrived purely on their own is much lower than a quarter of the migrant population. Even those who did arrive “alone” likely came with some group, though with my current primary source base I can only speculate what such units looked like. In my section on advertisements, I discuss ads calling for families to join together in joint ventures to mitigate financial costs. While I did not find similar ads for individuals in my preliminary research, I suspect they might exist. Interestingly, and also worthy of further study, a number of those who came without family were foreign. While many, like John “an Indian” came as servants, some did not, adding a fascinating dimension to the early Swan River Colony.

While many came to the Swan River without family, the vast majority, around 858 people, did arrive with at least one family member. In addition, within three years, families gave birth to 59 babies who were still alive by 1832, bringing the total of settlers who were with some family to approximately 917. These 917 settlers fit into roughly 226 family units, meaning each “family” had about 4 people.

Berryman’s alphabetical organization of surnames proved useful for determining the number of family units.<sup>34</sup> I simply counted up each unique surname. Naturally, surnames like Wood, Smith, and Harrison had multiple groups within them. To solve this problem, I looked to see if names within a surname had consecutive numbers. For instance, John Wood (#491) and Jessy Wood (#1037) were not necessarily family

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<sup>34</sup> Unfortunately, this category is unable to account for families that came to Swan River that were legally related. For instance a daughter might come with both her blood family and her husband. While she would appear to only belong to her husband’s family unit, she would in fact belong to two family units.

members since their numbers indicate they lived on opposite sides of the Swan River (which is telling, because a common joke in the colony was that it was easier to get to London than to cross the Swan). Furthermore, John and Jessy arrived on different ships, and while John is marked as being from Gloucestershire, Jessy's origin is unknown. While these facts do not prove definitively that settlers such as Jessy and John Wood were unrelated, we certainly cannot assume the opposite. So, my number for family units is the minimum, meaning there were 226 units that almost certainly were made up of members related by blood. This number could be higher.

### *Age*

For this category, there were eight groups for tallying: ages 0 through 79, divided by decades (i.e. 00s for 0-9, 10s for 10-19, etc.). Around 1,229 people had an age attached to their name in the 1832 census, making it an almost comprehensive category. Those missing from the age count would do little to change the overall picture of the population. What is most apparent from the age tallying is how young the colony was in 1832, and most of that youth came from the British Isles. Many children and teenagers came to Swan River in the earliest years. By 1832, 545 people between the ages of 0 and 19 made up about 40% of the colony's population. Some of these youths came by themselves, likely as indentured servants. For instance, Richard Harper was a 16-year-old farm lad from England, while Anne Duar was an 18-year-old from Edinburgh, working as a servant girl. Neither is marked as indentured, but they almost certainly arrived with adults, indentured or otherwise. Still, despite exceptions like Harper and Duar, both of whom were employed, most of those under

19 arrived with at least one parent, and for the most part did not have a job, at least according to the census takers. The other 60% of the colony's population was also quite young. The largest age group according to my tally was 20-29, which accounted for around 321 of the settlers, just about a quarter of the population. This means two-thirds of the entire population was under the age of 30. Only 23 of the first 1300 settlers were over the age of 50, and only three residents were over 60. As with all the categories, it would be worthwhile to compare these findings on age to the populations of other colonies and Britain itself. Were they just as young? With digitization, it will become easier to answer other questions that will be useful. In new colonies, both free and penal, you would probably expect most of the population to be men in their 20s, 30s, and 40s. While this demographic is certainly well represented here, the fact that so many of them came with their families complicates the colonial standard set by the male-dominated New South Wales and others and may be a counterexample to it.

#### *Country of Origin*

For this category, there were nine groups for tallying: England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, other British Isles, Continental Europe, British Colonies, Western Australia, and other. In Berryman's census these categories are described as "Place of Birth." England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland are self-explanatory categories. In a future study, it would be useful to look at which regions of these countries, especially England, were most represented in the settler population. Such a study could give more insight into whether or not the first settlers were more urban or rural, whether

certain areas had more social unrest or economic depression, and perhaps even whether advertising campaigns for settlement in particular cities' newspapers were more prolific or successful than others. The category "other British Isles" simply means those islands owned by the United Kingdom in the channel (Jersey, Guernsey, Wight, etc.) and in the Irish Sea (Man). Continental Europe as a category is any European country or region excluding those of or owned by the United Kingdom. These include places as varied as Poland, Portugal, and Sicily, to name a few. The category "British colonies" was made up of any region owned, colonized, or protected by the United Kingdom and included places like Bombay, Jamaica, Malta, and St. Helena. The category "Western Australia" included anyone that the census takers marked as born in either Western Australia or Swan River.<sup>35</sup> "Other" was the most diverse category. It covered anyone not represented in the other eight categories, ranging from those born "At Sea" to Africa and Arabia. The census takers marked "New England" as a birthplace, though it is uncertain which New England they had in mind, since there were at least three separate places in the English-speaking world with regions having this designation (Canada, the United States, and New South Wales). Thus, I put it into "other."

The most striking observation made about the settlers' nationalities was their overwhelming Englishness. Out of the 1300 residents of the Swan River Colony in 1832, around 968 were born in England, about three out of every four settlers. The other Australian colonies at the time were less predominantly English, with about

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39% of their occupants coming from outside of England.<sup>36</sup> Though England had a larger population than the other countries of the British Isles, its numerical superiority at Swan River was still disproportionate. Historians have not discussed this fact, at least not in relation to the Swan River Colony.

I have a few preliminary hypotheses. England may have had a more literate population, so that when the papers started to advertise and report on the new colony in Western Australia, “Swan River Mania” took hold most strongly there. However, this postulation itself cannot explain the phenomenon and is itself tentative. It could be that social unrest and the desire to move was higher in England, given its more urbanized population. This, of course, is complicated by the fact that Irish people were migrating in great numbers during this period as well. Possible too then, though also not fully satisfactory, is the possible greater mobility of the English working and growing middle class in relation to their Irish, Welsh, and Scottish counterparts. Despite the English majority, other British islanders came in notable sums. 45 Scottish and 51 Irish settlers arrived at Swan River in the first few years, while 9 Welshmen and women came as well. I was somewhat surprised that there were not more Irish migrants, as some in the English press thought the Swan River Colony would provide an opportunity for economically depressed Irish. I discuss this point in a later section in greater detail. In addition, 27 people from around the British Empire resided in Swan River in 1832. At least 31 people from outside of the British Isles or the British Empire lived at Swan River in 1832.<sup>37</sup> However, the diversity within this

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<sup>36</sup> Clemens Fritz, *From English in Australia to Australian English: 1788 to 1900* (Frankfurt am Main: In English Corpus Linguistics, 2007): 18.

group has been given little attention by historians. Interestingly, some of the mainland European migrants had English wives, while others had employment from the colonial government, which adds a small cosmopolitan aspect to the colony. These migrants may have lived in England for some time and perhaps were more English than not, but the fact that they settled on Western Australia shows its allure to people of many different origins.

### *Occupation*

There were three occupational groups: farmers, laborers, and non-farmers.<sup>38</sup> First, I should note these three categories cover only about 534 settlers, about 40% of the colony's population. This is because a.) most of the women in the colony are marked only as "wife," "daughter," etc. and b.) almost all the children had no specific occupation. This does not mean these two groups ("unemployed" women and children) did not work in some fashion. They almost certainly worked. Unfortunately, the census does not give enough information to say what they did do other than their place in the family.

This is probably one of the most useful counts I did, because it not only shows what types of working skills came to the Swan River Colony in its first few years, but it can also give insight into why the settlement may have floundered. These numbers support the argument that most scholars seem to agree on that the lack of labor, and especially the lack of appropriate labor, helped to frustrate early growth. Farmers

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<sup>37</sup> I use "at least" here because residents numbered 1258-1305 are not assigned a country, and there are people given the names "an Indian" or "a black" in place of surnames, meaning the number of non-British Empire residents could be higher.

<sup>38</sup> The census takers marked some settlers with more than one occupation. For instance, Charles Leroux was a merchant and agriculturist, so I gave a tally for both.

include farming servants, botanists, farmers, agriculturists, farm girls and boys, and gardeners.<sup>39</sup> Laborers totaled around 126 workers, around a quarter of those labeled as employed. However, this term is one of the most frustrating in the census, because the census takers did not say what the laborers did, whether they were farm laborers, skilled workers, or unskilled laborers. They potentially did a bit of everything, which is difficult to quantify when you want neat categories of labor. Because of these complications, laborers warranted their own category outside of farming and non-farming. Each individual within this category would need to be studied more closely to get a better sense of where they fit into the colony's early labor history. Non-farming consisted of any worker that was not a laborer and did something outside of agriculture. This included myriad jobs like jeweler, boatman, jailer, limeburner, storekeeper, and surveyor, just to name a small fraction. Non-farming was the largest of the three categories, consisting of 299, or around 56%, of the "working" settlers. Those directly involved in farming, on the other hand, numbered just 109, or about a fifth of all workers. However, since the early colony was agriculturally based, we can assume more than 109 workers took part in some form of farm work.

The diversity of settlers' occupation tells much. It gives a sense of how widespread the optimism for the Swan River was throughout the British Isles, across both urban and rural areas. Opportunity appeared available to any skillset. In the overpopulated United Kingdom, a carpenter would be one of thousands, but at Swan

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<sup>39</sup> I did not include fishing within this category, although it technically falls under agriculture. I was more concerned with the cultivation of land for this category, since that was the main draw to the Swan River Colony, or at least the ownership of land.



River, he could be one of the first of his kind, and thus make a name for himself. Social mobility clearly seemed more feasible in Perth or Fremantle than Lincoln or London. However, such optimism and such diversity of labor also posed problems, and though these difficulties are not the focus of this study, I hope the numbers I provide at least give some sense of what historians like Pamela Statham has argued to be a lack of necessary labor for a brand new settlement.<sup>40</sup> A jeweler seems superfluous for a fledgling colony on a pragmatic level. However, the jeweler might have indeed been useful in the early days of the colony, not in the realm of jewelry, but by providing skills outside of his job title. If primary sources relating to the individuals in Berryman's census can be found and organized, we can better understand what settlers actually did once they arrived at Swan River. Job titles could have been more fluid than previously thought or less so.

Even if future research determines that labor was overspecialized and that colonists were overly optimistic in what luxuries they brought, we cannot judge the early colonists and colonial organizers for wanting the services and comforts they enjoyed at home to be transplanted to Australia. In the eyes of the first settlers, if the Swan River was to be a colony of families and yeomen farmers, then it needed the things that now seem unnecessary. A piano seems absolutely useless and almost a hindrance to setting up a colony on unfamiliar land half a world away, but to a Briton used to hearing songs played by and for guests in his or her parlor, a piano might have

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<sup>40</sup> Pamela Statham, "Why Convicts II: The Decision to Introduce Convicts to Swan River," in C.T. Stannage [ed.], *Studies in Western Australian History IV: Convictism in Western Australia* (Nedlands, WA: University of Western Australia Press, 1981).

been critical in making the Swan River a suitable place to transplant their lives. The labor necessary to tame the difficult southwestern Australian landscape might have been grossly inadequate in the early days of the Swan River Colony, but the necessities and accouterments of a respectable English lifestyle were not.

## **Chapter Two: “Swan River Mania”**

Why did these settlers come to Swan River and not the United States, Canada, or other Australian colonies? The United States was established, predominantly English speaking, and was far closer than Swan River. The other Australian colonies, New South Wales and Van Diemen’s Land were also firmly planted and Anglicized. By looking at initial accounts of the Swan River by Captain James Stirling and the way in which emigrant guides, British newspapers, and government reports promoted these accounts, I hope to give some understanding to how migration to a new colony in the antipodes was marketed. First, I will look at James Stirling’s account of his 1827 mission to Swan River, but since this is a relatively well-covered primary document, it will largely serve as background. The initial terms of settlement as agreed upon by the Colonial Office will also be discussed in this section. I will then look at how various authors and presses presented Stirling’s account and the events that followed, including “Swan River Mania.” This section will look primarily at the period from Stirling’s voyage up to the 1832 census. In this section I argue two main points. First, the reports and especially the advertising on the Swan River Colony were extremely optimistic, and promoted the settlement as having cheap land, no

convicts, and almost guaranteed prosperity. Second, these features would have appealed to a wide range of British and Irish citizens' interests.

Stirling's report to the Colonial Office in 1828 summarized his and his voyage's botanist, Charles Frazer's, observations and opinions of the Swan River during their 1827 expedition. Owing to Frazer's position as a trusted government scientist, Stirling used Frazer's account heavily. The report marked four key natural advantages of the Swan River for settlement. "First, the evident superiority of the soil." Second, settlers could immediately begin farming due to the lack of impediments (i.e. rocks, trees, etc.). Third, there was abundant fresh water "of the best quality," which kept the soil constantly humid. And fourth, the ease with which "land" and "water carriage" could traverse the landscape.<sup>41</sup> Each of these claims eventually proved incorrect or at least exaggerated, but they stirred immense interest among parts of the British public. By October 1828, after tenacious lobbying by Stirling and investors, the Colonial Office seemed poised to approve of a settlement at Swan River.<sup>42</sup> On December 5, 1828, the Colonial Office published a circular detailing the new colony. The government was not to incur any expense from either conveying or supplying the settlers. 40 acres of land were to be distributed "for every

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<sup>41</sup> S.H. Collins, *The Emigrant's Guide to the United States of America. Containing All Things Necessary to be Known by Every Class of Persons Emigrating to that Continent: The Expense of the Voyage-First Steps to be Taken on Landing-the Parts of the United States to go to-And Expense of Traveling-Mode of Obtaining Citizenship-Prices of Land and Labor-The Best Money to be Taken, &c. &c. Preceded by a Geographical Description of the United States, the Climate, Soil, Manufacturers, Arts, Agriculture, Trade and Commerce, Natural History, Laws, Character, Manners and Customs, and Religion. Being the Most Comprehensible and Useful Description of the United States Ever Published. To which is Added, a Correct Account of the New Settlement on the Swan River* (Hull, UK: Joseph Noble, 1829): 127.

<sup>42</sup> Pamela Statham-Drew, *James Stirling* (Crawley: University of Western Australia Press, 2003): 102-107.

sum of £3 so invested.”<sup>43</sup> The circular added that no “convicts or other descriptions of Prisoners, [should] be sent to this new Settlement.”<sup>44</sup> Coupled with the glowing accounts from Stirling and Frazer, the colonial government’s stipulations and terms would have seemed immensely attractive to those who could afford the passage, either by their own investments or by a willingness to be indentured to an investor for several years.

In the wake of Stirling’s reports British newspapers expressed this interest most visibly. There were around 300 newspapers in Britain and Ireland when the Colonial Office approved Stirling’s scheme, and many of them latched on to the story.<sup>45</sup> In addition, profit seekers made advertisements for the colony, selling anything from rooms on ships to collapsible houses, and almost always depicting the Swan more favorably than even Stirling himself did. *The New Monthly Magazine* remarked “settlers cannot arrive at any season of the year without finding themselves enabled at once to plant some sort of grain,” while various publications quoted John Barrow as calling Swan River a “new land of Goshen.”<sup>46</sup> Even before the Colonial Office approved Stirling’s scheme, newspapers addressed the hypothetical colony. Some immediately saw the potential of a new and free settlement in curing social ills in the British Isles. For instance, an editorial in *The Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette* expressed worries about the ability of the “poor industrious Irish” to afford the cost of emigration, hoping the government would be “offering an inducement...”<sup>47</sup> Other

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<sup>43</sup> Colonial Officer, “Colonial Office Circular,” December 5, 1828.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ian Berryman, *Swan River Letters: Volume 1*, 2.

<sup>46</sup> D. Markey, *More a Symbol than a Success*, 41.

newspapers speculated about this possibility of ameliorating the growing social unrest in Ireland through emigration, with one writer opining that "...a scheme of emigration... would have the effect of relieving the empire of a portion at least of its superabundant population. If only £100,000 was employed annually, we should have an Irish nation in twenty years on the Swan River."<sup>48</sup> However, inducements in the way of free passage never came to the Irish (or any settlers), and perhaps can partly explain the somewhat low numbers of Irish migrants in the early years of the Swan River Colony.

While passage to Swan River did not seem possible for poor Irish laborers without government aid, there were families within Britain that found ways to mitigate the costs of travel. Families traveling alone would incur high costs, but a collection of families, a joint venture, could make passage more financially feasible. Therefore, ads from families calling on other families to join on certain ships were especially common in the first year of the settlement.<sup>49</sup> *The Morning Post* reported on one such group in November 1829, consisting of sixty people, who left on board the *Britannia*.<sup>50</sup> In a larger study it would be beneficial to compare such newspaper articles to the 1832 census in the hopes of gaining further insight into the makeup of the first groups of settlers. Such ads and articles about families, especially given the

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<sup>47</sup> "Editorial," *Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette*, October 23, 1828: 2.

<sup>48</sup> See *The Derby Mercury*, October 22, 1828; *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, October 25, 1828; etc. Quote taken originally from *Dublin Evening Post*, republished in *North Wales Chronicle*, May 21, 1829.

<sup>49</sup> L.M. "Emigration to Swan River, Western Australia," *The Leicester Chronicle*, December 12, 1829. There are other advertisements like this but they vary little from the one provided in their structure and purpose.

<sup>50</sup> "The Robbery of Earl Fitzwilliam's Half Yearly Rental Prevented/Emigration to Swan River," *The Morning Post*, November 28, 1829.

numbers of family units seen in the 1832 census show that the settlement of the Swan River was driven by a family-settler mentality, something not often acknowledged by past Western Australian historians.

Another method some adopted for gaining passage to Swan River was protest. An interesting episode of this nature occurred in summer 1829, near the height of migration to Swan River. In June, weavers from Spitalfields were arrested for planning a strike and tarnishing silk products in protest of unfair wages and physical punishment from employers.<sup>51</sup> When the same employers laid off many of the weavers, labor leaders made petitions and formed committees to address the deteriorating situation.<sup>52</sup> A lengthy petition from the weavers to Arthur Wellesley, Duke of Wellington and then Prime Minister, warrants inspection. Drawn up on a rainy July day, amongst a “considerable sum of persons,” many of them women “with children in their arms,” the petition called on Wellesley’s government to intervene.<sup>53</sup> The petitioners wrote, “It is the deplorable state of things which has harrowed the feelings of your petitioners; it is this want of subsistence which prompts them to seek an asylum in another hemisphere.” The petitioners continued that they wanted “employment instead of charity.” “Australia is the country to which their attention is now more immediately directed...but alas! they have not a sixpence in the world at their disposal.”<sup>54</sup> Eventually, the weavers, “between three and four thousand in number,” specified Swan River as the place “where there would be ample scope for

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<sup>51</sup> *The Bury and Norwich Post: Or, Suffolk and Norfolk Telegraph, Essex, Cambridge, and Ely Intelligencer*, June 3, 1829.

<sup>52</sup> *The Derby Mercury*, July 1, 1829.

<sup>53</sup> “General Meeting of the Unemployed Weavers,” *The Morning Chronicle*, July 15, 1829.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

industry, and abundant reward for those whose habits were inclined for perseverance & industrious pursuits.”<sup>55</sup> This episode has gone seemingly unnoticed by historians, but the sheer number of potential migrants involved (in a migration scheme already slated for 10,000 participants) in the petition is certainly notable.

In addition, this petition captures what many of the early migrants to Swan River surely felt: disillusionment with opportunity in their native homes. However, like the great majority of the expected 10,000 migrants, the 4,000 weavers never arrived. Wellington rejected the petition, perhaps because agreeing to its terms might have inspired similar proposals to pop up all over Britain. The government could not afford to send every discontented worker halfway across the world, and agreeing to send one group and not another would only cause greater consternation in an already greatly beleaguered working class. Even after Wellington’s dismissal of the petition though, *The Morning Post* reported that the unemployed weavers planned to march on Windsor to await a decision from King George IV himself in regards to their request for subsidized passage to Swan River.<sup>56</sup> I was unable to find out if these weavers won this appeal, but since there is no mention of weavers in the 1832 census and since the government did not finance passages to the settlement, I can only assume that the Crown denied their calls for aid as well.<sup>57</sup> These documents demonstrate not only the ways in which Britons tried to get to the new colony in Western Australia, but also the intense fervor with and reasons for which they did so.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> “The Money Market,” *The Morning Post*, August 6, 1829.

<sup>57</sup> I recognize the possibility that these weavers went to Swan River listed under occupations other than weaving, but I was unable to find strong enough evidence as such.

In addition, it gives a look at just who wanted to emigrate; in this case, it was the disgruntled and unemployed working class.

Also indicative of the interest in the Swan River Colony were the travel guides published between 1829 and 1831. Such publications were meant to aid potential migrants in learning more about Swan River, and to prepare them should they decide to make the journey. Helping migrants succeed was not the only impetus behind printing such guides. Swan River Mania would have been a great time for publishers to make a profit off those now interested in the fledgling colony. A great example of how publishers might have tried to benefit from those considering migration was *The Emigrant's Guide to the United States of America...To Which is Added A Correct Account of the New Settlement on the Swan River*, which S.H. Collins wrote and Joseph Holmes published in 1829. The fact that these two guides came together demonstrates the momentary perception of Western Australia as perhaps an equally appealing destination for migration as the United States, which was and would remain for some time the most common destination for British and Irish migrants. Unsurprisingly, the book is staunchly in favor of Swan River, calling previous negative French reports of Western Australia “inaccurate” and arguing that the colony was “fully capable of giving support to a million of souls.”<sup>58</sup>

Perhaps as appealing as the general favorability of the land would have been the fact that the colony was to be free of convicts. This sentiment was certainly apparent in travel guides. In *The Picture of Australia*, Robert Mudie devoted a good

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<sup>58</sup> S.H. Collins, *The Emigrant's Guide to the United States...*, 121.



deal of attention to there being no forced laborers at Swan River. Mudie wrote, “The Swan River has the advantage over every other British colony.” This advantage was its freeness, and Mudie argued that the lack of it in the West Indies and the other Australian colonies caused “the most unwholesome influence upon the state of society.”<sup>59</sup> While historians have noted the attraction to the lack of convicts at Swan River and have compared it to the other Australian colonies, historians have not made similar comparisons with slavery in the West Indies. Though British colonies in the Caribbean were largely slave based at the time of Swan River Mania, Mudie’s writings show that potential settlers had similar apprehensions about both convictism and slavery. The introduction of indentured workers or coolies to British West Indian colonies in this same period should also warrant further research in future works on how Britons chose where to migrate within the Empire and beyond.

Although Mudie was one of the few commentators to have some apprehension about Stirling’s report and the frenzy that followed, his opinions of the venture were overall quite positive and supportive. The government, too, remarked upon and promoted the Swan River as a free colony. In 1829, the Colonial “department” published *Hints on Emigration to the New Settlement on the Swan and Canning Rivers, on the West Coast of Australia*. In it, the author Joseph Cross remarked on how the Australian penal colonies “have made surprising progress,” with the use of convict labor and postulated that a similar colony, like Swan River, “with

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<sup>59</sup> Robert Mudie, *The Picture of Australia: Exhibiting New Holland, Van Dieman’s Land, and All the Settlements, from the First at Sydney to the Last at Swan River* (London: Whittaker and Treacher, 1829): 327-328.

independent persons of correct character” would greatly increase “the probabilities of a speedy and favorable result.”<sup>60</sup>

Not only did it seem that a free settlement could be more economically successful in less time than a convict one, but it also would keep its inhabitants “pure.” Indeed, Cross discusses how settlers and their offspring would not have to worry about their bloodlines containing “dubious” elements, like convicts.<sup>61</sup> That one could start a new life without worrying about sullyng their family’s genealogical purity would have seemed a useful marketing tool in attracting migrants to the Swan River scheme, and may even partly explain why so many people considered Western Australia as their new home in the first years after the settlement’s foundation. It also helps explain the great deal of attention given to the colonial venture in the British press. Although the numbers of free settlers that were coming to New South Wales and Van Dieman’s Land during Swan River Mania in 1829 were increasing, migration to these colonies was still largely forced. The year before settlers landed at Swan River there were around 31,000 white settlers and convicts living in Australian colonies. Of that number, just 4,121 came of their own volition or were born to those that had arrived freely. The other 85% of arrivals came as or were born to one or more convict parents.<sup>62</sup> In addition, the Australian penal colonies had uneven sex ratios. There were four men to every woman in 1828.<sup>63</sup> The Swan River Colony promised to be far more family-based, and in the first group of settlers, sex ratios

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<sup>60</sup> Joseph Cross, *Hints on Emigration to the New Settlement at Swan River*.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> Clemens Fritz, *From English in Australia to Australian English: 1788 to 1900* (Frankfurt am Main: In English Corpus Linguistics, 2007): 18.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

were more proportionate. In 1833, the Swan River Colony had two men to every woman.

Of special interest is how broad the appeal of Swan River was to the British public. Unemployed disgruntled weavers were not the only Britons interested in the settlement. Not enough farmers came to the colony in its first few years for it to succeed agriculturally, but they still made up about 20% of the early settlement's working population.<sup>64</sup> Their enthusiasm for emigration, like all the settlers inspired by vivid and promising descriptions of Western Australia, was high. Charles Gee was a farm laborer who came with the Hentys, a respected landholding family from Sussex. Before leaving England, he remarked in a poem:

So hear is health to Henty and all his joyful crew.  
So hear is off to New Holland if God will spare our lives,  
All with little children, hower sweethearts and hower wives.<sup>65</sup>

Again, it is clear how family-driven this settlement was in the early years. The eagerness to move one's family to what was then and still is one of the most remote places on earth demonstrates the anticipation that despite the risk involved, this place would be worth traveling to start anew. What is more, returning back to England seemed unlikely, save for the well to do. The *Times* remarked upon the passengers aboard the *Gilmore*, one of the earlier ships to arrive at Swan River, just before their

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<sup>64</sup> Pamela Statham, "Why Convicts II: The Decision to Introduce Convicts to Swan River," in C.T. Stannage [ed.], *Studies in Western Australian History IV: Convictism in Western Australia* (Nedlands, WA: University of Western Australia Press, 1981).

<sup>65</sup> M. Bassett, *The Hentys: An Australian Colonial Tapestry* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954): 53.

departure from St. Katherine's Docks in London. Thomas Peel paid for the conveyance of the vast majority of those aboard, in exchange for their servitude in Western Australia. The *Times* referred to Mr. Peel, one of the prime investors of the Swan River scheme, as "a second Noah," who saw Swan River as "the new Ararat."<sup>66</sup> Despite the biblically proportioned optimism of Peel and "the confident hopes of the success of the undertaking" by the ship's indentured servants, the *Times* reported that the passengers still "labour[ed] under the depression at the idea of leaving their native land..."<sup>67</sup> So although emigrants to Swan River showed great hopefulness in the venture, such high spirits were accompanied by bouts of sullenness. Despite the drawbacks, reports of Western Australia being a "portion of the largest, most healthy, and perhaps most fertile island in the world", and Swan River itself as "broad and magnificent," seemed to assuage many people's fears.<sup>68</sup> They believed they could look forward to more comfortable lives in their new homeland, even if it meant starting anew.

Such descriptions appealed greatly to some outside the working class(es) as well. They seemed especially alluring to those frustrated by what appeared to be increasingly limited opportunities for upward mobility at home. Even for the gentry, there was always the desire to better one's estate or position. Besides Thomas Peel, cousin of future Prime Minister Robert Peel, many other British landed gentry received land grants at Swan River for their investments, though none as large as

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<sup>66</sup> "Swan River Colony," *The Times*, July 30, 1829.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *Trewman's Exeter Flying Post or Plymouth and Cornish Advertiser*, January 29, 1829; *Royal Cornwall Gazette, Falmouth Packet & Plymouth Journal*, December 20, 1828.

Peel's, which, as one observer complained, was "larger than many German principalities."<sup>69</sup> James Henty, of the same family that conveyed Charles Gee to Swan River, wrote to his brothers of their homeland in Great Britain:

What can we do in England with £10,000 amongst us...brought up as we all have been unless indeed we chose to descend many steps in the scale of Society and which our feelings would ill stand, having at the same time the opportunity of doing as well and perhaps considerably better in New South Wales, under British Dominion and a fine climate.<sup>70</sup>

Though the Hentys clearly had wealth, they perceived themselves as having reached a social ceiling. That ceiling appeared also to be pushing downwards, limiting the comforts to which they had been accustomed. New South Wales seemed to offer greater mobility, opportunity, and apparent return on investments. "I have almost come to the conclusion that New South Wales will do more for our family than England ever will..."<sup>71</sup> This conclusion, however, was altered slightly when James decided the family would move out to "The New Settlement at Swan River," which seemed "of more importance every day." Though the Henty name was "already well known" in New South Wales, the growing competition for land on that side of the continent seemed less appealing than the 80,000 acres of land their investments would guarantee in fledgling Western Australia, a place advertised as a new "Hesperia."<sup>72</sup> The Hentys were not the only wealthy investors caught up in the surge of hopefulness surrounding Swan River. Indeed, the *Hampshire Telegraph and*

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<sup>69</sup> "Letter dated April 24, 1829," *Liverpool Mercury etc*, May 8, 1829.

<sup>70</sup> M. Bassett, *The Hentys: An Australian Colonial Tapestry*, 34-5.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 36-38.

*Sussex Chronicle etc* reported “The alacrity which prevails among the individuals of this class [capitalists], in preparing to depart for this settlement, has no precedent in any former opportunity for emigration.”<sup>73</sup> Perhaps this writer exaggerated, but his sense of this migration as being superlative shows the momentary perception of the Swan River Colony as something historically significant. This perception has largely been lost in histories of the colony.

Enthusiasm for a settlement on what seemed to be beautiful land in a perfect climate and in an area untainted by convictism or slavery was high. What is more, there was not going to be the crowding and unfair competition many Britons acutely felt back home. Yet there was competition once settlers arrived. This land was not free for the taking, as they had perhaps expected. Aboriginal groups like the Nyungar, Wadjuk, and the Pinjarup had lived in the area for tens of thousands of years, perfecting sustainable lifestyles in the harsh Swan River environment. This lifestyle, of course, differed greatly from the one Britons expected to live out in Western Australia. The Nyungar hunted and gathered semi-nomadically, moving season to season in small bands to available sources of food. Often, they would burn areas to attract new vegetation and wildlife. This feature of the Nyungar lifestyle would be especially abrasive to Western Australia’s newest inhabitants and would lead to devastating conflict in later years.

British settlers could not have been totally unaware of these inhabitants. If they had not read about the peoples living in the Swan River basin, they would have

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<sup>73</sup> *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle etc*, February 2, 1829. “Capitalists” is used earlier in the article. I have inserted here in brackets.

likely been familiar with some stories about the Aboriginal people of New South Wales and perhaps Van Dieman's Land. Curiously though, there is little talk of Western Australian native peoples in the British press in the months leading up to the colony's founding. This is especially intriguing given the reports of conflict between Aboriginal people and settlers in New South Wales. One might expect there to be more concern about native resistance to the new colony. Talk of Aboriginals people near the Swan in 1827 and 1828, however, is not entirely absent. The earliest reports came alongside Stirling's examination of the area. An article from *The Standard* about Stirling's expedition wrote that "Parties of natives were not unfrequently met with—they differed but little from the Aboriginals of New South Wales, and were less shy and more friendly than such vagrants usually are."<sup>74</sup> Here, we might again be seeing Stirling's influence over people's perceptions of Western Australia. Stirling traveled extensively around the settled parts of Australia and surely knew of the many problems cohabitation between whites and natives caused. While the Swan River Colony proved to be no exception to these problems, Stirling likely wanted the natives of the area he promoted to seem exceptional.

Another article, written over a year after Stirling's initial report, in *The Morning Chronicle* gave a lengthy description of the Swan's native population:

In the winter the natives retire to the hills, where their food is the opossum, the kangaroo, the land tortoise, and birds, of which the country affords a great variety and abundance, with roots and vegetables. Their appearance is forbidding, and their manner ferocious; but if managed

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<sup>74</sup> "Multiple New Items," *The Standard*, October 10, 1827. Also see: "Presbyterians," *The Morning Chronicle*, September 22, 1828.

with skill the natives may be attached, although great care must be taken not to give offence—for on the slightest provocation they are inclined to resort to hostile measure, and are capricious and vengeful.<sup>75</sup>

This account, if any of the potential settlers read it, should have caused some pause. There seemed to be little to suggest that there would be any less conflict with Aboriginal people in Western Australia than there had been with those in New South Wales and Van Dieman's Land. Supposedly, Aboriginal peoples' "ferocious" "manner" could be subdued and managed with careful skill, but who among the settlers—aside from a few officers who had experience in the antipodes—had any skill of that sort? Perhaps the hopeful hear what they want to hear and read what they want to read. Even if settlers read any of the scant writings on Western Australian natives, the positive and optimistic reports (which made up the vast majority of articles) on the area that the natives inhabited would have remained quite persuasive. Not everyone ignored the risk of conflict with tribes like the Nyungar. Stirling brought "one company of some regiment...as a protection against the incursions of the natives."<sup>76</sup> Unfortunately, this introduction of British arms was just a prelude to the conflict and bloodshed that the founding of the Swan River Colony created. The Aboriginal people would suffer the far greater part.

### Conclusion

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<sup>75</sup> "Proposed Settlement on the Western Coast of New Holland," *The Morning Chronicle*, December 16, 1828.

<sup>76</sup> "Multiple News Items," *The Standard*, November 24, 1828.



On September 10, 1829, while the first set of settlers struggled (at this point unbeknownst to the British public) to survive in the sandy shantytown that was the Swan River Colony, Henry Norris, age 24, stood accused of simple larceny at Old Bailey. He had stolen a coat and some money from a lodger with whom he had shared a bedroom with in East London. Norris admitted during the proceedings that he had attempted to escape to Swan River after making away with the lodger's possessions, but the boat he boarded (unnamed by the trial's transcript) did not leave on that day. Frustrated, Norris left the boat and headed to his father's place to hide, but was soon apprehended. Despite pleading guilty and arguing that he had previously been well behaved, the court sentenced Norris to seven years of labor in New South Wales.<sup>77</sup> The fate of Henry Norris was an ironic one: in an attempt to better his life and move to a free settlement, Norris was instead incarcerated and sent to a penal colony (though one might argue he was better off going to established and growing New South Wales than what awaited settlers at Swan River). Norris was just one of the thousands of British and Irish people who contemplated migrating to the Swan River Colony between 1828, its proclamation, and 1832, the colony's first census. And although Norris never made it to Swan River, during that same period, at least 1,200 others did. They were predominantly English, overwhelmingly young, eclectic in occupation, and a good deal of them came with family. The earliest settlers arrived for various reasons and were convinced by myriad sources. Travel guides,

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<sup>77</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* ([www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 7.0, 08 December 2014), September 1829, trial of Henry Norris (t18290910-233).

government decrees, editorials, advertisements, and newspaper reports all had a hand in creating what contemporaries dubbed “Swan River Mania,” where both the government and public expected at least 10,000 British and Irish souls to be transplanted halfway across the world. That this “New Salem” was to be free of convicts, supposedly bountiful in rich soil, and plentiful in opportunity appealed to a diverse swath of people who perceived their homeland to be both overpopulated and economically frustrated.

But the Swan River was not what settlers had hoped for, at least not immediately. It was clear to the first settlers upon their arrival that the Swan River was not the land of milk and honey that newspapers had advertised. The same newspapers that presented Western Australia so positively also had a hand in its slow growth. Publications in Britain received settlers’ disheartened letters about the poor land at Swan River. Soon, word spread that the area around Swan River appeared to be little more than sand and spinifex.<sup>78</sup> One paper wrote, “The soil is not near so fertile as has been represented but...of a light and sandy nature, the heavy rains had so washed away a great part of it, and the settlers were almost in a state of starvation...”<sup>79</sup> Though the Colonial Office attempted to quell the rumor mills, the word was out, even if it was often greatly exaggerated, that the Swan River was not the land of opportunity once promised. Migrants poised to go to Swan River either stayed in Britain or went elsewhere, usually to New South Wales or Van Dieman’s

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<sup>78</sup> Ian Berryman, *Swan River Letters: Volume 1* (Glengarry: Swan River Press, 2002): 29-30.

<sup>79</sup> Reginald Thomas Appleyard and Toby Manford, *The Beginning: European Settlement and Early Discovery of Swan River, Western Australia* (Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press, 1979): 169.

Land. Around 1,125 settlers arrived at Swan River in 1830. In 1833 there were only 73 new arrivals, while 148 left that same year.<sup>80</sup> Thomas Peel, the great financier of the scheme, stayed the course and laid claim to his 100,000 hectares. In 1842, an Anglican minister reported back to Britain on Peel's current state of affairs: "Everything about him shows the broken-down gentleman—clay floors and handsome plate—curtains for doors and piano forte—windows without glass and costly china."<sup>81</sup>

The colony did not flourish in the early years. It languished. Those that did stay, like Thomas Peel, struggled to make use of the land while maintaining their British comforts. Good land existed, but it was limited to the banks of the Swan River and could not support the colony's needs on its own, so settlers who did not receive these fertile plots were forced to make due elsewhere.<sup>82</sup> However, this land required much more labor and more time to be made useful. For many arriving settlers, there simply was not land ready for farming near Perth and Fremantle. This meant that a good deal of settlers, especially Scots, went further inland hoping to find better land. This inland migration was driven strongly by family units, and groups that came together from the British Isles often went inland together as well.<sup>83</sup> Migrants who arrived alone or in smaller groups often followed these inland families when they realized work could not be found on farms near the Swan.

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<sup>80</sup> *Broken Spears: Aboriginals and Europeans in the Southwest of Australia.*, 89.

<sup>81</sup> Macintyre, *A Concise History of Australia*, 80.

<sup>82</sup> Leigh S.H. Beaton, "Westralian Scots: Scottish Settlement and Identity in Western Australia, Arrivals 1829-1850, 59.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, 71.

Those that stayed near the coast struggled to build the towns of Perth and Fremantle. One settler, George Moore, described the area around the mouth of the Swan in 1830 as:

...a bare, barren-looking district of sandy coast; the shrubs cut down for firewood, the herbage trodden bare, a few wooden houses, many ragged-looking tents and contrivances for habitations...a few cheerless, dissatisfied people with gloomy looks, plodding their way through the sand from hut to hut to drink grog, and grumble out their discontents to each other...<sup>84</sup>

Moore's account made in the first year of the colony echoed what many back in the British Isles had read in newspapers: that Swan River settlers lived in abject poverty and struggled to survive. While early life in the colony was fraught with difficulty and disillusionment, colonists were not helpless, and those who stayed actively worked to improve the settlement. By 1831, workers built permanent houses, inns, shops, a church, and a prison, all according to the urban planning of surveyor-general John S. Roe. In 1833, Roe expanded that plan to accommodate growth.<sup>85</sup> However, growth occurred materially more than it did in terms of population. While permanent structures increased to replace the tents and shanties settlers used in the early months of the colony, the population decreased slightly as departures exceeded arrivals and natural growth. In 1834, the colony's European population hovered at around 2,000 residents.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> R. Reece and R. Pascoe, *A Place of Consequence: A Pictorial History of Fremantle* (Fremantle, WA: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1983): 5.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-7.

<sup>86</sup> Geoffrey Bolton, *Land of Vision and Mirage*, 11.

It would take several decades for anything resembling the wealth and prosperity many expected to appear. On June 17, 1833, nearly four years to the date of the Swan River Colony's founding, a group from "almost every clime and country" known as the "Friends of Ireland" met in Philadelphia to discuss the future of the Irish. James Gowen, the President of the association, addressed "the people of Great Britain and Ireland" and called for nothing short of revolution to "crush the despots."<sup>87</sup> Throughout the piece, Gowen lists the many injustices against the Irish and the rights that they were owed. In his final, passionate section of the address, Gowen writes:

No argument could persuade the poor man that because he is poor, the dead bodies of his wife and children should be cut to pieces, and sold for the benefit of those who deprived him of his rights and reduced him to poverty. Arguments there may be, but they must be fallacious, that would persuade you to give up your *birthright in the garden of the world* and be transported to the swamps and barren sands of Peel's Swan river. Is this at last to be the only glorious privilege of Irishmen!<sup>88</sup>

This final cry in Gowen's address profoundly demonstrates how far opinions of Swan River had fallen less than half a decade after overwhelmingly optimistic reports had caused a mania of interest in Western Australia. According to the Friends of Ireland, the Irish people had suffered immeasurable calamities. They had suffered through war, famine, and many thousands had been forced to emigrate away from their families and homes. Irish men and women had fled to many places in order to seek

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<sup>87</sup> James Gowen, "Address of the Association of the 'Friends of Ireland' and the Irishmen in the City and County of Philadelphia, to the people of Great Britain and Ireland."

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

better lives. Many of these places proved to be difficult new homes, and so Gowen had a wide selection of troubled destinations that would have aided his argument that emigration was an unfair solution to the Irish people's myriad problems. Instead of the United States, England, Canada, or New South Wales, Gowen chose the Swan River Colony to illustrate his point. All of these potential new homelands appeared to offer something to migrants, but the Swan River seemed to be the place that had the greatest disparity between promise and reality.

The Swan River colony may seem like an odd colony to want to study since it failed to meet its prospects. It was not exceptional in its growth, nor was it ever a complete failure. Other Australian colonies outpaced Western Australia and British migrants went in far greater numbers to other parts of the British Empire and beyond. There were also settlements and colonial schemes that were far more disastrous than James Stirling's project. However, this essay has argued that the value of studying the first group of migrants is not necessarily in seeing what they did or did not accomplish in those first few years of settlement, but in seeing what informed their aspirations, expectations, and motives in departing their homelands for a land half a world away from almost everything and everyone they had ever known. Few other colonial ventures were to places as remote as the southwestern corner of Australia.

While settlers to Canada, the United States, New South Wales, and to a lesser extent South Africa and the West Indies could expect to find established, largely English-speaking societies, colonists to Western Australia chose to go to a land they knew little about, relying on just one voyage's account and the sometimes dubious

newspaper reports that followed. Swan River was many thousands of miles away from Great Britain and Ireland. To its west and south lay vast oceans, and to its north and east were nearly as vast oceans of sand and dirt. Of course, settlers knew almost nothing of what existed beyond the western coast and in the interior, a fact that should make the decision to migrate to this spot even more startling. While the reports of the land and climate were immensely favorable, working the land and making a living in this new part of the world would largely have to be done from scratch. Yet the British Colonial government expected and planned that there would be 10,000 settlers there by 1833. Others in the press and public predicted even greater numbers.

The excitement found in British newspapers and select letters and guides surrounding the announcement of a new British colony at Swan River demonstrates much about what the British press believed the public wanted to hear, and what some in the public desired. First, that the new settlement was to be free of slaves or convicts was seen as a huge advantage by many. Second, the government offered cheap land for those who could make it to Swan River. This presented an opportunity for those who had never owned land and for those who believed the ability to keep or gain more land was limited in Britain. Third, Stirling reported that this land would be extremely favorable to a prosperous agricultural settlement. Fourth, Swan River Mania also shows the desire for an alternative to established British colonies or English-speaking societies. Each seemed to lack in one area or have some fault in another. The eastern United States was little better than the British Isles for those who dreamed of becoming yeomen, and getting to the continent's western interior was no

easy or cheap task. Slavery still marked the West Indies, where most land was also already owned. The Australian colonies of New South Wales, Van Dieman's Land, and smaller Norfolk Island, all had large numbers of convicts, and though free settlers were increasingly tipping the scales of free and unfree residents, such societies were still viewed as tainted by many. So while the Swan River Colony can tell us what was attractive about the Swan River Colony, it can also speak to what was unattractive about other destinations. In the minds of settlers, Swan River could be what other places, their homelands, and other parts of the anglosphere were not. The Swan River Colony stood out against already settled areas, because it allowed for a new society. This was novel.

The settling by free British and Irish settlers of the southwestern corner of Australia in 1829 marked a moment of colonial experimentation. While that experiment went awry and was eclipsed in short time by the better organized and more well informed colony of South Australia, the Swan River Colony deserves the merit of being the first of its kind in Australia and exceptional relative to the rest of the Empire. This thesis has barely uncovered what is to be said and learned from the migration history of the early Swan River Colony. But it has, I hope, at least asked questions and posed problems that will set up a foundation from which larger and more in-depth studies can be built. James Stirling's Swan River scheme was a brief but intense moment in the history of the British Empire, and has not been given the attention I believe its dynamism deserves. This short work can hopefully garner more attention for a fascinating episode of British social and imperial history.



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