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STUDENT RESEARCH PAPERS IN AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

No. 3

1978

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IN

AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

No. 3
1978

Authorised by Geoff Robinson, Secretary, History Club.

Typeset and Printed by the S.R.C. Office.

PREFACE

This journal is the third in a series commenced in 1976. In that year it was decided to publish the most original and best presented papers received in Australian History. The essays involved original research and frequently touched on local history topics.

The 1976 initiative has attracted a good deal of favourable comment . The journal now in fact circulates to most Australian libraries.

Our students this year have maintained the standards of previous years. The papers are relevant and imaginative. Congratulations are extended to those whose papers have been selected for publication to the "honorable mentions" listed below, and to the many other students who invested energy and hours in the project.

Howard Byfield	"The Settlement of the Rivers"
Graham Byrnes	"Whaling off the East Coast of Australia"
Suzanne Javes	"The Significance of the Hotel in Australian History"
David Kilby	"The Federated Seamens Union of Australasia and the 1925 Elections"
Danny McCloghry	"Governor Phillip and Major Ross – the Settlement under Strain"
Stephen Pullin	"St. John's Theological College – Armidale to Morpeth"
Tim Wellcox	"The Bush Myth in the Australian Legend."

C. Bacchi
P. Hempenstall
N. Rutherford.

Once again, the History Club is pleased to be associated with the presentation of this collection of essays. The finished product is a fitting tribute to the authors of the essays as well as Carol Bacchi, Peter Hempenstall and Noel Rutherford of the History Department who initiated the whole project.

History Club Executive.

"SOLOMON WISEMAN, AND HIS PART IN THE SETTLEMENT OF THE HUNTER VALLEY."

BY

B.M. PENGLASE

SYNOPSIS:

It was a stirring time in the infant colony of New South Wales when Solomon Wiseman, the indomitable emancipist, brought his large family to his land-grant on the Lower Hawkesbury River. Under Macquarie's orders, surveyors were probing north from Castle Hill, the end of the Government Road, to open a route between Sydney and the Hunter Valley. Where the pioneers' track crossed the Hawkesbury, Wiseman built the ferry that was to become an important link in the Great North Road, and a hub of activity for settlers, bushrangers, surveyors and toiling chain-gangs alike.

The tale of Wiseman's Ferry and of its founder, the indomitable Solomon Wiseman – ex-convict, pioneer farmer, innkeeper, shipowner and Government contractor – is closely interwoven with the early history of exploration and settlement throughout the northern districts of the colony of New South Wales. The activities of those who played their part in the spread of settlement to the north and west of the Lower Branch of the Hawkesbury River, of which Wiseman's Ferry was the hub and the main gateway, provide a colourful illustration of early nineteenth -century life in the colony, and of the development and extension of numerous homesteads and townships from Windsor to Hunter's River.

The figure of Solomon Wiseman looms larger than life in the legends that grew up around him and around the home he built near the site of the celebrated ferry on the Hawkesbury River crossing. The facts revealed in the official records, however, are no less interesting, if in some respects more credible, than the stories for which the man himself was either directly or indirectly responsible.

Believed to have been born in 1778, Wiseman claimed that he belonged to a respected landowning family living near Folkestone, Kent. He claimed to have engaged in the 'respectable profession' of smuggling, conveying coveted French products across the Strait of Dover and the Channel during the Napoleonic Wars. According to the story still told by residents of Wiseman's Ferry, the reckless young smuggler's sloop was apprehended by a Revenue cutter, whereupon he was charged, convicted of smuggling, sentenced to death, then reprieved and transported to Botany Bay.[1] In actual fact, he was convicted of theft while employed as a lighterman on the Thames by the firm of Lucas, Lucas and Barker, of London. At the Old Bailey on October 30, 1805, Wiseman was arraigned on two counts. The first charge involved the theft of 704 lb. of "Brazil wool", valued at 24 pounds the property of his employers; the second was for a similar theft of property belonging to three persons – Richard Buller, Cornelius Buller and Hieroniman Berminster – presumably also the proprietors of a shipping or importing firm. Though death was the statutory penalty for his crime, the reprieve and commutation of the sentence to transportation was a normal concession of the time. Nevertheless, Wiseman's reputed 'good character', to which seven witnesses testified on his behalf, may have influenced the clemency extended to him.[2]

Wiseman's story was that, as he was a gentleman of influential family, the support of Lord Bathurst was gained for him in presentation of a petition for reprieve, which resulted in the commutation of sentence. His status also earned him the privilege of taking his wife and young family with him. Apparently the family was sufficiently well provided with money to secure comfortable accommodation, and there is no doubt that all of the Wiseman family did land in Sydney from the "Alexander I" on August 20, 1806.[3] The Muster Lists and the Indent of the "Alexander I" name Wiseman's wife Jane (free born Middleton), his son William (aged 5 in the year of arrival) and another son Richard Alexander who was born at the Cape of Good Hope on the outward voyage.[4] A female child was listed, but not named. The infant son Richard was baptised on October 3, 1806, his birthdate being given as July 3, 1806.[5]

Little is known of Wiseman's first few years as a convict, but on June 4, 1809, he was included in a list of subscribers to a fund for enclosing the Sydney burial-ground.[6] Thereafter he emerged from obscurity gradually. Although still unpardoned, in 1811 he had a sloop-rigged schooner built for him at Cockle Bay (Darling Harbour)[7] Another vessel called the "Hope" was built for him in 1812, the year in which he was pardoned by Governor Macquarie.[8] A shrewd businessman, Wiseman lost no time in applying for a licence for premises in Bligh Street, Sydney, and becoming an innkeeper.[9] He then added the "Mary Ann" to his fleet, to exploit the first licence granted to export cedar from Port Stephens.[10] With his sloops plying the coastal waters carrying coal and cedar, sealskins and other profitable cargoes, and the social climate of Sydney under Macquarie favourable for the rise of an emancipist, Wiseman seemed set to become a prosperous Sydney merchant. But the risks were considerable.

For the capital necessary to expand his trading interests, Wiseman mortgaged his hotel and two of his sloops.[11] Then, in 1817, disaster struck. The wreck of the "Hope" at Port Stephens in July of that year was followed three months later by another misfortune, reported in the "Sydney Gazette":

"... on Saturday evening last arrived in an open boat from Gummoramorah, lying between the five Islands and Shoalhaven ... with unpleasant tidings of the loss of the sloop Hawkesbury Packet, 28 tons, on a reef of rocks at the entrance of Gummoramorah, whither she was destined to lade in cedar;"[12]

As a result, Wiseman was unable to redeem his property and on July 18, 1818, it was assigned to the mortgage-holder, Samuel Terry. [13] Almost ruined by these losses, Wiseman nevertheless proceeded to live up to his reputed family motto: "Resurgam!" He had already applied for and now received from Governor Macquarie a grant of 200 acres of land, which he selected in the locality opposite the confluence of the Hawkesbury and McDonald Rivers, known variously as Lower Branch, First Branch, Lower Hawkesbury, and Lower Portland Head, and now known as Wiseman's Ferry.[14] With his family, Wiseman moved out to the farm in 1819, and went on to build another fortune, this time based on farming, innkeeping and the profits from Government concessions and contracts.

Under Macquarie's order, various explorers, officially known as 'surveyors', were probing from Castle Hill, the end of the Government Road, to determine the route of the future Great North Road.[15] One of the first of these was Constable John Howe, from Windsor, whose activities may have influenced Wiseman in his choice of a holding.[16] The proposed Great North Road was an important developmental project, for the purpose of providing a land route between Sydney and the towns of the Hunter Valley – Wollombi, Maitland, Singleton, Newcastle and many smaller settlements.

By 1821, so many overlanders were using an unmade track on the north of Lower Portland Head that Wiseman opened an inn on his land, calling it "The Sign of the Packet".[17] His cedar concessions and other profitable trading ventures continued; in 1821 he secured a contract for the transport of a detachment of the 48th Regiment and convicts to Port Macquarie.[18] Within a year or two, his tender for supplying meat to the Government stores was accepted, [19] and he increased his landholdings and his original grant.

On July 2, 1821, his wife Jane died.[20] Some time before this, Wiseman had taken into his employ a man named William Warner, who had arrived in Sydney as a convict under life sentence, aboard the "Admiral Gambler" in 1811.[21] His wife Sophia (nee Williams) sailed as a free immigrant on the "Minstrel", landing in Sydney on October. 25, 1812.[22] Warner accompanied Surveyor-General Oxley as his servant on his first pardon from Governor Macquarie in 1818, and a donation from the Police Fund in 1819.[22] He was working on Solomon Wiseman's farm at Lower Portland Head when he died on May 24, 1825, aged 39.[23] His widow Sophia married Wiseman on November 1, 1826, at St. John's Church, Wilberforce.[24] The Rev. Meares officiated and the witnesses were James Main and William Gow. The signature, "Sol Wiseman", was, according to a note against this entry in the Index, "very shaky".

The index to the 1828 Census lists the following:

Wiseman, Solomon (50), free by servitude, Protestant, Farmer, Lower Portland Head. Number of acres 1100, acres cleared 220, acres cultivated 220; horses 6, horned cattle 80.
Wiseman, Sohpia (40);
Wiseman, William (27);
Wiseman, Alex. R. (22);
Wiseman, John (19);
Wiseman, Thomas (17);
Wiseman, Mary (5);
Wiseman, Sarah (12).

The same Index lists Richard Wiseman, aged 23, as a settler at Nerrern Luskentryre, 880 acres, 20 cleared, 20 cultivated; 1 horse, 60 cattle. (This would appear to be a duplication of the name in the first entry, "Alex. R. Wiseman".)[26]

In 1827 Wiseman built a ferry at the Hawkesbury crossing. He was granted the exclusive rights to levy tolls for seven years, with an exemption for Government horses and property.[27] The punt changed the locality's name (at first unofficially) to Wiseman's Ferry, and paid handsome dividends. Every non-offical traveller had to pay toll; even drovers who swam their stock across were charged 3d per head for 'guiding'.[28]

Wiseman and his second wife had no children.The family lived in Wiseman's large new home, built in 1826–7, and known as Cobham Hall. Part of this building, which was licensed for some time as "The Branch Inn",[29] is still in existence, forming a side section of the present Wiseman Inn. The stone steps leading to the old front

doors were supposed to have been the scene of ghostly manifestations: according to this story, which has apparently survived in the district from the convict days, "one of the ghosts is that of Jane, the first Mrs. Wiseman, who fell or was pushed from the high balcony and crashed to a messy death on the steps."[30] As Jane Wiseman died after an illness five years before the building was begun, the story remains merely as an illustration of the harsh times which produced it.

Wiseman was not noted for leniency to his convict servants. It was asserted that a good worker "never got out of his clutches" if Wiseman could help it; when such a man was due for his ticket of leave, Wiseman provoked a quarrel which involved a charge before a magistrate. The man was given the lash and his ticket was withheld for another year for bad conduct. One such case was that of young William Phillips, who arrived in the colony aboard the Lord Lyndock in 1833, to serve a seven-year sentence.[31] He was assigned to Solomon Wiseman and appears to have been a satisfactory servant until he was suddenly arraigned before a magistrate on a charge of "insolence". Phillips was sentenced to 12 lashes and to be "returned to service". Another case was that of John Dunckley, who was charged on October 22, 1837, with stealing onions and oranges from the garden that he was in the act of weeding when accused.[32] He was sentenced to 25 lashes and, presumably, returned to service.

Treatment such as this and harsh penalties for trivial offences were said to have driven many normally honest, industrious convicts to attempt escape. As death was the penalty for recapture, many escaped convicts became bushrangers and committed "outrages" which stirred the indignation of settlers[33]. Two officers and a detachment of soldiers were stationed at the ferry, and one of their duties was the discipline of convicts, including the men of the chain gangs engaged in road building.[34] The Courthouse Cave – a natural recess under a large overhanging rock beside the convict - built road, about a mile north of the ferry site - was the place where convicts were tried and sentenced by the magistrates; this appointment, which might be purely honorary, was often vested in the surveyors.[35] The verdict was given from Judgement Rock, a natural boulder used as a seat, and it is said that hangings took place at the Hangman's Tree, which was still standing in 1905. There is an almost circular hole in the dome of the cave, and it is claimed that hanging victims were droppedthrough this hole, suspended by a rope attached to the Tree.[36] There is, however, no documentary evidence to support this tale.

During much of Solomon Wiseman's life at Lower Portland Head, surveying and roadbuilding activities, with the frequent passage of settlers and their livestock, created constant traffic through the district and across the river. Under Governor Macquarie, roadbuilding and street layout became a matter for official concern, and this was continued under Governors Brisbane and Darling.[37] The construction of the road from Dural to Wiseman's was commenced in the year 1826 and, though not completed until 1830 "it was trafficable as far as the Hawkesbury by March 1828. Construction on the north side of the river was then undertaken."[38]

The surveyors were at work long before this: Singleton, Major Morriset, Howe, Blaxland jnr. Heneage Finch and others had travelled to and from the Hunter by various land routes, all passing through Wiseman's Ferry since William Parr's Journal had first aroused the interest of Governor Macquarie in 1817.[39] The Government's intention of constructing a "Great North Road" along one or other of the known tracks had been well known for some time, and the plans had come to fruition by May, 1826, when it was reported that:

> "The Great North Road is to be commenced, we believe this day, Mr. Oxley and Mr. Dumaresq having left town for the purpose of marking it out."[40]

With the heavy demand for surveying, as settlers moved steadily north and west and the extension of civilisation demanded means of communication and administration, the lag in the survey of grants and access roads grew steadily worse until, it appears, the Survey Department was forced to employ many unqualified men in the business.[41] One of these was Lieutenant Percy Simpson who, after previous appointments in the colony, took up a grant of land at Dora Creek and in 1828 became an Assistant Surveyor of Roads and Bridges at Wiseman's Ferry, at a salary of 150 pounds per annum and an allowance for his horse. For three years, under great difficulties, he supervised the building of the Great North Road, to the satisfaction of Surveyor-General Mitchell.[42] Among others who worked in the Hawkesbury and Hunter Districts was Lieutenant Johnathan Warner of the 2nd Royal Veterans, who was also an Assistant Surveyor as well as officer in charge of convicts while stationed at Wiseman's Ferry, where he assisted Simpson.[43] It was probably on his trip in 1828, when he was sent to examine a new line of road between Wiseman's and Maitland via Lake Macquarie, that Warner chose his grant of land, 1280 acres, at the spot which came to be known as Warner's Bay.[44] Four of the children of Johnathan

and Mary Warner – James, Augusta Louise, Jonathan, and William – were baptised at Sackville Rectory on the same day, November 4, 1827, the address of the family being given as "The Lower Branch".[45]

With all this activity going forward, Wiseman secured a profitable rations contract, supplying rations to the convict road gangs and the soldiers who guarded them.[46] According to the Government regulations, the ration for each convict in the "iron gangs" was 1 lb. of fresh or salt beef, 1lb. of wheaten meal, ½lb of maize meal, daily." Wiseman's contract, according to Judge Therry, returned him a net profit of between 3,00 and 4,000 pounds a year.[48]

At the remodelled Cobham Hall, Wiseman continued to play the dual role of local squire and elegant host. In support of his part as a genial, kind-hearted gentleman, he wore a swallowtail coat, flowered vest and highly polished boots. A dress-sword completed an ensemble which was more appropriate to a Governor's levee than to a wayside inn.[49] He became widely known as "king of the Hawkesbury", and the legend bloomed; his assigned servants, knowing him for a despot, were not doubt responsible for those aspects of the legend that gave rise to the ghost stories. It was reported in 1833 that he had entertained Governor Darling "and his suite",[50] and in 1835 that he was still entertaining "largely and successfully."[51]

Solomon Wiseman died on November 30, 1838, "at his residence, Lower Portland Head, in his 62nd year".[52] With his famous swallowtail coat and dress-sword, he was buried in his own grounds, beside the remains of his first wife, Jane. After the erection of the Church of St. Mary Magdalene, for which Wiseman had previously donated the land (later found to be Crown Land), the bodies were re-interred in a vault beneath the floor.[53] Many years later, after the church had fallen into ruin, they were finally removed to the cemetery farther down the river where a headstone was erected bearing the insciption:

> "In memory of Solomon Wiseman who died January 12, 1838, aged 61
> also his wife, who died on June 20, 1821, aged 45."

No explanation can be discovered for the discrepancies in the dates. The famous ferry was purchased by the Government in June, 1832, for the sum of 267 pounds. "After the passing of Act of Council No. 12, 9/3/1832, for the better regulation of the Tolls and Ferries through the Colony it was considered expedient as being in the public Line of Road to Hunter's River that this Ferry should be under the Control of Government and the Punts, etc. belonging to Mr. Wiseman were accordingly taken by the Government at a valuation."[54]

Until the opening of the Hawkesbury railway bridge in 1889[55] the northern inland was served only by road, and access was by the river crossings where Wiseman's Ferry, and later Peat's Punt, provided the means. As late as 1894, Wiseman's Ferry was still the principal crossing place for large herds of cattle from the northern 'runs', bound for the Sydney markets.[56] The picturesque history of the Great North Road and of the first settlements from Windsor to the towns of the Hunter Valley is everywhere related to the life and fortunes of Solomon Wiseman and the township that grew up at Wiseman's Ferry.

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2. Session Papers, Old Bailey, 1805, No. 713, Mitchell Library.

3. Shipping Indents, 4/4004, Alexander I, Mitchell Library.

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6. Sydney Gazette, June 4, 1809

7. Ibid, July, 6 1811.

8. J.S. Cumpston, Shipping Arrivals and Departures, Sydney, 1788 - 1835, Mitchell Library, p.90

9. Charles Swancott, "Wiseman's Ferry", Gosford, B.W.H.S., 1970, p.7

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11. Registers of Assignments and Other Legal Instruments, A3620, vol. 6, p.292

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13. Registers of Assignments and Other Legal Instruments, vol. 7 p.125

14. Index to Registers of Grants, 1792 - 1856 (Cumberland), Mitchell Library, vol. 4.

15. H.H. Newell, Road Engineering and Its Development in Australia, Sydney 1938, p.45

16. Sydney Gazette, July, 29, 1820
Sir Thomas Mitchell in his "Report on Roads in New South Wales", 1855, (Mitchell Library), wrote: " ... one line of communication between the seat of the Government and the northern part of the colony having been a desideratum from the earliest days of the settlement, even according to military principles of occupation." p.31

17. Sydney Gazette, March 24, 1821; Sydney Herald, June 13, 1831

18. Ibid, September 8, 1821

19. Ibid, November 27, 1823

20. Sydney Gazette, July, 27 1821

21. T.D. Mutch, Index to 1814 Muster Lists.

22. Ibid.

23. Wentworth Papers, Mitchell Library

24. Index to Parish Registers, Vol. 1

25. Ibid.

26. T.D. Mutch, Index to the 1828 Census Lists, Mitchell Library

27. Colonial Secretary's Correspondence, September, 4, 1827, Archives Office of N.S.W.
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28, Sydney Morning Herald, October, 19. 1843

29. Swancott, op.cit., p.8

30. Frank Cayley, Hawkesbury River Sketchbook, Adelaide, Rigby, 1970

31. Swancott, op.cit., p.11

32. Sydney Gazette, November 5, 1837

33. The Australian, April, 3, 1829
H.A. McL. Morgan R.A.H.S., Vol. 44, 1958, Part 4, p.200

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39. James Jervis, R.A.H.S., Vol. 16, 1930, p.103

40. The Australian, May 24, 1826

41. H.R.A., series I, vol. 23, p.526

42. Thomas L. Mitchell, Three Expeditions into the Interior of Eastern Australia ...; London, 1838, vol. 1, pp.8, 10

43. C.J. Mitchell, Hunter's River, Maitland, Est. C.J. Mitchell, 1973

44. Register of Land Grants, County of Northumberland, vol 9. Index, Mitchell Library.

45. Index to Parish Registers, vol.1

46. Therry, op.cit., p.121

47. Goold, N.H.D.S., vol. 3., 1948, p.104

48. Therry, ibid.

49. Ibid.,

50. The Australian, May 3, 1833

51. Ibid, September 1, 1835

52. Index to Parish Registers, vol. 1

53. Sydney Morning Herald, August 8, 1843

54. H.R.A., series 1, vol. 17, p.574

55. Hawkesbury Advocate, December 22, 1889

56. Swancott, op.cit. P.17

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