Emigation of Women to Australia: Forced and Voluntary[i]
By Dr. Noeline Kyle

The forced and voluntary emigration of women to Australian, began with the First Fleet, with 568 male and 191 female convicts on board. By the time transportation ended, in 1853 for New South Wales, Tasmania, Norfok Island and Moreton Bay, and in 1868 for Western Australia, approximately 158,702 male and female convicts had been transported. About 84,000 of these landed in New South Wales of which, approximately 11,5000 were women. Around 12,000 female convicts went to Van Diemen's Land and Norfolk Island. No Women were sent to Western Australia.[ii] The total number of women transported, 24,960, was tiny compared to men, comprising about 15% of all convicts.[iii] Free women also arrived with the First Fleet and continue to emigrate today. Unassisted female emigrants arrived as wives, daughters and mothers, mostly within a family group. These free settlers paid their own passage, and are notoriously difficult to research. Until the 1850s few were listed individually in shipping lists and, if they travelled in steerage, were not recorded at all. The New South Wales State Records hold all immigration records to 1922, when the Federal Government took over responsibility.

Assisted immigrants are almost always easier to find in the records. With government funds involved official records are readily available, and made accessible today for most states.There are indexes to Bounty Immigrants (1828-1842), and for assisted immigrants from the 1840s to the 1890s for New South Wales, Moreton Bay and Victoria.Many indexes for assisted emigrants to Australia are now online and searchable on state library and state archival websites.[iv] The majority of the 125,000 free emigrants to 1850 to New South Wales were assisted and men outnumbered women by two to one.[v] Women were a minority group in colonial Australia whether convict or free. The social, economic and political status of Australian women reflected British society but was modified by the rough and ready living and working conditions experienced by early arrivals to the colony. While still under sentence convict women can be traced via marriage applications, assignment registers, conditional pardon lists, convict indents, and tickets-of-leave. It is when they were freed and able to marry, travel interstate and re-located elsewhere, that research becomes more difficult.

When researching convict women it is useful to be aware of the general administration of convicts in the colony, and the social and economic differences experienced by women. Although convict women were sent to all destinations, apart from Western Australia, almost half of all women transported went to Van Diemen's Land.[vi] The records for convicts transported to Tasmania are held in the Mitchell Library[vii] in the State Library of New South Wales (ML, NSWSL) , New South Wales State Records. (NSWSR) and the Tasmania Archive Office. On arrival most women were assigned to carry out domestic work for a family. In the first years they were also likely to be assigned to individual soldiers or officers. Some assignment records do

survive but are patchy. The NSWSR hold indexes relating to assignments, and convict indents. Convict indents or arrivals are progressively being placed online. Perhaps of more use to beginning researchers are the muster and census records, which list every resident in the colony. Census records survive for 1828, 1841 and 1891. Musters recorded the numbers of convicts in the colony, and for New South Wales are found for the years 1787-1825 and for Tasmania 1811-1822. Convicts who gave satisfactory service under assignment were entitled to a Ticket-of-Leave and if they continued to show good behaviour would gain a Certificate of Freedom. All of these phases of convict administration are well-recorded on the website of the NSWSR at: http://www.records.nsw.gov.au   and the Society of Australian Genealogists at http://www.sag.org.au

The Parramatta Female Factory in Sydney and the Cascades Female Factory in Hobart, Tasmania were holding depots for arriving female convicts, were prisons for re-offending women, and acted as places of refuge for women mistreated by employers. Prior to this time some women were housed in the upper floor of the Parramatta gaol but this proved highly unsatisfactory to all concerned. A 'new' Parramatta Female Factory, "surrounded by a stone wall, nine and a half feet high" was completed in 1821 further away near the Parramatta River. It closed in 1848. There is an index to the Parramatta Female Factory compiled from records held at NSWSR and the Cascade Female Factory has a website at http://www.femalefactory.com.au/ The Cascades database holds the records of any ' female convict who spent time in Van Diemen's Land is included in the database. Thus, it not only includes those women transported directly to Van Diemen's Land, but also those who came free and were convicted here during the period of transportation (1804-1853), or those who were transported to New South Wales and later sent to Van Diemen's Land (many of whom came via Norfolk Island.'[viii] The records of the female factories are found atML, NSWSL and NSWSR.

The records for researching free emigrant women are many and varied, and patchy and dispersed. Some organisations, like the Female Emigration Societies, meticulously record the leaving, voyage and arrival of individual women. In Australia there are a bewildering array of government and non-government sources, including those associated with women's health, maternity and employment. There are specific passenger lists to search such as those managed by the London Emigration Committee (these found in the Fawcett Collection, London). Nola Mackey has indexed Sydney newspapers for free passengers and crew in and out of Sydney for the period 1830-1842, and these are a useful source.[ix] Other Australian states have various indexes to free passengers arriving and some are available online. However, as Kay Daniels and others point out, most female emigrants to Australia were not middle class gentlewomen but were generally poor, young and unlikely to be important enough to be officially recognised and recorded on any databases.

The Hyde Park Barracks in Sydney was an Immigration Depot for single female immigrants from 1848-1886, and a female asylum from 1862-1886.   Caroline Chisholm established her Female Immigrant Home in 1841 and she also worked on a scheme for female

emigrants departing England in 1846-1847. Upon arrival in Australia immigrant women could make use of or be supported by such organisations as the Young Women's Christian Association, Girls' Friendly Societies, Female Immigration Societies, Boards of Immigration, Traveller's Aid Societies and various Immigration Agents. Women's lives were invariably bound up with children and they are found in the lists of charitable organisations, children's societies, industrial and reformatory schools and orphan schools. Your research journey will certainly be a jigsaw charting the ragged and uneven life events mirroring the uncertain and difficult times young free and convict women faced in the early decades of Australia. Records that have survived from such organisations will be located in the NSWSL or NSWSR and you should check online catalogues as well as other primary databases offered by these repositories. For all ancestors, but especially for women, reconstructing as many of the lives of the people associated with them – including husbands, fathers, brothers or sons, women friends, sisters, neighbours, business associates, friends of the family – can help to assemble information that is relevant to her life. And as we all know, the smallest crumb of information is sometimes all we need to lead us into a line of productive research.

A useful source for immigrant arrivals in Australia before 1850 is to look at the website of the Society of Australian Genealogists. Most of these records are also available in major Australian state, university and some public libraries:

Society of Australian Genealogists and Australian Biographical & Genealogical Record (ABGR):

- 1800-1802 Musters & Lists - NSW & Norfolk Island * - published 1988
- 1805-1806 Musters of NSW & Norfolk Island * - published 1989
- 1811 General Musters of NSW, Norfolk Island & Van Diemen's Land - published 1987
- 1814 General Muster of NSW - published 1987
- 1822 General Muster & Land and Stock Muster of NSW * - published 1988
- 1823, 1824, 1825 General Muster List of NSW * - published 2000
- 1837 General Return of Convicts in NSW - published 1988

Four volumes of pocket biographies have been published, many accompanied by photographs:

- Volume 1 of Series 2 (arrivals/births 1842-1899) - published 1985
- Volume 2 of Series 2 * - published 1987
- Volume 3 of Series 2 * - published 1989
- Volume 1 of Series 1 (arrivals/births before 1842, plus a supplement to the Series 2 volumes) * - published 1991

Records already captured in part or in full include:

- NSW convict transportation records - full details from all available series of transportation records to 1812 have now been produced on a CD-ROM. Indents to 1816 have also been captured.
- Musters 1800-1837 (the seven volumes listed above)
- Norfolk Island Musters & Lists 1792-1809
- Free passengers arriving in Sydney 1826-1842. Checking work for the period 1826-1837 (over 12,000 persons) commenced early in 2003, and a CD for this period expected before the end of 2003.
- Early Sydney & Parramatta Baptisms, Marriages & Burials
- Census of NSW 1828

- Muster of Van Diemen's Land 1821.[x]

If your female ancestor was an unassisted immigrant, the research problems encountered increase dramatically. If you peruse the website of the New South Wales State Records their advice for researching unassisted passengers is not encouraging. There are no lists of unassisted passengers comparable to the assisted records and if you do not know the name of the ship your ancestor sailed on, you are faced with the painstaking task of combing through endless and mind-numbing microfilm copies of unindexed lists of passengers, one ship after another.

In summary, some of the strategies for finding out more about emigrant and convict women include:

- **Birth, death and marriage certificates** – the staples of family history research. If women are single look at the marriage and births of their sisters, mothers, aunts, brothers, and cousins. Check the witnesses to marriages as these can reveal significant family relationships; look at the nurse/midwife/witness to a birth as this may show mothers, sisters or other family members take care of birthing. With death certificates look at the informant – was it a nurse, the husband, a close friend?

- **Marriage, re-marriage** - researching the men in a woman's life can provide starting points for mapping out her life. Women's lives are not just reflected through men's but can be seen as parallel to and explained as a part thereof. Look at the personal, social and political dimensions of how women lived in the period you are researching.

- **Local records, especially local newspapers, records associated with their work** – Australian towns and villages were small prior to 1900 and local newspaper were more likely to report on minor characters, and indeed events associated with women's lives.

- **Look at work colleagues, women friends, sisters, neighbours, the community in which she lived –** if you do not know anything about how your female ancestor lived then widen your perspective. Look at people around her, and in the community in which she lived.

- **Oral history** – if female ancestors are not as likely to be in the official records we need to try and find out as much as we can from remaining relatives, other people who might have known her.

- **Other sources** -There are many other sources to add to your research of convict and emigrant women: these include letters, diaries, family books, cook books, photographs, sewing books, other memorabilia, trophies/prizes, obituaries, divorce records, electoral rolls, directories, government publications, pioneer registers, council records, court and gaol returns, inquests, charitable records, hospital records, church records, school records and women's organisations. Begin your search by looking at the New South Wales State Library and State Record collections (their online information is very good) and then move on to other Australian states. There are local, state and national genealogical societies that can

help with sources.

- **For female immigrants** after arrival the following list of Australian organisations could be useful. Look for them in the records of the various state libraries or archives:
    - Agents for Immigration, e.g. New South Wales Immigration Agent Reports.

    - Assisted and Unassisted Immigration and Bounty Indexes
    - Boards of Immigration, e.g. New South Wales Immigration Board Lists

    - Girls' Friendly Societies (in all states)

    - Young Women's Christian Associations (Sydney and Melbourne)

    - Benevolent Asylums, (Sydney and Brisbane)

    - Refuge for Fallen Women, (Melbourne)

    - Ragged Schools, (in all states)

    - Other female refuges, church societies, and private charitable organisations.

    - Immigration Aid Societies
    - Female Immigrant Homes e.g. as established by Caroline Chisholm in New South Wales.

That age-old research problem we encounter when researching women's lives always seems to be with us…we find Mrs. Smith, or Mrs. A. Smith, (the "A" could stand for Alan, the husband, or it could be her name Alice), there is Nurse Brown and Matron Brown, and, of course, Miss Smith,…the missing names and incomplete or incorrect names for women and the lack of rigour in linking not just married names to single names but the problem of when a woman marries several times…all of this imprecision with women's names complicates the research process unnecessarily. Women's invisibility in family history is part of a wider historical perspective which relegates women's lives, too often, to the invisibility of neglect and omission. As family historians we are in a unique position to research, record and write about our women ancestors who were brave enough to live the most extraordinary lives. The least we can do is include their stories more accurately, in more detail, and more vividly in our family histories.

Footnotes:

[i] The text of this paper was first concieved in a paper delivered to Society of Genealogists, Charterhouse Building, London.Wednesday, 31st August, 2005 and has been shortened, modified and updated to take account of changes since that time.

[ii] Deborah Oxley,, *Convict Maids: The forced migration of women to Australia,* Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp.253-254.
Charles Bateson, *The Convict Ships, 1787-1868,* Library of Australian History, Sydney, 1983, p.9.

[iii] L. L. Robson,, *The Convict Settlers of Australia,* Melbourne University Press, 1965, p.74.

[iv] See NSW State Library for access to the Index to assisted (Bounty) immigrants to New South Wales 1828-1842 (known as the Bounty index), a searchable computer index, book at the Family History Desk on the ground floor. Other state and local libraries have copies of this index and the microfilm reels which have the passenger's details recorded. Check with your local family history society or local library.

[v] Anne Summers, *Damned Whores and God's Police: the Colonization of Women in Australia,* Penguin Books, 1975, p.279.
Ruth Teale, ed *Colonial Eve: Sources on women in Australia 1788-1914,* Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1978, p.39.

[vi] Kay Daniels, *Convict Women,* Allen & Unwin, St. Leonards, 1998, p.50.

[vii] The printed books, manuscripts, photographic, map and others collections of the Mitchell and Dixson Libraries form an extensive research collection relating to Australia with special emphasis on New South Wales, Antarctica and the South West Pacific.

[viii] http://www.femalefactory.com.au/FFRG/fffdb.htm
see also, Deborah Oxley,, *Convict Maids: The forced migration of women to Australia,* Cambridge University Press, 1996.
Charles Bateson, *The Convict Ships, 1787-1868,* Library of Australian History, Sydney, 1983
K. Alford, *Production and Reproduction? An Economic History of Women in Australia, 1788-1850,* Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1984.
Beddoe, D. *Welsh Convict women: A Study of women Transported from Wales to Australia, 1787-1852,* S. Williams, Barry, 1979.
Damousi, Joy, *Depraved and Disorderly: Female Convicts, Sexuality and Gender in Colonial Australia,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997.

[ix] Nola Mackey, Index of Passengers and Crew in and out of Sydney from Sydney newspapers [1830-1841]/V1-V7, Grafton Family History Centre, Grafton, 1998.
See also on female immigrants:
Gothard, Jan, *Blue China: Single Female Migration to Colonial Australia,* Melbourne University Press, 2001.
Hammerton, A. J. *Emigrant Gentlewomen: Genteel poverty and female emigration, 1830-1914,* Croom Helm, London, 1979.
Richards, Eric, ed., *Visible Women: Female Immigrants in Colonial Australia,* Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University, 1995.
Rushen, Elizabeth, *Single & Free: female migration to Australia, 1833-1837,* Australian Scholarly Publishing, Kew, 2003.

[x] Society of Australian Genealogists, <http://www.sag.org.au>, The Rocks, Sydney, sourced July, 2005.
(marked * above) remain in print and are available from the online bookshop at http://www.sag.org.au