

CHILDREN AT PORT ARTHUR

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CHILDREN

As was the case with women at Port Arthur, it has not been possible to find a definite date for the arrival of the first children; there may have been some children attached to the military before the Brownell children (Jane b 1827, James b 1829 Mary Elizabeth b Oct. 1832) arrived with their parents in October 1832. The only child's account of Port Arthur located so far are the reminiscences of Edith Mary Hall, nee Giblin, who visited Port Arthur during the time her uncle, A.H. Boyd was commandant. As with the recollections of Mrs Irvine, they lack the immediacy of a contemporary account, but are nevertheless of great interest.

For detailed accounts of daily life and routine, albeit in a secondary sense, the most valuable material is contained in the Lempriere diary, but the life of the Lempriere children could not be taken to reflect the typical. As with servants, a great disparity would appear to have existed between the lives of the Lempriere children and, for example, the Durham children, and a "typical" existence would probably lie somewhere between these two documented extremes. It is not proposed to discuss education of children here, as this subject merits special attention, but Lempriere's references to teaching his own children have been noted.

The Lempriere children spent a lot of time with their parents, the boys going with their father for long walks (27 June 1834 to Brown Mountain Blowhole, 28 Feb. 1837 to Brown Mountain & Blowhole, 5 Aug. 1837 to Opossum Bay to shoot, 29 Jan. 1838 fishing at Safety Cove) while the girls and younger children accompanied their parents on shorter walks, usually to the government gardens (12 Feb. 1837, 1 Jul. 1837, 7 Jan. 1838).

It may be safe to assume that the children enjoyed these sorts of activities; their reactions are not recorded, but generally Lempriere seemed to make a genuine attempt to make life pleasant and enjoyable for his family. There are references to children's parties, and occasionally to visitors for the children (24 Feb. 1838). Where there may have been social barriers between the parents, there were none between the children, and in fact references to Mrs Watson and Mrs Hoy are in connection with

matters pertaining to children. His own large family is not the only evidence of Lempriere's liking for children - Booth's remark of 11 November 1834 "Scald at Lemprieres to meet another bouncing girl & Spotiswood whom Lempriere (not satisfied with his own family of about eleven) brought with him on his return to P. Arthur yesterday" is one of astonishment. Lempriere seemed quite pleased that "Little Cart kept us company (at the solstice observations) and his eyes open by playing at draughts and back-gammon" (22 June 1838). When he observed signs of domestic discord at the Montgomerys at Point Puer, Lempriere brought one of the children home with him (8 Apr. 1834), and he was perturbed when his godson William Powers was accidentally scalded (15 Feb. 1837). As well, the illness of children other than his own was noted: little George Cart very ill, not expected to live through night; the following day he was a little better, and two days later it was noted that he continued to progress (3,4,6 May 1837).

In their fluency in French the Lempriere children were definitely atypical. Lempriere taught the children French himself, and at one stage noted that both their French and drawing lessons were being neglected because he was too busy (6 June 1837). Edward and Thomas had begun French lessons by November 1835, when they were aged 13 and 12 respectively. It seems that their education was rather intermittent, as on 2 January 1837 Lempriere notes that Edward and Tom were learning French, much to the envy of William, who was then aged 11. By June 1838 Edward's proficiency enabled him to entertain visiting sailors on board the Conway with a French song (7 June 1838).

The eldest Lempriere daughter, Mary Earle, born 26 November 1829, "began her letters in earnest today" (22 May 1834). Some months later Lempriere was incensed that his sister Harriet and her husband Charles Abbott refused to accept Mary as a pupil at their school, the Young Ladies' Seminary, New Town. Lempriere's mother-in-law offered to pay for Mary's education for six months and it was decided that Mary

would go to Hobart with her grandmother, and on 24 September "our dear little Mary" left on the Tamar to attend an unspecified Hobart school. Mary remained at school in Hobart, apparently living with her grandmother, but she returned to live with the family at Port Arthur in December 1835. Just before her return she had had a cold, "all her curls" had been cut off, much to her mother's annoyance; the observation that the "poor little dear suffers from Rheumatism" was indicative of more serious problems (4, 11 Dec. 1835).

Mary may have been a favourite with Booth - Lempriere noted that the commandant gave Mary books including a "very pretty book on drawing" (28 Jan., 13 Jul. 1837). On 6 March 1837 Lempriere rewarded Mary for being good for five days with an evening party, and late in May he was pleased with her for answering her questions "very prettily"; to this accomplishment she also added singing a hymn (28 May 1837). In July Lempriere noted that she was knitting, the only reference to needlework etc. found to date (7 Jul. 1837). The following year, however, he was less than satisfied with her progress: "By-the-bye, that child gives us much uneasiness, she appears quite altered in her disposition. We must either get a governess, or send her to school" (7 Jul. 1838). Earlier in the year Lempriere recorded that he had given a lesson to Mary and "Popsy", that is, Charlotte, then aged five.

Other references reveal that the children had a swing (18 Feb. 1837), that they played cricket, an activity possibly confined to the boys, (15 Mar. 1838), and that by the time Edward, the eldest was 14, his father was applying for a salary to be paid to his son in recognition of the clerical duties he performed (6 Jul. 1838). Other references disclose that the children were called upon to deal with a number of situations which would apparently require some maturity - it fell upon Tom, aged 12, to advise his parents, away for the night at Eagle Hawk Neck, of Miss Wood's drunkenness (2 Apr. 1837); in September 1837, Billy aged 11 was appointed to escort his mother and younger children to Hobart, filling the role his father would

have occupied if he had been able to go there; in April 1838 10 year old Charles was sent to Eagle Hawk Neck with Ashworth, his father's clerk, whose weakness for drink was well-established; as it happened, Ashworth succumbed, and Charles was taken in by an officer (28 April 1838). Earlier in the month, Edward and William had escorted the dismissed Miss Wood to Norfolk Bay (9 Apr. 1838). A trip to Fortescue Bay with his father the following month may have been an adventure for William, but sleeping in a breakwind for two nights would have been far from comfortable (12 May 1838).

At no stage does Lempriere discuss the influence of Port Arthur itself upon his children; he does not seem to have been beset by the same sort of moral dilemma which affected Dr. Brownell who considered that the constant exposure to scenes of crime and punishment would deaden the initial impact "so that what at first appears shocking and revolting is apt to soften down to a lighter grade and sin is not seen and felt to be so exceedingly sinful as it should be" (Brownell Letterbook). Another attitude was taken by the irascible Rev. E.P. Durham, whose children had contact with the convicts. Durham allowed his son, aged about 12 or 13, to go into the bush to collect ferns in the sole company of a convict, and Courtenay also thought that Durham would use his children to distribute tobacco to the men (MM62/26 12337).

Part of the explanation for any differences in the experience of the Lempriere children and other children at Port Arthur may be found in a consideration of the fathers' respective positions at the settlement. As Commissariat Officer, T.J. Lempriere was not concerned with the convict system per se, and thus was able to remain more detached than would have been possible for either Durham or Brownell, whose positions required them to be personally involved in the daily life and routine of their convict charges. With this in mind, it may not be too presumptuous to assume that the parents' attitude influenced their children's perceptions of life at Port Arthur.