

THOMAS JAMES and ANNE CONNOR

PREFACE

This is one of seven biographies of my paternal ancestors in Australia, whose family tree is shown on the following page. Thomas James and Anne Connor were my great-great-grandparents. They met, married and began their family in England, and arrived in Van Diemen's Land in 1841. Their story spans the history of education in early Van Diemen's Land to Tasmanian statehood, Victoria during the gold rushes, and early farming in Gippsland, Victoria.

The biographies in this series are;

Thomas James Connor (1813-1880) and Anne Peake (1811-1894)

Edward Thomas Newton (1813-1882) and Eliza Martin (1817-1903)

Sprott Boyd (1814-1902) and Catherine Cutler (1819-1894)

George William Connor (1842-1873) and Eliza Newton (1843-1912)

Robert Mitchell Boyd (1849-1912) and Eliza Agnes Brown (1855-1884)

George Stanley Newton Connor (1871-1951) and Isabella Sprott Boyd (1882-1957)

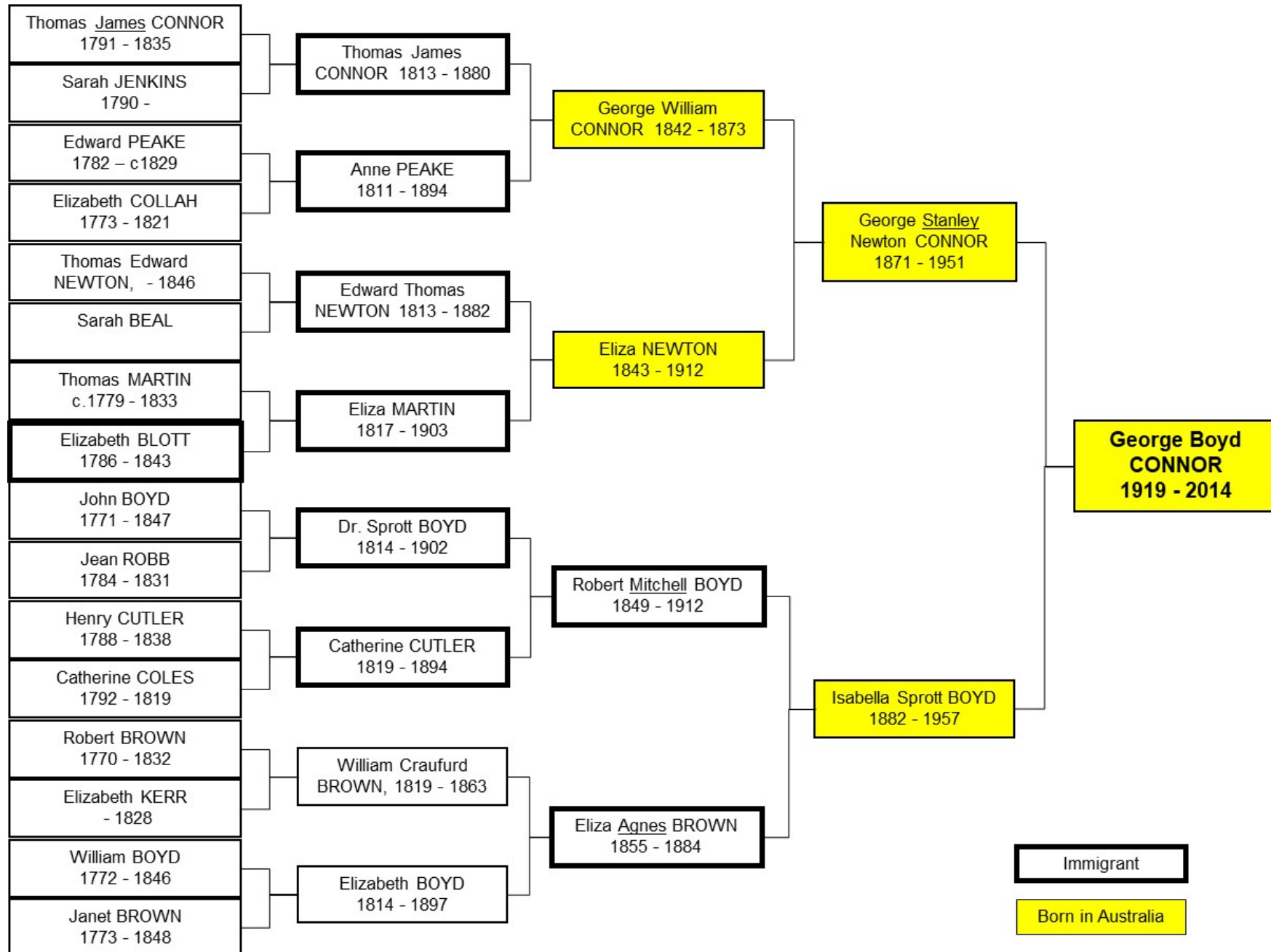
George Boyd Connor (1919-2014) and Sybil Kane Whiting (1922-1995).

Each of the stories can be read in isolation. Inevitably, there is overlap between them, so some repetition is unavoidable but I have tried to keep this to a minimum. For easy reference, family trees are included at the end of each story.

Many organizations have provided research material for this story. In particular, the National Library of Australia 'TROVE' database was an invaluable resource. The archivists at the Port Albert Maritime Museum, Port Albert, Victoria freely gave access to their records and their time. The archivist at Brunel University provided copies of relevant records of the Borough Road College and the British & Foreign School Society. The Public Records Office of Victoria provided access to Teachers' and Education Department Records; Record of Inquiry; Birth, Death and Marriage certificates, and Wills. The State Library of Victoria provided copies of photographs and access to original manuscripts. The Land and Environment Office of Victoria conducted title searches and provided copies of original title deeds. Ancestry.com.au provided transcripts of many important records of the Connor family. My thanks go to them all.

Andrew G. Connor
Perth, 2018

MY FATHER'S ANCESTORS



THOMAS JAMES and ANNE CONNOR

England (1813-1841)

According to the Birth Register, Thomas James Connor was born on 7 May 1813 at the British Lying-in Hospital, Endell Street, St. Giles in the Fields, Holborn, Middlesex, but Thomas always gave his birthday and celebrated it on the 8 May. He was the first child of Thomas James (called James) and Sarah Connor (nee Jenkins), who were married on 24 September 1811 at Bloomsbury St George, just 350 metres away from the hospital. Thomas was christened at the hospital on 13 May 1813.

London at the time of Thomas' birth was undergoing huge change. The population was about one million and growing at more than 20 per cent per annum as people moved from the country to the city, attracted by the promise of employment and to escape rural poverty. London was the largest city in the world and the centre of a rapidly expanding British Empire, which also attracted immigrants from the British colonies and other countries, notably Ireland. As well as manufacturing, the city became the centre of Government for the Empire, requiring an educated middle-class to run the bureaucracy; and this middle-class created growing demand for goods and services.

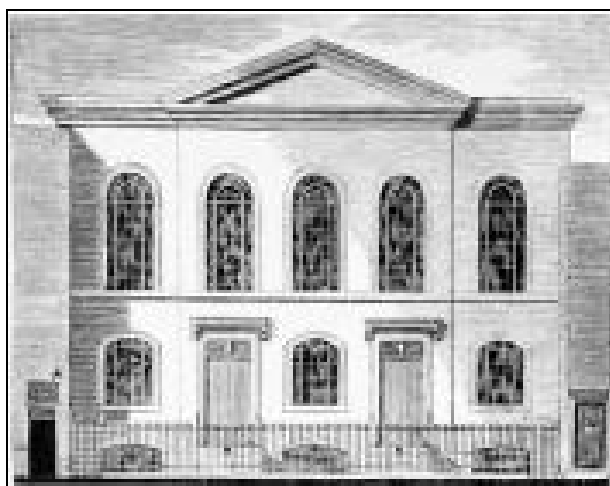
The population explosion put huge pressure on the city's infrastructure. There was no public transport; housing within walking distance of the workplace was very expensive and crowded; water and sewerage systems were totally inadequate; the air was polluted with smoke from wood and coal fires; streets were crowded with people and horses and there was no centralised city administration to deal with the issues. As a result, slums developed on the outskirts of the city; epidemics of cholera, gastroenteritis and respiratory disease occurred regularly, and crime increased putting pressure on the judicial system, gaols and the system of transportation to the colonies. The population growth accentuated the class system and the disparity between rich and poor. Education was a luxury that the poor of London could not afford – young children were sent to work in order to supplement the family income. Of course, there were those in the community, including the churches, who attempted to help those in need and provide elementary education to the masses but, apart from grants to some churches after 1833, the government did little to help education directly until the 1870 Education Act.

Thomas' father James was an upholsterer with a business in Piccadilly, London. As such, he would have been regarded as lower-middle class, an "intelligent craftsman", servicing the needs of the higher classes who lived in and around central London. In those days, an upholsterer managed all aspects of house renovation and sometimes was the letting agent for London residences. He probably lived quite close to his business, if not in the same building, but his exact address is not known. He may have employed an apprentice or two. Thomas' mother Sarah supplemented the family income doing needlework and helped out in the family business. They could afford to give their children time to receive an elementary education at one of the numerous schools run by Parish Churches in central London.

Judging from their choice of wedding venue, it appears that Thomas' parents were Anglican, and it is likely that Thomas was sent to one of the many schools in the area run by the Church of England. At school, Thomas would have been taught reading (mainly the Bible as the only readily available book), writing and reckoning. There was also natural history and religious instruction (of course), as well as music. Towards the end of his school days, he may have been taught grammar, geography,

higher mathematics and history, and possibly some Latin depending upon aptitude. The Anglican schools adopted the monitorial system of teaching, developed by Joseph Lancaster in 1798, whereby the ablest and brightest pupils taught what they had learned to a group of fellow-pupils, each of whom in turn passed it on, with the aid of large lesson sheets on the wall. This system was highly regulated and allowed each teacher to handle more students efficiently, but the effectiveness of the teaching probably suffered.

It seems likely that Thomas was one of the abler and brighter students who became a monitor and, eventually, became a teacher himself. By early 1833 at the age of nineteen, Thomas was teaching in the Little Chapel Street School, Soho and was a member of the Chapel congregation. The Chapel site had a long history, dating back to 1694 when the first chapel was built to cater for Huguenot refugees living in London. It became a Presbyterian Chapel in 1796 and, under their watch in 1824, the old chapel was demolished and a new chapel built with a school-room for poor children.



Presbyterian Chapel, Little Chapel St (now Sheraton St.), Soho c.1824¹

The school grew rapidly in response to the needs of the growing and impoverished local community and funding the school became a significant problem for the Presbyterian Church. Being non-conformist, they received no government funding and relied upon donations and philanthropy. No doubt Thomas worked very hard for little reward.

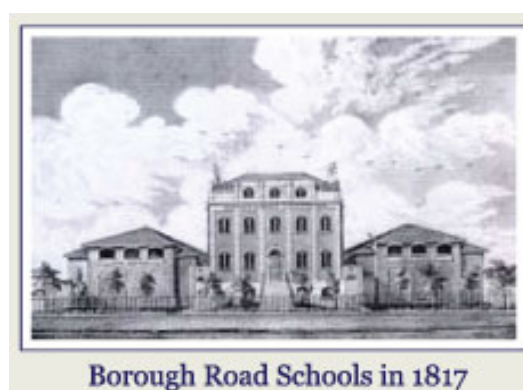
In about 1835, Thomas met a Yorkshire lass, Anne Peake. Anne was slightly older than Thomas, having been born on 29 December 1811 at Heckmondwike, Yorkshire, the sixth child of Edward and Elizabeth Peake (nee Collah). Elizabeth died when Anne was ten and Edward died when Anne was seventeen, forcing her to rely upon the extended Peake family for support. It is possible that Anne had some early teaching experience in Yorkshire, for her older sister Jane and husband Joshua Rouse were school mistress and master at the Barkisland Grammar School, Yorkshire from about 1831 onwards. Anne's uncle Robert Peake (Edward's brother) resided and had a coach-making business at 11 Princes Street, Soho, London (now part of Wardour Street) which is less than 500 metres from the Little Chapel Street School. Robert employed his son William (Anne's cousin) and George Peake, Anne's older brother as apprentices in his business. No doubt, this family connection is what brought Anne to London.

¹ British History On-line 'Plate 25: Chapels', *Survey of London: volumes 33 and 34: St Anne Soho* (1966).

How Thomas and Anne met is pure speculation, but considering that the Connor and Peake families lived and worked so close to each other in and around Soho, there would have been ample opportunities for them to meet. Thomas' father might have supplied the upholstery for the interior of coaches made by Anne's family. Or Thomas and Anne might have attended the same church. Or Anne might have been a schoolmistress at the Little Chapel Street School. Or Thomas might have been a school friend of Anne's cousin William, as they were about the same age and lived in the same parish.

By 1836, Thomas had earned a reputation as "*a young man of irreproachable and uniformly exemplary conduct*" and "*possessed of qualifications that render him well adapted for a master under the British & Foreign School system.*"² Thomas applied to enter Borough Road College, Borough Road, Southwark, a teacher training institute established in 1801 adjacent to Joseph Lancaster's School, the Model non-sectarian free school which promoted Lancaster's monitorial education system. The *British and Foreign School Society for the Education of the Labouring and Manufacturing Classes of Society of Every Religious Persuasion* ran the Model school and College, and established other schools throughout the Empire which became known as "British Schools".

Thomas entered Borough Road College in 1836 and spent the year learning and practising the Lancaster education system at the Model School attached to the college. At the end of the year, he became an accredited teacher under that system. There were two other students in Thomas' year, James Bonwick and James Low, who were to travel out to Tasmania with him five years later.



Also in 1836, Thomas Connor married Anne Peake on the 21 August at St. James' (Anglican) Church, Piccadilly, by posting banns. Anne's brother George and cousin William were witnesses at the wedding.

Following his Borough Road College training year, Thomas and Anne were posted to the British school at Point Pleasant, Wandsworth, Surrey, just south of the Thames River. This school had been open for many years and catered to the rapidly growing poor population attached to the workhouses of the Wandsworth & Clapham Poor Law Union. When Thomas and Anne arrived in 1837, the school had 90 boys and 66 girls, but in the following year the school committee reported; "*The exertions of the present master and mistress have been highly satisfactory, and a considerable increase has taken place in the attendance. There are at present on the books— Boys 110. Girls 78. Total 188.*"³

² BRC Archives. BFSS-BRC Applications 1836. Testimonials from Little Chapel Street.

³ Thirty-fourth Report of the British and Foreign School Society. 1839 pp 87-88

Thomas and Anne's first child, Edward Peake Connor, was born at the Point Pleasant School, Wandsworth at 3:30a.m. on the 22 February 1838. (See the last page for Thomas and Anne's family tree.) Possibly, Anne found it difficult to raise young Edward and continue teaching needlework and knitting to 78 girls, so at some stage during 1838, Thomas and Anne were transferred to a boys-only school at Camberwell. The school had been established in 1810 to service the most overcrowded and neglected part of Camberwell. It became affiliated with the B.& F.S.S. in 1816. After some lean years, new school buildings and a school master's residence were erected on the corner of Leipsic Road (now Comber Grove), Camberwell. The new building opened in 1836, so Thomas, Anne and baby Edward moved into quite comfortable accommodation. The school had 154 boys when they arrived but, by the end of 1840, it had reached the school's capacity of 200 boys.

Anne became pregnant again in the summer of 1839 and their second child, Thomas James Connor (junior), was born at the Leipsic Road, Camberwell school on 14 February 1840. In 1841, the School Committee reported; *"The result of the public examinations, of which six have been held since last report, have been very gratifying to the committee; the visitors present having on each occasion, expressed their satisfaction with the conduct and attainments of the children."*⁴

On the other side of the world in Van Diemen's Land, events were unfolding which would forever change Thomas and Anne's lives. Following first European settlement of 262 people at Hobart Town in 1803, the Colony of Van Diemen's Land (now Tasmania) had grown through a steady arrival of convicts and later, free settlers. It was governed from New South Wales and did not become an independent Colony of Britain, with its own executive, legislature and judiciary, until 1825. Population growth created similar problems as those in England. By 1838, the population had reached about 50,000; the majority were convicts, and there were many children, the sons and daughters of poor convicts and ex-convicts, who needed to receive elementary education if they were to contribute meaningfully to the future prosperity of the colony. The Lieutenant Governor, Sir John Franklin (and his superiors in London), believed that education of the poorer classes was a public responsibility and, in December 1838, he established a Board of Education to oversee the establishment of public schools and their funding. The establishment of the Board was not uniformly well received, as it threatened the power of various churches which, up to that time, had been the sole providers of education, the sole beneficiaries of any government funds, and defined the school curriculum and programme to suit their own doctrines. The 'Board System' tried to placate the churches by having representative clergy as advisers to the Board, inviting inspection of the schools by the clergy and ensuring that the scriptures would be taught in class. In trying to steer the middle ground, the colonial administration sparked a long and fierce debate, conducted publicly in the press, concerning the relative merits of secular versus non-secular education.

In 1839-40 while the debate raged on, the Board of Education quietly began to implement its charter to establish and staff public schools in the colony. It advertised locally for conductors (teachers) to run the schools. Among other regulations for new public schools, the following are pertinent to this story;

- *"The Free Day Schools are to be conducted, as nearly as may be, on the British and Foreign School System; excepting that the entire Sacred Scriptures are to form part of the daily course of reading; with the consent of the parents;*

⁴ Thirty-sixth Report of the British and Foreign School Society 1841 pp 72-73

- *No commentary or exposition of the Scriptures is to be offered by the conductors, nor will they be allowed to teach any Catechism.*
- *In Hobart Town and Launceston, whenever the average number of children may exceed forty, for each child of such excess up to one hundred, ten shillings a year will be allowed from the public revenue;*
- *The Conductors will be entitled to claim weekly from the parents, three-pence for one and two-pence each for two or more of the same family, attending in Hobart Town and Launceston;*
- *The salaries in Hobart Town and Launceston shall not exceed one hundred pounds for the master, and fifty pounds for the mistress, and an allowance for a house, and fuel for two fires in winter and one in summer.*
- *The course of instruction is to comprise, for boys, reading, writing, and the first four rules of arithmetic. Girls are to be taught reading, writing, needle-work, and knitting. Should the parents of the children require any extension of this course, the Conductors will be entitled to make extra charges”*⁵. This curriculum was extended in 1841 to include geography and history.

It soon became clear to the Board of Education that the colony alone could not provide a sufficient number of qualified school masters and mistresses to fill the vacancies. In late 1840, Sir John Franklin wrote to the Colonial Secretary Lord John Russell, requesting that the home government immediately send out six masters and mistresses, thoroughly acquainted with the discipline and organization of British schools, one to take charge of a Model or Training School at Hobart Town and the others to superintend district schools in the townships. Lord Russell, being a supporter of the Borough Road College, referred the request to the Committee of the British and Foreign School Society, which sent a circular to its past students seeking volunteers for the posts. The volunteers were told that each couple would receive £150 per annum, a house, additional payments for numbers of children and was secured for five years. An allowance of £15 would be paid to reach the place of embarkation, passages were free and the whole package was guaranteed by Government.

Thirty couples, including Thomas and Anne Connor, applied for the posts in early 1841. It must have been a difficult decision to make because none had much knowledge of Van Diemen's Land, of teaching the children of convicts, and they were leaving family and friends. During the selection process, they were interviewed, examined and their schools were inspected by Mr. Tremenhare, the first Educational Inspector. In May 1841, the B. & F.S.S. advised the following applicants of their success and their posting;

Mr. and Mrs. James Bonwick	Hobart Town Model School.
Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Connor (+2 children)	Launceston.
Mr. and Mrs. James Low (+2 children)	Richmond.
Mr. and Mrs. Chambers (+5 children)	Campbell Town.
Mr. and Mrs. Edward Rainy (+4 children)	Oatlands.
Mr. and Mrs. Charles Hall (+ 6 children)	New Norfolk.

The Committee of the B. & F.S.S. reported “*Your Committee have had great pleasure in recommending suitable parties to the government, who, after a rigid examination both as to attainments and skill in the art of teaching by the government inspector, have been fully approved, and are expected in the course of a few weeks to sail for the colony.*”⁶

⁵ The Gazette. Published in The Colonial Times 1 Oct 1839

⁶ Thirty-sixth Report of the British and Foreign School Society 1841 pp 39

Thomas and Anne did not have much time to prepare. Anne's sister Jane managed to put some of Anne's belongings aboard the two-masted brig *William Wise* as it departed Liverpool on its way down to London. On Census night of the 6 June 1841, Thomas, Anne and their two children Edward and Thomas junior were staying with Thomas' mother Sarah, his younger brothers Henry and Richard and sister Sarah at Dorset Square, Marylebone, London. On the 10 June 1841, the family boarded the *William Wise* on the Thames and set sail for Van Diemen's Land.

Van Diemen's Land (1841-1859)

We have James Bonwick to thank for the following description of their trip out to Van Diemen's Land.

"The story of our passage out is illustrative of voyage trials at that early date.

A brig of 200 tons – the William Wise – was chartered for our accommodation; but while Government attended to provisions, the owners named the Captain, Mate and Surgeon. These proved regular toppers [drinkers], and the skipper tried us with fits of delirium tremens. The crew imitated the officers, and made free with the cargo. One night, fortunately calm, all on deck were asleep from drink, and the rudder had no one in charge." [James Bonwick himself was a strict teetotaler].

"It was not too late for piracy; passing near the Cape de Verde, we were chased by a piratical craft. We were saved by our superior sailing in an aft wind. On the second day of our chase, a British frigate came up, fired a shot, and with all sail was after the craft. We some years after heard of the capture of the Spanish pirate, and our saving from "treading the plank".

After looking into the crater of St Paul's volcanic Island [southern Indian Ocean], we had but just raised the boat, when a cyclone burst upon us in wildest fury. For three days we were driven helplessly before the wind, with only biscuits and water for subsistence.

The weather quieted the cargo-broachers; and as our navigation had been aided by our sight of St. Paul's, we struck safely the entrance to Storm Bay of Hobart Town.

When at the end of 120 days' voyage, we sat down, October 10th, 1841, to a civilized meal, with milk to our tea and fresh butter to our bread, we felt grateful for our preservation from Nature's tumults and from man's vices. Although in a convict Colony, we thought some on shipboard were more worthy the chains than the victims of the lash we met in the streets.

*The vessel left us in port and went on to New Zealand, where as we heard, the drunken captain was seized and imprisoned for stealing the ship's goods. The Doctor, many years later, I met as the teacher of a Roman Catholic School, who recognised in his Inspector one of the victims of his former medical career."*⁷

Soon after arriving, Thomas and Anne were sent to Launceston, where a public school already existed. The teacher there, Mr. Peter Jacob, was transferred to Longford in November 1841, which upset some of the Launceston community. The

⁷ Bonwick, J. "An Octogenarian's Reminiscences" 1902. pp 96-97

Government School House in Launceston was in Cameron Street and had 64 boys and 64 girls on its books, which the Board of Education considered to be a 'large' school. The school buildings in Launceston were constructed in 1826 by the Wesleyan Mission and consisted of a school room and cottage. The school room had been declared unfit for years. The plaster was broken, and there were boards and tin in place of glass in many of the windows. The school had received some teaching supplies, mainly books, from the B.& F.S.S. In 1842 however, the school house and cottage were owned by the Holy Trinity (Anglican) Church - the scholars occupied the building on sufferance, and could be summarily evicted. Thomas and Anne quickly began to put their stamp on the school and, in March 1842, they advertised for young gentlemen boarders at the school, with a fee of forty guineas per annum, plus four guineas for washing.

Convict arrivals in Van Diemen's Land peaked in the year 1842 – 5329 convicts came, an almost ten per cent addition to the then 57,471 population. The Home Government did not provide sufficient funds for the maintenance and care of these additional people, with the result that the Colony went into debt, public services were curtailed, and people were asked to pay an increasingly greater share of the costs of providing services. Free immigrants felt neglected by a government that classified Van Diemen's Land as a penal colony, and a governor whose main focus was management of convicts. Thus, the anti-transportation movement was born.

Thomas became involved in establishment of a Mechanics' Institute in Launceston. The Mechanics' Institute movement was designed to make reading materials and knowledge of a practical and scientific nature available to a broader range of society. The B.& F.S.S. had long recognized the inverse correlation between levels of criminal activity and levels of basic education. No doubt Thomas (and others) soon realised that the working and convict classes, which they saw all around them on a daily basis, were just as uneducated as their children. They wished to help the children by educating the parents. He was present at the preliminary meeting of the Institute held on 8 March 1842 and read to the prospective members the objects of the Institute which, among others, were;

*"...the promotion of science and the arts and the profusion of general literature."
"That as the Institute was formed with a special view of promoting the intellectual culture of the operative classes, mechanics and workmen of all classes are invited to enroll their names and promote the objects contemplated." "That gratuitous assistance of professional gentlemen and others on the northern side of the colony be bespoken as lecturers."⁸*

Thomas became its first librarian. People who wished to donate books, magazines, papers, apparatus or articles for the proposed library and museum were asked to deposit them with Mr. Connor at the Cameron Street school room. The school room became the meeting place and reading room for the Mechanics' Institute after school hours. Monthly lectures were held on such topics such as "Electricity", "Astronomy", "Meteorology" and "Mechanics". Adults were admitted for one shilling, children sixpence. Thomas also became honorary secretary of the Launceston Mechanics' Institute which gave him the opportunity to rub shoulders with the press, government, intelligentsia and the wealthy. But in this position, he also became a focus for those in Launceston who were opposed to broader and more liberal education, such as some of the clergy and the editor of the Cornwall Chronicle newspaper. He also had to deal with some prima donnas and egos within the intelligentsia, and some of their inevitable disagreements were aired in the editorial and personal columns.

⁸ Launceston Examiner 12 March 1842

Thomas and Anne's third child, George William Connor, was born in Launceston on 6 October 1842. That same month, the Board of Education's Report for the year 1841-42 was published, reporting in glowing terms of the progress that had been achieved since Thomas, Anne and their fellow teachers arrived from England only a year ago.

*".....The other teachers have been placed respectively at Launceston, Campbell Town, Oatlands, New Norfolk, and Richmond, in all which places as well as in Liverpool-street, the most striking improvement has taken place in the general character of the schools. The course of instruction pursued at all of them includes grammar and geography, in addition to the subjects required to be taught under the regulations of the board; and at several of them general history, linear drawings, the principles of mechanics, and the outlines of natural history and philosophy, are also included, in which subjects many of the children have already made very satisfactory progress."*⁹

The Board requested additional funds to purchase new school books and maps from the B. & F.S.S; to construct a new school at an outlying town and to maintain existing schools. The Board regretted that, despite doing all in its power to engage with the various churches and seek their assistance in the religious education of the pupils, the majority of the clergymen of the Church of England still withheld their supervision and would not visit the Board schools.

On the day that the report of the Board of Education was tabled in the Legislative Council, a petition from twenty-one Anglican clergymen in Van Diemen's Land was also tabled, stating they did not agree with the present non-denominational system under the Board of Education and requesting that the funds for education be voted instead to the churches in Van Diemen's Land and distributed in proportion to their following in the 1842 census (64% Anglican) to establish church schools, run by the clergymen. It is worth noting that two of the petitioners were clergymen at Holy Trinity Church Launceston, which owned the Cameron Street school room. Thus were the battle lines drawn, and the Church of England began its campaign to rid Van Diemen's Land of the Board of Education System.

Not content with his present workload, in 1843 Thomas offered additional classes for boys and girls at a fee of one guinea per quarter. The Mechanics' Institute established a Debating Society of which he was also honorary secretary.

In July 1843, the Lieutenant Governor Sir John Franklin, architect and supporter of the Board of Education System, was recalled to England and replaced by Sir Eardley Wilmot. This was an opportunity welcomed by many Church of England clergy, who had been encouraged by their success in having a similar Board of Education System in New South Wales abolished, and who now reinvigorated their attack on the system in Van Diemen's Land. Firstly, a book was published entitled "*The System of General Religious Education Established in Van Diemen's Land in 1839, with an Account of its Introduction and Effects.*" by John D. Loch Esq. This book laid out the general complaints of the church against the Board System and used many 'facts' gleaned from local sources and school visits about the conduct of the Board members and the teachers. James Bonwick in Hobart and Edward Hall at New Norfolk were personally attacked for alleged breaches of the regulations of the Board. The book received a lot of publicity, both good and bad, but no-one regarded it as an objective work. The Board of Education wrote a detailed reply to Loch's

⁹ Launceston Examiner 8 October 1842

allegations as an appendix to its Annual Report for 1843, refuting most of the specific accusations made against it and the school masters.

At about the same time, the Holy Trinity Church evicted the students, and the Mechanics' Institute, from the Cameron Street school room in Launceston. The school and the Institute moved to a new school room, at 1 Elizabeth Street behind St. John's (Anglican) Church. It was an excellent room, but hired at a high rental. While this was suitable for the school, the Mechanics' Institute decided it needed cheaper and more permanent premises. The committee issued a prospectus for raising funds by shares "for the erection of a building suitable as a Lecture Room, Library, Museum, and place of deposit for apparatus, models, and other purposes required by the Launceston Mechanics' Institute; also as a Hall suitable for public meetings, assemblies, or, entertainments; restricted to no class, sect, or body whatsoever." As honorary secretary, Thomas was active in attempting to sell shares, but he also wrote to the Lieutenant Governor, their patron, requesting a grant of land on which to establish the new building. In October 1843, the Government duly granted a block of land in Wellington Street to the Mechanics' Institute. Thomas advertised for plans of a building of suitable dimensions costing less than £1000, but raising sufficient funds for the building would take several years.

Until 1843, the Church of England in Van Diemen's Land had been part of the diocese of Sydney, and before that Calcutta, but in July that year it became a diocese in its own right. Upon arrival, the new Bishop of Tasmania, Dr. Nixon, wasted no time in entering the education battlefield. He was granted leave to address the Legislative Council in support of a new petition to redirect Board of Education funds to the church. Armed with Loch's book, the bishop spoke eloquently for two and a half hours against the Board of Education System, at one stage exclaiming "*As a father, rather than a child of mine were educated in such a school, I would wish to see him dead at my feet!*"

The speech was followed by large petitions both for and against reverting to a denominational system. The new Lieutenant Governor, Sir Eardley Wilmot, could not decide if he should change an education system that had been established with the support of the home government, in favour of the church's petition, so he dodged the issue. He said;

*" I do not wish to determine what, if any, change should be made; but all I can do is, to transmit the petitions, the Reports of the schools, and all the documents respecting them, to her Majesty's Secretary of State ; and when he answers my despatch, I will communicate such answer to this Council, and carry out the commands of her Majesty when she shall be graciously pleased to communicate them."*¹⁰

As a result of this indecision, additional funding for new schools and maintenance of existing ones was withheld. The Liverpool Street school in Hobart Town had been built in 1821. The building, which had originally been the private residence of the Rev. Dr. Bedford - tradition says deserted by him in about 1838 because it was unsafe - consisted of several rooms, the largest of which was 36' x 15', and was repaired for the last time in 1841. In 1844 it was condemned by the Director of Public Works, but still used as a school room. According to James Bonwick,

"..It was most unsuitable for a lot of rough lads, and had got into a lamentably ruinous condition, with the classes scattered about the several rooms, in defiance

¹⁰ Colonial Times 28 Nov 1843

of organization and discipline.” “It was impossible for any system to be carried out under such conditions.”¹¹

The stresses of the job and problems of ill-health forced James Bonwick to resign his position as School Master at Liverpool Street, Hobart Town. He stayed in Hobart to start a private school. The Board of Education promoted Thomas and Anne Connor to take the Bonwicks' places, and the family moved to Hobart in January 1844, taking up residence in Bathurst Street in a house which backed on to the school house. Mathers Lane ran down the side of both buildings, connecting Bathurst and Liverpool Streets. Anne became pregnant again and was seven months advanced when their eldest child Edward Peake Connor died suddenly of apoplexy (cause unknown) on 1 June 1844. He was buried in the Hobart Cemetery. Anne's baby, their first daughter was born two months later on 8 August 1844 and named Sarah Frances Connor, although she soon became known as Fanny.

As in Launceston, Thomas involved himself in activities outside the school room. He joined the Hobart Mechanics' Institute and, along with James Bonwick, was soon elected to its committee, where he met long term friends and influential colonists such as Rev. John Lillie and Dr. Robert Officer. He was also on the committee of the Van Diemen's Land Colonial Missionary and Christian Instruction Society.

Thomas' and Anne's efforts at Liverpool Street were acknowledged in the 1844 Report of the Board of Education.

“..Mr. and Mrs. Connor have been promoted from Launceston to the charge of it; and in their management fully bear out the favourable impressions created by their former zealous exertions. The numbers attending have increased, and would, no doubt, be much greater but for the extreme unfitness and dilapidated state of the premises in which the School is obliged to be held.”

The Board also acknowledged “the absolute necessity of providing new premises for the large and important School in Liverpool-street, Hobart Town. Those at present used are unfit for the purposes of the School, and so old and ruinous that the Director of Public Works considers it undesirable to recommend any attempt at placing them in suitable repair.” Through cost cutting wherever possible the Board wished, “in the first place, to recommend the erection of premises sufficient to accommodate 600 children upon the site of the present School House in Liverpool-street, the property of the Government, — such premises to be rendered suitable in every respect for the observance of the system and discipline of the British and Foreign Schools.”¹²

Despite the Board's good intentions, little happened in the way of new building during 1844 to 1846. The economy of the colony was depressed – bodies such as the Mechanics' Institute struggled to retain members and raise funds, resulting in some strong disagreements among committee members. Thomas and Anne continued to make do with their dilapidated school facilities which, the Board noted, “during the present winter the decay has rapidly advanced, and the Board fear that ere long it will be altogether uninhabitable.”¹³ The outer door was off, the inner one secured by a rope, water poured in at the door during rainy weather; in fine, it became a nest of filthy rats and vermin of all descriptions. Despite the atrocious conditions, Thomas and Anne continued to make good progress with their 200 or so pupils (including their sons Thomas junior aged 6 and George aged 4), holding several public examinations

¹¹ Bonwick, J. “An Octogenarian's Reminiscences” 1902. pp100

¹² Launceston Examiner 9 Aug 1844. Report of the Board of Education

¹³ Launceston Examiner 29 Oct 1845.

which were well supported by the Council members and public. The results received high praise from the Colonial Secretary and the other examiners. Thomas and Anne's second daughter, Cornelia Anne Connor was born in Hobart on 22 July 1846.

In the background, the Board of Education was slowly being starved out of existence. Each year, their budget was reduced while the Governor and Legislative Council waited for a decision from the Secretary of State for the Colonies concerning the future of the Board system in Van Diemen's Land. In September 1845, the Board ceased its funding support for Sunday schools. Demands in the country towns for new schools could not be met and numbers of students at the existing schools began to fall as the buildings became neglected, all of which gave ammunition to the Board's enemies. Rumours circulated that the Board of Education was to be dissolved; the pros and cons were discussed openly in the press and, no doubt, privately within the colonial and home governments.

After a delay of three years, in November 1846 the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Mr. Gladstone, as one of his last acts in that capacity, formalized his decision, namely, that the Board of Education should be broken up gradually, and that the sum of £800 saved by the Board for the purpose of erecting some new urgently-needed school rooms, should be appropriated to what he called independent schools. He also proposed a "penny-a-day" system whereby the Government would pay teachers one penny per day per student. It was left to the Lieutenant Governor to sort out the details.

There was considerable confusion about how Mr. Gladstone had arrived at this decision, after his statement of the case had so clearly pointed in the other direction. Many disagreed with it and continued to petition the colonial and home governments to retain public schools, arguing that the system had never had a fair trial - its resources had been impaired and its operations checked. Further confusion and delay resulted from the replacement in February 1847 of Sir Eardley Wilmot with a new Lieutenant Governor, Sir William Denison. Sir William spent the rest of 1847 designing the details of the new education system along the lines recommended by Gladstone, while the debate raged around him. At the same time, New South Wales' experiment with a "penny-a-day", denominational education system was finally shown to be a failure; under Governor Fitz Roy with the backing of Lord Stanley, N.S.W. reverted to a public non-denominational education system (the foundation of the present public education system) in June 1847.

Towards the end of 1847, it appears that the Board of Education was successful in securing some funds for building. It advertised that it would consider applications for funds to aid with the maintenance of country schools. Most importantly for Thomas, Anne and their students, at very short notice the Board decided to erect new school rooms at the Central School in Liverpool Street. The Public Works Department called for tenders and in November, the school moved temporarily to the Albert Theatre during the construction period. It must have been a great Christmas present for the Connor family, topped off by a crop of magnificent carnations and a 22lb bunch of grapes in their garden at Bathurst Street, and the discovery that Anne was pregnant again.

Anne does not appear on the list of teachers for 1848, and may have retired to concentrate on her growing family. Edward Charles Connor (known as Charlie) was born on 31 July 1848 in Hobart. In the same month, the new school rooms were completed. There were two "substantial and commodious" school rooms of equal size, one for boys, and another for girls, fitted up for the application of the British and

Foreign system. Also in July, Thomas sat on a jury which found a man guilty of murder and sentenced to death, without any hope of mercy.

Despite the negative experience gathered from the experiment in New South Wales, in March 1848 Sir William Denison introduced a new Education Bill, to take effect in 1849, which had the following principles at its heart;

- each teacher's salary to be based on daily student numbers;
- complete decentralisation of responsibility for establishing schools, raising funds through taxes, distributing the funds, hiring school masters, and managing the schools, to small, local, democratically elected councils;
- abolition of the Board of Education, and
- restriction of the State's role to that of an Inspector of Schools.

Naturally, this announcement sparked another round of petitions to the colonial and home governments, including one from the Committee of the B. & F.S.S. to Lord Earl Grey, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, arguing against the adoption of a denominational system and citing as evidence the bad experience in New South Wales. Editorials in the local press pointed out the impracticalities of the proposed system and predicted its failure. Their protests were to no avail and the new public school system was duly announced in the Gazette on 7 November 1848. The main points of relevance to this story were;

- The Inspector of Schools will appoint and remove teachers, taking into consideration community wishes
- The schools will be open to all religious denominations.
- Secular instruction will at least embrace in every school reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, and grammar, with needle-work and knitting for the girls.
- Religious instruction to be imparted in each school will be in accordance with the wishes of the parents of the majority of the children attending, but is not compulsory
- Should the system of instruction pursued in the schools of the British and Foreign School Society be desired in the case of any school, the Inspector will facilitate this.
- Payments to the teachers from the government will be made quarterly, at the following rate for each child in actual daily attendance; namely, for 10 children and under, three halfpence per day - from 16 to 40, one penny per-day - from 40 upwards, one halfpenny per day. Thus, the annual payment for a school having an average of 40 pupils daily present will be £60, - two weeks in the year being estimated as holidays
- The teachers will be under no restrictions as to the charges they make to the parents of children attending the schools.
- The schools will be supplied at the expense of the government with all necessary elementary class books and school materials. Only those class books approved by the Inspector may be used.
- The Government will not provide school-houses, except in cases where the Lieut. Governor may specially approve the appropriation of any public building to this purpose.

For the school masters and mistresses who had come out from England, this was a disaster. Overnight, their income would be more than halved. Messrs Rainy, Low, Chambers and Hall resigned without compensation at the end of 1848 because, being in smaller schools, they could not support their families under the penny-a-day system. Twenty-six schools and 1908 students were affected across the colony.

Many of the smaller country schools closed and the local children were no longer provided with education as the communities could not afford a teacher or a school room.

Thomas also submitted his resignation at the end of 1848 and requested compensation for the loss of income that had been guaranteed to him by previous governments, on the promise of which he had emigrated to Van Diemen's Land. The local press took up the cause in the name of "justice and common equity"¹⁴. The first Inspector of Schools was Charles Bradbury, who had been secretary to the Board of Education for several years and latterly on the Board itself. He knew Thomas and Anne, and their capabilities as teachers very well, and made an effort to keep them. He could not offer them compensation at that time, but he asked Thomas to give the new system a six-month trial. At Central School Liverpool Street, the Government already owned the school house; the school had a larger number of students, a local population more able to afford school fees, and a majority of the parents at Liverpool Street desired that the school continue to use the B.& F.S.S. system. Thomas decided to give it a try.

At the Annual Meeting of the Mechanics' Institute in January 1849, Thomas was not elected to the Committee. It seems that the Institute had become an exclusive club run by a few members who, under the existing regulations, were able to re-elect themselves *ad infinitum* to the Committee. Under their stewardship, the Institute was believed to be losing its influence, relevance and credibility. Thomas and others decided to attempt a coup and change the rules. Several special general meetings were held which were raucous and fiery affairs. In the end, Thomas was appointed to a committee to draft a new set of regulations for the Institute and to present them at a general meeting of the members within the next few months.

But Thomas had a more important issue on his mind, namely how to support his family. After trying the new penny-a-day system for almost six months and seeing his income from the system "*amounting in all, to something less than £50 per annum*"¹⁵, Thomas was forced to resign in June. He was one in a long line of teachers who had tried and failed under the new system for reasons of non-viability. The Church of England attempted to take control of the Central School Liverpool Street by means of a rigged petition of the parents. Student numbers at Liverpool Street declined to about fifteen. Schools were being abandoned across the colony, and there were several examples of schools where ex-convicts set themselves up as teachers in order to milk the system for as much money as possible, with little regard for the children in their care. The Launceston school was housed in the top of a barn, having been evicted from St John's. There was a public outcry against the penny-a-day scheme and its treatment of *bona fide* school masters. The following is an extract from a passionate speech by Mr. Gregson to the Legislative Council on 30 August 1849;

"Sir, I have been in communication with two of the schoolmasters, and they justly, I conceive, complain of the treatment they have received; and I, sir, assert that they have been most scandalously treated. There has been a complete breach of faith on the part of the Government. They have been kidnapped to this colony and left, if not destitute - in circumstances of difficulty. Their appointments implied permanency. I have been told by the gentlemen to whom I refer, that they never would have left their native land, where they held respectable situations of good emolument, had they not relied upon the faith of the Government. Have they not

¹⁴ Cornwall Chronicle 23 Dec 1848

¹⁵ Colonial Times 31 July 1849

*been deceived, and have they, I ask, not just cause to complain? They have been literally starved out of their situations, and degraded by being put upon a level with convicts. On leaving England they were told in the words of Sir John Franklin that they should rank next to the clergy only "junior to them." What has the Government done to maintain their position? Why, to reduce them to a level with passholders. Sir, I have no language to express my abhorrence of such conduct: no words to stigmatise such breach of faith, and when the question of compensation has to be considered, one of the gentlemen, Mr. Connor, is told he can have no claim until he tries the penny-a-day scheme. He tries it for six months, and finds his emoluments cut down upwards of one-half - reduced to a stipend on which he could not support life, much less maintain a respectable appearance. I therefore repeat, sir, the masters who came from England were starved out of their situations, and the colony deprived of the services of men well qualified "to discharge the most important of human duties". I have seen their testimonials - they could not be higher. I have had the pleasure of personal intercourse with them; and without pretending to have a standard by which to measure their abilities, I may, without presumption, add my testimony to their moral worth, and my belief that their intellectual attainments were far above the requirements of their pupils; and my principal object in bringing this question of education under the notice of this Council, and submitting the resolutions which are now under consideration has been, if possible, to induce the Government to return to the original contract with these gentlemen, and by substituting fixed salaries, as formerly, secure the services of a valuable class of teachers; and to enable your Excellency to carry out so desirable a measure, I, for one, would submit to any amount, and any description of taxation."*¹⁶

Under the weight of public opinion, the Executive was forced to reconsider its position regarding compensation for the school masters who had been sent out from England. Messrs Rainy, Low, Chambers and Hall were granted 1¼ years' salary as compensation. Thomas Connor was re-offered his salaried position at Liverpool Street, and the following somewhat triumphant notice appeared in the Hobart press soon afterwards.

"Central Public Day School, Liverpool street.

MR. CONNOR, (of the British and Foreign Normal School, London), having been RE APPOINTED to the above School by His Excellency the Lieutenant-Governor, begs to assure the parents of the children, and the public generally, that the same system of instruction which has for eight years afforded so much satisfaction will be continued to be pursued.

The school will be open to public inspection daily (Saturday excepted) from 9 to 12 a.m., and from 2 to 4 p.m.

Terms as usual.

*October 12, 1849."*¹⁷

Within days of Thomas returning as school master at Liverpool Street, student numbers grew to 60 and by year's end were 73. In the Inspector of Schools' Report for 1849-1850 Mr. Connor's school "stands at the head of all" for quality of education. The Inspector also observed that remuneration of teachers was not only inadequate but fluctuating, and recommended they receive a fixed salary, to remove the temptation to falsify student attendance returns.

With his employment issue settled for the moment, Thomas once again embroiled himself in the politics of the Mechanics' Institute. At the Annual meeting in January 1850, the redrafted rules were presented to the meeting and passed. One of the new

¹⁶ Colonial Times 4 Sep 1849

¹⁷ The Courier 13 Oct 1849

rules required that nominations for the incoming committee must be posted fifteen days in advance, so another general meeting was necessary to elect the new committee. At the next meeting, a completely fresh committee (including Thomas and his friends John Lillie and Robert Officer) was elected, but not without several objections from the outgoing committee. No sooner was the internal wrangling quieted than an external threat appeared in the form of a Mechanics' School of Arts. At the inaugural meeting of the new body, Messrs Connor and others from the Mechanics' Institute were in the audience and expressed their disagreement with the formation of a new society, which seemed to have the same objectives and *modus operandi* as the existing Institute.

In mid 1850, Thomas received an offer to join the Hobart High School as English master. The High School had opened in February 1850. It was a new building, "an ornament to the town - the finest in it and so situated as to be a striking object from the river and harbour". It was constructed by a syndicate of private citizens with £5000 of private money, but with the promise of Government land and assistance and "was intended to advance and elevate the general education of the colony, with a view to the establishment of a Tasmanian university." It was to be "of the same character as that of the public-schools in England", "free from all sectarian influence, conducted by highly accomplished and talented tutors, and watched over by a council, the members of which are a guarantee for its efficiency and respectability."¹⁸ No doubt the presence of Rev. John Lillie and Dr. Robert Officer on the Council helped in selecting Thomas as a candidate. The first Rector and Head Classical master died soon after the school opened, so Rev. John Lillie became acting Rector, and the Head Mathematics Master, Thomas Dobson, became the acting Head Master while the Council recruited another Head Classical master.



Hobart High School (now Domain House)

¹⁸ Colonial Times 8 Jan 1850

Thomas accepted the offer; it meant moving the family from their home in Bathurst Street to live in new, spacious accommodation at the High School, presumably with a higher salary and the prospect of teaching intelligent boys with the capabilities to study English at a higher level. Thomas junior, having reached High School age, was one of those boys.

With the Mechanics Institute in a more stable position, Thomas' next extra-curricular interest was the anti-transportation movement. The movement in Van Diemen's Land began in Launceston in about 1842. It spread and grew slowly but, by 1850, support for abolition had grown large because the other colonies had already succeeded in stopping transportation (1840) and because the British Government had broken several promises to stop transportation to Van Diemen's Land. During 1850, three public meetings were convened in Hobart to debate transportation and draw up petitions for its abolition. About 800-1000 people, including Thomas Connor, attended the third meeting at the Victoria Theatre and Thomas' friend Dr Robert Officer was elected chairman of that meeting.

Soon after the public meeting, the Hobart Town Anti-Transportation League was established, with the object of adopting such measures as would stop Transportation to Van Diemen's Land. Members of the League, including Thomas Connor, pledged *"not to Hire or Employ, directly or indirectly, any Convicts- Male or Female, and whether called Exiles, Probationers, Pass-holders, or Ticket-of-Leave Men, and whether sent under the present or any other system of Transportation, who shall arrive in this colony after this present date."*¹⁹ In 1851, the League won all of the sixteen elected seats available in the first partially-representative Legislative Council and, against Governor Denison's wishes, forced the Council to request Queen Victoria to revoke the Order for transportation to Tasmania and Norfolk Island.

Thomas' and Anne's fifth son, Robert Arthur Henry Connor (known as Arthur), was born at the High School, Hobart on 19 February 1851 (see last page). The family now consisted of Thomas junior (11), George (9), Fanny (6), Cornelia (4), Charlie (2) and Arthur – more than a handful!

In Hobart, it was prematurely announced to the public that the High School Council had recruited a new Headmaster George Brien, Esq., M.A., however, the Council had actually decided *not* to appoint a new Headmaster until they had assessed the performances of both Dobson and Brien. Until a final decision was made, the two were placed on an equal footing – a recipe for disaster.

February 1851 was also the start of the Australian gold rush and, although quite distant from Hobart Town, the effects were acutely felt. Many people, mainly men from all classes of society, left Van Diemen's Land to seek their fortunes. As gold was discovered in Ballarat and Bendigo later that year, the exodus grew. And its impact reached beyond Australia's shores. In 1851, Australia's population was 430,000. In 1852 alone, 370,000 immigrants arrived in Australia seeking gold and other business opportunities. The wealth generated from gold in N.S.W. and Victoria created demand for buildings, roads, bridges and railways; and schools. Australia was becoming independent of Britain. The gold rush, together with the strong local opposition to transportation, persuaded the British Government to discontinue transportation to Tasmania and the other Eastern Australian colonies in 1852.

¹⁹ The Courier 21 Sep 1850

In Hobart, the Mechanics' Institute noticed a significant fall in numbers attending their lectures. Many of the men had left the town temporarily for the goldfields. The committee was concerned at one stage that the Institute might fail through lack of interest, and made an effort to attract a larger female audience.

The High School also suffered a decline in student numbers and a consequent drop in its revenue from fees. Thomas advertised for boarders to live on the school premises to raise extra funds. There was a lack of clear accountability for the decision-making and daily running of the school, and the new Classics master, Mr. Brien resigned in October out of disappointment and frustration, leaving Thomas Dobson as the decision-maker and Headmaster by default, and the School without a Classics master. Dr. William Carr Boyd was eventually employed to fill that position permanently, arriving from England in December 1852.

Florence Marie Connor was born at the High School, Hobart on 28 December 1852. Florence was eventually given the nickname "Dot" because she was such a diminutive person. Also in December, her eldest brother Thomas junior received a prize for Latin at the annual High School examination day.

During 1853, Thomas continued to teach English at the High School and, with Anne, to look after boarders at their residence on the High School grounds. The last convict ship to be sent from England arrived in Tasmania in 1853, fifty years after the colony was founded. Hobart celebrated the day of triumph and the golden jubilee with a holiday on 10 August (for all except Governor Denison and the public service) and a firework display in front of the High School. The children were each given a Demonstration Cake, and a ticket entitling them to receive a pewter Commemorative Medal, celebrating the Jubilee and the Cessation of Transportation.²⁰



1853 Jubilee and Cessation of Transportation Commemorative Medal

Later that year, Thomas joined the bandwagon to elect his friend Dr. Robert Officer to the seat of Buckingham in the Legislative Council. The opposing candidate was Dr. William Croke, a Governor's man, a person whom Thomas had come up against on the Committee of the Mechanics' Institute, and in the Anti-Transportation League, and who was a shareholder of the High School. Thomas spoke 'fluently and effectively'²¹ at some of the rallies held in support of Dr. Officer and, in doing so, further alienated Dr. Croke. The election, held in November 1853, was quite a dirty affair - some supporters of Dr. Croke threatened violence against those who would

²⁰ The Courier 9 Aug 1853

²¹ Launceston Examiner 15 Nov 1853

vote for Dr. Officer. Names of dead persons were used to cast multiple votes. On the morning of the election, Dr. Crooke's supporters twisted a harmless joke made by Thomas at one of the rallies at the expense of a Mr. Bush, into an attack on Mr. Bush's character – a political 'beat-up', forcing Thomas to publish a letter of explanation. The election was won narrowly by Dr. Officer who, in 1854, contributed to drafting a new education act and a new constitution for Tasmania.

During 1853, the High School ran into financial difficulties. It had a debt of £900 and a shortfall in subscriptions. The Headmaster, Thomas Dobson, was struggling to cope – he was a good and enthusiastic teacher but not an efficient and charismatic administrator. The Council increased the school fees, but would not allow some of the 20 or 30 school rooms to be used for boarders, despite demand from parents, and did not wish to rely upon Government beneficence. In this weakened state, the High School, its Council and employees became a target for people such as Dr. Crooke.

In December 1853, both Thomas Connor and Thomas Dobson resigned their positions at the High School. William Carr Boyd resigned soon afterwards. It was reported that Thomas Connor intended to try farming at the isolated settlement of Southport, 100km by road south of Hobart. This settlement was being constructed by convicts and supported local timber, whaling, kelp harvesting and fishing industries. It was (and still is) Australia's most southerly settlement and it had a reputation for bleak weather and lawlessness.

Thomas' and Anne's last day at the High School was the 14 December, and it is clear from the following press article that the boarders regretted their departure.

"The scholars dispersed for the holidays yesterday, but before leaving they presented Mr. Connor with a pleasing mark of their esteem, in the shape of the following address which was accompanied with a very handsome Dressing-case.

High School, 14th Dec, 1853

DEAR Sir, - We, the undersigned, who have been favoured with your parental care, hearing of your intended departure for Southport, desire in acknowledgment of your kind services to give an expression of our gratitude to you. We much regret that we shall no longer be honored by your presence, and beg you to receive as a token of respect the accompanying 'Dressing-case.'

Of Mrs. Connor, we deem it unnecessary to say many words. From the first day that we found shelter under your roof, we have received at her hands the kindness of a mother, and should any of us whose education is incomplete, again have to leave our homes, we shall ever lament the separation.

In conclusion, we cannot but feel grateful when we consider your conduct towards us; we have never had to complain of injustice, but on the contrary have always found you the advocate of fair and impartial measures.

You may rest assured that it's our cordial wish that every success may attend you, and hoping you may arrive at your destined haven in safety, we have the honor to remain, dear sir, your affectionate pupils.

To THOMAS J. CONNOR, Esq., English Master."

Thomas replied as follows:

"High School, 14th Dec. 1853.

MY DEAR BOYS, - It is with no ordinary pleasure that I accept the accompanying token of your respect.

The very strong expressions you have used in reference to the treatment you have received from Mrs. Connor and myself, are most grateful to us both; and prove, that, however discouraging other circumstances may have been, as far as you are concerned, we have not laboured in vain.

I thank you most heartily for the confidence you have expressed in my sense of justice, and for your earnest wishes for my success.

In conclusion, I have now to bear testimony to your excellent conduct in my house, and to express our united desire, that you may be guided safely through the difficult path of life, and that we may all have a happy meeting where parting scenes are never witnessed. I am, my dear boys, faithfully and affectionately yours,

*THOMAS J. CONNOR."*²²

What the "discouraging other circumstances" were, we do not know. Perhaps they were dismissed, or forced to resign under pressure from the School Council, or resigned out of protest against their situation, or for some other reason. Thomas Connor and Thomas Dobson held auction sales of their household furniture, goods and effects on the 28 December at the High School. Thomas sold a large amount of furniture. We don't know if Thomas, Anne and the family ever actually moved and settled in Southport. It certainly would have been a major lifestyle change for all of them.

In February 1854, the Legislative Council announced a "new" Education Bill, to take effect from the 1 April. This Bill re-established a Board of Education for managing public schools in Van Diemen's Land and rescinded the 'penny-a-day' system, replacing it with a salary structure for payment of teachers and setting limits for school fees charged by teachers. It also advertised for teachers to apply for positions. Public schools were defined as any school which received financial assistance from the Government, whether denominational or not. Important other changes were that;

- teachers, who had to be approved by the Government, were classified (and paid) according to ability;
- a scheme for apprenticed pupil teachers was introduced;
- the government would fund up to two thirds of the cost of building a school and schoolmaster's residence;
- school books used must be those approved by the Board and would be provided free; and
- every public school shall teach, as a minimum, Reading, Spelling, Writing, Arithmetic, English Grammar, Geography, History, and Singing.

Perhaps Southport was too quiet and the renewed promise of stable salaried employment as a teacher was too attractive for Thomas to resist, for in June 1854 he advertised that he would be opening the Launceston Academy for young gentleman, temporarily located in the St John's chapel school room, where he had taught more

²² Colonial Times 17 Dec 1853

than ten years before. In August 1854, the Board of Education sent a request to Britain to send out eight qualified teachers to take charge of public schools in the colony. The irony was not lost on Thomas, and some members of the press!

In September, the Launceston Academy moved about 1200 metres to a house on the corner of Elizabeth and Welman Streets, where Thomas and Anne could accommodate boarders. On the 19 September 1854, Narcissa West Connor (known as Cissie), Thomas and Anne's ninth and last child, was born at the house on Welman Street. She may have been named after Rev. John West, a long-term friend of Thomas' since his arrival in Tasmania, who left Launceston in November 1854²³. Thomas and Anne fell easily back into Launceston society – Thomas was re-elected to the committee of the Launceston Mechanics' Institute, which was now located in temporary quarters in St. John Street. The Institute still had not raised sufficient funds to build its own hall. Later in 1854, the colony of Van Diemen's Land (still not officially 'Tasmania') achieved self-government, with its own constitution, with democratically-elected Upper and Lower houses of Parliament.

It seems, however, that the Launceston Academy was not a great success, because Thomas answered an advertisement for a teacher, trained in the B.& F.S.S. system, to take charge of the non-government Redfern Congregational School in James Street, Redfern, New South Wales. This school was in new premises located at the rear of the Congregational Church. Thomas and his family (except Thomas junior who stayed behind in Launceston) sailed from Hobart for Sydney on the barque *Eliza Frances* on the 30 December 1854.

The Connor family did not stay in N.S.W. for long. Barely one year later on 18 January 1856, an advance party of Thomas and George returned to Launceston aboard the steamer *Black Swan* and reunited with Thomas junior. Anne and the other six children returned three weeks later aboard the *Royal Shepherd*. By the time they returned to Launceston, Van Diemen's Land had formally been re-named Tasmania, and the Church of England had agreed to co-operate with the Tasmanian Board of Education. On 21 January, Thomas re-opened the Launceston Academy for young gentlemen at the St. John's chapel school room, the Welman Street building having been occupied by another teacher soon after the Connors departed. By April, however, they returned to the premises at the corner of Welman and Elizabeth Streets, Windmill Hill. They also offered classes in Arithmetic and Geography to young ladies. The school house had a large muddy drain out front into which the boys would push each other, and Tom (as he was known to the boys) occasionally had to break up fights between them²⁴. The remainder of 1856 passed uneventfully.

In 1857, the government decided to establish a Northern Division of the Board of Education, with its own inspectorate, and they called for applicants to the position of Inspector of Schools, northern division. Thomas applied, and it appeared for a while that he was the preferred candidate. After a resume of Thomas' experience and qualifications, backed up by Colonial testimonials from twenty-six ministers of seven denominations, members of parliament, and other gentlemen, one editor said;

"In every place he acquired the confidence and esteem of those who knew him, as the numerous testimonials appended to his application abundantly testify. The central school in this city, under his supervision, was certainly the best conducted school in the colony. So far as experience goes Mr. Connor is exceedingly well

²³ John Reynolds, 'West, John (1809–1873)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/west-john-2784/text3965>,

²⁴ Launceston Examiner 12 Dec 1905

fitted for the post. A somewhat long and diversified career as a schoolmaster, after having been regularly trained to the work, along with the opportunities he has had of acquiring experience in other places, and of which he has industriously availed himself, should certainly give him a preference in the consideration of the government.”²⁵

Other newspaper editors were less complimentary;

“We regret to find that a system of partizanship, without the shadow of justification, has been imported into the privileges of this body, in reference to the appointment of an Inspector of Schools for the northern division of the Island. It is stated, that a Mr. Connor - a man better known than liked - has secured the support of three members of the board, prior to the examination of the candidates or any real investigation into their respective merits or claims.”²⁶

Thomas failed to get the appointment and, after a trip to Melbourne with John Lillie, continued running his Launceston Academy. In October 1857, the school and the family moved to Canning Street near St John’s Square. In October the following year, the school moved again to Upper Elizabeth Street and was renamed the Fellenberg House School. All of this moving must have been very unsettling for the family, and very expensive.

In the meantime, Thomas continued on the committee of the Mechanics’ Institute and also on the committee of the Philharmonic Society. He gave a lecture at the Mechanics’ Institute entitled “National Amusements - their History and Influence”, and attended meetings concerning the Public Lands Bill, Public Education, the Launceston-Deloraine Railway and the Indian Relief Fund. He became the returning officer for the St John’s Square district and, in 1858, was nominated without his consent as an Alderman for the Town of Launceston (although he declared the nomination invalid, his name appeared on the ballot paper and he recorded less than ten votes).

During July and August 1859, Thomas made two trips to Melbourne, presumably to investigate teaching opportunities in Victoria for, at the end of September after eighteen years in Tasmania, the whole family left Launceston and arrived in Melbourne on 1 October, the day that Flying Buck easily won the Great Australian Champion Sweepstakes.

²⁵ Colonial Times 3 Jan 1857

²⁶ Hobart Town Mercury 2 Mar 1857

Victoria (1859-1880)

Melbourne

When the Connors arrived in Victoria, the population had reached 500,000 people thanks to the gold rush, and Melbourne had become Australia's largest city with about 120,000 people. The city was fully established – most of the land had been sold and already the city was differentiated into business, entertainment, medical, legal etc. precincts. It had a reliable water supply system and the first horse-drawn trams were already operating between the city and the port at Hobson's Bay.

Immigrants seeking gold were the main source of population growth but, of course, only a minority of them actually became wealthy. Some arrived at Melbourne but found that they could not afford the exorbitant costs of travelling to the goldfields, and stayed. Many who reached the goldfields gave up prospecting as the easy diggings were exhausted and returned to Melbourne with their families, looking for work.

Between 1855 and 1860, the number of children enrolled in public schools in Victoria rose from 21,000 to 48,000 and the high demand for teachers is what attracted Thomas away from Tasmania. Schooling was not compulsory and not entirely free, so no doubt, the number of school-age children was much higher and attendance was irregular. The Victorian Government had strong revenues from the gold sector and, unlike Tasmania, could afford to support public co-education. Even so, schools were often held in makeshift and dilapidated buildings. The course of study, in addition to the 3Rs, usually included grammar, dictation, spelling, geography, drill, drawing and singing, and in some instances, higher subjects such as mathematics, bookkeeping, Latin and French.²⁷ Each class had students of similar education level but, because schooling was not compulsory, ages within a class could range from six to thirteen years.

Upon arriving in Melbourne, Thomas and Anne were employed by the Denominational Schools Board of Education (as distinct from the National Schools Board) effective from 1 January 1860 - Thomas was Teacher No. 578 Classification II, and Anne was Teacher No. 579. They were posted to the Carlton School (No. 158), Thomas as Head Teacher and Anne as Assistant Teacher and Sewing Mistress. The family lived at 33 Rathdowne Street, Carlton, opposite Carlton Gardens. Perhaps they were part of the large crowd that turned out to farewell the Burke and Wills expedition in August 1860.

Soon after arriving in Victoria, Thomas (47) and his two sons Thomas junior (19) and George (16) joined the Victorian Volunteer Rifle Corps, Carlton Brigade. The volunteer rifle brigades had been sanctioned by the Victorian Government in 1854 in response to perceived vulnerability of the colony while its small military garrison was being used to quell unrest on the gold diggings at Ballarat and the Eureka stockade. The gold discoveries also made Victoria a more attractive target for international powers such as Russia and France, which at that time were engaged in the Crimean War. In 1857, the Government decided to place greater reliance on its volunteers and, by late 1860, the volunteer force had almost reached its planned full complement of 5000 men. Thomas senior was an inaugural member of the Carlton Rifles in August 1860.

²⁷ Hooper, C. "eMelbourne". Department of History, The University of Melbourne Published July 2008
<http://www.emelbourne.net.au/biogs/EM00507b.htm>



Sgt. Thomas J Connor, Victorian Volunteer Rifles, Carlton Coy, c.1861.
(enlargement from the small photograph²⁸.)

²⁸ Victorian Volunteer Rifles, Carlton Company: Captain Radcliffe. ca 1861. Batchelder & O'Neill. Copyright held by the State Library of Victoria. Accession Number H183 - b28218 - A400.

The Carlton Volunteer Rifle Company held several parades per week, participated in annual range practices and attended field camps during Easter. They also competed in rifle matches conducted by the Victorian Rifle Association, using Government supplied rifles and ammunition. Thomas senior and George qualified as marksmen. By January 1861, when all three Connors competed in the Victorian Rifle Association matches, Thomas senior had been promoted to Sergeant²⁹. Promotion in the Victorian Volunteer Rifles was a democratic process. It was only natural that someone with Thomas' background and experience in teaching and public service, with an ability for public speaking, should be selected as a leader. A photograph was taken in about 1861 of Captain Radcliffe with other officers and N.C.O.s of the Carlton Volunteer Rifle Company. Sgt Thomas J. Connor, then aged about 48, is second from the left.

Following in his father's footsteps, Thomas junior (Teacher No 580) was also employed by the Denominational Schools Board and in June 1861 was posted to the Errol Street School (No. 206) North Melbourne as an assistant teacher. It was here that he met his future wife Emily Gibbons, also a school teacher at Errol Street. Like his father, Thomas junior quickly became involved in extra-curricular activities. Along with his commitment to the Carlton Rifles, he was honorary secretary of the Carlton Cricket Club and called the meeting to establish the first Carlton Football Club in 1861.³⁰ In November 1861, the first Melbourne Cup was run and won by the favourite 'Archer'. Then in January 1862, the first international cricket match between an All England XI and the XVIII of Victoria was played at the Melbourne Metropolitan Cricket Ground, rounding out a portentous summer sporting season in Melbourne. Given their love of cricket, no doubt Thomas senior, junior and George attended the cricket match, which the All-England team won easily despite being out-numbered.

In 1862, the Victorian Government rationalised its management of schools by creating a single Board of Education for the distribution of public funds, for determining where public schools should be established, the inspection of schools, the examination and classification of teachers, the determination of a course of secular study to be adopted in schools and the setting of school fees.³¹ Probably as a result of the new Board's decisions, in April 1862 Thomas and Anne were transferred, although not far, to the Grattan Street Carlton School No. 175 (later known as the Lygon Street Carlton School No. 1073). Their roles as Head Teacher, and Assistant Teacher and Sewing Mistress respectively did not change. The family also moved to a house close to the northern end of Cardigan Street, Carlton, near the cemetery. Young Arthur (aged 11) joined a Volunteer Band as a drummer, and played at Victoria's first state funeral, for Burke and Wills, in January 1863.³²

In May 1863, Thomas junior married Emily Gibbons and became Head Teacher of the South Yarra Presbyterian School No 583. Then in August, Thomas and Anne moved to the National School (No. 317) attached to the Immigrant's Home. Thomas was the Head Teacher and Anne the Work Mistress. We don't know if this move was voluntary, or a normal posting by the N.S.B. It involved relocating the family to live on site at the Immigrants' Home.

²⁹ The Argus 2 Jan 1861

³⁰ The Argus 20 May 1861

³¹ Public Record Office Victoria Group VRG 24 Educational Institutions.

³² Foster Mirror and South Gippsland Shire Advocate 11 Nov 1915



Melbourne c.1863, from the Barracks, showing the Immigrant's Home (foreground) and St Kilda Road leading over Princes Bridge to the city.³³

The Immigrants' Home was established by the Immigrants' Aid Society, a benevolent institution associated with protestant churches and run by businessmen, to help and advise new immigrants to Melbourne. It was established in response to the many new arrivals, attracted by gold, who were living in 'Canvas Town' on the southern fringe of the city during the 1850s. The Immigrants' Home was the name early colonists gave to ramshackle buildings on either side of St Kilda Road south of Princes Bridge. The buildings were the old barracks of the 40th Regiment and were in very poor condition.

Over time, the Immigrants' Home came to serve a similar function to an English workhouse, operating a night shelter, convalescent hospital and providing shelter for deserted wives, single mothers, the disabled and neglected children. Children dealt with by the courts could be sent to the Immigrants' Home for care and reform. In the first eight months of 1863, *"158 children had been sent to the Immigrants' Home by the police magistrates, and the Home at present contained 320 of these destitute children."*³⁴ By January 1864, there were 438 children whose care was chargeable to the Government, and 162 children chargeable to the Society. The superintendent of the Immigrants' Home, Mr. James Harcourt, was in the process of establishing an Industrial School to teach carpentry, shoemaking, tailoring etc. when the Connors arrived. The pride of the Home was their fife and drum band that played at public events around Melbourne.

For Thomas and Anne, it must have been a familiar sight and challenge, having been placed in similar circumstances in Launceston and Hobart, although with fewer students. According to their Teacher Record Books, they were paid by the Government until 31 December 1863 and from then on, it is presumed that they were in the employ of the Immigrants' Aid Society. From 22 January 1864, Cornelia (aged 17, Teacher No. 581) and Charles (aged 15, Teacher No. 582) were also temporarily employed at the Immigrants' Home but received no pay from the Government. By that time, Thomas junior and Emily were expecting their first child, and George had probably left home, leaving Fanny, Arthur, Florence (Dott) and Cissie at home.

³³ Charles Nettleton, photographer. State Library of Victoria.

³⁴ The Argus 7 Sep 1863

The buildings at the Immigrants' Home consisted of "*ugly barn-like constructions, of the most primitive and make-shift character, and of three or four iron cottages.*"³⁵ With so many new arrivals, disease was regularly introduced to the Home. There was insufficient room to have an isolation ward, so communicable diseases such as measles, ophthalmia, conjunctivitis, influenza, scabies and eczema, and outbreaks of lice, fleas etc. could spread rapidly through the inmates. In summer, the conditions were stifling and in winter they were sodden and cold. In December 1863, the Yarra River flooded and, although the flood level did not reach the Immigrants' Home, many people were displaced from Canvas Town and required assistance. By day, Thomas, Anne, Cornelia and Charles, along with other teachers, taught mixed classes ranging from infants (3 to 6 years) up to young adolescents (12 to 13 years). By night, they became maintainers and carers *in loco parentis*. No doubt the boundary between teacher and parent became rather blurred, for all the occupants. Meanwhile, Thomas continued his active participation in the Carlton Volunteer Rifle Company, becoming Acting Lieutenant in March 1864 and then Lieutenant in May 1864³⁶. He organised morning and moonlight parades, and the annual encampment at Sunbury during Easter.

In August 1864, the Victorian Government passed the Neglected and Criminal Children's Act, which covered every child found begging, wandering about, sleeping in the open, residing in a brothel or "squat", guilty of an offence, deserted without support, uncontrollable by its parents or an inmate of the Immigrants' Home. The Act allowed for the establishment of Industrial Schools for educating and training these children in trades, and Reformatories for correction. The Immigrants' Home was immediately renamed the Princes Bridge Industrial School and all the 463 children came under Government control and eligible for Government support. James Harcourt was temporarily appointed Superintendent of all Industrial Schools in Victoria. Reformatories for boys were established initially on the floating hulks *Deborah* and *Sir Harry Smith* moored in Hobson's Bay.

For the Connors, the immediate impacts of the new Act were that the buildings at the Princes Bridge Industrial School got a fresh coat of whitewash, and there was a new influx of children, criminal and otherwise. In the last four months of 1864, the school, which was already straining its capacity, received 190 children from the courts, sentenced to stay at the Prince's Bridge Industrial School for up to seven years. The Government began to build a new Industrial School on a large estate at Sunbury, 40km north-west of Melbourne, but in the meantime, more and more children arrived. James Harcourt spent increasing amounts of time looking after Sunbury and other new developments; consequently, Thomas had to spend more time superintending and administering the Prince's Bridge School although technically he was only the Head Teacher.

At the beginning of 1865, there were 600 children at the Prince's Bridge School and 200 more arrived in the first three months of that year. The Government estimated that by the end of the year the school would contain 1300 children, in buildings which were "*crumbling into decay, infested with bugs and so dried up that a single spark might execute a conflagration...*" The mortality rate in 1865 (for all Industrial Schools) was more than 11 per cent! Something had to give. Although the Sunbury Industrial School had not been completed, in March James Harcourt moved 160 children to the unfinished buildings at Sunbury – some children lived in tents. In July, forty boys were sent to one of the ships in Hobson's bay to be trained for the sea. Then in November, 100 boys were moved to a new Industrial School at Geelong. James

³⁵ The Argus 15 Sep 1864

³⁶ Government Gazette 6 May 1864

Harcourt spent less and less time at the Prince's Bridge School. Even after these measures, the school had 650 children in September 1865 - about 253 in excess of its accommodation capacity³⁷. All the while, some members of parliament complained hard about the high costs of supporting these institutions (including James Harcourt's salary). In October 1865, according to the coroner, one child at Sunbury died because of the neglect of a warder. Several newspapers reported other cases of alleged ill-treatment or neglect of children, which were contradicted by subsequent favorable inspections of Sunbury and the Prince's Bridge establishments. Undeterred, the press mounted a public campaign against Government mismanagement of Industrial Schools and, by November, the Government and Chief Secretary Mr. McCulloch were under extreme pressure to take some positive action.

The Chief Secretary first appointed a board of inspectors to review the conditions at Sunbury and Prince's Bridge but it was clear that the public expected change in management. First to go was the superintendent of the Sunbury Industrial School Mr. Weekes, despite his strong warnings to the Chief Secretary concerning the poor state of the Sunbury Industrial School and its children. Then in early 1866, James Harcourt, who had been working tirelessly to manage a rapidly expanding portfolio of Industrial Schools with insufficient resources, fell ill and requested leave of absence. The Chief Secretary refused his application and James Harcourt was forced to resign. Before leaving the public service, he strongly recommended that Thomas Connor should be made superintendent of the Prince's Bridge Industrial School, a position that he had been filling in a nominal capacity for some time. The replacement for James Harcourt was George O. Duncan, ex-Superintendent of Pentridge Penal Establishment.

By early 1866, the Princes' Bridge School had become almost exclusively a girls' school. There had been some unwanted interaction between the sexes, so most of the older boys were sent to other establishments, as they became ready to receive them. After Thomas took over as superintendent, he began to organize outings for the children. There were picnics up the Yarra and a joint concert with pupils from the South Yarra State School where Thomas junior was head teacher. The Government inspectors reported favourably on what they saw of the management, education and health of the children, while noting that the premises were wholly unsuited to their present use.

Then, on 28 March 1866, soon after Thomas had become superintendent, the clerk and store-keeper at the Prince's Bridge Industrial School Mr. Macfarlane, wrote a letter to the inspectors detailing rumours he had heard within the school that Thomas had been acting with gross indecency towards some of the girls. Given the seriousness of the charges and knowing that the public spotlight was trained on Industrial Schools, Mr. Duncan immediately conducted a preliminary internal inquiry at the school. Thomas was present at this inquiry to hear the evidence against him. While this inquiry was in progress, someone leaked the matter to *The Age* newspaper and, on 31 March, it published the story in lurid and sensational detail, which was quickly copied by other newspapers³⁸. Although most papers were careful to say that the allegations against Thomas Connor were unproven, the stories assumed that he was guilty, which supported their claims of Government mismanagement of Industrial Schools in general. They demanded a full and open Government inquiry - some demanded a judicial inquiry – and “*nothing but a complete*

³⁷ *The Argus* 26 Sep 1865

³⁸ *The Age* 31 Mar 1866 ‘Frightful Immorality at Industrial Schools’

*refutation of the charges made, or, if proved, an exemplary punishment of the offence*³⁹ would satisfy them.

Thomas was suspended after the preliminary investigation and Mr. Macfarlane, who had lodged the complaint, was made acting superintendent of Prince's Bridge Industrial School. Anne was still the Matron at the school and it seems that she was very protective of her husband and his reputation. Eventually Anne defied Mr. Macfarlane and, in true Yorkshire style, told him bluntly what she thought of him and her husband's accusers - she was charged with insubordination and also suspended⁴⁰. A majority of the girls in the school had contempt for those inmates who had made what they regarded as unjust and untruthful accusations against Thomas. They threatened one of the informants and were insubordinate to Mr. Macfarlane who threatened them with a night in the cells unless they behaved.

The Government quickly appointed a Board of Inquiry, comprising the Sheriff Claude Farie and two Police Magistrates, to investigate the charges against Thomas. They began taking evidence behind closed doors at a school room at Prince's Bridge on the 12 April and concluded their inquiry on 20 April. Thomas was represented by a solicitor and spoke in his own defense. The Board of Inquiry reported their findings and conclusions to the Government on 26 April and the report was tabled in the Parliament on 23 May 1866, on which date it became public.⁴¹ Unfortunately, the eight appendices to the report, which contained Thomas' statement and other evidence, have been lost.

The Board found *"there is not apparently the slightest foundation for the gravest of all the charges preferred against the accused"* and *"there is not sufficient reliable evidence to sustain any of the other charges as contained in Mr. Macfarlane's letter."* The Board said that the witnesses were, almost without exception, from the very dregs of society, they were not likely to be very reliable witnesses, and the Board found it very difficult to distinguish truth from falsehood.

The Board also found, however, that *"Mr. Connor did what should have been performed by female officers only; and his doing so unaccompanied by any female officers, if not absolutely indecent, was certainly highly unbecoming and indiscreet."* These actions included visiting the female dormitories when necessary, taking tea to a sick girl, and taking a small crying child to be comforted by her older sister.

Lastly, the Board concluded that the officers at Prince's Bridge *"have had great difficulties to contend with in the establishment of such an institution, from the large number of inmates brought hurriedly together, in premises so utterly unsuited, both from the nature of their construction, and the insufficiency of accommodation, for the large number that have had to be provided for. The character and antecessors of the children and their parents have, in most instances, been such as to render the task of looking after them anything but easy or hopeful..."*. This last conclusion eventually led to refurbishment of the Prince's Bridge Industrial School.

No matter what the Board concluded, given the politics and publicity attached to the case, Thomas' position at Prince's Bridge Industrial School had become untenable and he was dismissed from his post. Anne and the family had to leave also and find

³⁹ The Argus 3 Apr 1866

⁴⁰ The Gippsland Times (from the Age) 5 Apr 1866

⁴¹ 1866 (Second Session) Victoria Mr. CONNOR. REPORT of the Board appointed by the Governor in Council to inquire into and report on the Charges preferred against Mr. Connor, Superintendent of the Prince's Bridge Industrial Schools. Public Records Office Vic VPRS 3253 P0 Units 243 and 254.

other accommodation. Thomas was dismissed from the Public Service in May. By July, their quarters at Prince's Bridge were being refurbished for the next school master. Cornelia was given a teaching post at her brother Thomas' school at South Yarra. Charles found a job teaching the boys at the reformatory-cum-industrial school aboard the hulk *Sir Harry Smith*. He went on to have a distinguished career in the Victorian Reformatory and Penal Department, rising to become Chief Inspector. Arthur also taught at the South Yarra School, but not in any official capacity.

After such a sensational event, Thomas' reputation in Melbourne was permanently damaged and he had to escape the city. Coincidentally, advertisements appeared in the Melbourne Argus for a married teacher at the Alberton Common School, with a residence provided. Thomas may have sent his application and testimonials to the correspondent for the Alberton School Committee, Mr. E. T. Newton, but he was not successful. Thomas and Anne sailed to South Australia in May to visit Anne's younger brother Robert Peake who had emigrated to Australia with his family in 1862 and was a school teacher in Naracoorte. While there, Thomas and Anne investigated opportunities for teaching positions in South Australia, however they returned to Melbourne in August and probably stayed with Thomas junior, Emily and their two granddaughters while they assessed their options for the future.

In October 1866, Thomas managed to secure a teaching post at the St John the Evangelist Church of England School, Footscray. He and Anne were also Sunday School teachers at this church, but after four months there, the clergyman was nominated for transfer and Thomas' posting became redundant. Armed with glowing testimonials from Rev. Dixon Bertram of Footscray, Rev. George Mackie of South Yarra, ex-Schools Inspector James Bonwick, children from the Industrial School, Princes Bridge and several others, Thomas applied for teaching jobs around Melbourne, but without success. Leaving Melbourne seemed to be their only option.

Gippsland

At that time, the Government advertised allotments of Crown land for lease near Alberton. Through their long service in the Carlton Rifles, both Thomas and George became entitled to receive from the Board of Land and Works a certificate equivalent to £50 towards the purchase money or rent of any Crown Land. George was also seeking a change of career, so the possibility of securing some farming land gave the whole family an extra incentive to move to Alberton and start afresh.

Alberton was a small town in the lush dairying country of South Gippsland, about 170 kilometres east of Melbourne⁴². The Alberton Shire, which included the towns of Alberton, Port Albert, Yarram Yarram, and Tarraville had about 2700 people, and the Alberton School had about 50 children. Access to Alberton at that time was a day's sail by ship from Melbourne (Hobson's Bay) to Port Albert, and then by road northward for nine kilometres. At one stage in Victoria's history, Port Albert was vying with Port Phillip to be Victoria's major port, but the opening up of grazing and agricultural land in central Victoria and then the gold rush assured Port Phillip's future. Port Albert became a small trading and fishing port, serving the agricultural activities in the local Gippsland hinterland.

Using their grants, Thomas and George leased an allotment on the Albert and Jack River pasture flats, six kilometres upstream from Alberton. The selection was called *Jack Rivulet Run* and had previously been leased and occupied by John Amey, who

⁴² Gippsland Guardian 29 Mar 1867

had died in 1866. The family, consisting of Thomas, Anne, George, Fanny, Arthur, and Cissie took up residence in the four-roomed timber house on 29 May 1867⁴³. Thomas junior, Cornelia, Charlie and Florence (at South Yarra school) stayed in Melbourne. Within a short time, largely through joining the local Church of England congregation, the Connor family was soon accepted into the small Alberton community.

In July after only three months in the job, the school master at Alberton Mr. W.H. Dunne gave notice of his intention to resign, and the Alberton school committee had to find a replacement quickly. The head of the committee Edward T. Newton realized that they had a suitable candidate in Thomas Connor already at hand and, after some due diligence, the committee agreed to employ Thomas and Anne and ask permission afterwards. So, while George managed the farm, Thomas and Anne returned to teaching and moved into the schoolmasters' residence in Alberton. Thomas was appointed Head Teacher and Anne the Work Mistress at the Alberton School (No.1) effective 1 August 1867.

E.T. Newton wrote to the Board of Education on behalf of the Alberton School Committee advising them of the resignation of Mr. Dunne and seeking their approval for the appointments of Thomas and Anne.⁴⁴ After some delay, the request was forwarded to the Chief Secretary who recounted the reason for Thomas' dismissal from the Public Service following the Princes Bridge enquiry, namely that *"Although the evidence did not substantiate the gravest of the charges yet Mr. Connor's conduct was shown to have been such as to render him in the opinion of the Governor-in-Council unfit to be retained in the Service."* In the face of this reply from the head of the Public Service, the Board of Education declined to sanction the Alberton appointment. The Alberton School Committee decided to go in to bat for Thomas and replied to the Board of Education, sending them testimonials of Thomas' character and abilities and begging them to reconsider, in the firm belief that *"If the Board will be good enough to enquire into the case they will find that the Board of Inquiry reported that the charges against Mr. Connor were utterly groundless, and they did not recommend Mr. Connor's removal. The Committee think with many others that Mr. Connor has been a victim of unworthy motives."* Despite this, the Board of Education again declined to sanction Thomas' appointment. E.T. Newton's reply of the 21 October was scathing of the Board's decision, setting out reasons why the Alberton Committee believed that *"these charges preferred against the Superintendent of the Industrial Schools by his subordinate office exhibited unmistakably a fore-existing animus, but which unfortunately received a reward by the transference of the situation from the superior to the subordinate, thus engendering a suspicion that the affair was not altogether got up by him for a purely public purpose."* On the 13 November 1867, the Board of Education relented and approved the appointments of Thomas Connor to Mastership and Anne Connor to Works Mistress of the Alberton School.

Apart from the corrugated iron school building, Alberton had a post office, churches, a police station, court house, hotel and general store. It was a very small and close community. Thomas, Anne and their family immediately began to contribute to community life, as they had done everywhere else they had lived. Thomas became the honorary secretary and treasurer of the Alberton Cricket Club at the start of the 1867-68 season. The family members were great supporters of St. Luke's Anglican Church and contributed to managing church affairs and participating in fund raising activities. A series of concerts and readings were held during 1868 in aid of the church. Thomas' forté was reading extracts from literature, such as "Oliver Twist".

⁴³ Gippsland Standard 3 Jun 1880

⁴⁴ Special Case File No 158a, Education Department. *Public Records Office Victoria Ref VPRS 892, Series P0000, Unit 10*

According to the reports, Thomas had a strong, expressive reading voice but he tended to read far too long, to the point where it became tiresome and he lost the audience. Fanny and Cissie had excellent singing voices, performing solo and as a duet.



The Alberton Connors kept in close touch with their family members in Melbourne. They sent food parcels to Melbourne occasionally and once, a live kangaroo. Over the Christmas - New Year period, the Melbourne families would visit Alberton to see their parents and grandparents. Cornelia, who was unmarried and teaching in South Yarra, became pregnant in mid 1868. She took leave of absence from teaching in October 1868 and returned to Alberton for most of her pregnancy. Florence came to live in Alberton at the end of 1868 after completing her schooling at South Yarra and receiving a prize for needlework. Cornelia returned to Melbourne at the end of January 1869 to have her baby at a clinic, and to resign from the Board of Education. Her baby, named Emily, was born on 8 March 1869, but she died only 27 days later. At the end of April, Cornelia returned to live in Alberton permanently.

On 5 June 1869, Thomas was appointed as Deputy Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages for the District of Alberton. Perhaps his experiences in this role are what prompted him to write (in a strong, clear hand) his Will on 30 August 1869, in which he left his interest in a life insurance policy and his half share of Jack Rivulet Run to Anne. One of his most pleasurable tasks was to register the marriage of his son George to Eliza Newton (daughter of E.T. Newton) at St. Luke's Church on 13 July 1870, followed by the birth of his second grandson George Stanley Newton Connor (called Stan) on 25 March 1871.

In 1872, the Victorian Government passed a new Education Act. It was something of a landmark, the main changes being the appointment of a Minister for Public

Instruction, withdrawal of public funding for denominational schools, and free secular compulsory education for children aged from 6 to 15 years old. During 1872, the Alberton School was caught up in a rationalization of schools, with the result that Alberton's allotment was reduced but Thomas' salary increased. Anne ceased teaching for five months, during which time her third grandson William Edward Ernest Connor was born. With education becoming compulsory (under threat of fines against parents) and an increase in the frequency of school inspections, student numbers at Alberton soon increased and Anne returned to her old post. Later that year, Thomas ran for the position of Auditor of the Alberton Shire, but he did not put much effort into his election campaign and was easily beaten by his opponent, a long-term resident of Port Albert.

In early 1873, Thomas bought *Seabank*, a home located on 14 acres of land at old Port Albert, for £150 with a bank loan of £110 secured by mortgage over the property. He also selected the adjoining 33 acres of sandy, poor quality land. *Seabank* was one of the original houses in the area, built in 1858 by Captain Charles Tyers, an old and respected colonist, surveyor and magistrate. The house looked west over the beach, water and mangrove islands of McMillan Bay which provided access to the Old Port Albert and the Albert River mouth. This is the place where overland explorer Angus McMillan reached the south coast from southern New South Wales in 1841. *Seabank* was built of timber with shingle roof (later replaced with iron). It had three sitting rooms and four bedrooms lined with papered hessian, a detached kitchen, servants' quarters, store and the usual outhouses. Verandahs ran along three sides and double french doors looked west over the water⁴⁵. There was a small jetty upstream and a protected swimming area. Thomas imported trees from Melbourne to plant around the property. It would have been a pleasant place to retire; to stroll along the beach, sit on the porch and watch the sun set over the bay and Wilson's Promontory in the distance, and perhaps go fishing on weekends.



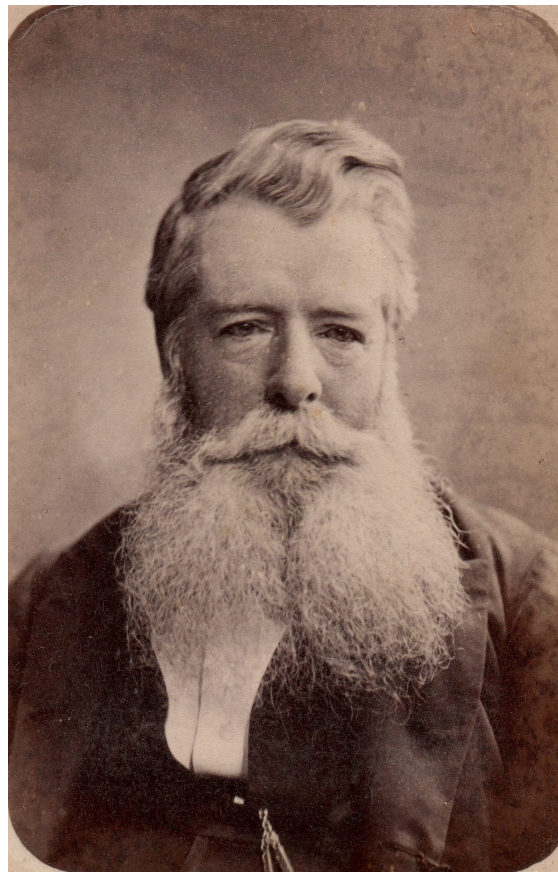
Seabank circa 1970⁴⁶. The house has since been demolished and the area is now the Seabank Caravan Park. Only some old post-and-rail fencing remains.

⁴⁵ Graeme Butler & Associates 1982 *Port Albert Conservation Study* pp 39-40

⁴⁶ Graeme Butler & Associates 1982 *Port Albert Conservation Study* pp 39-40

The year 1873 was an eventful one for Thomas and Anne's family. Happy events were that Cornelia (aged 26) married Henry Archer Denham (called Denham) on 19 June at St. Luke's Church in Alberton. Florence (aged 20) became a Pupil Teacher at Alberton School on 1 July. Georgia Alice Connor was born to George and Eliza at Jack Rivulet Run on 16 August. In Maryborough Vic., Charlie (aged 25) married Elizabeth Marion Joyce on 30 September. These were overshadowed by the death of George on 7 September 1873. George became ill quite suddenly. He went to *Seabank* to be closer to medical and family care but, within three weeks, died of valvular disease of the heart and Bright's disease of the kidneys. He was only 30 years old. He left half of his farming property totaling 226 acres to his wife Eliza and half to his father Thomas. His brother Arthur (aged 22) was the executor of the will.

Although Thomas now had a direct interest in a farming venture for the first time, he was still teaching and did not have the time or experience to run the operation. Eliza and her young children Stan (2), Ernie (1) and Georgia (3 weeks) had to rely upon their extended family to help them through. Arthur, with Eliza's brother Alfred, helped to run the farm in George's place, while Thomas and Anne and Eliza's parents provided grandchild minding duties when necessary. Now in their 60s, Thomas and Anne (with Florence) continued teaching the children of Alberton, including their grandchildren, but as time went on, it is clear from the school inspectors' reports that Thomas' enthusiasm and energy for teaching was waning.



Thomas James Connor
(courtesy Jennie Russell)

More grandchildren arrived over the next three years – Cornelia's boys Henry James and George Hamilton Denham brought the total at Alberton to five. Thomas junior in Melbourne had lost two sons as infants and now had four living children. Charlie and

Lizzie, who were then living at Sunbury, had two children. At the end of March 1877, Florence resigned from teaching in order to marry John Davey Ferres, son of John Ferres the Government printer who, coincidentally, had printed the report of the Board of Inquiry into the Prince's Bridge affair. This left Thomas, Anne, Fanny and Cissie living at *Seabank*.

In January 1879 Thomas and Anne were posted to the Yarram Yarram Public School (No. 93). This meant a daily return journey of 25 kilometres by horse and trap. Perhaps the school inspector who visited in September 1879 and commented "*appears to have been a good teacher - getting rather too old*", realised that this travel was too much for Thomas. In April 1880, they were transferred again, this time to Port Albert School (No. 490), only five kilometres from *Seabank*.

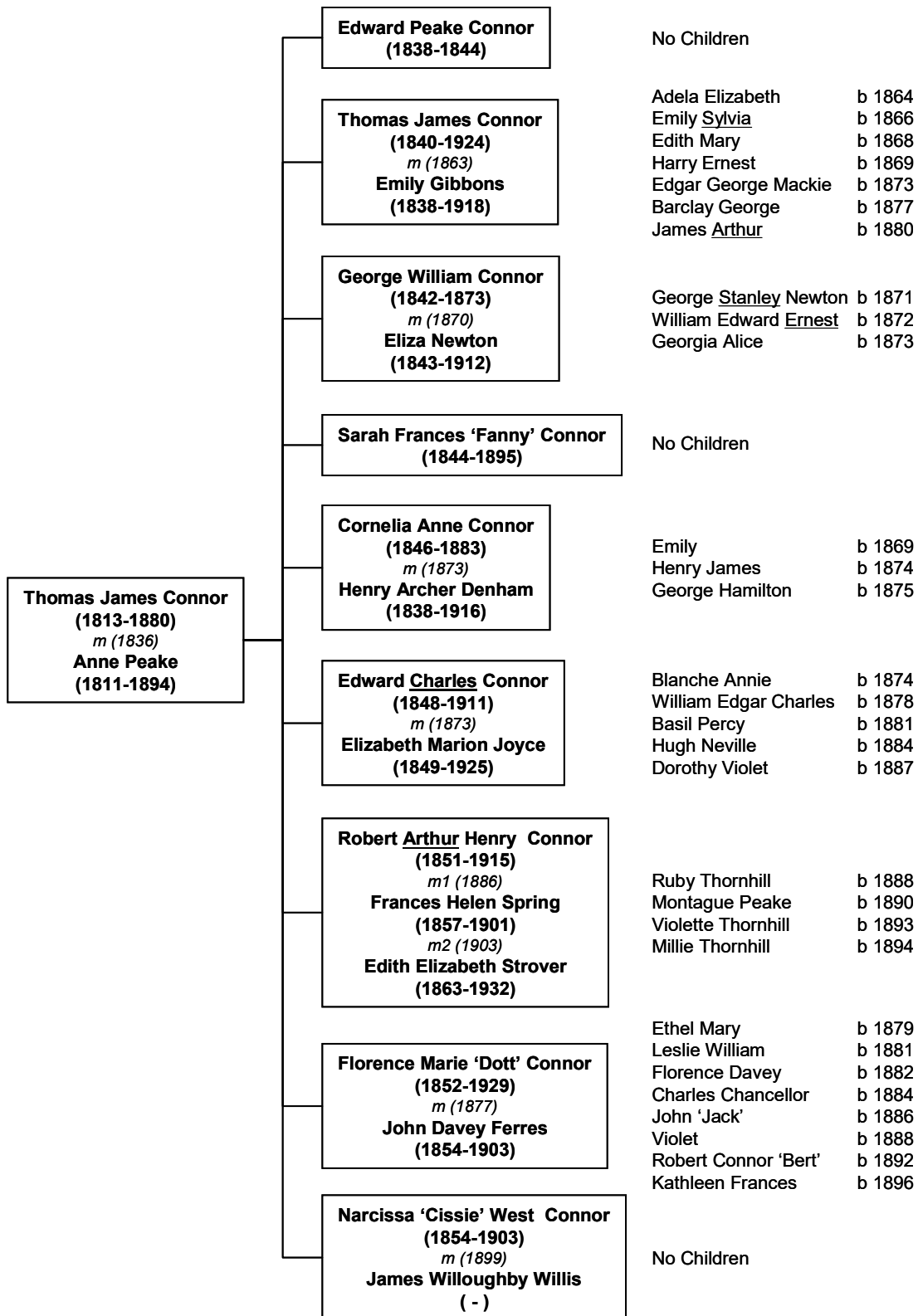
Two months later on 23 May, while having a conversation with his son-in-law Henry Denham over Sunday dinner at *Seabank*, Thomas suffered a stroke which paralyzed the right side of his body and rendered him speechless. His family rallied around him – Thomas junior came from Melbourne and Charles from Ballarat. Although he could not speak, he could recognise them and acknowledge them by squeezing their hands. He died peacefully on 30 May aged 67, and was buried in the Church of England section of the Alberton Cemetery on the 1 June 1880. He left his estate to Anne and to George's widow Eliza.

Thomas was survived by his wife Anne, seven children and thirteen grandchildren. His legacy is the inspiration he gave to some of his children and grandchildren to become teachers, contribute actively to civic life and, together, the thousands of young children that they educated in England, Tasmania, New South Wales and Victoria.

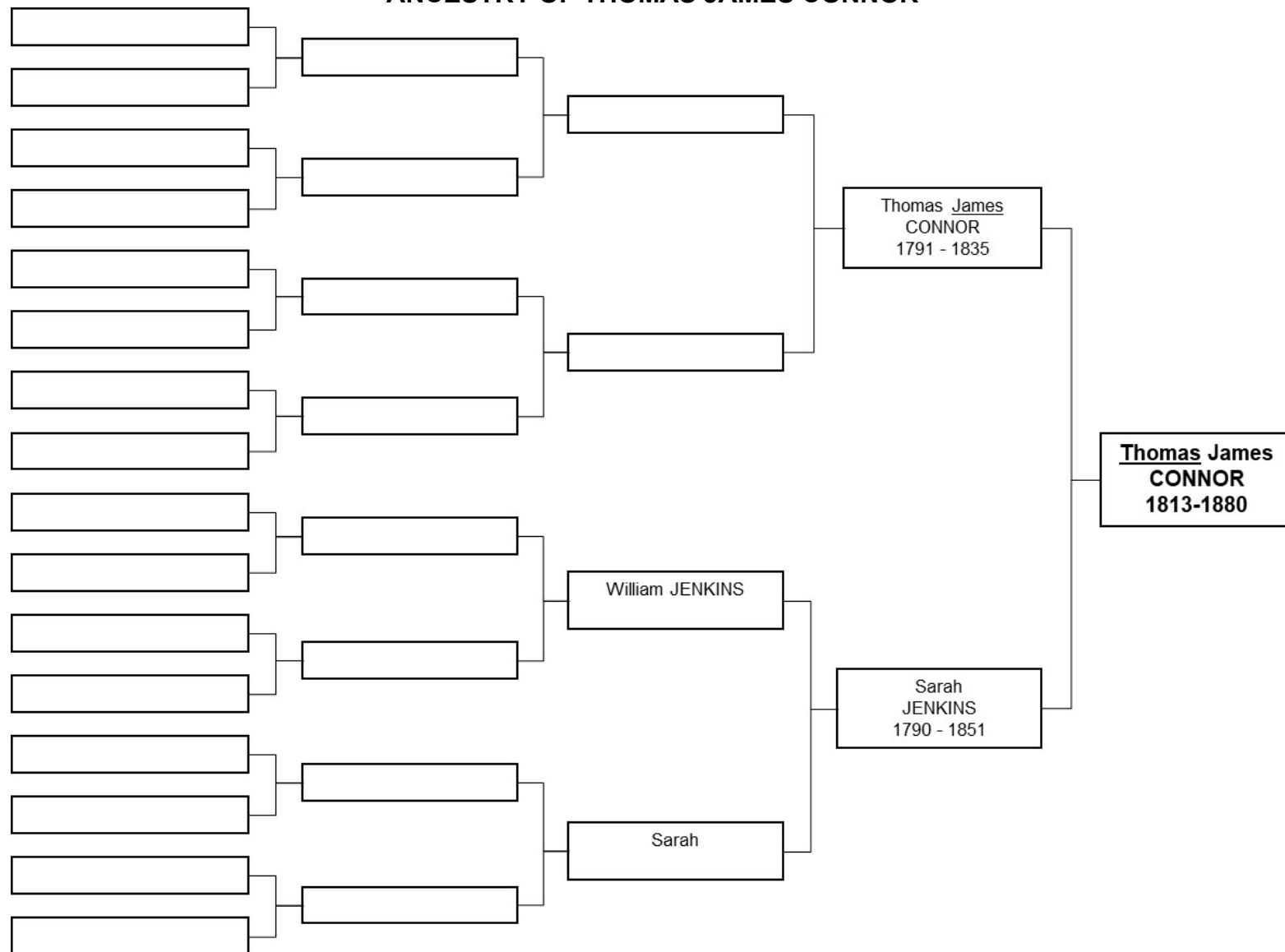
Anne retired from teaching after Thomas died. The Government granted Anne a gratuity of £122 19s. 3d. upon Thomas' death and superannuation of £10 6s. per annum upon her retirement – which seems rather small after so many years of service in the teaching profession. In 1886, the leases at *Seabank* were converted to freehold title. Anne lived the rest of her life at *Seabank* with Fanny and Cissie. In 1889 her brother Robert Peake died at Naracoorte in South Australia, prompting Anne to execute her Will on 7 August 1889, leaving her estate, including *Seabank*, equally to Fanny and Cissie. She died at *Seabank* on 16 November 1894 aged 82 and was buried at Alberton, next to George and Cornelia who pre-deceased her. In her obituary Anne is described as a "*venerable and deeply respected Christian of the good old school*", a "*warm hearted and genuine type of Englishwoman*".⁴⁷ The funeral procession was very large, indicating the community's high regard for her. Anne was survived by seven children and 28 grandchildren.

⁴⁷ Gippsland Standard 17 Nov 1894

THOMAS AND ANNE CONNOR'S FAMILY



ANCESTRY OF THOMAS JAMES CONNOR



ANCESTRY OF ANNE PEAKE

