

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE TASMANIAN HISTORICAL  
RESEARCH ASSOCIATION HELD AT THE TASMANIAN MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY  
ON 9 FEBRUARY 2016 AT 8PM.

‘The Life and Times of Sarah Mitchell of Lisdillon’

Speaker: The President introduced Maureen Martin Ferris, curator of the East Coast Heritage Museum, to speak on ‘The Life and Times of Sarah Mitchell of Lisdillon’. ‘Lisdillon’ was the east-coast property of her father, John Mitchell, born in Cornwall in 1812 and coming to Van Diemen’s Land as a government surveyor in 1837; thereafter he served as an administrator at Point Puer before settling on the land, at ‘Lisdillon’ in the early 1850s. In 1839 John had married Catherine, his fiancée from Cornwall; the couple were to have ten children, several dying young and Sarah the second youngest. John Mitchell was an active citizen, encouraging migration and serving in the House of Assembly in the 1870s. Never marrying, and resident throughout her 92 years in the region of her birth, Sarah amassed a wonderful store of historic materials, now in the care of various repositories. In outlining this story the speaker displayed on screen many enriching images. Like her mother, Sarah had skill as an artist, sketching local scenes and events. More remarkably, virtually throughout her life she kept a diary, full of exact information. One highlight was the local visit of Governor Thomas Gore-Brown in 1866, and another the wreck of the *Guiding Star* in 1870, but plenty of everyday people also received mention. A near-by probation station and the local school were described in characteristic detail. Sarah’s scrap-books included many verses, and expressions of religious faith. She spoke of her meeting with Truganini—the sole Aboriginal she knew; John Mitchell prompted Truganini to make a traditional basket (half-a-crown the reward), Sarah subsequently donating this remarkable artefact to the Queen Victoria Museum. Other collected objects were a geranium leaf said to be from Napoleon’s tomb, and the first telegram sent to ‘Lisdillon’. In 1900 Sarah travelled to Europe, maintaining her diary and her sketching through this eighteen-months’ sojourn; in 1934 she crossed Bass Strait—*by air!* In her latter years she moved into Swansea, at the end dictating her diary. Death came in Hobart, 10 September 1946.

Ms Ferris concluded by drawing attention to the recent publication, under the auspices of the East Coast Museum, of a single volume edition of Louis Ann Meredith’s *Bush Friends in Tasmania*. Enthusiastic applause endorsed the President’s thanks for a most interesting presentation, and the meeting closed at 9 o’clock.