

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE TASMANIAN HISTORICAL RESEARCH
ASSOCIATION HELD IN THE ROYAL SOCIETY ROOM, TASMANIAN MUSEUM
AND ART GALLERY, ON TUESDAY 12 OCTOBER 2010, AT 8PM.**

Present: The President, Ms Caroline Homer, in the chair and about 30 members and friends.

Minutes: The minutes of the August meeting would be read t the next meeting.

Business: The President thanked Alison Alexander for organising the recent and enlightening excursion to the Police Museum, and welcomed the attendance tonight of a friend made on that occasion. The President also appealed for any member prepared next year to become webmaster, as Robert Dooley had had now moved to New South Wales..

Speaker: The President introduced Dr Rob Dobson, Senior Project Officer, Higher Education, Skills Tasmania. Tonight s address would draw upon his doctoral thesis, Curtin University, and was entitled ‘The Scientific Educators: Measuring and Fitting Tasmanians for the Twentieth Century’.

Dr Dobson’s overall argument stressed that the first half of the twentieth century was remarkable for the impact of a range of measuring, testing and selecting procedures that were intended to guide Tasmanians into vocational education that would best fit them to achieve their full potential, and thus build a strong community. While concerned to apply these principles across the whole range of students’ abilities, particular attention went to those failing average norms, especially the mentally deficient, and half-castes. The Progressive/eugenic ideology underlying these concerns was international, with probably its greatest strength in the U.S.A. and personified by Theodore Roosevelt, President 1901-9. They fused with a racist and Darwinian nationalism that upheld the supreme virtue of ‘Whiteness’, as embodied in the White Australia Policy, and of British people and institutions. Fear of Oriental invasion of Australia sharpened such attitudes. One organ for the early local expression was the Royal Society of Tasmania, .especially notable being an address delivered to the Society in 1901 by JA Johnson, Principal of the Teachers; \’ College; in 1911 prompted the Society to establish a section dealing with Education and Psychology. Another important activist in these directions was WL Neale, Director of Education, 1905-10. Around then too Professor RJ Berry of the University of Melbourne intensified interest in craniometrical study of Tasmanian Aborigines, and long- continuing discussion arose as to whether Cape Barren half-castes were educable. The First War intensified all these concerns, its aftermath seeing a Mental Deficiency Act and the establishment of the State Psychological Clinic. Edmund Morris Miller, teacher of Psychology and Philosophy at the University, became the dominant figure in consequent activity. The Mental Deficiency Act, in oblique way, opened the possibility of surgical sterilisation of the unfit, and through to the 1950s there was some advocacy—even by Miller, but most forcefully by ophthalmologist JB Hamilton for more deliberate recourse to this mean of eliminating the unfit. Dr Albert Shugg told a Parliamentary committee in 1941 that he and other medics sterilised some patients. However there generally prevailed less draconian views whereby the thoroughly deficient would be segregated rather than sterilised, while all other children would be given schooling appropriate to the ir level of ability. Successive Directors of Education endorsed these concepts. Supreme in their elaboration from the 1920s to the early ’50s was Henry Thomas Parker, author of studies that won international recognition, and a key figure in the early history of the Australian Council for Educational Research. Parker proposed a nine-level classification of students. The establishment of ‘Modern’ schools and the ‘Modern School Certificate’ in the earlier 1940s were important achievements from this perspective, giving force to Education Department claims of providing an impressively wide variety of schools. Albeit often in different terms of expression, the influence of Parker and his philosophy continued to the present.

The President remarked that Dr Dobson had introduced members to some remarkable concepts, some of them disturbing, albeit not far distant. After questions, the meeting closed at 9:10pm.

Michael Roe for Secretary

Caroline Homer, President