The Spurling Legacy
and the emergence of wilderness photography in Tasmania

by

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ABSTRACT

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Spurling photographic firm made a significant contribution to photography in Tasmania. However, over the years, fact and fiction about the Spurlings became confused. Their photographs became dispersed and inaccessible. Then, in the late 1970s a series of co-incidences led to the re-discovery of a large number of photographic glass plates. Some Spurling-related research commenced and then lapsed. Since then, with the exception of a few dedicated investigators, the Spurlings’ contribution to Australian photography has remained largely untold. The task of this research was to redress this situation by locating, worldwide, as many Spurling images as possible, to catalogue and date them, and then to investigate relevant contextual information. This data was then placed into an historical and social framework.

The thesis examines the careers of the three generations of Spurling photographers – Stephen 1st, his two photographer sons Stephen 2nd and Frederick, and his grandson Stephen 3rd. It describes and analyses their cumulative photographic achievements from the early 1840s through to 1941, and traces their move from portraiture through to scenic, and ultimately wilderness photography. It also examines Stephen 3rd’s significant wilderness treks and looks at the artistic and photographic conventions that influenced the ways in which the Spurlings depicted the landscape. Other subjects considered include issues surrounding the production of these images, and how wilderness photography can play an important role in alerting the public to environmental conservation.

By examining these issues, this thesis adds significantly to the current literature on Australian photographic history. Although many photo-historians refer to the Spurlings, most have either overlooked or dismissed the significance of the Spurlings’ photographic legacy, or provided only brief overviews. This thesis argues that while some of the factors that led to the Spurlings’ virtual disappearance from the historical record were due to external influences and prejudices, the Spurlings themselves did little to record their history for posterity.
This was due in part to modesty, but also a desire to keep family secrets hidden. This thesis concludes with a call for more accurate, unbiased and data-driven accounts of early Tasmanian photography, and a re-assessment of the Spurlings’ place in Australian photographic history.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The genesis of this thesis dates back to my childhood and memories of my grandfather, Stephen Spurling 3rd. Although he rarely spoke about his photography or wilderness treks, mention was made of the store at 93 Brisbane Street, Launceston – at that stage still owned by the family. My mother, Hazel McCammon first told me the stories of my grandfather’s adventures. She had a box of memorabilia, which unfortunately had disappeared when I started my research. Fortunately, my uncle, Ted Spurling had kept some family photographs and records. He had also traced the family tree and made notes about the significant events. His resources provided a starting point for my research.

However, the majority of the photographs, which were most important part of the Spurling legacy had, over the years, been either lost or sold. Then in the 1970s film and sound archivist Chris Long discovered over 550 glass plates in a garage in Melbourne. He contacted the family, and then moved to Canberra to undertake a project at the National Film and Sound Archives. At this time my husband and I were also living in the national capital, and we arranged to meet Long. During discussions, we encouraged him to transport the glass plates to Canberra, where they could be copied by the National Library of Australia. Long subsequently applied for a fellowship from the Tasmanian Arts Advisory Board, and this enabled him to spend two years in Tasmania researching the Spurling story, and collecting photographs. He made several copies of these images – depositing one set at the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery in Launceston.

Although Long intended to write about the Spurlings, no book eventuated and for several decades the photographs remained untouched. Then, around the turn of the twenty-first century, the National Library began the mammoth task of digitising their photographic collection. Shortly afterwards my husband and I retired and moved to Queensland. I now had the time to begin researching the Spurling saga, but in order to do this, I had to undertake a series of trips to Tasmania, Melbourne, Sydney, Canberra and Adelaide to delve into archives, libraries and museums, and meet with family members. In addition, I also made
trips to England, where the Spurlings had originated, and New Zealand, where for a brief interlude in the 1860s, the Spurlings had sought their fortunes.

Having brought all this material together the next task was to present it in a useful and meaningful way. To achieve this I owe special gratitude to my academic supervisors, Dr Stefan Petrow (School of History and Classics, University of Tasmania) and Dr David Stephenson (School of Art, University of Tasmania) both of whom have been unfailingly helpful and enthusiastic throughout my journey. I would also like to thank Professor Michael Roe for appraising my working document, and providing comments and suggestions.

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Lodden River near Frenchman’s Cap, 1920, Stephen Hiller Collection, gelatin silver photograph.  
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Lord Kitchener, National Library of Australia (nla.pic-an21697618-111) gelatin silver photograph.  
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Marriott’s Falls (fern scene near), c. 1920s, National Library of Australia (nla.pic-an21697618-488) gelatin silver photograph.  
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Miena Dam and Accommodation House, Great Lake, c. 1922 or later, National Library of Australia (nla.pic-an21697618-103) gelatin silver photograph.  
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Moore’s Bend, Gordon River, c. 1907, George Eastman House, Rochester, NY (89: 0850: 0010) transparency, gelatin silver on glass.  
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Mount Ossa from the Pelion Saddle, 1909, Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office, State Library of Tasmania (NS 345/1/12) gelatin silver photograph.  
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Mount Pelion Huts, Mole Creek Track, 1898, Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office, State Library of Tasmania (NS 787/1/57) lantern slide.  
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Mt Gould and Lake Marion, 1908, National Library of Australia (nla.pic-an21697618-395) gelatin silver photograph.  
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Mt Huxley and King River Gorge from Mt Jukes, c. 1916, National Library of Australia (nla.pic-an21697618-239) gelatin silver photograph.  
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Mt King William from Lake George, 1920, National Library of Australia (nla.pic-an21697618-244) gelatin silver photograph.  
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Mt Oakley, Forth Gorge, 1898, National Library of Australia (nla.pic-an21697618-294) gelatin silver photograph.  
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Mt Olympus from Lake Laura, National Library of Australia (nla.pic-an21697618-388) gelatin silver photograph.  
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Mt Olympus, Lake St Clair, 1913, National Library of Australia (nla.pic-an21697618-328) gelatin silver photograph.  
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Mts Byron and Cuvier, and Lake Petrarch, 1908, National Library of Australia (nla.pic-an21697618-387) gelatin silver photograph.  
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Old Church, Port Arthur, c. 1920s, National Library of Australia (nla.pic-an21697618-131) gelatin silver photograph.  
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Old Court House Ruins, Sarah Island, c. 1906, Private Collection, gelatin silver photograph.  
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On Du Cane Range, 1908, National Library of Australia (nla.pic-an21697618-396) gelatin silver photograph.  
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Parson’s Falls, Western Tiers, 1904, National Library of Australia (nla.pic-an21697618-300) gelatin silver photograph.  
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Pieman River at Railway Bridge, c. 1920s, National Library of Australia (nla.pic-an21697618-306) gelatin silver photograph.  
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Pine Lake, Great Lake Road, c. 1920s, National Library of Australia (nla.pic-an21697618-148) gelatin silver photograph.  
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Piner’s Landing, c. 1906, Private Collection, gelatin silver photograph.  
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Pinnacle, Ben Lomond, 1903, National Library of Australia (nla.pic-an21697618-347) gelatin silver photograph.  
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Portrait of Marie Cuttle, c. 1907, Private Collection, gelatin silver photograph, oval.  
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Princes Square and Christ Church, Launceston, c. 1910s, National Library of Australia (nla.pic-an21697618-466) gelatin silver photograph.  
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Quamby Bluff from Great Lake Road, 1915, National Library of Australia (nla.pic-an21697618-464) gelatin silver photograph.  
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Queenstown, Mt Owen in rear, c. 1930s, National Library of Australia (nla.pic-an21697618-525) gelatin silver photograph.  
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Rainbow Chalet, Great Lake, c. 1930s, National Library of Australia (nla.pic-an21697618-502) gelatin silver photograph.  
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Ration Tree Creek track, 1898, Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office, State Library of Tasmania (Illustrated Supplement to Launceston Examiner, 9 July 1898, p. 3) print from newspaper.  
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Robert’s Fall, Little Dove River, 1905, Stephen Hiller Collection, gelatin silver photograph.  
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Rugged Mountain, 1913, National Library of Australia (nla.pic-an21697618-362) gelatin silver photograph.  
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Sandy Beach Lake, 1904, Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office, State Library of Tasmania, Weekly Courier, 8 October 1904, p. 23, print from newspaper.  
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Shearing lambs – Leverington, c. 1920s, National Library of Australia (nla.pic-an21697618-156) gelatin silver photograph.  
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Sir John Falls, Gordon R, c. 1906, Private Collection, gelatin silver photograph.

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Sir John Falls, Gordon R, Tas, c. 1906, Private Collection, gelatin silver photograph.

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Snowbank, Western Tiers, winter, 1904, George Eastman House, Rochester, NY (89: 0850: 0007) transparency, gelatin silver on glass.

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‘Solitude’, Swan Bay, Great Lake, 1905, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra [Donated by Christine Burgess, on behalf of the descendants of Stephen Spurling 3rd] gelatin silver photograph.

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St Columba Falls, East Coast, c. 1920, National Library of Australia (nla.pic-an21697618-147) gelatin silver photograph.

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Stella Glen, Great Lake track, c. 1905, George Eastman House, Rochester, NY (89: 0850: 0004) transparency, gelatin silver on glass.

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Surprise Valley, West Coast Road, c. 1932, National Library of Australia (nla.pic-an21697618-515) gelatin silver photograph.

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Swan shooting, East Coast, c. 1920s, National Library of Australia (nla.pic-an21697618-255) gelatin silver photograph.

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The bathroom in winter, Waldheim Chalet, c. 1920s, State Library of Tasmania (ADRI: au-7-0016-125141705) postcard.

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The Bower, Fern Tree, c. 1911, National Library of Australia (nla.pic-an21697618-418) gelatin silver photograph.  
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The Butts of Ben Lomond from the old Ben Lomond Hotel, 1903, State Library of Victoria (PCV LTLS 17) glass lantern slide.  
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The Citroën-Kégresse carrying a load, 1924, St Helens History Room, b&w print.  
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The Cliffs, Ben Lomond, 1903, National Library of Australia (nla.pic-an21697618-290) gelatin silver photograph.  
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The Crater Lake, 1905, National Library of Australia (nla.pic-an21697618-144) gelatin silver photograph.  
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The Devil’s Gullet, Western Tiers in Winter, 1904, Stephen Hiller Collection, gelatin silver photograph.  
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The Devil’s Gullet, W Tiers, c. 1908, National Library of Australia (nla.pic-an21697618-397) gelatin silver photograph.  
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The Frenchman’s Cap from Mt Mullins [sic], 1920, National Library of Australia (nla.pic-an21697618-245) gelatin silver photograph.  
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The Great Lake, Tasmanian Highlands – the northern end showing Little Lake, date uncertain, National Library of Australia (nla.pic-an21697618-142) gelatin silver photograph.  
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The Plateau, Ben Lomond, 1903, National Library of Australia (nla.pic-an21697618-303) gelatin silver photograph.  
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The Shrine, Scott’s Caves, c. 1909, National Library of Australia (nla.pic-an21697618-408) gelatin silver photograph.  
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Timber Carting, Maurice, East Coast, c. 1916, National Library of Australia (nla.pic-an21697618-256) gelatin silver photograph. Chapter 6, p. 424

Trout from Great Lake, c. 1905, National Library of Australia (nla.pic-an21697618-301) gelatin silver photograph. Chapter 6, p. 371

View of Lake Spurling, 1908, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery (QVM: 1986: P: 3055) gelatin silver photograph. Chapter 5, p. 320

Waratah to Wynyard Road, c. 1916, National Library of Australia (nla.pic-an21697618-218) gelatin silver photograph. Chapter 4, p. 246

Wattle study in vase, c. 1920s, National Library of Australia (nla.pic-an21697618-128) gelatin silver photograph. Chapter 6, p. 408

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Allport, Morton (1830-1878), Mount Ida (Lake St Clair), 1863, Allport Library and Museum of Fine Arts, State Library of Tasmania (ADRI: AUTASOO1126254143) b&w stereograph. Chapter 1, p. 58


Beattie, John Watt (1859-1930), Corra Linn near Launceston, 189-?, National Library of Australia (nla.pic-an23768294) albumen silver print. Chapter 6, p. 412

Binks, Chris (date unknown -), View of Mount Spurling, 1995, Private Collection, colour photograph. Chapter 5, p. 321

Caire, Nicholas (1837-1914), Fern Terrace on the River Watt, near Mount Munday (Victoria), c. 1890s, National Library of Australia (nla.pic-an23783907) albumen photograph. Chapter 1, p. 64

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Creators unknown [probably Stephen Spurling 3rd in collaboration with F Vaudry Robinson], *Dilston Fall with people superimposed*, c. 1890s, Launceston Library (Atherton Album, Hodgkinson Collection, LPIC 50/31/3) State Library of Tasmania, b&w print.  
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Creator unknown, *Mr Frederick Spurling* [aged 92 years], Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office, State Library of Tasmania (*Mercury*, 22 January 1942, p. 5) print from newspaper.  
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Carpenter, W [attributed] (dates unknown), *A Christ's Hospital boy in the London Cloister*, c. 1935, Private Collection, card [from an original painting].  Chapter 2, p. 102


Creator unknown, *Jessy Spurling with her grandson, Frank Searl*, c. 1857, Mike and Jan Searl, Launceston, possibly a pastel over albumen silver photograph.  Chapter 2, p. 98

*Dilston Falls Stamp*, c. 1899, Private Collection.  Chapter 4, p. 219

Ducote, Alfred (dates unknown), *E-migration, or, A Flight of fair game*, London, 1832, National Library of Australia, Canberra (nla.pic-an6589648) lithograph, hand coloured.  Chapter 2, p. 87

Glover, John (1767-1849), *Hobart Town, taken from the garden where I lived*, 1832, Dixson Galleries Collection, State Library of New South Wales (Call no. DG 6, Digital Order no. 62704) oil on canvas.  Chapter 2, p. 92

Glover, John (1767-1849), *A View of the Artist's House and Garden, in Mills Plains, Van Diemen's Land*, 1835, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, Morgan Thomas Bequest Fund 1951, oil on canvas.  Chapter 1, p. 45

Haghe, Louis (1806-1885), *Sir John Franklin*, 184-?, National Library of Australia (nla.pic-an9579248) lithograph.  Chapter 1, p. 52


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Piguenit, William Charles (1836-1914), *On Craycroft [i.e. Cracraft], Tasmania*, National Library of Australia (nla.pic-an2292673) oil on academy board. **Chapter 1, p. 48**

Piguenit, William Charles (1836-1914), *Mount King William from Lake George, Tasmania*, 1887, National Library of Australia, Canberra (nla.pic-an2292677) oil on academy board. **Chapter 5, p. 350**

Prout, John Skinner (1805-1876), *Cataract Glen, Mount Wellington, Tasmania*, 1874-1876, Allport Library, State Library of Tasmania (ADRI: AUTASOO1125644427) Steel engraving. **Chapter 1, p. 46**

Scott, Thomas (dates unknown), *Map of the settled part of Van Diemen's Land*, 1830, National Library of Australia (MAP RM 739) mounted on linen. **Chapter 2, p. 93**

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ABBREVIATIONS

ALMFA – Allport Library and Museum of Fine Arts, State Library of Tasmania.

ANA – Australian Natives Association.


NGA – National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, Australia.

NLA – National Library of Australia, Parkes, Canberra, ACT.

NTCC – Northern Tasmanian Camera Club.

NTTA – Northern Tasmanian Tourist Association.

QVMAG – Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston, Tasmania.

RACV – Royal Automobile Club of Victoria.

SLT – State Library of Tasmania, 91 Murray Street, Hobart, Tasmania.

SLV – State Library of Victoria, Swanton Street, Melbourne, Victoria.

TAC – Tasmanian Automobile Club.

TAHO – Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office, 91 Murray Street, Hobart, Tasmania.


Stephen Spurling RN – Stephen Spurling (1790-1827) father of Stephen Spurling 1st.

THRA – Tasmanian Historical Research Association.

TMAG – Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Macquarie Street, Hobart.

TTA – Tasmanian Tourist Association.

WLCL – W L Crowther Library, State Library of Tasmania, 91 Murray Street, Hobart.
CONVENTIONS

Over the past century the conventions and units for recording place names and measurements have changed. In order to maintain the integrity of the original text, measurements where they appear in quotes are unchanged. However, elsewhere in the text measurements are converted from imperial to metric units. Likewise, to maintain historical accuracy, place names such as Van Diemen’s Land and Hobart Town are used when chronologically appropriate, but change to Tasmania and Hobart from the date were officially altered – that is, from 1855 and 1881 respectively.

A further complication occurs in the use of an apostrophe in place names. As these punctuation markers are no longer used in place names, this convention is adhered to in the text. However, when the Spurlings’ took their photographs, apostrophes were used in place names. To ensure image titles appear as originally intended, apostrophes are retained in these instances.