

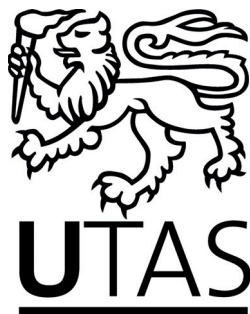
The Spurling Legacy

and the emergence of wilderness photography in Tasmania

by

Christine Hazel Burgess (B Ed)

**Submitted in fulfilment of the
requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**



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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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The Cliffs, Ben Lomond, 1903, National Library of Australia (nla.pic-an21697618-290) gelatin silver photograph. **Chapter 5, p. 288**

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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. **Chapter 6, p. 434**

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

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Newland, J W (1810-1857), *Murray Street*, 1848, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (Q 612) Daguerreotype full plate. **Chapter 1, p. 53**

Yard, Syd (1889-?), *At Lake St Clair – Stephen Spurling 3rd, Fred Smithies, Ray McClinton, George Perrin and Charles Monds*, 1920, Private Collection, gelatin silver photograph. **Chapter 5, p. 340**

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Aikenhead & Button, *Launceston in 1886*, State Library of Tasmania (ADRI: AUTASOO1124071218) two-tint lithograph. **Chapter 6, p. 389**

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Creator unknown, *Cataract Gorge from King's Basin*, National Library of Australia (nla.pic-an21697618-126) etching [Based on Stephen Spurling 3rd, *Cataract Gorge from King's Bridge*, c. 1913]. **Chapter 6, p. 389**

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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**

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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**

Spurling correspondence letterheads, c. 1906-1920s, showing their appointment to the Government of Tasmania, Private Collection. **Chapter 6, p. 358**

Summers, Charles (1825-1878), *Intercolonial Exhibition medallion, Victoria 1866: Medallion Awarded to Morton Allport*, Allport Library and Museum of Fine Arts, State Library of Tasmania (ADRI: AUTASOO1127112423) bronze in wooden frame with glass. **Chapter 2, p. 128**

The Mount Lyell Tourist Association, *Mount Lyell and the Gordon, Western Tasmania: A land of riches and beauty*, date unknown, Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office, State Library of Tasmania (TC 919.464 MOV) brochure. **Chapter 6, p. 362**

Von Guérard, Eugene (1811-1901), *Hobart Town from Kangaroo Point*, 1867, National Library of Australia (nla.pic-an7744597) Lithograph, hand coloured. **Chapter 2, p. 127**

ABBREVIATIONS

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

ANA – Australian Natives Association.

GL – Guildhall Library, Aldermanbury, London, England.

NA – National Archives, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, England.

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.

Ted Spurling – Stephen Edward Spurling (1916-2004) son of Stephen Spurling 3rd.

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.

