Chapter 2

Farewell to England – the Spurling family emigrates to Van Diemen’s Land

Introduction

Historians not only analyze historical data through the long lens of time but also try to imagine what the past felt like, looked like, smelled like; they are always balancing their analysis of how multiple factors shaped past events with their empathy for the human beings whose lives were altered by those factors and events.¹

Jessy Spurling and her family left England in the 1830s. To understand the significance of such an event, the historian needs analyse the contributing factors – both public and private. The historian then needs to probe further to appreciate conditions prevalent at that time. Only then is it possible to achieve an empathic understanding of events. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to examine the Spurlings’ decision to leave England within the context of historical events, the family’s needs and aspirations, and the era in which they lived.

To address these aims, the first part of this chapter focuses on Jessy Spurling and her resolution to take her young daughter and emigrate to the penal colony of Van Diemen’s Land. To help explain her decision, this section includes a brief examination of Jessy’s social and financial circumstances as well as the cultural and political situation in England in the early nineteenth century. This section also describes the conditions in the colony when the Spurlings arrived, and will investigate how these factors affected the family.

The second part of this chapter examines the life of Jessy’s elder son, Stephen Spurling 1st. Again, this section goes beyond the mere statement of facts and explores

how external events shaped his life and influenced his choices. This section begins with Stephen 1st’s birth and education in England. It then details his journey to Van Diemen’s Land and early experiments with photography. Next, the failure of his business ventures and time in New Zealand provide a background to his decision to establish a photography studio on his return to Hobart Town. Viewed through the ‘long lens of time’ it becomes apparent that many of his decisions were a response to scientific discoveries and the conditions of the era. The chapter concludes with an assessment of Stephen 1st’s contribution to Tasmanian photography.

**Jessy Spurling (1795-1870) – searching for Utopia**

Hell is a city much like London –
A populous and smoky city …

Jessy Spurling and her daughter, Emma arrived in Hobart Town on 3 February 1836 aboard the Boadicea. This ship was one of fourteen vessels the London Emigration Committee chartered to transport young, single women to the colonies. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Committee hoped that by encouraging women to emigrate, they could address the imbalance of males to females in the colony. The committee advertised their schemes in the English press and lured potential immigrants with promises of well-paid employment and assistance upon their arrival. A poster from the era depicted the women as butterflies, winging their way from England into the welcoming arms of potential husbands.

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4 While Jessy and Emma were the first Spurlings to emigrate to Van Diemen’s Land, there was another Spurling in the colony some years earlier. Records at the Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office (hereafter TAHO), show a John Spurling departed Hobart Town aboard the whaler *Martha* on 25 September 1819. It is not known if this John Spurling was related to the Stephen Spurling family.
5 Arrivals Index (CSO 1/848/17942, TAHO). A record in the Wayn Index, TAHO, recording Jessy Spurling as arriving in 1825 cannot be substantiated.
Neither Jessy nor her daughter fitted the profile for a subsidised passage.⁷ At forty years of age, Jessy was too old, and her daughter Emma, at nine years, was too young.⁸ Since they were not eligible for a subsidy, they paid £26 for their journey. The ship’s documents record Jessy as being a ‘Matron of 1st Division’ and state she intended becoming a housekeeper.⁹ Her classification as a matron suggests she was one of ‘the carefully selected … matrons [whose job it was] to watch over the health and comfort’ of the younger women during the trip.¹⁰

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⁷ To qualify for assisted passage, applicants had to meet certain criteria. They had to be single females, in good health, of unblemished character and aged between fifteen and thirty years. They also had to be willing to accept some form of domestic employment.

⁸ Jessy and Emma’s ages from Shipping Records (CSO 1/1/853 Z 1947, TAHO p. 258). Church records, St George’s, Camberwell, England show Emma was christened on 13 September 1826.

⁹ Arrivals Index (CSO 1/848/17942, TAHO).

¹⁰ *Times*, 21 July 1835, p.1 c. A.
When Jessy arrived in Van Diemen’s Land she had been a widow for nine years. Since her husband’s death, she had been supporting herself and her family of four children on a pension of £58 per year.\textsuperscript{11} Although this would have been barely enough to sustain them, it is not clear why Jessy decided to emigrate. She was leaving behind the support of her husband’s extended family\textsuperscript{12} and her other three surviving children – Frances aged seventeen, and her two sons, Stephen 1\textsuperscript{st} and Ansley, then aged fourteen and eleven.\textsuperscript{13} However, she was also leaving behind a country undergoing huge social adjustments.

King William IV (1765-1837) was nearing the end of his reign. While it was a period of vast wealth for some, many others lived in poverty. It was also a period of social and economic change. The advent of mechanisation meant towns and cities throughout England were becoming increasingly industrialised. In addition, the invention of the steam train had revolutionised transport. These changes reduced opportunities for employment in agriculture and forced people to move to urban areas. At the same time, a significant increase in the population added to the problems caused by unemployment and overcrowding.\textsuperscript{14} As a consequence of these upheavals, many people felt alienated and riots occurred over a variety of issues. For example, in the Midlands, the Luddites conducted a campaign to destroy machinery.

\textsuperscript{11} Christ’s Hospital presentation papers (GL Ms 12818A/96, no. 79, Guildhall Library, England – hereafter GL). £58 equates to somewhere between £2 500 and £3 000 in today’s terms. Evelyn M Smith, ‘Historic Money Values’, \textit{Family Tree Magazine}, March 1999, p. 61. In 1838, Charles Dickens suggested in \textit{The Adventures of Oliver Twist} (London, 1968) p. 366, that a suitable pension for a widow might be £20 per year for each child and £50 for twins. On this basis, Jessy would have needed at least £80 per year to sustain her family of four children. However, Jessy was fortunate that she was eligible for any pension. In this era, central government assistance was not normally available to widows with dependant children. Kenneth Morgan, \textit{The birth of industrial Britain: social change, 1750-1850} (Great Britain, 2004) p. 59.

\textsuperscript{12} Jessy was either living with, or close to her brother-in-law John Henry Spurling and his wife, Emma. John Henry Spurling worked for the Stock Exchange and would later invest in the railways. D and A Spurling, ‘The Spurling Family in East Anglia and London’, (Unpublished, 2004, copy held by Christine Burgess) p. 15.

\textsuperscript{13} Frances was born on 8 January 1818; Stephen 1\textsuperscript{st} on 11 June 1821 and Ansley was christened on 28 May 1824. Jessy and Stephen’s eldest daughter, another Jessy, was christened on 23 October 1816 and appears to have died sometime prior to 1828. Spurling, ‘The Spurling Family’, p. 7.

\textsuperscript{14} Aharon Kellerman, \textit{Time, space and society: geographical societal perspectives} (Boston, c. 1989) p. 47. During the period 1800-1850, the population density in London increased by a factor of 2.5.
while in the southern counties, where the state of affairs was especially grim, violence erupted over wages and conditions.\textsuperscript{15} To add to these problems, the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act meant that the situation for the impoverished became significantly worse. Those in need of relief were separated from their families and confined to workhouses. Here they had little privacy, were forbidden luxuries, including tea, and allowed only basic food.\textsuperscript{16} Historian Robert Hughes described the situation thus:

Never had there been deeper unrest among the common people of England than between 1810 and 1845; hopelessness, poverty and resentment were endemic … The climax of this tension, between 1830 and 1845, saw more than 10 percent of the working population of England classified as paupers, thrown by the Poor Laws on the meager charity of the parish.\textsuperscript{17}

Many of these changes would have affected the Spurling family. Between 1801 and 1841, London’s population more than doubled, to over two million.\textsuperscript{18} During this period, the once rural villages of Peckham, Camberwell and Streatham, where the Spurlings lived, metamorphosed into urban districts.\textsuperscript{19} The increasing numbers of residents, combined with the move from agrarian to industrial pursuits, meant a greater consumption of fossil fuels. The skies thickened with smoke. Open sewers, which allowed effluent to flow directly into the Thames, added to the stench. As the living conditions deteriorated, the risk of disease increased.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{15} Morgan, \textit{The birth of industrial Britain}, pp. 73-83.
\textsuperscript{17} Robert Hughes, \textit{The Fatal Shore} (London, 1988) p. 196.
\textsuperscript{19} ‘Camberwell’, ‘Peckham’ and ‘Streatham’ in Ben Weinreb and Christopher Hibbert (eds), \textit{The London Encyclopedia} (London, 1983) pp. 114, 588-589, 834. Christ’s Hospital children’s registers (Ms 12818/15 no. 30, GL) show Stephen Spurling was admitted from Peckham. Other information on the Spurlings’ residences comes from Stock Exchange annual registers. John Henry Spurling worked there for some years, as did his brother Stephen Spurling RN (prior to his active service in the Navy). These registers show the Spurlings moved to various addresses in Camberwell and Streatham during the early 1800s. D and A Spurling, ‘The Spurling Family’, pp. 12-13.
\textsuperscript{20} Peter Brimblecombe, \textit{The Big Smoke: a history of air pollution in London since medieval times} (London, 1987) pp. 63-65; Stephen Halliday, \textit{The great stink of London: Sir Joseph Bazalgette and the cleansing of the Victorian capital} (Gloucester, c. 1999) pp. ix-xi, 21-25. In 1866 Sir Joseph Bazalgette designed and had constructed a sewage system that transformed London. Before this the city’s open sewers contributed to the spread of diseases – such as the cholera epidemic in 1831.
Jessy Spurling was no stranger to the harsh realities of the era. Officially classed as being ‘in need of relief’, in 1828 she allowed her first-born son Stephen 1st to be admitted to Christ’s Hospital boarding school to be educated ‘among other poor children’. When she signed the papers for his admittance, she agreed to ‘leave the said Child to the Disposal of the Governors’. In doing so, she relinquished parental responsibilities for her seven-year-old to the school authorities and from then on would have seen him on rare occasions. Her decision would affect her son in two ways. Firstly, it ensured Stephen 1st received a rigorous education, which in turn provided the academic background for his later experiments with photography. Secondly, it meant that from the time he entered boarding school, Stephen 1st had little experience of family life. This disruption in parental-child bonding may explain his interactions with his own sons.

Perhaps it was concerns about the conditions in England that led Jessy to take Emma and travel to the far ends of the earth. For Jessy, the promise of a new life in a new land must have seemed tempting. Reports, such as the surveyor George William Evans’ 1822 account of Van Diemen’s Land, portrayed idyllic conditions and helped to promote the fledgling colony as a desirable destination. In addition, art exhibitions helped promote the colony’s attractions. For example, Robert Burford’s 1831 exhibition at the Strand in London featured a panorama depicting Hobart Town and the surrounding countryside. The accompanying text described the colony as being picture-perfect and an ideal place to live. Similarly, John Glover’s exhibition, which opened in London in late June 1835, just three months prior to Jessy and

21 Christ’s Hospital presentation papers (Ms 12818A/96, no. 79, GL).
22 Christ’s Hospital presentation papers (Ms 12818A/96, no. 79, GL). This school, which is also known as the Bluecoat School, was founded in 1552 and is still in existence. Originally situated in Newgate Street, London, the school moved to its present location in Horsham at the beginning of the twentieth century.
23 Christ’s Hospital presentation papers (Ms 12818A/96, no. 79, GL).
Emma’s departure, featured over sixty pictures painted in the colony. These paintings portrayed Van Diemen’s Land as an Arcadian paradise. According to a review in the *Times*, the paintings revealed the island as ‘a beautiful and picturesque country; in some districts magnificent and sublime; and in the neighbourhood of Hobart-town, from the union of cultivated plains, stupendous mountain scenery, and broad expanse of waters, delightful and noble’. 

Although there is no record as to what prompted Jessy’s decision, it is possible that these reports and exhibitions encouraged her to believe that by migrating she would arrive in some kind of Utopia. The reality proved somewhat different. Jessy reached Van Diemen’s Land at a time of political confusion. Yet, on the surface, the situation looked promising. Hobart Town had grown considerably since the first settlement at Risdon Cove in 1803. The township boasted well laid out streets and a number of sizable buildings including ‘a government-house, a handsome church, a commodious military barrack, a strong gaol, a well-constructed hospital, and a roomy barrack for convicts’. Further, the era of threats from Aboriginal Tasmanians had ended, and with many of the escaped convicts re-captured, there was a semblance of order within the community.

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26 According to a review in the *Times*, the exhibition opened in late June 1835. ‘Mr Glover’s Views in Van Dieman’s [sic] Land’, *Times*, 29 June 1835, p. 5 c. A. The Boadicea (on which Jessy and Emma Spurling travelled) departed England on 1 October 1835 (*Times*, 21 July 1835, p. 1 c. A).
28 ‘Mr Glover’s Views in Van Dieman’s [sic] Land’, *Times*, 29 June 1835, p. 5 c. A.
John Glover (1767-1849), *Hobart Town, taken from the garden where I lived*, 1832, oil on canvas, 74 x 150 cm.

While the incumbent Lieutenant Governor George Arthur, had achieved a great deal during his twelve years in office, his enemies regarded his reputed autocratic rule and nepotism as intolerable. One of his detractors, Henry Melville, who was closely associated with several early newspapers, described the situation thus: ‘[s]carcely is there a single settler in the Island, who is not dependent on his Excellency’s will and pleasure’. 31 When news of Arthur’s alleged excesses reached London, the authorities announced his recall. Arthur received his termination papers in early 1836, but remained in office until October of that year. 32 During this period of political uncertainty, Jessy arrived in the colony.

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When Jessy disembarked she expected to take up a position as a housekeeper to a Mr Savery.\textsuperscript{33} However, six weeks later, a letter written on her behalf from the Immigration Asylum claimed Jessy was unable to support her daughter and ordered Emma’s enrolment at the King’s Orphan School.\textsuperscript{34} Somewhat curiously there is no record of Emma actually enrolling at the school and Jessy disappears from the records for the next two years.\textsuperscript{35} Although it is uncertain as to what became of them during this period, it seems Jessy’s employment with Savery did not eventuate. Perhaps she found employment in a private residence as a governess, dressmaker or housekeeper and was able to keep Emma with her.

\textsuperscript{33} Arrivals Index (CSO 1/848/17942, TAHO).
\textsuperscript{34} Letter written by Geo. Weith to the Colonial Secretary, 17 March 1836 (CSO 1/1/853 Z 1947, pp. 223-224, TAHO).
\textsuperscript{35} Enrolment records for the King’s Orphan School (SWD 2811, p. 2, TAHO). These records show that on 22 March 1836, an Emma Spilling was admitted to the school. However, this Emma was only four years old, so is unlikely to have been Emma Spurling who was nine or ten years old at this time. Further, Emma Spilling was discharged from the school on 9 July 1842 and Emma Spurling departed for England circa 1840.
It is open to speculation as to why Jessy’s employment with Mr Savery may not have eventuated. The only Savery found in the records during this period was Henry Savery, who made his mark in history as Australia’s first novelist.36 Savery arrived in Van Diemen’s Land in 1825 as a convict.37 When Jessy arrived eleven years later, Savery had a ticket of leave and was engaged in farming.38 By placing herself in his employ, she would have positioned herself at almost the lowest rung of Hobart Town society – just above the convict class. As the widow of a naval officer, this would have been an extremely humiliating predicament.

Ironically, Savery’s need to acquire a housekeeper from England was probably due to his status as persona non grata. Ticket of leave convicts were not entitled to convict servants.39 Even if he had been able to overcome this hurdle, his inappropriate associates would have placed him on Arthur’s list of settlers denied assigned convicts.40 When Jessy arrived Savery was in a politically precarious situation. He was closely associated with two of Lieutenant Governor Arthur’s most vocal detractors.41 Since Arthur had just received his notice of recall he was unlikely to feel magnanimous towards those he believed had engineered his demise. As free settlers relied on vice-regal patronage for favourable treatment, it would have been unwise for Jessy to align herself with Arthur’s nemeses. Finally, Savery’s association with Henry Melville, whose interests included the occult, confirmed that the Savery household was an inappropriate place for Jessy and her daughter.42

Van Diemen’s Land proved a very different environment to the one Jessy had left behind. Like a mirror image or a photographic negative, many things were the reverse of those in the northern hemisphere. In the Antipodes the seasons occurred at the opposite times of the year, the sunniest aspect was to the north not the south, the swans were black not white, trees shed their bark not their leaves, poorer soils supported more trees than fertile soils, and unfamiliar constellations appeared in the night skies.\(^{41}\) Even within the home things were topsy-turvy – many domestic servants were convicts on assignment. The popular analogy was that everything seemed to be upside down.\(^{44}\) For women in particular, it was an alien environment, without the comfort and protection of their extended families and friends.\(^{45}\)

Jessy survived, despite her inauspicious start, and a little over a year after her arrival she arranged for her two sons to travel to Van Diemen’s Land. Stephen 1\(^{st}\) and his brother Ansley arrived in Hobart Town on 14 November 1837.\(^{46}\) Ten months later, in September 1838, Jessy advertised she had established a ‘Millinery, Dress and Toy Warehouse’ in Liverpool Street, next door to Derwent House.\(^{47}\) With a business to run and three children to support, Jessy had reason to be concerned about their future. Changes were afoot in the colony and the economic outlook was bleak.\(^{48}\) Stephen 1\(^{st}\) found it difficult to obtain permanent employment and Emma needed to complete her education. On 18 July 1840 Jessy wrote to Lieutenant Governor, Sir John Franklin, requesting a position for Stephen 1\(^{st}\) and thanking him for ‘the kind and condescending attention’ she had received from him on the occasion of sending

\(^{41}\) Smith, *European vision and the South Pacific*, p. 269.
\(^{45}\) Haynes, *Tasmanian Visions*, p. 36.
\(^{47}\) *Courier*, 21 September 1838, p. 1 c. 2.
Emma to England to complete her education at an Orphan School.\textsuperscript{49} Perhaps due to this letter, Stephen 1\textsuperscript{st}, who was then nineteen years old, received an appointment.\textsuperscript{50} Emma’s trip also proved successful. After completing her studies in England, she spent an extended period in France.\textsuperscript{51} She returned to Hobart Town, at the age of eighteen, aboard the \textit{Calcutta} on 30 October 1844.\textsuperscript{52}

Although the Spurling family had found a degree of stability, for the majority of free settlers in Van Diemen’s Land, the 1840s proved turbulent. After the boom of the previous decade, an economic depression loomed and the numbers of convicts increased at an alarming rate.\textsuperscript{53} At the same time the decision to end the system of assigning male convicts to landowners saw the end of cheap labour. The new system involved placing male convicts in probation gangs. This made supervision difficult, which in turn led to the convicts becoming truculent and belligerent.\textsuperscript{54} It was a different situation for the female convicts. Since the Franklin government received no directive from England as to their deployment, it remained possible for householders to obtain female convict workers.\textsuperscript{55} Jessy was no exception and in 1844 she was assigned a convict servant named Ellen Graham.\textsuperscript{56} This suggests by this stage that Jessy had acquired her own residence and needed domestic assistance.\textsuperscript{57} Her accommodation was evidently quite commodious, and in April of that year, she

\textsuperscript{49} Letter written by Jessy Spurling to Sir John Franklin, 18 July 1840 (CSO 5/1/226/5756 p. 445, TAHO). In her letter Jessy refers to the school, but her writing is difficult to decipher. The name appears to be ‘Ashoth’ or ‘Adroth’ Orphan School. No records have been found of a school matching these names. However, an ‘Emma Sperling’, aged 15 years appears in the 1841 English Census, as a student at a boarding school in Hempstead Place, Ashford, Kent (HO 107/471/2). Jessy’s decision to send Emma to England to complete her education was unusual. While some parents sent their sons to England to complete their education, very few girls made the journey. Fitzpatrick, \textit{Sir John Franklin in Tasmania}, p. 52.

\textsuperscript{50} Stephen Spurling 1\textsuperscript{st}, Employment Records, Colonial Secretary’s Office (CSO 50/14, 1840, p. 218, TAHO).

\textsuperscript{51} \textit{Courier}, 7 October 1848, p. 1 c. 4.

\textsuperscript{52} Arrivals Index (CSO 92/13 F. 76, TAHO).

\textsuperscript{53} Fitzpatrick, \textit{Sir John Franklin in Tasmania}, p. 333.

\textsuperscript{54} Fitzpatrick, \textit{Sir John Franklin in Tasmania}, pp. 328, 333.

\textsuperscript{55} Fitzpatrick, \textit{Sir John Franklin in Tasmania}, p. 325.

\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Hobart Town Gazette}, 22 March-17 December 1844, p. 720.

\textsuperscript{57} A possible residential record for Jessy Spurling was found for 1847, when a J Spurling was listed as living in Argyle Street. \textit{Hobart Town Directory}, p. 47.
advertised for two ‘gentlemen’ lodgers at her ‘pleasantly situated’ home in Macquarie Street.\textsuperscript{58}

In 1848 the Spurling family’s equilibrium received a jolt when Jessy’s thirty-year-old daughter, Frances arrived in the colony. In her arms Frances cradled a baby. He had been born in Bath, England on 8 November 1847.\textsuperscript{59} The name on his birth certificate was Frank Searl Darvell Spurling, but there is no record of the father’s name or occupation.\textsuperscript{60} Over the years, the child’s name contracted to Frank Searl, while Frances called herself Mrs Searl. When Frank was ten months, Frances advertised in the Hobart Town press that she intended opening a ‘daily boarding school’ for young ladies, based ‘upon an entirely new system’.\textsuperscript{61} Her proposed curriculum featured a range of academic subjects, with languages, music and dancing as extras. From these ambitious beginnings, Frances went on to establish a series of private schools in Hobart Town.

Little more is known about Jessy’s life. In 1867, she advertised she had boarding facilities for two young girls, and one boy to keep her grandson company.\textsuperscript{62} Later that year, a young girl named Catherine Conroy died after her clothing accidently caught fire at Jessy’s residence.\textsuperscript{63}

In her twilight years, Jessy went to live with Frances at Broadland House, Hobart Town. It was here, at the age of seventy-five, that she died on 21 February 1870. According to her death certificate the causes of her demise were ‘Senilio and

\textsuperscript{58} Courier, 26 April 1844, p. 1 c. 5.
\textsuperscript{59} Frances was twenty-nine when she gave birth. At the time, she was living in the home of the artist Joseph Horler at 4 Vineyards, Parish of Walcot, in the district of Bath, England.
\textsuperscript{60} Frank Searl, Birth certificate (Application no. COL 684458, Walcot, Somerset, England, 1847). The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 included clauses that made an unwed mother solely responsible for her child, and made proving paternity a lengthy and expensive procedure. Gill, ‘Appendix 3: Oliver Twist and the New Poor Law’, p. 453. Had Frances remained in England, she would have been in an extremely vulnerable position.
\textsuperscript{61} Courier, 23 September 1848, p. 3 c. 1; Courier, 7 October 1848, p. 1 c. 4.
\textsuperscript{62} Mercury, 12 February 1867, p. 1; Mercury, 12 July 1867, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{63} Mercury, 1 October 1867, p. 2; Mercury, 11 October 1867, p. 2.
Hydrothorax’.\textsuperscript{64} Mother and daughter must have been very close, for the Searl family continues to remember their forbearer. To this day, the family retains a picture of Jessy with her grandson, Frank.\textsuperscript{65} A descendant, Peter Searl, described the artwork thus:

\begin{quote}
... we have a very large pastel drawing [of Mrs. Spurling] and a small boy of about ten years of age in an ornate gold frame... [She] is elegantly dress [sic] ans [sic] sitting at a table with a heavy cloth and has a doley [sic] type cap.\textsuperscript{66}
\end{quote}

Creator unknown, \textit{Jessy Spurling with her grandson, Frank Searl}, c. 1857, possibly a pastel over albumen silver photograph, 62 x 47 cm.\textsuperscript{67}

\begin{footnote}
\textsuperscript{64} Jessy Spurling, Death certificate (Rgd. no. 35, Registration no. 9147, Hobart, 1870, TAHO).
\textsuperscript{65} In a letter attached to his will, dated 16 November 1906, Frank Searl stated in part, ‘to Harry Archibald Searl the picture of my late Grandmother (Jessie [sic] Spurling and myself).’ Frank Searl, Will and Associated Documents (A 1960/30, pp. 400-403, TAHO).
\textsuperscript{66} Letter written by Peter Searl to Ted Spurling, 10 April 1983 (Copy held by Christine Burgess).
\textsuperscript{67} There is some dispute as to the exact nature of this artwork. While Peter Searl described it as a pastel drawing, other family members believe it might be a crayon-coloured photograph. (Email from Peter Bridley to Christine Burgess, 19 May 2008).
\end{footnote}
Jessy had journeyed to a new world seeking a better life for herself and her family. In doing so, she endured hardships and disappointments. She may not have found Utopia, but she did find a new beginning for her fatherless children. Her descendants stayed in the colony and established schools and businesses. In addition, her elder son, Stephen 1st founded a photographic tradition that would span three generations.

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68 Frances Searl established a series of schools for young ladies. Frances’ first establishment was in Colville Street, Battery Point. By 1853 she had moved to Portsea Place, Hampton Road. The following year she opened Broughton Hall Ladies School in Macquarie Street. Early 1860 she moved to Stephens Street, New Town, but by September of that year she relocated to Claremont House Seminary in Elizabeth Street, Hobart Town. She operated this school with her sister Emma (Mrs F H Lovett) in charge of a juvenile class. Next she moved to New Town Road, where she conducted a school until 1868. Her next establishment, Broadland House Seminary at 77 Collins Street, opened in 1869 and continued to operate until 1881. On her retirement her sister Emma (Mrs F Lovett) took over the school. However, Frances continued to offer private tutoring.

Ansley Spurling’s wife and two daughters operated a finishing school during the years 1869 -1898. Stephen 1st’s wife, Louisa was also a teacher, as was Stephen 2nd’s daughter, Stella. For some years Ansley Spurling ran a grocery store in Hobart Town. He subsequently worked for the Courier, Advertiser, Mercury, and Examiner newspapers, and as an accountant. His wife, prior to opening her school, conducted a dressmaking establishment. Other Spurling family associations with Tasmanian businesses include the firm of G P Fitzgerald & Co. – established in the 1880s by Emma Lovett (née Spurling)’s son-in-law.
Stephen Spurling 1st (1821-1892) – pioneer photographer

It is not merely the likeness which is precious … but the association, and the sense of nearness involved … the fact of the very shadow of the person lying there fixed for ever69.

By the time Stephen Spurling 1st had reached the age of seven he had experienced several traumatic events. As if to give credence to the proverb, ‘give me a boy until he is seven and I will give you the man’70, these events were to play a significant role in determining his future.

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70 Origin unknown. Variously attributed to St Francis Xavier, Jean Piaget and others.
Stephen 1st’s birth on 11 June 1821 and his subsequent christening on 3 August seem to have passed uneventfully. Then, when he was four months old his father, another Stephen (hereafter referred to as Stephen RN), left his position at the Stock Exchange and joined the Royal Navy. For the next three years Stephen RN was rarely at home and Stephen 1st would have had little chance to get to know him. However, the situation changed in November 1824 when Stephen RN’s deployment ended and he went on to half pay. Presumably Stephen RN spent the next ten months at home with his family while he awaited a new position. This came in September of the following year with his appointment as a purser on board HMS Hind, which plied between England and Ceylon.

When Stephen 1st was five-and-a-half years old, the family received some devastating news. In late January 1827, Stephen RN had died of an unidentified illness in Trincomalee, on the northeast coast of Ceylon. This disaster had far-reaching consequences. Although it would have been of little comfort to the bereft family, as a fatherless child Stephen 1st became eligible for admission to the highly regarded Christ’s Hospital – otherwise known as the Blue Coat School. A little over one year after his father’s death a family mentor Andrew Amedée Miéville presented the young boy for enrolment. Stephen 1st’s admission took place three months later, just two days after his seventh birthday. On 13 June 1828 his mother Jessy and six others signed a petition for his admission to the school.

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71 Christ’s Hospital presentation papers (Ms 12818A/96, no. 79, GL, England).
74 Muster Book of the Hind (ADM 37/7546, NA, England). Ceylon is now known as Sri Lanka.
75 Captain’s Log (ADM 51/3221, NA, England). As there are no surviving surgeon’s logs for HMS Hind during this period the cause of Stephen Spurling RN’s demise remains a mystery.
76 Stephen Spurling 1st’s presentation Papers were dated 21 March 1828. Andrew Amedée Miéville also recommended Stephen Spurling RN for admission to the Stock Exchange in 1816. Annual registers of the Stock Exchange (Ms 17957/15 to Ms 17957/18, GL).
77 Christ’s Hospital presentation papers (Ms 12818A/96, no. 79 and Ms 12818/15 no. 30, GL). At this stage the family lived in Peckham in the Parish of St Giles, Camberwell, Surrey. Others who signed the petition were the minister of St Giles, Camberwell, two church wardens and three housekeepers [occupiers], including Jessy’s brother-in-law, John Henry Spurling.
Stephen 1\textsuperscript{st}'s life had changed irrevocably. By the age of seven he had endured the loss of his father and left the comfort of his family home for the rigours of boarding school. When he entered the school, his mother surrendered her parental rights and agreed that he would remain at the school until his discharge at the age of fifteen years.\textsuperscript{78} These events would play a crucial role in shaping his choices and decisions in later life. It is impossible to know how Stephen 1\textsuperscript{st} fared in this new environment. Although he now had the opportunity to receive a good education, we can only speculate as to how he managed emotionally. However, it would seem reasonable to assume that the change in his circumstances was, at least initially, overwhelming.

\textbf{W Carpenter [attributed] (dates unknown), A Christ's Hospital boy in the London Cloister, c. 1835, card [from an original painting], 15 x 10.5 cm.}

At the time of Stephen 1\textsuperscript{st}'s admission into Christ’s Hospital all the students under ten years of age lived and studied at the school’s Hertford campus, north of London.

\textsuperscript{78} Christ’s Hospital presentation papers (Ms 12818A/96, no. 79, GL).
It is likely that Stephen 1st spent the first few years of his schooling here, and moved to the London campus when he turned ten. Four years later, when he was fourteen years old, his mother Jessy and sister Emma set sail on 1 October 1835, bound for Hobart Town, Van Diemen’s Land, leaving Stephen 1st, his younger brother Ansley and older sister Frances in England. Nearly a year later, on 2 June 1836, when Stephen 1st was approaching his fifteen birthday, his aunt arrived at the school to organise his discharge.

A further twelve months elapsed before Stephen 1st and Ansley embarked on their voyage to Van Diemen’s Land. In June 1837, the two boys travelled as second cabin passengers aboard the Andromeda, commanded by Captain Jacks. By coincidence, this was the same ship that some ten years earlier should have taken their father back to England when he became ill in Ceylon; but his sudden death meant he never made the trip. Amongst the passengers was the eight-year-old Henry Button, whose family would settle in Launceston, and who in later life would write an account of the journey. Button recorded how, on 21 June 1837, as their ship sailed down the English Channel they heard the bells tolling to proclaim the death of King William IV. It was an ominous start to a journey that would take them half-way around the world. However, the same bells also heralded a new beginning – Queen Victoria (1819-1901) had ascended to the throne.

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79 Christ’s Hospital, A Short History (Christ’s Hospital, Horsham, West Sussex, England) p. 11.
81 Christ’s Hospital children’s registers (Ms 12818/15, no. 30, GL). This aunt was another Emma Spurling, wife of Stephen Spurling RN’s brother, John Henry Spurling.
82 Ian Nicholson, Log of Logs: a catalogue of logs, journals, shipboard diaries, letters, and all forms of voyage narratives ... for Australia and New Zealand, and surrounding areas, v. 3, (Queensland, 1999) p. 16 gives the date as 1 June. However, family records and Henry Button, Flotsam and Jetsam (Launceston and Hobart, 1909) p. 26, both cite the date as 18 or 19 June. Since, as the ship sailed down the Channel, the passengers heard the bells tolling for William IV’s death and this occurred on 20 June 1837, the latter date would seem to be more accurate. The classes on board the Andromeda were 1st Cabin, 2nd Cabin, 1st Steerage and 2nd Steerage.
83 Captain’s Log (ADM 51/3221, NA, England).
84 Button, Flotsam and Jetsam, pp. 25-40.
The two boys arrived in Hobart Town on 14 November 1837. Although the township had grown since their mother and sister arrived nearly two years earlier, convicts still carried out most of the menial tasks and chain gangs were a regular sight in the streets. It was not an easy time for free settlers to find employment and it is not clear what became of the two boys during their initial years in the colony. However, by 1839 the colony’s financial situation made it imperative for Stephen 1st to find permanent employment. Although it was a growth period for investors, prices on basic commodities had increased, forcing the Society for the Relief of the Distressed Poor to set up soup kitchens in Hobart Town.

Stephen 1st had hoped to use his education to secure an appointment but little was on offer. On 14 February 1840 he wrote to the Colonial Secretary Captain Forster, stating that for the past two months he had been unemployed and was no longer able

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87 Button, Flotsam and Jetsam, p. 41.
to support himself. He requested ‘any sort of employment until I get an appointment, which his Excellency the Governor has kindly promised me’. 89

The political situation in Van Diemen’s Land at this time was a volatile mix of internecine hostilities. The person to whom Stephen 1st directed his letter Captain Matthew Forster, while officially the Chief Police Magistrate, was acting in the position of Colonial Secretary. Meanwhile the incumbent Captain John Montagu had taken two years leave of absence to return to England – officially to attend to family business. In fact, he used his time to ingratiate himself with the Colonial Office and begin his crusade against Lieutenant Governor Sir John Franklin. Forster and Montagu had both married nieces of the previous Lieutenant Governor Sir George Arthur. Apart from their official duties, both men were also involved in Arthur’s business dealings in the colony. 90

From a political point of view it was not a good time to be seeking employment in the government services. However, there was also a need for able administrators. This was because in the early 1840s convicts comprised nearly 40 per cent of the population of Van Diemen’s Land, 91 and the government had huge organisational problems. As transportation to New South Wales had ceased, prisoners arriving from Britain went to Van Diemen’s Land. 92 Further, following the deliberations of the House of Commons’ Molesworth Committee, the assignment system, which allowed a majority of convicts to work for free settlers, was about to end. In its place the new probation scheme would force male convicts to work in gangs, with the government responsible for all the associated expenses. 93

93 Fitzpatrick, Sir John Franklin in Tasmania, pp. 222-237.
Perhaps due to his letter to Captain Forster, Stephen 1st gained a temporary position while he continued to search for permanent employment. Within six months his luck changed when he heard of a suitable vacancy. On 10 July 1840 he wrote another letter to the Colonial Secretary.\(^{94}\) In his letter he stated the position ‘was confirmed to me by Mr Gunn Esq’. Presumably, this is a reference to the botanist and private secretary to Sir John Franklin – Ronald Gunn. In 1840, Gunn also became the Tasmanian Society secretary.\(^{95}\) Stephen 1st’s reference to Gunn implies he knew the botanist and therefore had contacts with the scientific community in Hobart Town.

Eight days later his mother, Jessy composed her previously mentioned letter to Sir John Franklin, in which she reiterated her son’s request for a government position. She intended that Stephen 1st should present her letter directly to Franklin.\(^{96}\) However, her intervention may have been unnecessary. A memorandum appeared in the records recommending Mr Spurling’s appointment by the lieutenant governor from 17 July 1840.\(^{97}\) He was to become a clerk to the Principal Superintendent of the Convicts Department at a rate of £100 per year. By 1845 this salary had increased to seven shillings and sixpence per day.\(^{98}\) Stephen 1st’s duties included monitoring the monthly ration returns, reporting any discrepancies and checking the accounts.\(^{99}\) He was fortunate in obtaining a position at this time – the colony was on the cusp of slipping into a depression that would last for five years.\(^{100}\)

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\(^{94}\) Letter written by Stephen Spurling 1st to the Colonial Secretary, 10 July 1840 (CSO 5/1/226 file 5786, p. 287, TAHO); Seyfried, An Island at the Bottom of the World, pp. 2-50.


\(^{96}\) Letter written by Jessy Spurling to Sir John Franklin, 18 July 1840 (CSO 5/1/226/5756 p. 445, TAHO). This letter is dated a day after the date of Stephen 1st’s official appointment. If the dates are correct, the appointment was either backdated, or was already finalised when Jessy wrote her letter.

\(^{97}\) Stephen Spurling 1st, Employment Records, Colonial Secretary’s Office (CSO 50/14, 1840, p. 218, TAHO). Note: Sir John Franklin’s private secretary; Alexander Maconochie’s pay was £300 per year plus a house. This was considered insufficient reccompense for such a position. By contrast, a salary of less than £100 per year was considered by the True Colonist, 25 May 1838, to be more than enough for a government clerk. Fitzpatrick, Sir John Franklin in Tasmania, pp. 153, 167.

\(^{98}\) Stephen Spurling 1st, Salary increase (CON 1/1/64 file 4346, 1845, TAHO).

\(^{99}\) Stephen Spurling 1st, Convict storekeeper’s department, list of duties (CON 1/1/53, file 4077, 1845, TAHO).

\(^{100}\) Fitzpatrick, Sir John Franklin in Tasmania, p. 308.
Two years after Stephen 1st commenced work in the Convict Department, Charles Lovett, son of ex-convict George Lovett, commenced work in the same department. It is possible it was through this connection that Stephen 1st met Charles’ sister Louisa. A romance blossomed and Stephen 1st and Louisa married on 9 November 1844. Louisa was seventeen years old and Stephen 1st was twenty-three. Again, Stephen 1st had been fortunate. He had found a bride at a time when there were around twice as many males as females in the colony.

Stephen 1st and Louisa were to have three children. Their first-born Henry Edwin arrived on 21 June 1845, just over seven months after their marriage. Their second son Stephen 2nd arrived on 7 May 1847. In the 1848 census, Stephen 1st recorded living with his wife, two boys under two, and a bonded female domestic servant in a brick house in Argyle Street. He gave no street number, because the street was ‘not regularly numbered’. Stephen 1st and Louisa’s last-born son Frederick arrived on 22 January 1850. All three sons were born in Hobart Town.

Towards the end of the 1840s the colonists became concerned about the influx of convicts. The newly introduced probation system had proved a disaster, and served to convince the colonists that abolition was the only way forward. In order to agitate for reform, in 1849 they established an Anti-transportation League. However, the final trigger to halt transportation came from an entirely different quarter – the discovery of gold on the Australian mainland. When this happened, in the early

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102 Seyfried, An Island at the Bottom of the World, pp. 2-51.
103 Stephen Spurling 1st and Louisa Lovett, Marriage certificate (Rgd no. 37, Registration no. 1375, Hobart, 1844, TAHO); Hobart Town Courier & Van Diemen’s Land Gazette, 12 November 1844, p. 2 c. 4.
106 Tasmanian Pioneer Index 1803-1899 (Informit, Melbourne, 1993).
1850s, the British authorities realised that transportation was simply providing felons with a free ticket to the diggings.\textsuperscript{109}

On 27 November 1852 the last consignment of convicts bound for Van Diemen’s Land left port and arrived in Hobart Town some six months later. In January 1854 the rescinding of the law permitting transportation to the colony marked the end of the convict era. To symbolise this new beginning the name of the colony changed in December 1855.\textsuperscript{110} By naming their island Tasmania, after the Dutch explorer Abel Tasman, the colonists hoped to expunge forever the demon connotations associated with the previous name.\textsuperscript{111}

The cessation of transportation was to have an effect on Stephen 1\textsuperscript{st}’s employment. In 1853 he left the Convict Department\textsuperscript{112} and took up a position in the Lands and Survey Department as a temporary clerk. Then on 25 November 1853 a James Black resigned and Stephen 1\textsuperscript{st} was recommended for appointment in his stead as a permanent employee. The recommendation stated that Stephen 1\textsuperscript{st}’s pay should be the maximum for a third class clerk as he was reliable and hard working.\textsuperscript{113} During his time with this department Stephen 1\textsuperscript{st} probably met the artist and photographer William Charles Piguenit, who worked there as draftsman between 1850 and 1874.\textsuperscript{114}

This connection with Piguenit may explain the assertion that Stephen 1\textsuperscript{st} began his association with photography from his time in this department. According to his grandson, Stephen 1\textsuperscript{st} remained in his position at the Lands and Survey Department for some years until his successful dabbling with the earliest processes of

\textsuperscript{109} Robson, \textit{A History of Tasmania, Volume I}, p. 466; Button, \textit{Flotsam and Jetsam}, p. 42.
\textsuperscript{112} Stephen Spurling 1\textsuperscript{st}, Employment Records, Colonial Secretary’s Office (CSO 50/14; CSO 50/18; CSO 50/19; CSO 50/21; CSO 50/22; CSO 50/24; CSO 50/25, 1840-1849, TAHO).
\textsuperscript{113} Stephen Spurling 1\textsuperscript{st}, Employment record (LSD 1/111 pp. 354-357, 1853, TAHO).
photography led him to resign his position and launch out into Studio portraiture.\textsuperscript{115}

Interestingly, Stephen 3rd makes no mention of the years Stephen 1st spent working in the Convict Department. This raises the question as to whether this omission is an example of the Tasmanian obsession at that time of expunging any connection with its convict past.\textsuperscript{116} Photographic historian Jack Cato makes the same omission and implies that Stephen 1st went straight to the Lands and Survey Department soon after his arrival in the colony.\textsuperscript{117} The historian Joan Kerr makes a similar claim.\textsuperscript{118}

Despite omitting Stephen 1st’s employment in the Convict Department, both authors suggest he started his association with photography soon after his arrival in the colony in 1837. Kerr believes that Stephen 1st’s interest in photography probably dates from this time, although ‘it was not until the late 1850s, when in partnership with Shepherd as a carver, gilder and frame-maker at 34 Brisbane Street, Hobart Town, that Spurling began taking photographs as an amateur interest’.\textsuperscript{119} Cato, on the other hand, states Stephen 1st started taking photographs before he left the government service, claiming, ‘[f]or some time he made “likenesses” of his friends’, and when demand for his work grew, he resigned from the Government’.\textsuperscript{120}

These references provide some insights as to when Stephen 1st started to experiment with photography. However, there is some confusion. As mentioned in the Introduction, in his 1991 essay, film and sound archivist Chris Long makes no mention of Stephen Spurling 1st in his list of early Tasmanian photographers,\textsuperscript{121} but does include him in his 1995 directory of Tasmanian photographers. In his directory

\textsuperscript{115} Stephen Spurling 3rd, Notes on the Spurling Family History (Undated, original document held by Christine Burgess) p. 2.

\textsuperscript{116} Haynes, \textit{Tasmanian Visions}, pp. 42, 179.


\textsuperscript{118} ‘Spurling, Stephen (1821-1892)’ in Kerr (ed.), \textit{The Dictionary of Australian Artists}, p. 748.

\textsuperscript{119} ‘Spurling, Stephen (1821-1892)’ in Kerr (ed.), \textit{The Dictionary of Australian Artists}, p. 748.

\textsuperscript{120} Cato, \textit{The Story of the Camera in Australia}, p. 165. Cato then states that Stephen 1st opened a studio at 75 Murray Street. Apart from getting the street number incorrect, this statement fails to acknowledge that Stephen 1st resigned in 1853 and opened his studio around 1865.

Long states Stephen 1st may have worked ‘in the daguerreotype period’, and claims at the time of his research in the 1980s that the Spurling family owned ‘several unsigned daguerreotypes mounted as small brooches with a watch-style cover glass’.122 The fact that these daguerreotypes were unsigned is not surprising. According to Long, ‘[n]one of the Tasmanian daguerreotypes were [sic] signed by their makers’.123 Although the Spurls’ daguerreotypes have disappeared, if they were Stephen 1st’s this would confirm his early photographic experiments date back to the early 1840s. The fact that these daguerreotypes have gone astray is not atypical. Photo-historian Weston Naef records that in America, significant numbers of daguerreotypes have vanished.124 There are other recounts of Stephen 1st’s photographic activity during this era. Suzanne Seyfried, who compiled the saga of Lovett and Spurling families in Van Diemen’s Land states: ‘[b]y ‘February 1844, Stephen was taking portraits and landscapes with his daguerreotype process’.125 As previously mentioned, Stephen 3rd also believed his grandfather dabbled ‘with the earliest processes of photography’.126 He further stated that ‘[i]n 1941 … the business was sold … The family therefore have completed over [a] 100 years of high class photography’.127

If these statements are correct, then Stephen 1st’s initial encounters with photography date back to the early 1840s, not long after French researcher Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre (1787-1851) released details of his daguerreotype process (in French and English) to the public in 1839.128 The publication of this information enabled others to experiment because ‘by following Daguerre’s detailed instructions one could construct, or have constructed, the camera for oneself’.129 If Stephen 1st’s initial

127 Spurling 3rd, Notes on the Spurling Family History, p. 3.
129 Goldsmith, *The Camera and its Images*, p. 44.
experiments with photography took place in the early 1840s, how and when could he have encountered this new technology?

As mentioned in the previous chapter, news about early experiments in photography reached the Antipodes towards the end of 1839. Technical information on the daguerreotype was readily available from this time because, when Daguerre released details of his process, the French Government paid him a pension on the condition his discovery was freely available throughout the world. According to curator Gael Newton, it is uncertain as to whether Daguerre’s manuals ever reached Australia. However, the fact that the artist and ex-convict, Thomas Bock (1793-1855) advertised he had obtained a daguerreotype and would shortly ‘produce photographic likenesses in the first style of the art’ in September 1843, indicates that information on the process was available in Hobart Town at least by this date. In fact, the information may have arrived in the colony even earlier. The survival of Bock’s notes on Talbot’s calotype and further twenty-two pages of notes on Daguerre’s process, sewn to a copy of the Athenæum dated 17 July 1841 suggest that this information made its way to the colony around this time. It is possible Bock transcribed some or all of his notes from Robert Hunt’s A Popular Treatise on the Art of Photography, including daguerréotype .... If this was the case, then this book, or excerpts from it, must have been available in Van Diemen’s Land. The accessibility of this information meant that ‘there was nothing to prevent anyone with a knowledge of chemistry from experimenting with it’.

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132 Hobart Town Advertiser, 29 September 1843, p. 3 c. 6.
133 Thomas Bock, Transcribed notes (Allport MSS, Box 17, Folder 11, Allport Library and Museum of Fine Arts – hereafter ALMFA).
134 Written beneath the transcribed notes is, ‘R Hunt on Photography and Daguerreotype’.
135 Robert Hunt, A Popular Treatise on the Art of Photography, including daguerréotype ... was published in Glasgow in 1841. See also Long, ‘Thomas Bock as a Photographer’, p. 65.
It is possible Stephen 1st became aware of these scientific innovations through correspondence with his family in England, or through his contacts in Van Diemen’s Land. As previously mentioned, Stephen 1st met Sir John Franklin when he presented him with a letter from his mother Jessy in July 1840. This was around the time Franklin received correspondence from the Royal Society in London regarding the daguerreotype. As discussed earlier in this chapter, it is likely Stephen 1st also knew Ronald Gunn. Gunn was listed as a member of the Tasmanian Society in the first volume of their journal. This publication included an extract from Dr Richardson’s letter about the daguerreotype. The fact that these men knew about Daguerre’s discovery and knew Stephen 1st suggests there were several possible ways for him to have learnt about this innovation.

Although there is no conclusive proof to verify when Stephen 1st began his photographic experimentations, there is a final piece of evidence that may be significant. Stephen 1st died in a mental asylum. According to family legend his mental deterioration resulted from head injuries sustained following a fall from his horse. However, it is possible that his condition was a result of poisoning, induced by the chemicals used in the early days of photography. In conducting their daguerreotype experiments, early photographers used a number of toxic chemicals. These included the use of ‘quickstuff’ – the fumes of chlorine with or without

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137 A letter written by S J Spurling (London) to Mrs Lakin (née Hilda Spurling), 15 August 1937 (Copy held by Christine Burgess) records that his great-uncle, Percy Spurling kept a diary from 1860 until his death. In this diary he quoted from letters written by his Tasmanian cousin. This confirms the Tasmanian and English Spurlings maintained contact for some decades.

138 On 18 July 1840, Jessy Spurling wrote a letter to Sir John Franklin. It read in part, ‘my eldest Son who will have the honor [sic] to present Your Excellency with this letter …’, (CSO 5/1/226/5756, p. 445, TAHO).

139 See discussion in Chapter 1.
140 Letter written by Stephen Spurling 1st to the Colonial Secretary, 10 July 1840 (CSO 5/1/226 file 5786, p. 287, TAHO).
142 Admission Register, Royal Derwent Hospital (HSD 247/1/1 Z 1150, 9 September 1886, Admission no. 1415, TAHO).
143 Stephen Edward – hereafter Ted Spurling of Devonport, Recollections as told to Christine Burgess. Ted might have confused Stephen 1st’s demise with the fate suffered by Stephen 2nd’s father-in-law.
bromine. Chlorine gas is a highly toxic. They also handled and inhaled other poisonous chemicals including potassium cyanide, iodine and mercury fumes.\footnote{Goldsmith, \emph{The Camera and its Images}, p. 48.} According to the photographic researcher Karen Frisch-Ripley, ‘[c]early photographers were unaware of the dangers inherent in producing daguerreotypes; many of the first to use the process died a slow death from mercury poisoning after inhaling the toxic vapors that rose during the heating process’.\footnote{Karen Frisch-Ripley, \emph{Unlocking the secrets in old photographs} (Salt Lake City, c. 1991) p. 126.} The symptoms of chronic mercury poisoning include ‘incoordination, motor tremors and jerky movements followed by psychic disturbances such as insomnia, irritability, indecision and psychological deterioration (depression, loss of memory and frequent out bursts of anger). Kidney disease is also common’.\footnote{Susan D Shaw and Monona Rossol, \emph{Overexposure: Health Hazards in Photography} (New York, 1991) p. 121.} According to Mark Osterman, from George Eastman House and the International Museum of Photography, ‘[m]ercury poisoning is insidious; the effect of minute amounts may take months to show up, usually as damage to the human brain and kidneys. Continued exposure causes insanity, unconsciousness, paralysis, and death’.\footnote{Mark Osterman, ‘Poisons’ in Michael R Peres (ed.), \emph{The Focal Encyclopedia of Photography}, 4th edition (Boston, 2007) p. 106.} 

Stephen 1\textsuperscript{st}’s medical records show that at the time of his admission to hospital he suffered from delusional insanity, possibly caused by senility and that his physical condition was feeble with impending paralysis.\footnote{Admission Register, Royal Derwent Hospital (HSD 247/1/1 Z 1150, 9 September 1886, Admission no. 1415, TAHO). These records show patients admitted around the same time suffered from a range of mental illnesses including congenital imbecility, delusional insanity caused by alcoholism, mania caused by hysteria, and melancholia caused by nostalgia and lactation.} Further, his death certificate shows that he died of kidney failure.\footnote{Stephen Spurling 1\textsuperscript{st}, Death certificate (Rgd no. 35, Registration no. 466, New Norfolk, 1892, TAHO).} These records indicate Stephen 1\textsuperscript{st}’s medical condition towards the end of his life was consistent with chronic mercury poisoning. It is therefore possible that his physical and mental deterioration were the long-term result of his early experiments with the daguerreotype process.
While much of the evidence to support the contention that Stephen 1st started his experiments with photography in the early 1840s is anecdotal, it seems in the case of early Tasmanian photographers this is often the only substantiation available. In his essay on Thomas Bock’s experiences as a daguerreotypist, Chris Long quotes ‘a distantly retrospective version told by Alfred Bock to J W Beattie as late as 1919’. He also states ‘surviving documentation of Bock’s pioneering photographic work is patchy and unreliable’.150 By comparison, the evidence in Stephen 1st’s case consistently supports the contention he probably started his amateur photographic experiments in either the 1840s or early 1850s. Interestingly, the 2010 discovery of a pastel drawing signed ‘S Spurling 1850’ reveals that Stephen 1st was also involved with artistic pursuits from at least this date.151 Further confirmation of Stephen 1st’s initial, amateur involvement with photography is that by 1865 he had sufficient knowledge to set up in business as a professional and the following year, win a medallion for his work. Given the complexities involved in the photographic process at this time it would seem almost impossible for him to have done this – unless he had prior, practical experience and a working knowledge of photography.152

If Stephen 1st’s encounters with photography date back to the earliest days of its discovery, he may have been experimenting around the time of George Barron Goodman’s stay in Hobart Town. In August 1843, Goodman set up a daguerreotype business at 20 Patrick Street.153 By this stage, there were restrictions on the use of the daguerreotype and Goodman had a monopoly on the use of the process in Australia. These restrictions came about after the Englishman, William Henry Fox Talbot (1800-1877), took out a patent on his calotype process, forcing Daguerre to take out an English patent on his invention. In July 1841, Daguerre sold the English patent rights to Richard Beard (1801-1885) who on-sold a colonial licence to Goodman.154

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151 The portrait is in a huon pine, Hood frame and features a girl of about twelve years, wearing an elaborately trimmed dress. Email from Gillian Winter to Christine Burgess, 9 February 2010.
Just over a month after Goodman’s arrival in Hobart Town, Thomas Bock advertised his intention of taking daguerreotypes. Immediately Goodman threatened to sue him for patent infringement and Bock did not pursue his operations at this stage. No doubt threats of legal action also served as a caution to anyone else in the colony experimenting with photography. Then, after several months in Hobart Town, Goodman travelled to Launceston before returning to Sydney.

Within a few years the threat of legal retribution for those experimenting with early photographic processes had evaporated. A number of legal challenges in London led to Beard losing control of his patent. From then on daguerreotype photographers in the colonies no longer concerned themselves with obtaining licences, and by the mid-1850s several studios had opened in Hobart Town. Then, around 1853 the new collodion or wet plate process started to make inroads into the popularity of both the daguerreotype and Talbot’s calotype process. Two years later, the patent on Talbot’s process expired and, with the threat of patent infringements no longer an issue, several more Hobart Town photographers established businesses.

At some stage during this period Stephen 1st left his government position and departed for the goldfields. Meanwhile, his wife Louisa established a day school for young ladies. Her advertisements, which appeared in the press in early 1855 announced she intended to meet the needs of parents who objected ‘to sending their little Girls to mix with Boys’. The extra income proved vital. By May, her husband was before the courts, facing insolvency. He owed just over £203 and had

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160 *Courier*, 2 May 1855, p. 3 c. 2.
161 *Courier*, 3 January 1855, p. 3 c. 3; *Courier*, 6 January 1855, p. 3 c. 3.
162 *Courier*, 3 January 1855, p. 3 c. 3.
assets of £35. According to a newspaper account, his debts resulted from the ‘[l]oss of gold taken from [the] insolvent on his return from the diggings’.\textsuperscript{163} The matter came before the Commissioner of Insolvent Estates, Fielding Browne on 1 May, and was listed for a meeting of the creditors on 17 May. This meeting was adjourned.\textsuperscript{164}

Stephen 1\textsuperscript{st}’s financial situation evidently improved over the next twelve months, and in May 1856 he formed a partnership with G F Shepherd. They traded as carvers, gilders and picture frame makers from their premises at 34 Brisbane Street, Hobart Town, and advertised that they made bespoke mirror and picture frames, and would clean and restore oil paintings.\textsuperscript{165} Their firm, variously referred to as \textit{Spurling & Shepherd} and \textit{Spurling’s}, also displayed examples of a new style of portrait, which incorporated the use of Swiss crayons and photography.\textsuperscript{166} This is the first recorded reference to Stephen 1\textsuperscript{st}’s commercial involvement with photography.

Early in 1857 Stephen 1\textsuperscript{st} set up a retail establishment at 134 Liverpool Street, Hobart Town. These premises had an annual assessment value of £110 and comprised a house and shop.\textsuperscript{167} This shop, known as \textit{S Spurling’s}, sold amongst other things colonial statuary, music and musical instruments, cabinets, stationery, soaps and ‘Superior Magic Lanterns and Cosmoramas’.\textsuperscript{168} (Cosmoramas were perspective images, enhanced through the use of lenses and lighting.)\textsuperscript{169} It was a precarious time to be setting up in business – 50 per cent of the adult population in the colony was

\textsuperscript{163} \textit{Courier}, 2 May 1855, p. 3 c. 2.
\textsuperscript{164} \textit{Courier}, 2 May 1855, p. 3 c. 2; \textit{Hobarton Mercury}, 4 May 1855, p. 3 c. 5; \textit{Colonial Times}, 26 May 1855, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{165} \textit{Tasmanian Daily News}, 24 May 1856, p. 1 c. 4.
\textsuperscript{166} \textit{Tasmanian Daily News}, 20 May 1856, p. 4 c. 3; John A McPhee, \textit{The painted portrait photograph in Tasmania, 1850-1900} (Launceston, c. 2007). It is interesting to note that the portrait of Jessy Spurling with her grandson, Frank dates from around this time.
\textsuperscript{167} \textit{Assessment Rolls}, 1858, p. 287, TAHO.
\textsuperscript{168} \textit{Courier}, 28 January 1857, p. 3 c. 2; \textit{Hobart Town Daily Mercury}, 10 July 1858, p. 1 c. 7.
either convicts or former convicts.170 However, it seems Stephen 1st prospered for a while, and by September his business had expanded to incorporate a ‘bazaar and fashionable lounge’.171 Two months later he placed a large advertisement in the local press announcing the arrival of a ‘Euterpeon’172 and an exhibition of ‘Dissolving Views’.173 (To create a dissolving view, two magic lanterns were arranged side-by-side. By manipulating a handle, the view from one lantern would fade and a new view from the second lantern would appear.)174 Clearly, at this stage, photographic views formed an important part of his business.

By September 1859 Stephen 1st was in some financial trouble and the auction firm, Burn & Co., began disposing of his stock. The euterpeon, described as ‘the finest instrument in the colony’ and a ‘large and valuable magic lantern’, were amongst the items listed for sale.175 However, Stephen 1st’s problems were soon resolved, and just over two weeks later he re-opened at the same address, trading as a ‘Fancy Repository’.176 His financial situation then seems to have improved, and in August of the following year he moved to 62 Liverpool Street. This store sold a vast array of goods including telescopes, microscopes, stereoscopes and stereoscope slides.177 Although it is unclear whether Stephen 1st produced these slides, the fact he had them for sale again confirms his commercial activity involving photography. The huge range of items on sale, and the employment of his son Henry as a clerk, and two other staff, suggests Stephen 1st anticipated his business would be viable.178 However, after his earlier financial woes, the grand scale of this enterprise suggests he was, at this stage, somewhat delusional.

170 Haynes, Tasmanian Visions, p. 42.
171 Courier, 28 September 1857, p. 1 c. 5-6; Courier, 4 November 1857, p. 3 c. 2.
172 A type of mechanical organ. Hobart Town Daily Mercury, 3 September 1859, p. 3 c. 8.
173 Courier, 13 November 1857, p. 3 c. 3-4
175 Hobart Town Daily Mercury, 3 September 1859, p. 3 c. 8.
176 Hobart Town Daily Mercury, 24 September 1859, p. 1 c. 5.
177 Mercury, 9 August, 1860, p. 4 c. 2.
178 Newspaper accounts show Stephen Spurling 1st owed wages to Henry E Spurling, Arthur Butler and Catherine Lynch. Mercury, 20 September 1861, p. 3 c. 5; Mercury, 3 October 1861, p. 2 c. 4.
Despite Stephen 1st’s optimism, his business venture soon floundered. Unable to generate sufficient turnover to justify his stock, within twelve months he again faced economic ruin. In July 1861 he advertised a grand sale in anticipation of a move to Launceston.\textsuperscript{179} However, this strategy failed to avert disaster, and on 26 August the Commissioner of Insolvent Estates, Fielding Browne Esq. once again declared Stephen 1st insolvent. Browne had a reputation for being ‘deficient in legal knowledge’.\textsuperscript{180} One of his best-known cases had occurred some fifteen years earlier, when he presided over the trial of a group of convict rioters on Norfolk Island. At the trial he disregarded an application by the accused for legal representation. Unofficial accounts of the proceedings claim that of the twelve men condemned to death, at least four and possibly more, were innocent.\textsuperscript{181}

Despite Browne’s reputation, it seems in the matter of Stephen 1st’s bankruptcy, the court proceedings progressed without undue problems. Browne’s initial task was to appoint John Milward as the official assignee.\textsuperscript{182} At the first meeting of creditors, held on 18 September, Browne examined Stephen 1st’s debts, which amounted to £3712 5s 3d. At this meeting local lawyer D’Arcy Haggitt appeared for the insolvent. Amongst the creditors were Alexander Ireland who claimed £18 15s 9d in school fees and Stephen 1st’s sixteen-year-old son, Henry who claimed £25 in wages. Under examination Stephen 1st explained he had employed Henry two years earlier with a promise of £1 a week. As Henry had received only £3, the court allowed his claim and issued an order for payment.\textsuperscript{183} A further meeting held on 2 October heard an application for an order of discharge. At this meeting Stephen 1st agreed to surrender ‘all his Estate and Effects’ and was subsequently pronounced a discharged bankrupt

\textsuperscript{179} \textit{Mercury}, 13 July 1861, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{180} Robson, \textit{A History of Tasmania, Volume I}, p. 475.
\textsuperscript{182} \textit{Hobart Town Advertiser}, 27 August 1861, p. 3 c. 1; Stephen Spurling 1st, List of Persons declared Insolvent (Supreme Court of Tasmania, AE 764/1/302, Series 84, Code no. 328/43, 1837-1879, TAHO); \textit{Mercury}, 6 September 1861, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{183} \textit{Mercury}, 20 September 1861, p. 3 c. 5; \textit{Hobart Town Advertiser}, 19 September 1861, p. 3 c. 4.
by the Commissioner on 9 October 1861. Although Stephen 1st’s situation appeared grim, he had fared better than might be expected. The insolvency laws at this time acted to protect the debtor, rather than the creditors.

For Stephen 1st, the disgrace continued. A series of advertisements appeared in the local press advertising the forthcoming sale of his residual stock. These goods included wools, paints, brushes, flutes, accordions and ‘a splendid piano melodian’. The humiliation of having his remaining merchandise sold off at bargain prices must have been devastating. Stephen 1st was forty. He had a wife and three sons aged sixteen, fourteen and eleven years – and no assets. For Henry, it seems this was the end of his business associations with the family. Ten years later he married and over the following years he and his wife had eight children. During this period they moved around the island, with Henry trying his hand at various occupations, including photography. The family finally settled in Queenstown, where Henry died just prior to his sixty-first birthday, on 2 June 1906.

There is some uncertainty as to what became of Stephen 1st and his family for the period immediately following his bankruptcy. However, it is possible they sought temporary accommodation with their extended family. At that time Stephen 1st’s brother, Ansley had a house at 168 Elizabeth Street and his sisters, Frances and Emma both resided in the town. By January Stephen 1st’s premises was occupied by another business. Meanwhile, his wife Louisa advertised she was accepting pupils at ‘Rosetta Cottage Seminary’ in Glenorchy. Presumably, her earnings provided an

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184 *Hobart Town Advertiser*, 3 October 1861, p. 3 c. 3; *Mercury*, 3 October 1861 p. 2 c. 4; Stephen Spurling 1st, List of Persons declared Insolvent (Supreme Court of Tasmania, Series 84, Code no. 328/43, 1837-1879, TAHO).
186 *Hobart Town Advertiser*, 11 October 1861, p. 3 c. 4; *Mercury*, 9 October 1861, p. 1 c. 5; *Mercury*, 10 October 1861, p. 1 c. 5; *Mercury*, 11 October 1861, p. 4 c. 3; *Mercury*, 12 October 1861, p. 4 c. 3.
188 Assessment Rolls (TAHO); *Walch’s Almanac* (Hobart).
190 *Mercury*, 3 January 1862, p. 4.
income for the family, and enabled them to save sufficient funds for their next venture. On April Fools’ Day 1863 Stephen 1st, Louisa and their two younger sons left Hobart Town bound for New Zealand. Although it not known whether Stephen 1st had found employment during the intervening period, there are several possibilities. He could have worked in his brother’s grocery store, or perhaps taken photographs on a commission basis. Nevertheless, there remains a degree of mystery surrounding this period of his life.

There is another mystery. As mentioned in the previous chapter, in early 1862 a photographer known as ‘Paul Ricochet’ undertook an excursion to Lake St Clair in the colony’s central highlands. His trip would become significant in Australian photographic history, and a cause for controversy. It was significant because a report of his journey, which appeared in the British journal Photographic News in September 1863, provides the earliest known account of a photographic trip to Lake St Clair. However, his account has also led to controversy – no other records have been uncovered for a photographer by this name. To add to the mystery, his photographs appear to have been lost to posterity.

Some writers believe that the name, Paul Ricochet may be a pseudonym for the Hobart Town lawyer and amateur photographer, Morton Allport. This theory relies on the assertion that Ricochet and Allport made their trips to Lake St Clair ‘at

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191 *Mercury*, 31 March 1863, p. 1 c. 1; *Invercargill Times*, 10 April 1863, p. 2 c. 1.
195 Records checked at the TAHO include Arrivals and Departures Index, General Index, Census Index, Wayn Index, Photographer Index and databases for Wills, Convicts and Divorces. Other institutions whose records have been checked include the National Archives of Australia, National Library of Australia, Picture Australia, State Library of Tasmania – hereafter SLT, and Coolcat (covering records held at Victorian Universities and State Library of Victoria – hereafter SLV).
precisely’ the same time. However, a close analysis of the two accounts reveals that Allport made his trip approximately twelve months after Ricochet. In addition, each traveller took a different route, had different companions, stayed in different places and took different photographs. There are many other variations of style in the two accounts. Since it is hard to imagine what motive could have compelled Allport, a respected lawyer and citizen, to perpetuate such a ruse, it seems unlikely that Paul Ricochet was Morton Allport.

If Paul Ricochet was someone other than Morton Allport, this leaves open the possibility that Ricochet was either some visiting photographer or a local, who had reason to disguise his identity. One person who fits this profile is Stephen 1st. According to several authors, he had the necessary photographic skills, and he had a need to find employment. Further, through his connections with the Lands and Survey Department, he would have known people who could have acted as a guide. Finally, as he was persona non grata in Hobart Town he had a good reason to write the article under a pseudonym. According to Ricochet’s account, he used ‘a 9 x 7 instrument, with single and double combinations of lenses . . . ’ to take his photographs. Although these images have been lost, the Allport Library and Museum of Fine Arts has in its collection an image that is probably of a similar vintage to Ricochet’s photographs. This image depicts the foreshore of Lake St Clair and gives an indication of the type of photograph Ricochet might have produced.

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201 Burgess, The Paul Ricochet Mystery.
While the identity of Paul Ricochet is open to speculation, in the 1850s and 1860s speculation of an entirely different nature seized the populace. This was the era of the gold rushes. Although the days of easy pickings on many Australian fields were long over, the lure of riches waiting discovery beckoned further afield. In May 1861 a Tasmanian prospector, Thomas Gabriel Read found gold in the Otago region of New Zealand and within months gold fever gripped the South Island.203 By 1862 the fares were cheaper and more family groups were making the journey across the Tasman,204 but it was not until the following year, when fresh goldfields beckoned diggers, that the Spurlings departed for the Land of the Long White Cloud. On 7 April 1863, Stephen 1st and his wife Louisa, accompanied by their sons Stephen 2nd and Frederick disembarked from the barque India near the town of Invercargill, in the south of the South Island.205 From a letter of appreciation the Spurlings and some other passengers wrote to the captain it seems they intended to make New Zealand their

205 Passenger list for the India shows Mr and Mrs Spurling and two children disembarking in Invercargill. Southland Daily News, 8 April 1863, p. 2 (Invercargill Public Library, New Zealand).
‘adopted home’.206 The family’s choice of destination reflects a trend amongst Tasmanian emigrants of this time to settle in the townships of Dunedin or Invercargill rather than head for the diggings.207

When the Spurlings arrived in Invercargill the township had grown considerably since its establishment on 17 January 1856. Situated on a flat, windswept plain the original surveyors had plans for a vibrant and prosperous metropolis. They laid out wide streets, generously proportioned city blocks and an extensive, central parkland. By the early 1860s the township had a population of 400 and a number of timber buildings replaced the original canvas dwellings. Although the settlement lacked an adequate water supply and had no public clock, it boasted a banking service, a locally produced newspaper and a variety of public buildings including several stores and two hotels.208 Then in late 1862 two shearsers discovered gold beside the Shotover River in the Wakatipu area, to the town’s north.209 As a result, prospective diggers rushed to establish claims and, since ‘the most direct route to the Wakatipu diggings was from Invercargill’, the township became the main source of supplies for the new goldfields.210

Shortly after his arrival, Stephen 1st opened a grocery store and bakery on the corner of Gala Street and Dee Streets in Invercargill.211 This would have been an ideal position. Dee Street turns into North Road, which was the main supply route to the

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206 Letter written by the Spurling family and other passengers to Captain Wm Young, Barque India (Southland Daily News, 11 April 1863, p. 2, Invercargill Public Library, New Zealand). The letter is signed by ‘J’ Spurling, Mrs Spurling, S Spurling, F Spurling and several others. Presumably, the ‘J’ Spurling is a transcription error, and should in fact be S Spurling.


goldfields.\textsuperscript{212} While opening a grocery and bakery store seems an unlikely enterprise for Stephen 1\textsuperscript{st}, there was a family precedent in this line of business. As mentioned previously, his younger brother, Ansley had a grocery store in Hobart Town. In January 1861 Ansley placed advertisements in the local press announcing he had ‘opened in the grocery trade’ at 51 Liverpool Street.\textsuperscript{213} The fact that both brothers were involved in similar commercial activities may be more than a coincidence. At this time there were strong trade links between Tasmania and Invercargill. According to the historical geographer Roger Kellaway, ‘almost forty percent of Tasmanian-New Zealand trade in 1863 [was] landed at a Southland port. Most was shipped direct to Invercargill’.\textsuperscript{214} This trade link would have enabled Stephen 1\textsuperscript{st} to import groceries directly into Invercargill, perhaps through his brother’s contacts in Tasmania.

It was a good time to set up a business in Invercargill. By 1863 the population had increased to 5161 and the township boasted a number of substantial buildings. Commerce was also thriving – there were now thirty-five hotels, three banks, twelve bakeries and two photography studios.\textsuperscript{215} During this period of economic growth the Spurlings’ business seems to have prospered. In December of that year the family was sufficiently confident to submit a tender to supply bread to the newly built Invercargill Hospital in Gala Street. Although their first tender met with rejection, their second tender, to supply bread for twelve months at 8 ½ pence per 4-pound loaf was successful. This tender undercut their competitors who quoted between 9 ¼ pence and 10 pence for the same sized loaf.\textsuperscript{216}

\textsuperscript{212} \textit{Invercargill Times}, 14 December 1863, p. 4 c. 7.
\textsuperscript{213} \textit{Mercury}, 21 January 1861, p. 1 c. 7; \textit{Mercury}, 23 January 1861, p. 1. Ansley also worked as a ‘pressman’ for various Tasmanian newspapers, and became an accountant. \textit{Mercury}, 2 July 1888, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{214} Kellaway, ‘Tasmania and the Otago gold rush 1861-1865’, p. 222.
\textsuperscript{216} \textit{Southland Provincial Government Gazette}, New Zealand, v. 1 no. 71, 14 December 1863, p. 391.
The Spurlings may have won their tender but their competitors were not impressed. Almost immediately a price war broke out, with other bakers advertising in the local press that they had reduced the price of bread to 8 pence for a 4-pound loaf. 217 This cost cutting evidently affected the Spurling enterprise. Unable to fulfill their obligations to the hospital and in danger of being ‘tarred and feathered’ 218 by the local populace, they decided the time had come to depart. While the family left New Zealand in haste, their misdemeanors were evidently not serious enough to warrant a police report. There is no mention of any of the Spurlings in the Otago Police Gazettes for the period 1861-1865. 219

In early 1864 three Spurlings departed Bluff Harbour near Invercargill bound for Melbourne. 220 To date, no records have been located for the departure of the fourth Spurling. Perhaps he travelled steerage, worked his passage, or went directly to the wharves and ‘took passage’. In such cases, the traveller’s name did not always appear on the passenger lists. 221 The Spurlings departed just in time, for the boom in Invercargill was about to end. In 1864 the promise of substantial gold fields in Southland failed to materialise. In addition, the discovery of gold on the west coast of New Zealand led to an exodus of miners from the Wakatipu region. Almost immediately businesses in Invercargill that relied on supplying the goldfields started to falter. With the economic downturn various construction projects stalled, and by the end of 1864 the region’s population was in decline. 222

218 Ted Spurling, Recollections.
219 Otago Police Gazettes, 1861-1865 (P 12/3-4, Archives, New Zealand).
220 The first male Spurling departed Bluff Harbour (Invercargill) for Hobson’s Bay (Melbourne) aboard the Souchays on 29 January 1864 (Argus, 9 February 1864, p. 4. c. 1). The following month, on 28 February 1864, Mrs Spurling and a male Spurling departed Bluff Harbour for Hobson’s Bay aboard the Alhambra (Argus, 5 March 1864, p. 4. c. 1).
221 Kellaway, ‘Tasmania and the Otago gold rush 1861-1865’, pp. 219, 223. Both the Souchays and the Alhambra carried over 200 (un-named) passengers in steerage class.
It is open to debate as to whether Stephen 1st dabbled in photography during his time in New Zealand. Although an ‘S Spurling’ appears in Hardwicke Knight’s index of over a thousand photographers who operated in New Zealand up until 1900, it has proved difficult to substantiate this claim.223 If Stephen 1st was involved in photography in New Zealand, it was probably only on an occasional, non-professional basis. There is no Spurling listed as a photographer in Harnett’s trade directory for 1864.224

According to family anecdotes, when the family arrived in Melbourne Stephen 1st gave his son, Stephen 2nd £1 0s and told him he was ‘on his own’.225 It seems Stephen 2nd then made his way to Bendigo, where he decided to work in a bakery, rather than search for elusive riches in the ground.226 Meanwhile, the rest of the family returned to Tasmania. Once back in Hobart Town Stephen 1st set about establishing a new business. This time there would be no lavish store with a vast array of merchandise for he intended to specialise and set up purely as a photographer. Around 1865 he took over a lease on a property at 76 Murray Street, Hobart Town, comprising a dwelling place and a shop, which he converted to a photographic studio.227 It would not have been difficult to obtain a rental property in Hobart Town at this time – ‘almost a quarter of the dwellings in [the town] were without tenants’.228

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223 Hardwicke Knight, New Zealand Photographers: A selection (Dunedin, NZ, 1981) Index. Unfortunately, no source is provided for this listing. When contacted in 2006, Hardwicke Knight, (who was in his nineties), stated he may have had one or more cartes de visite attributed to S Spurling in his photograph collection. This collection was donated to the Te Papa Museum in Wellington, New Zealand, but a search of their collection failed to locate any images attributable to ‘S Spurling’.
225 Ted Spurling, Recollections.
226 Ted Spurling, Recollections as told to Ron Thomson, New South Wales and Christine Burgess.
227 Assessment Rolls (1866, TAHO). A number of writers record this address as 75 Murray Street. There is no record in the Assessment Rolls of the Spurling family ever having a business at 75 Murray Street.
228 Kellaway, ‘Tasmania and the Otago gold rush 1861-1865’, p. 221.
Eugene von Guérard (1811-1901), *Hobart Town from Kangaroo Point*, 1867, lithograph, hand coloured, 32.5 x 51 cm.

The next year Stephen 1st won a medallion for his portraits of Tasmanian children at the Intercolonial Exhibition.229 This exhibition opened in Melbourne on 24 October 1866.230 Although Chris Long states Stephen 1st’s award was ‘a minor prize’,231 of the one hundred and eight entries in the ornamental arts section of the Tasmanian stand, just five photographers received medallions. The recipients were Morton Allport, Henry Hall Baily, William Cawston, Charles Woolley and Stephen 1st.232 These medallions were not ‘a minor prize’, but were highly regarded. Designed by the sculptor Charles Summers and crafted in bronze, they were the size of a small dinner

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230 *Mercury*, 30 October 1866, p. 3 c. 1.


232 Email from Jennifer Gissing, SLV to Christine Burgess, 27 May 2008; *Argus*, 14 February 1867, Supplement, p. 2 c. 4; *Mercury*, 25 October 1866, p. 3 c. 4; Anne-Marie Willis, ‘Allport, Morton’ in Kerr (ed.), *The Dictionary of Australian Artists*, p. 16; Long, *Tasmanian Photographers*, p. 4. The Allport medal is now at the ALMFA.
plate. The Melbourne press described them as ‘both chaste and simple’ and stated they would have a ‘handsome decorated card [attached for presentation] to those considered worthy by the jurors of this distinction’. From this time onwards Stephen 1st stamped a replica of his medallion on the back of his photographs. The actual medallion has passed down through the generations and is still in the possession of his descendants.


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233 *Age*, 25 October 1866, p. 4 c. 2.
234 For many years this medallion, identical to the one pictured above, was held by Ted Spurling of Devonport, Tasmania. It is now held by his son, Stephen John Spurling of Melbourne, Victoria.
Following his win Stephen 1st’s business appears to have flourished and by 1867, two of his sons, Stephen 2nd and Frederick, were assisting in the studio.\footnote{Mercury, 22 January 1942, p. 5 c. 4-5; Spurling 3rd, Notes on the Spurling Family History, p. 2.} The firm specialised in portraiture and in an advertisement for his business dated 1869, he advised potential clients that he took portraits ‘in every size, plain, or colored [sic] in water or oil’. Such portraits were often presented in the form of carte de visite and were popular for mounting in albums and presenting as gifts.\footnote{Alan Davies and Peter Stanbury, The Mechanical Eye in Australia: Photography: 1841-1900 (Melbourne, 1986) p. 113; Cato, The Story of the Camera in Australia, pp. 23-24.} This was particularly important to the colonials as they could send images of themselves back to their families in Europe.

![Image of a young girl's portrait and carte de visite card](image_url)

Stephen Spurling 1st, Portrait of young girl, carte de visite, c. 1870, albumen silver, 11 x 7 cm & verso [showing a replica of the medal Stephen Spurling 1st won at the Intercolonial Exhibition in Melbourne in 1866].
Stephen Spurling 1st, Portrait of unidentified woman, carte de visite, c. 1870, albumen silver, 10 x 6 cm.

Stephen Spurling 1st, Morton Allport, 1867–70, albumen silver print, oval image; 4 x 4 cm.

Stephen Spurling 1st, Portrait of boy, carte de visite, albumen silver, c. 1870, 10 x 6 cm. & verso [showing a replica of the medal Stephen Spurling 1st won at the Intercolonial Exhibition in Melbourne in 1866].
According to photo-historian, Anne-Marie Willis:

It was the carte de visite … that made photography a democratic medium. For this cheap-to-produce photograph provided the first opportunity in history for large numbers of people from virtually all social classes to own images of themselves and of those who were close to them.\textsuperscript{237}

The carte de visite also proved popular as a memento of the rich and famous.\textsuperscript{238} Stephen 1\textsuperscript{st} evidently sought to capitalise on this enthusiasm and advertised he had ‘numerous specimens of the elite of Tasmania on view’.\textsuperscript{239}

There are differing opinions as to the quality of Stephen 1\textsuperscript{st}’s work. Chris Long has described Stephen 1\textsuperscript{st}’s portraiture as ‘rather primitive and uninteresting’. He goes on to say, ‘the same curtains, carpet with a diamond pattern and ornate chair appear in practically every known cdv portrait’.\textsuperscript{240} As the above examples illustrate, these backdrops do feature in some of Stephen 1\textsuperscript{st}’s work, but not all. As for his images appearing primitive and uninteresting, perhaps this is not so much a reflection of Stephen 1\textsuperscript{st}’s skills, but of the constraints of the era. According to the gallery curator, Marion Fletcher, ‘photographs of the nineteenth century seem so dull: the slow process of taking the photographs made the figures completely static and wooden’.\textsuperscript{241}

Despite these constraints, Stephen 1\textsuperscript{st}’s images were well regarded. For example, in 1868 he was amongst a group of local photographers who contributed images to be included in an album presented to His Royal Highness Prince Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh when he visited Tasmania.\textsuperscript{242} This album included ‘eighty-three photographs illustrating the scenery of Tasmania, forty-eight portraits of children

\textsuperscript{237} Anne-Marie Willis, *Picturing Australia: a history of photography* (North Ryde, NSW, 1988) p. 47.
\textsuperscript{238} Willis, *Picturing Australia: a history of photography*, p. 47.
\textsuperscript{239} Henry Thomas, *Guide to Excursionists between Australia and Tasmania* (Melbourne, 1869-18) p. xli.
\textsuperscript{240} Long, *Tasmanian Photographers*, p. 105.
\textsuperscript{241} Marion Fletcher, *Costume in Australia: 1788-1901* (Melbourne, 1984) p. 19.
born in the colony, and nine plates immediately connected with the Duke’s visit.\textsuperscript{243} The other photographers who contributed images were Henry Baily, George Cherry and Charles Woolley. Jack Cato describes Stephen 1\textsuperscript{st}’s photography and that of his two sons as being ‘quite as good as Freeman’s of Sydney, or Batchelder’s of Melbourne’.\textsuperscript{244} Moreover, according to Joan Kerr, Stephen 1\textsuperscript{st} ‘soon became one of the colony’s most popular portrait photographers’.\textsuperscript{245}

According to several sources, Stephen 1\textsuperscript{st} was one of the photographers who made portraits of Aboriginal Tasmanians. Cato and Kerr claim he took several images including a head study of Truganini, the last full-blooded indigenous Tasmanian.\textsuperscript{246} Further evidence of Spurling images of Aboriginal Tasmanians comes from the Rose Stereographic Company, Melbourne. In 1961 the proprietor, H L Cutts wrote to W F Ellis at the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery in Launceston (hereafter QVMAG), offering to sell two negatives featuring ‘aborigines … from Mr Spurling’s collection’.\textsuperscript{247} However, it seems the sale did not proceed – the museum has no record of these negatives.\textsuperscript{248} Although these sources agree Stephen 1\textsuperscript{st} took images of Aboriginal Tasmanians, finding them has proved challenging. A photograph entitled \textit{Group of Five Tasmanian Aborigines in Warm Clothing}, held by the Royal Historical Society of Victoria, which has been attributed to Spurling, shows no identifiable Spurling features, other than it is in an album of eight other Spurling images.\textsuperscript{249} As it seems unlikely that such historically valuable images would disappear, what has

\textsuperscript{243} Lloyd Robson, \textit{A History of Tasmania, Volume II, Colony and State from 1856 to the 1980s} (Melbourne, 1991) pp. 16-17. For photographs of this event, see Sprod, \textit{Victorian and Edwardian Hobart from old photographs}, plate nos. 117-120.

\textsuperscript{244} Cato, \textit{The Story of the Camera in Australia}, p. 165.

\textsuperscript{245} ‘Spurling, Stephen’ in Kerr (ed.), \textit{The Dictionary of Australian Artists}, p. 748. Spurling images from this era have been located at Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, hereafter – TMAG, Morris Miller Library (University of Tasmania), TAHO, SLT and many private collections.


\textsuperscript{247} Letter written by H L Cutts from the Rose Stereograph Company, Melbourne to W F Ellis, QVMAG, Launceston, 19 May 1961(Community History Supplementary File: Spurling photographer, QVMAG).

\textsuperscript{248} Email from Rhonda Hamilton, QVMAG to Christine Burgess, 18 September 2007.

\textsuperscript{249} \textit{R G S Tasmanian Photos No. 1} (Royal Historical Society of Victoria Inc., Melbourne).
become of them? The most likely scenario is that Stephen 1st’s images were reprinted by other photographers, and have been attributed to them. Such reprinting of images of Aboriginal Tasmanians was widespread. For example, John Watt Beattie reprinted Charles Woolley’s images. There is even a Spurling enlargement of a Woolley image. According to Helen Ennis, ‘photographs of Aboriginal people were commercially lucrative … there was sufficient popular demand from the mid-1860s onwards to warrant mass production’.  

Throughout the period 1865 to 1875, Stephen 1st specialised in portraits. Although, according to Chris Long, Stephen 1st is ‘not known to have done any outdoor work’, there is evidence to suggest otherwise. This evidence comes from several sources. For example, the journalist Kerry Pink records, from an interview conducted with Stephen 3rd in 1961, that ‘[s]ome of Tasmania’s oldest photographs were taken by Stephen Spurling in the middle 1800s. However, these were not taken by [Stephen 3rd], but by his grandfather [Stephen 1st]’. Further evidence comes from photographer Alfred Winter’s advertisement for reprints of Stephen 1st originals, in which he refers to ‘Tasmanian views’. In addition, Spurling views of Nine Mile Springs goldfields may also be the work of Stephen 1st. Also, in the previously mentioned letter written by H L Cutts to the QVMAG, Cutts included ‘a list of old negatives from Mr Spurling’s collection’. These negatives have plate numbers, similar to those used by Stephen 3rd. However, the years attributed to the images suggest they date from the early 1850s. Assuming these dates are correct, the most likely explanation is that these negatives were Stephen 3rd copies of his grandfather’s

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251 Helen Ennis, *In a New Light: Australian photography 1850s-1930s* (Canberra, 2003) p. 10.


255 *Mercury*, 6 December 1876, p. 2.


257 For example, *Brisbane Street, Launceston* (c. 1850); *Launceston from Trevallyn in 1859; Launceston from Windmill Hill* (c. 1850); *Deloraine – old view* (1857).
originals. Although these negatives have disappeared, the print ‘View of Launceston from Windmill Hill’ held by the SLV, states on the verso that it is a Stephen 3rd reprint of a Stephen 1st original.258 There is also an original outdoor image taken during Stephen 1st’s studio years still in existence.259 This image (a copy of which is held at the TAHO, is of Surrey House, 199 Macquarie Street) affords an interesting comparison with J W Newland’s 1848 daguerreotype of Murray Street.260

Collection of the Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office, State Library of Tasmania


Another outdoor image taken during this period is a photograph of the church at the convict settlement of Port Arthur. This image, although now severely damaged, shows the church with the main steeple intact. Since the steeple blew down in the mid-1870s,261 the photograph must pre-date this event. There are other Spurling images of Port Arthur from this era, but unfortunately, all show signs of deterioration.

258 SLV (Accession no. H21024). This image depicts Launceston prior to the construction of Kings/Cataract Bridge (1864), but after the construction of St Andrew’s Church (1850). Therefore the original image was taken between 1850 and 1864 – that is, before Stephen 1st’s studio days.
259 Stephen 1st’s two sons worked for their father from around 1867, so it is possible some Spurling images from this time were taken by Stephen 2nd or Frederick. As it is impossible to prove which of the Hobart-based Spurlings took images between 1867 and the early 1880s, it has been assumed Stephen 1st was the prime photographer, and that his two sons played a supportive role in the studio.
260 See Chapter 1.
261 According to Margaret Tassell and David Wood, *Tasmanian Photographer from the John Watt Beattie Collection* (Melbourne, 1981) p. 24, the date was 1875, but according to Ken Lee the date was 7 November 1876. Email from Ken Lee, Resource Centre, Port Arthur Historic Site, 12 October 2007.

During the early 1870s several changes occurred in the Spurling family circumstances. In 1873 Stephen 2nd moved to Launceston. Here, in September of that year, he ‘established the Northern Studio and landscape business’ in St John Street.262 Meanwhile, Frederick remained in Hobart assisting in his father’s firm. Then around 1874 Stephen 1st’s wife, Louisa started teaching at various schools in and around Hobart Town.263 Louisa was forty-seven years old and her decision suggests that once again the family was in a precarious financial situation.

Their situation worsened when, on 11 August 1875, Stephen 1st, whose address was given as the Hobart Inn, declared his inability to pay his debts from 2.45pm.264 The following day, Stephen 2nd lodged a petition with the Supreme Court requesting that his father be ‘adjudicated bankrupt, being indebted to the petitioner in the sum of £201 1s for goods sold and cash lent’.265 At the hearing, the Registrar judged Stephen 1st bankrupt and called for a meeting of creditors at Stephen Sheehy’s office

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263 Letter written by F Bond, in support of Louisa Spurling’s application for employment as a teacher, states in part, ‘Mrs S Spurling … has been teaching in, and about Hobart, for some considerable time (about fifteen (15) years’), 10 June 1889 (ED 2/1/1120 1316, Louisa Spurling, TAHO).

264 Stephen Spurling 1st, Minutes of Proceedings in Bankruptcy (Supreme Court, Registrar’s Office, SC 34, 7/03/1871-17/07/1942, 1875, TAHO).

265 *Mercury*, 13 August 1875, p. 2 c. 5.
on 30 August at twelve o’clock.266 Once again, Stephen 1st faced insolvency, and once again, one of his sons was amongst the creditors. However, newspaper reports suggest there was no acrimony between father and son, and Stephen 2nd was actually trying to clear his father’s debts.267 So perhaps Stephen 2nd’s petition was a prearranged strategy to ensure that as many of the firm’s assets as possible remained within the family. A further meeting of creditors, held at eleven o’clock on 27 November, determined under the Debtors’ Act,268 to auction the photographer’s glasshouse at the rear of a building Frederick occupied.269 This auction, listed for midday on Monday, 29 November would have created new problems. The glasshouse was an integral part of the firm’s studio. Before the advent of electricity, photographers needed a premises with north facing skylights as they relied on sunlight to take photographs and to print.270 As Frederick was earning his living as a photographer, the loss of the glasshouse must have severely affected to his earning capacity. Perhaps due to this enforced sale, Frederick fell out with the family.271

In January the following year, Stephen 1st was again before the courts. This time the charges were obtaining goods and credit by false pretences. According to the accusations made in court, on 27 February 1875, Stephen 1st had obtained goods by claiming he ‘had to take £200 from his son’. Stephen 2nd’s version was that Stephen 1st actually owed him money, but that he would have helped his father meet his debts, if he had been able. Although the judge advised the jury they should give the accused the benefit of the doubt, they were unable to reach a verdict. Subsequent reports suggest that rather than pursue their deliberations, the jury had become preoccupied

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266 Stephen Spurling 1st, Minutes of Proceedings in Bankruptcy (Supreme Court – Registrar’s Office, 7/03/1871-17/07/1942, SC 34, 1875, TAHO); Tasmanian Tribune, 13 August 1875, p. 2 c. 5; Mercury, 13 August 1875, p. 2 c. 5.
267 Mercury, 16 October 1875, p. 2.
268 Mercury, 20 November, 1875 p. 3 c. 7. The meeting was held at the office of the Trustee, T E Creswell in the Stone Buildings, Macquarie Street, Hobart Town.
269 Mercury, 29 November, 1875, p. 3 c. 7.
270 Email from Gael Newton, National Gallery of Australia, to Christine Burgess, 24 November 2003; Goldsmith, The Camera and Its Images, p. 51.
271 Long, Tasmanian Photographers, p. 105, states Frederick ‘fell out with his family, for reasons still unclear, in the early 1870s’.
with the issue of smoking in the jury room. This discussion degenerated to the point where one of their number had hurled a chair from a window. In the circumstances, the judge ordered them locked up over night, and released Stephen 1st on bail, with his two sons providing surety. The judge subsequently discharged the jury and the case lapsed.272 Within five months, the studio at 76 Murray Street was operating as a stationery store, and on 28 September 1877, William Burrows advertised the opening of his new portrait rooms at the old Spurling address. His advertisement concluded ‘[n]o connection with any other Photographer in Hobart Town’.273 Despite Burrows’ disparagement, Alfred Winter purchased Stephen 1st’s negatives and from 1876 to 1886 advertised copies and enlargements.274 Meanwhile, the town prospered and on 1 January 1881 the name was simplified to Hobart.275

Throughout this period Louisa supported herself with her teaching. Then around 1877 she set up her own school in Colville Street, which she operated until 1887.276 However, Stephen 1st could not forsake his career. In 1881, he made one final attempt to re-establish a studio, this time on the corner of Harrington and Melbourne Streets. The venture evidently proved short-lived.277 To complicate matters, Stephen 1st’s mental health was deteriorating. Although in this era there was little understanding, but a great fear of psychiatric illness, by 8 September 1886 the situation had reached crisis point and a Dr Perkins certified him insane. The next day two justices ordered his admission to the asylum at New Norfolk. He was sixty-five years and his condition had been deteriorating for two months.278 As previously discussed, his demise may have been due to the toxic chemicals including mercury, which he possibly handled and inhaled during his early days of photography. Stephen 1st died

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272 Mercury, 13 January 1876, p. 3; Mercury, 11 February 1876, pp. 2-3; Mercury, 12 February 1876, p. 2; Mercury, 21 February 1876, p. 15.
273 Mercury, 18 July 1876, p. 1; Supplement to the Tribune, 28 September 1877.
274 Mercury, 19 May 1876, p. 1; Mercury, 27 July 1878, p. 1; Mercury, 21 September 1886, p. 1.
275 Button, Flotsam and Jetsam, p. x.
276 Mercury, 7 July 1877, p. 3; Walch’s Almanacs (Hobart, 1881-1887).
277 Mercury, 30 December 1881, p. 3, Mercury, 31 December 1881, p. 2S. There are no other records of this venture. Note: Melbourne Street was renamed Victoria Street. Mercury, 30 August 1939, p. 2.
278 Admission Register, Royal Derwent Hospital (HSD 247/1/1 Z 1150, 9 September 1886, Admission no. 1415, TAHO). The register states incorrectly that he was sixty-six years old.
at the asylum at the age of seventy, on 13 April 1892.\textsuperscript{279} His funeral at St Matthew’s church the next day was followed by his burial in the New Norfolk Old Cemetery.\textsuperscript{280}

For a short period after Stephen 1st’s incarceration in 1886, his wife Louisa continued operating her school.\textsuperscript{281} However, there were moves afoot in Tasmania to rein in the proliferation of small private schools and bring education under tighter state controls.\textsuperscript{282} Perhaps in response to this pressure, Louisa closed her school. Then in 1889, when she was sixty-two years old and living at Colebrook, New Town she applied to the Education Department for a position.\textsuperscript{283} After some negotiations, she received an appointment at the Sandford School, where she was to assist her granddaughter, Agnes Spurling.\textsuperscript{284} Agnes taught at the school for the next two years,\textsuperscript{285} and it seems Louisa was still with her when Stephen 1st died in 1892.\textsuperscript{286} Louisa then went to live with her eldest son, Henry, on Tasmania’s west coast. She stayed here until her death on 8 October 1898.\textsuperscript{287} Louisa was seventy-one years old and was suffering from senile decay. For the last twelve years of her life she had struggled to survive without any emotional or financial support from her husband – in an era when social services in Tasmania were limited.\textsuperscript{288}

\textsuperscript{279} Stephen 1st’s death certificate shows (incorrectly) that he was seventy-two years old at the time of his death. (Rgd no. 35, Registration no. 466, New Norfolk, 1892, TAHO); Mercury, 23 April 1892, p. 1 c. 1; Seyfried, \textit{An Island at the Bottom of the World}, p. 2-53.
\textsuperscript{280} Stephen Spurling 1st, Record of burials (No. 2165, New Norfolk, 1892, TAHO).
\textsuperscript{281} \textit{Walch’s Almanac} (Hobart, 1881-1887).
\textsuperscript{282} The 1882 Parliamentary Select Committee recommended a free education system, which they believed would ‘sweep out of existence the inferior private schools’. Phillips, \textit{Making More Adequate Provision}, pp. 58-60, 82, 90, 99. Subsequently, the Education Act of 1885 attempted to bring state education in line with the other colonies. The next decade saw a significant increase in the number of Education Department schools. Meanwhile, private schools, especially those run by unqualified teachers, came under pressure to close. Robson, \textit{A History of Tasmania, Volume II}, pp. 250-254.
\textsuperscript{283} Louisa Spurling, Application for teaching position (ED 2/1/1120 1316, 12 June 1889, TAHO).
\textsuperscript{284} Agnes was presumably the first-born child of Henry Edwin Spurling and Agnes Matilda Rodman. However, there is no record of her birth. According to her marriage certificate she was 22 in 1895, which indicates she was born in 1873. Confusingly, the application for her teaching position (in 1889) states her date of birth was 4 May 1871 and that she was then 18 years old.
\textsuperscript{285} \textit{Walch’s Almanac} (Hobart, 1890-1892).
\textsuperscript{286} Mercury, 23 April 1892, p. 1 c. 1.
\textsuperscript{287} Louisa Spurling, Death certificate (Rgd no. 35, Registration no. 557, Lyell, 1898, TAHO); Mercury, 12 October 1898, p 1 c. 1.
\textsuperscript{288} Joan C Brown, ‘Poverty is not a crime’: the development of social services in Tasmania, 1803-1900 (Hobart, 1972) pp. 170-172.
Conclusions

During the course of his life, Stephen Spurling 1st experienced many traumas. His childhood experiences no doubt affected his attitudes towards his own sons and, at times, his apparent lack of concern for their predicaments. In addition, his lack of financial astuteness thrice plunged the family into insolvency. Towards the end of his life, his insanity would have placed even further strains on his relationships.

Despite these adversities, Stephen 1st achieved a great deal. He acquired a good education and while still in his teens he travelled halfway around the world to Van Diemen’s Land. Here he found employment and started experimenting with photography. His experiments possibly date back to the 1840s; making him one of Hobart Town’s earliest amateur photographers. In the mid-1860s, he established a photography studio and he became well known for his portraiture. During this period he photographed some of the colony’s eminent citizens and won a highly regarded medallion at the 1866 Intercolonial Exhibition in Melbourne.

Stephen 1st’s contribution to outdoor photography is more difficult to assess. Suzanne Seyfried claims he was taking landscapes in February 1844, but these daguerreotype images appear to have been lost. Although many of his outdoor images taken from the 1850s to 1870s are also missing, there is other evidence of his involvement with outdoor photography. For example, newspaper advertisements reveal he exhibited dissolving views from 1857, and by the 1870s, had a collection of Tasmanian scenes. However, when viewed ‘through the long lens of time’, perhaps Stephen 1st’s greatest legacy was the skills and love of photography that he instilled in two of his sons. His second and third born, Stephen 2nd and Frederick, would continue the Spurling contribution to Tasmanian photography into the next generation.

280 Brown and Shannon, Going to the Source, p. 122.