



UNIVERSITY  
OF TASMANIA

**IN SAFE HANDS:**

**A history of aged care in Tasmania**

by

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“Our society must make it right and possible for old people not to fear the young or be deserted by them, for the test of a civilization is the way that it cares for its helpless members.”

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Pearl S. Buck (1892-1973), *My Several Worlds* [1954]

*For Dad*

## Statement of Authorship

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Elaine Peta Crisp

August 2012

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Elaine Peta Crisp

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# Abstract

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Perhaps no part of the world can show relatively so many aged people.<sup>1</sup>

Aged care is one of the more controversial and problematic areas of healthcare in Australia in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Whilst most people today accept that residential care is an essential service for those who can no longer cope on their own in the community, few people want to end up in a nursing home, and few nurses aspire to work there. But was this always the case?

This diachronic study integrates archival research and oral history interviews to explore the history of aged care in one state of Australia, Tasmania. Tasmania began its white history as Van Diemen's Land, a penal settlement on a remote island intended to be the 'gaol for the entire British Empire'. The high number of convicts transported to the colony and the resulting large emancipist population, many of whom were both impoverished and without family to help them as they aged, meant that the colonial administration was forced to make official arrangements for their care from almost the first days of the state's existence. These arrangements bore some similarities to those in other Australian states and in the mother country, but the peculiarities of life on the edge of civilization brought their own unique solutions in that century, and the next.

This thesis follows the development of Tasmanian aged care from the early colonial charitable institutions, to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century period of 'making do', to the ennurserment of aged care in the middle of that century, and finally to developments in the 1980s that led to today's highly regulated and businesslike aged care sector. It illuminates the changes and continuities in conditions and practices within homes for the aged, and the shifting attitudes of Tasmanian society towards the elderly and those that cared for them. Official records paint an almost uniformly positive picture of aged care. In contrast, public opinion is almost equally negative. This study provides a more balanced story, in the hope that an understanding of the successes and failures of the past will provide some guidance for the future to assist our aging population in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Tasmania', *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed, (Edinburgh, 1888)

## List of Abbreviations and Glossary

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ACAT	Aged Care Assessment Team
AOT	Archives Office of Tasmania
APHA	Aged Persons' Homes Act, 1954
DON	Director of Nursing (equivalent to 'Matron')
EN	Enrolled Nurse
GAT	Geriatric Assessment Team
LGH	Launceston General Hospital
NRB	Nurses' Registration Board
RCI	Resident Classification Instrument
RN	Registered Nurse
TLC	Tasmanian Legislative Council Papers 1858 to 1883
TPP	Tasmanian Parliamentary Papers 1884 to present

### **Abbreviated names of government institutions and dates in use**

New Norfolk	New Norfolk Invalid Hospital, New Norfolk, 1824–1848
Impression Bay	Impression Bay Convict Station, Impression Bay, 1848–1857
Port Arthur	The Pauper House, Port Arthur, 1857–1859/1877
Brickfields	Brickfields Invalid Station, Hobart, 1859–1882
Cascades	Cascades Invalid Depot, Hobart, 1867–1879
New Town	New Town Charitable Institution, Hobart, 1874–1913 New Town Infirmary and Consumptive Home, 1913–1934 New Town Rest Home, 1934–1938
St John's Park	St John's Park, 1938–1994 (in private hands from 1994 to date, as Rosary Gardens)
IDL	Invalid Depot, Launceston, 1868-1912
HFI	Home for Invalids, Launceston, 1913–1954
Cosgrove Park	Cosgrove Park Home for the Aged, Launceston, 1954–1993 (in private hands from 1993 to 2008)

The term 'aged care' refers to the care provided to aged people in long-term residential accommodation, by paid employees who are not their relatives. In this thesis, the capitalized word 'Home' refers to any formal establishment providing aged care, 'public' means government-run, whilst 'private' denotes a Home run by an organization or person outside the government, whether philanthropic or proprietary. Trained nurses are denoted by the accepted abbreviations 'RN' or 'EN', whilst untrained or semi-trained care staff are called 'aides'. The uncapitalized word 'nurse' is used when referring to all staff who provide personal care to residents, trained and untrained, both as a collective noun and also when it is not possible to differentiate between the two groups.

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