ABSTRACT

Selling Tasmania—Boosterism and the Creation of the Tourist State, 1912-28

This thesis traces a shift in public policy. Its title “Selling Tasmania” is double-edged. Not only do we discuss the advertising of the island to “outsiders”. In fact that issue is minor. Tourist advocates in the first quarter of the century concentrated much of their efforts on “educating” the Tasmanians themselves. In the period 1912-1928 tourism in Tasmania went from being a trade to an industry. As such it demanded “national” outlook and organisation. In 1914 a state Tourist Department was established under the Commissioner of railways. A Director formulated state-wide policies aimed at distributing tourists over a broader geographical and temporal range. This demanded infrastructural investment in roads and accommodations and the campaigns for both helped convince “non-tourist” interests that tourist arguments could be employed in many areas. Tasmania, an island, also found tourism a valuable bargaining chip in its constant battle for adequate shipping facilities. Throughout the period less and less people found reason to voice doubts about Tasmania taking the tourist road.

Although centralisation of tourist organisation under the Director brought immediate and steady growth, a number of commercial and regional interests were less than satisfied with the status quo. In 1923, after a Royal commission into the railways, the Director was removed from office and the Departmental vote for advertising reduced. Then followed a period of testing whether voluntary business-led organisation could fill the Director’s role. Despite some remarkable successes in state-wide organisation, regionalism and lack of proper management saw the government left with little option but to restore affairs to the 1914-23 model. Never since has a Tasmanian government forsaken the industry.

The above events were not decided within government or the public service. Instead the state’s acceptance of financial responsibility for tourist promotion and regulation resulted from the efforts of “boosters”. In the course of the thesis a “commercial-civic elite” is identified. Existing in subsets in the two cities and many towns of the island, they also formed a pan-Tasmanian elite, displaying rivalry at times but basically like-minded. The boosters were the “movers and shakers” of society, essentially bourgeois, imbued with ethics of civic responsibility, and certain that benefit to them meant benefit throughout the community. It was the boosters who kept tourism on the agenda through the period 1912-1928. They convinced government that the tourist industry was “honourable” and worthy of taxpayer investment. Eventually government also came to realise that the Tourist Department afforded a useful tool for bolstering public morale, for Selling Tasmania to the Tasmanians.
By no means a “class analysis”, the thesis nevertheless provides insights into the ruling ideology of Tasmanian urban bourgeois business elites in the period. It brings politics into an area of historical study dominated by geographers, sociologists and economists. Its observations, based on the Tasmanian case study, claim applicability to Australia in general and in fact much of the industrial-capitalist world. While it is in many ways “local history”, reference is made to comparative developments elsewhere. The thesis is therefore a foray into “business history” and “administrative history”, both much-neglected in the Australian genre. Themes also reviewed are parochial conflict and “state-nationalism”, state-federal relations, the regulation-deregulation cycle, technological change, developmentalism, propagandism and “boosterism”. It reflects upon such concepts as “civic pride”, “hegemony”, “natural leadership”, and the media’s role as publicists of the “advertising classes”.
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ILLUSTRATIONS

Illustrations used in this thesis come primarily from Milford McArthur (ed) *Prominent Tasmanians* (Hobart: GJ Boyle; 1924) and the pages of *The Mercury*, Hobart, and some tourist ephemera produced by the Tasmanian Government Tourist Bureau. It has not been considered necessary to list them in detail here as in most cases they relate directly to accompanying text. In the few cases where they do not so relate, they are included for the enjoyment of the reader and do not require reference. However special mention should be made here to the map of Tasmania, facing page thirteen.

The author is happy to provide any other details should they be required.

Most of the illustrations have been prepared from originals with computer technology operated by Warwick Harris of Leo Productions.