

An early glimpse of the physical landscape of Van Diemen's Land comes from Alexander McRae on board H.M.S. *Dromedary* which in 1819 brought a shipment of convicts to New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land. A collection consisting of two handwritten transcripts of his sea diary, notes and maps on New Zealand, shows that he was nothing if not impressed with his first sight of Hobart:

Nothing could exceed the beauty of the scenery on the Derwent. This fine river winding its course amongst mountains which rise with a gentle Slope from its banks and are covered with wood interspersed here and there with a hut or patch of cultivated ground—the abode of some industrious Settler, which gave additional Beauty and interest to the scene—certainly one of the finest I ever saw . . . On the 11th went ashore and paid my respects to His Excellency Lieut. Gov Sorel and afterwards traversed the Town which consists of three streets composed of a number of wooden huts in general pretty well built but irregularly situated there are also some excellent Brick houses the property of the more opulant settlers. The public buildings also Government House and Church Barracks etc, are neat and commodious—Called on Revd. Knopwood the Chaplain to the Colony and one of the first settlers at this place who obligingly shewed me his garden here I saw all our English fruits and vegetables growing in the greatest perfection and Peach and Apples in particular the trees were all propped to support the weight of the fruit.

Although McRae then sailed on to New Zealand several other collections continue the description of Van Diemen's Land. Soon after his arrival in Hobart the new Lieutenant-Governor Sir John Franklin wrote to his sister on the state of the Colony:

The newcomer may have fewer difficulties but he cannot hope for the same advantages—Now the power of giving grants of land has been revoked and the cattle and sheep are treble the price they were before. The sale of wool is the principal source of wealth and next the breed of horses and oxen, but the proprietors of these cattle require much less space than the feeders of sheep . . . I have found several men of intelligence and general information among the Settlers—and among all of these I have been happy to witness a desire for the increase of the means of Religious and Rural instruction . . . from these statements you will perhaps say V.D. Land must be a happy place and so it might and I trust will be but for years there has been so much distraction among the colonists owing to political differences that all social discourse seems to be at an end. . . .