Abstract

From Cork To Van Diemen's Land & New York State - encapsulates the life of James Hackett & family. James was an affluent, outspoken and irascible Catholic related to the famous Cork Distillery family, Hackett and Murphy. An entrepreneur & democrat in early Hobart Town, James possibly showed family traits being related to later radical Jesuit priest and IRA supporter, Father William Hackett, sent to Victoria in the late 19th century.

From his arrival in Hobart Town with wife Maria in 1828, until leaving disillusioned in 1841, James Hackett established the Derwent Distillery in Hobart Town, owned a nearby hotel and built and/or owned a grain mill. He became embroiled in several contentious issues, including the honesty of Father Connolly the island’s first Catholic priest whom he challenged publicly, quarrelled with Lt G George Arthur and the Home Office over liquor taxes, and supported rebel farmer, William Bryan against Arthur. To the delight of local newspapers, at the ‘Battle of Waterloo Bridge’ the hot-headed Irishman fought a fist fight with Colonial Surgeon Scott in one of Hobart Town’s main streets. Seeking financial redress for loss of income, James Hackett also fought an ongoing legal battle via anti-government publications.

With wife Maria, James Hackett raised 7 children in Hobart Town only to return to Cork and die while assisting in a typhoid outbreak in 1847. Undaunted, Maria and family sailed for North America, but were shipwrecked off the St Lawrence River. All were rescued and landed in Newfoundland. Maria Hackett and family eventually settled in Albany New York State, where many descendants of the couple were born.

Peter MacFie has 30 years' experience as a public historian, giving him a wide knowledge of all facets of colonial history. He lives and works at Dulcot (near Richmond) in southern Tasmania. Born in Launceston in 1943, Peter is a 6th generation Tasmanian. He is former historian at the Port Arthur Historic Site and founder member of a number of Historical Societies.