

AUSTRALIAN JOINT COPYING PROJECT

SIR WILLIAM DENISON

Papers, 1846-64

Reels M606-607, M671

**Col. W.M.W. Denison
Newark Nottinghamshire**

**National Library of Australia
State Library of New South Wales**

Filmed: 1960

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

William Thomas Denison (1804-1871) was born in London and attended Eton and the Royal Military College. He graduated in 1826 as a lieutenant in the Royal Engineers. He served in Canada and later worked on harbour defences in southern England. In 1838 he married Caroline Hornby and they had six sons and four daughters. He was promoted to the rank of captain in 1841.

In 1846, following the dismissal of Sir John Eardley-Wilmot, he was appointed Lieutenant-Governor of Van Diemen's Land. He was knighted in the same year and awarded a KCB in 1856. He arrived in the colony in January 1847 and held the office for eight years. A strong supporter of the continuance of convict transportation, he clashed with the nominated Legislative Council and two of the judges. The publication of some of his despatches, criticising the colonists generally, added to his unpopularity. His powers were reduced following the creation of an elected Legislative Council in 1850 and, with the cessation of transportation, his later years in Tasmania were more harmonious. In January 1855 Denison was appointed Governor of New South Wales and was given the additional title of 'Governor-General of Australia'. Prompted by the Crimean War, he immediately reorganised the defences of Sydney Harbour. He presided over the introduction of responsible government in the colony in 1856 and had to deal with considerable political instability, with three ministries formed in the first year. He dealt with the separation of Moreton Bay to form the new colony of Queensland in 1859 and appointed its first Legislative Council. He ended the penal colony on Norfolk Island and arranged the transfer of the Pitcairn Islanders to Norfolk Island in . He visited Norfolk Island on two occasions.

Denison left Sydney in January 1861 following his appointment as Governor of Madras. He acted as Governor-General of India for two months in 1863. He returned to England in 1866.

SIR WILLIAM DENISON

Reel M606

1 Letterbook, August 1859 – August 1862

The bulk of the letters were written after Denison left Australia, in January 1861, and was serving as Governor of Madras. The subjects of the early despatches and letters include the military forces in New South Wales, the political situation in the colony, postal arrangements, public finances, the outbreak of hostilities in New Zealand, Denison's career prospects (1860) and his transfer to Madras. Some of his Indian letters refer to his experiences in Australia, such as his dealings with the Legislative Council in Van Diemen's Land.

The principal recipients are the Duke of Newcastle, Sir Charles Wood, Lord Canning and Sir George Clerk. The volume also contains ten original letters from Wood to Denison and one letter from Sir John Lawrence.

2 Letterbook, January - December 1862

Copies of letters written by Denison, as Governor of Madras, to the Viceroys of India, Lord Canning and Lord Elgin, and Sir Charles Wood, the Secretary of State for India. The volume also contains an original letter from Lord Canning in Calcutta and 12 original letters from Wood.

At the end of the volume is a list of specimens of Australian wood, sent to Denison by Ferdinand von Mueller in Melbourne.

3 Letterbook, December 1862 – July 1864

Copies of letters written by Denison, as Governor of Madras, to Sir Charles Wood, Lord Elgin, Sir Robert Napier, Sir Charles Trevelyan and Colonel R. Balfour.

4 Letterbook, October 1846 – August 1849

Unlike the other letterbooks, this volume contains reflections, notes, diary entries and records of conversations, as well as copies of some of Denison's despatches and letters. The early entries were written in London and on the voyage to Van Diemen's Land. They include occasional diary entries (Nov. 1846-Jan. 1847), a summary of the report of the House of Commons Committee on Transportation (1837), thoughts on a Legislative Council for Van Diemen's Land, an abstract of Kay's

account of the public education system in Switzerland, notes on land policy and education in Van Diemen's Land and an analysis of a return on the amounts of land in the colony under cultivation.

The later part of the volume mainly contains copies of despatches to Lord Grey, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, and official and personal letters. There are also occasional notes, such as a record of a conversation with the Attorney-General on the crisis in the Legislative Council (18 Jan. 1848). The subject matter of the correspondence includes the conduct of the previous governor, Sir John Eardley Wilmot, and the chief justice, Sir John Pedder, the appointment of a third judge, coalfields in the colony. Poverty and destitution in Hobart, religious education, Crown leases, the charting of Hobart's harbour, the relations between the Anglican and Catholic churches, and Denison's relations with the Legislative Council.

The recipients include Lord Grey, Sir James Stephen (Colonial Office), Herman Merivale (Colonial Office), Sir John Pedder, W.R. Allison, Admiral Sir Francis Beaufort, Sir Henry De la Beche, Bishop R. Willson, Bishop F. Nixon, Thomas Arnold and Sir George Grey (Auckland).

Reel M607

5 Letterbook, December 1849 – April 1856

The volume contains copies of Denison's personal and confidential letters to the Secretary of State for the Colonies and letters to a wide range of correspondents in Australia and New Zealand. The subjects include the anti-transportation leagues and the proposed cessation of transportation to Van Diemen's Land, the transfer of convicts to Norfolk Island, the treatment of the Irish political prisoner W. Smith O'Brien, constitutional changes in the colonies, the 1850 Australian Constitution Bill, appointments to the Legislative Council, government and ecclesiastical appointments, economic conditions in the colony, prices and wages, public finance, land policy, agriculture, the education system and the teaching of religion in schools, the effects of the gold rushes, Van Diemen's land as a colony for immigrants with capital, the affairs of the late Charles Stanley, Denison's private secretary, collections of botanical and ornithological specimens, paintings of John Glover, the Hobart observatory, the death of the Colonial Secretary, J. Bicheno (1851), the resignation of the Chief Justice, Sir John Pedder, the proposed transfer of the Pitcairn Islanders to Norfolk Island, the possibility of a federal government (1854), Denison's move to Sydney in 1855, early impressions of New South Wales, and the establishment of responsible government.

The recipients include Lord Grey (1849-52), Sir John Pakington (1853), the Duke of Newcastle (1852-54), H. Labouchere (1855-56), H. Merivale, Admiral Sir Francis Beaufort, Capt. Owen Stanley, Bishop F.R. Nixon, Rev. F. Marriott, Bishop R. Willson, E. Bisdee, W.R. Allison, Rev. T. Reibey, J. Leake, Sir John Pedder, C.J. La Trobe, Sir Charles Hotham, Bishop C. Perry, Sir George Grey, E. Deas Thomson and S. Donaldson. Some of the recipients are not identified.

The volume also contains three original letters from Lord Grey to Denison.

At the end of the volume are lists of letters written and received.

6 Letterbook, September 1855 – January 1859

The volume contains letters from Denison (1855-57) and his wife Caroline (1855-59) to their sons Frank and William who had returned to England and were attending Eton College. The letters from Denison are copies, but many of the letters from Caroline Denison are originals and carry postmarks. Denison's letters were addressed to the 'Boys', whereas Caroline wrote separately to each of the brothers.

The letters deal with family and domestic affairs, life at Government House, servants, walks and rides around Sydney, books, religious beliefs and practices, fishing, cricket matches and other recreations, social events, church affairs, political developments in New South Wales, and news from Tasmania. There are occasional references to public events, such as the opening of the railway from Sydney to Parramatta (1856) and the Sydney University commemoration ceremony (1857).

7 Letterbook, June 1856 – July 1859

The volume contains copies of Denison's personal and confidential letters to the Secretary of State for the Colonies and letters to a wide range of correspondents, mainly in Australia. The subjects include the inauguration of responsible government in New South Wales, the absence of political parties in the colony, the series of ministerial crises in 1856, the Donaldson, Cowper and Parker ministries, the 1858 elections, the possibility of an Australian federation, the separation of Moreton Bay from New South Wales, the alienation of vast blocks of land in Moreton Bay, the defence of the colonies, the Indian Mutiny and the despatch of Australian troops to India, honours, criminals and secondary punishment, railways, postal services, gold discoveries, the 1855-56 North Australia exploring expedition led by A.C. Gregory, German migration to Australia, Denison's knighthood, his travels in New South Wales and his visit to Norfolk Island, and the despatch of plants and other scientific collections.

The recipients include H. Labouchere (1856-58), Lord Stanley (1858), Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton (1858-59), S. Herbert, Major-General E. Macarthur, G. Macleay, Bishop C. Perry, Bishop G.A. Selwyn, Bishop F.R. Nixon, Rev. G. Nobbs, Father J.J. Therry, Ann Swainson, Lord Canning and Henry Denison. Many of the recipients are not identified.

At the end of the volume are lists of letters written and received.

8. Norfolk Island diaries, 1857, 1859

Two diaries, in a single volume, kept by Denison on his visits to Norfolk Island. The first diary (63pp) covers the period 18 September – 25 October 1857, while the second diary (35pp) extends from 16 June to 7 July 1859.

The first diary, which is very detailed, describes the voyages to and from Norfolk Island, meetings with Pitcairn Islanders including members of the Nobbs, Quintal, Buffett and Adams families, a meeting with Sarah Selwyn and the question of the jurisdiction of the Melanesian Mission over Norfolk Island, the natural resources, plants and crops of Norfolk Island, the ownership of land, and

Denison's short visit to Auckland and discussions with Governor Gore Brown. The second diary is briefer and describes the voyages, Denison's reading during the trip, his travels around the island, meetings with the Pitcairn Islanders, church services, and negotiations over the allocation of allotments.

Reel M671

Letters from Denison to Henry Labouchere, March 1856 – December 1857 (19 letters)

Private and confidential letters sent to the Secretary of State for the Colonies at roughly monthly intervals. Among the many subjects discussed by Denison were the state of society in New South Wales, the 1856 and 1857 elections, the colony's relations with Britain, military defences, the inauguration of responsible government, the Sydney Mint, a visit to Sydney by Bishop G.A. Selwyn, the transfer of the Pitcairn Islanders to Norfolk Island, railways, the proposed separation of Moreton Bay from New South Wales, the boundary between the two colonies, parliamentary proceedings, ministerial crises, the award of the KCB to Denison, the Northern Australia Expedition, prison discipline in Britain, customs duties at the border between Victoria and New South Wales, mail services, comparisons between the Australian colonies and the United States, honours, and Denison's visit to Norfolk Island in 1857.

Enclosed with the letter of 27 Oct. 1856 are letters from G.M.F. Young and Rev. G. Nobbs in Norfolk Island both acknowledging the supply of food received on the *Kate Kearney* and referring to potatoes received from Bishop Selwyn. Nobbs also raised the question of diocesan responsibility for Norfolk Island.

Enclosed with the letter of 25 Nov. 1856 is a copy of a letter from Sir Alfred Stephen, the Chief Justice, on the legal question of the separation of Moreton Bay from New South Wales. There are also cuttings from the *Sydney Morning Herald* (5 Nov., 13 Nov. 1856) and a page from a printed document on provisions in the 1850 Australian Constitution Act.

The final item is an unsigned letter written from Auckland, 1 Oct. 1857, referring to a visit to Norfolk Island and discussing the claims of Bishop Selwyn to ecclesiastical jurisdiction over Norfolk Island.

The original papers filmed on reel M671 are now held in the National Library of Australia (MS 1957).