

AUSTRALIAN JOINT COPYING PROJECT

WILLIAM C. WILLS

Journal, 1841-44

Reel M934

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

William Charles Wills (1807-1871) was educated at a school in Wallingford, Berkshire, and, according to references in his diary, he later held teaching positions. From 1837 to 1840 he was the steward at the Foundling Hospital in Bloomsbury, London, which had been founded by Thomas Coram in 1739. He resigned on account of ill health (he suffered from asthma) and in 1841 decided to emigrate to New South Wales. He arrived in Sydney in April 1842 and was to remain in the city until his death nearly thirty years later. Wills was first employed as a clerk by the merchant and landlord Felix Wilson (1802-1865). In 1843 he was appointed secretary to the first Mayor of Sydney, John Hosking, and he worked for a series of mayors until 1848. In 1849 he was appointed the first secretary of the Board of National Education, which was chaired by John Plunkett. He was replaced by William Wilkins in 1863, but continued to work for the Board as assistant secretary and later chief clerk until his death.

On 1 August 1849 Wills married Mary Gurner (1822-1872), the daughter John Gurner, a Sydney solicitor and chief clerk of the Supreme Court of New South Wales.

WILLIAM C. WILLS

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William C. Wills. Journal kept on a voyage from London to Sydney and in his first two years living and working in Sydney, 30 October 1841 – 13 January 1844. (c. 400pp)

The journal is addressed to John Brownlow, who was secretary of the Foundling Hospital in London. Wills despatched it in instalments, for instance in May 1842 and December 1842. For most of this period, Wills wrote daily entries, often of considerable length. However, after 10 August 1843 the entries are intermittent and often very brief. The last entry on 13 January 1844 records his decision not to continue, on account of the monotony of his life and the time that it took writing up the diary.

The first part of the journal documents the voyage from Gravesend to Sydney, 30 October 1841–14 April 1842, on the barque *Louisa*, commanded by Joshua Pallot. There are references to the seasickness of many of the passengers, sighting of the Channel Islands and Tenerife, winds and weather, the character of the captain, crew and fellow-passengers, the monotony of the voyage, sighting of flying fish and albatrosses, Wills' study of the French language, shortages of fresh water, fishing, the heat of the tropics, storms, Christmas celebrations, the sighting of ships, Wills' angry exchanges with the captain, the captain's wife, games of chess, meals, petty feuds, the sighting of St Pauls in the Indian Ocean and the arrival at Port Jackson. From 5 March to 4 April there was a break in the entries, due to problems with his eyesight, but Wills then described the period retrospectively.

The next part of the journal describes Wills' quest for employment, his first impressions of Sydney, the Botanic Gardens, Australian College and other educational and cultural institutions, meetings with Rev. John McGarvie and Sir Thomas Mitchell, services at St James's Church and other churches, conversations with Sydney residents, a review of the 28th Regiment (19 May 1842), walks in Sydney, concerts, and finally Wills' appointment as a clerk with the merchant and landlord Felix Wilson of Castlereagh Street (June 1842).

Wills remained with Wilson until December 1842. The entries for this period refer to his clerical duties, stocktaking and rent collecting, living conditions, his observance of a convict chain gang, Aborigines in Sydney, inscriptions on tombs in the burial ground, attendance at quarter sessions (July 1842), a public meeting of the directors of the Benevolent Asylum (27 July 1842), news of killings of Aborigines, including children, auctions, Jewish businessmen in Sydney, visits to the Insolvent Court, relations with Wilson and Wilson's wife, a Homebush race meeting (23 Sept. 1842), canvassing for Wilson in the elections for the Sydney Council, ship arrivals and news from England, asthma attacks, accounts of bushrangers, criminal trials, the first Sydney Council elections (1 Nov. 1842), journeys to Liverpool and Parramatta (Nov. 1842), Wills' scheme for bringing German immigrants to New South Wales (17 Nov. 1842), meetings of the Sydney Council, visits to the North Shore, bushfires, drought, French and American ships visiting Port Jackson, observation of exams at Sydney College (13 Dec. 1842), and the sudden dispute with Wilson and their parting.

The last part of the journal records Wills' renewed search for a clerical or teaching position, a visit on board HMS *Beagle* (14 Jan. 1843), musical evenings, celebrations of the founding of the colony (26 Jan. 1843), interviews with the mayor and aldermen of Sydney, sightings of a comet (3-6 March 1843), his appointment as secretary of the Mayor, John Hosking (21 March 1843), a dinner at the Mayor's house, parties, his duties as secretary, economic depression in the colony, the collapse of the Bank of Australia and difficulties of the Sydney Banking Company, English newspapers, the erection of military barracks by convict gangs, changes in lodgings, expenses, relations with Hosking, Queen's birthday celebrations (23 May 1843), a Government House ball (25 May 1843), proposed zoological gardens, charges made against the City Surveyor (June 1843), the first election of the expanded Legislative Council (15 June 1843), meetings with Alderman James R. Wilshire and the Town Clerk, the prevalence of measles and smallpox, the compilation of assessment books for the city wards, Wills' appointment as acting town clerk (19 July 1843), insolvencies, the resignation of Hosking following the bankruptcy of his company, the election of Wilshire as mayor, the drastic reduction of government salaries (Dec. 1843), the state of the pastoral industry, and the materialism of colonial society.