

2022 ANNUAL LECTURE OF THE HAMILTON LITERARY SOCIETY
REMARKS BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA BAKER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
GOVERNMENT HOUSE, WEDNESDAY 6 JULY 2022

Good afternoon. I warmly welcome you all to the Hamilton Literary Society Annual Special Lecture.

I begin by paying my respects to the traditional and original owners of this land: the palawa people. I acknowledge the contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal community. I recognise a history of truth, which acknowledges the impacts of colonisation upon our First People. I stand for a future that respects and acknowledges Aboriginal stories, culture, language and history.

I also warmly acknowledge among us Kathy Rundle, Vice-President; Committee members, Carol Edwards and Beverley Richardson and members; Felicity Edgell representing the Itinerants, and Deirdre Pearson representing ADFAS.

I am very pleased to welcome Dr Alison Alexander, who will deliver the special lecture today. Alison's mother taught me Ancient Civilisations in Matric, Alison knew my sister and I knew her sister at school, very Tasmanian. Also, recently, I have been given her rich and beautiful book *Beneath the Mountain*.

This is the second occasion on which I have had the honour of hosting this Lecture as Hamilton Literary Society President. The first occasion was last July, three weeks after being sworn-in to office.

I was interested to learn last year, when reading the history of your Society, that ten members resigned in 1891, after upsetting Lady Hamilton by accepting an invitation to attend a cocktail party on board one of three naval ships in port. As a result, only three members attended a meeting of the Society. Lady Hamilton demanded apologies or expulsion. Those women who resigned were among a group of women, who two years later, started the Itinerants Literary Society, which continues today.¹ We have one of its members here today. Hopefully, this demonstrates that all has been forgiven. I look forward to hearing about the Itinerants Society from Felicity when we have tea.

I return to the Hamiltons. We know that they were in Tasmania from 1887 to 1892. I'd like to share with you something of the Society in the years immediately after.

¹ The Hamilton Literary Society 1889-2014 page 12.

Specifically, I quote from an 1895 New South Wales publication called *Australian Town and Country Journal*² which ran a weekly column called “Tasmanian Letter”. In her 29 August 1895 letter Nell Dieman wrote, and I quote:

“The only smart event to tell you of this [week] is the annual evening meeting of the Hamilton Literary Society. This society, as perhaps I have mentioned before, was founded by Lady Hamilton, and used in the old days to meet in the drawing-room at Government House, and the day’s work being done, we followed our hostess into the pretty little ante-room for afternoon tea”.

I am sure many will know that the ante-room is behind you.

May I return to Nell Dieman’s “Tasmanian letter”.

“There was the annual ‘party’, also at the vice-regal residence, when each member nominated two friends for invitation ... First, remember, no men are allowed. Is that not delightful? Though there is a legend of a male private secretary once turning up in his capacity of escort – in time for supper!

Nell’s lengthy article concludes:

“...Only the other day in her letter to me Lady Hamilton says: ‘Dear Tasmania! Every memory nearly is one of happiness, and my husband and I talked of it again and again, as if we had left our hearts there behind us.’”

I had intended to end on that affectionate note of your founder, but coincidentally, this morning I found a reference to Lady Hamilton in the May edition of *Australiana*. A French woman, Madam Henry, who lived in Hobart for two years from 1891, enjoyed success as a French teacher under the patronage of the Governor Sir Robert Hamilton and Lady Hamilton, who was her senior pupil, and the friendship of then Attorney-General Al Clark, one of the founders of our Constitution, and his wife. At a gathering arranged by Madam Henry, Lady Hamilton read a written paper in French, in which she touched on the subject of Women’s Rights.³ I shall leave the edition here if anyone would like to look at it. On that note, I shall finish.

Thank you.

[HE returns to seat. David introduces Kathy Rundle]

² *Australian Town and Country Journal* (Sydney) Saturday 7 September 1895, page 37.

³ *Australiana* May2022 vol44 no2 page 49.