

**REMARKS BY THE HONOURABLE PETER UNDERWOOD AC,
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA AT THE HOBART TOWN (1804)
FIRST SETTLERS' ASSOCIATION ANNUAL FLORAL TRIBUTE,
THURSDAY, 20TH FEBRUARY 2014**

The first settlement by white people at Sullivan's Cove was colloquially known as the *Camp* until the 1820's. The site was selected by the settler, William Collins, - no relation of Lieutenant Governor David Collins - and Surveyor, George Harris. Harris wrote that "our settlement is formed about 16 miles from the mouth of the Derwent, one of the finest rivers I ever beheld ... deep enough and large enough to admit the whole navy of Great Britain at once."¹ As the ships that carried the first white settlers came up the river, Harris noted: "From the great number of fires we see all around it appears to be tolerably well settled."²

Harris also wrote of the camp that there was what he called "a run of capital water" and that it was the place "where we shall shortly lay out the foundation of Hobart Town." He added that it was "the most beautiful and romantic country I ever beheld, it is not merely fine to the eye only, as was the case at P. Phillip, the soil in general is excellent, plenty of fresh water & immense forests of astonishing large trees"³

As Harris noted when he sailed up the Derwent, the camp was an area of Van Diemen's Land well populated with indigenous people. Tasmanian Historian, Dr William Boyce, wrote about the relationship between the first settlers and the

¹ Hamilton-Arnold, ed., *Letters and Papers of G P Harris*:54 - 64.

² Ibid.

³ Tardif, Phillip, *John Bowen's Hobart: the beginning of European settlement in Tasmania*, Sandy Bay, THRA, 2003, cited at p 119.

indigenous population in his book "Van Diemen's Land"⁴. Dr Boyce wrote:⁵

"Relations with the Aborigines on the western shore remained comparatively peaceful for many years, and Collins must be given considerable personal credit for this. He studied and reflected on Aboriginal-settler relations at Port Jackson [where he failed to establish a post immediately before coming to Van Diemen's Land] and his book, '*Account of the Colony of New South Wales*' includes extensive sections on Aboriginal customs."

In her publication "Dancing with Strangers", Inga Clendinnen⁶ observes that Lieutenant David Collins matured "into an absorbed observer of native conduct, and a man capable of recognising, indeed honouring, a quite different way of being ... [He was] our best and most sensitive informant on Australian ways of life especially in matters of justice and rights."

Boyce concurred with that view, writing⁷ that: "Van Diemen's Land was fortunate ... to have as its first lieutenant governor a man who at least understood that, whatever the legal claims of the British, the Aborigines 'also had their real estates'"⁸

⁴ Published by Black Inc 2008 ISBN 971863954136(hbk.)

⁵ Supra at page 31

⁶ Cited Ibid.

⁷ Supra at page 32

⁸ Collins "An Account of the English Colony: 45,107,349.

Two hundred and ten years have now passed since Collins arrived in Sullivan's Cove. This annual commemoration of that event occurs less than a month after Australia Day, the anniversary of the day the First Fleet arrived in Botany Bay; a day that attracts widespread protests by some of the descendants of the Aborigines who were here 210 years ago. But so far as I am aware, the anniversary of Collins' arrival has not attracted similar protests. Perhaps it might be said that that is a legacy of the manner in which Lieutenant Governor Collins treated and regarded the indigenous Australians. Whether or not that is so, Collins' attitude is to be admired and emulated, and on this day I respectfully suggest that we should renew our efforts to heal any rifts between today's descendants of the indigenous Australians and today's descendants of the first settlers and others who followed, like myself. It is time to move on from protests. It is too late to talk about invasions. It can't be undone. We must all accept that fact and strive to better understand and respect all the different cultures in our country and strive to provide better education and socio-economic conditions for all Australians, irrespective of skin pigment or the country of birth of their forebears. As the song has it: "We are Australian. We are one."⁹

⁹ Song written in 1987 by Bruce Woodley of The Seekers and Dobe Newton of The Bushwackers.
<http://blog.australian-native.com.au/2009/07/18/i-am-australian-we-are-australian-song-lyrics/>