



*Plate 1a-b: Desk closed & open. Rare Tasmanian made tambour-front desk, in the form of a Boston secretary. The rectangular top of Australian cedar; over a pair of fitted tambour doors. The doors banded in a clear pine with dark inclusions that is identified as Oyster Bay pine. The leading edges to the doors is similarly banded, with inset rectangular panels of musk. The ends of the secretary front are similarly panelled. The doors with diamond shaped escutcheons are in southern Tasmanian casuarina, opening to reveal seven pigeon holes with shaped tops edges in Tasmanian myrtle, all over four short and two long flame cedar drawers with re-entrant mitred crossbanding of Tasmanian native cherry. All with finely turned ivory knobs, two replaced. The central door, similarly veneered, contains a pull-out drawer with fitted writing compartment with baleen knob and concealed secret drawer with myrtle veneer. The carcass is Australian cedar and constructed of the best quality. A fold out writing scriptor, with fine flame cedar crossbanding has the leather replaced below a single full-length drawer veneered with book-matched tiger musk veneers, with central casuarina escutcheon, surrounded by show banded veneers of an unidentified acacia. The whole is supported on four tulip-topped legs with finely turned shafts, with rope twist turnings. The legs are a Tasmanian native hardwood, Phealium squameum, native tallow wood, or in the 19th century cabinet makers terminology, white wood, these with the original cedar graining. The legs terminate in the original brass ball casters of American type. The desk is in original condition, with revived original polish and no structural losses or repairs*



# Edward Augustus Wilson,

## American-born patriot, cabinetmaker, political convict and 'British Slave'

JOHN HAWKINS

In 2004 through the good offices of Bill Hind, a dealer of many years standing, I acquired this important Tasmanian-made Boston secretary. Members of the Hind family have been dealers of repute in Brisbane for nearly fifty years. Bill's mother purchased the desk in Queensland in 1968 from a family called Judge. I sold a half share in the desk to a Hobart dealer, Warwick Oakman, who was the first to identify its American antecedents and correlate it with the Tasmanian chest of drawers in the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra. Warwick has since sold the desk to a prominent collector of Australian furniture.

Its perambulations gave me time to investigate why such an unusual item should be constructed in a penal colony far from its American, specifically Boston, parents and I tender the following hypothesis.

Fifty or so American patriots and thirteen British soldiers were killed during an abortive invasion of the British Colony of Upper Canada by sympathisers from the United States bent on inspiring another republican revolution. After the Battle of the Windmill from 12-16 November 1838 near Prescott, Ontario, 92 American patriots were transported to Van Diemen's Land. Seven book-length accounts by patriots describing their travails in Van Diemen's Land were later published in America. From these and other sources, Cassandra Pybus and Hamish Maxwell-Stewart published their authoritative book *American Citizens British Slaves*, a constant source of reference throughout this article.<sup>1</sup>

Edward Augustus Wilson had been born on 13 August 1812 to Andrew Wilson and Mary Bradshaw<sup>2</sup> at Pompey, Onondaga County, New York.<sup>3</sup> Captured during the invasion, the young man was tried by the Militia General Court Martial at Fort Henry in Kingston, Ontario. Found guilty of 'piratical invasion of Upper Canada', Wilson was sentenced to life on 8 December 1838<sup>4</sup>, and taken to Quebec where he boarded HMS *Buffalo* along with 79 others on 25 September 1839.<sup>5</sup> The decision to send them to Van Diemen's Land was taken by Lieutenant-Governor George Arthur, formerly of Hobart.

HMS *Buffalo* sailed direct to Hobart via Rio de Janeiro in 140 days, arriving on 12 February 1840. A further 58 French-speaking convicts from Lower Canada remained on board and were sent on to Sydney to be incarcerated at Concord, where Canada Bay and Exile Bay commemorate their stay.

Wilson's arrival in Australia as both a political convict and cabinetmaker was not an Australian first. I have recorded and discussed the activities of both Lawrence Butler,<sup>6</sup> convicted after the 1798 uprising in the south of Ireland, who arrived on the *Atlas* in 1802, and Alexander Hart<sup>7</sup>, a Scot from Glasgow, convicted at Stirling after the Carron uprising of 1819. Skilled men such as these had little or no reason to seek work in the convict colonies but their stylistic imprint on furniture constructed on arrival in the traditions of their apprenticeship was considerable.

*Plate 1d. Detail of American brass-enclosed castor, a seemingly unique American fitting. The quilled decoration reversed on each leg is a sign of quality and doubles the time and labour required in the turning*



*Plate 1c. Sliding tambour shutter fronts are difficult to make, being constructed from thin pieces of wood glued to a canvas backing. The brass handles are a later addition*





*Left: Plate 1e. The tambour open, to reveal the veneered decorated drawer fronts*

*Below left: Plate 1f. The original sliders, probably originally fitted with ring-turned whale dentine handles, now later brass rings. Original brass hinges*



Under Sir John Franklin, appointed in 1837 to replace Governor Arthur at Hobart, the convict system in Van Diemen's Land was changing from assignment to probation. Franklin tried to introduce the new probationary system gradually. Assignment to domestic service ceased in July 1839 but assignment in towns did not finally come to an end until July 1840.<sup>8</sup> At this moment, Franklin had to deal with 79 American political convicts who had no love for the British, but neither were they convicted criminals.

The men from HMS *Buffalo* landed at New Town and were marched through the streets of Hobart to Sandy Bay. This departure from the norm was authorised by Franklin on a suggestion from Arthur in Canada. In his dispatch to the Colonial Office, Franklin stated 'I have not allowed these men to pass through the usual ordeal out of the Convict Barracks, not wishing them to be thrown amongst the usual class of Thieves and Rogues who are kept in such places of punishment.'<sup>9</sup>

Franklin addressed the patriot convicts for over two hours from his horse. Linus Miller, a patriot, was struck by the irony of the fact that this man 'so destitute of honourable feelings and principles could be related to one of the founding fathers of Yankee republican

virtue ... a nephew of our immortal Benjamin Franklin.'<sup>10</sup>

Allotted a special station at Sandy Bay, the patriots worked as a gang on the road to Hobart. They were allowed access to the Colonial Hospital and attended St Georges Church, Battery Point. Under the new probationary system, they suffered as a group.<sup>11</sup> After four months in June 1840, they were moved inland to the Lovely Banks Probation Station, north of what is now Kempton, to keep them away from American whalers. Four of the patriots had already been sent to Port Arthur for attempting to board American whale ships and escape.

At Lovely Banks, they helped construct a new probation station and submitted a petition to W.E. Lawrence, a member of the Legislative Council. This petition dated 16 August 1840<sup>12</sup> was signed by them all and written by Linus Miller

*'... Our sufferings have hitherto been very severe for men to endure, who have been accustomed to enjoy all that is desirable in life, many of my companions are considerably advanced in years, their health impaired by the vigors of imprisonment, and their spirits broken by sorrow and want ... Linus Wilson Miller.'*

*Plate 2. Unknown maker, Tasmania. Chest of drawers c. 1840. Cedar, 166.0 x 133.5 x 62.5cm. National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. The form of this chest is American, suggesting that it was made by a United States-trained cabinet maker working in Tasmania (such as E. A. Wilson), or commissioned to a design provided by an American client.*



It was to no avail. Miller and Stewart wrote to the visiting magistrate that they were being 'treated far worse than African slaves.'<sup>13</sup> As a result they decided to facilitate a mass breakout with the help of American whalers then in port. They were captured and sent to Port Arthur, the remaining prisoners being moved to a more secure location at Green Ponds, now Kempton.

On 16 July 1841 Wilson was sent, together with 22 other patriots, to Browns River just south of Hobart. At least ten of these were carpenters<sup>14</sup> and five skilled metal workers, although Wilson was the only cabinetmaker. They were allowed quarters of their own and permitted to construct a hut for their own use.

Seventy patriots were granted tickets of leave on 10 February 1842. All are listed in the *Hobart Town Gazette* 11 February 1842, on condition that they 'reside in the following Districts only: Fingal, Campbell Town, Oatlands, Bothwell, Hamilton and Swan Port ... they shall not be allowed to leave their respective Districts without the sanction of the Chief Police Magistrate being first obtained.'

After receiving his ticket of leave, Wilson may have spent a year at Browns River. It would appear that he was free to do as he wished and Browns River

gave him access to Hobart, his movements being constricted only from 25 July 1842 when he was listed as working at Campbell Town.

At Campbell Town, Wilson may have worked for another Scottish family, George and Marion Wilson at 'Ceres', a property granted to George Wilson in 1831. Their daughter Margaret, born 1834 was to marry in 1857 the Rev. Loughlan Campbell. That family still has a letter to and photograph of Mary Ann Sly, whom they may have employed. The letter from Margaret Wilson to her mother Marion states that she is knitting for her servant Mary Ann's baby.<sup>15</sup>

In late 1843, the patriots gained an important new conduit for their appeals with the appointment of Elisha Hathaway Junior to the post of United States Consul at Hobart Town (**plate 4**). Hathaway arrived in Hobart on the *Waterwitch* in November 1843 from Sydney where he had lived with his family from March 1843.<sup>16</sup> His wife and child came to Hobart in February 1844.<sup>17</sup>

Hathaway's appointment, only four years after the first US consulate in Australia was established at Sydney, may well have been made with two distinct American concerns in mind. American whalers in the Pacific used Hobart as a centre for repairs, supplies

and administration and for sailors' rest and recuperation, in the process making Hobart Town a vibrant and rich port. Hathaway also had to deal with some 75 patriots incarcerated under British law and sentenced to life in the colony.

Late in 1843, having concluded a treaty to resolve the United States' border dispute with Britain, Everett, the Ambassador to the Court of St James in London made an appointment with Lord Stanley, the Colonial Secretary, to discuss a full pardon for the patriots<sup>18</sup> He discovered that the process was complex and slow, so he applied directly to the Prime Minister, Lord Aberdeen, using a direction from the US President dated January 1844. Twenty-eight free pardons were promptly granted and Ambassador Everett requested the help of the newly approved consul, Elisha Hathaway, in petitioning for those outstanding.

The 28 pardons were dispatched from London in May 1844 and were gazetted on 27 November 1844. One of these was for Edward Augustus Wilson. Wilson may well have been in contact with Hathaway from his arrival in Hobart in November 1843. By this date, Wilson was confined to the district of Campbell Town and had fallen in love, requesting permission to marry Mary



Plate 3a: A simple example of a Boston secretary, circa 1810



Plate 3b: The finest example of its type by John Seymour & Son. Boston circa 1800. Sold the American Art Association, January 1930 for US\$30,000

Ann Sly of Hobart in May 1844.<sup>19</sup> They did not marry until 4 November 1844, at St Andrew's Church in Hobart.<sup>20</sup> The delay may have been a result of the need to obtain from the American Consul the US death certificate of his wife from his first marriage in America.

On 27 January 1845 the whaler *Steiglitz*, captained by Selah Young from Sag Harbour, New York, left Hobart with 25 patriots for the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii). On board were Mr and Mrs Edward Wilson. They remained in the Sandwich Islands, as their first child was born there on 29 September 1845.<sup>21</sup>

They were back on the west coast of America by 1850 and are to be found in the census, he as a cabinetmaker with one daughter, Elbryanna,<sup>22</sup> living in Oregon City. They moved to Umatilla, Oregon in 1863 where Mary Ann ran Wilson's Hotel, 'a first class hotel' and the family prospered.

Hathaway lived in a cottage in Elboden Place at the top of Davey Street in Hobart. On his departure early in 1854, his effects were sold at auction. The newspaper auction notice shows he was a man of substance and interest

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Cassandra Pybus and Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, *American Citizens, British Slaves*, Melbourne, MUP, 2002.
- <sup>2</sup> Gloria Jesser, Edward A Wilson article published in the *Columbia Gorge Genealogical Society Journal Newsletter*, July 2004 and November 2004.
- <sup>3</sup> Pybus & Maxwell-Stewart, *op.cit.* p. 241.
- <sup>4</sup> See E. A. Wilson's Conduct Record, AOT 31/48 'Police number 2656, Tried Province of Upper Canada, Ticket of Leave 10 February 1842, Free Pardon 10 December 1844, no further offences whilst in Colony, sent to Brown's River 16/7/41, Campbell Town 25/7/42. Widower with one child.'
- <sup>5</sup> The Indent Record, AOT Con 27/8 gives his height as 5' 9", age 27, and occupation cabinetmaker from New York State.
- <sup>6</sup> J B Hawkins 'The Botany Bay Wood in Australian Furniture Part II'. *Australian Antique Collector* no. 50, 1995 p.32.
- <sup>7</sup> J B Hawkins, Quilled on the Cann. Alexander Hart, Cabinetmaker, Glaswegian, Scottish Radical and Convict. *Australiana*, November 2001.
- <sup>7</sup> Kathleen Fitzpatrick, *Sir John Franklin in Tasmania*, Melbourne 1949, p. 257.
- <sup>8</sup> Pybus & Maxwell-Stewart, *op. cit.* p.74.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* p. 80.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 100-105.
- <sup>12</sup> AOT C805/268/6962
- <sup>13</sup> Pybus & Maxwell-Stewart, *op. cit.* p.127.
- <sup>14</sup> J B Hawkins, Australian Decorative Arts in the Clyde Bank Collection, Australiana, May 2003. p 56. Here I draw the distinctions between, Carpenters, Joiners and Cabinet makers.
- <sup>15</sup> Gloria Jesser, *op.cit.*, November 2004.
- <sup>16</sup> GO 1/54, pp. 367-380.
- <sup>17</sup> MB 2/3917 p. 289.
- <sup>18</sup> Pybus & Maxwell-Stewart, *op. cit.* pp. 192-193.
- <sup>19</sup> Mary Ann's mother, Sarah Sly, posted the permission to marry in the *Hobart Gazette* 17 May 1844.
- <sup>20</sup> Marriage Certificate no. 1443. Wilson's occupation is given as cabinet maker; she signed by her mark so was illiterate. The minister was Rev. J. Little, Church of Scotland, witnesses John Passmidge and Theophilus Hillhouse.
- <sup>21</sup> Gloria Jesser, *op. cit.*
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* Elbryanna appears only in the 1852 Census.
- <sup>23</sup> Mrs Mary Morton Allport's Diary, transcribed, 151 pages, Allport Library, Hobart.
- <sup>24</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 4 February 1854, for a full description of the dinner attended by 60 gentlemen and presided over by The Speaker.

**GOVERNMENT NOTICE.**  
No. 100.

Colonial Secretary's Office, 7th November, 1844.

**T**HE Lieutenant-Governor has granted the publication of the following instrument, appearing at the appointment of Mr. Elisha Hathaway, Junior, as Consul for the United States of America, for the Port of Hobart Town, and such other Ports as shall be notified thereto than to the residence of any other Consul or Vice-Consul of the said United States.

By His Excellency's Command,  
J. E. BICHENO.

**VICTORIA R.**  
Victoria, by the Grace of God, Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, Defender of the Faith, &c. &c. &c.

To all Our loving Subjects whom it may concern.

GREETING—

WHEREAS the President of the United States of America, by a Commission bearing date the twenty-sixth day of November, one thousand eight hundred and forty-two, constituted Mr. Elisha Hathaway, Junior, to be Consul for the said United States for the Port of Hobart Town, in Van Diemen's Land, and such other Ports as shall be notified thereto than to the residence of any other Consul or Vice-Consul of the said United States, in and for the States of the said United States in their commerce and traffic there; and We having approved of the said Elisha Hathaway as Consul for the said United States, according to the Commission before mentioned, Our Will and Pleasure are, and We do hereby require you to receive, continue, and as there may be occasion favourably to assist him the said Elisha Hathaway in the exercise of his post, giving and allowing unto him all privileges, immunities, and advantages thereto belonging.

Given at Our Court at Buckingham Palace, the twenty-sixth day of June, one thousand eight hundred and forty-four, in the eighth year of Our reign.

By Her Majesty's Command,  
ABERDEEN.

JAMES BARNARD, Government Printer, 25, Market Street.

Plate 4. Government notice appointing Hathaway, Hobart Gazette, 12 November 1844

(plate 5). A copy of the printed catalogue has not been located. The family had become close friends with the Allports, a leading Tasmanian family then also living in Elboden Place.

Mary Morton Allport kept a diary.<sup>23</sup> On 6 August 1853, she wrote 'I went with Mrs Hathaway to look at some American furniture, but it was all made for sale only.' This obscure note may be interpreted in various ways, but at least it shows Mrs Hathaway's interest in American furniture. The Hathaways departed Hobart-Town on the Derwentwater after a farewell dinner in the Legislative Council Chamber.<sup>24</sup>

The survival of two Tasmanian-made items of colonial furniture of American design (plates 1 & 2) is more than coincidence. The creation of one may be considered the exception, the survival of two would indicate a greater number, some as yet unfound.

I have set out to discover an American cabinetmaker working in Tasmania in the 1840s, for the extant furniture requires a customer with an American background, ordering furniture in a style that he could comprehend, to remind him of home or as

**Household Furniture.**  
**ELEGANTLY-BOUND BOOKS,**  
**PLATE, PLATED-WARE,**  
**CHINA, GLASS,**  
**FINE ENGRAVINGS,**  
*And Effects of*  
**E. HATHAWAY, ESQ.**

**MESSRS. HAY AND IVEY**  
Are favoured with instructions from  
**E. HATHAWAY, ESQ.,**

Who is proceeding to Europe by the Derwentwater,

**TO SELL BY PUBLIC AUCTION,**

On the premises, at the top of Navy-street, on **FRIDAY, the 20th January,** at 11 o'clock for half-past 1, practically

**T**HE whole of his EFFECTS, comprising in the

**Drawing-room**

Usual's carpet and rug to match  
Steel fender and stove  
Steel pan for wash  
Couch, mahogany, with blue damask  
Chairs to match  
Fancy chairs  
Dining table, card tables  
A very superior & large piano-forte, by ticks and 11, in handsome mahogany case  
Music stool

Choice engravings, framed  
Fancy tables, Ottomans  
A large and valuable collection of books, handsomely bound  
Cedar book shelves, with drawers below  
Chimney ornaments, curtains, bell-pulls, &c.

**Dining-room.**

Telescope dining table  
Beauvais carpet and rug  
Hair-covered chairs  
Hair-covered sofa  
Cassinoor work table  
Small sideboard, medicine chest  
Fender and irons, nest of fancy tables  
Fine engravings, neatly framed  
A small quantity of silver plate  
Curtains, bell-pulls, chimney ornaments, &c. &c.

**Bedroom.**

Handsome mahogany French bedstead and hangings  
Large green robe  
Handsome marble top chest of drawers, with large toilet glass attached  
Carpeting, chairs, curtains  
A cult's revolver, in case complete  
Hair mattresses  
Chamber crockery,

Iron bedstead and furniture  
Carpeting  
Handsome wardrobe  
Large clothes press, with drawers  
Toilet table, toilet glass  
Washstand and crockery  
Hair mattresses, bolsters, &c.  
Chairs, curtains, &c.

French bedstead, pine  
Mattresses and bedding  
Chest of drawers  
Toilet glass, washstand & crockery  
Linen press, chairs, hip bath  
Picture, matting  
Nursery stove, guard and fender  
Serrant's bedsteads, bedding, &c.

**Kitchen.**

Kitchen range, with oven and boiler  
Fender and irons  
Tables, chairs, roasting screen  
Tea and coffee pots, plated ware  
China, crockery, and glass  
Kitchen utensils, meat safe

Store rooms and pantry, containing a variety of essentials  
A superior milk cow, choice fowls, ducks, pigs, water carts, tubs, buckets, rocking bars, garden tools,  
And sundry effects,

Full particulars of which will be published in catalogue to be issued prior to the sale.

Terms—Under 50l., cash.

Plate 5. Auction notice of the sale of household effects of Elisha Hathaway, The Tasmanian Trade Circular, 3 January 1854

a status symbol pertaining to his American position or antecedents.

Wilson may have contacted the newly arrived American Consul with regard to his status as a widower, his pending Tasmanian marriage and stating his wish to return to America, thereby providing the contact for making these items of Tasmanian American furniture.

#### Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge the help of Warwick Oakman who was the first to point out the American design of this Tasmanian desk. On a guided National Trust tour of Hobart, Des Hanlon alerted me to the memorial to the American patriots at Battery Point and the existence of the Pybus and Maxwell-Stewart history of their activities in Tasmania.

John Hawkins is a leading Australian antiques dealer who relocated to Tasmania in 2003. He has written many articles and books, mostly on Australian antiques and British clocks.