

**Yoorrook Justice Commission Submission: Attachment**

Dr Katrina Kell

12 April 2024

**Full Transcript of Janet Liddell's Letter****“The Settlement of Portland” *Queenscliff Sentinel*, Saturday 29 November 1884, 4.**

We take the following letter from the Argus.

Sir.—Your able correspondent “The Vagabond,” under the title of “The Cradle of Victoria,” gives a very interesting account of the foundation of the colony, and as I am sure his researches must have cost him both time and trouble, it is with fear and reluctance that I offer any objection to his chronicles, only as the daughter of the Late Captain James Liddell (not Liddle) I feel that he has not done sufficient justice to the memory of one who played a more important part in the early history of Portland than he is usually credited with. My late father was particularly reticent concerning early events, and it was very seldom that I could get him to converse on such topics, but from letters of instruction to him, as master of the *Thistle*, from the Hentys (to whom she belonged), and memoranda in my possession, I claim that he was the direct cause of the Hentys’ attention being called to the advantages of Portland Bay as a place of settlement. From his letters I gather that he sailed from Launceston in the *Thistle*, December, 1832, bound to King George’s Sound, Port Augusta, and Swan River, having Mr Stephen George Henty on board as supercargo. Arrived at King George’s Sound, discharged some cargo there took on board Mr J. Henty, landing both gentlemen at the Swan River. On the return passage to Launceston, whilst beating up the coast, stood into Portland bay, and being impressed with the locality as a site for a bay whaling station, anchored his vessel there, and went on shore. The fertility of the soil so pleased him, and knowing that the Swan River settlement was much inferior, he, to quote from his own memoranda, “took a sod of Portland soil to Launceston to show to Thomas Henty, the father.” In April, 1833 I read from one of Messrs J. and C. S. Henty’s letters of instructions, he made a voyage to Swan River direct. On the return passage he called into Spencer’s Gulf, whither Mr E. Henty had gone in the *Caernarvon*, whaler, and that gentleman returned to Launceston as passenger with him: but I have no record of his calling into Portland bay on that trip. In December 1833, the *Thistle* was commissioned for sealing in conjunction with her voyage to Fremantle, and in reference to this trip I will again quote from my father’s written memoranda:—

“Sailed again for Swan River, having as passengers Thos Henty, Esq., and his son Mr Edward. Took two whale boats and crews: left them at the Western Group to catch seals; whilst the schooner was on her way to Swan River. Called at King George’s Sound, and landed some of the cargo. The Governor, Sir Richard Spencer, was there at the time, and opened the mail bags to see if any letters were for him. Thos. Henty, his son Edward, several of the inhabitants, and self, dined with Sir Richard. On our return to Launceston, picked up the whaleboats and crews, and what sealskins they had go. Thomas Henty and his son Edward both returned with the vessel, and we called at Portland Bay on our way back. My instructions from James Henty and Co. were to leave a boat and crew at Portland, but it was not done; I forget the reason why. Thomas Henty liked Portland very much.”

On the return of the *Thistle* from this cruise she was sent to New Zealand on a trading voyage; Henty’s letters of instruction bearing date May 23, 1834. It was on this voyage that

Captain Liddell was instrumental in rescuing the crew of the John Dunscombe who had fallen into the hands of the natives using part of the cargo (under owner's instructions) to effect their ransom. On the vessel's return she was fitted out for the conveyance of stock, etc., to Portland. And again I quote :—

“At Launceston, fitting the vessel up to carry cattle, etc., to Portland. On the 19<sup>th</sup> November arrived at Portland after a long passage having twice sheltered under King's Island from the westerly gales. Landed all the cattle, young trees, Edward Henty, servants, farming implements, etc., The next trip to Portland was with sheep, timber for fencing, and a passenger named Mr Camfield.”

The above is a brief and hurried account of my father's connection with Portland Bay, and as the dates may be relied upon, perhaps they may be useful to those who take an interest in early records as well as earn for him a place on the scroll of fame to which as pioneer skipper, he is so fully entitled.—I am, &c.,

**J. LIDDELL**

**Queenscliff, Nov. 19.**