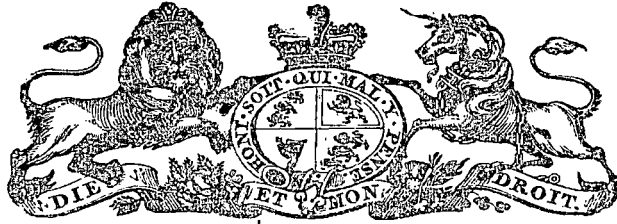


(No. 12.)



1863.

TASMANIA.
LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

CONTRACT SURVEYS.

SURVEYOR-GENERAL'S REPORT.

Laid upon the Table by Mr. Whyte, and ordered by the Council to be printed,
February 24, 1863.



(COPY.)

Survey Office, 18th September, 1862.

SIR,

THE Parliament having been pleased to reduce the Field Expenses of the Survey Department from the sum asked to £3000,* I think it a duty to assure you of my belief that such reduction will be injurious to the public interests, on account of the insufficiency of the sum voted to meet the necessities of the service and the requirements of *The Waste Lands Act*, by which it is made imperative that all applications for Surveys should receive a speedy attention, and that all work performed should be done in a creditable manner.

Before troubling you with any comments on the reasons that seem to have led to this reduction, I must be allowed to make a few explanations: for I think the operations of this Department must be greatly misunderstood, otherwise a sum so insufficient for a year's Surveys as £3000 would not have passed the Legislature.

The occupied portion of Tasmania is so large that it has been found necessary to divide it into *Sixteen* Survey Districts, each of which requires the presence of one Surveyor, be the demand for land therein great or small, and when great of two, three, or even four.

These Districts, which may average about a thousand square miles each, are fully large for our purposes; for the back or bye roads by which they are crossed are almost always so unsuited to rapid progression, that a survey party, whose journeys are necessarily made a-foot, is often occupied three or four days in reaching one end of it from the other.

In these Districts the work of the Surveyor is so scattered, owing to the irregular manner in which settlement has spread itself about, that travelling on survey duty is always a source of much expense. The time consumed in the frequent shiftings from place to place is worse to the Surveyor than time lost; for his disbursements are always greatest when his earnings are *nil*.

It is right to state that each man of a survey party costs about £80 a year; his wages varying from 15s. to 20s. a week, and his board, which is always additional, being about £30 a year more.

The yearly cost of a party which consists of three men varies from £200 to £250 a year, exclusive of cost of horses, camp equipment, and general wear and tear.

But the sum about to be allowed for 1863—viz. £3000—will not pay the cost of menial labour alone; for if the grant were distributed equally, it would give to each Surveyor only £188 to meet expenses that far exceed it, leaving nothing to the Surveyor himself for highly skilled services but an absolute loss.

If such be the terms we have to offer professional men, we can hardly expect that they will be agreed to. That two or three of our *employées* that possess land may work for us when it pleases them, to fill up spare time, is probable enough; but others will not. And if we are to make any show of work it must be under some such system as that of employing beginners, who, for the sake of field practice, may consent to work at a loss, (the public being a far greater loser in the long run,) or men who, by the methods understood by the unprincipled of all trades and professions, can make profit out of anything.

Against all such methods of doing business, I, who am answerable for the correct discharge of the duties of this Department, must be excused for entering a most energetic protest. I have confidence in the men now under me; but I cannot answer for the fidelity of such as would take service with us for less than £200 a year, which, being below their outlay, can only be made to pay by combining it with practices which it is fearful to think of.

* The sum submitted was £6000, but I asked for £7000.

Honorable Members who have expressed themselves so strongly against the Survey Department on account of its presumed expensiveness and "enormous cost," &c., will hear with surprise, (and I hope with pleasure also) that about two-thirds of the principal item of our expenditure,—namely, that for Contract Surveys,—is recovered again in a very short time, owing to that cost being invariably added to the price of the land sold.

Thus, of the sums allowed us since the passing of *The Waste Lands Act* up to the end of last year (£33,022), we have restored to the Treasury the handsome amount of £21,444, being at the rate of £5361 a year; so that the outlay, however large it may appear to be, is in reality nothing of the sort. I shall not be thought disrespectful in saying, that it appears to me hardly fair that our estimates are never credited with this large and certain restitution, but on every occasion of their being submitted to discussion we are mercilessly assailed on account of an excessive expenditure, which, though provided for by vote, cannot be said to take place.

Nor have we, taking the four years above referred to, very much exceeded the entire sum allowed by Parliament to meet the immense demand for surveys, which I have had far more difficulty to overcome than persons unacquainted with my duties can possibly have any conception of.

The following Table will illustrate the above statements:—

<i>Years.</i>	<i>Estimated Cost for Contract Surveys.</i>	<i>Amount paid for Contract Surveys.</i>	<i>Survey Fees recovered on Lands sold.</i>	<i>Remarks.</i>
	£	£	£	
1858.....	10,000	5,812	5,712	All fractional parts rejected.
1859.....	6,000	7,314	5,441	
1860.....	7,000	9,826	5,551	
1861.....	6,000	10,070	4,740	
	29,000	33,022	21,444	

It will thus be seen that the formidable sums set down against us in original and supplementary Estimates for Contract Surveys are vastly diminished by the Survey Fees recovered; and I believe that very nearly the whole amount spent on these Surveys (shown in the second money column) would have been repaid us long ago, but for the practice, which I must be excused calling a very pernicious one, of forcing the Department to affix prices to our lands often far in excess of their worth.

The sole reason assigned for reducing the estimate for Contract Surveys from the sum required to £3000 (as I learn it from the *Mercury* report of the debate of the 2nd instant) was, that, the Government having already large tracts of land surveyed that are undisposed of, it is not desirable to undertake any operations, except on the most limited scale, until these lands are sold. But Honorable Members will cease to wonder that so much remains on hand, when it is explained to them that the great bulk of the same is mere rough pasture land (marked off under circumstances to be hereafter explained), that is no more worth the price we affix to it than sixpence is worth half a crown, and so it remains unpurchased.

For the survey of these lands this Department is in no way accountable, for it was allowed no discretion in the matter, but acted under orders, to cut up everything it could lay hands on, that were in the highest degree mandatory and decisive.

The first of these orders, dated March 26, 1857, directed the Department "to put up as large an amount of Crown Land as possible for sale, and to secure the survey in advance of lands in various localities, with the least possible delay."

This order was speedily supplemented by others to cut up every acre of rented land as fast as the leases fell in; indeed, so anxious was the Government to sell all the land it could, that, in the early days of the Weston Ministry, a Bill was actually prepared empowering the Government to sell any of its country lands *without waiting for any surveys at all.*

To keep the survey of a country well in advance, is, I humbly apprehend, a very wise practice indeed; but this wisdom avails us nothing if counteracted by fixing high prices on such of our soils as are of low value only,—such, for example, as some of our sheep-runs.

Persons unacquainted with the Crown Pastures of the Midland Districts of the North and East Coasts are prone to overrate their value, and to believe that every acre of the same is cheap at a pound.

It appears to be unknown to this class of persons, who may number three-fourths of the population, that no little proportion of the same is composed of rough hills; and that the vast plateaux that form the region known as the Lake Country are very elevated and bleak, and much less perfectly protected by trees or hills than the low country lands are.

That there are fertile, favored, and sheltered tracts amongst them of more than ordinary value is perfectly true, and these are they for which we get our own price (witness our sales of 170,000 acres of them at 18s. 8d. per acre); but the chiefest portions are too steep and stony to be fit for anything but pasture ground, and such they must remain for ever.

Of lands surveyed but not sold, the great bulk will be found to lie amongst the tracts above described, which were marked off under the circumstances above stated, and being over priced find no purchasers.

Of the 226,000 acres open for sale under the 18th Section of the Act, 168,000 were put up by order, and which, though they would doubtless sell for 20 or 30 years' rental, will never bring the price we ask,—namely, a sum exactly equal to the rent of a hundred years,—which cannot be expected from second and third rate lands.

The remaining 58,000 acres were marked off under private applications, as required by the Act, whenever made. Such lands as those last named as remain unsold are invariably put up by persons intending to buy when reduced to their real value, but who will not give a pound an acre for them, and who therefore wait for their reduction; but, as this is to be no longer the rule, they will not purchase at what they justly conceive to be unfair prices.

To show that I do not stand alone in the opinion that much of our lands are not worth a pound an acre, I must advert to a Table that I have been at the pains of compiling, from information received twelve months ago from the District Surveyors, who I requested to report on the value of the Agricultural and Pastoral Lands of the Crown in their respective Districts which they were acquainted with. From 12 of these gentlemen I received reports (the rest being either absent or newly appointed.) They valued about 1,865,000 acres, and the following is an abstract of their reports:—

Worth 40s. an acre	9,600 acres.
Worth 37s. 6d. ditto	500 "
Worth 30s. ditto	9,000 "
Worth 20s. ditto	338,125 "
Worth 15s. ditto	234,887 "
Worth 10s. ditto	604,645 "
Worth 5s. ditto	473,415 "
Worth 2s. 6d. ditto	50,000 "
Worth 2s. ditto	144,000 "

From this it will be seen that, of the whole quantity appraised, no less than 1,272,060, or more than two-thirds of it, was rated at 10s. an acre or less, and of which 667,000 acres ranged between the very humble prices of two and five shillings an acre.

The operations of late years having been so much amongst second-rate lands, it follows as a thing unavoidable that we must have large quantities undisposed of, but which would go off rapidly enough if they were priced according to *value* instead of according to *law*.

Other Colonies of a far more pretentious character than we claim for Tasmania are much in the same position as we are in respect of not being able to dispose of all their surveyed lands. From Victoria or New South Wales I have never been able to obtain any return of lands of this class, though I have tried hard enough to get them; but I have succeeded better with South Australia and Queensland.

In these Colonies, it would appear, they have nothing but small agricultural farms, varying from 80 to 300 acres, to dispose of; but in South Australia there were no less than 1633 of such farms advertised for sale in the Official Returns at the last date, (May 1862), and in Queensland, 1502, (1 January, 1862). At the date when we made up our last Returns (30 April, 1862), we had 837 lots for private sale.

Our own condition is not so very appalling after all; but if the argument be good at present that we ought to engage in no operations, except on the most limited scale, till we have sold all our refuse stock of land, it is likely to be good through all time, for we shall never sell it at present prices.

I hope I have succeeded in showing that the reason assigned for the reduction of the Estimate for Contract Surveys is an unsound one, and that, if persisted in, it will prove not only most inconvenient to the Public Service, but highly impolitic as well. I trust, therefore, that yourself and Honorable Colleagues will make an effort to obtain a reversal of the vote, and the approval of the estimated sum.

In any other land-selling Colony such a reason as the one assigned for cutting down the Estimate would have, I believe, no weight. I have shown that in South Australia and Queensland their unsold lots far outnumber our own, and yet they do not slacken in their subdivisionary surveys of territory, because their best lands go off first, as they do with ourselves, whereby the inferior are left unsold, which they must continue to be so long as we ask first class prices for them.

I may, in conclusion, cite the practice of the Great North American Colonies as examples worthy imitation, who wisely keep their surveys in advance of immediate necessities as the surest means of advancing themselves, and beg to follow it up with a Table illustrative of their Land System, compiled from information contained in the Land Tables of the Colonization Circular for 1861, page 75.

I remain, &c.

(Signed) J. E. CALDER.

The Hon. the Colonial Treasurer.

TABLE showing the progress of LAND ALIENATION in the principal Colonies of North America.

<i>Name of Colony.</i>	<i>Area alienated.</i>	<i>Surveyed and open for selection.</i>	<i>Price per Acre.</i>
	ACRES.	ACRES.	
Upper Canada.....	(Not given.)	1,530,252	Half a dollar (2s. 1d.) to a dollar (4s. 2d.)
Lower ditto	6,373,597	5,630,552	1s. 9d.
Nova Scotia.....	4,792,014	3,555,720	
New Brunswick	6,864,364	276,993	2s. 5d., (20 per cent. discount for cash.)
Cape Breton	750,220	840,762	Unknown.