

EARLY ILLAWARRA AND ACADEMIA

Krimhilde and Terry Henderson, *Early Illawarra, people, houses, life. An Australia 1838 Monograph* pp. viii and 148, Canberra, 1983. Our copy \$12.00

Every serious contribution to the study of our sphere of historical interest is to be welcomed, and still more so is this attractively produced quarto paperback with its full range of maps, illustrations and tables. It is academic in approach, as it should be, for it is designed to be part of the bi-centennial history of Australia 1788-1988. One of the nine volumes will be devoted to life in the colonies in 1838, and the present study is a contribution to that volume. The purpose of taking only one year (or a period of several years around that year) is to adopt a "slice" method, looking in detail at a given point so that, by contrasting one with a similar treatment of other years, the growing structure of Australian life may be discerned as distinct from a relation of events. To achieve its object the present book is divided into three parts, as its sub-title indicates: people, houses, life.

First, people. The social structure is determined by quantitative analysis of the 1841 census returns. It so happens that although the consolidated figures are on record for the entire colony, practically all the individual returns upon which those figures are founded have been lost; but Illawarra is a most fortunate exception, returns being extant for this district, which embraced the Shoalhaven area as well as old Illawarra proper. It is an extremely rich resource, and the authors make the most of it. There are problems of reconciliation; for instance, some of the census-gatherers had different interpretations of the information they were seeking. Even so, a general picture emerges, well demonstrated in a plenitude of tables showing sex, age, religion, family status, convict origin or otherwise, employment, and indeed the entire spectrum of demographic study of the time. Not only are comparisons made with the colony as a whole, but breakdowns have been achieved into six sub-regions: Northern Illawarra, Town of Wollongong, Dapto Small Farms, Lake Illawarra Estate, Kiama-Jamberoo District, and Shoalhaven.

The result is strangely negative. It turns out that Illawarra was not markedly different from any other place. It does not tell us much at all to say that the proportions of Presbyterians were a bit higher here than they were there, or that the disproportion of sexes was a little more pronounced in the other place, or that (as one would expect) there were more artificers and tradesmen in the town of Wollongong than in rural areas. Of course, it would be different if the variants and departures from the broad average were greater; but they do not seem to be significant. In the result, we do not learn much that we did not know already, and there are no surprises. This is not to say that later "slice" studies of our history may not reveal trends, and indeed it is only to be expected that with industrialization and retreat from rural background which eventuated there will certainly be trends apparent. We know this already. Nevertheless, the important thing is that the detailed study has been done, professionally and based on an impeccable source. That the result is, after all, not very illuminating is not the fault of the authors, but of Illawarra in being run-of-the-mill in this respect. The importance lies in the thoroughness, not the findings.

The study of houses has been made by extracting advertisements for sale of Illawarra houses and farms from *The Australian* newspaper of 1840-41, and valuable links have been established between such properties and the returns made for the census of 1841. Though allowance has to be made for the age-old tendency of agents to boost virtues and gloss over faults, the long descriptions are revealing not only as to houses and outbuildings, but also as to stock, crops and areas cleared or under cultivation. Two statistical tables are compiled. Yet somehow, once again, the picture contains little we did not know before, and in this sense this part of the book also is confirmatory rather than otherwise.

The same holds true of the third part. The study of people, one must say, is rather shallow and narrowly derivative. It consists of a summary of the Paulsgrove Diary, the early journal of Margaret Menzies of Minnamurra House, Jamberoo, and the diary and letters of Lady Franklin on her visit to Illawarra in 1839. These are backed by a measure of research, but to no great depth; nor is there anything much that is new in the content. On the other hand it is good to have summaries made more accessible than are available from earlier publications. Yet the serious scholar will still want to see the original texts, and that of Lady Franklin, excellent in its way, is frankly edited and prepared as a dish for the reader more palatable than are the lady's actual writings, with abbreviations and elisions abounding. These aspects of Illawarra's life are first-rate, but far, very far, from being exhaustive. The potential field of research here is very rich indeed.

In all, then, the book is rather disappointing. Illustrations, varying in quality of reproduction, are not new, nor are the contemporary maps. There is no bibliography, though a run through the book and notes indicates that any bibliography would be relatively short, perhaps even revealingly so. But, if there is little that is new for the student of early Illawarra history, there is no gainsaying that there is much detail of value, particularly for those engaged in that thriving growth industry, genealogical research. Which points to the unforgivable omission of an index, for this would have made the book a valuable tool in the hand of the researcher on specifics. There are curious errors, too, of a minor nature: for instance James Stares Spearing of Paulsgrove is always referred to as James H. Spearing. More importantly, it is not to be thought that the central view of life at Paulsgrove of the overseer, Webster, its author, or that of the doctor's wife at Minnamurra, let alone that of her ladyship during her brief cavalcade through Illawarra, depicts anything like the true and full throb of life of the people. Justice department records and the "News from the Interior" paragraphs in Sydney newspapers would fill out the details realistically, to mention only two fruitful sources. In the same way, one wonders: why scan only *The Australian* for advertisements for the sale of farms and houses? One gains the impression that parts two and three were makeweights rather than the product of deep and wide-ranging research. They put a certain amount of flesh on the bare statistical bones of the first part; but the bodies remain more skeletal than rounded.

Having said that, the fact remains: this is a book not lightly to be ignored; the statistical analysis stands, and will stand, however

confirmatory. The newspaper advertisements are a handy compilation and pointer to sources. The journals are highly valuable, if not presenting the complete picture. One cannot see a general reader deriving much joy from the census numericals, but there is more in the houses section, and positive enjoyment in the "life" journals with thanks for their new and ready accessibility. The researcher in depth is likely to be grateful for what has been done, even if it is recognized as being only part of the job. Overall, the book must be assumed to be adequate for what is required for the grand design of the coming bi-centennial history; but it is not going to put local historians of the period out of business. It could have been much better.

—EDGAR BEALE.