

## The Earliest 20th Century Review of *Settlers and Convicts*

Alexander Harris's famous book remained unregarded by most Australians after a number of early reprints in the late 1840s and early 1850s. One hundred years later, Australian historians began to rate it as perhaps one of the best books of its kind - not only easy to read but capturing much of the essence of Australian society in the 1830s.

Curiously, I discovered the following review of *Settlers and Convicts* in the August 1st 1930 edition of the Illawarra Mercury. Admittedly, it was submitted by a reader, but it nevertheless constitutes the earliest known 'resuscitation' of this classic text in our own century.

### An Early Settler

#### Illawarra in 1831

A Correspondent writes:- I have just got hold of a little book entitled "Settlers and Convicts", published in London in 1847, being the "Recollections of Sixteen Years labour in the Australian Backwoods by an Emmigrant Mechanic". In this the author relates "My first job in the Colony" (which I suppose would be about 1831) "was in the Illawarra District. The Five Islands (by the aborigines much more euphoniously called Illa Warra) is a tract of New South Wales a short distance south of Sydney, on the sea coast, and so called from five small islands which lie a short distance off, immediately abreast of it. It may be described loosely as a flat of richest soil, bounded on the one side by the sea, and on the other by enormous masses of mountains confusedly heaped together. These are covered either with dense dark forests, or low bush scrub knee high or higher, with flats of swampy tableland, and gloomy ravines into whose depth the eye cannot reach. The soil is excellent. I have heard some settlers say that they could dig down 40 feet through soil of their farms on the sea-side tract without finding a stone as large as a pea. Little crystal brooks of the coldest and purest water, making their way out of the mountain reservoirs, traverse the ground at all seasons of the year, in their passage to the sea."

"It was therefore one of the most amiable features of the policy

of the best Governor this Colony ever had to give out in this district farms to a number of little settlers; for a poor man's use of land is, of course, first agriculture, and a fertile soil must be an immense advantage."

"Amidst the wild dark gullies of the mountains, and along the shadowy courses of the cool streams grew, at that time, great numbers of rich and massive cedars, the price of the timber was so high as to counter balance, in the minds of the hard working man of the country, the difficulties, toils and perils of procuring it for the Sydney market. He describes the journey by land from Sydney; a meeting with a bushranger and his first glimpse of the "Cedar Brush" and, after describing it, house-building work to which he went (apparently where [sic] Wollongong but is the South Coast, he returned to Sydney by sea.)