“JAMES MEEHAN.”

Notes on an address to the Society by B. T. DOWD, Esq., F.R.A.H.S.,
Thursday, 10/8/50.

In opening his address Mr. Dowd said, “I purpose this evening to
trace briefly the career of a man who played a most important part
in the early settlement of this country, and a man whose pioneering
work in the infant colony of N.S.W. has received no recognition by the
writers in our school history books.

“I refer to James Meehan, Irish exile, explorer, pioneer surveyor
and settler.”

Meehan came to Port Jackson in the convict ship “The Friend-
ship,” which arrived in February, 1800. He had been sentenced to
transportation for a political offence following the affair of Ireland in
1798. The offence for which he was transported was said by Commissio-
ner Bigge (who was not an Irishman) to be one not of a serious
nature.

It is not generally known that he came to the colony under the
assumed name of Mahon. This revelation is made in a letter dated
28/10/1810 written by him to one Lloyd in England.

Fortune favoured him, however, for shortly after his arrival he
was assigned to Charles Grimes, Acting Surveyor General. His know-
ledge of practical mensuration made him an able assistant in survey
work.

In 1801 Meehan accompanied Grimes and Lieut. Barrallier to the
Hunter to explore and report to the Governor on that river. Two
years later, when Governor King sent Grimes and Fleming to ascer-
tain the suitability of King’s Island and Port Phillip District for
settlement, Meehan accompanied them. It was this party that came
upon the Yarra and was the first white man’s party to stand on the
site of Melbourne.

He was in Van Deeman’s Land in 1803/4, having been sent by King
to examine the country with a view to general settlement. In 1805 he
explored the Shoalhaven River, an adventure which almost cost him
his life. Travelling by the cutter “Anne” he was to traverse the coast
from Jervis Bay to the Shoalhaven and explore that river. Owing to
the appalling weather the ship was again and again almost grounded.

Surveyor General Grimes went to England on leave of absence
from 1803/6 and all his work fell to Meehan. On Grimes’ return he
expressed his unqualified approbation of Meehan’s work. In the same
year (1806) Meehan received his absolute pardon for his political sins.
Meehan was again in Tasmania from 1811/1813. On his return to the mainland he was with parties that discovered Lake Bathurst and the Goulburn Downs. In 1821 Meehan crossed the tract of rough country between Wellington Valley, Goulburn Plains and Camden, a distance of some 180 miles.

As a surveyor he laid out most of our early towns: Richmond, Windsor, Castlereagh, Pitt Town, Liverpool, Wilberforce and Bathurst.

In June 1816 Oxley and Meehan were sent by Macquarie to examine the country round the Five Islands.

Five months later, Meehan was back in the Illawarra at the Five Islands, having no doubt, been sent by Macquarie to accompany Oxley, who had been instructed to meet the settlers at Throsby's Hut and locate the grants promised. Meehan arrived on 27/4/1816 and commenced locating the grants on 5/12/1816. He returned to Sydney on 10/12/1816. He was again in the Illawarra in 1819 and on 29/9/1819 continued his trace to the Minnamurra River.

Meehan acted as Surveyor General from 1805 until superseded by the appointment in England of Oxley, who arrived in N.S.W. in 1812. Macquarie was a disappointed man, for he expected Meehan to get the job. He made Meehan deputy to Oxley with right of succession, but Meehan died before Oxley. Oxley was not a land surveyor and never measured one block of land; all such work being left to Meehan until 1820.

It was just at the time of Surveyor General Grime's departure for England in 1803 that Meehan received his first grant of land by Governor King and was for 100 acres in the Field of Mars. Six years later Meehan disposed of this land and in 1810 he was granted 1140 acres by Macquarie near what is now Ingleburn. This area was increased in 1816 to 2000 acres. He called the farm "Macquarie Field" after the Governor. It was here that Meehan succeeded best as a settler. Here he grew wheat and corn, bred cattle and pigs from which he supplied beef and pork to the Government Stores. His returns from these sources were considerable. His wife worked and managed all the affairs while he was absent on survey duty.

Early in 1821 the strain of a hard and laborious life began to take effect on Meehan's health, so that towards the end of that year he tendered his resignation to Oxley. The Surveyor General wrote to Macquarie on 30/11/1821 warmly eulogizing Meehans' work and recommending a pension. Macquarie, in supporting this recommendation to the Home Government, said, "His services have been unremittingly useful in the Colony. He is a man of real worth and probity and has very strong claims to the bounty of the Home Government."

It was some four or five years before Meehan actually retired. His last work being a survey or traverse of the Sydney Domain in 1826.

Meehan received a pension of £100 a year. He did not live long to enjoy his retirement, for, on April 21st, 1826, he passed away at his beloved "Macquarie Field" at the early age of 52 years.