

MARY JOHNSON - her life in N.S.W.

The
subject This abridged address, I have just read, seems ^{what to} to ~~have~~ lead towards the preparation of ^{my} paper, taken from the life of Richard Johnson by Neil Mackintosh. I refer to that little known lady, Mary Johnson who came on that long voyage in 1788, with her husband, the first clergyman in N.S.W. Mary and Richard spent 13 years in N.S.W., and a look at their family life gives an accurate picture of the hardships and loneliness of the period. Particularly notable are the details of the first four years ----- Married in London in 1786, the couple set sail in the storeship, Golden Grove, and after the arduous voyage, the ship caught up with the Supply, and entered Botany Bay.

Richard and Mary probably lived on the Golden Grove, till later in the year, while waiting for their first dwelling to be built at Richard's own expense - a little cabbage tree cottage (cabbage tree palms were sunk into the ground to form walls, and the roof thatched). It was soon surrounded by a garden, and by November, '88 was yielding vegetables. However, this same cottage was awash with water indoors when there was excessive rains - this remained their home for 3 years. In October of that first year Mary gave birth to a stillborn male child, and for some time she was in the utmost danger. It is not difficult to imagine the sorrow and loneliness of that event, when one takes into account the fact that Richard was the only officer of the Fleet to bring his wife with him. In 1790, a daughter was born and named Milbah, an aboriginal name. During that year great privation by the colony was suffered with failure to produce food locally, and with lack of supplies from England. Richard's Journal of 1790 records the event of fishing during the night to supplement the food supply. It is also recorded that it was ~~also~~ necessary for him to rise at 3 or 4 am in order to take the 4 hour journey to Rose Hill, or Parramatta, ~~in order~~ to conduct divine service. Eventually Richard stayed overnight each alternate weekend in Rose Hill for the Service - a further anxiety for Mary, because of the necessity to have the Sydney house guarded because of thieves. In that year also, Richard volunteered to act as a hostage at considerable risk and remain with the wife of Benalong on the uninhabited northern shore of the harbour while Benalong visited Governor Phillip; the mutual trust which seems to have developed between the chaplain and the Aborigines thus helped to restore friendly relations which had been disrupted by the spearing of Phillip at Manly.

In 1791 the family moved to a substantial dwelling of brick - situated where the present Lands Department Building stands today. The household now consisted of 9 - including 2 aboriginal girls and 3 servants. That year

saw a severe drought in N.S.W. with great lack of water.

Deterioration in the health of Richard commenced about this time, and must have been a great cause of concern for Mary. Their second surviving child, Henry, was born in 1792.

The Johnsons gave hospitality to members of the Spanish Scientific Expedition of 1793, Father Mesa recovering his health after a period at this first Rectory in N.S.W. The arrival of Samuel Marsden and his wife in 1794, was the occasion of some months stay with the Johnsons, and must have been of great comfort to the newcomers.

In 1794 ^{Richard} was in poor health for the greater part of the year, and was treated by the Surgeon General. Unfortunately at this time Mary and the two children and their woman servant all contracted an eye disease by which they were blind for some time.

Mary must have been in many ways an extraordinary woman - and there is no record of a single complaint from her. She raised and cared for her family and for a number of aboriginal girls as well, under very primitive conditions. She showed the true characteristics of the pioneer, courage, resourcefulness and adaptability. She was always hospitable and must have done much to ease the problems encountered by other women, such as Mrs. Marsden, and the wives of the Tahiti Missionaries (1798) on their arrival. ~~As well as the care and support of her husband,~~ ^{she cared for} ~~Mary deserves an honoured place in the history of this country.~~

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~~raising~~

As well, she cared for & supported her husband in his difficult & demanding task. Mary deserves an honoured place in the history of women pioneers in this country.