

MEET MARY HUTCHINSON

Mary had to manage an incompetent husband, twelve pregnancies and one thousand convict women.

Mary was only 16 years old when she accompanied her new husband John to Tonga, where he attempted to start a Christian mission. John's poor health and lack of missionary talent doomed the enterprise.

Their next attempt at good works was among the fallen women of Van Diemen's Land. John Hutchinson was appointed Superintendent of the Female House of Correction in Hobart in 1832, and 22 year old Mary was appointed Matron, with special responsibility for the health and behaviour of the inmates. A challenging job was made even more difficult by the explosion in numbers of transported women in the 1830s-40s, her own frequent child bearing and her husband's persistent ill health and incompetence.

Bored, hungry women proved difficult to manage. There was little for them to do but washing and sewing, living conditions were appalling and the diet was limited and inadequate. But the tragedy of the Female Factory was the effect that this regime had on the children also imprisoned there. They died in numbers considered a scandal even in those times of high infant mortality. Six of Mary's 12 children died too.

Since John was often ill, Mary had to manage an institution that housed up to 1,000 women. As a woman in a public role in a controversial institution she became the target of intense criticism over the Factory's shortcomings. She was accused of failing to reduce the death rate among the babies and children, and rarely inspecting conditions in the Yards. She did



Discover the lives of convict women at the Cascades Female Factory

however introduce improvements in sleeping quarters, better accommodation for children, looms to provide gainful occupation and a points system to encourage the development of good habits.

When John was finally forced to retire, Mary was appointed Matron at the smaller Launceston Factory, where again she was Superintendent in all but name. She retired on a small pension in 1854.

Visit the Cascades Female Factory Historic Site to gain a sense of what convict women experienced.

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