

Emmett, Henry James (1783–1848)

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Henry James Emmett (1783-1848), public servant, was the eldest son of Henry Emmett of London and his wife, Grace West, née Taylor. After seven years service at the War Office in England, he emigrated to Van Diemen's Land, arriving at Hobart Town in the *Regalia* in November 1819 with his wife Mary Thompson, née Townsend, their six children, and a settler's letter of recommendation from his former chief, Viscount Palmerston. On the strength of his capital and large family, he received 1100 acres (445 ha) at Ross and 500 acres (202 ha) in two lots near Hobart Town. He stocked his runs with cattle bought from the government and improved his flocks with imported merino rams, but settled his family in Hobart where in 1821 he became clerk to the bench of magistrates and later inspector of distilleries and breweries. In 1824 he resigned these positions, having been appointed chief clerk in the colonial secretary's office and editor of the *Hobart Town Gazette* by Lieutenant-Governor William Sorell. On the arrival of Colonel (Sir) George Arthur harmony between the paper's owner and the government ended; the proprietor launched a virulent attack on the lieutenant-governor and sacked Emmett in favour of a more outspoken editor.

By 1828 his family had increased to nine, and had moved from his farm Marylands, near Crayfish Point, to Beaulieu Lodge which he had built at New Town. With the erection of this house Emmett's fortunes declined. Unable to cope with building expenses, he temporarily borrowed the fees collected by his office. When they fell into arrears, a board of inquiry ordered him to repay them fortnightly and furnish regular accounts, but exonerated him from deliberate dishonesty.

As his financial troubles increased, his requests for a larger salary became more urgent, but the presumptive nature of his pleas for improved status, including appointment to the Commission of the Peace and a retiring allowance of land, met with blunt refusal. However, in 1833 he was appointed clerk of the peace and registrar of the Court of Requests, a title he considered of greater prestige than that of chief clerk. His financial embarrassment continued and he resorted again to the public purse, this time borrowing from wine and spirit licences which he had collected although he knew they were not his responsibility. Dismissed from office, he set up as a general agent, amanuensis, and debt collector and appealed unsuccessfully to the Colonial Office. Although offered a regular income in 1833 as editor of the *Colonist*, the most outspoken opposition newspaper, he refused when privately advised by the lieutenant-governor that it was unwise for a man with four sons in positions of confidence in the public service to join the hostile press.

He sold his house and in 1836 moved to Campbell Town, where he spent £200 on building a windmill to improve the town's water supply. Lack of funds forced its abandonment, and the Emmetts went to Mayfarm on the Tamar River, the younger sons undertaking the mortgage. In 1841 he applied for the charge of a probation party without success, but two years later he rejoined government service as schoolmaster at the Back River school near New Norfolk, his experience in educating his family carrying weight with the Board of Education. Later he returned to Hobart where he died on 28 December 1848. He was buried at St John's, New Town, an Anglican church for which he had petitioned twenty years previously. His wife survived him eight years.

The family name is perpetuated in a street and parish at Smithton and Lake and Mount Emmett in the highlands.

<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/emmett-henry-james-2025>