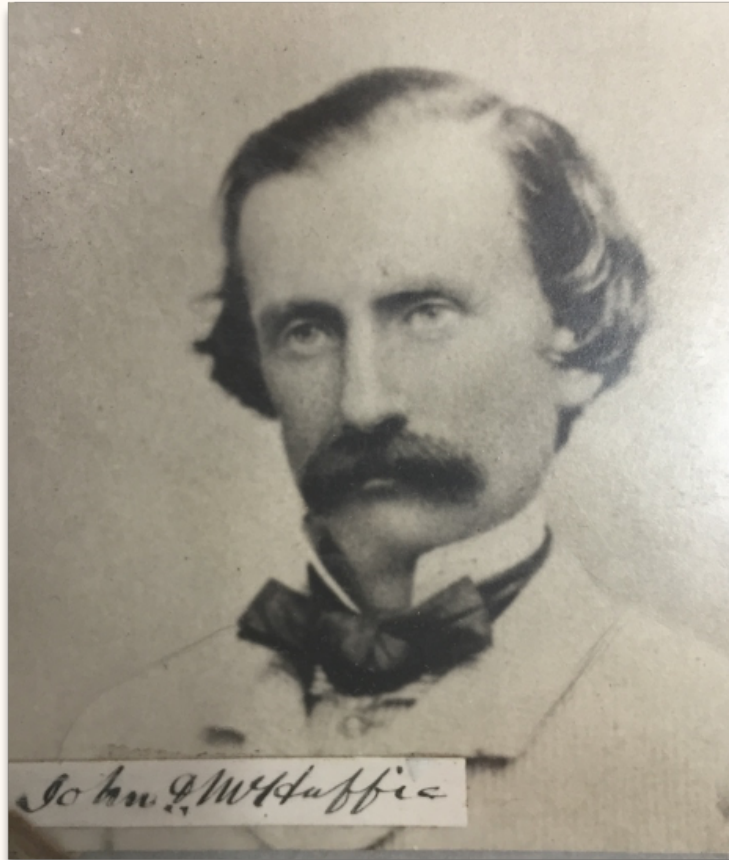


# Colonial Ideals

McHaffies 1842



## Phillip Island considered wasteland by the Crown

Born in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1819, John David McHaffie's early life was predominantly spent in Canada. His father, Lt. General James McHaffie, and mother, Hanna, shaped his upbringing.

In 1841, at the age of 22, John embarked on a journey to the colonies of Australia, spurred by an appeal from his older brother William, who had ventured there a year prior along with their younger brother, James (who unfortunately perished during the voyage).

In the nascent days of their Australian adventure, William and David laid the

foundations for a station at a place known as Moonee Moonee Ponds. However, after approximately 18 months, a unique opportunity emerged to secure the pastoral license for the entirety of Phillip Island, a region previously considered wasteland by the Crown. With youthful determination, they seized the opportunity, acquiring the license from the Colonial government for the nominal sum of ten pounds annually. Despite the island's remoteness, unpredictable water supply, and questions surrounding its land quality, they embraced the challenge.

Their license strictly limited the land's use to grazing, with any form of cultivation prohibited except for their personal needs.

Upon their arrival on the island, they found seven sealers residing there, along with several Aboriginal women. In addition to constructing their own dwelling, they grappled with the presence of a substantial population of boars that had been transported to the island by a pastoralist from Mornington. The remnants of this herd provided the brothers with the opportunity to engage in wild boar hunting over the years, a thrilling pastime for visitors, and a successful hunt culminated in a lavish feast. They eventually introduced deer to the island, broadening their hunting pursuits.

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# “Their legacy lives on in the history of the Phillip Island community.”

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William and John diligently cleared the land, involving the controlled burning of the scrub and the removal of logs to enable the grazing land to flourish. Alongside these endeavours, they built fences and shelters for the shepherds they employed to tend to their sheep.

In 1850, William returned to Scotland, where he married his beloved Isabella Paterson Black, but he came back to Phillip Island with her in 1852. By 1858, William and Isabella decided to make a permanent return to Scotland.

John, meanwhile, remained on Phillip Island and made occasional trips to Melbourne, where he owned a residence in the fashionable St. Kilda neighbourhood. He maintained close ties with Melbourne's high society, including political acquaintances. It was through his friend, Peter Snodgrass, the MLA for Dalhousie, that he met his future wife, Georgianna Henderson, who worked as a governess for Snodgrass.

In 1861, John and Georgianna married, and she relocated to the island, becoming the mistress of the McHaffie estate.

Throughout the late 1850s and into the 1860s, there were whispers that various parliament members sought to dispossess John of his home and offer the island for sale to settlers for cultivation. This sparked a fierce battle, with John enlisting the support of influential figures in Melbourne to convince the government of the land's merits. His arguments included the island's role in acclimatizing introduced plant and animal species, the absence of natural predators, and its strategic potential for defence if the need ever arose.

However, despite McHaffie's impassioned arguments, the Government's decision to subdivide Phillip Island was finalized in November 1868. As part of the subdivision, he was granted a parcel of land under what is known as pre-emptive rights, allowing him to retain 640 acres (260 hectares), where his homestead was situated.

Regrettably, this land wasn't sufficient to sustain his sheep, and in 1869, he acquired a run at Yanakie near Wilsons Promontory, where he relocated his farm manager.

Georgianna and John embraced the emerging Phillip Island community and continued to reside there as it slowly developed. Despite their loss in the battle with the Government, McHaffie remained generous, offering valuable assistance to the new settlers due to the substantial knowledge he had accumulated over a quarter of a century of working the land. Georgianna also adapted to the new way of life and became deeply involved in the community, tirelessly working to establish St. Philip's Church in the growing township.

In the early 1880s, Georgiana and John made the decision to return to the city of Melbourne due to health issues. Tragically, Georgiana passed away in 1885, followed by John six years later in 1891. Their legacy lives on in the history of Phillip Island and the contributions they made to the island's development and community.

