

This is the two-hundredth year since Europeans first settled at what is now called Risdon Cove, a few kilometres upstream on the River Derwent's opposite shore from Hobart's present CBD. The date of 12 September 1803 marks that point in our history when Lieutenant John Bowen RN officially founded the British colony of Van Diemen's Land. The accepted intention was that this should be a penal colony – a place for the empire to dispose of its convicts. Tasmanians can be justly – or perhaps unjustly – proud of the quality of many of those original “assisted-passage” Europeans. (The best judges in Britain after all carefully selected them.)

Another driving force for the establishment of the colony was fear of the French, the other super-power of the early nineteenth century. Fear of the French was not only a fear of military might but also that the ideologies of post-revolutionary France might cross the English Channel and presumably destroy the British class system.

While these two super-powers played global strategic chess there were lesser European powers also pursuing empire building “by right of conquest”. In the spirit of the times invading and conquering someone else's country were frequent occurrences.

It is only in the last few decades, however, that mainstream thinking has accepted that the landing at Risdon Cove was also a European invasion. And invasion it was. When Bowen stepped ashore Trowunna was not an uninhabited island. The first Tasmanians had already enjoyed their homeland for possibly 40,000 years. The destruction of their culture began almost immediately, justified by an unquestioned presumption of European superiority that went way beyond arrogance or racism. Many Aboriginal people were killed by the gun, many more by European diseases.

This is a painful part of our history that must be confronted and I cannot but wonder why we are not officially recognising 2003 as our Bicentennial. Perhaps the history is too painful,

too confronting, but it seems to me we have allowed a golden opportunity to pass – an opportunity to examine the ramifications of Risdon Cove and to reinforce the progress of reconciliation. We Tasmanians have a long way to travel together.

There is another significant anniversary that coincides with the bicentennial. It is 150 years – the sesquicentenary – since the transportation of convicts to Van Diemen's Land ceased. In my youth a convict in the lower limbs of the family tree was cause for concealment. Now it is highly desirable. It is similarly a great source of pride to be Aboriginal.

This year we lost Auntie Ida West, AM. She was an elder and leader of the Aboriginal community, though her dignified influence went far beyond the Aboriginal community. Her funeral in September was not only the celebration of the life of a distinguished Tasmanian but also highlighted significant positive changes in our community. As Aboriginal leader Heather Sculthorpe stated, Auntie Ida would never have expected to have been awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia or have the Premier deliver an address at her funeral. She richly deserved such recognition.

As we move into the New Year with the state enjoying the current economic good times we should be able to look forward with confidence to a future that all of us can share – a future that offers a good life and a fair go for all Tasmanians.

In conclusion, may I again thank my hard-working and creative colleagues at *40° South*, our writers and photographers, and our advertisers and commercial partners. May I also wish all our readers wherever they may be, whether in Tasmania or elsewhere around the world, the very best wishes for the festive season and a peaceful and happy 2004.

