

The Sealers' Shanty

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Tragic Drownings at Campbell Island

Elizabeth Farr is said to have been the first 'woman' to have visited Macquarie Island. It appears that she was only thirteen at the time she first saw Macquarie Island and only fourteen when she died.

First 'woman' to see Macquarie Island



Young Elizabeth Farr had at least one and probably two trips into the subantarctic in 1810. History does not record why she was aboard the *Perseverance*, and we do not know when, where or why she boarded the brig. Elizabeth Farr (sometimes spelled Fahar) was born on Norfolk Island on 1 October 1796. Her mother was probably a convict by the name of Elizabeth Farr (née Clarke). She was therefore only thirteen when she first saw Macquarie Island, and fourteen when she drowned.

Digital artist's impression of Elizabeth Farr, by Glyn Roberts

It is likely that Elizabeth was a on board the *Perseverance* when Captain Frederick Hasselburgh first discovered Macquarie Island, but she was certainly on board when the *Perseverance* set sail for Macquarie Island for the second time.

Hasselburgh was overjoyed when he discovered the island group he named 'the Macquaries', after the Governor of the Colony of New South Wales. The place was teeming with fur seals and he and his crew killed two or three hundred seals there. He left some men on the main island to continue sealing and wasted no time sailing back Sydney to buy a large quantity of salt and to hire another sealing gang.

He quickly sailed back to Macquarie Island and landed a sealing gang there. Hasselburgh then sailed to Campbell Island, where he had left a gang of sealers several months earlier. In his haste to exploit Macquarie Island before any rival sealers heard about it, Hasselburgh had neglected to collect a gang of sealers he had left on Campbell Island many months earlier. By the time Hasselburgh returned to Campbell Island in November 1810, these sealers were in a miserable state. They had long since filled all available barrels with seal oil and were unable to continue working. Their provisions were gone and they had been forced to live off the land.

While the *Perseverance* was moored at Campbell Island, Hasselburgh decided he would take a rowboat ashore to check on some barrels of seal oil that had been left by his sealing gang. He launched a jollyboat and attempted to

row ashore. Elizabeth Farr, who is described as 'a young woman' and 'a native of Norfolk Island', was in the jollyboat. So, too, were James Bloodworth, the ship's carpenter, George Allwright, a twelve year old boy from Sydney, another boy from New Zealand and a sailor by the name of Richard Jackson.

The weather was cold and the sea was rough. Hasselburgh saw that his oil casks were safe and started to head back to the *Perseverance*.

Then a sudden wind overturned the jollyboat.

Jackson and the New Zealand boy swam ashore while Bloodworth tried to help the others. Hasselburgh desperately held on to an oar, begging Bloodworth to help him. He was wearing a heavy coat and high boots and these dragged him underwater before Bloodworth could reach him. Young George Allwright also sank beneath the waves.

Bloodworth held onto Elizabeth Farr and swam with her through the rough seas. He was exhausted when he reached the shore. It was only then that Bloodworth realised that Elizabeth had drowned during the rescue mission. Her shipmates gave her a 'decent burial' on Campbell Island.