

CRITCHLEY PARKER JUNIOR

(1911-1942)

by

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Critchley Parker Junior played a unique chapter of recent times in Tasmania's history. His efforts, little known, sadly came to naught; however the concept behind his plans was humane and perhaps could have been of world-wide repercussions.

As a bushwalker, he had once proposed the rugged beauty and remoteness of Port Davey on Tasmania's south west coast to be the new Jerusalem for Jews, persecuted and exiled from Europe during World War II. He planned a Zionist Socialist settlement in this wild and remote place.

In 1911, only son Critchley, was born into a well-to-do Victorian family who were into publishing and political activism. His father was Ernest (Frank) Critchley Parker (1862-1944) who lived with his mother in Beaconsfield Victoria. Frank broiled himself in controversy during WWI when he supported conscription and was very anti-Catholic Irish. He married Kathleen Kerr his second wife, mother of Critchley.

Critchley senior was born in Richmond Victoria the son of T. Parker of Devon England. Critchley established the Sun newspaper in Melbourne and Sydney in 1908 and was the owner and editor of the Mining Standard.

His great passion was fly fishing and was a pioneer of trout fishing at the Great Lake, Tasmania.

Critchley Junior, who was quite wealthy, grew to be an intellectual and of a romantic nature.

In 1932 he bought 52 acres of land off St George's Road, Upper Beaconsfield, Victoria.

His health was not good, however, so he took to bushwalking. One of his trips was to explore the remote western part of Tasmania.

In 1940 he was unable to join the military because of his health, he married an older Jewish woman Caroline (Lynka) Isaacson. It was becoming aware publicly of the plight of the Jews in Europe and the Zionist movement had plans to build a place of safety for them for sanctuary and to prosper. Several sites around the world were considered, one being East Kimbley in Western Australia. The Curtin Federal Government was not in favour and besides, the Japanese attack on Darwin made the site possibly insecure.

Why not then, the rugged south west of Tasmania? With the introduction of his wife, Critchley met Dr Isaac Steinberg, a Russian politician and a leader of the Freeland League and together they walked the area and decided that yes, it would be a good place for a new Jewish homeland.

The following year on the 28th March 1942, Critchley decided to survey the area for such a purpose and came in contact with the only resident, Charlie King to take him twelve miles up the river to Port Davey. Critchley had planned to take a five day walk from there to Fitzgerald near Maydena. Having left him King returned. Unfortunately for Critchley after beginning his walk the weather deteriorated and he took ill. He endeavoured to return to the base at Mt McKenzie and to signal King to come and retrieve him, but the fire would not light. He died three weeks later. When he did not arrive at Fitzgerald a search was made without success led by Police Trooper A. Fleming (The Mercury 2) October 1942) It was four months before his body was discovered by fishermen Sydney Elijah Dale, his sons and Clyde Clayton. Critchley was discovered still in his sleeping bag together with his notes and plans for this proposed utopia homeland.

The Advocate newspaper reported: "The discovery of the body was reported today by Sydney Elijah Dale fisherman, on his return from a fishing trip. He said that about 4:30pm on September 4, he was fishing at the foot of Mt McKenzie at Bathurst Channel near Port Davey, in company with his sons, Colin and Sydney Dale and Clyde Clayton. They went ashore at Mt McKenzie and after walking about 20 yards saw a stick with a small white bag attached to it. Printed on the bag was the word *Help*."

"Thirty yards away Dale saw a body lying in a green sleeping bag with only the head showing. The body was on its back under the remains of a small tent. It was lying in some scrub with Parker apparently had cut down to make a bed.

"Beside the body was a compass, on the back of which were engraved the words, Critchley Parker, also a camera, a wallet containing bank notes, a diary and some papers." (12th September 1942)

After the discovery, a party was despatched from Hobart to bring back the body, but it was decided to bury the body where it was found.

Charles King was father to Deny King known as a man of great passion for the wilderness of Tasmania. Clyde Clayton was Deny's friend. Critchley's mother after five years organized a headstone of engraved marble and local quartzite at the site made by local stonemason Leo Lukman.

With his death nothing further developed regarding the Jewish settlement at the south west. The modern State of Israel came into being. When Steinberg put the concept to Tasmanian Premier Robert Cosgrove he embraced it and endorsed a Jewish settlement in Tasmania. Cosgrove stated, "My government accepts in principal the proposal that a settlement of Jewish migrants should be established in Tasmania.", but the Federal Government was not so enthusiastic. Critchley is buried at the foot of Mount Mackenzie. There is a reserve named after him at Upper Beaconsfield, land once owned by Critchley.



Parker's grave. Photo Tasmanian State Library.

Critchley's diary reveals that he visionised a city being built which he said will be a model for the whole world. It was to be called *Poynduc*, a local aboriginal word for swan. Critchley had plans that it would be a place of manufacturing, producing perfume, fancy goods, jewelry and furs, together with farming, mining fish canning and processing eels, crayfish.

Often he referred to Dear Caroline, his wife, as we have learnt, Caroline Isaacson. Caroline was a journalist who was also advocating a Jewish state in the north west of Australia, which as noted was not supported by the Federal Attorney-General, Herbert Evatt and the Curtin Government. Critchley had a Tasmanian friend, Miss Gwladys Morris, a music teacher at Hobart High School.

The end of this diary reads: "To die in the service of so noble a cause is to me a great satisfaction and if, as I hope, the settlement brings happiness to many Jewish refugees and in so doing serves the state of Tasmania, I die happy."

Most of his papers now are with the Victorian State Library.



Reg Watson photo

A rather large and well framed landscape painting (pictured above) hangs in the hallway of The Tasmanian Club, Hobart. The plaque states that it was donated by Critchley Parker Esquire. According to the Tasmania Club Clitchley Parker senior had joined the club in 1901 and again in 1932. Although he did not live here, he visited Tasmania on occasions. The painting is signed by *J. Peele 1890*. James Peele was an Australian artist (1847-1905). The painting at the Club it is believed to be of Mt Cook Zealand entitled, “Mountain Peak and .River.”



Tasmania Club

The Kalgoolie Miner newspaper also ran the story with the headline DEATH FROM STARVATION*. It went on to say, “A tragic story of a fight against death from starvation has been revealed in a diary found with the body of Critchley Parker junior of Melbourne, which was located at Port Davey on September 4th by a group of fishermen who were sheltering

from severe weather.

Parker existed for nearly two months after his food supply had run out....it appears that Parker encountered extremely severe weather after two days in the bush and his progress gradually became weaker through lack of good food and from water. His last entry in the diary found with the body was on June 13. It read, *Still alive.*" (16th September 1942)

It is important to add that Critchley suffered from TB and to go on such a journey was certainly a risk. He was buried where he was found. Friend Gladys and his mother visited the site on many occasions. It is believed that Critchley and Gladys had romantic interests with each other.

Critchley was an idealistic youngish man who went on a crusade and adventure, but was not fully versed with the reality of what was before him. His knowledge of the environment was inadequate. Overall of course, it was a great tragedy. His efforts have given Tasmania a unique episode in our history.

- Another report said he died of pleurisy.