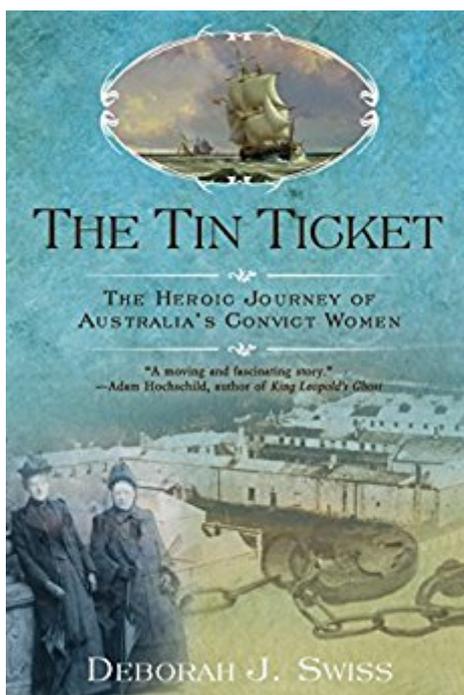


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# The Tin Ticket: The Heroic Journey Of Australia's Convict Women



## Synopsis

Historian Deborah J. Swiss tells the heartbreaking, horrifying, and ultimately triumphant story of the women exiled from the British Isles and forced into slavery and savagery—who created the most liberated society of their time. Agnes McMillan and Janet Houston were convicted for shoplifting. Bridget Mulligan stole a bucket of milk; Widow Ludlow Tedder, eleven spoons. For their crimes, they would be sent not to jail, but to ships teeming with other female convicts. Tin tickets, stamped with numbers, were hung around the women's necks, and the ships set out to carry them to their new home: Van Diemen's Land, later known as Tasmania, part of the British Empire's crown jewel, Australia. Men outnumbered women nine to one there, and few "proper" citizens were interested in emigrating. The deportation of thousands of petty criminals—the vast majority nonviolent first offenders—provided a convenient solution for the government. Crossing Shark-infested waters, some died in shipwrecks during the four-month journey, or succumbed to infections and were sent to a watery grave. Others were impregnated against their will by their captors. They arrived as nothing more than property. But incredibly, as the years passed, they managed not only to endure their privation and pain but to thrive on their own terms, breaking the chains of bondage, and forging a society that treated women as equals and led the world in women's rights. The Tin Ticket takes us to the dawn of the nineteenth century and into the lives of Agnes McMillan, whose defiance and resilience carried her to a far more dramatic rebellion; Agnes's best friend Janet Houston, who rescued her from the Glasgow wynds and was also transported to Van Diemen's Land; Ludlow Tedder, forced to choose just one of her four children to accompany her to the other side of the world; Bridget Mulligan, who gave birth to a line of powerful women stretching to the present day. It also tells the tale of Elizabeth Gurney Fry, a Quaker reformer who touched all their lives. Ultimately, it is the story of women discarded by their homeland and forgotten by history—who, by sheer force of will, become the heart and soul of a new nation.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Before reading this book, I knew little about Australia's convict past. I had a vague notion that a lot of criminals from England and Ireland travelled to Australia to settle the area under British rule... ergo, the rowdy, "cowboy" spirit of the Australian people. I had no idea that, between the mid 1700's though the mid 1800's, convicts were forcibly exiled to Australia for crimes as minor pilfering stockings or a loaf of bread... or that women and children were among those torn from family and friends and shipped to an untamed land on the other side of the world. Though their sentences ranged from 7 to 10 years (during which they were indentured servants under rigorous government rule), few had the means to return home once they earned their freedom. Thus, in most cases, their exile lasted a lifetime. What makes Ms. Swiss's book truly remarkable is that, woven into the layers of fascinating, meticulously-researched facts about this dark chapter in history, are the personal stories of 3 women who had the grit, heart, and determination to survive the 4-month voyage across the seas, as well as their long sentences in Australia. Two were street urchins from Glasgow who stole here and there to get by; they were barely out of childhood when they were sentenced and shipped to a government-run female factory in Tasmania. The third was a widow and mother of 4 who stole some spoons and a bread basket after falling on hard times. Their stories are as engrossing; their characters are fully realized. I found that I could not put the book down... I had to learn what was in store for them as they struggled to survive their ordeals and forge their way to freedom. I came away from the book all the wiser about the true circumstances of the convict maids... and very grateful for the opportunity to get to know the courageous, spirited women who, despite being dealt a cruel hand in life, managed to live productive, happy lives in their new homeland.

I love this book! Great writing, draws you in from the first page. I really enjoyed the incredible detail woven into the story of these remarkable survivors and was completely transported by this epic and spellbinding saga. Kudos to Swiss, whose extensive research brings sharp focus and vivid color to this long-suppressed and shocking piece of history. A wonderful and inspirational journey to a fascinating time and place, told in a fluid and riveting style. Totally engrossing, at points heartbreaking to the point of tears, at others I found myself laughing out loud. A thoroughly satisfying read. Highly recommended!

Touching, engaging and overwhelming are the first three words that come to mind when trying to explain my feelings on this book. It's a remarkable true story that will have you crying and later on jumping for joy. The Tin Ticket taught me a lot about what it means to be a woman and also, how you have to fight for yourself because if you don't, no one else will. It's amazing and should be added to the reading lists at high school's everywhere. Five stars!

Too often the historical contributions and achievements of women have been overlooked, or at best given 'token' status in textbooks. Deborah Swiss has done something incredible with *The Tin Ticket*. Here she uncovers the stories of four women who were victimized by the British crown, and transported to Van Dieman's land for crimes bred by abject poverty, in order to assist in the 'taming' of her Majesty's colonial outliers between 1788 and 1868. Amazingly, these women, despite the desperation of their forced circumstances, managed to not only survive, but thrive, and Deborah Swiss traces their contributions down to their great-great-great-etc. grandchildren. *The Tin Ticket* is meticulously researched and lushly written; it's a necessary addition to historical canon, and a great tribute to the founding mothers of Australia.

I have great respect for the Quakers after reading "The Tin Ticket." As a reformer Mrs. Fry wouldn't bow to the queen or anybody else. Her calling in life was to help the forgotten. Their belief is that nobody is better than anybody else. There are no saints. Her first visit to Newgate Prison, written in exquisite detail, is a metaphor for life. Just keep moving forward to achieve your goal of helping people no matter what's underfoot. It tells a historical story in rich detail, of how inhumane people can be to one another and another story of kindness, survival & friendship. It should be required reading for all. I felt rooted to the story, could have been me or my kin. The fact that their descendants are still making bonnets for the 900 children as a travelling memorial shows what an important story it still is today. The paperback will be in everybody's stocking this year! Can't wait for

the movie!

The Tin Ticket is a GREAT book club read! Swiss has a wonderful way of weaving historical events of the day with her compelling, sometimes haunting, story of these convict women. The Tin Ticket opened my eyes to a growing early 19th century British Empire, warts and all, and a history I was unfamiliar with. Thank God for women like Elizabeth Fry and her compatriots who stood firm against the unjust and inhumane treatment of prisoners and the social reforms that were put in motion. A must read!!!

This is an incredible book. I was amazed at the details found on the women's lives that this book focuses on. I was shocked at the journey these women had to go through as they were just trying to survive and were punished for it. I am still thinking about this book weeks after I finished it and that's how I know that this is one of the most important pieces I have ever read.

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