

Agnew, James Wilson, Sir (1815-1901)

Sponsored: Elijah Round (Staffordshire, collier)
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According to the *Australian Dictionary of Biography, Volume 3*, 1969 Sir James Willson Agnew (1815-1901), medical practitioner and politician, was born on 2 October 1815 at Ballyclare, County Antrim, Ireland, son of James William Agnew, physician, and his wife Ellen, née Stewart. After studying medicine at London (MRCS., 1838), Paris and Glasgow (MD, 1839), he emigrated to Sydney where he practised for a few months; he then decided to take up land in the Port Phillip

District but in Melbourne had second thoughts when he received a letter offering him appointment as private secretary to Sir John Franklin <<https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/franklin-john-2066>>, lieutenant-governor of Van Diemen's Land. By the time he arrived in Hobart Town the position had been filled, so he applied for professional employment. His first appointment was in 1841 as assistant surgeon to the agricultural establishment; later that year he became assistant surgeon to the Saltwater River probation station on Tasman Peninsula. When Norfolk Island was taken over from New South Wales by the Tasmanian government as a probation station, he was selected in May 1844 by the comptroller-general of convicts to accompany the Lady Franklin to the island with prisoners from Tasmania. In 1845 he became assistant surgeon, and later colonial surgeon, in Hobart with the right of private practice; this appointment ended during the retrenchment of 1853 caused by the cessation of convict transportation. On 27 April 1846 he had married Louisa Mary, daughter of Major Fraser of the 78th Regiment. Of their six children, only two sons and a daughter survived childhood.

Agnew was an early member of the Tasmanian Society (later Royal Society), and in 1841 his first paper, 'Notes on the teeth and poison apparatus of the snakes of Tasman's peninsula', was published in the second volume of the *Tasmanian Journal of Natural Science*. In 1851 he was elected to the council of the Royal Society, and was its honorary secretary in 1861-81 and 1884-94. He became the first chairman of the board of management of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, and an early chairman of the trustees of the Hobart Public Library; he retained both offices until 1901. His ethnological pamphlet, *Last of the Tasmanians*, was published in Sydney in 1888.

Agnew continued his medical practice until 1877 when he retired on election to the Legislative Council. In that year he also became a member, without portfolio, in the ministry of (Sir) Philip Fysh <<https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/fysh-philip-oakley-6262>>; in 1878 he joined the ministry of William Giblin <<https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/giblin-william-robert-3606>> without portfolio. In 1881 he resigned from the Legislative Council and went to England. His first wife had died on 10 March 1868, and on 19 November 1878 he married Blanche, née Legge, widow of Rev. Samuel Parsons. On his return from abroad he was again elected to the Legislative Council in 1884; in 1886-87 he was premier. When his government was defeated he resigned from the Legislative Council and took no further part in politics, but became a member of the Council of Higher Education and in 1890 of the Council of the University of Tasmania. ...

Agnew was Knight Commander of the Order of St Michael and St George. He passed away on 8 November 1901, aged 86, in Hobart, Tasmania.

Picture by J W Beattie held at the State Library of Tasmania and copied from *Australian Dictionary of Biography, Volume 3*, 1969.

Dr JW Agnew, Physician, Hobart Town applied for Immigrant Bounty Tickets on 30 June 1856.