



John DARKE (1806-1844)

Married

Elizabeth CARTER

in 1840 in Adelaide

Departed in 1838 from Launceston

Arrived 2 December 1838 at Port Adelaide on the

Lady Emma



Darke of Darke's Peak

John Charles Darke, aged 18, travelled with two uncles, surveyor John Helder Wedge and Edward Davy Wedge to Van Dieman's Land aboard the *Heroine* in April, 1824

John learned the skills of surveying from his uncle and worked for the Van Dieman's Land government in the Survey Department in Hobart from 1833. After two attempts to gain permanency within the department failed, John sailed for Port Phillip in 1836. He took up land on the Barwon River and was present at the first meeting of the settlement of Port Phillip (later known as Melbourne) held at John Batman's home in June 1836.

In 1838, John answered the call of South Australia's Governor Gawler for extra surveyors and joined the Survey Department as Assistant Surveyor. He headed a large team that surveyed the River Sturt, O'Halloran Hill, Reedbeds and Islington districts but was not happy in his position and resigned in 1839.

John married Elizabeth Carter in 1840, but had no children. He practised as a private surveyor from 1839 until 1844 and then headed a privately subscribed exploration party (promoted and partially financed by John Bentham Neales) to explore land north-west of Port Lincoln on Eyre Peninsula.

John's exploration party of four departed Port Lincoln on 29 August 1844 with the object of exploring the country to the north-west of Port Lincoln and then crossing the Gawler Range to explore surrounding country. On 15 October they turned back, having gained knowledge of the country and proving beyond doubt that no land fit for settlement existed beyond the Gawler Ranges. A week later, when John was unarmed and out of his tent for less than a minute, a group of aborigines appeared and he was speared. The following day he died from his injuries.

John was buried in an unmarked grave by his party at the foot of what is now known as Darke's Peak. After his skeleton was located in October 1909, the Government erected a marble obelisk on his grave. Several plaques have been erected to commemorate his heroic pioneering exploits, including one in King William Street on the AMP building.

From information provided by Sally Grundy,
John's great great great grandniece
March 2016

