

Provenance 2008

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About Provenance

The journal of Public Record Office Victoria

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The records held by PROV contain a wealth of information regarding Victorian people, places, communities, events, policies, institutions, infrastructure, governance, and law. *Provenance* provides a forum for scholarly publication drawing on the full diversity of these records.

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Editorial

Provenance 2008

Welcome to the 2008 issue of *Provenance*! This year's issue again reflects the extraordinary range of research that is facilitated by archives held at PROV (and other archival collections). Two of the articles in the peer-reviewed section this year present analyses of past government policies. Belinda Robson in 'From Mental Hygiene to Community Mental Health: Psychiatrists and Victorian Public Administration from the 1940s to 1990s', looks at government records relating to the formulation of policy on mental health and the related developments in this field of expert knowledge during the later half of the twentieth century. Robyn Ballinger, in a timely examination of rural landscapes and climate, 'Landscapes of Abundance and Scarcity on the Northern plains of Victoria', employs a range of records relating to land use in the semi-arid northern plains of Victoria to argue that settlement visions in the period 1836-1930 were shaped not only by political and economic imperatives but also by the climatic changes of a semi-arid country.

One of the unifying themes amongst the other articles appearing in issue number 7 is the use of archives to document the lives of people who are otherwise forgotten by mainstream history. Many of these present stories of hardship and struggle, sometimes against a bloodless bureaucracy, sometimes with concerned public servants wanting to genuinely assist. Either way, the recollection and telling of their stories have been made possible by the records kept by these government officials.

Anna Davine, 'Italian Speakers on the Walhalla Goldfield: A study of a small place and ordinary lives', examines the struggle for self-improvement among Italians on the Walhalla goldfields through the case study of Vittorio Campagnolo, and thereby proposes a challenge to prior analyses and theories of migration patterns in Australia.

In her article 'The Curious Case of the Wollaston Affair', Lyn Payne presents a portrait of school teacher Edward George Wollaston and his protracted battle with the Victorian education authorities, particularly his ongoing efforts to secure official redress of a perceived injustice. Another fight with the bureaucracy is explored by Victoria Haskins who revisits a political campaign

waged by residents at Lake Tyers Aboriginal Station to allow Caroline Bulmer, the widow of the late missionary and station manager John Bulmer, to remain on the station with them. "Give to us the People we would Love to be amongst us": The Aboriginal Campaign against Caroline Bulmer's eviction from Lake Tyers Aboriginal Station, 1913-14', presents the evidence of this campaign in the form of petitions and letter writing.

In the Forum section of the journal, marking the centenary year of women's suffrage in Australia, Brienne Callahan in 'The "Monster" Petition and the Women of Davis Street' takes us back to a street in North Carlton and the working-class women who stood up to support electoral equality with men by signing the women's 'monster' suffrage petition in 1891. Peter Davies, "A lonely, narrow valley": Teaching at an Otways outpost', presents the story of an isolated milling community through records about its public school, one of many such remote schools that opened following the Victorian government's introduction of free, secular and compulsory education in 1872.

Dawn Peel gives us a glimpse of the community of Colac in 1856-57 as revealed through a range of government records in 'Colac 1857: snapshot of a colonial settlement'. In 'Wanted! Honourable Gentlemen: Select applicants for the positions of Deputy Registrar for Collingwood in 1864', Jenny Carter explores the wealth of detail revealed through the Victorian Chief Secretary's Correspondence relating to applicants for a routine job vacancy. And Karin Derkley tells the story of parents struggling to keep their children in education during the difficult years of the Great Depression in "The present depression has brought me down to zero": Northcote High School during the 1930s'.

Finally, Ruth Dwyer, in 'A Jewellery Manufactory in Melbourne: Rosenthal, Aronson & Company', has researched records from both Public Record Office Victoria and the National Archives of Australia to create a detailed account of a Melbourne jewellery firm in the later half of the nineteenth century.

Recently at the Australian Society of Archivists (ASA) conference, which took place in Perth in August 2008, last year's issue of *Provenance* (issue number 6 – September 2007) received a Mander Jones Award in Category 2A: *Best publication that uses, features or interprets Australian archives, written by or on behalf of a corporate body*. This is the second year running that the journal has been recognised by the ASA through its Mander Jones awards. It is a rare honour to receive the award two years running and I would like to thank the ASA for acknowledging the hard work of the editorial board and the quality of contributions we have published from the wide range of authors engaged in researching Victoria's government archives.

I would like to acknowledge the work of Meredith Sherlock (copyediting), Kasia Zygmuntowicz (proofreading), Colin Kemp (digitising) and Daniel Wilksch (indexing) in helping me prepare the 2008 issue of the journal for publication.

Brienne Callahan's article is a revised version of an article that was published earlier this year in *Reflections on Fitzroy*, a book written and published by 10 fourth year Honours and Masters students in the School of Historical Studies at the University of Melbourne – which explores the social and cultural history of Fitzroy. PROV provided funding and research assistance to students who took part in this project. For copies of *Reflections of Fitzroy* contact **history-enquiries@unimelb.edu.au**.

Sebastian Gurciullo
Editor

Refereed articles



The Curious Case of the Wollaston Affair

Lyn Payne

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'The Curious Case of the Wollaston Affair', *Provenance: The Journal of Public Record Office Victoria*, issue no. 7, 2008. ISSN 1832-2522. Copyright © Lyn Payne.

This is a peer reviewed article.

Lyn Payne has a Bachelor of Arts (Hons), Diploma in Education, Master of Educational Studies and Master of Arts (Public History). She has been a teacher of history in secondary schools and was an educator in schools programs and public education at Museum Victoria for over ten years. She has an ongoing interest in the history of education in Victoria, in local and community histories and in cultural heritage.

Abstract

Edward George Wollaston was born in South Australia in 1857 and died at Murrumbena in 1935. His life spanned decades of educational change in Victoria, when National and Denominational schools were brought together under the *Common Schools Act of 1862*; education became free, compulsory and secular through the *Education Act of 1872*; and the *1883 Public Service Act* gave teachers the status of public servants. Wollaston's career provides an insight into the personal consequences of these measures that formalised methods of appointment and promotion, and saw seniority and merit become the basis for advancement rather than family connections or political patronage. His story is that of one individual's encounter with an intransigent administration, rigid bureaucratic procedures, political expediency and a system that demanded unquestioning compliance. It also demonstrates Edward's own persistence and determination, his various strengths and foibles as a teacher and, most importantly, his ongoing quest for official redress of a perceived injustice, a case that became known as the 'Wollaston Affair'. An honourable man from a religious family, Edward was fined £5 and severely censured by Duncan Gillies, Minister of Public Instruction, in 1884. An indelible mark was put against his career and still exists in his files. For forty years he tried to clear his name, and, in so doing, engaged in a dispute with the Department of Education that was firmly grounded in contemporary debates and, in particular, in the contested area of state education and religion.

Edward George Wollaston came from a family of churchmen and educators. He was named for his great-grandfather, Edward Wollaston, who was master at Charterhouse School, London where his maternal great-grandfather, Dr Ramsden was headmaster. Edward's grandfather, John Ramsden Wollaston, was educated at Charterhouse and Christ College, Cambridge where he took his degree and was ordained. He married Mary Amelia Gledstanes and they produced a family of five sons and two daughters. Edward's father was their fourth son, George Gledstanes Wollaston.[1]

To support their growing family, John and Mary migrated to Western Australia where John was promised a ministry at a proposed new settlement on Port Leschenault. On arrival, however, he was dismayed to find he had to construct his own church before receiving any wages. He and his sons set about building a small wooden church with a thatched roof, which was consecrated in 1842. Colonial life suited John, and his personal qualities and dedication to missionary work led him to remain in the West where he became Archdeacon of Western Australia, an office he held until his death. His sons, George, Henry and William, moved on to South Australia where George, a religious man of resolute faith, became manager of Poonindie Aboriginal Mission. He later travelled through South Australia and Tasmania, visiting influential acquaintances with letters of introduction from his father. He married Mary McGowan, daughter of the Reverend James McGowan, who ran the first classical school in Adelaide. Their first son, Edward George, was born at Gum Creek on 3 October 1857. In 1860 George became manager of Lake Hamilton Station near Port Lincoln, where Edward spent his childhood.[2]



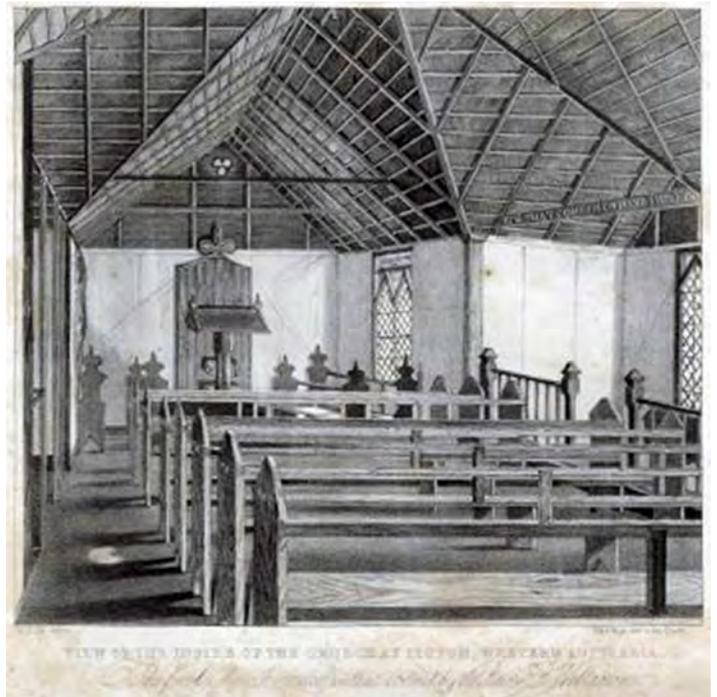
Portrait of Edward's grandfather, Archdeacon John Ramsden Wollaston (1791-1856). National Library of Australia, GM Matthews collection of portraits of ornithologists 1900-1949, ID 3799374.

Edward's early education was at Whinham College in Adelaide but at the age of eight he was sent to Victoria where he remained for the rest of his life. He lived with his Uncle Henry who had become Minister of Trinity Church on the corner of Hoddle and Hotham Streets and he attended the attached Denominational school that later became State School 303, Hoddle Street, East Melbourne. In 1873 Edward was appointed pupil-teacher under the head master Stephen Trythall and two important strands of his life, pedagogy and religious commitment, were established.[3]

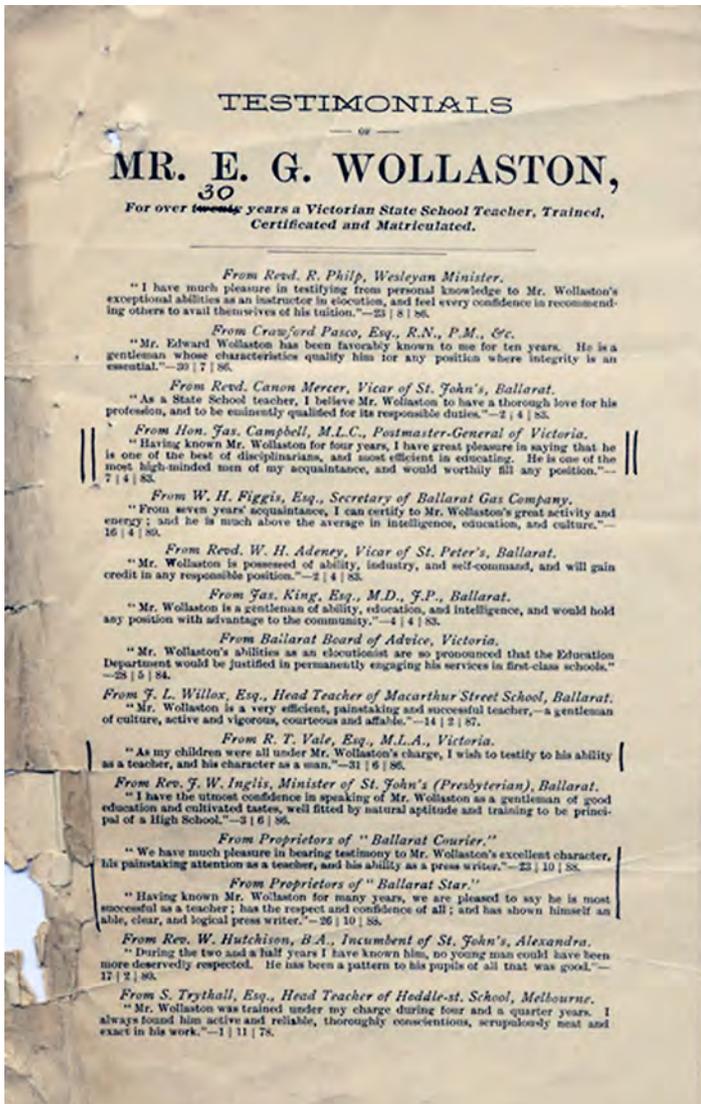
The pupil-teacher system was a method of teacher training designed to provide staff to the growing number of state schools under the jurisdiction of the Department of Education. Edward's acceptance of a pupil teachership indicates that his family thought this a useful career and one that would enable him to proceed to higher education. Edward was ambitious and diligent in following this path. As a pupil-teacher he was efficient and obedient. In 1878 he was praised by head teacher Stephen Trythall: 'Mr Wollaston was

trained under my charge during four and a quarter years. I always found him active and reliable, thoroughly conscientious, scrupulously neat and exact in his work'. [4] Having gained his Licence to Teach, Edward wrote to the Department of his ambitious plan to matriculate and continue on to a university degree.[5]

Mary Davies Barker commenced duty at Alexandra State School 912 in 1873, the same year that Wollaston was appointed pupil-teacher. Mary was born in Devonshire around 1843 and was about nine years old when her family travelled to Australia.[6] They settled in Sandhurst where her father, Charles Eli Barker, was a land surveyor. Mary commenced employment as a teacher in 1867 at the Church of England School, New Gisborne but was dismissed from her position when deemed to be 'a female teacher not being equal to the growing requirements of the school'.[7] She later took up employment with the new Department of Education at Alexandra State School 912. Her records show she was frequently absent for long periods, her health already affecting her ability to work. Inspectors Main and Gamble considered her 'Moderate in ability but lacks energy' and Inspector Craig thought she 'has skill – lacks life'.[8] In April 1877 Mary was joined on the staff by the young, bright and ambitious second assistant, Edward George Wollaston. Edward was then twenty years old and Mary about thirty-five and most certainly frail in health.



Interior of the church at Picton, c. 1842. Lithograph, Day & Haghe, London, 1842. National Library of Australia, ID 7748222.



Wollaston published his testimonials in printed pamphlets that increased in length over the years, and attached them to his numerous letters. PROV, VPRS 892/P0, Unit 84, Special Case 894.

In August 1877 a confident Edward requested a transfer to a larger centre at either Ballarat or Melbourne where he could pursue his studies for a university degree. In November he wrote again to the Department, stating his need for time for study. By December he had passed the literary section of his Certificate examination and again applied for transfer to Ballarat. Almost a year passed. By October 1878 he was fearful he would lose his position at Alexandra due to falling attendances. He did not want his career stalled through transfer to a small bush school and again pleaded his case for removal to a city where he could pursue his studies. 'I respectfully beg that I may be transferred to Ballarat or another of the large centres,' he wrote, 'where I may have a better opportunity of making myself efficient in the higher branches of learning than I possess here.' [9]

Edward and Mary were distressed when the school was examined in November 1878 and they each received a poor report from Inspector Gamble. Mary, as noted above, was described as 'moderate in ability', but Edward received the devastating judgement of 'poor'. [10] Fearing the report would have a prejudicial effect on their careers, they worked together on a reply. 'We respectfully beg that the adverse report of Mr. Gamble may not affect our credit in the department', they wrote. Epidemics had swept through Alexandra and obviously affected their results. In addition they thought the examination 'was unusually severe'. The letter is written in Edward's hand and he attached several testimonials, a strategy he practised throughout his career. In 1878 these were copied carefully in his hand, but later his testimonials were published in a brochure that he affixed to appropriate letters. [11] Edward would use Trythall's 'much superior to the generality of junior teachers' and Inspector Main's 'active and skilful in the discharge of his duties' as testimonials for the next thirty years.

Edward often impatiently avoided bureaucratic procedures and appealed directly to ministers; or he utilised his excellent contacts to do so on his behalf. In December 1878 his maternal uncle, JT McGowan, a chemist and druggist of Ballarat, intervened with a letter to the Hon. Major Smith, Minister of Public Instruction, noting that Edward was an exceedingly good cricketer and would be most useful to the Ballarat Cricket Club. [12] In June the following year, McGowan received a guarantee that Edward's transfer would occur when convenient. In July 1879, Edward wrote to the Department restating his ambitions for a university career. Typically he had taken his case to a higher authority: 'During the Easter vacation I had a personal interview with the Inspector General who kindly made a special note of my case.' [13] His Uncle Henry wrote to the Department and made a personal visit, while McGowan petitioned Henry Bell, Member for Ballarat West: 'If you would use your influence for me on this occasion with the Major at the Department, I should be very much obliged to you.' [14] By August 1879, McGowan noted that he had been asking for a transfer for his nephew for two years and received the reassuring reply that special consideration would apply. In September, Edward's insistence and his family's interventions finally succeeded in an offer from the Department of a position as fifth assistant at State School 2022, MacArthur Street, Ballarat. [15] Edward was 'chosen' from eleven applicants but in fact he paid a heavy price for this transfer. He was overqualified for the position (most of his competitors for the position were pupil-teachers), he accepted a demotion to fifth assistant and, unknown to him at the time, the transfer meant a considerable reduction in salary.



Ballarat, from Ballarat East, Victoria, 1880s. National Library of Australia, album of photographs from the private library of H Grattan-Guinness, ID 3084147.

In September 1879, however, Edward looked forward to university studies, graduation, and a rising career. On the evening of 1 October, he and Mary married, took the next day for a honeymoon and returned to school on 3 October. Head teacher Charles Cookson slipped his letter informing the Department of their marriage into a drawer and promptly forgot about it. On 2 October, in an optimistic mood, Wollaston wrote to the Department requesting that his wife be transferred with him to Ballarat or, failing that, to Sandhurst, where her father resided. In the meantime, he made plans to attend his matriculation examination in December: 'If the Department can conveniently remove me soon, I intend paying for the first year's university course'. After bureaucratic delays, Edward finally left for Ballarat on Saturday, 8 November with the problem of Mary's transfer unresolved. Despite numerous pleas to an unyielding Department, she remained ill and alone at Alexandra for another nine months.

Tragically, Edward's plans for their future together began to unravel. After Mary requested two days' leave to obtain specialist medical advice in Melbourne, her husband advised the Department that she would resign her position due to 'a complaint beyond remedy'. A doctor's certificate identified Mary's illness as a large fibrous tumour of the womb, which was considered incurable but could be alleviated through rest. Faced with medical expenses and a single salary, Edward asked to remain in his present position and await promotion. Mary retired from the teaching service on 30 June and joined her husband at their residence in Lydiard Street, Ballarat.

Edward was only twenty-three years old while Mary was in her late thirties. He now found himself in Ballarat in a reduced position on a diminished salary with a wife not only in frail health but possibly mortally ill. He begged

the Department to compensate his salary to its previous amount, maintaining that he had not realised his new position would result in a lower classification and lower wages. The Minister agreed to a special supplement that ceased on 1 July 1880 when such payments were cut. More seriously, due to impending legislative change, Edward's straitened circumstances threatened to become permanent. The implications of the imminent *Public Service Act*, the role of the Committee of Classifiers and the effect of 'Classification on present positions' concerned him deeply. He knew that without immediate promotion he would be permanently classified in the 5th class with a salary of £116, 'while many of my equals and juniors go into the 4th or 3rd classes ... simply because their present positions are higher than mine'. He requested that his case be put on a Department list of 'hard cases', 'as my claim to go into a higher class can only under such circumstances be investigated by the Classifiers who otherwise have no power to do so'.^[16]

Edward's only other opportunity for an improved position was an immediate promotion to head teacher before the *Public Service Act* came into effect. For this to occur he had to obtain a first-class certificate of competency that included his ability to draw up a timetable. To pass this certificate, his timetable had to be inspected while in operation, and inspection could only be implemented if he was a head teacher in another school. Again his Uncle Henry intervened to secure an improved position for his nephew. Reverend Wollaston used his influence and political connections to prompt the Minister of Public Instruction to find Edward a temporary head teachership at a small country school. For Edward, this was a welcome change of luck. The year 1883 was not kind to his family. Mary's brother died in January and it is likely they also lost their first daughter, Ruby May, around this time. Moreover, his family was growing. Despite her illness, Mary was already pregnant with another child, Mary Beatrice, who was born in January 1884. They were to have another daughter, Frances Amy, born in 1886. Frances had a physical ailment, probably spinal, that required her to lie upon a sloping board at intervals during the day.^[17]

By early 1884 Campbelltown State School 1129 had had four head teachers in four months due to its remote location and the poor condition of its teacher's residence, but for Edward it offered promotion and opportunity. With a confident flourish, he accepted the Department's offer of temporary head teacher. Over Easter, he and Mary, with four-month-old Mary Beatrice, packed their belongings in anticipation of their move. To their dismay, they were met with filthy conditions, scratched, stained and greasy walls, broken windows and a leaking tank. Cleaners had to be put to work to make the school and premises habitable in order to accommodate his family.^[18]

Case for the Minister.
 I, Edward G. Wollaston,
 have been employed
 by the Education Department since Feb.
 1872, ^{and have made good} reports from Inspectors
 and am in possession of
 testimonials from leading
 men in Ballarat and
 other places, - and have
 never been censured.
 In Alexandra in 1878
 I was 2nd assistant in
 receipt of £138 per
 annum, where I was
 introduced to Mr. Berry
 by the Chairman of the
 local Board of Advice
 during a Ministerial
 visit. I applied several
 times for removal to
 Melbourne or Ballarat.

'A Case for the Minister' (undated), perhaps a draft for a printed brochure, in which Wollaston outlines the implications for teachers' salaries (including his own) of the 1883 Public Service Act. PROV, VPRS 640/P1, Unit 153, Ballarat State School 2022, received 15 November 1883.

Worse, for Wollaston, Campbelltown 1129 would become a testing ground for some of the thorny issues of the day: the relationship of church and state; the provision of secular education; the rights of teachers under the 1872 Act, the intrusion of government bureaucracy in the lives of its employees; political loyalty, expediency and, perhaps, dishonesty. Edward's elation at promotion soon gave way to a desperate bid to save his name and erase a serious charge against him, a charge that to this day is marked by a bright and unmistakable red tag in his file. Years later, Charles Long was to write of Wollaston as having 'a unique place in the history of education in Victoria as the teacher who was fined £5 for conducting a church service in his school'.^[19] The unlikely labels of 'insubordination' and 'distinct insolence' are still written in Edward's file in Departmental red crayon.^[20]

It is doubtful whether, with his deeply religious Anglican background, Edward ever fully concurred with the provisions of the 1872 *Education Act*, particularly that section which stated that 'secular instruction only shall be given', and 'no teacher shall give any other than secular instruction in a State school building'. His father thought compulsory education was a radical plan to educate Catholic Irish 'peasant children' in order to 'put them on an equal footing with the most refined "Jack" in this colony ...'.^[21] As a newly appointed head teacher, however, Edward was compelled to act within the 1872 Act's parameters and took his duties seriously, both to the Department and to his own school community. Within weeks of arrival he was approached by residents of Campbelltown who wished their children to attend Sunday School classes. As the school building was the only public building available, Edward was asked to contact the school's Board of Advice for permission. Following the correct procedure, he wrote to JN Pritchard, Correspondent, and offered his own assistance to 'guarantee preservation of furniture etc.'. Inadvertently he addressed this letter not to the Board of Advice but to the Department of Education and it landed on the Secretary's desk. Mistaking Edward's offer of help to be potentially one of personal supervision of the Sunday School class, the Department curtly reminded him that Section 12 of the 1872 Act precluded him from giving religious instruction in state schools and that he therefore was not permitted to provide assistance to Sunday classes in the Campbelltown school building.^[22]

Edward was incredulous. First he chided the Department for responding to a letter clearly intended for the Board of Advice: 'I regret the mistake the more in that, from the tenor of your letter, it would appear that the fact was overlooked that I was addressing the correspondent of the Board of Advice'.^[23] Then he applied for further information on the Department's interpretation of the 1872 Act. In his view, the Department's position was a 'strained' one. He was aware of the section relating to religious instruction in state schools but he did not know that 'such a strict interpretation could be made'. Weren't teachers free on Sundays from their responsibilities as employees of the Department? Were state school teachers barred 'from religious liberty outside of, as well as within, the hours in which they were in the employ of the State?' In the absence of this knowledge, he said he had already taught Sunday School in state school buildings for the last six years, as had scores of other teachers throughout the colony. He went on to inform the Secretary that he had already made contact with Mr Duncan Gillies, Minister of Public Instruction, had laid the whole matter before him, and was awaiting his advice.

.....

A stern reply from the Secretary instructed him to correspond through the proper channels and advised that the Minister entirely concurred with his own Department's view. There was no 'strained interpretation of the Act' involved; and their advice simply gave effect to the deliberate intention of the legislature as it was passed by the Parliament.[24] For the time being, Edward obeyed his instructions. He taught Sunday School, not in his own school but at nearby Glendower Station, walking two miles each Sunday to bring the gospel to the children. The matter might have rested there, but two events occurred that together set in motion a chain of events that became known as the 'Wollaston Case'. Edward wrote a letter; and a visiting preacher was ill.

In May 1884, Edward wrote a private letter expressing his thoughts on religious instruction in schools to his friend, the Honourable James Campbell MLC, Postmaster General and a prominent Methodist with business connections to Ballarat. Knowing from past discussions with Campbell that their opinions were identical, it is likely Edward was extremely frank in his views. Both men probably agreed that Bible reading would inevitably be reintroduced as part of the state school curriculum. Years later, in a letter to the *Ballarat Courier*, Wollaston enthusiastically supported the introduction of Bible reading into schools by teachers 'who daily feel that our earnest endeavors at turning out good men and women are sadly crippled and hampered by our inability to go to the Scriptures for both authority and example'.[25] Edward was keen to enlist Campbell's help in obtaining the true thoughts of Minister Gillies on the subject of religious instruction in state schools and he invited Campbell to add any ideas of his own that might be useful. However, Campbell proved most unhelpful in advancing Edward's case. Inexplicably, 'by some unaccountable error of judgement',[26] or perhaps because he wished to draw Wollaston's well-drawn arguments to the Department's attention, he simply passed Edward's letter on to G Wilson Brown, Secretary of the Department, who in turn submitted it to the Minister. As one politician to another, Gillies courteously replied to Campbell: 'There is no objection to Mr Wollaston conducting a Sunday school *or Church service* [author's italics] provided that the meetings are not held in a State school building'.[27] This letter, with Edward's private correspondence attached, was then returned to Campbell. There is no written evidence that the Minister or the Secretary instructed Campbell to pass this advice on to Wollaston. If there was any arrangement between the two politicians, and it seems there was, it must have been verbal. All official correspondence from the Department to Wollaston refers only to the ban on religious instruction by Departmental employees in state

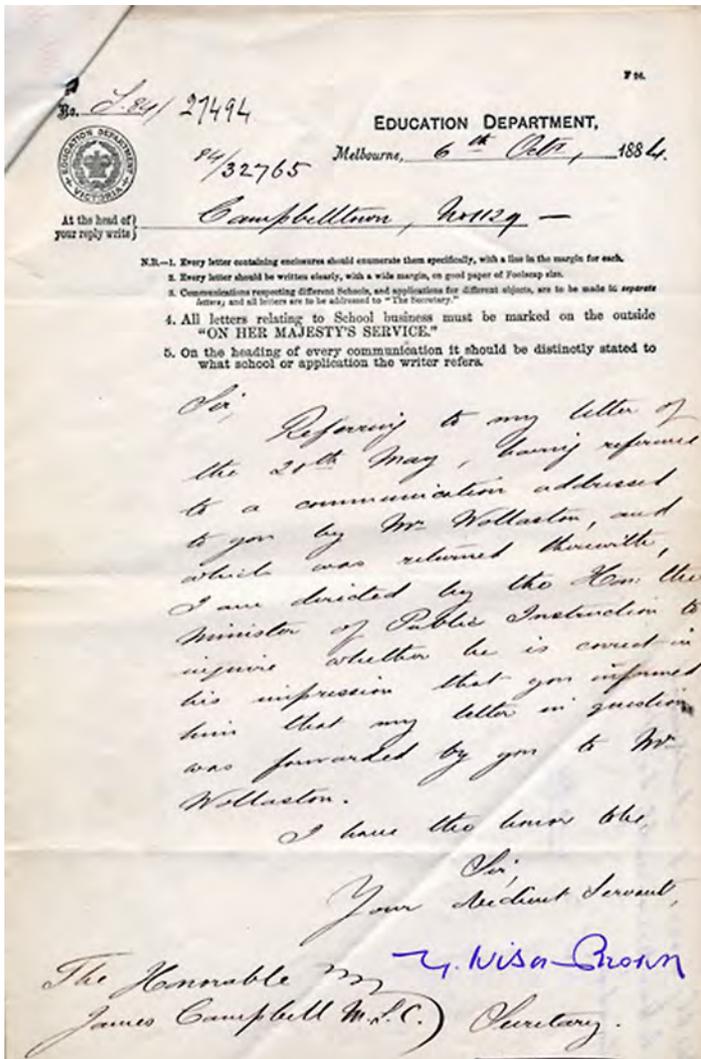
school buildings. The Minister's letter to Campbell is the only time the phrase 'or Church service' appears in their correspondence, a point vital to understanding the following damaging events.

The residents of Campbelltown continued their quest for religious worship on Sundays. Over the next three months, correspondence took place between John Pritchard, Correspondent for the Board of Advice, and the Department of Education, requesting permission for the Reverend Bettus, a Bible Christian Minister based in Clunes, to conduct public worship and Sunday classes each alternate Sunday in the Campbelltown State School building. Edward Wollaston, as head teacher, was informed of this decision and helpfully wrote to the Department to inform them that Reverend Bettus had commenced his Sunday services on 31 August 1884. Further, he went on, on the previous Sunday, 7 September, he had had to take the service himself, for 'neither that gentleman nor his assistant appeared at the appointed hour. In consequence of this, I was urgently solicited by the congregation to officiate. I undertook the responsibility and now take the first opportunity of reporting the matter to the Department'. While he had been prohibited from giving religious instruction, he continued, he was anxious to know if officiating at a church service was within Departmental guidelines. 'I am desirous of knowing if, in conducting Divine Worship, I am acting with the consent of the Department'.[28]

On receipt of this letter and in the light of his previous advice to Wollaston, Minister Gillies erupted! 'The law on the subject which was already sufficiently clear to so many persons has been specially explained to Mr Wollaston. He shouldn't act in violation of it and should be fined therefore. ... Any repetition of the offence will be visited with suspension from duty'.[29] Wilson Brown was directed to write the censure to Wollaston:

I am directed by the Honorable, the Minister of Public Instruction to whom your communication has been submitted to inform you that he regards this question as a piece of distinct insolence and he has decided to inflict a fine of Five Pounds (£5) for your deliberate disobedience of instructions.[30]

Edward was shocked. To him, the prohibition on religious instruction of children, which was at the heart of the drafting of the *Education Act*, did not include divine worship for families. He had reported his actions to the Department in order to seek Ministerial guidance; he had not willingly reported himself for deliberate disobedience! 'The Minister is in error in supposing that I have been guilty of "deliberate disobedience to instructions" in conducting Divine Worship as I had received *no instructions* on the subject', he replied.[31]



A key document in the 'Wollaston Affair', dated 6 October 1884. G Wilson Brown, Secretary to the Minister, anxiously checks that information regarding divine worship in schools, written in his letter to the Hon. James Campbell MLC, has been passed on to Wollaston. The memorandum shows the convoluted route by which Wollaston was made aware of his 'disobedience'. PROV, VPRS 892/PO, Unit 84, Special Case 894.

As he wrote, he noted that the Department's instructions of 16 May lay open in front of him on his desk. The letter only referred to religious instruction, 'and the offence for which I am to be fined lies in the fact that I acted in an unforeseen emergency in the absence of instruction'.

Gillies was exasperated. He could not believe that Wollaston had any doubt that the prohibition on religious instruction included divine worship. 'It is absurd to suppose that Mr Wollaston has any serious doubt whether conducting Divine Worship is included under that term', he wrote. Not so, Edward answered. 'In reply I can but repeat my assurance that I had no idea that my action was contrary to law, nor that Divine

Worship had any connection with religious instruction.' Astonishingly, the Department then directed Edward's attention, not to its own correspondence with him, but to their letter addressed to James Campbell, 'which we understand was forwarded to and received by him [i.e. Wollaston].' In this letter, Gillies clearly set out the Department's interpretation of the 12th Section of the Act, and the Minister was therefore at a loss to understand how Wollaston could still claim that he acted in ignorance. To ensure Edward was fully aware of the contents of the Campbell letter, the Department attached a copy. At the same time, Wilson Brown approached Campbell to ensure that he had forwarded the Minister's letter of 20 May to Wollaston. 'Perfectly correct', Campbell scrawled across one corner, 'I addressed the letter personally to Mr Wollaston.' Campbell also took the liberty of informing Edward Wollaston of Cabinet discussions in which it emerged that Gillies had acted without consultation, that Premier Service endorsed the view that Wollaston should have had opportunity to defend himself, and that a majority of the government were opposed to Gillies's actions.

Edward was prompt and honest in his reply. He acknowledged that he had received the copy of the Department's letter to Campbell with his own, private correspondence to Campbell attached. He admitted that he had earlier enlisted Campbell to obtain, as one politician to another, a personal opinion from Gillies on the 12th Section of the Act. Campbell had indeed forwarded a letter addressed to himself and signed by the Secretary and had added a personal note that 'he had not had time to look up the Act in order to endorse (or otherwise) the opinion of the Minister'. Unfortunately Edward was unable to find these letters amongst his personal papers. However, he maintained that the words 'or Church service', which appeared in the Campbell letter, were either omitted from the copy received by him, or overlooked by himself, his wife, and the work mistress at the school, all of whom had closely examined the correspondence. Again the Minister erupted. Rather than serving as an explanation, Edward's words were considered inflammatory, a further deliberate insult to the Minister. He was directed to withdraw his assertion that 'Church service' was omitted from his copy of the Campbell letter, for this was an imputation upon the credit of the Department. Edward responded immediately. He was dismayed that his own admission formed the basis of the Department's case against him of deliberate disobedience. He admitted that he had been instructed not to take religious instruction but he had conducted divine worship in the school building owing to the illness of the regular preacher.

.....

He maintained, correctly, that he had no *official* access to the correspondence of the Postmaster General, and no letter addressed directly to him by the Department ever included the words 'Church service'. Moreover, as the significant letter was personally addressed to Campbell, it is quite likely that Wollaston did not directly connect the phrase to himself, or to any actions that he would take three months into the future.

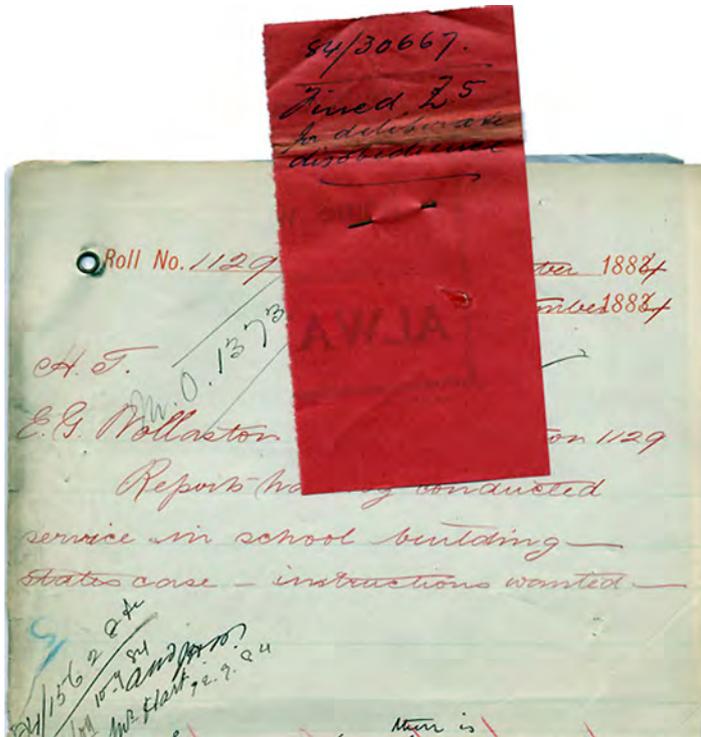
The matter was not allowed to rest. On 23 September a petition in support of Wollaston, signed by the residents of Campbelltown, was sent to the Minister. The petitioners asked for remission of the imposed fine and protested that Mr Wollaston only consented to conduct divine worship at their earnest request as the officiating minister had failed to arrive.[32] They were informed unsympathetically that in view of the importance of maintaining proper discipline in the Department the Minister felt himself unable to remit or reduce the fine imposed.[33] The Department was further insulted by the public collection of a penny subscription to cover Edward's fine. A wealthy benefactor, SJ King, innocently enquired if the Department would agree to Wollaston personally receiving this money. Minister Gillies was outraged: 'The Minister can only regard this request as an insult and to express his surprise that a gentleman in your position should be guilty of such a proceeding.' Calmly, King replied that bad laws should be changed: 'The public having raised the money as a protest against a law that required amending, I sought your permission as the provisions of the Civil Service Act forbid his receiving without your permission.'[34]

There are countless cases of teachers who were disciplined in similar language to that experienced by Wollaston. The Education Department had to appear efficient and the 1872 Act implemented. Discipline had to be exerted and obedience maintained. An unusually articulate and energetic voice, Wollaston was able to use his contacts in local and state newspapers, utilise his social and family networks, and take his case to parliament to seek justice. 'The whole press of the colony took the matter up and out of twenty six leading articles written on "The Wollaston Case", twenty four condemned the Minister's treatment of me.'[35] He obtained legal opinion from David Gaunson MLA, who supported his position. Gaunson was a notorious and colourful figure, an associate of Bent's and counsel in defence of Ned Kelly in 1880. His opinion was that if rent was paid to the Department for the use of the school building on Sundays, it was constituted as a church at that time. Moreover, on Sundays, Wollaston was 'untrammelled as a State School teacher'; he was a private person, free to do as he wished.[36] Edward's cousin, HN Wollaston, then Collector of Customs, was

of the same opinion and added that there was no authority to inflict a penalty under Section 12 of the Act.[37] Despite these arguments, the Department and succeeding ministers remained unmoved. Their position as members of government made them responsible for implementing the law and punishing any disobedience on the part of their officers. 'I had his own admission of the offence before me: what more did I want?' demanded Gillies to his own Cabinet.[38] Wollaston's protestations of innocence were always in vain.

It is in the correspondence between King and Gillies that the profound questions that underlay the Wollaston Affair can be seen. King was of the opinion that the 1872 *Education Act* contained laws that required clarification, if not amendment. Gillies viewed Wollaston's actions as deliberate and calculated, gross disobedience and a breach of the law. The crux of the disagreement between Gillies and King was the place of religious instruction in schools. 'That gentlemen who advocate religious instruction being made part of our state school system should have so far shown their sympathy with disobedience to constituted authority and disregard for the law, must, on consideration be rather a matter for deep regret', wrote Gillies; but for King the whole matter was open to question: '... your statement that Mr Wollaston was punished for disobeying his instructions and the law is scarcely accurate, ... it is yet more open to doubt (in the opinion of many) whether the law forbids the act, even if the instructions do.'[39]

It is implausible that Edward insisted on his innocence for so long because he thought he had simply overlooked the key phrase 'Church service' in the Campbell letter. He wrote in vain to each incoming Minister of Education for the next forty- two years in an effort to expunge the censure on his record. In 1889 he tried to clear his name with Charles H Pearson, who cited the Wollaston Case during an interview with the *London spectator*, an interview that was reprinted in a local edition of the *Telegraph*: 'I may state, Sir, that, although five years have passed since the occurrence, the sting of unjust blame and punishment remains as keen as ever in my mind', he wrote.[40] Pearson went through the case papers and came across Wilson Brown's 1884 letter to Campbell and Campbell's assertion that he had forwarded the letter to Wollaston. Pearson used this correspondence to accuse Wollaston of dishonesty: 'You say in a letter of October 9th [1884] that either the words "or Church service" were omitted from the communication you received through the Honorable J. Campbell or they were entirely overlooked.'[41] The Department, he warned, kept facsimile copies of its outward letters.



The red 'Disobedience' tag remains in Wollaston's file despite his efforts over 35 years to clear his name and have this tag removed. PROV, VPRS 892/P0, Unit 84, Special Case 894.

Perhaps Wollaston was ignorant of that fact! 'It is proved therefore by your own admission that you had received the orders of the Department not to conduct a church service in a state school building.' As already noted, however, these words did not appear in any direct communication from the Department to Wollaston, at a time when correspondence was flying thick and fast between them. It is entirely possible that the fine wording of a letter to Campbell, which would have appeared a personal one, was overlooked by Wollaston. It was not, after all, addressed to him.

In April 1891 Wollaston wrote to Minister Sargood, again requesting that the fine and censure be removed from his record. A Departmental refusal noted peremptorily that 'This matter has been dealt with by the Minister's predecessors in office and he is not disposed to reopen it.'^[42] Two months later, the undaunted Edward requested permission from the Department to speak at a public meeting 'to consider the question of referring the introduction of Scripture teaching in State schools to a plebiscite of the people'. Naturally, he was refused! In March 1892 he requested a public enquiry into his case in order to 'cause the record of fine and censure against me to be erased, not as a favour, but as a clear act of justice'. Again he was refused. His letter of 14 September 1903 was addressed to Minister Sachse. The affair had occurred

nine years ago and, as Duncan Gillies was dead, Edward had cause for optimism. 'That bar to tardy justice being done to me has at last been removed', he wrote to Sachse, and begged for the erasure of the charges made against him. In 1917 he wrote to Minister Lawson, noting that he was about to retire and asking for the stigma 'which has so long and so unjustly been attached to me' to be removed. But Lawson only noted that 'The question of the remission of the fine has come before several Ministers of Public Instruction who have refused to interfere'. In August 1924, Edward wrote to John Lemmon, a fellow member of the Australian Natives Association, asking for 'rectification of a wrong which I have borne for 40 years'. Lemmon displayed interest and raised Edward's hopes when he asked for a meeting. Before this could be held, however, the Minister made a decision based probably on his predecessors' notes: 'Cannot re-open the case.'

Perhaps Edward's most touching letter is to Alexander Peacock, who visited Campbelltown in 1884 as a young reporter and who, in his published article 'Religious liberty', expressed sympathy and outrage over the events.^[43] By a curious coincidence, Peacock was the Minister of Public Instruction when Edward wrote to him in 1926:

You will remember the general indignation at Mr. Duncan Gillies' action. In leaving me, as you shook hands, you used the following words: 'If ever in the future I am in a position to right the great injustice you have suffered, I shall have pleasure in doing it.'

My object in writing is to ask you to have the record of the false charge under which I have lain over forty years, together with the punishment inflicted on me, expunged from the records.

He went on to remind Peacock of their common interests, cricket and the Australian Natives Association. The letter ends on a gentlemanly and courteous note, 'with kind regards and remembrances of your sixty fifth birthday today ...'. The reply was a curt one: 'Acknowledge and say the Minister is not prepared to reopen this case.'

In 1886 Edward had requested a transfer from Campbelltown to a school where Mary would be close to medical attention. Their second daughter was born in that year and Edward took up a position as second assistant at his old school in MacArthur Street, Ballarat. There is no doubt that his experience at Campbelltown had affected him personally and professionally and delayed any promotion commensurate with his abilities and qualifications. Head teacher Oldham, who previously had befriended and supported him, had been transferred.

His position was taken by James Rattray, with whom Edward experienced years of ongoing, bitter conflict. His career stalled, he remained at the level of second assistant, and his teaching and discipline methods came increasingly under the scrutiny of Rattray and the inspectors. To add to his woes, Mary died in January 1904 after years of suffering from uterine carcinoma, leaving him alone with their two young daughters.[44]

After ten years of humiliation, Edward charged his head teacher with 'having persistently belittled both my intelligence and my teaching ability' with 'humiliating interference with my methods' and with 'constant limitation of my authority as a class teacher of experience'. The effects were, he claimed, 'the consequent demoralization of my influence and a lowering of my class results and ... making my teaching life absolutely hateful'.[45] The grievance was brought before Inspector Jackson, who formed the opinion that Wollaston was argumentative and contumacious. He thought that Wollaston's professional shortcomings were due to staleness, as he had been in the same position for twenty-five years. Moreover, Jackson considered that Wollaston's thoughts, time and energies had been elsewhere: '... as a citizen he has expended a considerable portion of his energy in outside work'. Edward's bitter feud with Rattray and the resulting enquiry into his own teaching practice did not help his professional position. After an extensive and carefully documented investigation, Inspector Jackson delivered a mixed decision. He recommended that Wollaston be transferred immediately to another school as head teacher but that 'The school should not be in the neighbourhood of Ballarat. In this locality Mr Wollaston has too many engagements outside his school work'.[46]



Pupils at MacArthur Street School, Ballarat in 1913, much as it would have appeared when Wollaston taught there between 1880 and 1884 and 1886 and 1905. 'Ruffians attempted to carry off the school tent': a history of state education in Ballarat, *Ballarat Times* Office, Sovereign Hill, Ballarat, Victoria, 1974, p. 36.

Edward was established in Ballarat. He never completed his university studies but he constructed a rich personal, intellectual and public life. In 1906 he married Florence Hammond, who was born at Poonindie Station in South Australia where his father had once been manager. He travelled regularly to Port Lincoln and later to Adelaide to visit his father, brothers and sisters. He was a member of the Australian Natives Association and the Ballarat cricket team. He had personal contacts in the local press and was a great writer of letters. He taught elocution to children and, like his brother, Tully Cornthwaite Wollaston, he was an author. He wrote and published several histories, biographies and novels. One of these was a semi-autobiographical work, *Ulipa: a South Australian story*, based on his memories of childhood at Lake Hamilton and his recollections of the people of Port Lincoln.[47] It is Dickensian in tone, a story of sharply observed characters written with laconic humour, wit and empathy. In *Ulipa* Edward described his view of the individual's right to deal directly with members of a bureaucracy whose decisions affected his or her life: '... many good people look askance upon originality or individuality and treat it as a craze or a taint which must be eradicated, ... it would seem that the world is yet far from the wise recognition of individuality as being a special gift of God, worthy of cultivation ...' (p. 99). In later life, when Edward and Florence retired to Railway Parade, Murrumbeena, he called their home 'Ulipa'.

In 1907 Edward was promoted to Kirkstall (near Koroit) where he remained as head teacher until 1910. He was then at Nhill until 1913, Casterton for one year and Kyneton where he remained from 1915 until 1918, the year of his retirement. Documents suggest that Edward's career had no further public rancour, dramatic investigations or bitter confrontations. His marriage to Florence was a long and rewarding union. In 1916 the couple visited Edward's father in Glenelg and George wrote of his pleasure at seeing them so happy.[48] Edward's letters to each incoming Minister for Education continued, but these were courteous and gentlemanly, indicated activities and interests they shared, described his story in measured terms and pleaded for removal of Gillies's judgement against him. Charles Long made an accurate assessment of his friend when he wrote that Wollaston was 'zealous in Church work' and 'wielded the pen of a ready writer'. [49] After Edward's retirement, he and Florence moved to Ulipa where he busied himself each Tuesday at the Murrumbeena school as one of the religious instruction staff; and every year he was present on Empire Day, Anzac Day and at other celebrations to address the school.



After retirement, Wollaston was able to give religious instruction to students at the newly opened Murrumbreena Primary School. He also addressed the school on Empire and Anzac Days and at other celebrations. Photograph Lyn Payne.

There is little doubt he impressed his young audience with his powers of oratory. When Long first saw Wollaston at a recital in Alexandra, he was overcome: 'On his first appearance at an entertainment ... he recited Adam Lindsay Gordon's "The Sick Stockrider" ... On that evening I sat open-eyed and open mouthed. May I say that Gordon's memory owes something to my hearing that recital when I was about seventeen years old?'[50]

Endnotes

- [1] John Ramsden Wollaston (1791-1856), *Australian dictionary of biography online*; DH Wollaston, *From now to Domesday with the Wollastons*, McAlister & Co, South Australia, 1975, p. 93.
- [2] *ibid.*, p. 109; *The honorary magistrate* (the official organ of the Justices Association), no. 24, July 1910, pp. 307-8; Victorian Index to Births, Deaths & Marriages (BDM), Registration no. 9080.
- [3] PROV, VA 714 Education Department, VPRS 13718/P4 Teacher Record Books (microfilm copy), Unit 3, Record 5537.
- [4] Testimonial, in PROV, VA 714 Education Department, VPRS 892/P0 Special Case Files, Unit 84, Special Case 894. The correspondence in Wollaston's Case File has been drawn on extensively in this article (cited hereafter as Special Case File 894).
- [5] Wollaston to Department, PROV, VA 714 Education Department, VPRS 640/P0 Central Inward Primary Schools Correspondence, Unit 523, Alexandra State School 912, 18 November 1878.
- [6] Mary's date of birth is noted as 1841 in her Teacher Record, 1844 on her Death Certificate and 1843 on the birth certificate of her daughter Mary Beatrice: BDM Registration no. 187.
- [7] PROV, VPRS 13718/P4, Unit 1, Record 35.
- [8] *ibid.*
- [9] Wollaston to Department, PROV, VPRS 640/P0, Unit 523, Alexandra State School 912, 2 and 21 December 1877, 12 October 1878.
- [10] PROV, VPRS 13718/P4, Records 35 and 5537.
- [11] Copy in Special Case File 894.
- [12] JT McGowan to Minister, PROV, VPRS 640/P1, Unit 33, Alexandra State School 912, 9 December 1878.
- [13] *ibid.*, 11 July 1879.
- [14] *ibid.*, 2 September 1879.
- [15] Wollaston, 'A Case for the Minister', PROV, VPRS 640/P1, Unit 57, Ballarat State School 2022, undated.
- [16] Wollaston, 'Case for the Minister', *op. cit.*
- [17] BDM Registration nos. 9080 and 38603; GG Wollaston, 'Diaries of George Gledstones Wollaston' (handwritten), State Library of South Australia, Archival Database, PRG 1131/1/2, 8 March 1897.
- [18] Wollaston to Department, PROV, VPRS 640/P0, Unit 694, Campbelltown State School 1129, 14 March, 25 March, 8 April and 18 April 1884.
- [19] CR Long, 'History of Alexandra', Part 1, *The Victorian historical magazine*, vol. XVII, 1939, p. 176.

- [20] Special Case File 894.
- [21] GG Wollaston, 'My trip to Melbourne Exhibition 1880'; in 'Diaries'; op. cit., PRG 1131/1/1, 6 December 1880.
- [22] Wollaston to JN Pritchard, Correspondent, Board of Advice, 30 April 1884, and Department to Wollaston and to Pritchard, 3 May 1884: PROV, VA 714 Education Department, VPRS 796/P0 Outwards Letter Books, Primary Schools, Unit 177, Campbelltown State School 1129.
- [23] *ibid.*, Wollaston to Department, 7 May 1884.
- [24] *ibid.*, Department to Wollaston, 16 May 1884. See also the Departmental précis of the Wollaston Case in *ibid.*
- [25] Wollaston, 'Bible reading in state schools', *Ballarat Courier*, 14 May 1890, clipping in Special Case File 894.
- [26] Wollaston to Minister, 12 March 1892 in Special Case File 894.
- [27] G Wilson Brown, Departmental Secretary to J Campbell, VPRS 796/P0, Unit 177, Campbelltown State School 1129, 20 May 1884.
- [28] Letter from Wollaston to CN Pearson, Minister of Public Instruction, *ibid.*, in a letter written five years later, 28 September 1889.
- [29] Secretary's Minutes, *ibid.*, 13 September 1884.
- [30] Department to Wollaston, *ibid.*, 16 September 1884.
- [31] Wollaston to Department, *ibid.*, 18 September 1884 (author's italics).
- [32] Petition to the Minister, Special Case File 894, 18 September 1884.
- [33] Department to Petitioners, PROV, VPRS 796/P0, Unit 177, Campbelltown State School 1129, 26 September 1884.
- [34] Correspondence between SJ King and Minister Gillies, *ibid.*, October 1884.
- [35] Quoted in Wollaston to the Minister of Public Instruction, Special Case File 894, 12 March 1892.
- [36] D Gaunson to Wollaston, *ibid.*, 24 August 1901.
- [37] Quoted in Wollaston to the Minister of Public Instruction, *ibid.*, 12 March 1892.
- [38] Gillies to Cabinet, quoted in Wollaston to A Peacock, *ibid.*, 11 June 1926.
- [39] See note 34 above.
- [40] Wollaston to CH Pearson, PROV, VPRS 796/P0, Unit 177, Campbelltown State School 1129, 28 September 1889.
- [41] Pearson to Wollaston, *ibid.*, 5 October 1889.
- [42] Correspondence between Wollaston and the various ministers discussed in this paragraph can be found in Special Case File 894.
- [43] A Peacock ('Special Correspondent'), 'Religious liberty', *Daily telegraph*, October 1884.
- [44] BDM Registration no. 187.
- [45] Wollaston to Department, PROV, VPRS 892/P0, Unit 84, Special Case 1097, 22 August 1905.
- [46] Jackson's Report, *ibid.*, 13 July 1905.
- [47] EG Wollaston, *Ulipa: a South Australian story*, EE Campbell, Ballarat, 1896. See also *Vincent Bostock: a Victorian tale*, Fergusson & Mitchell, Melbourne, 1890; *On the down grade: a tale of Victorian life in the '90's*, EE Campbell, Ballarat, 1901; *Thomas Carlyle: his life and works: no. 1 of a series of short biographical sketches*, G Robertson, Melbourne, 1891.
- [48] GG Wollaston, 'Diaries'; op. cit., PRG 1131/1/4 1916.
- [49] Long, 'History of Alexandra', p. 176.
- [50] *ibid.*

'Give to us the People we would Love to be amongst us'

The Aboriginal Campaign against Caroline Bulmer's Eviction from Lake Tyers Aboriginal Station, 1913-14

Victoria Haskins

"'Give to us the People we would Love to be amongst us': The Aboriginal Campaign against Caroline Bulmer's Eviction from Lake Tyers Aboriginal Station, 1913-14", *Provenance: The Journal of Public Record Office Victoria*, issue no. 7, 2008. ISSN 1832-2522. Copyright © Victoria Haskins.

This is a peer reviewed article.

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Abstract

Between 1913 and 1914 the residents of the Lake Tyers Aboriginal Station waged a campaign to allow Caroline Bulmer, the widow of their late missionary, to remain on the station with them. Preparing two separate petitions, the first to the Victorian Board for the Protection of Aborigines, and the second to the Governor of Victoria, the residents sought to make themselves 'understood', as they put it, to the authorities at a time of great uncertainty about their future. This was a critical moment in the history of Aboriginal administration in Victoria, as the State garnered increasing and encompassing powers to control Aboriginal people and their land. Mrs Bulmer's continued residence was vehemently opposed by the Board's appointed manager of the reserve, and his hostility to the widow can tell us something about the lives of those who were forced to live under his administration. While the petitioners were unsuccessful, the story of their campaign, buried in the PROV archives, brings to light a forgotten, and perhaps unexpected, episode of cross-cultural collaboration on the issue of land and policy. Drawing on recent scholarship on the Indigenous use of writing as a tool of resistance, this article highlights the complexity of relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, and reveals the persistence of Aboriginal efforts to determine their own future and to assert their right to do so.

In September 1913 Caroline Bulmer, widow of the missionary John Bulmer, wrote to the Victorian Board for the Protection of Aborigines to request that she 'be allowed to live in the old home' she had shared with her late husband on Lake Tyers Aboriginal Station 'for the rest of my life-time', adding that 'I feel to leave this home, would hasten my end'. [1] She had just received Board advice that she and her dependent adult daughter Ethel were obliged to leave the station. It was a pathetic case: her husband had died barely a month earlier, she was 73 years of age, and she had known no other home since the start of her married life fifty-one years previously. The *Aborigines Act 1886*, under which no Aboriginal person of mixed descent under the age of 34 was entitled to reside on an Aboriginal station, was in full force, but Mrs Bulmer's situation as an elderly white woman was unique. Intriguingly, the Aboriginal residents of the station strongly supported her cause. Having already spelt out their concerns on her behalf in a carefully written petition to the Board, they prepared a second to be presented to the Governor of Victoria. The first of these petitions lies alongside Mrs Bulmer's letter and further correspondence and documents in files held at PROV. The second petition, apparently never delivered to the Governor, is in another, rather slimmer file, also in the PROV archival collection. [2]

BOARD ³ 739 ⁵

FOR THE PROTECTION OF
ABORIGINES

Mission Station,
Lake Tyers,
September 8th 1913,
Reg 10/9

Secretary,
Board for the Protection of the Aborigines,
Melbourne.

Sir,

In reply
to your communication of the 3rd inst.
re my arrangements for my future
residence, I wish to ask you if I
may still be allowed to live in the
old home for the rest of my life time.
During the fifty years of my married
life, I have worked among the
Aborigines, hand in hand with
my late husband; and now I
feel to leave this home, would
hasten my end.

For many years, my daughter,
Ethel - has conducted Sunday
School and acted as Organist
in the Church, but if you think
that the Manager should now
attend to these duties, she will
resign.

Awaiting your reply,
I am,
Yours respectfully,
Caroline Bulmer

all the same

Letter from Caroline Bulmer to the Board for the Protection of Aborigines, 8 September 1913. PROV, VPRS 1694/P0, Unit 6, Bundle 2.

In the end the campaign for Mrs Bulmer's tenure was unsuccessful. It is one of those forgotten snippets of the past that lie buried in the archives of Aboriginal administrations around Australia – another small, lost cause all but discarded from historical memory. But the story of the Aboriginal campaign against Mrs Bulmer's eviction rewards closer examination, though it is one we might struggle to interpret. It will, perhaps, surprise the present-day reader to find a white woman of that time pleading with the authorities to be allowed to live amongst Aboriginal people on an Aboriginal reserve; we might find it even more curious today that the Aboriginal residents should have merged their own struggles with her cause. Certainly the petitions highlight a complex episode of alliance between a white woman and an Aboriginal community that

interrupts a history dominated by representations of female and Aboriginal passivity and submission. More crucially, however, the story provides an insight into the fissures within the edifice of a white colonising power, so often imagined to be monolithic and unfaltering, revealing some of the ways in which those on the receiving end of colonisation resisted by intervening and actively engaging at such interstitial moments.

A simple narrative can be constructed from the archives. Such a narrative opens with the first petition, bearing 42 names, being received by the Board in August 1913 just five days after John Bulmer's death. The Board thereupon sent a remarkably distant letter to Mrs Bulmer, advising her that 'under the altered conditions your claim to occupy the quarters at the Aboriginal Station has ceased'.^[3] Mrs Bulmer replied to ask – with what seems a certain degree of confidence – that she be permitted to stay. Promptly approached by the Board for his 'opinion' in the matter, the manager RW Howe made his hostility to Mrs Bulmer explicit, by which time – late September – the existence of the second petition had come to the Board's attention. In November 1913 the Board notified the widow that it could 'not approve' of her remaining at the station after the end of that year. As events transpired, her date of removal would be deferred in late December till the end of January 1914, and then again till the end of March, and in fact it was not until May 1914 that the Board's vice-chairman himself informed Mrs Bulmer that she was required to 'remove with as little delay as possible', and to ensure she had 'severed her connection with the station by the end of June'. '[S]o far as the Board [was] concerned', the decision was 'final', he stated firmly. Yet the Board was finally obliged to provide an annual pension, conditional upon Mrs Bulmer vacating the station, to persuade her to leave – which she did, on the very last day of June 1914.

Nobody who looks through the records of the Victorian Board for the Protection of Aborigines can fail to be struck by the prevalence of 'the Aboriginal voice' within their pages: the Indigenous communities of Victoria reveal themselves to be prolific letter-writers who were more than willing and able to adopt the constitutional tools and methods – including formal petitions – of white Victorians to defend their interests. ^[4] In her perceptive discussion of Aboriginal writings from Lake Condah in the same time period (and in the same archive), Penny van Toorn reminds us that these carefully worded public texts, seemingly concessionary and couched in the language of the white oppressors, can carry embedded within them 'hidden transcripts' of resistance, and evidence of chronic dissatisfaction. ^[5]

At the same time, the Aboriginal petitioners themselves seem intensely aware that they are writing to a particularly obtuse audience – white, educated, male authorities – to whom they wish to make their point unambiguously. ‘We will try to make ourselves understood’, the first petition begins. ‘It is on behalf of Mrs Bulmer & Miss Ethel Bulmer that we are concerned about.’

Aged about 21 when she married widower John Bulmer in January 1862, Caroline had accompanied her husband later that year to set up home on the site he had only just selected for a new Church of England mission in Gippsland, at Lake Tyers.[6] Decades later, in mid-1907, the Board, which had been pushing for the closure of one or more of the Aboriginal missions since the turn of the century, resolved to take over the management of Lake Tyers Station and oversee the transfer there of Ramahyuck Mission residents, appointing RW Howe as manager.[7] Bulmer had asked permission to remain in his house with his wife and ‘minister to the spiritual needs of the Aborigines’. The Board consented, and allowed him, his wife and daughter to continue to receive rations.[8] But the Bulmers only remained on sufferance, and when John Bulmer died his aged widow was entirely redundant. ‘As her role was created by marriage, so it was destroyed by her husband’s death’, observes historian Hilary Carey of the missionary wife’s experience in the Australian colonies.[9] For the Lake Tyers people, preparing their petition within a few days of John Bulmer’s death, the uncertainty of his widow’s position was likely to have been a source of cultural anxiety as well as symbolic of their own insecure position. John Bulmer had earlier recorded the care that ‘the Gippslanders’ had shown a bereaved widow, noting also their belief that when a man died his spirit ‘may hang around the camp for a time to see to the interests of his wife, but as soon as all is settled he takes his departure’, as told in the story of a ghost who haunted his wife until the people organised her remarriage.[10] What the residents of Lake Tyers made of Caroline Bulmer’s situation in spiritual terms we cannot know, but we can be sure they would have felt it appropriate, even urgent, that someone look after her interests. They had reportedly been very concerned about what would become of John Bulmer back in 1907, and a sense of their loyalty to his memory – rather than a concern for Caroline Bulmer’s welfare *per se* – comes through strongly in their advocacy for his widow in the first petition. Reverend Bulmer had ‘spent his life time amongst us’ this petition stressed, and through his teachings and the ‘home’ he established at Lake Tyers, ‘many were led to lead better lives’.

He was

our beloved minister, friend, adviser, & father ... and we now miss his familiar face among us. For over (50) fifty years he laboured among the natives, and we will probably never get another to spend a life of self-sacrifice as he did.

The petitioners asked only that ‘if she wishes’, Mrs Bulmer be allowed to stay at the station, without making any specific claim for her. However, they went on to request that her daughter Ethel be allowed ‘to live with her & carry on the work in which she assisted her late father’ (conducting Sunday School) and pointed out that ‘Yesterday Sunday there was neither Sunday school or Church, and if this is what is before us, then it is a poor outlook for the children & younger ones growing up.’ Two of the Bulmers’ adult children resided on the station at that time. Son Frank, who John had once hoped would take over from him as manager, was on a salary as an assistant to Howe,[11] while Ethel, who had earlier returned to Lake Tyers to act as matron there until Howe’s wife could take up that duty, was now taking Sunday School and playing the church organ in return for her rations.[12] The reference to Ethel’s contribution could be read as a pointed criticism of the government’s administration of the station.

The Board it seems did not deign to reply. Whether its members recognised the implicit challenge in the petitioners’ statement of their own perceived obligations to the late missionary, or were annoyed by the aspersions cast on their secular management, or were simply being bloody-minded, the decision to evict Caroline Bulmer was made *in direct response* to the petition. A minute scrawled on the back of the document a fortnight later (1 September) by secretary Ditchburn would be repeated in the blunt note sent to her two days later: ‘Write Mrs Bulmer pointing out that she has now no claim to occupy the quarters inquiring what arrangements she proposes to make her future residence’. So it was, in fact, the intercession of the Lake Tyers people on behalf of Mrs Bulmer that was the catalyst for the Board’s decision to evict her.

In her initial response to the Board’s letter, Caroline Bulmer had also insinuated the spiritual inadequacy of government administration when she suggested, somewhat slyly, that if the Board thought Howe should take over her daughter Ethel’s duties Ethel would resign. However, over the following months her correspondence with the Board tended to argue her claim upon the house at Lake Tyers in financial terms alone, deviating from the need expressed by the petitioners for a continued church presence.

Her home, she reiterated, was 'wholly built by my late husband' with the 'assistance of the natives – thereby costing the Government nothing'. As a strategic device this may have seemed astute, given that the Board was always attentive to cost-saving measures, as Mrs Bulmer was well aware, but in fact it provided leverage for the Board. At the end of 1913 they offered to consider 'a money allowance' both as an inducement to Mrs Bulmer to leave and as a way of avoiding 'the appearance of harshness', eventually providing a pension of £52 per annum. The minutes of the Board's discussion on this payment in 1914 show further that they were aware they were getting off lightly (compared with the monies provided to former male manager-missionaries on other stations), and, as her allowance was to be paid out of the 'Compassionate Allowance Vote' rather than their own coffers, in effect they had saved the cost of the rations allowed her on the station. These rations were, they noted, of equivalence. For Caroline Bulmer's part, the financial hardship was probably less critical than the distress caused by leaving the home she had lived in all her married life and called her own. She had relations in the vicinity, and a male relative – possibly another son, an apparently successful timber merchant – took her in after she left the station and continued to represent her interests up until her death some five years later. [13] John Bulmer had left a modest estate of a little land and a house in Cunninghame let for 10s. a week; and in the event, if we can believe the spiteful report submitted by Howe soon after her departure, Mrs Bulmer was in a position to buy a block of land in Cunninghame and build a house on it.[14] Indeed she seems to have accepted the offer of a pension only once she was resigned to the inevitability of her eviction, ten days before she actually left.

We have seen that the Board's initial decision to expel Mrs Bulmer was made in reaction to the petition from Lake Tyers. Their determination to carry this decision through would be based on the threat they were increasingly convinced her presence posed to the station management. On 16 September 1913, Howe had responded with irritation to the Board's request for his opinion on Mrs Bulmer's appeal. He complained that 'the proposition was unworkable', referring to the 'party interests' on the station and the need for the Board's representative to have 'sole and uninterrupted control over the natives', as the 'old regime [was to] be ended forever by the death of Mr Bulmer'. The Board asked him to elaborate.

It was clear Howe had been looking forward to directing Mrs Bulmer to go. Seeing his opportunity to do so evaporating, he was strenuous in his defence of his opinion. As he explained in his cramped writing: 'What I meant by party interests, was that, at any time when I had occasion to correct or punish any of the blacks or halfcastes for misbehaviour' (for example, sending people off the station), Mrs Bulmer would sympathise with those people, saying 'that it was a shame to treat them like that', and so 'always caus[ing] a strong current of opposition against me' and making 'it much more difficult for my wife & myself to control the natives & maintain discipline on the Station'. Furthermore, he complained, Mrs Bulmer was in a habit of 'order[ing]' the people to carry out work for her '& they of course would not refuse her', thus keeping them 'from doing the work which I had instructed them to do'. All this meant that Howe 'could not cope with the position without a great deal of unpleasantness which I wished to avoid during the lifetime of Mr Bulmer as he had nothing to do with the before mentioned facts'. [15]

Howe was known as 'a hard man' by the Lake Tyers people and his reputation lives on in their history. [16] In the archival records, his vindictiveness towards Mrs Bulmer betrays a man who felt his own position of authority to be insecure. A confrontation in 1911 between him and his wife and an Aboriginal woman, Emily Stephen, who had been moved onto Lake Tyers from Ramahyuck, provides a telling glimpse into the history of his relationships not just with the Aboriginal residents but also with Mrs Bulmer. It suggests too that the Aboriginal people were adopting a protective stance towards Caroline Bulmer even before her bereavement. Emily Stephen had arranged for her 14-year-old daughter to work for Mrs Bulmer (as a servant) and was incensed when Mrs Howe tried to bully the girl back to work in her own household, complaining to the Board of the Howes's high-handed treatment of the station people. Mrs Stephen represented Mrs Bulmer as a defenceless 'old lady' who depended upon her daughter's regular 'help', and who was 'afraid for me to write to you, because she said Captain's word would be taken first':

I say again it is selfish & mean of him to want Blanche from Mrs Bulmer ... very unkind of the Captain to wish to take Blanche from Mrs Bulmer as the lady is getting old & needs help.[17]

Howe was outraged, countering that Emily Stephen 'defies me ... she goes round to all the blacks and the Bulmers telling them that she has the "Board" on her side ...'[18] He was certainly not above exploiting existing tensions on the station (or 'party feelings') himself in his efforts to get Mrs Stephen driven off the station. Howe's complaints against Mrs Stephen would be echoed in those he made against Mrs Bulmer a few years later, and suggest that Mrs Bulmer may have had good cause to fear him. Mrs Stephen, wrote Howe with open venom,

has told so many malicious lies about us that if she were a white woman instead of an evil minded black gin I should prosecute her communally ... Emily keeps the whole station in a state of ferment & while she remains here there will be no peace.[19]

Mrs Stephen was indeed forced off the station in October of that year (1911),[20] so she was no longer there when Mrs Bulmer was facing eviction two years later. Her experience at the hands of Howe gives us an insight into the kind of 'unpleasantness' Howe felt obliged to 'avoid' when John Bulmer was alive. The conflict itself provides clear evidence of solidarity between Caroline Bulmer and the Lake Tyers people, alluded to by Howe in his 1913 complaints about the widow's misplaced sympathies.

Of course, Howe's personal hostility does not explain the Board's determination to expel Mrs Bulmer (or indeed Mrs Stephen). The Board members had been impatient with Howe over the case of Mrs Stephen. '[A] little gentle advice may probably have the effect desired so that the intervention of the Board would not be necessary', they admonished him in response to his first request to have her removed.[21] It was only his consummate failure to exert his authority effectively, the evidence of which he provided in such detail in his complaints, that compelled them to intervene in that instance. Now, in relation to Mrs Bulmer, the Board responded cautiously, and relatively slowly, to his reply of 22 September.

Although the exact order of events is unclear, the Board's request to Howe for further information was dated 19 September, the day after the Member for Gippsland North, James McLachlan, forwarded the second petition from Lake Tyers Station to the representative for the Lake Tyers district, the Member for East Gippsland, James Cameron. This second petition, which had significantly revised the original and was open in its criticism of the Board, had been sent to McLachlan, who now advised Cameron that he had 'informed the petitioners it is in your hands'.[22] Cameron himself had just received a letter concerning

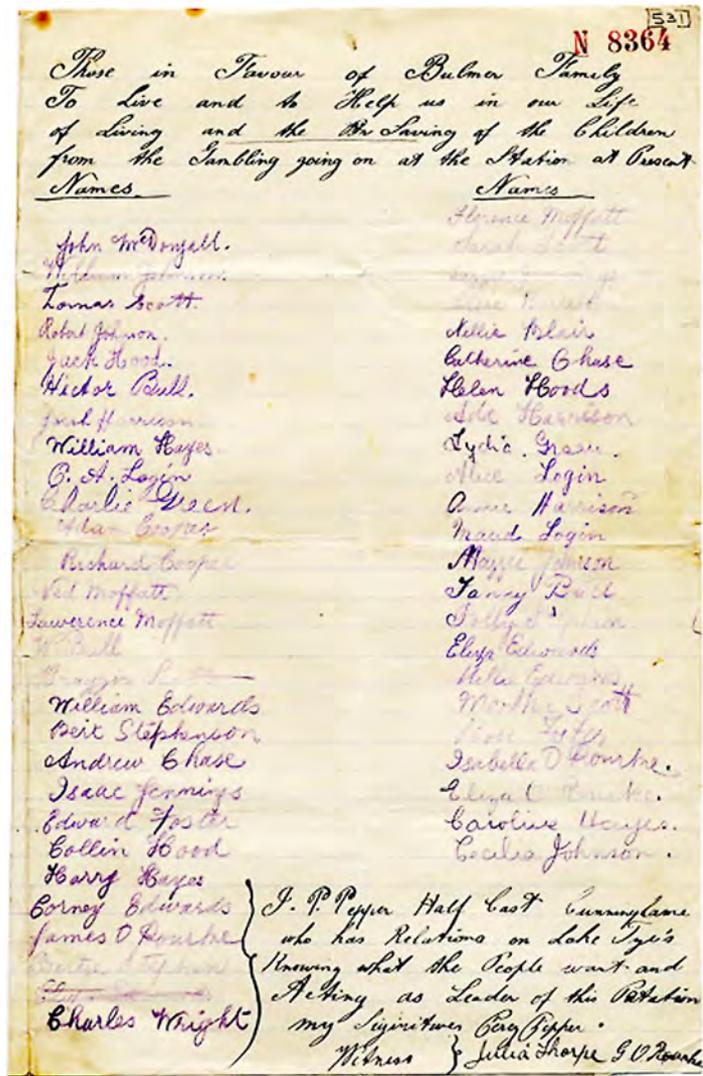
Mrs Bulmer from a Mr HS Dickson in Melbourne. Probably drawn in through a connection with the Bulmer family, whom he appeared to know personally, Dickson asked Cameron to rectify this 'injustice': 'it seems a very hard and cruel thing, to treat his widow like this ... Surely the old lady can be left in her house, and receive supplies for the year or two she might live'.[23] Cameron, it seems, then passed the assorted correspondence to the Chief Secretary, who was also the Board's chairman. It was then referred directly to the Board for consideration on 20 September – two days before the date of Howe's reply. Meanwhile, the Board's secretary had also received a second letter from Mrs Bulmer (dated 19 September, the same day that they had first asked Howe for more details), asserting the validity of her claim to the house her husband had built.

The extension of the matter into the wider public domain and especially the interest of two parliamentarians may well explain the Board's hesitancy at this point. Mrs Bulmer and Howe were directed on 2 October that 'existing arrangements will not be disturbed for the present'.

A month later the Board had arrived at a considered opinion on the matter. In a letter to the Chief Secretary (who, as already noted, was chairman of the Board), dated 24 November, the secretary recorded the bland explanation that the Board felt 'that in the best interests of the station it is advisable that she [Mrs Bulmer] is not permitted to remain'. The point was clarified in the minutes of their discussion on the question in the New Year, 1914:

The Board thinks that a continuation of residence is not desirable, as discipline is interfered with, since from long association, the Bulmer family necessarily retains a strong influence over the aborigines.[24]

Whether beyond their understanding, or simply their capacity to express it, the fact that Aboriginal people had taken the initiative was not allowed for in this record of the Board members' view. Nevertheless, the intervention of the Aboriginal people at Lake Tyers to help Mrs Bulmer, in the face of the manager's overt hostility, was the foremost reason the Board decided to support the latter's position. It is therefore worth returning to a closer consideration of this second petition.



Petition from Lake Tyers Mission to the Governor of Victoria, 9 September 1913. PROV, VPRS 1694/P0, Unit 12, Bundle 4.

Faced with no response to their original petition (other than the peremptory letter sent to Mrs Bulmer), in early September 1913 the Lake Tyers residents had approached Percy Pepper, a man living off the reserve, for help. Pepper re-wrote the petition for them and included a statement describing his role at the bottom: 'I, P. Pepper Half Cast Cunninghame who has Relations on Lake Tye[r]s Knowing what the People want and Acting as Leader of this Petation my Signature Percy Pepper'. By now the list of signatories had grown from 42 to 53 (including Pepper and his two witnesses). The first petition had been headed by John McDougall and his wife Bella (in what seems to be the tradition of Lake Tyers petitions, men's names were generally listed in a column on the left, and women's on the right) and while the order of the names had changed somewhat, the name of John McDougall still headed the list.

As van Toorn points out, the order of names listed on Aboriginal petitions signified the ongoing recognition of authority within Aboriginal communities that was being subtly asserted in formal correspondence with the white administration. Pepper, originally from Ramahyuck Mission and forced away by the *Aborigines Act 1886*, was married to a woman from an original Lake Tyers family, and, as John McDougall's wife was the aunt of Pepper's wife, it may have been through this connection that Pepper was approached.[25]

Van Toorn has written more extensively on the BPA archives in her recent book, *Writing never arrives naked*, in which she makes the point that the Victorian authorities used writing as a self-protective distancing device – that is, orders to be carried out on the stations were sent by the authorities comfortably ensconced in their Melbourne office, while the Aboriginal writers used the same tool to bridge the social and spatial divide between themselves and those who could help them, evading the 'proper' channels of communication to write directly to those in positions of higher authority. Furthermore, van Toorn speculates, for Aboriginal people 'the written petition had to be delivered as though it were an oral message' in order to be considered effective, both in terms of the white man's criteria for authenticity, and to satisfy their own cultural precepts: 'Power and meaning did not reside inherently in the alphabetically written document itself, but were activated through the ceremonial process of its face-to-face delivery and re-voicing'.[26] In fact, when Pepper forwarded this second petition to McLachlan, he explained in a cover note his intention to come to Melbourne in the company of 'The oldest Aboriginal' on Lake Tyers and one of that man's sons. They would present the petition 'our Selves' to the Governor, wrote Pepper, as the Board 'have not given us Satisfaction to the last Petation we sent in':

... we think it is better to carry the Petation and any question we will answer or rather the 2 men I take down will as one of them was in his wild State when he first knew Mr and Mrs Bulmer

They wanted to call upon McLachlan as well, to 'let you know every thing also show to you some of the Aborigines Complaint how things are carried on'. Face-to-face contact could serve pragmatic reasons as well as ceremonial, of course, allowing opportunities to elaborate and argue that were not necessarily available or possible in the written text.

While respectful, the tone of Pepper's letter was not that of a supplicant. Pointing out that he realised that McLachlan was not the member for their electoral district, he explained that he had taken the parliamentarian 'into Confidence' on behalf of 'our People' who were 'unsettled about what is to become of Mrs Bulmer and also the daughter ...':

[A]though they [the Lake Tyers people] have no Say in putting men in Parlement the Same as I do as I am a half cast they look to me to help them the Same way as I look to you for help ... I hope and trust you will help us with the Pass [to come to Melbourne by rail] as it is no good to write to the Board of Protection as they would not give us one ...

Pepper concluded his letter, having emphasised that the petition was 'for Miss Bulmer and Mrs Bulmer to remain ... we intend to get it through', by making one final appeal for clemency that sits somewhat incongruously, if not impossibly, with the assertive tenor of the rest: 'it is for the sake of a Race that will soon die out trusting you will help'.

The petition itself had been substantially reworked from the original, particularly in the vigorous exposition of the petitioners' reasons for caring about Mrs Bulmer's fate (the original, as we have seen, expressing only their loyalties to her late husband). Opening with the heartfelt plea that the Governor 'give to us the People we would Love to be amongst us', the statement emphasised the close and filial affection the petitioners felt for Mrs Bulmer. She had 'been like a mother to us ... we all want her to Live the Rest of her Life with us'. Those of 'our Parents' who had known Mrs Bulmer when they 'were young and in their Wild state' did not want Mrs Bulmer to 'go away from them', while those of the younger generations who had been 'brought up with the Bulmer Family' considered that 'it will be very hard for them to Part from us'.

At the same time, concerns about the future of the station under government administration, discernible in the first petition, emerged more strongly. This was framed through the device of Mrs Bulmer's continuing motherly care, despite her removal from any position of responsibility with the new management:

... we know the help Mrs Bulmer and Miss Ethel Bulmer has given in the time of Sickness not only when they had the Station but after Mr Bulmer had handed it to the Present Manager and his wife although Mrs Bulmer has nothing to do with the Mission She still Looks after us in the time of trouble in the way of a Mother she Loves the Blacks and we love her we do beg to have her and her daughter with us not only for the our Selves but for the sake of our Children ...

They had 'heard no more about' the petition they had sent to the Board, and so they had 'made up our minds' to see the Governor himself, believing he would see they were 'treated in the Proper way', again implying that the Board itself would not. Indeed the petitioners concluded that Mrs Bulmer's eviction represented a state of affairs at Lake Tyers that demanded investigation into the Board's administration: 'the Station is a place that want to be seen into by some one who will look into things and they will know'. In this way, Mrs Bulmer's plight became a symbol of Aboriginal grievances against the new government regime, and a cause that might motivate other white authorities to take their grievances seriously. Her treatment was, perhaps, an 'injustice' that would outrage all.

At the point at which this petition arrived at the Board's office, as we have seen, the Board put the decision on Mrs Bulmer's eviction in abeyance while they assessed the situation. However, the hostility to the Board revealed in the second petition, and the Aboriginal effort to wield resistance it represented, could only have hardened the Board's resolve. In many ways the two petitions reflected a general air of unrest amongst Victorian Aboriginal people that had been evident for some years. John Bulmer himself had written sourly of the young 'half educated fellows' who used their 'powers of writing' to 'air their supposed grievances' by writing to the Governor, or interviewing a member of parliament.[27] One can only wonder what he would have made of the Lake Tyers campaign on behalf of his widow. But in the eyes of the Board it could only be a demonstration of Aboriginal subversion at a crucial time of regime change, organised around the figure of one who stood for the missionary control of the past. In 1915 legislation would be passed extending the government's powers over all Aboriginal and mixed-descent people in the state. The intent had long been to make Lake Tyers the centre for a Board policy of forcibly 'concentrating' all remaining Victorian Aborigines onto this one reserve. This was finally formally fixed upon by the Board at a meeting in 1917, by which time James Cameron, along with other parliamentarians 'in whose districts aboriginal stations or depôts existed', had been appointed to the Board.[28] Mrs Bulmer *had* to be expelled. Not because her presence in itself threatened the government (for, indeed, she may well have been allowed to live out her days in peace, had there been no petition), but to demonstrate to the Aboriginal residents the resolution of the state authorities and the futility of any attempts to resist. Had Pepper been able to deliver the second petition in person we can assume the outcome would have been no different.

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In hindsight, the campaign looks remarkably naïve. It not only backfired for Mrs Bulmer – remembering that the Lake Tyers residents and not she had apparently taken the initiative – but in the end was quite clearly unsuccessful in terms of changing the power relations both on the reserve and between Aboriginal people and the Board.

But to interpret this episode, this small lost cause, purely in terms of its outcomes is in a real sense to miss the point. In acting to support and endorse Mrs Bulmer's claim to stay at Lake Tyers, the Aboriginal petitioners seized upon an opportunity to make known their wider concerns about their collective futures at a key moment in their history, intervening at a vulnerable point of rupture between the old (missionary) and the new (secular state) forms of management and indeed colonisation. Regardless of both the motivation and the outcomes, this was at once an assertion of the central and ongoing importance of land and community connections to the residents of Lake Tyers, and an assertion of the rights of the people of the land and community to manage their own affairs – at root, to decide and announce who was to live among them. Revealing a humanity and generosity of spirit that resided at the heart of the Aboriginal community of Lake Tyers, the petitions showed the resilience, also, of a deep sense of Aboriginal authority that had abided through generations of violence, dislocation and missionary control, and that stood in open challenge to the growing power of the state in the opening years of the twentieth century.

Endnotes

[1] Caroline Bulmer to the Secretary, Board for the Protection of Aborigines (hereafter BPA), PROV, VA 515 Board for the Protection of Aborigines, VPRS 1694/P0 Correspondence Files, Unit 6, Bundle 2, 8 September 1913. Unless otherwise indicated, correspondence files referred to in this article are found here.

[2] Petition to BPA, PROV, VPRS 1694/P0, Unit 6, Bundle 2, undated but received 18 August [1913]; 'Petition From Lake Tyers Mission to the Governor of Victoria', *ibid.*, Unit 12, Bundle 4, 9 September 1913. This second petition includes a covering letter by Percy Pepper, who assisted the residents with its preparation and delivery (discussed below).

[3] Secretary, BPA to Caroline Bulmer, 3 September 1913 (copy).

[4] See, for example, the collection of letters in E Nelson, S Smith & P Grimshaw (eds), *Letters from Aboriginal women of Victoria 1867-1926*, History Department, The University of Melbourne, 2002.

[5] P van Toorn, 'Hegemony or hidden transcripts?: Aboriginal writings from Lake Condah 1876-907', in L Dale & M Henderson (eds), *Terra incognita: new essays in Australian studies*, API Network, Perth, 2006, pp. 15-27.

[6] 'Introduction', *John Bulmer's recollections of Victorian Aboriginal life, 1855-1908*, compiled by Alistair Campbell and edited by Ron Vanderwal, Museum Victoria, Melbourne, [1999?], p. xvii.

[7] P Pepper with T De Araugo, *What did happen to the Aborigines of Victoria*, vol. 1, *The Kurnai of Gippsland*, Hyland House, Melbourne, 1985, pp. 222-7.

[8] *ibid.*, p. 229.

[9] H Carey, 'Companions in the wilderness? Missionary wives in colonial Australia, 1788-1900', *Journal of religious history*, vol. 19, no. 2, Dec. 1995, p. 240.

[10] *John Bulmer's recollections*, pp. 35-6.

[11] Pepper & De Araugo, *op. cit.*, p. 227.

[12] *ibid.*, p. 230; Caroline Bulmer to Secretary, BPA, 8 September 1913.

[13] There is correspondence between a Robert Bulmer and the Secretary, BPA, in January and February 1918. Robert Bulmer's letterhead reveals that he was a timber merchant. See also P Pepper, *You are what you make yourself to be: the story of a Victorian Aboriginal family 1842-1980*, Hyland, House, Melbourne, 1980, p. 83.

[14] Howe to Secretary, BPA, VPRS 1694/P0, Unit 12, Bundle 4, 31 August 1914.

[15] Minute dated 22 September 1913.

[16] Pepper, *You are what you make yourself to be*, p. 83.

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[17] Emily Stephen to WA Callaway, Vice-Chairman, BPA, PROV, VPRS 1694/P0, Unit 7, Bundle 3, 28 February 1911, 30 March 1911, undated but registered 27 June [1911]. See also Nelson, Smith and Grimshaw, *Letters from Aboriginal women of Victoria*, pp. 165-6, 169-72.

[18] Howe to Secretary, BPA, PROV, VPRS 1694/P0, Unit 7, Bundle 3, 3 April 1911.

[19] Howe to Callaway, *ibid.*, 9 August 1911.

[20] See Nelson, Smith & Grimshaw, *Letters from Aboriginal women of Victoria*, pp. 172-5; and Pepper & De Araugo, pp. 236-8.

[21] [Callaway] to the Manager, Lake Tyers, VPRS 1694/P0, Unit 7, Bundle 3, 10 April 1911 (copy).

[22] James McLachlan to James Cameron, PROV, VPRS 1694/P0, Unit 12, Bundle 4, 18 September 1913.

[23] HS Dickson to James Cameron, *ibid.*, 15 September 1913.

[24] Minute, BPA, PROV, VPRS 1694/P0, Unit 6, Bundle 2, 2 January 1914. Notes and minutes regarding Mrs Bulmer continued in the following months.

[25] For the Pepper family connections see Pepper, *You are what you make yourself to be*, especially pp. 11, 30-3, 43-5, 51, 52; also Pepper & De Araugo, *op. cit.*, p. 240.

[26] P van Toorn, *Writing never arrives naked: early Aboriginal cultures of writing in Australia*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2006, pp. 195-6, 143-4 (original emphasis). In Chapter 6 of this book, van Toorn writes extensively on the petitions from another Aboriginal Station, Coranderrk (pp. 123-51).

[27] *John Bulmer's recollections*, p. 88.

[28] *49th Report of the Board for the Protection of the Aborigines*, Government Printer, Melbourne, 1922. This report for 1921 was the first report presented by the Board since its last in 1912. For the *Aborigines Act* of 1915 and the introduction of the concentration policy, see Pepper & De Araugo, pp. 241-8.

Landscapes of Abundance and Scarcity on the Northern Plains of Victoria

Robyn Ballinger

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This is a peer reviewed article.

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Abstract

The contemporary landscape of the northern plains of Victoria is the outcome of cultural interaction with an unpredictable physical environment. In this article I argue that settlement visions for the northern plains in the period 1836-1930 were shaped not only by political and economic imperatives but also by the climatic variations of a semi-arid country. This article examines the history of one particular section of land, and contends that settlement visions developed around ideas of scarcity and abundance have had far-reaching consequences for plains' dwellers and for the country itself.

The northern plains of Victoria[1] are a place of both scarcity and abundance. They experience a median annual rainfall of 420 mm. But to speak in terms of medians does not describe the rain that falls to double this figure, or the rain that falls to halve it. The northern plains are not a place of norms or averages, and like other semi-arid regions they have drawn varied responses.[2] Some white settlers described a place transformed by rain into a sea of waving grasses as far as the eye could see; others spoke of the plains without water as parched and unwelcoming. Shaped by individual motivations, societal attitudes, and the seasonal shifts of the country itself, some have reacted to it as a place of promise, others as a place of disappointment.

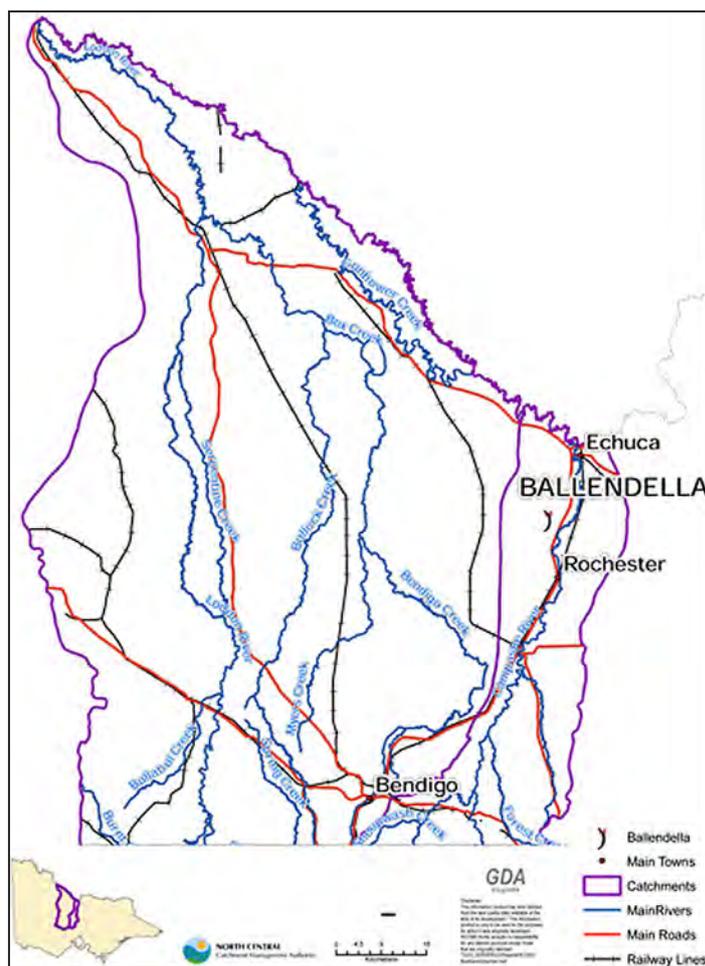


Figure 1 – Study area showing township of Ballendella. Courtesy of North Central Catchment Management Authority.

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Informative studies of how cultural attitudes and appraisals of the physical environment have influenced patterns of settlement in Australia have been undertaken, notably, by historical geographers DW Meinig, RL Heathcote and JM Powell.[3] This article extends the themes of these studies by contending that dominant appraisals of the northern plains of Victoria were constructed around ideas of abundance and scarcity influenced by the country's semi-arid climate. Using documentary records such as those held by Public Record Office Victoria, this article explores cultural interactions with the northern plains through an analysis of settlement visions applied to one particular section of land over the eras of squatting, selection, and closer settlement. By undertaking an historical micro-study of a section of land that lies within the present-day Victorian township of Ballendella, approximately 80 kilometres northwest of Bendigo (see Figure 1), it is possible to trace how the larger dynamic processes of culture and nature continually describe one another to form local landscapes.

The plains country is of itself an abundant place, a finely balanced ecosystem that functions as its own living entity. Its natural features have provided a home for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in turn. Today's Ballendella comprises part of the homeland of the Barababaraba people.[4] Like other Indigenous peoples of the River Murray, the Barababaraba hunted and collected seasonally, farmed land through fire-stick burning, engineered waterways, and altered their social and territorial interaction at times of climatic fluctuation.[5] Over thousands of years, they learnt to work within the limitations of the plains, for it was this country that sustained them both spiritually and physically. Despite this, the explorer Surveyor General Thomas Mitchell viewed the northern plains as an 'empty' space. Mitchell's heavily promoted vision of his journey through the area in the wet year of 1836,[6] published in newspapers in Sydney and Britain and in his book *Three expeditions into the interior of eastern Australia*, described the landscape in terms of its potential for Europeans, for what it could become. In imagining it ready for white settlement, Mitchell negated Aboriginal experience of the plains as homeland. Yet, in the name of the Ballendella township and parish there is a link to New South Wales Aboriginal woman Turandurey and her daughter, Ballendella, who accompanied the expedition.

Squatters brought their herds and flocks to the Port Phillip district from 1834, however it was not until 1841 that they first moved into the northern plains to claim the country for their own.[7] With increased stock numbers and most of the better-watered land of Port Phillip already claimed, fierce competition forced run seekers to move further afield to find fresh pastures. In 1840 there remained only the areas of Gippsland, the Wimmera, the Mallee, and 'the scantily watered plains in the north'.[8] In initial assessments of the country's grazing capacity, the northern plains with their intermittent water supply and patterns of seasonal vegetation growth were judged as wanting. However, following rains that transformed the country in 1841, the first runs on the plains were taken up along the Campaspe, Murray and Loddon Rivers. Based on the capitalist notion of economy, the business of sheep and cattle stations relied on the water and fodder potential of the northern plains to produce the commodities of livestock, meat and wool. Waterways were dammed, Aboriginal soaks enlarged,[9] channels excavated from rivers and swamps, and, as the climate varied, people and stock relocated.

The changing landscape of pastoralism can be traced through the documentary record held for Restdown Plains station taken up on the Campaspe River in 1841 by John Hays for Captain George Benson.[10] In looking for land for a run, David Munro came across Restdown Plains in the drought year of 1842, the same year the station was sold to David Kelsh. Munro was less than impressed with what he saw:

The country is dead level, on either side of the river are large clear open spaces, the surface of which exposes about 3/4ths of sand and a fourth of weeds, not grass, of that sickly blue colour which we see on the poor moorland pastures at home. These open spaces are backed by the eternal sad looking forest. Yet here we found a gentlemanly well educated man in this dismal wilderness submitting himself to a course of life, which if inflicted upon a malefactor would be denounced as cruel.[11]

Affected by the financial crisis of 1842, Kelsh sold the station and his 3500 sheep to Alexander Sim in November 1843.[12] In March 1848, Sim stocked 500 cattle and 12,000 sheep on a run of 106,922 acres that incorporated a head station and nine outstation huts, six of which were located on the Campaspe River.[13] In 1853, new licensee John Pearson Rowe was making the most of the growing demands of the goldfield markets. In January of that year, stock numbers had risen significantly to 1110 cattle, 16,000 sheep and 19 horses.[14] In 1855, after subdividing the run into Restdown Plains East and Restdown Plains West, Rowe continued to bring merino wethers from Queensland for sale in Bendigo, fattening the sheep at Restdown Plains West in conjunction with his other run held at Terrick Terrick on the northern plains. Like other squatters who took over runs on the plains from the mid-1850s to exploit the opportunities of the burgeoning goldfields, Rowe responded to the unpredictability of the climate by using his northern runs in winter, and, when dry seasons occurred, building up stock on his better-watered Five Mile Creek run in Gippsland.

The effects of the business of pastoralism on native flora and fauna, and on the Barababaraba people who depended on these food sources, were soon evident. Squatter Edward Curr, traversing the northern plains from the Campaspe River to Mount Hope in the early 1840s, noted the impact of stock after only two years of grazing:

In places ... around Mount Hope and the Terricks ... the salt bushes occasionally attained the height of twelve feet ... in other localities a dwarf variety of this plant prevailed, and grew so close together as almost to crowd out the grass entirely. With this class of vegetation great changes have occurred, and at Mount Hope ... stocking has almost entirely destroyed it.[15]

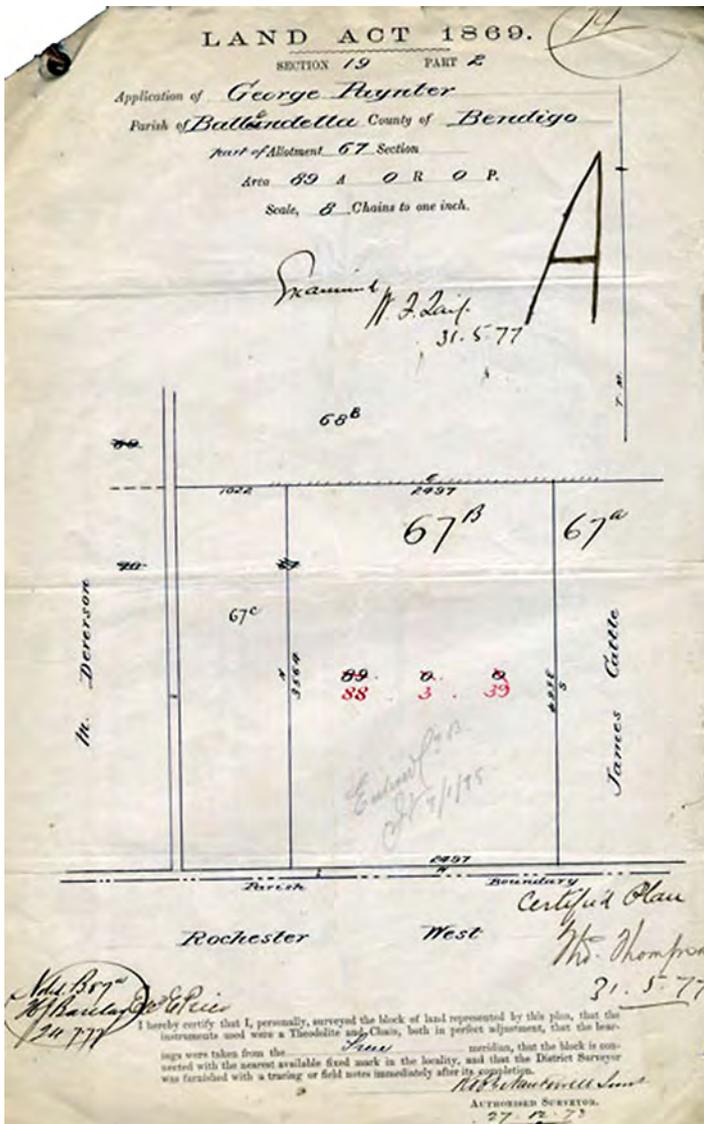
In 1853, squatter Charles Hall recorded the drop in numbers of kangaroos, emus, quail and turkeys in the Loddon and Wimmera districts, which he had explored earlier in 1840-42.[16] In addition to a reduction in food resources, the use and alteration of watercourses impacted dramatically on Aboriginal populations. Squatters established runs along the same watercourses that Aboriginal people depended on. Grazing regimes mirrored traditional Aboriginal movements: in winter, animals were fed and watered in the 'back country' away from rivers, and in summer they were moved to water frontages.[17] Gerard Krefft in 1857, in remarking on the site of an Aboriginal rock well at the Terricks, noted that it was 'not accessible to the herds of sheep and cattle, who went to drink at a muddy pool in the flat, which contained a thick liquid of a greenish colour the greater part of it being comprised, to judge by the smell, of sheep and cattle dung'.[18]



PROV, VPRS 625/P0, Unit 162, Item 9470/19.20, part parish plan of Ballandella showing allotment 66 shaded pink.

Squatter notions regarding use of the plains for extensive winter pastoral runs did not accord with official visions of a more closely settled country. The Land Acts of 1860, 1862 and 1865 aimed instead to settle farmers on the plains, however squatters continued to consolidate and expand their holdings. In preparation for selection under the *Land Act 1865* for instance, the Restdown Plains West run was surveyed into allotments of between 80 and 400 acres. The then owners of the run, Alexander Boyd and Francis Bell, took up the majority of the selections themselves through the illegal means of dumming.[19] With the introduction of the strict residency and cultivation conditions of the *Land Act 1869*, however, a determined push was made by the colonial government to transform places like the northern plains, which by then were controlled largely by only twenty-nine men, into a patchwork of rural holdings.[20]

Heavy rains brought selectors to the plains from the early 1870s under the *Land Act 1869*, which opened up all unalienated land in the colony to selectors with runs of up to 320 acres.[21] Licences (Section 19s) were taken up for three years at an annual rental of 2 shillings per acre. These licences required the selector to develop the land by living on-site for at least two and a half years, and within three years building a house to fulfil residency conditions, fencing the selection, cultivating at least ten per cent of the land, and affecting other advances such as the clearing of vegetation, the construction of water storages, and the erection of outbuildings. If improvements at a rate of £1 per acre were made within this time, the selector could either purchase the land freehold by paying the balance of 14s. per acre, or obtain a seven-year lease (Section 20) paid at an annual rent of 2s. per acre and credited as part payment of the fee simple.



PROV, VPRS 625/P0, Unit 577, Item 46016/19.20, survey for allotment 67 Parish of Ballendella.

Under this Act, unmarried Rochester farmer George Paynter took up land on the former Restdown Plains West run in the newly surveyed parish of Ballendella. Paynter selected two allotments: 230 acres in July 1871 and 89 acres in December 1873. On the first block, after a weatherboard cottage with shingle roof and a slab hut had been built, fences erected, dam and well dug, and 70 acres cultivated to wheat, he applied for a lease in February 1876. On his second allotment, after enclosing the land with post-and-rail sapling and chock-and-log fences, and grubbing and clearing 18 acres, he applied for a lease in April 1877. At the same time, the erratic nature of the country was brought into sharp relief by a series of dry years over the period 1876-81.[22] Paynter, in order to pay debts perhaps

incurred because of the continuing drought, mortgaged the lease on his first allotment in July 1878 for £200, and the lease on his second selection in May 1879 for £100. He was able to pay back these debts and make the required rental payments under the terms of the lease, coming to own his farms freehold in March 1882 and February 1884.[23] Many other selectors however were less fortunate and had to sell their farms or transfer their leases. On the northern plains, the population of the East Loddon Shire fell from 3400 in 1877 to 2000 in 1882, and in the Echuca Shire from 12 000 in 1877 to 8200 in 1882.[24]

Settlers on the semi-arid plains such as Paynter increased their vulnerability to the disaster potential of meteorological drought through the removal of vegetation, as required under the cultivation and improvement conditions of the *Land Act 1869*. As a result of these practices, soil from the northern plains was carried great distances by the wind. Widespread 'red' rain coloured by dust from wind erosion of the soils of inland Victoria was recorded across the colony in April 1884.[25] Moreover, the continuous cropping of the soils of the plains, initially fertile because of centuries of accumulation of silt deposited by rivers, resulted in 'grain sick' land and decreasing yields, especially over the drought years of this period. In the counties of Bendigo, Gladstone, Gunbower and Tatchera, average annual wheat yields fell from 9.2 bushels per acre in 1877-78 to 5.6 bushels per acre in 1882-83.[26] The ideal of settling a yeomanry on small farms was increasingly challenged as the land could not provide the returns that were required to meet the debts of the selectors. Consequently, cultural constructions began to emphasise the inability of the plains country to support more intensive farming systems. When the northern plains failed to make their expected contribution to the economy in the 1880s, instrumental expectations were disappointed. Likewise, when Land Acts failed to settle people as envisaged, territorial approaches reformulated the plains as the 'empty north'. [27] From the 1880s, a concerted effort was then made to reverse the decline by controlling environmental fluctuations through human intervention.

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The Federation vision of Australia as an industrial landscape of production linked to international markets had to look to technology and science if such a vision were to be realised. Severe droughts across the nation in the periods 1895-1903 and 1911-16 highlighted the necessity of incorporating the climate into a program that sought to reduce all aberrant forms to fit national ideals. As land-use patterns based on the ideas of science were applied, environmental vagaries were denied and notions of agricultural settlement limited by rainfall isohyets were deemed outmoded. From the early 1900s the northern plains became the focus of prevailing institutional narratives based on 'land, labour, and capital'. State agendas of closer settlement, and federal programs of soldier settlement and migration settlement accompanied by the delivery of an irrigated water supply promised to bring certainty to an uncertain landscape.

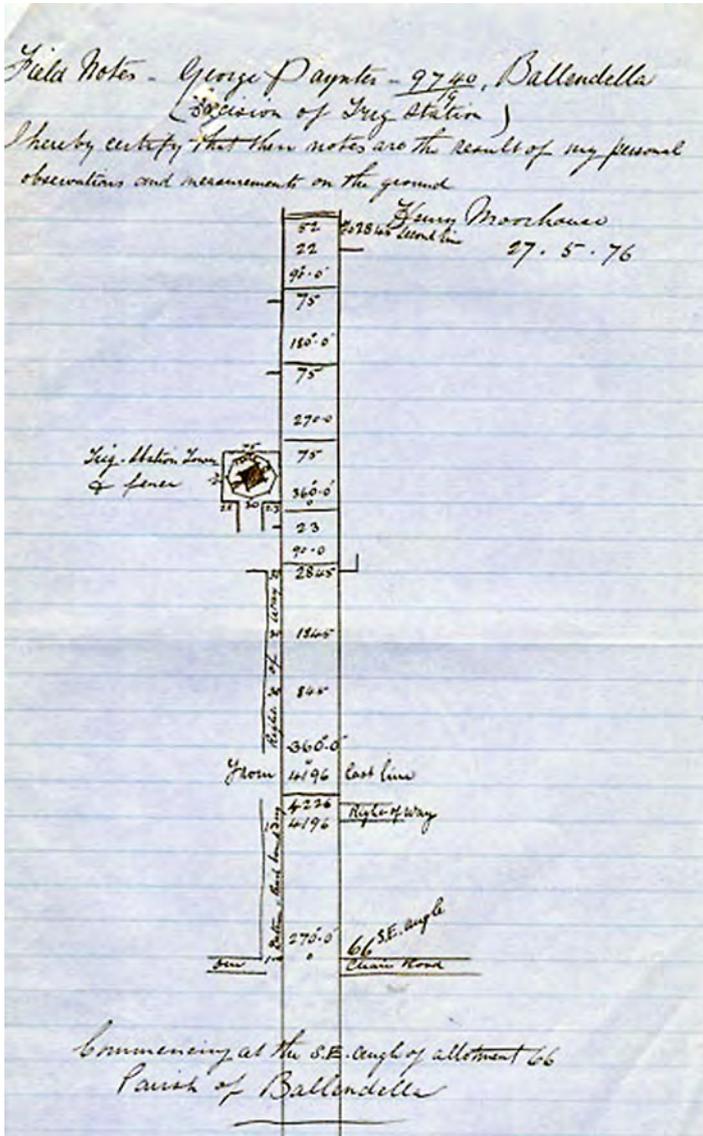
As part of the closer settlement vision, under the *Closer Settlement Act* of 1904 a number of estates on the northern plains were made ready for the reception of irrigator settlers. On the former Restdown Plains West run, selections were purchased, stock removed, channels surveyed, and land subdivided into 184 allotments averaging 50 acres to form the new irrigated Bamawm Estate. J Roy, State Rivers and Water Supply Commission (SRWSC) District Secretary, reported on the remaking of the landscape in March 1910: 'The Estate is entirely clear of all recent occupants and all stock. Owing to the recent heavy rainfall the Estate looks very luxurious, in fact I have not seen it in such a good state at this time of the year for over 20 years.'^[28] The following year, however, brought drought. Channels had not been completed, and Roy was obliged to report that water for domestic use was being carted to families on the Estate.^[29]

In April 1911, Harold Waterman, dairyman of Poowong in South Gippsland, applied for a fifty-acre irrigated block of land, which in 1841 had comprised part of the Restdown Plains run of 106,922 acres, and in 1873 had formed part of Paynter's selection of 89 acres.^[30] Waterman's lease on the Bamawm Estate block required him to make half-yearly payments of £21 over 31½ years in order to pay off his allotment valued at £718 15s. In 1912, Harold, twenty-five years old, his wife Lillian aged twenty-eight, and two small children were living in a two-roomed unlined house with verandah paid for by a £70 advance from the Closer Settlement Board. A water tank, dam, shed, fowl house and fencing were listed as other improvements, and the family had sown three acres of maize, ten acres of wheat and three-quarters of an acre of onions. In the first few years, Harold

supplemented the family's income by working on the channels under construction in the area and Lillian sold produce from the garden to canning factories in Bendigo.

By July 1912, 88 of the 138 lessees on the Bamawm Estate were requesting assistance by way of cash advances or deferred payments. Roy listed the causes of failure to meet payments as the limited carrying capacity of allotments until lucerne was established, small returns from dairy cows because of insufficient fodder due to dry seasons, inexperience in irrigation and cultivation, and expenditure of available capital. Harold was judged a 'first class man' by Roy, however in July 1913, after no payments had been made on £115 due in instalments, the Waterman family was informed that their permit for the area was to be cancelled and that the land would be made available to others. A written plea from Harold to SRWSC chairman Elwood Mead resulted in a reversal of this decision, but the demands from the SRWSC did not stop. By the dry year of 1914, because of a predicted shortage of fodder owing to the drought, the Watermans were hopeful that a return of £120 on six cuttings of their lucerne crop would allow payment of arrears. However, the 'unprecedented drought' of 1914-15 meant that irrigators were not supplied their allocated water, and by 27 January 1915 the Watermans owed £234 in instalments and £151 on a stock mortgage to the Commission. Because of the drought, the government established a scheme in April 1915 which allowed Closer Settlement lessees 'to improve their financial position by removing present pressing financial liabilities'. The Watermans applied for an extension of their lease and suspension of land instalments for three years but were refused as their debt was in excess of the security provided by their improvements.

On 4 March 1916, Harold enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force, serving as a motor transport driver in France until the end of the war. This action at least secured Lillian Waterman and her four children an eight shilling a day payment. Lillian, with the help of her eldest son and neighbours continued to farm the block in Harold's absence. Roy reported in 1916 that he found the place better than when Harold was working it, with the 'whole area now cultivated', however with part of the block under water because of the heavy rains of 1917, local farmers and members of the settlers' association were called upon to help. Friends, the Ballendella Progress Association and the Anzac Society carried out 'praiseworthy work' over three days on the Waterman's leasehold, pruning twenty acres of fruit trees, and ploughing, harrowing and drilling sixteen acres of wheat and barley.



PROV, VPRS 625/P0, Unit 162, Item 9470/19.20, survey field notes for allotment 66, Parish of Ballendella.

In July 1919, Harold returned home from France and moved back into the two-roomed house with his wife and four children. At his request, the block was brought under the *Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act* in 1920, but 1922 was one of the driest years on record across the northern plains. At the end of 1924, the Commission informed the Watermans that the 'utmost leniency' had been shown them, and because no payment had been made since a deposit on the land in 1911, no further delay could be permitted. The family was managing an orchard of twenty-one acres of prunes, apricots and peaches, a lucerne crop of thirteen acres, barley and oat crops of four and eight acres respectively, and milking two cows in July 1924 when Roy visited to report on progress. Later in the

same year, Roy wrote that prospects for the family were improving:

He [Waterman] has a splendid show for the coming season from his orchard and states that he feels sure that he will be able to pay at the very least a lump sum of £100 from the sale of his fruit. ... His prospects never looked so good as at present and although seriously in arrears I am hopeful that from the next fruit season he will rapidly reduce his arrears.

The SRWSC threatened 'drastic action to compel a settlement' twice in 1925. Harold had promised a payment of £50 from the proceeds of the sale of dried fruit but because of a slump in the price of this commodity owing to large quantities arriving at the Melbourne markets from South Australia, and because 1925 was another dry year, the Watermans did not realise the expected returns.

Letters demanding payment of outstanding arrears of £990 remained unanswered throughout 1926, and six memos sent to Roy in the first half of 1927 brought only one response from Lillian who informed the Commission that Harold was in Caulfield Military Hospital recovering from an operation necessitated by war disabilities; she hoped that 'some day we will be able to straighten matters out'. In July 1927, £712 of the Watermans' arrears were written off under the terms of the amended *Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act*. In October of that year the Closer Settlement District Enquiry Board reported that Harold's health had been detrimentally affected by the war, and recommended that no pressure be made for payment for two years and that instalments on arrears be spread over three years. However, even under these conditions no payments were forthcoming, and by October 1930 the Watermans were in arrears by £483. In February 1931 their consolidated debt was £1299, and by June 1933 their debt measured £1543. Harold wrote in November 1930 that 'with the exceedingly low prices for all our products, the best intentions in the world cannot produce more returns until the markets look up'. Roy took a somewhat different view, however, describing the land as good and Harold as sober but noting his propensity to 'mess things up like Barwood'. The *Closer Settlement Act* of 1932 provided for the adjustment of accounts of all settlers, and in 1937 the Watermans' liability was reassessed at £1287. Harold, Lillian and their son managed their forty-two acres of fruit trees as a registered partnership from the late 1930s, and in January 1944 gained a freehold title to the block by paying off the closer settlement liability of £1271 5d in full. Almost thirty-two years after moving onto their fifty-acre block at Ballendella, Harold and Lillian Waterman finally owned their land.

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The story of the Waterman family records the realities of life under the official vision of irrigated closer settlement. Paradoxically, as environmental uncertainties were downplayed, 'hazard risks', shaped by the vagaries of distant markets and climatic variability, were amplified. As Heathcote has argued, official policies encouraged 'the transformation of the variety of the original ecosystems into commercially productive and simpler ecosystems. The results have been an increased ecological *and* economic vulnerability [original emphasis]'.^[31] Farmers who used irrigation came to depend on a regular water supply over the summer growing months. In dry periods, when this supply was reduced or dried up altogether, they were unable to realise the financial return on which their livelihood depended. Moreover, irrigation schemes radically altered the natural hydrology of the plains, left little water in reserve for dry seasons, and raised salinity levels. In seeking to bring certainty to the northern plains through the introduction of new technologies, the country was only made more uncertain, and its reputation as a place of capriciousness was entrenched.

This article, through a close study of one section of land, has highlighted the processes that conditioned the making of settlement visions for the northern plains, and has traced the impact of these visions on the landscape and on the people who lived there. These same settlement visions were applied throughout Victoria, and indeed Australia. The point to be made here, and one which this article has defined, is that the northern plains became a particular focus of larger economic and political agendas because of the country's very nature – a nature that defied human demands for patterns of ordered white settlement expected to contribute to the economic prosperity of the individual, the state, and the nation.

The documentary record testifies to the conflict between human dreams and environmental actualities. The place itself, the physical environment, has been, and continues to be, an active agent in the settlement process. By telling the story of how people have exploited the opportunities and minimised the challenges thrown up by the environmental variability of the plains, it is evident that populations have increased their vulnerability to climatic variations by moving 'further down the rainfall gradient'^[32] into semi-arid regions, and, in doing so, have judged the country as defective. Perceptions of the plains reflect the physical abundance and scarcity brought to the country by a variable rainfall, but just as importantly reflect the potency of mental landscapes that imagine

abundance and scarcity. With growing concerns about human-induced climate change, a new epoch of uncertainty has begun. If the future is to be imagined in any meaningful way, past and present reactions to uncertainty need to be understood. Our role as creators of landscapes needs to be recognised by coming to know the difference between the actualities of the country and the country inside our heads.

Endnotes

[1] The 'northern plains' in this study refers to the bioregion of the Victorian Riverina that lies west of the Campaspe River.

[2] The delineation of the study area as part of a semi-arid climate zone is based on MC Peel, BL Finlayson and TA McMahon, 'Updated world map of the Köppen-Geiger climate classification', *Hydrology and earth system sciences*, vol. 11, 2007, pp. 1633-44. The updated Köppen-Geiger climate map is also available online.

[3] DW Meinig, *On the margins of the good earth: the South Australian wheat frontier, 1869-1884*, Monograph Series of the Association of American Geographers no. 2, Rand McNally, Chicago, 1962 (reprinted by Rigby Limited, Adelaide, 1976); RL Heathcote, *Back of Bourke: a study of land appraisal and settlement in semi-arid Australia*, Melbourne University Press, 1965; JM Powell, *The public lands of Australia Felix: settlement and land appraisal in Victoria 1834-91 with special reference to the Western Plains*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1970.

[4] Based on Aboriginal language boundaries in ID Clark, *Aboriginal languages and clans: an historical atlas of Western and Central Victoria, 1800-1900*, Monash Publications in Geography no. 37, Department of Geography and Environmental Science, Monash University, Melbourne, 1990, p. 388.

[5] Colin Pardoe, for instance, suggests that at the end of the glacial epoch 7000 years ago, Aboriginal people on the River Murray developed a fundamentally different social order: C Pardoe, 'Riverine, biological and cultural evolution in southeastern Australia', *Antiquity*, vol. 69, no. 265, 1995, pp. 696-713.

[6] Rainfall was not officially recorded at weather stations on the northern plains until 1881. Information about rainfall before that time has been gleaned from anecdotal evidence contained in written accounts and from rainfall records kept at Bendigo from 1862.

[7] The term 'squatter' first applied to those pastoralists who took possession of land before legislature was introduced in 1836. It is adopted in this article because it was widely used in the literature of the time.

[8] Sir Stephen Roberts, *History of Australian land settlement*, 2nd edition, Macmillan, South Melbourne, 1968, p. 169.

[9] Soaks were shallow depressions excavated into soft sandy sediments above a slowly permeable clay subsoil. They were used to catch rain, or were sometimes dug to tap into the water table.

[10] JO Randell, *Pastoral settlement in Northern Victoria*, vol. 2, *The Campaspe District*, Chandos Publishing Company, Burwood, Victoria, 1982, p. 549.

[11] D Munro, Letter dated 17 August 1842, ML A6936-2, Manuscript Collection, Mitchell Library, State Library New South Wales.

[12] Randell, *The Campaspe District*, pp. 551-2.

[13] PROV, VA 538 Department of Crown Lands and Survey, VPRS 5920/P0 Pastoral Run Papers, sheet 688, pastoral run no. 1083 (microfiche copy of VPRS 5359).

[14] *ibid.*

[15] E Curr, *Recollections of squatting in Victoria*, 2nd edition, Melbourne University Press, 1965, p. 86.

[16] Letter from Charles Browning Hall, 6 September 1853, in *Letters from Victorian pioneers*, edited by CE Sayers, Currey O'Neil, South Yarra, Victoria, p. 268 (originally edited by TF Bride for the Trustees of the Public Library, Museums, and National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 1898).

[17] 'Boort revisited – Mr Godfrey, the pioneer, interviewed', *Boort Standard*, 25 September 1892.

[18] Quoted in Johann Louis Krefft, 'Narrative of the exploring expedition led by W. Blandowski to the Lower Murray and Darling Rivers 1856-7', Gerard Krefft Manuscript and Pictorial Collection c. 1856-1895, ML A268 CY 754, Manuscripts Collection, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales.

[19] 'Dummies' were nominal selectors acting on behalf of someone else to apply for land or to fulfil residency conditions.

[20] Based on run information in R Spreadborough & H Anderson (comps), *Victorian squatters*, Red Rooster Press, Ascot Vale, Victoria, 1983.

[21] Bendigo, which has a median annual rainfall of 550.7 mm, received 974.6 mm in 1870, and 715.3 mm in 1871.

[22] Below-average rainfall was recorded in Bendigo in the years 1876, 1877, 1878 and 1879. At the nearest rainfall station at Echuca with a median annual rainfall of 423.2 mm, 376.7 mm in 1881 and 306.8 mm in 1884 were recorded.

[23] PROV, VA 538 Department of Crown Lands and Survey, VPRS 625/P0 Land Selection Files, sections 19 and 20, 1869, Unit 162, 9470/19.20 and Unit 577, 46016/19.20.

[24] *Victorian Year Book*, Government Printer, Melbourne, for the years 1877-78 and 1882-83.

[25] HA Hunt, *Results of rainfall observations made in Victoria 1840-1910 including all available rainfall totals from 1,114 stations; together with maps and diagrams*, Commonwealth Bureau of Meteorology, Melbourne, 1911?, p. xxxvi.

[26] *Victorian Year Book*, 1877-78 and 1882-83.

[27] Instrumental orientations regard the environment merely as resources awaiting current or future development for material ends, and territorial orientations frame the environment as property to be owned or at least controlled. See E Cohen in RL Heathcote, 'Manifest destiny, mirage and Mabo: contemporary images of the rangelands', *Rangeland journal*, vol. 16, no. 2, 1994, pp. 156-7.

[28] PROV, VA 2266 Closer Settlement Board (previously known as Lands Purchase and Management Board 1905-1918), VPRS 5714/P0 Closer (and Soldier) Settlement Files, Unit 1130, 'Bamawm Estate'.

[29] *ibid.*

[30] Information on the Waterman family is drawn from PROV, VPRS 5714/P0, Unit 1559, Item 4489/12 'Ballendella'; National Archives of Australia, Australian Imperial Force, Base Records Office, 'Waterman, Harold: Service Number-11943' and First Australian Imperial Force Personnel Dossiers, 1914-1920, B2455/1; *The Age*, 26 June 1918.

[31] RL Heathcote, 'Summary and conclusions: the role of perception in the desertification process', in *Perception of desertification*, ed. RL Heathcote, United Nations University Press, Tokyo, 1980.

[32] RL Heathcote, 'Drought mitigation in Australia: reducing the losses but not removing the hazard', *Great Plains quarterly*, vol. 6, 1986, p. 227.

From Mental Hygiene to Community Mental Health

Psychiatrists and Victorian Public Administration from the 1940s to 1990s

Belinda Robson

'From Mental Hygiene to Community Mental Health: Psychiatrists and Victorian Public Administration from the 1940s to 1990s', *Provenance: The Journal of Public Record Office Victoria*, issue no. 7, 2008. ISSN 1832-2522. Copyright © Belinda Robson.

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Abstract

This paper offers an overview of public policy in Victoria as it changed its approach to the treatment and prevention of mental illness from the late 1940s to the 1990s. While this has come to be understood as a move away from institutional to community care, I argue that there is still a great deal to understand about how government policy managed this process and how the concepts beneath community mental health have been applied. In this paper I look at the role of psychiatry and suggest that during this period there were a range of ways psychiatrists came to influence public policy. I pay particular attention to the perspectives of the first chairman of the Mental Hygiene Authority, the psychiatrist Eric Cunningham Dax (1908-2008). I hope to offer insights into the way debates and perspectives about mental health evolved in Victoria by looking at government archives from the period and contextualising them within the internal debates within psychiatry.

There are three factors that are suggested as defining features in this policy environment. The first was the move in the locus of treatment from a hospital setting to a community setting, fuelled by improved medication and the high costs of maintaining old and large separate institutions. The second was the changing role of psychiatrists, in response to their increased role in the community. The third was the administrative amalgamation of health and mental health from the 1970s which enabled a generic model of health promotion to become a public policy priority.

The paper draws on the available public records to describe the story of how government modified its approaches over time. Records which reflect these policy debates have been accessed through Public Record Office Victoria, the Department of Human Services, and the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists. It concludes with a recommendation that further research be conducted in this area across State and Commonwealth governments to identify how government achieved a shift in mental health care into the community and what this meant for services, staff and patients.

Introduction: Government, Psychiatry and Community Mental Health

This paper looks at some of the issues debated by government and psychiatry as they formulated and implemented mental health policy in Victoria during the past fifty years. It tells the story by picking up various themes along the way: the Mental Hygiene Authority and its role in mental health education; social psychiatry and anti-psychiatry; the administrative amalgamation of mental health into the Health Commission; and the entry of psychiatric terms into broader public discourses about mental illness and its place in society. It is based on available files from Public Record Office Victoria (PROV) as well as the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, Annual Reports and the Department of Human Services. While a significant proportion of the Victorian State Government archives held by PROV which relate to policy development in psychiatric services over the last fifty years are closed to the public under the privacy provisions of Section 9 of the *Public Records Act 1973*, it is still possible to produce a picture of some of the public policy debates around mental health during this period.

The General Correspondence Files (Mental Health), which currently cannot be viewed without special permission, appear to contain many of the internal files on community mental health centres, administration and staffing. A subject card index is available, and this gives an idea of the areas of policy under consideration by government. The closure of all records which relate to service development is because records may reveal personal details of patients and their families. There are therefore voices in this story which for the current time remain unheard, especially those of patients, carers and staff in the services. This article is intended to further knowledge about how government and psychiatry related to each other – just one layer in what has to be a very complex picture of social and cultural change.

The philosophical debates which characterised policy around mental health and mental illness from the 1950s onwards resulted in a split between two policy objectives. The first objective was to design services for the treatment of mental illness in individuals that met the needs of a community-based rather than an institution-based service system. The second objective was to make the community itself a site where psychiatric concepts were readily understood and integrated into the social fabric of everyday life.

For the new service design to be successful, families and other immediate networks had to be able to identify symptoms of mental illness, evaluate their severity, feel prepared to seek assistance and, if necessary, seek admission of patients to hospital as well as readily

receive them again after discharge. This required expertise which I will describe as ‘mental health literacy’. The direction of policy attention moved away from the focus on institutions as being separate and largely disconnected from people’s day-to-day lives, and increasingly toward a concept of mental health which attempted to make psychiatric concepts more easily understood by the general community.

Three Paradigms: Treatment, Prevention and Mental Health Promotion

Within the policy setting, three concepts can be inferred from the term ‘mental health’ as it was used by psychiatrists and government officials: mental illness treatment, mental illness prevention, and mental health promotion. These concepts were not mutually exclusive and often overlapped in practice, but for the purpose of this paper they will be treated as separate areas within the historical evolution of policy and practice. The first concept (treatment) refers to the ways people with a diagnosed condition received ongoing clinical care, the second (prevention) has a dual focus on identifying groups at risk of developing mental illness as well as on the factors which contribute to mental illness, and the third (mental health promotion) looks beyond an absence of mental illness and toward social and emotional well-being as its goal. All of these concepts involve a philosophical position about the relationships between the individual, their mental illness, and the role of the broader social and cultural context in creating, managing and preventing illness. How should a mental health system incorporate the various perspectives? What role should government play in mental health prevention and promotion?



Mont Park Hospital, undated, 20.3 x 25.4 cm. Reproduced with the permission of Iliya Bircanin.

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In the 1950s and 1960s, the Victorian Mental Hygiene Authority (later the Mental Health Authority), led by the English psychiatrist Eric Cunningham Dax, combined the role of treatment with an active program to build a community with better mental health literacy. It sought to instil a sense of community responsibility for the treatment, rehabilitation and prevention of mental illness. This period saw government begin to take the lead in developing specialised mental health initiatives, closely aided by psychiatrists. From the 1970s, there was a move to integrate the administration of Victoria's mental health services with other health services, a trend which became more pronounced during the 1980s and 1990s. This move saw psychiatry redefine its parameters in relation to new professional groups. There was a redesign of treatment services away from isolated institutions where patients stayed for many years, and toward day hospitals, community rehabilitation services, and employment and housing support designed to prevent the need for hospital care.

The distinction between treatment and prevention has become recognised within the mental health industry as creating two tangible professions which, while overlapping, need to be treated as separate streams. [2] Some have argued that with limited and inadequate resources for programs to treat and support people with mental illness, there has been a steady decline in the image of public psychiatry.[3] The impact of a split between mental health promotion and mental illness treatment on the lives of people with mental illness is not clear, but with limited resources in the health budget it is arguable that the treatment and care of people with mental illness has had to compete with mental health promotion for attention and resources. But how did this happen and why? How did the policy debates shape community treatment? In order to understand this process, it is necessary to start with the late 1940s when Victoria's mental health administration underwent a significant overhaul.

The Mental Hygiene Authority and the Creation of Mental Health Literacy

In the late 1940s and early 1950s there were high hopes that mental illness could be reduced through public educational activities. There were also wider social movements to create a society in which mental illness might actually not occur. The World Federation for Mental Health (WFMH) was formed in 1948 by the World Health Organisation and heralded a new era of post-war optimism that society could be re-built to prevent war. The goals of the WFMH included world peace, and its founding document 'Mental Health and World

Citizenship' claimed that 'the ultimate goal of mental health is to help [people] live with their fellows in one world'.[4] According to the WFMH, 'mental health' could be achieved through global harmony.

While lofty ideals were being articulated on the world stage, psychiatry in Victoria was establishing itself as a profession that could lead policy on mental illness treatment and prevention. During early attempts to professionalise psychiatry, the Australian Association of Psychiatrists (AAP), the precursor of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP), began to consider questions of mental health literacy. In 1948 it formed a sub-committee to 'investigate the possible avenues of propaganda in education in the matter of mental hygiene'.[5]

The AAP also expressed a tendency to ascribe greater levels of mental illness to migrants, reflecting notions of eugenics which characterised the period.[6] The post-war era was one in which homogeneity and social assimilation characterised policy around race, ethnicity and other difference.[7] Indeed, the growing desire to return psychiatric patients to their families and community also reflected this interest in reducing the differences between people with mental illness and those without, by assimilating groups which had previously been separated back into society.

Psychiatrists sought to define themselves as the experts in this process. In 1948 the AAP minutes also recorded that 'the question of specialization and protection of the term "psychiatrist" was discussed and the Council resolved that steps should be taken to ensure if possible that only medical men be permitted to use the term "psychiatrist": These twin concerns about community education and the professional specialisation of psychiatry characterised the development of mental health services in Victoria over the next fifty years.

The Mental Hygiene Authority (MHA) was established by statute in 1950 as the government body with responsibility for managing the psychiatric hospitals. This body was to replace the Mental Hygiene Department, and it changed its name to the Mental Health Authority in 1959. Despite codifying its administrative responsibility for managing the public psychiatric system, the *Mental Hygiene Authority Act 1950* (Vic) also specified that the functions of the MHA included 'provision for the treatment and measures for the prevention of mental defect disorder and disease' (Section 10a). Hence prevention was included within its purview, giving legitimacy to its attempts to influence public policy around the social determinants of mental illness.



Mont Park Mental Hospital Plan, 1959, acrylic on masonite, 237 x 121.5 cm. Reproduced courtesy of the Cunningham Dax Collection.

The psychiatrist Eric Cunningham Dax was brought out by the Victorian Government from England to chair the MHA after a series of inquiries and press-led campaigns about the impoverished state of Victoria's psychiatric hospitals. Alexander Kennedy of Durham University had conducted an inquiry in 1949 which found that the existing administrative arrangements were no longer

effective and that a Mental Hygiene Authority was required that would have six to eight members from diverse professions. When the government decided to have a three-member authority instead, Kennedy wrote to the Minister for Health, CP Gartside, to express his dissatisfaction with this structure and express his view that the chairman should be a lay citizen with 'energy and experience' rather than a psychiatrist.[8] Nevertheless, the appointment of Dax as chairman of a three-person authority went ahead. Dax was selected from a total of seventeen applicants, eight from the United Kingdom and nine from Australia. The selection panel was constituted of RD Wright, Dean of Medicine at Melbourne University, JG Hayden from the British Medical Association, and John F Williams, representing the AAP.[9]

There was a clear government preference for a psychiatrist to lead the MHA, indicating its trust in the profession to lead the reform of mental health services. Moreover, the MHA would report directly to the Minister for Health, thus bypassing the bureaucratic tangles which Kennedy had identified as interfering with the autonomy of the former Mental Hygiene Department.

Dax himself was quite suited to working in this environment and immediately began to speak freely to the press, something that his predecessor, John Catarinich, had been constrained in doing in his role as a public servant. When he arrived at the airport, Dax declared to the press: 'My first objective is to foster a new attitude to mental illness'.[10] The next year he was appealing to the community: 'The more work there is to be done the better I like it. But please don't think I'm going to do it myself. It will be done by the staff of your mental hospitals, by social workers and by the public. Unless I can get their help, I'll be a failure'.[11]

Dax was clearly adept at using the concept of mental health as a means of mobilising reforms that would improve social conditions. In July 1952 he wrote to the Minister of Health, WO Fulton, expressing the view that 'the attention of the Mental Hygiene Authority [should] be directed to the emergency housing problem with a request that the Authority approach the appropriate ministers to ... investigate in detail those aspects of emergency housing camps which bear on the Mental Health of the community'.[12] Housing was not a traditional focus for psychiatry, but here Dax made a clear connection between social conditions and mental health. This foreshadowed the growing interest within government in the links between the environment and mental well-being.

While the mental health of the community was of increasing interest to government, the problem remained that individuals with mental illness required care. The rates of patients entering and leaving hospital were an important barometer of how well the community understood mental illness and to what extent sufferers had sought treatment or were able to be supported outside of hospital. Discharge and admission figures were continually commented upon in the Annual Reports of the Mental Hygiene Authority. In 1955, for example, Dax wrote that the discharge rate had risen from 55 per cent to 71 per cent and that the number of 'voluntary boarders' (those who were admitted with the consent of the patient and therefore not needing to be certified by a doctor) had trebled in three years and was running at 40 per cent of all admissions.[13]

In order to improve these figures further, Dax set out to develop prevention programs that targeted individuals at risk of developing an illness. In 1952 he wrote to Fulton requesting funding for a Mental Hygiene Information Bureau 'for emotional, domestic and psychiatric problems'.[14] The Bureau, he wrote, would be staffed by two social workers and a typist and would 'ease psychiatric problems of the community'. This service was to provide information to individuals at risk of developing a mental illness. While this particular project was not funded, a similar service was set up as a 'Personal Emergency Service' in April 1960, which was staffed by volunteers.[15] The year 1960 also saw the MHA propose a training course in public relations for sections of the staff.[16] A Mental Health Education Officer, Rachele Banchevska, led many of these activities, and a Mental Health Week became a focus for public education, with exhibitions such as 'Mental Health – the People's Wealth' being held in 1958.[17]

New legislation made the role of government even more clear with regard to both treatment and the building of mental health literacy. The *Mental Health Act 1959* (Vic) led to a separation of the mentally ill from the 'intellectually defective', provided for 'easier admission and discharge', and gave the Authority more power to make arrangements with the Minister for the provision of further community and preventative services.[18] In addition there was to be a greater permeability of the institutions. Admission and discharge would be more streamlined, meaning that the community had to become more literate in mental health in order to recognise when someone should be admitted as well as to be able to receive patients who had been discharged.

Voluntary organisations were critical to this process, both as community educators and in their role providing practical support to patients. The Mental Hospital Auxiliaries, the Melbourne Rotary Club, Victoria's Aid to the Mentally Ill, the Red Cross and the Country Womens' Association all played an active role.[19] But while Dax encouraged the public to become more involved with mental health, he also advocated that the psychiatrist should be closely involved in all of the community efforts. Volunteers and social workers had a role to play in mental health promotion, he noted in his 1961 book *Asylum to Community*, but 'the psychiatrist should take an active part in community care, the promotion of mental health and the prevention of mental illness' (p. 30). Dax was a strong voice for his profession and sought to increase the status of psychiatrists within the public sector.

In some ways, the work of the MHA during the 1950s and 1960s benefited from the boom economy of the period, following the climate of post-war reconstruction, expanded social welfare, and expanded notions of social citizenship. Between 1939 and 1956 public employment rose from 67,000 to 154,000. [20] The total combined Commonwealth and State expenditure in health and community services grew from £160,450 in the period 1949-50 to £675,867 in the period 1961-62.[21]

This was also a period that saw increased optimism about the new treatments which enabled patients to leave hospital and use the new outpatient clinics. The project known as 'deinstitutionalisation' saw the number of patients in Victorian psychiatric hospitals decline by 33 per cent between 1963 and 1973.[22] 'Largactil' (chlorpromazine) and lithium were hailed by the psychiatrist JFJ Cade (himself a leading figure in the discovery of lithium) as allowing a 'multitude of schizophrenics [to be] maintained in the community, at home and working, whereas once they would have been foredoomed to spend the rest of their days as chronic mental hospital patients'.[23] On a similar note, Cade applauded the tri-cyclic anti-depressants and benzodiazepines as contributing to an environment where 'equanimity [is] brought on by prescription'.[24]

But while psychiatry as an emerging profession was enjoying an increase in status as a result of these modern treatments, there was disquiet within its ranks about other competing professions in the community. For example, in 1959 the AAP discussed the government's support for Marriage Guidance Councils and clearly felt that it would be better if the government subsidised qualified psychiatric services to perform this role.[25] Psychiatry was keen to work beyond the traditional clinical focus and faced competition from agencies which were supported by the government to work with the community on broader social issues. This created an environment where psychiatry had to clarify its role and defend its expertise.

Social Psychiatry and Anti-Psychiatry

Beginning in the 1960s, there was interest amongst some psychiatrists in conducting collaborative research with a range of professionals including sociologists, psychologists and social workers as well as psychiatrists. As the historian George Rosen commented in 1968, reflecting on whether psychiatrists had a role in public mental health: 'the problem in mental hygiene is basically one of aetiology'. Therefore, psychiatrists saw themselves as having expertise to offer in determining what caused mental illness. Nevertheless, Rosen also observed that 'many of the weaknesses in the mental hygiene movement reflect the deficiencies that psychiatrists have brought to it'. [26] It was a time for reflection and the re-orientation of psychiatry if the profession were to build a place for itself in the public dialogue about the cause-and-effect relationships between the environment and mental illness.

The late 1960s saw the partnership between biological and psychological and social approaches strengthen. [27] This was difficult when psychiatry itself was divided about the respective roles of biology and environment in causing mental illness. As David Hamburg noted in 1970, 'It is no longer worth while to ask, Is schizophrenia genetic or environmental? The basic questions center on the specific nature of the gene-environment'. [28] To add weight to the argument about the relationship between illness and environment, Hamburg cited research 'a decade ago' which surveyed people with mental illness to look at whether mental illness was related to class, and found that schizophrenia was more prevalent in lower classes. It also found that patients from the upper

classes were more frequently given psychotherapy and those from the lower classes were given ECT. Such a critique of the scientific objectivity of psychiatry fed into a climate of questioning how environment and illness interacted.

Psychiatry as a profession also turned to broader epidemiological questions through social research on the emergence of physical health issues. For example, the MHA published a study of Heyfield, a rural town in Gippsland, which covered both mental illness and certain physical conditions.[29] In Victoria, the Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists also turned to social questions, with a 'Political Issues Committee' formed to develop positions on such controversial areas as abortion, homosexuality and capital punishment. Dax was encouraged to be the convenor 'because he has shown considerable interest in the matter on both the social issues and the political issues side'. [30] Psychiatry was keen to expand its mandate and influence a range of broader social concerns.

There was, however, a countering phenomenon which threatened to undermine the validity of psychiatry. The anti-psychiatry movement played an important role in questioning the ability of psychiatrists to offer disinterested advice and some groups went so far as to claim that psychiatrists violated civil liberties.[31] Alongside this movement, there was an ascendancy of other groups who also claimed to represent a mental health industry, albeit one which saw itself as separate to, if not in opposition to, traditional psychiatry. These groups included social or welfare workers in community-managed organisations who worked directly with people diagnosed with psychiatric disorders, and who felt increasingly that people with mental illnesses should be involved in policy decisions. For example, Richmond Fellowship and the Schizophrenia Fellowship both became active in Victoria in 1977.[32] While the government files of groups such as the Victorian Association of Psychiatric Patients (VAPP), Psychiatric Complaints Council and the Campaign Against Psychiatric Injustice and Coercion (CAPIC) are closed to the public, it is clear that groups existed that began to speak from a critical perspective about psychiatry and treatment.[33]

Negotiating Boundaries: The Health Commission and Community Mental Health

In 1969, Cunningham Dax left Victoria for Tasmania and was succeeded by another psychiatrist, Alan Stoller. In 1975 the Health Commission was formed, integrating mental health under the broad umbrella of health.[34] The report which recommended the amalgamation of health services observed that mental health administration and its services had become too isolated. This foreshadowed the arrival of a multi-issue approach to health promotion which would attempt to incorporate mental health while also maintaining a separate policy area on community mental health services. This in turn saw psychiatrists developing specialisations in community treatment.

The Victorian Mental Hygiene Council (VMHC), an influential body in non-government mental health advocacy, took mental health to have 'sociological, psychological, anthropological, spiritual, educational, biological and medical aspects' in a letter it wrote to the Minister for Health in 1975.[35] Its wide definition meant that the tasks which were seen to be potentially related to 'mental health' could go far beyond the traditional medical treatment of psychiatric illness. In 1975 the VMHC's members included 'community leaders, teachers, clergymen, employers, housewives, retired people, office workers, doctors, nurses, psychologists, psychiatrists, and representatives of many agencies including social workers'. The group ran an Annual Prize known as the 'Victorian Council for Mental Hygiene Cunningham Dax Prize' which was 'awarded for an essay on Mental Health in its broadest sense'. In 1973 the prize went to an essay on 'The Survival of the Nuclear Family'. Alan Stoller, Chairman of the MHA, was asked by the Minister what he thought of the organisation and he wrote in a note that it should be supported.[36]

The Commonwealth Mental Health and Related Service Assistance Program in 1973 provided for eight new community mental health services in Victoria. These services posed challenges in determining how much support was required and how roles should be defined. For example, communities which abutted psychiatric hospitals feared that early release of patients may make them unsafe. A letter written in 1978 from Steve Crabb, MLA for Knox and signed by many local residents, complained about the early release of one patient who had been guilty of indecent assault, and stated that residents were frightened to go outdoors.

During this period, community mental health required increasingly careful negotiation between government and community about what was deemed to be acceptable practice in terms of managing people with mental illness who were discharged from hospitals.[37]

The Health Department/Social Welfare Department Standing Committee provided one forum for this negotiation. In 1978 there were debates about how to manage people with mental illness who required services from the Social Welfare Department, with the committee deciding that it was not necessary to get the approval of the Head Office of the Mental Health Department to assess state wards. Its minutes noted that even though small reception centres were being developed in regional areas it was difficult to find psychiatrists. There were also practical issues to resolve about patient records. The committee decided that all medical records, including psychiatric problems and treatment, should be included in the one folder. It was noted, however, that 'some officers of the Mental Hygiene Branch of the Health Department, insist that the psychiatric records are the responsibility of their Branch'.[38]

While the administrative borders were being negotiated, the profession of psychiatry was also continually questioning its role in the public policy debates. In 1983 there was a forum on ethics in psychiatric practice at which Dax spoke on the topic 'Are we treating the wrong patients?'. Dax considered that the scope of psychiatry had to include all the social issues which were attended to under the 1977 Inquiry into Human Relationships. He observed that 'the public mental health services may in the future have the major task of organising the care of the community's chronic psychosocial needs. I therefore imagine the future mental health services to become "Departments of Social and Preventative Psychiatry"'. He also cautioned that there would be 'demarcation disputes if there [were] perceived to be a threat to invasion of the social field'[39] and pointed out that if psychiatry were to assume its responsibility in this field, there would be opposition to the 'medical model' and labelling. This caution was well-founded as voluntary groups became more organised and expressed strong views about their roles as advocates for people with mental illness.[40]

1980s Health Promotion and Mental Health Literacy

Mental health administration had become increasingly integrated within the bureaucratic structure of the Health Commission, consistent with the trend towards linking policy around mental health and generic health. This also applied to the area of health promotion. In 1980, a meeting of all the commissioners and divisional directors of Health made recommendations about how a sum of \$50,000 should be allocated to health promotion. The Mental Health Division was included in this process. The aim of health promotion was to 'raise people's awareness that they can do things to improve their health and to reduce health costs'. A second aim was to 'promote the corporate identity of the Health Commission of Victoria' and establish favourable attitudes toward the commission. There were plans for a logo, slogan, jingle, posters and media coverage.[41] Health promotion was to be encouraged, and mental health was seen as part of the definition of health.

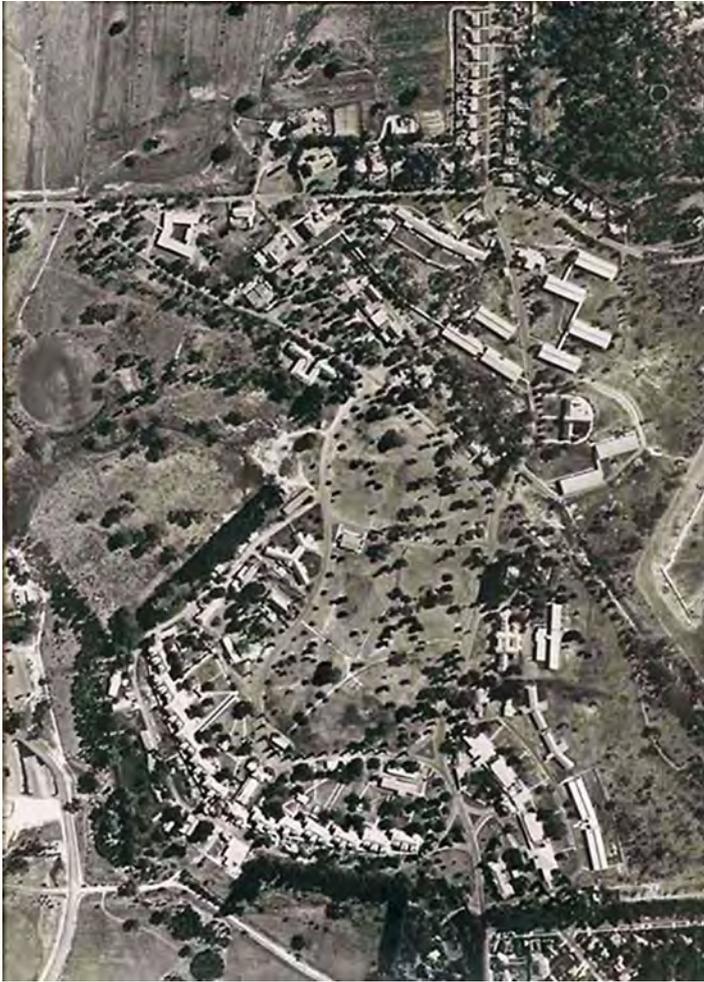
The concept of health promotion at this time was not unanimously endorsed within the bureaucracy, however. Patricia Mundy, from the Health Promotion Unit, wrote a memo to J Bennie, Convenor of the Health Promotion Committee, on the subject 'What is meant by health promotion?'. She expressed concern that the commissioners and Health Promotion Committee did not understand health promotion the same way. She wrote that 'the definition of Health Promotion implies a positive state of health, valuable in its own right', which could be achieved by providing people with self-help information, helping people acquire the skills to use this information, and outlining the services available.[42] The Director, Building and Services Division had another view, stating that as far as they were concerned, people should be provided with 'care and attention when something goes wrong rather than being helped to live a healthier life'.[43] Herein lay a dilemma for the government in deciding how to invest in health promotion. To what extent should health services, including mental health services, devote resources to people who are not actually ill?

In the area of mental health, as we saw from the early 1950s, there was an interest in improving mental health literacy. This had continued throughout the 1960s and 1970s. The Mental Health Division of the Health Commission had continued to have its own mental health education staff, with Rachele Banchevska still leading government work in this area. In a remarkable similarity to the model which Dax had requested thirty years earlier, there were two health education workers (one of whom was Banchevska)

and a stenographer/typist. In 1980, it was noted by JL Evans in his report for the Health Promotion Committee on health promotion that the mental health education role could be spread into a wider field, while recognising Banchevska's role and status as a professional with twenty years' experience. An integrated health promotion unit appeared to be the preferred model, with mental health operating within a larger administrative health bureaucracy.[44]

This approach was consistent with the move to treat people in the community and to improve the community's mental health literacy. By 1986, with the passing of the new *Mental Health Act 1986* (Vic) it was clear that the closure of the large psychiatric institutions was government policy. The money required to sustain these buildings and staff was greater than for community-based day services. The treatment preference was for 'the least restrictive environment' and the civil liberties of patients was to be more clearly enshrined in legislation. The report which recommended the closure of Willsmere Hospital, the former Kew Asylum, stipulated that budget requirements favoured this approach, alongside the social benefits of community-based services.[45] In the ten years from 1975 to 1985, 1600 beds were closed in Victoria and by 1985 there were 15 Community Mental Health Clinics and 17 Outpatient Clinics at hospitals. [46]

As mental health literacy was essential in this environment where people were to be treated outside of hospitals, psychiatrists saw an opportunity to apply for funds to run their own mental health education activities. In 1986 the Mental Health Foundation of Australia and the National Association of Mental Health sought funding from the Federal Minister for Health, Neal Blewett, to develop a community awareness program that discussed problems of mental health. In the same year, the Australian Government released a report on 'The Better Health Commission', which included just two paragraphs on mental disorders as one part of a much wider discussion of a health promotion program.[47]



Aerial view of Mont Park and Plenty Hospitals, c. 1972, 144 x 105 cm (framed). Reproduced courtesy of the Cunningham Dax Collection.

Whilst the health promotion model was being developed and trialled, psychiatrists also looked at their own profession and found there was still a lack of unity in its approach. For example, the psychiatrist Graham Burrows, Chairman of the Mental Health Foundation of Australia, told the national conference of the Australian National Association for Mental Health in 1989, 'We have to stop the silly fight, between psychology, sociology, psychiatry, medicine and physical health. The debate about whether it is psychological or biological must stop'.^[48]

The late 1980s saw the further development of community organisations taking a leading role in defining how people with mental illness should be treated. Voluntary groups were given an even stronger role in service planning with the establishment of a peak body for psychiatric disability support services known as VICSERV, first funded in 1987. Its members were non-government agencies such as the North

Eastern Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NEAMI) and the Outer East Council for Development of Mental Health Services, and offered alternative models of care. In the Melbourne suburb of Essendon, for example, there was an organised response from within the community to the establishment of a new community mental health service in 1989. A discussion paper on the topic reported that 'new structures are developing and roles and responsibilities defined. There is still opportunity for new players to be involved and have an impact'. The paper warned however that bureaucratic constraints made input difficult: 'The cumbersome nature of the operations of psychiatric services which place emphasis on the differences between professions and client confidentiality ... can preclude co-ordination.' Service providers were interested in the question 'Where does decision-making power lie?'.^[49]

By 1992, the state, territory and commonwealth governments had decided that a more co-ordinated approach to mental health issues was required. All governments agreed on a National Mental Health Policy which encouraged the states and territories to adopt a consistent approach to the treatment of mental illness, including the closure of stand-alone psychiatric hospitals. It also codified responsibilities for mental illness prevention and mental health promotion and applied the broad thinking about health promotion to the mental health sphere.

In 1993 the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission released its *Report of the National Inquiry into Human Rights of the Mentally Ill*. This report focused on the experiences of people with mental illness and reflected a widespread recognition that the treatment, rehabilitation and social participation of people with mental illness since the advent of deinstitutionalisation had been below the standards of a caring society.

For the mental health industry, it could be argued that the last fifty years have seen an increased specialisation of professionals and a competition for resources and talented staff between the streams. The treating of people with mental illness in the public sector may have suffered a loss of status and, according to some, is now perceived to be the 'second best' stream within the profession.^[50] While policy discussions over the last fifty years or so have revolved around the intention of reducing mental ill-health and suffering, it is debatable whether this goal has been reached, with research in 2001 finding that fewer than 40 per cent of people with mental disorders had received any care in a twelve-month period compared with almost 80 per cent for other common physical health problems.^[51]

Mental Health, Psychiatric Language and Government Policy

Differing concepts of mental health and mental illness have translated into robust debates about professional and policy roles and responsibilities. Government has been prepared to take leadership from psychiatry, while psychiatry has also had to adapt to the changing cultural landscape. The relationship between government and psychiatry has been even more complex because psychiatry itself has often been under the 'conflicting influences of ideologies which are difficult to reconcile with each other and often contradictory'.^[52] It has been argued that one of the reasons that psychiatry has struggled to find its role in the social debates about mental health is because as a profession it has lacked clarity about cause and treatment, especially the weightings it gives to biological or genetic, versus social or environmental, explanations.^[53]

Moreover, the very definition of mental illness itself has evolved. The *Diagnostic and statistical manual* of the American Psychiatric Association, first published in 1952, was 100 pages long, while the fourth version, produced in 2000, is 943 pages. This explosion in the scale of psychiatry suggests that as forms of mental illness have multiplied, the expertise required to diagnose, differentiate and treat has also become more specialised.^[54]

In 2002, the historian Roy Porter observed that the language of psychiatry had permeated Western culture, partly because the profession was unable to reach agreement about the role of medical and social factors in mental illness and treatment. Psychiatry:

still lacks the cognitive and professional unity enjoyed by general medicine and remains torn between bio-psychosocial and medical models both of its object and its therapeutic stages. Meanwhile, partly because of the proliferation of psychiatries, more people are said to be suffering – indeed claiming to be suffering – from a proliferation of psychiatric syndromes, in a 'victim culture' in which benefits may appear to lie in buying into psychiatric syndromes ... as the idioms of the psychological and psychiatric replace Christianity and humanism as the ways of making sense of one's self.^[55]

This proliferation of psychiatric syndromes can be seen in the government policy tendency to slip between different medical and social constructs of mental health. It can be argued that government has been increasingly prepared to accept the role of community as a major defining element in mental illness, its prevention and treatment. This is at least partly because the individual with mental illness is no longer seen as an object to be incarcerated in a large

stand-alone psychiatric institution, but rather as a subject who exists in an active relationship with his or her community. The current mental health policy now includes attention to the impact of mental health issues on the whole community.^[56] Therefore the very quality of community has become a central concept in mental health policy and informs the thinking behind policy and service delivery.

Conclusion

The policy debates about mental health have been characterised by many different concepts and intended aims. In Victoria, there has been a move from a central Mental Hygiene Authority, with responsibility for all aspects of mental illness, treatment and education, to a more integrated concept of mental health with a multitude of stakeholders and perspectives. Objectives related to treatment have always been paramount in policy formulation, but increasingly the wider community has taken centre stage.

Psychiatric terminology entered the public arena through the influence of psychiatrists operating within government and also through the increasing advocacy of voluntary agencies. These struggles took place against a backdrop of new models of health promotion which gained ascendancy in the public administration, and while psychiatry has influenced the formation of this model it has also had to adapt to the changing public policy context.

One of the key defining features of the policy context was the shift toward community care. While many files which relate to this issue are closed to the public, it is hoped that further research can be conducted to deepen our understanding of how policy evolved in relation to community mental health. This article has suggested that the closure of the psychiatric institutions required a greater focus on community education about mental illness to encourage people to recognise symptoms of illness and seek earlier treatment. This process posed challenges for psychiatry as it sought to define its various roles in both clinical treatment and the improvement in mental health literacy. Further research on the development of the different educational approaches and the evolving relationships between the various professionals involved will further advance our understanding of the complex area of mental health policy in Victoria and beyond.

Endnotes

[1] My thanks go to Sebastian Gurciullo at PROV and the two referees who provided very useful and constructive feedback on earlier drafts of this article.

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Italian Speakers on the Walhalla Goldfield

A Micro-History Approach

Annamaria Davine

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Abstract

Following the discovery of gold around Walhalla in 1863, thousands of men and women flocked to the district hoping to make their fortune. Among them were hundreds of Italians and Swiss-Italians. The men worked mostly in the timber industry servicing the needs of local gold mines, but others took up different occupations. Micro-histories of small groups and the individuals within them help to challenge accepted theories. In *Southern Europeans in Australia*, Charles Price has argued that migrant settlements often occurred in certain areas because 'pioneer' or early arrivals from particular nationalities, regions or locations became involved in the same type of work, which, in turn, led to the 'accidental' development of migrant communities. In this article, I argue that application of Price's model to Walhalla's Italians makes the settlement appear one-dimensional and rigid in its composition when it was, in fact, a dynamic and interactive environment. Although offering an excellent starting point, his theory remains incomplete and does not allow for the individuality of the men and women involved, nor for the flexibility and versatility they demonstrated in their quest for prosperity. Drawing on a vast array of primary source material, including goldmining, Crown Lands and probate files, I use Vittorio Campagnolo as a case study to present an alternative scenario.

The Walhalla goldfield is located south of the Great Dividing Range, one hundred and eighty kilometres east of Melbourne, in a narrow valley surrounded by steep, densely timbered mountains and gullies. It is a remote but beautiful place.

In 1863, following the discovery of gold around Stringers Creek, thousands of men and women flocked to the district hoping to make their fortune. They were a diverse group of individuals and national and ethnic groups dominated in numbers by Anglo-Celts. Among them were hundreds of Italians and Swiss-Italians (Italians), mostly woodcutters, timber contractors, tramway builders and charcoal makers who generally worked in groups (work clusters).[1] They were also miners, owners of wine bars, hotels and boarding houses, a bootmaker and a mining agent. A number of Italians took up land on the goldfield's periphery and became farmers. By the early 1920s, however, apart from a few remaining families and single men, most Italian speakers had left few traces of their presence in the district, and there are a variety of reasons for this. Principally, many had been sojourners, temporary workers intending to stay only for a short period before returning home.[2]

Location of Walhalla

There are large gaps in the historiography of Italo-Australian society. Gentili, O'Connor, Pascoe and Douglass have documented well the migration of specific regional or provincial groups.[3] Templeton, using letters, was able to capture the aspirations of her subjects and their motives for migrating.[4] However, apart from Carlson's dissertation on Daylesford's Italian-speaking settlers, there is little coherent historical understanding of the particularities of early Italian rural settlements in colonial Victoria.[5]

Essentially, the migration patterns of Italians to Australia usually involved the arrival of male migrants who moved around the country looking for work. As they became settled, they were followed by male kin, compatriots and, later, wives and children. Charles Price has argued, in part, for the 'accidental' development of migrant communities, with settlements springing up as 'pioneer' or early arrivals from particular nationalities, regions or localities became involved in the same type of work.[6] His theory has limitations (as he himself acknowledged) as it relies principally on statistical data and naturalisation applications that can provide only an impersonal and abstract description of migrants and what they may have made of their lives. Women, of course, play little part in it.

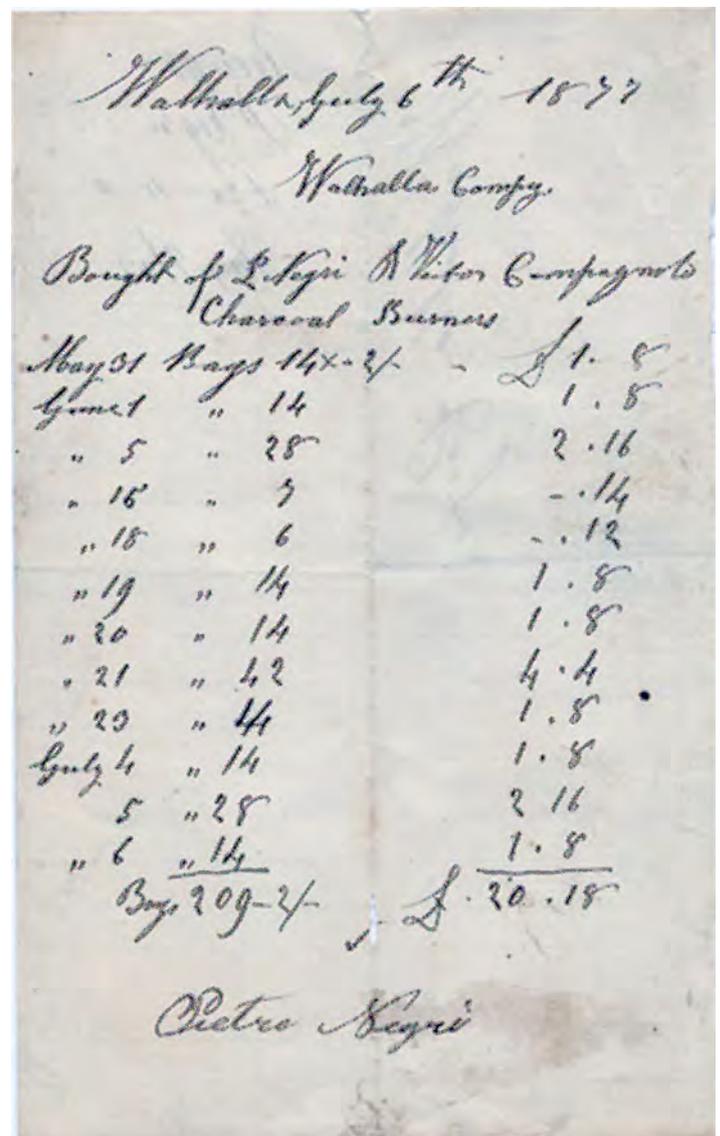
Castles and Miller refer to migrant settlements as 'micro-structures', informal networks developed by new arrivals in order to cope with migration and settlement. Double-sided bonds and dynamic cultural responses developed between them and the receiving population in relationships of co-operation, competitiveness and conflict.[7]

Micro-histories of small groups and the individuals within them help to challenge accepted theories. I argue here that application of Price's model to the Italian community which developed on the Walhalla goldfield gives just a broad brush effect and discounts the flexibility and versatility of the men and women involved. While their choice of occupation may have been limited because of language, cultural and other difficulties, this did not prevent ambitious Italians from becoming involved in a wide range of work. In my Walhalla study, I found that Italians were engaged in diverse occupations, albeit mostly running parallel to the needs of a goldmining society.

In my reconstruction of the settlement, I examined large volumes of primary source material including births, deaths and marriages indexes, shipping lists, Italian records, local newspapers, and Public Record Office Victoria goldmining, Crown Lands Department and

probate files. Limited information was provided by some descendants. Collectively, these helped to flesh out and develop the lives of certain Italian individuals and their families.

Individuals will always find a means to defy categorisation and Vittorio Campagnolo is a case in point. He was not restricted to any one occupation in Walhalla, but over his lifetime criss-crossed occupational boundaries whenever a fresh opportunity offered a better life for him and his family. I now trace Campagnolo's documented life in Victoria and the various levels of his economic and social involvement around Walhalla from the 1870s until his death.



PROV, VPRS 1383/P0, Unit 5, Walhalla Gold Mining Co. account with Negri & Campagnolo, 6 July 1877.

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In a very small way, Vittorio Campagnolo was an active share trader in Walhalla's gold mines. He put specific and calculated strategies into place with the intention of creating wealth, which involved risk-taking and speculation. For example, during his first visit to Walhalla, between June 1872 and December 1874, he purchased two Walhalla Gold Mining Co. shares with a face value of £10 each but with a market value of between £162 and £185 each.[15] After he returned to Walhalla in about June 1876, he purchased a further two shares at an unknown cost. The four shares were on-sold in January 1877.[16] Their sale coincides with the Campagnolo & Negri partnership being set up and the likely need to free up some capital for the enterprise.

Campagnolo continued trading in Walhalla Gold Mining Co. shares and, between July 1876 and August 1877, held a further ten shares with a face value of £3.[17] These may have been in lieu of cash, as it was not uncommon for suppliers and contractors to accept payment from mines in this way. However, he had little joy from the latter acquisitions and was still the unfortunate owner when he paid up a seventeenth and last call, in December 1880.[18] In 1883, mining records show that Campagnolo had a one-twenty-fourth share in the newly formed General Gordon Gold Mining Co. that fronted Stringers Creek, three and a half kilometres north of the Walhalla township. In 1888 he also held a few hundred shares in Broham's Reef Gold Mining Co.[19] Neither mine had good yields. There may have been other share interests, records of which are now lost.

Marriage to a non-Italian woman dramatically changed the direction of most Italians and they rarely returned permanently to their home communities. In 1888, Alexander Sutherland described Vittorio Campagnolo's position in Walhalla and noted that 'in 1880 he married Miss Gray and has a family of four children'.[20]

A closer examination of this account reveals small inaccuracies in relation to Miss Gray's true status. Although referred to as 'single' prior to her marriage, she was not in fact a 'miss' when she married Vittorio Campagnolo. Born on 30 June 1859, Anne (later referred to as 'Anna' [21]) was the child of Irish emigrants, James and Mary Gray (née Mulligan), who had arrived in Victoria on the *Tudor*, also in June of that year.[22] Records of James and Mary's deaths have not been found but, when Anne was sixteen, her guardians induced her to marry David Andrew Baldy with whom she had three children, Alice, David and

James.[23] According to family sources, David Baldy was a waster and the couple separated after a few years of marriage. No record has been found of Vittorio and Anne's wedding. He declined to have Anne's children and they were cared for and brought up by the Baldy family.[24]

After his 'marriage', Vittorio Campagnolo moved away from charcoal production and timber cutting to become a hotelkeeper. In September 1884 he purchased the Alpine Hotel from Antonio Simonin, another Italian, and retained its name and licence.[25] Over the next few years, Vittorio and Anna renovated and extended the hotel to the extent that it became a local landmark. In 1886, when Vittorio applied for a victualler's licence, the hotel had 'eleven rooms exclusive of those required for family and servants' and, by 1888, it contained fourteen rooms, with six stalled stables attached to it.[26]

It was not uncommon in colonial Victoria for hotels and wine bars to be owned and operated by Italians, particularly if they had non-Italian wives.[27] Anna Campagnolo's ability to speak English helped Vittorio to arrange financial affairs and facilitated his engagement with the wider public. In their case, both husband and wife had complementary family backgrounds in the wine or hotel business. Prior to emigration Vittorio had been a 'vine grower', while Anna's family records show that, when she was a child, her parents had been hotelkeepers on the Murray River.[28] When the family first emigrated, Anna's father worked as a punt operator on the Murray River at Swan Hill.[29] In 1860 he took over the Lower Murray Inn after the previous licensee had become insolvent, and renamed the hostelry 'The Punt Hotel'. It was sold in 1865.

Details of Anna Campagnolo's early life in Walhalla are, at best, sketchy but, given her early family background, it is likely she had a hands-on role in running the hotel. It is not unreasonable to assume that Vittorio may have been only nominally in charge of the Alpine Hotel in its day-to-day operations and that Anna dealt with the staff and clientele. During his time as licensee, Campagnolo also had his General Gordon Gold Mining Co. interest to take him away from the hotel's daily chores. Records also show that Vittorio operated a timber tramway known as 'Campagnolos' around this time.[30]

As hotelkeepers, Vittorio and Anna Campagnolo provided a focal point and a watering hole for Italians where they could meet and socialise, and helped draw together the scattered clusters and groups. In this way, Vittorio was a consolidator within the Italian settlement and a major player in its evolution into a cohesive and vibrant migrant community. After 1880 there are references to a few wine shops and to sly-grog shops run by Italians around Walhalla but, apart from the Alpine Hotel, no others specifically provided a decent temporary shelter for fellow countrymen.[31] While it is unlikely that many first-time Italian arrivals would have stayed in a hotel, not all were necessarily too poor to do so. Men coming into town on weekends after several weeks in the bush looked forward to a little of 'home' and the Campagnolos provided welcoming and familiar surroundings, a meal, a beer or spirits, and a bed. The hotel was also a refuge for Italian speakers when they were sick: Stefano Balsarino died there in 1885 after a bout of pneumonia.[32]

The Alpine Hotel was well promoted and became a popular venue for locals as well as visitors from outside districts. Vittorio and Anna arranged to have gold displays within the hotel building as an attraction to customers and to promote the local mining industry. Details are vague, but in May 1887 the *Walhalla Chronicle* reported that

We have seen some very rich quartz specimens in Mr. Campagnolo's possession (licensee Alpine Hotel). They were found at upper Moondarra by a party of Italians on a prospecting tour. They have formed themselves into a company and applied for a thirty acres lease.[33]

Again, on 8 May 1891 the newspaper observed that 'rich stone could be observed at Campagnolo's Hotel from South Long Tunnel Gold Mine', found in the vicinity of 'Campagnolo's tramway'.

Vittorio Campagnolo moved between Italian and Anglo-Celtic business and social circles with apparent ease. In 1885, at the launch of Loan's new brewery in Walhalla, he was on its promotional Ball and Supper Committee of Management, although there is no record of him having had a commercial interest in the brewery itself.[34] He was interested in local politics and, in 1889, along with a number of prominent citizens, signed a petition supporting the election of Charles Amor as the Shire auditor.[35] He was also on the Walhalla Common Jurors' List of 1883-84 and 1891-92.[36]

Campagnolo was a regular donor to charitable appeals, in particular those relating to mining accidents.[37] He also supported local musical events. For example, he was a subscriber to the local Mountaineers' Brass Band and made regular donations to it.[38]

While many of Vittorio Campagnolo's business and social activities took him away from his compatriots and cluster life, strong ties remained that enabled him to become an intermediary between Italian and local interests. On occasion, he acted as court interpreter in legal proceedings. The court cases were varied and sometimes related to quarrels between Italians over money or charges of assault. For example, in January 1887 he interpreted during a wages dispute between two Italians.[39] Later that year, in July, he assisted in a serious assault case following a dispute over timber supplies.[40] Vittorio also defended his own interests and actively pursued debts owing to the Alpine Hotel through the courts.[41]

However, fortune did not always shine on Campagnolo. In August 1891, disaster struck the family. A torrential downpour, followed by massive local floods, swept through Walhalla township. The *Walhalla Chronicle* reported that Campagnolo's Alpine Hotel was

frightfully wrecked, not only sustaining irreparable damage from the water but the windows and doors were smashed in by huge stones and boulders of rock which were brought down with terrific force by the storm water from the gully at the back of the hotel and filled the rooms.

Locally, damage was widespread, particularly to the firewood tramlines, roads and tracks, and the district became isolated by damaging landslides. The Campagnolo family was forced to move to a house they owned just forty yards opposite the hotel.[42]

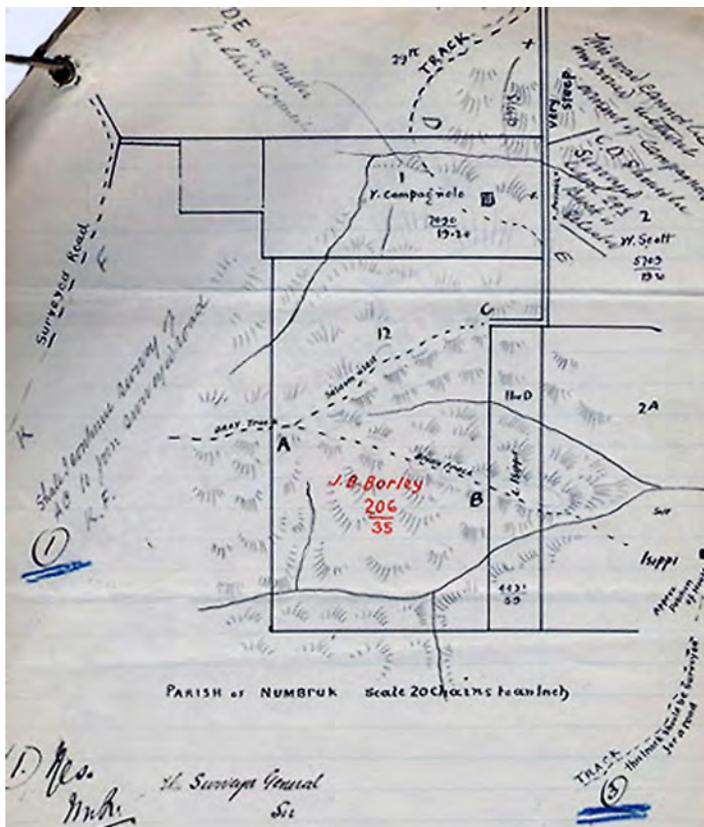
The situation continued to deteriorate. One week later, the hotel's shell was burned to the ground and its charred remains were all that was left of 'one of the strongest weatherboard buildings and oldest landmarks in Walhalla'. The hotel stables were saved and it was noted that 'Mr. Campagnolo must be one of the heaviest individual losers in a pecuniary sense'. The building was insured for £600 (\$55,000) and for £300 (\$27,500) in stock.[43] Considering it had been valued at £1500 (\$132,000) in 1888, Vittorio had grossly underinsured the Alpine Hotel and its stock, and he was to suffer the consequences. 1891 was a bad year. His interest in General Gordon Gold Mining Co. had reaped little or no profit, and in April its plant was sold to another mine.[44]

Vittorio Campagnolo's hotel-keeping days were over but he quickly moved on and became involved in farming, perhaps fulfilling a pre-migration aspiration to own land. This was not an unusual feature for Italians in the study, as many had emigrated, not only for basic economic reasons, but also to advance their family status through the acquisition of land back home. Campagnolo never returned to his home community but he may have applied this landowning desire in an Australian and local context.

The land that Campagnolo leased in 1892, and later purchased, from the Crown Lands Department had been previously, but unsuccessfully, taken up by two of his compatriots.[45]

His Land Selection File shows that, in March that year, he took over a Crown Land lease from Giovanni Valli, an Italian, of approximately 64.40 hectares (159 acres) at Ostlers Creek, a small farming settlement approximately sixteen kilometres (ten miles) south of Walhalla, on the Walhalla-Toongabbie Road.[46]

The terrain was very steep and only some of the land was suitable for cultivation. When Vittorio took possession of the farm, it was not fully fenced, only partly cleared, and improvements included an area of ringed timber and cut and burnt scrub. Cultivation, totalling 8.05 hectares (twenty acres), included crops of oats, peas and potatoes. The previous owners had planted an orchard of 100 fruit trees together with a vineyard and vines, continuing a home tradition of wine-making. The dwelling was of log, slab and bark construction and outbuildings included a stable, cowshed, pigsties and sheds.



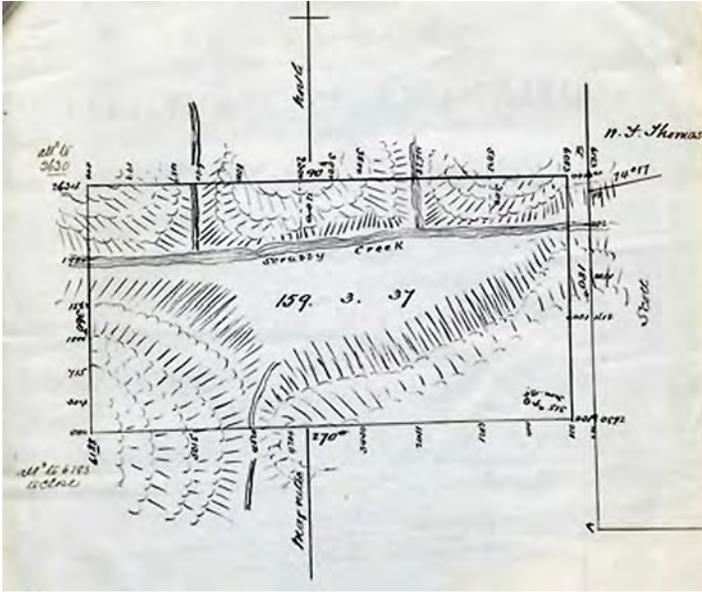
PROV, VPRS 5357/P0, Unit 682, File 067/54, Survey of allotments 12 and 12A, Parish of Numbruk.



N Caire, Ostlers Creek. La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria.

Between 1892 and early 1894, Vittorio and Anna Campagnolo settled their family at Ostlers Creek but, for reasons that are not entirely clear, returned to live closer to the Walhalla township in 1894. The farm's previous history suggests that it was not overly productive, but the land was not abandoned and, when the family left, an employee was engaged to work and reside on the property.

After his seemingly short attempt at farming, Vittorio Campagnolo resumed work as a timber contractor. It is possible that he had not ceased his involvement in woodcutting and associated industries during his time at Ostlers Creek, but there are no extant records on that account. In February 1894, and further expanding his interests, he was a co-applicant for a tramway licence of four acres located at Marsdens Creek to the east of the Old Walhalla Road. The land was to be used as a narrow-gauge timber tramway with an estimated building cost of £600 (\$65,400).[47] The tramway was 1.6 kilometres in length, was horse-driven and hand-operated, and was commonly known as 'Campagnolo's firewood tramway'. It may have been an extension of the one in operation in 1891.[48] During the next five years or so, Campagnolo operated the tramway to transport and supply cut timber to the Long Tunnel Gold Mining Co.[49] Records show that Vittorio employed both Italian and non-Italian men. The size of his overall operations and number of employees are not known, but Long Tunnel Gold Mine was not the only mine Vittorio supplied: in 1895 he was referred to in the *Walhalla Chronicle* as 'a firewood contractor for several of the mines'.[50]



PROV, VPRS 626/P0, Unit 1969, licence no. 7090/20, leasehold land and its rough terrain.

Bad luck continued to follow Campagnolo. In September 1895 he suffered a compound fracture of the right leg. He was starting the flywheel of the steam-operated engine, used for hauling wood up the tramway to the top of the hill, when he placed his foot on the wheel and was injured.[51] The bone in his leg was shattered and he was conveyed, with great difficulty, to his home along a rugged downhill track. The leg was saved, but in June 1897, nearly two years later, he suffered a further break to the same leg. On this occasion he had gone into Walhalla to have a horse shod. While at the blacksmith he had climbed onto a bench to mount his horse, but the horse swerved and he fell to the ground. The leg was later amputated.[52]

In 1900, perhaps due to failing health, Vittorio Campagnolo and his family again returned to live at Ostlers Creek. The Crown Lands Department file shows that, in the summer of 1897-98, a bushfire had burnt through the property and destroyed everything in its path.[53] The house, outbuildings and fences were totally rebuilt and, in 1901, Vittorio made an application to transfer his lease of the land into a Crown Grant. While the land was not totally enclosed, it had 120 chains (2415m) of post-and-rail fencing and 70 chains (1408m) of post, rail and slab fencing.[54] There were now thirty acres under cultivation with a fruit garden enclosed by a picket fence of eight chains. Erected on the land was a five-roomed dwelling house constructed of hardwood outside and pine lining inside; the five rooms were all twelve feet square. The house had a zinc roof and stone chimneys. There was also a stable built of slabs with a bark roof. The purchase price was

£160 (\$15,500), being the total rental paid for the lease over its term. The value of improvements to the farm totalled £693 (\$67,500). Vittorio had difficulty in paying the outstanding rental and the costs of transfer. He was forced to write to the Crown Lands Department for leniency, acknowledging that 'I am behind with my rent' and 'I lost one of my legs three years ago. I am living on the land with my wife and ten children, [but the] land is not mortgaged'.[55]

After re-settling at Ostlers Creek, Vittorio's local profile was reduced. He no longer appeared to be operating his tramway or supplying cut timber to local mines. There are no known reports of him acting as a facilitator or interpreter, or of any engagement in local business or social affairs. He died on 5 January 1903 of heart failure, aged 53 years, at 'his residence at Ostlers Creek, beloved husband of Anna Campagnolo'.[56] He was never naturalised and died intestate. The absence of a Will disadvantaged Anna financially as her husband's intestacy meant that she was only legally entitled to one-third of Vittorio's estate, and his infant children were to receive the remainder on attaining adulthood. [57] Vittorio and Anna had the following children: Victor (b. 1881), Grace (b. 1883), Teodoro (b. 1884), Victorina (b. 1887), Rudolf (b. and d. 1888), Hilda (b. 1889), Leopold (b. 1891), Teresa (b. 1893), Eugenie (b. 1895), Ernesto (b. 1897), Adelina (b. 1899) and Ada (b. 1903, after her father's death). Of the twelve children, ten were living and nine were still minors living at home when Vittorio died.

In June 1903, Anna Campagnolo applied for a grant of Letters of Administration, and the relevant file provides a glimpse into her life and her financial struggle to carry on the family farm after her husband's death.[58] It also reveals the little-recorded part played by women married to Italian speakers when they were widowed or forced to take over the mantle as head of the family. The Inventory and Statement of Assets and Liabilities of the estate signed by Anna show the farm was valued, for death duty purposes, at just over £458 (\$42,200). While this was less than the purchase price paid in 1901, it would have been a conservative figure applied so as to attract less probate duty. Improvements on the land included a stable, barn, pigsty, fowl house and orchard. Two acres of potatoes were planted, one acre of oats and half an acre of maize. Animals included an ageing horse, ten cattle and five pigs valued at £30 (\$2,920). Usual farm tools included two ploughs, one harrow, one waggonette, a blacksmith's anvil, bellows, hammers, two spades and three hoes. Other items were two horse collars, one pack-saddle and one riding saddle. The bank overdraft was just over £10 (\$975). Probate duty on the estate was assessed at £2 16s. 10p. (c. \$250).

Under the conditions of a grant of Letters of Administration, Anna Campagnolo was required to lodge with the Court a yearly account of the estate's management, and her regular reports provide a picture of her capability to run the farm and to harness, as best she could, its resources. She was physically active on the property, maintaining a hands-on approach that reflected her role in the operation of the Alpine Hotel with Vittorio in the preceding decades. In September 1903 she advised the Court that the potatoes, maize and oats referred to in her previous affidavit had been consumed by her family and by stock. She had sold three cattle for £14 12s. and one pig for £2; another pig had died. Money received from the sale of the stock had been used to pay family debts. Despite difficulties, Anna was enterprising and hard-working. In the time since her husband's death she had planted forty young fruit trees and cleared, ploughed and fenced a further three acres. [59]

Anna's 1904 summary shows, however, that the family's assets continued to decline. During the previous year, she had sold one steer and two aged cows for nearly £11. With the funds raised she paid £3 off her overdraft, paid her rates and used the balance for food and clothes. Livestock numbers were dwindling, now reduced to nine cattle, two pigs and one aged horse but, again, she had continued to clear the land and had fenced two paddocks of about three acres.

Despite her efforts, Anna Campagnolo finally lost her battle to keep the farm. In December 1906, Ellen Maria and Charles Collins, friends and local business proprietors who had given surety over Vittorio's estate, advised the Court that they had no objection to Anna Campagnolo selling the farm at Ostlers Creek as 'we are sure she has done the right thing as it is impossible for her to make a living on the land in question'. [60]

It is not known what amount Anna received from the sale of the farm. In 1907 she purchased a house in nearby Toongabbie about which there is little information as all records were destroyed in the Shire of Narracan municipal office fire in the 1960s. [61] In 1923, Anna Campagnolo died of pneumonia at Toongabbie, aged 63. She left an estate of £275 (\$14,145). [62]

Vittorio Campagnolo only partly fits into Price's model of immigrant communities. He is an example of an individual who was initially part of the local timber industry and work cluster system, and who enjoyed the economic benefits and camaraderie that flowed from them. But, as his ambitions grew, he moved outside the boundaries of cluster life and worked in other occupations that better fulfilled his aspirations. Even though he married a non-Italian woman, Campagnolo

remained aligned to the work cluster system and utilised its human resources to further his business interests. In doing so, he perpetuated the on-flowing opportunities provided and sustained by work clusters which he himself had benefited from after his arrival in Walhalla in the 1870s.

Price's model provides a useful tool for the historian to develop a theme or concept. By drawing on the small and seemingly insignificant, the Walhalla Italians study has helped to develop broader themes of migration which test a formularised and impersonal approach. Micro-histories focus on the finer detail of a small place and on ordinary lives and bring to life something of the past and the way men and women may have lived. Their use also emphasises the relevance of such studies within the wider national and international study of migration and its patterns.

Endnotes

[1] Most of Walhalla's Italians came from adjoining districts on the Italian and Swiss border. The Italian nationals were from the region of Lombardy, to the north of Milan, mainly the city of Tirano in Sondrio province and its surrounding districts. The Swiss citizens were Italian-speaking ethnic Lombards from the Ticino and Grisons cantons of southern Switzerland. Historically, both groups shared a common dialect and a cultural affinity. 'Work cluster' serves as a useful term to describe and roughly summarise the composition of the scattered group of Italian speakers, initially almost exclusively male.

[2] This paper has been taken from my PhD thesis 'Migration, work and community: Italian speakers in Walhalla's goldmining district – 1865-1915', Department of History, University of Melbourne, 2006.

[3] J Gentilli, 'The settlement of the Swiss Ticino immigrants in Australia', *Geowest: working papers of the Department of Geography, University of Western Australia*, no. 23, 1988; J Gentilli, 'Swiss Poschiavini in Australia', *Geowest*, no. 25, 1990; D O'Connor, *No need to be afraid: Italian settlers in South Australia between 1839 and the Second World War*, Wakefield Press, Kent Town, South Australia, 1996; R Pascoe, *Buongiorno Australia*, Greenhouse Publications, Melbourne, 1987; and WA Douglass, *From Italy to Ingham*, Queensland University Press, St Lucia, 1995. See also G Cheda, *L'emigrazione ticinese in Australia*, vols 1 & 2, Armando Dadò editore, Locarno, 1976.

[4] J Templeton, *From the mountains to the bush: Italian migrants write home from Australia 1860-1962*, edited by J Lack assisted by G Di Lorenzo, University of Western Australia Press, Crawley, 2003.

[5] BR Carlson, 'Immigrant place-making in colonial Australia: the Italian-speaking settlers of Daylesford', PhD thesis, Department of Social & Cultural Studies, Victoria University, Melbourne, 1997.

- [6] C Price, *Southern Europeans in Australia*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1963, in particular, pp. 166-9. See also Price, *The methods & statistics of 'Southern Europeans in Australia'*, Australian National University, Canberra, 1963.
- [7] S Castles & MJ Miller, *The age of migration*, Guildford Press, New York, 1993, p. 23.
- [8] Only a few *bergamaschi* have been recorded in Walhalla.
- [9] A Sutherland, *Victoria and its metropolis, past and present*, McCarron, Bird & Co., Melbourne, 1888, vol. 2, p. 369.
- [10] Pietro Bombardieri, diary, J Templeton collection, Italian Historical Society, Carlton.
- [11] Sutherland, vol. 2, p. 369.
- [12] PROV, VPRS 604/P0, Units 6, 13 & 17, Walhalla Gold Mining Co., shareholders' register, dividend & wages books. National Archives Australia (NAA), series A712/1, no. 1868/55908. Pietro Negri was born in 1843 in Madonna di Tirano, Sondrio province and migrated to Victoria in 1870. He had taken over the charcoal business from Pietro Raselli in early 1877. See also PROV, VPRS 1383/P0, Unit 5, Walhalla Gold Mining Co. & 'Negri & Campagnolo'.
- [13] PROV, VPRS 5357/P0, Unit 1235, File 794/49, Rutter, dated 1878. 'Componio' should be 'Campagnolo'.
- [14] A Middleton & FB Maning, *Middleton and Maning's Gippsland directory for 1884 and 1885*, Melbourne, 1885.
- [15] PROV, VPRS 604/P0, Unit 4, Walhalla Gold Mining Co. In 1874 the market value of a share was around \$14,000 in today's figures (formula applied from the Australian Bureau of Statistics *Year Book*, 2000, p. 724).
- [16] *ibid.*, Units 4 and 6.
- [17] *ibid.*, Units 4, 6 and 16, Walhalla Gold Mining Co. share register.
- [18] PROV, VPRS 603/P0, Unit 53, Walhalla Gold Mining Co.
- [19] *Walhalla Chronicle*, 1 June 1888.
- [20] Sutherland, vol. 2, p. 369.
- [21] 'Anne' became 'Anna' sometime after her marriage to Campagnolo. She was named 'Anna' on her tombstone and in her will.
- [22] *Index to Unassisted Inward Passenger Lists to Victoria 1852-1923 (British, Foreign and New Zealand Ports)*, PROV, online database. Further information about the family comes from Kit Campagnolo, a great-grandson, in a letter to the author dated 1 December 2002. Anna's parents were married at Antrim, Northern Ireland. She had an older brother, John.
- [23] *Pioneer Index, Victoria 1836-1888: index to births, deaths and marriages in Victoria*, 3rd rev. edn, 1999 (CD-ROM). Anne's children were Alice Edith (b. Swan Hill, 1876), David (b. Swan Hill, 1877) and James Gray (1878-82).
- [24] Records of David Andrew Baldy cannot be traced. David junior never forgave his mother but, in adulthood, daughter Alice was reconciled with her mother, her stepbrothers and stepsisters.
- [25] *Walhalla Chronicle*, 12 September 1884. From my observations, the Alpine Hotel was located in Brewery Gully near the cemetery track, two blocks north of the present Walhalla Lodge. The *Licensing Act 1890*, Section 177, required that 'no new licence shall be granted nor any licence transferred to any person whatever who is not a natural born or naturalized subject of Her Majesty'. Campagnolo never became naturalised but remained licensee of the Alpine Hotel until late 1891, reflecting, in his case, lax local enforcement of the Act.
- [26] Sutherland, vol. 2, p. 369.
- [27] See Carlson, 'Immigrant place-making' and C Gervasoni, *Bullboar, macaroni & mineral water: spa country's Swiss/Italian story*, Hepburn Springs Swiss Italian Festa Inc., Hepburn Springs, 2005.
- [28] *Index to Unassisted Inward Passenger Lists, 1852-1923*; information about Anna's family kindly provided by Kit Campagnolo.
- [29] A punt is a shallow, flat-bottomed boat.
- [30] J Aldersea & B Hood, *Walhalla: valley of gold*, Walhalla Publishing, Trafalgar, 2003, p. 38.
- [31] WH Lee, *The Switzerland of Australia: views of early Walhalla and district*, Lee brothers, Walhalla, 1910, revised and re-published for the *Walhalla Chronicle, Moondarra, Toombon & Woods Point Times*, 1981, p. 55. The Alpine Hotel was one of fifteen hotels in the Walhalla district.
- [32] *Walhalla Chronicle*, 3 December 1885. Balsarino was a Swiss national.
- [33] *ibid.*, 20 May 1887. No further details about these displays have been found.
- [34] *ibid.*, 11 September 1885.
- [35] *ibid.*, 26 July 1889.
- [36] PROV, VPRS 1501/P0, Unit 4 Common Jurors Book.
- [37] *Walhalla Chronicle*, 19 January 1883 (appeal organised by Long Tunnel Extended Gold Mining Co.); *ibid.*, 8 July 1887 (Bulli Disaster Relief Fund).
- [38] *ibid.*, 28 May 1886, 26 June 1891.
- [39] *ibid.*, 21 January 1887 ('Batisla' [i.e. Battista]) and A Anda).
- [40] *ibid.*, 22 July 1887, 5 August 1887.
- [41] *ibid.*, 21 November 1890 & PROV, VPRS 359/P0, Unit 2, debt G Smith; *Walhalla Chronicle*, 18 February 1887.

[42] *Walhalla Chronicle*, 7 August 1891. This was probably the 'large house on the hill, which he let', referred to in Sutherland, vol. 2, p. 369.

[43] *ibid.*, 14 August 1891.

[44] *ibid.*, 10 April 1891.

[45] PROV, VPRS 626/P0, Unit 1969, licence no. 7090/20.

[46] The lease specified Campagnolo's land as Allotment 1, Section D, Parish of Numbruk (transfer of leasehold 5 March 1892). The land had been initially selected by Francesco Melano (also known as Milano), an Italian national, in 1880 and was held by him until 1886. Milano had not continuously resided on the property and was therefore in contravention of his lease: it is recorded in his file that he 'had hired a servant to reside on it since he selected it and visits once a month'. While he risked forfeiting his rights to the leasehold for this non-compliance, in 1886 he applied for a licence lien in favour of Giovanni Valli, for £268 and as an execution creditor for approximately the same amount. Valli was probably the 'servant' referred to in the file as he had resided on the property since 1881. Milano subsequently became insolvent. Prior to 1885, Giovanni Valli married Julia Sheehan (or Shay) and lived on the land at Ostlers Creek. After his move from that property he continued to live locally until Julia died at Toongabbie in 1898 (Indexes to births, deaths and marriages in Victoria).

[47] *Walhalla Chronicle*, 23 February 1894. The partner was Reuben J Salvado.

[48] *ibid.* For a description of the tramway see PROV, VPRS 1502/P0, Unit 4, ref. *Victorian Government Gazette*, 01/1123. The lease was declared void in 1901.

[49] PROV, VPRS 603/P0, Unit 54, Long Tunnel Gold Mining Co.

[50] *Walhalla Chronicle*, 6 September 1895.

[51] *ibid.* 52. *ibid.*, 4 June 1897. He was hospitalised until 22 July 1897.

[53] PROV, VPRS 626/P0, Unit 1969, licence no. 7090/20.

[54] *ibid.*, Crown Lands Bailiff's report, 14 March 1901.

[55] *ibid.*, letter from Campagnolo to the Department of Crown Lands, 12 February 1901.

[56] *Walhalla Chronicle*, 16 January 1903.

[57] Under the predecessor of the current Section 52 of the *Administration and Probate Act 1958* in force at the time of Campagnolo's death, when a man died intestate leaving a widow and children, the widow received one-third of the estate and the remaining two-thirds was held (in the case of minors, in trust) for the children.

[58] PROV, VPRS 28/P2, Unit 647, File 87/138 and VPRS 28/P0, Unit 1119, File 87/139 (Letters of Administration).

[59] Affidavit dated 26 September 1903, in *ibid.*

[60] Letter from EM and C Collins to Court, 18 December 1906, in *ibid.*

[61] The Shire of Walhalla merged with the Shire of Narracan in c.1930.

[62] PROV, VPRS 7591/P2, Unit 669, File 187/164 and VPRS 28/P3, Unit 1293, File 187/164 (will and probate of Anna Campagnolo).

Forum articles



‘The present depression has brought me down to zero’

Northcote High School during the 1930s

Karin Derkley

“The present depression has brought me down to zero”: Northcote High School during the 1930s, *Provenance: The Journal of Public Record Office Victoria*, issue no. 7, 2008. ISSN 1832-2522. Copyright © Karin Derkley.

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Abstract

The Great Depression hit just as state secondary education was becoming established in Victoria. At Northcote High School, which opened as a boys-only school in 1929, the effects of a 26 per cent unemployment rate in the suburb were particularly hard felt. During 1931 and 1932 the school received dozens of letters from parents pleading for leniency on fees they could not pay. The problem was compounded further when in 1933 the Victorian Government, under pressure to cut its education expenditure, decided to increase high school fees. The resulting decline in enrolments was dramatic. From 516 in 1930, student numbers at Northcote High School dropped to 406 by 1934 and the number of year 10 students more than halved. Distressed by the loss of its students, the school sent deputations to the government in 1933 and 1934 asking that fees be cut. The request was to no avail, dashing the educational hopes of many young students forced to leave the school. Enrolment numbers at Northcote High School, as in the rest of the state, did not fully recover until after the Second World War when fees for secondary education were finally abolished.

As a former schoolteacher, John Burrell’s father knew the value of a good secondary school education. But in December 1931, as the effects of the Great Depression were beginning to bite hard, he had to admit he was finding it difficult to keep John at Northcote High School. In a letter to the school’s acting headmaster, Sidney Kitson, he wrote that after having been unemployed for over eighteen months he was ‘quite unable to pay any fees ... The present depression has brought me down to zero’.[1]

Mr Burrell wasn’t the only parent at Northcote High forced by the ‘present depression’ to beg for leniency with school fees in the early 1930s. His letter is one of several received by the school in 1931-32 from parents explaining why they hadn’t yet paid their third-term fees. On 3 July 1932, Mr Dickson wrote that he hadn’t been able to pay his son’s fees for the term ‘owing to being unemployed for several weeks recently and on a very reduced wage’. Mr A Phillips of Westgarth Street explained in a letter on 3 August that ‘our present position (working part-time on reduced wages) will not allow me to pay for Keith’s school fees’.

For musician Mr HJ West of Dennis Street, Northcote, the Depression compounded the havoc wreaked by the ‘talkies’ on his profession. The small orchestras that accompanied silent films in picture theatres in and around Northcote were the main source of employment for musicians like Mr West, but that had all ended when synchronised sound was introduced to movies in 1929. He had just completed, he explains in a letter written in beautiful copperplate, ‘about three years out of work’. This is the first term he had not paid his son Stanley’s fees, he notes, adding ‘You will agree with me under the circumstances I have done very well.’ Given that, he wrote: ‘I would deem it a personal favour if you would be so kind as to allow this matter to stand over until the new year.’[2]



Northcote High School Orchestra, c. 1930s. Courtesy Northcote High School.

The names of Stanley West, John Burrell, Norman Burrell and Keith Phillips appear on a list of around a dozen students that Mr Kitson and headmaster Mr FW Johnson spent months chasing for fees outstanding for term 3, 1931.[3] As at December 1931, 25 boys had fees outstanding, the parents of whom had been interviewed by the headmaster at least six times, Mr Johnson reported. His instructions from the Department were clear: none of the pupils should be re-admitted in 1932 unless all fees were paid or the Department received their application for free tuition.[4] It was a chase that dragged on through much of 1932, with stern letters from the school being replied to with pleading and apologetic letters from parents desperate to keep their children in school despite their inability to pay the fees.

Most of the students on the list owed just £2 for the term, but it was an amount that would break the financial backs of many parents and stymie their children's educational future. For the four boys, along with many others, it spelled the end of their secondary education. 'Left School' is the handwritten annotation alongside their names and those of six others on a carbon copy of the list held in the same file.

The Great Depression hit just as state secondary education was becoming established in Victoria. Victoria's first state secondary school, the Melbourne Continuation School (later Melbourne High School) had opened in 1905. Over the next twenty-five years a dozen more secondary schools appeared across the city.[5] Northcote High School opened in 1926, first as a co-educational school and then as a boys-only school when it moved to its current location on St Georges Road in 1929.[6]



Northcote High School, 1926. Courtesy Northcote High School.

It didn't take long for Northcote High School to become fully enrolled with students. By 1930 the school boasted 516 pupils, despite the fact that it had only opened in its permanent building the year before, that the Depression was starting to have an impact on employment figures in the city, and that students in forms higher than year 8 had to pay school fees of £6 a year.

Fees were a part of the state secondary school system right from its inception. Free state education, so hard fought for during the late 1800s, only applied to primary-school-aged children initially. It was extended to years 7 and 8 when the compulsory school age was raised to 14, and in many cases those students were accommodated at the local primary school, which now offered the extra two years of classes. But increasingly students moved to the new high schools where they had the opportunity to stay on, theoretically at least, to year 12. But if they stayed beyond year 8 they had to pay – at a rate of £2 a term.[7]

Neither the Left nor Right of politics was particularly supportive of the idea of extending free education past the compulsory years. The Labor Party had something of an ambivalent attitude to high school education, regarding it as for the elite: 'those who could afford the fees, the uniforms and the books.' It supported technical education as the proper sphere of the working class, and was concerned that educating children in academic high schools would give them middle-class values that would turn them against their working-class origins. [8] Those of a more conservative bent (the Nationalists) argued that extending the years of education for children of families from less wealthy homes might produce children who were 'misfits', over-educated for their proper station in life.[9] If children from such backgrounds did continue their secondary education, their parents should pay for it.



Northcote High School, 1930. Courtesy Northcote High School.

For bright children from impoverished families there was a safety net in the form of a fee exemption their parents could apply for on the basis of their need and their merit.[10] Until the Depression hit, it was a system that seemed to work well enough: numbers of enrolments in high schools across the state nearly doubled in the ten years between 1918 and 1928, growing from 4,959 to 9,774.[11] But by 1931 it was already evident that local families in Northcote, as elsewhere, were struggling to afford the cost of sending their children to high school.

Unemployment hit Northcote as hard as the rest of the state, where in 1931 the figures for those who were out of work were around 26 per cent.[12] Andrew Lemon writes in his history of Northcote, *The Northcote side of the river*, that more than 1500 people in the municipality were registered as receiving sustenance. Taking their families into account, Lemon estimates that around 5000 of Northcote's 42,000 residents were reliant on sustenance handouts. But, he adds, many more were affected than the bare figures suggest. Even for those in work, average full-time weekly wages dropped from £5 to £3/17/10 in 1931. 'Thousands more were in insecure or rationed employment, had received pay cuts, were not eligible for assistance or did not take the dole!'[13]

Things were clearly already bad in early 1931 when the secretary of Northcote High School, Mr HF Tulloch, wrote several letters to the Education Minister to inform him of the enormous hardship the fees were causing to the school community. He recommended that 'in the present state of finance all pupils receive free tuition at least until things become somewhere near normal'. The next day he wrote again, asking that 'serious consideration be given to the question of lightening the burden of parents anxious to provide for the future well-being of their children'.

Mr Tulloch and the anxious parents were smartly put in their place by a reply from the Minister's office a week later. The request could not be agreed to, the Minister pointed out, 'because the government will have great difficulty ... finding the necessary money for the work of the department'. The amount it would lose out on by eliminating fees would be about £25 000, he estimated, 'and this is too serious an item to forgo'. Mr Tulloch made one more attempt in February, adding that 'I am only asking for assistance owing to the present state of depression!'[14]

In fact, by 1931 the government was under increasing pressure over its expenditure on state education. The previous year, Sir Otto Niemeyer, a representative of the Bank of England to which the Australian Government was heavily indebted, had visited the Premier's Conference in Melbourne to give guidance on how the country's leaders could steer the country out of the Depression. His advice was clear-cut: the states would have to cut their public expenditure by around 25 per cent.[15]

State education was an obvious target for the spending cuts. After the railways, it was the biggest single item in the government's budget – representing 10 per cent of expenditure. And, unlike the railways, it didn't produce any direct returns or revenue.[16] In the light of the financial crisis, the ever-present, but until now distant, grumblings against state secondary education became a din.

In November 1932, Dr Clive Shields of the United Australia Party wrote an opinion piece in *The Age*, declaring that free (sic) secondary education had caused 'grave economic harm' to the state. Over-educated children expected jobs in the public service, he pointed out, where they would further drain the public purse.[17]

At Northcote High School, where many parents were already suffering the financial burden of fees on increasingly meagre incomes, enrolments at the school had fallen from 506 in 1931 to 449 in 1932. They were about to suffer a further onslaught. The bad news had clearly begun circulating by late 1932 when a Mrs J Street wrote to the school to check whether 'it is proposed to charge fees to High School students under 14 years of age'.^[18] Yes, came the reply from the Education Department's secretary. 'Parliamentary approval is now being sought to charge a fee of £3 per annum to pupils of Form F (Year 7): Those students who stayed on past year 8 would now have to pay £9 in tuition fees a year.'^[19]

Parents who had found it difficult to find £6 a year for their children's education now found it impossible. Those who previously could have sent their children to the high school for years 7 and 8 for free were now forced to consider other options. Mr AJ Stanton of Preston wrote to the school on 17 January 1933 saying that while his twelve-year-old son Keith was ready to move on to the high school, there was no way he could afford the fees. 'My whole income last year was only £197/141, and will be less this year.'

There were no fees for children who stayed on until year 8 at the local primary school, but this was not an option that Mr Stanton was enthusiastic about. His letter voices the frustration that many families no doubt felt at the time: 'I would like to know if my son is to return to the State School for another two years to learn nothing, or will he be allowed to wander the streets for the next two years until he is eligible to work according to the law of the State of Victoria?'

What was most frustrating was that over the border, in New South Wales, children could continue to attend high school for free. Jack Lang, the feisty Labor premier who vowed to renege on loans to England rather than cut back on public expenditure, refused to charge fees for education. William Henshall, who had recently arrived from New South Wales when he wrote to the headmaster of Northcote High on 24 July 1934, pointed out that there 'they were educated by the State, no school fees, all text books and writing materials supplied', whereas 'we will have to make great sacrifices to educate our children in this state'.

Of course those who suffered financial hardship could always apply for a fee exemption, the Education Department pointed out.^[20] The new Act allowed for fee exemptions for students whose parents were in 'necessitous circumstances' and who were, in the opinion of the Director, able to profit from their education.^[21]

'Necessitous circumstances' as defined by the Department meant an average weekly income of less than £4, with an extra 10 shillings allowed for each school child under the age of 14. The income of any working children was added to the weekly family income. Parents had to prove their financial hardship on a form provided by the Department that required them to set out exactly how much they earned, their expenditure on rent or mortgage, the value of their home and any other savings or investments (with grave warnings of punishment for false declarations). Then they had to prove that their children would profit from their education: the child's teacher was required to detail the child's academic results thus far and give any other supporting reasons as to why the child deserved assistance to stay on.^[22]

No doubt many parents did fill out the form: according to a report by the Chief Inspector John Seitz to the Minister of Public Instruction in 1934, approximately one-third of students who were liable for fees received fee exemptions.^[23] But, whether out of fear of being branded needy by the Education Department, or not wanting to jump through bureaucratic hoops, many others wrote directly to the school to request leniency with the fees. The correspondence files for 1933 and 1934 are littered with letters to the headmaster – many of them asking for extra time to pay the fees because of financial difficulties. Mr Kaufmann, for instance, writes on 19 February 1934 to ask for an extension of time to pay the fees for his sons Norman and Ronald because his wages had been 'considerably reduced owing to the depression'.

Others asked for fee reductions rather than an exemption. Mrs Olive Greig of Shaftsbury Parade, Thornbury asked for a reduced fee for her son Edward, explaining that her husband was unemployed, leaving her and her children to support the family. Ignoring her request for a reduction, the Department curtly refused free tuition.^[24]

In many cases, however, parents responded by withdrawing their children from the school altogether. As Wendy Lowenstein points out in *Weevils in the flour*, an oral history of the Depression in Australia, it was often easier for teenagers in a family to get jobs, at a fraction of the adult wage, than adults.^[25] To have children at school at this time thus represented a double sacrifice: not only were the parents required to come up with a considerable amount of money in fees, books and uniforms, they were also sacrificing the possible income these children could have earned at the time.

Given that the term fee of £3 represented as much as the weekly wage for many families, it is unsurprising that much of the correspondence during 1933 and 1934 consists of parents asking for refunds for children who had left school. Few requests were granted. In early 1933 Mr JJ Jeffrey of Ivanhoe asked for a refund when his son, who had 'only returned to school as he could not get employment', left again within weeks when he 'secured a position'. His request was refused on the grounds that the school was required to employ teachers on the basis of its enrolment figures and could not be expected to give refunds to students who left once the school year had begun.[26]

Other times the school was more generous. In June 1934 Samuel C Burgess of Croxton wrote that his son had obtained a position and thus requested a refund of his £2 fee, as 'I have had very little work for the last months and I have had difficulty getting the amount'. In this case the headmaster recommended refunding half the fee, 'as Mr Burgess is a boot employee and his work is not continuous'.[27]

By 1934, enrolment numbers at Northcote High School had dropped to 406, with just 98 students in year 9 – half as many as in 1931. In year 10, student numbers were 68, down from 154 in 1931.[28] In May 1933 the situation was serious enough to warrant a deputation from the school to the inspector of secondary schools, Mr Seitz, 'to obtain relief regarding the present scale of fees because of cases of children being withdrawn from the school'. Mr Seitz, while sympathetic, the council minutes reported, could not grant exemption from the fees.[29]

Another deputation in December 1933 was informed that there was very little prospect of such a reduction for at least twelve months. In March 1934 the headmaster Mr FW Johnson reported that 'there had been a falling off of new scholars from the state schools due to the difficulty of parents in meeting the increased fees'.[30]

Between 1930 and 1934 the number of secondary school enrolments across Victoria is estimated to have fallen by more than 10 per cent.[31] At Northcote the drop-off was more like 22 per cent.

According to some commentators, the Depression put the cause of secondary education in Victoria back by around fifteen years.[32] It wasn't until after the Second World War that fees were finally abolished in Victorian secondary schools and secondary education became available to all children.

For children like Stanley West, Keith Stanton and Edward Greig, the Depression spelled the end of their, or their parents', hopes for their further education. Like the thousands of other students from Northcote High School and other secondary schools across the state, their lives would be affected forever by the combination of one of the harshest financial periods in history and a system that preserved secondary schooling as a privilege rather than a right.

Endnotes

[1] Letter from AE Burrell to Northcote High School, PROV, VA 714 Education Department, VPRS 10249/P0 High Schools Inward Correspondence Files, unit 160 Northcote High School 1931-1939, 14 December 1931. All correspondence discussed in this article (including copies of outwards correspondence) is contained in this file. On the Depression see LJ Louis and I Turner (eds), *The Depression of the 1930s*, Cassell Australia, Stanmore, New South Wales, 1968.

[2] Letter from Mr HJ West to Sidney Kitson, 9 December 1931.

[3] Undated list in 1932 correspondence file.

[4] Letter dated 18 December 1931.

[5] AM Badcock, 'The secondary Division', in LJ Blake (ed.), *Vision and realisation: a centenary history of state education in Victoria*, Education Department of Victoria, Melbourne, 1973, vol. 1, pp. 473-80.

[6] A Lemon, *The Northcote side of the river*, City of Northcote in conjunction with Hargreen Publishing Company, North Melbourne, 1983, p. 198.

[7] Badcock, pp. 473-80.

[8] B Bessant, 'Education and politics in the development of the education systems of N.S.W. and Victoria 1900-1940, with particular reference to post-primary education', PhD thesis, Monash University, 1971, p. 435.

[9] *ibid.*

[10] *ibid.*, p. 504.

[11] *ibid.*, p. 505.

[12] W Lowenstein, *Weevils in the flour*, Hyland House, Melbourne, p. 15.

[13] Lemon, pp. 213 and 221.

[14] Letters from Mr HF Tulloch to Minister of Education, 21, 22, 28 January, 2 February 1931.

[15] Bessant, pp. 291-2.

[16] *ibid.*, p. 295.

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[17] J Bessant, 'An examination of public criticisms of schooling during three periods of economic crisis: the 1890s, the 1930s, and the mid 1970s to 1980s', PhD thesis, La Trobe University, 1988.

[18] Letter from Mrs J Street to Mr Sidney Kitson, 5 November 1932.

[19] Reply to Mrs Street's letter from the secretary, Education Department, 9 November 1932.

[20] Letter from the Minister to HF Tulloch, 28 January 1931: 'The Education Department has always given sympathetic consideration and assistance to parents who are anxious to have their children provided with a good education.'

[21] Badcock, p. 504.

[22] Pro-forma Application Form for Fee Exemption issued by the Victorian Education Department.

[23] Badcock, p. 504.

[24] Letter from Mrs Olive Greig to Northcote High School, 16 March 1933.

[25] Lowenstein, p. 3.

[26] Letter from Mr JJ Jeffrey to Northcote High School, 27 March 1933.

[27] Letter from Mr Samuel Burgess, 23 June 1934.

[28] Northcote High School archives, Inspector's Reports, 1931, 1934.

[29] Northcote High School archives, Council Minutes Book 1932-38, 18 May 1933.

[30] *ibid.*, 5 December 1933, 6 March 1934.

[31] Badcock, p. 505.

[32] Bessant, 'Education and politics', p. 434.

A Jewellery Manufactory in Melbourne

Rosenthal, Aronson & Company

Ruth Dwyer

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Abstract

In the years after the gold rush, as alluvial gold became scarce, many enterprising men in Victoria saw the opportunity to develop secondary industries. One of these businesses was Rosenthal, Aronson & Company, Manufacturing Jewellers of Melbourne. This paper documents the history of the company, from David Rosenthal's arrival in 1852 until his retirement and the continuation of the firm in 1903 as Aronson & Co. The business closed in 1927, just prior to the Great Depression.

Research for this paper has shown the importance of original documents and contemporary publications when recreating stories of the past. In particular, the Argus newspaper contains regular reports on the activities of the firm and its partners. Its articles on the introduction of tariff protection show how this legislation benefited firms like Rosenthal, Aronson and Co. From its Law Reports it was possible to identify the two criminal cases involving thefts from the manufactory. This then led to a visit to PROV to examine the Criminal Trial Briefs (VPRS 30/P) and to locate the appropriate court transcripts. The second case, *The Queen v. Dawes*, also contained measured coloured drawings of the interior of the premises. Other documents held by the National Archives of Australia and by PROV helped to fill out the story of a successful business that flourished as part of 'Marvellous Melbourne'.

Victoria in 1851 – all were off to the goldfields to try their luck![1] As William Howitt observed:

the diggers' carts are piled with all sorts of diggers' apparatus – shovels, sieves, cradles, iron buckets, picks, axes, and the like. Behind hang whole heaps of pans, panikins, kettles and iron pots, [and atop], bedding and often two or three women and some children.[2]

Astute men soon realised that to belong to the emerging merchant class offered greater possibilities in all kinds of fields: sly grogging on the diggings, supplying goods to the miners, and manufacturing of all kinds, including of the precious metal. Very soon individual goldsmiths were fashioning presentation pieces of gold, such as the massive ostentatious brooch presented to the notorious Lola Montez in 1855. The more discerning identified a market among the general populace for personal ornaments of a more refined taste. Jewellery manufactories began to appear in subsequent years.

David Rosenthal, a merchant jeweller and a native of Russian Poland, arrived in Melbourne aboard the *Sydney* in November 1852. His first years in Melbourne were spent in business with other emigrants from Europe, firstly with Hayman Feldheim, then later also Abraham Berens, a relative, as importers and wholesale jewellers at 33 Little Collins-street west until 1859. Rosenthal then continued alone until 1871, when he, with a partner (see below), commenced manufacturing jewellery in Melbourne on his own account.[3] A jewellery manufactory was erected for him in 1872.

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The new manufactory, erected for David Rosenthal & Co., Wholesale Jewellers and Importers, at the rear of their then-retail premises at 15 Little Collins-street west, was designed by the architects Messrs Reed and Barnes, prominent in their field in Melbourne.[4] Constructed of stone and brick, it was a substantial building of three storeys, measuring 66 by 20 feet (20.11 by 6.09 metres), and was designed to accommodate fifty-five goldsmiths in comfort. Placement of the windows over the workbenches eliminated danger to their health by ensuring proper ventilation. The charcoal furnaces (which once caused the fire brigade to attend[5]) were on the ground floor. A celebratory banquet was held in honour of the opening of the new building, with the principal, Mr Rosenthal, welcoming some hundred guests.[6]

Gold, in bars and sovereign blanks, was obtained by manufacturing jewellers from the Royal Mint in William Street, Melbourne, these being 91.67% gold; the remainder was of copper. The sovereign blanks were then melted down and other metals added in proportion to give the carat required: 9, 12, 15 or 18. Pure gold – 24 carat – is too soft for such use.[7] The colour of the finished piece was determined by the addition of other metals; for instance, if 25% copper were added to 75% gold the colour would be red-gold. The metal was annealed during the manufacturing process by plunging it into water when black-hot to prevent it becoming brittle. Most locally made pieces were of gold rather than of silver. Although these pieces found a ready market, the wealthier classes still purchased imported jewellery. The *Argus* reported that

specimens of the colonial goldsmiths' art have been executed which would do credit to any manufacturer in London or Paris. ... in one direction they claim superiority, and that is in connexion with the quality of the material of which their productions are composed.[8]

No doubt influencing David Rosenthal to commence manufacturing jewellery in Melbourne was the decision of the Victorian Government in 1866 to pass legislation introducing tariff protection for local industries. Imported jewellery then carried duty of 10 per cent.[9] David Syme, of the *Age*, 'the people's paper', championed this cause.

The firm's beginnings were modest. Included among the thirty men and boys then employed was the manager, Otto Brinkmann, a working jeweller who had emigrated from Hanover, Germany, aboard the *Sophia* and who had been resident in the colony since 1854.[10] The firm also imported skilled labour, goldsmiths from Germany, possibly including Henry Hessels and Julius Haber. In mid 1871, according to the *Argus*, manufacturing jewellers were paid between £2 15s and £3 15s per

week with the better workmen receiving as much as £5 or £6.[11] The wages paid to apprentices were not listed but would have been from about 2s 6d to 5s per week in the first year. At this time many such tradesmen were unemployed. Output of the factory included 'brooches, chains, rings, earrings, lockets and studs'.[12]

As early as 1872, the business was described as 'David Rosenthal & Co., wholesale jewellers and importers, 15 Little Collins-street west', with no listing for his business partner. The situation was clarified when Rosenthal decided to travel to Europe in January 1875 and was tendered a farewell dinner at Gunsler's Café prior to sailing. Fellow jeweller and ex-Mayor, Mr Frederick Walsh, occupied the chair and spoke of the Melbourne he had encountered when he first arrived in 1849. Gold had not yet been discovered. It was a city that was neither lighted, paved, nor drained, excepting for Elizabeth-street, a perpetual torrent in which there had been drownings. The streets were bordered by mainly wooden tenements. He hoped that the following years would bring a more prosperous condition than in the past. Walsh then raised his glass to Mr Rosenthal, 'the *beau ideal* of a Victorian merchant'.[13] Mr Samuel (sic) Aronson, his partner, was present and responded to the toast.[14] The Aronson family was also Jewish and originally from Russian Central Europe, but had migrated to Bangor, North Wales. Saul Aronson, who was Rosenthal's brother-in-law, was resident in St Kilda. David Rosenthal, accompanied by his family, travelled aboard the *Pera*, sailing to Europe by way of Port de Galle, Ceylon, ostensibly calling there to arrange the purchase of gems, in those times an undertaking fraught with difficulty for those without a professional knowledge of precious stones. He remained in Europe during the following year.[15]



Brooch made by Rosenthal, Aronson & Company, before c. 1880, synthetic stone, punch marked RA & Co 9 carat. Courtesy CGC Gold Pty Ltd.

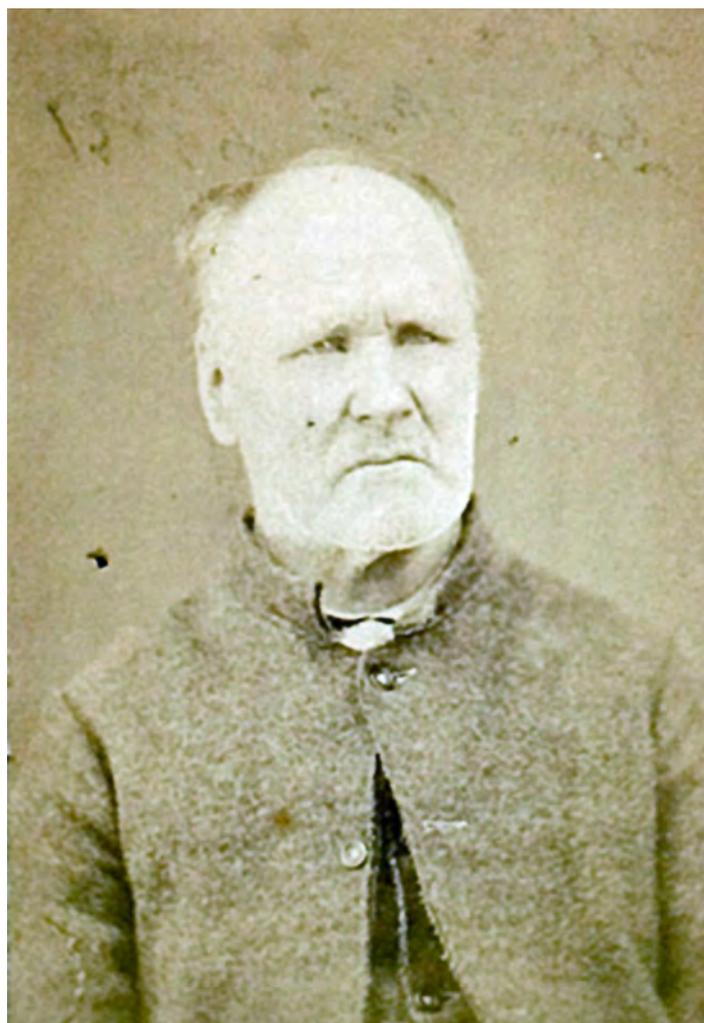
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It was the custom of the business houses of Melbourne to hold an annual picnic for employees and their families, usually during the summer months. In January 1877, the company of some 150 ladies and gentlemen gathered at Mordialloc for a picnic hosted by the resident partner of Rosenthal, Aronson & Company, Mr Saul P Aronson. It is possible that his brother George Aronson was also present as he was in Melbourne at least by 1869. Sporting events took place. Dinner was served followed by the loyal toast, to Queen Victoria, *she who was not amused!* Then an employee, Mr Lindsay, proposed the health of the firm and wished Mr Saul Aronson well for his return journey to Europe and success in opening a London house. Dancing, perhaps even the risqué waltz, was normally carried on until late in the evening at such functions.[16]

The good wishes for the health of the firm were timely. Although the business was not advertising as a manufactory as yet, developing such an enterprise was not without difficulties. Gold was missing. The lemel box, which was kept in a locked drawer in the office of the manager, Otto Brinkmann, had been pilfered again.[17] Another goldsmith with premises in Little Collins-street, Thomas Young, had been buying gold – sovereign blanks – from a short, scarred, almost toothless balding man of about fifty years of age. As time passed, Young became suspicious and communicated with the Mint authorities. Only three such manufacturing businesses in Melbourne were supplied with sovereign blanks by the Mint. David Rosenthal was informed.[18]

A trap was set. In early January 1877, Brinkmann, in the presence of George Aronson, used a chasing tool[19] to mark two pieces of gold, sovereign blanks. Two weeks later they were gone. The short, scarred, almost toothless balding man, Joseph Ralph, subsequently offered sovereign blanks to Young, who gave him a cheque on the London Chartered Bank for £19 11s 6d for the 5 ounces 9 dwts, then alerted Detectives Hartney and Edleston. They ascertained Ralph's correct name to be Joseph Ralph Smith and called at his residence at Little Charles-street, Collingwood. Smith was unco-operative. He stated that he had bought the gold from a young man, refused to name or describe him, and claimed not to know where he lived. It became obvious that the young man must have been one of the apprentices in the employ of Rosenthal, Aronson & Company. Smith was escorted to their premises but would not identify any employee. He was charged with receiving stolen property and locked up. A young, slight, fresh-faced apprentice, John Coley, was later arrested.

The case came before the Central Criminal Court in Melbourne on 15 February 1877 before his Honour Mr Justice Fellows. A jury was empanelled. The prisoners stood in the dock. Smith pleaded not guilty. The Sandhurst-born apprentice, John Coley, as he pleaded guilty, had his sentence adjourned to the following day. [20]



Joseph Ralph Smith, Prisoner No. 07932, 1877, convicted of receiving stolen property passed to him by John Coley, the dishonest apprentice employed by Rosenthal, Aronson & Co. PROV, VPRS 515/ P0, Central Register of Male Prisoners, Unit 25, p. 205 (detail).

The first witness, George Alfred Aronson, was called.

Detective Hartney came to my office ... the boy has confessed. ... he cried ... he said 'What will become of me?'. John Coley had taken about 40 pieces of gold from the lemel box, mostly in the late afternoon, and later sold them to Smith. Detective Hartney and I, and the apprentice, John Coley, confronted Smith at Russell Street ... 'Is this the man you sold gold to?' ... 'You are a damned fool. I would have saved you for the sake of your father and mother and not have put you away.'

Otto Brinkmann testified.

The prisoner, Coley, sometimes assisted me to pack up and put away the gold in the lemel box in the drawer in my office.

Thomas Young took the stand.

I recognize the two pieces of marked gold produced. I got them from prisoner Smith on the 29th of January last. Smith has been selling me gold since 2 November last.

The last witness, Detective John Hartney, gave his testimony, summarising the evidence.

Mr Justice Fellows then addressed the jury.

The jury subsequently brought down a verdict of guilty. [21]

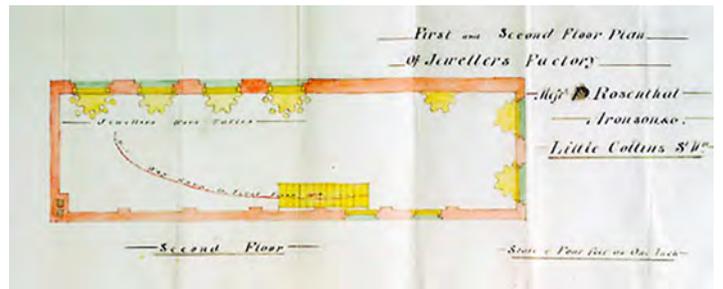
Smith, a Yorkshire man with a long record in Victoria and possibly in the USA, was sentenced to seven years with hard labour. He again became an inmate of Pentridge Prison. In the ensuing years he committed further offences and died in Pentridge in 1890.[22]

Nineteen-year-old John Coley received two years with hard labour to be served in Pentridge. He did, however, commit one offence therein, being found in possession of tobacco, for which he received three days solitary confinement. Coley was released on 17 September 1878, *freedom by remission*, with pay of £1 19s 9d. He did not re-offend.[23]



Brooch made by Rosenthal, Aronson & Company, before c. 1880, synthetic stone, punch marked RA & Co 9 carat. Courtesy CGC Gold Pty Ltd.

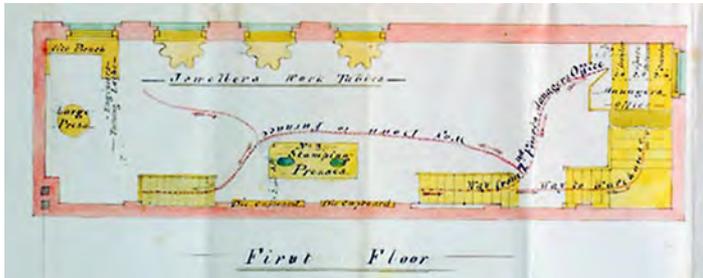
In 1878, an auspicious year, the listing for Rosenthal, Aronson & Co. included the words 'manufacturing jewellers' for the first time, with George Aronson recorded as a principal of the business as well. Obviously sufficient stock was now available. The annual picnic was a celebration: a cricket match, Mercantile versus Manufactory. With a margin of eight runs, Mercantile won.[24]



Detail of a coloured measured drawing of the second floor of the jewellery manufactory of Rosenthal, Aronson & Company at 15 Little Collins Street west. PROV, VPRS 30/P Criminal Trial Briefs, Unit 556, Case number 10 of 5 June 1880, The Queen v. Dawes.

Surviving from 1880 are the measured coloured drawings of the interior of the manufactory.[25] On the second floor of the building were workbenches for thirty-five goldsmiths, with five almost semi-circular, well-lit working positions at each, and suspended leather pouches to catch the lemel. Before him each man had a vertical 'peg', a wedge-shaped piece of hardwood to hold the current job in position. A swivelling gas jet was attached to the side of each workbench for the purpose of soldering. Gold for each workman was carefully weighed by the manager, Otto Brinkmann, before manufacture. Then the finished piece of jewellery and any waste was presented to Brinkmann and was again carefully weighed. A very, very small discrepancy was usually noted. Three of the goldsmiths working on this floor were Arthur Dawes, a diamond setter earning £3 a week, Julius Haber, also a moulder of precious gems, and William Wylie. The latter's work consisted of assembling brooches, soldering the components together, and punching the firm's trademark thereon.

Unlike in England and many European countries, there was (and still is) no legislation requiring the marking of precious metals in Australia. However, Rosenthal, Aronson & Company chose to do so. The firm's punch mark, a flag with five stars within, a stylised representation of the Southern Cross, which was struck to either left or right, was most appropriate for a Melbourne manufacturer. It was first recorded as being used in 1880. In earlier years it was simply their initials, 'R A & Co', accompanied by a carat mark.[26]



Detail of a coloured measured drawing of the first floor of the manufactory at 15 Little Collins Street west. PROV, VPRS 30/P, Unit 556, Case number 10 of 5 June 1880, *The Queen v. Dawes*.

A stairway led down to the floor below. Where possible in such manufactories it was usual to separate the heavier tools from the goldsmiths' workbenches. Consequently the stamping press, the large press, the dies, the lathe and the vice bench were all on this floor. Edward Müller, the engineer, worked here operating the presses. Here gold was pressed into form. Dies, female and male, were inserted into the stamping press, with sheet gold between, and the constant swing of the hammer resulted in small gold strikes or stampings to be used as decoration for brooches, locket, earrings, and so on. Müller also forged tools for use in the manufactory. Henry Hessels was the die sinker and designer. He constructed the steel dies which were stored in shallow cupboards on this floor, and also forged tools such as the mandrels, both large and small. These were tapering round tools used for making such items as studs used to fasten gentlemen's dress shirts, or rings and bracelets for ladies. Undoubtedly the most important aspect of Hessels's work for the firm was his designing of the jewellery to be made. He kept his many pattern books on this floor. Owing to lack of space on the floor above, there were three goldsmiths' benches here, situated on the opposite wall from the die cupboards, again well lit with windows above. August Adamske and Bartholomew Herbstritt, both goldsmiths, worked on this floor. Brinkmann's manager's office, where the lemel box was kept, was also here at the head of the staircase leading to the warehouse below.

The warehouse, where retailers called to inspect brooches, locket, rings and so forth, and then to place orders to purchase, occupied most of the ground floor. A small enclosed area to the west held the two gas furnaces for the purpose of melting metals.[27]

The *Factories and Shops Act* was passed in 1885. Regulations pertaining to premises to be used as manufactories of any description were formulated, and inspectors were employed to examine such premises. Plans had to be submitted to the Local Board of Health

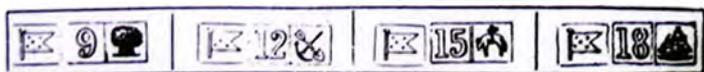
showing all floors of the building, a cross-section of same, and drawings of the layout of the yard, if any. If living accommodation were provided on-site, details were required. Means of escape in the event of fire had to be provided, as did adequate space for employees. Some method of heating was required as well as suitable ventilation, lighting and sanitary facilities. Safety measures to be taken when using machinery were to be described. Other measures were later introduced under this Act. Unfortunately these plans of the manufactory of Rosenthal, Aronson & Co. appear not to have survived.[28]



Brooch made by Rosenthal, Aronson & Company, c. 1902, pink tourmalines, natural seed pearls, flag, 15, and a fleece. Courtesy CGC Gold Pty Ltd.

By 1888 as many as 100 hands were employed by the firm, and more than 5000 brooches had been made, in addition to rings, locket, chains, etc. Having built a prosperous enterprise, David Rosenthal retired in 1889, but still retained a financial interest in the business. Saul Aronson travelled regularly between his London and Melbourne premises, leaving George Aronson in charge of the manufactory in Melbourne. Over time other retail branches were opened in some Australian states.[29]

The Manufacturing Jewellers' Association of Victoria was formed in 1889, the year Rosenthal retired. Two years later George Aronson and other manufacturing jewellers applied for permission as the Manufacturing Jewellers' Association of Victoria to use carat and guarantee marks. These guarantee marks were a sheaf for 9 carat, a pick & shovel for 12 carat, a fleece for 15 carat and a three-masted ship for 18 carat in respect of goods of precious metals. It is unclear exactly when this marking system began to be used; illustrations of it first appeared in the first issue of the *Australian Manufacturing Jewellers', Watchmakers' and Opticians' Gazette* in 1906, but agitation for such a marking system had begun before 1885.[30]



Punch marks used by Rosenthal, Aronson & Co.: a flag with five stars within (facing either left or right); carat marks accompanied by guarantee marks, 9 carat with sheaf, 12 with pick & shovel (not used after 1920), 15 with fleece, and 18 with sailing ship, these being the carat and guarantee marks introduced by the Manufacturing Jewellers' Association of Victoria, possibly first used c. 1880. Courtesy CGC Gold Pty Ltd.

New and extensive brick premises designed by Nahum Barnet were erected for Rosenthal, Aronson & Company in 1892 at 275-281 Lonsdale Street, near the intersection with Swanston Street. The application to move the manufactory to the rear of this site was lodged with Melbourne City Council in April of that year for the approval of the Chief Inspector, Harrison Ord, appointed under the *Factories and Shops Act*. Iron fire-proof construction was used and Grinnell's sprinklers were installed, also insulation and hydrants. A system of elevated wash stands with receptacles beneath was fitted to catch the small gold particles from the employees' hands, and it was estimated that this would save up to £50 worth of gold annually. The *Factories and Shops Act* now required a continual stream of air to circulate throughout the building (though much to the ire of the inspector, most manufactory workers pasted paper across these apertures during the colder months). Mechanical power, a gas engine of four horsepower, was installed. Fewer manufacturing jewellers were to be employed owing to the now unwelcome effects of the protective system and Victoria's precarious financial state. Although the customs duty payable on imported jewellery was now 20 per cent, some retailers were bringing in unfinished goods which only required a bare minimum to finish the pieces, thereby avoiding the duty. The manufacturers asked for 50 per cent, however the amended tariff passed was 25 per cent – and this now included unfinished goods. During these years, Rosenthal, Aronson & Company employed only twenty-eight men and boys and five females. The latter were paid a lesser amount per week, a minimum of 30s for a 48-hour week, while some males were awarded as much as 60s. This was considerably less than the wages of up to £6 received in 1871.[31]

In 1900 the Victorian Government passed legislation enabling the appointment of a Jewellers' Board under the *Factories and Shops Act*. This board was constituted to set wages for employees and regulations governing apprenticeships. It consisted of a chairman and equal representation of employers and employees, the maximum being five of each. Elections were held to

appoint members. Rosenthal, Aronson & Company were not represented as employers. The reason may have been the departure in 1900 of George Aronson, who returned to England.[32] It is not known if one of their goldsmiths was a representative of the employees. Also in this year, under this Act, Henry Newman, the grand old man of the trade, a retailer and manufacturer, began collecting signatures for a petition in support of a half holiday. Support for closing at 1.00 pm on either Wednesday or Saturday afternoons was evident. In the City of Melbourne a half holiday was granted.[33]

On 30 July 1901, Rosenthal, Aronson & Company sought approval from the inspector at the local municipality, Melbourne City Council, to move back to Little Collins-street at no. 297 near Royal Arcade. The building was of brick with a slate roof. Employed were to be one man in the smelting room, two engineers, and fifty-nine goldsmiths, including three females, who were usually employed in finishing and polishing pieces. The goldsmiths, or manufacturing jewellers, were to occupy premises measuring 144 by 24 feet (43.89 by 7.31 metres), with a height of 13 feet (3.96 metres). The twenty-four windows were double hung to allow adequate light and ventilation. Sanitary conditions were satisfactory. Double doors opened outwards to allow for easy escape in case of fire. Mechanical power was supplied by an electric engine of five horsepower. The Jewellers Board determined that 50s per week be paid to mounters, setters, ring makers and chain makers etc., and 60s to chasers and engravers. Apprentices in their first year received 5s a week rising to 40s in the last and seventh year. The wages of their travellers, such as John Harris Marks and Mr Holtz in Wagga Wagga (where the town was plastered with bills offering £50 reward for the recovery of his supposedly stolen goods[34]), are unknown. They may have been paid on a commission basis.[35]

Also in 1901, in October, the business still known as Rosenthal, Aronson & Company was floated as a public company, with £90 000 in shares of £100 each. It is unclear whether David Rosenthal still had a financial interest in the business at this time. After making his will in 1893 he lost all his money during the Depression of the 1890s, though he was able to compromise with his creditors, thereby avoiding insolvency. At his death, his personal estate was valued at £177 2s 7d. He owned no real estate. (It was a common practice for men involved in their own enterprises to put the family home in the name of their spouse after the passing of the *Married Women's Property Act* in 1870.) The Lonsdale Street building had been sold prior to Rosenthal's death, presumably in part to provide for this impecunious manufacturing jeweller and his family.[36]

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In 1903 the business became Aronson & Company as David Rosenthal was no longer a partner. He passed away on 7 March 1910 aged 84 at his residence, Amoe, in Redan Street, St Kilda.[37] He had lived in Melbourne for over fifty years, and for almost forty years had been engaged in manufacturing jewellery. It was unfortunate that he was unable to benefit from what continued into the early twentieth century to be a very successful enterprise. The manufactory was sold in 1927.[38] It is still possible today to find examples of the jewellery of Rosenthal, Aronson & Company, carrying their punch mark – a flag with five stars within.

Appendix: Principals and Employees at Rosenthal, Aronson & Company, Melbourne

The following principals and a number of employees of Rosenthal, Aronson & Company in Melbourne are listed below. Some employees may have continued when the business became Aronson & Company in 1903. The spelling is as found.

David Rosenthal (b. Russian Poland c. 1825, d. Melbourne 1910), Saul Philip Aronson (b. Bangor, Wales, c. 1845, d. London 1931), George Alfred Aronson (b. Bangor, Wales, c. 1848, d. London 1910).

Nuriel Aronson (Norman), Thomas J Flynn, WA Walton, John D Rosenthal, Ernest Hogarth, Snr & Jnr, J Hansen, R Wolffe, F Brienkman (Otto Brinkmann, manager), Charles Wigg, Peter Scherwager, F Haber, J Johnstone, H Beyer, Henry Lange, F Tilley, Alf Stokes, F Parrish, William Parrish, Percy Wadleton, T Dennison, H Petersen, G Alexander and his son, C Jenkins, Fred Stannus, George Stott, Walter Walton, John Harris Marks (traveller), John Coley, William Wylie, Henry Hessels, Edward Müller, Bartholomew Herbstritt, Julius Haber, Arthur Dawes, August Adamske, Mr Holtz (traveller), Mr J Lindsay, Thomas Morton, Gustav Paul Schober (known as George).

Endnotes

[1] I am grateful to Andrew J Walsh, of Robt H Parker and Sons Pty Ltd, manufacturing jewellers since 1875, for his reading of the text and assistance in dating pieces. I also thank Professor GWK Cavill for his reading of the text and permission to use the images of the jewellery of Rosenthal, Aronson and Co.

[2] W Howitt, *Land, labour & gold, or two years in Victoria with visits to Sydney and Van Diemen's Land* (1855), Lowden Publishing Company, Kilmore, Victoria, 1972, p. 63.

[3] National Archives of Australia (NAA), A712/1 1855/12259, Applications for Naturalisation, David Rosenthal; *Sands & Kenny's commercial and general Melbourne directory for 1859*; *Argus*, 17 December 1859, p. 3e. The history of Rosenthal's partnerships and addresses can be followed in the annual *Sands & Kenny* (later *Sands & McDougall*) directories.

[4] Joseph Reed and Frederick Barnes, architects, also designed the Trades Hall, the Exhibition Building, the Collins Street Independent Church and other notable buildings.

[5] *Argus*, 9 February 1877, p. 5d. No Fire Inquest was located in PROV, VA 862 Office of the Registrar-General and the Office of Titles, VPRS 407/P0 Fire Inquest Deposition Files.

[6] *Age*, 25 November 1872, p. 2f; *Argus*, 25 November 1872, p. 5b.

[7] 9-carat gold = 0.3750 parts of 1,000 (or 37.5 per cent), 15-carat = 0.6350 parts of 1,000 (or 63.5 per cent), and so on. Gold melts at 1054° centigrade.

[8] *ibid.*

[9] GD Patterson, *The tariff in the Australian colonies 1856-1900*, FW Cheshire, Melbourne, 1968, pp. 20, 48. The firm had always imported glassware, jewellery, crockery, electroplated ware, optical goods and so on.

[10] NAA, A712/1, 1857/1583, Applications for Naturalisation, Otto Carl Heinrich Brinkmann. I suggest that the correct order of his name was Carl Heinrich Otto Brinkmann, as usually the German-born immigrants were known by their last given name.

[11] *Argus*, 12 August 1871, Supplement, p. 2g.

[12] *Argus*, 25 November 1872, p. 5b.

[13] *Argus*, 27 January 1875, p. 5b.

[14] *Age*, 27 January 1875, p. 3a.

[15] PROV, VA 606 Department of Trade and Customs, VPRS 3506 Outwards Passengers to Interstate, UK and Foreign Ports (Microfilm Copy of VPRS 948), Reel 43, Rosenthal. Ceylon is now Sri Lanka.

[16] *Argus*, 22 January 1877, p. 5e.

[17] Lemel is the trade name for the gold and silver filings which collect in pouches suspended from goldsmiths' workbenches. These, and the 'sweeps', a mixture of dust, debris and metal from the floor, are sent to be refined.

[18] The case was reported in the *Argus*, 1 February 1877, pp. 5c-d and 2 February 1877, p. 5c.

[19] Steel chasing tools of various sizes with rounded ends are used with a small hammer to move metal on the front of a piece to create a design.

[20] In 1877, those accused were not permitted to give evidence on their own behalf, or to be cross-examined. Sandhurst was re-named Bendigo in 1891.

[21] PROV, VA 667 Office of the Victorian Government Solicitor, VPRS 30/P Criminal Trial Briefs, Unit 501, 5/2/77 The Queen v. Smith and Coley; *Argus*, 16 February 1877, p. 6f 'Stealing Gold'.

[22] PROV, VA 1464 Penal and Gaols Branch, Chief Secretary's Department, VPRS 515/P, Central Register of Male Prisoners, Unit 25, p. 205, Smith; PROV, VA 863 His Majesty's Gaol, Pentridge, VPRS 10858/P Registers of Personal Descriptions of Prisoners Received, Unit 1, p. 479, No. 07932, previously No. 14458, Smith.

[23] PROV, VPRS 515/P, Unit 25, p. 206, Coley; PROV, VPRS 10858/P, Unit 1, p. 486, No. 14459, Coley.

[24] *Argus*, 8 February 1878, p. 5g.

[25] PROV, VPRS 30/P, Unit 556, Case number 10 of 5 June 1880, The Queen v. Dawes, including measured coloured drawings of the interior of the manufactory of Rosenthal, Aronson & Co. GE Gee, *The practical gold-worker*, Crosby Lockwood, London, 1877, pp. 80-91; GE Gee, *The goldsmith's handbook*, Crosby Lockwood and Son, London, 1881, revised edition 1922.

[26] K Cavill, G Cocks & and J Grace, *Australian jewellers: gold & silversmiths, makers & marks*, CGC Gold Pty Ltd, Roseville, New South Wales, 1992, p. 32.

[27] For a general discussion of jewellery manufacture at this time see *Argus*, 23 February 1885, p. 7a-c 'The industries of the colony. No. V. Jewellery'.

[28] *Victorian Government gazette*, Supplement, 24 December 1885, p. 295 and 13 June 1890, p. 2453. Details concerning living accommodation on-site were especially aimed toward the Chinese, mainly cabinet makers, but also at a small number of manufacturing jewellers who worked in sub-standard conditions, usually in their dwellings.

[29] A Sutherland, *Victoria and its metropolis, past and present*, 2 vols, McCarron, Bird & Co., Melbourne, 1888, vol. 2, p. 574.

[30] NAA, A11731, 2607-2610, Applications for Registration of Victorian Trademarks; *Argus*, 23 February 1885, p. 7.

[31] *Argus*, 29 July 1892, p. 5e 'The Revised Tariff'; PROV, VA 511 Melbourne City, VPRS 3181/P0 Town Clerk's Files, Series 1, Unit 250, 1892, Factories and Shops, Inspector's Report, Rosenthal, Aronson & Co.

[32] *Argus*, 6 December 1900, p. 5a.

[33] *Victorian Government gazette*, 16 November 1900, p. 4279; 25 January 1901, p. 291; PROV, VPRS 3181/P0, Unit 268, 1901/3239 Jewellers' Petition for a half holiday. The Jewellers' Board was also known colloquially as the Wages Board.

[34] John Harris Marks was the son of Charles Marks, jeweller, of Ballarat. Holtz was robbed of stock worth £300 in Wagga Wagga in that year; it was recovered (*Age*, 15 July 1881, p. 3a; 16 July 1881, p. 5g).

[35] PROV, VPRS 3181/P0, Unit 268, 1901/3083 Factories and Shops, Inspector's Report, Rosenthal, Aronson & Co.; *Victorian Government gazette*, 19 July 1901, p. 2752; State Library of Victoria, MS 11756, Box 1875/14; *Australian storekeepers' journal*, 26 October 1901, p. 285.

[36] PROV, VA 2620 Registrar of Probates, Supreme Court, VPRS 7591/P2, Unit 447, File 115/828, will of David Rosenthal; PROV, VA 2624 Master in Equity, Supreme Court, VPRS 28/P3, Unit 129, File 115/828, probate and administration of David Rosenthal; PROV, VA 3022 Castlemaine Courts, VPRS 12873/P1 Index to Insolvencies (1871-1911), List of Certificates Granted and Issued (1875-1900), David Rosenthal.

[37] Index to Deaths in Victoria, 1910, no. 3520.

[38] According to the *Australian manufacturing jewellers' watchmakers' and opticians' gazette* of 2 March 1931, p. 5, Aronson & Company continued manufacturing jewellery until August 1927 when their factory and plant were purchased by WH Dempsey and Company Pty Ltd, manufacturing jewelers.

Colac 1857

Snapshot of a Colonial Settlement

Dawn Peel

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Dawn Peel lives and works in Colac. She has had articles published on the history of old age, housing and the elderly, Federation, soldier settlement, the home front during the Second World War and the role of death in community formation. While Colac's history is drawn on in all of these, it is always used to illuminate wider historical themes and to demonstrate the potential and broad relevance of local history in this regard. Her books include *Quality community care* (2003) – a history of the Colac District Hospital, and *Year of hope: 1857 in the Colac district* (2006), which received a commendation in the Victorian Community History Awards. Her current project is a biography of Anna Bage. Called 'Anna's journey: a British lady in West Africa and colonial Australia', and hopefully to be published during 2008, it outlines the adventurous life of a woman who had, amongst her experiences, spent time in the Colac of the 1850s.

Abstract

It began as a challenge: the extent to which I could identify the people living in my home district of Colac in 1856-57, the first year for which there was any sort of list with which to begin. Using this list, the electoral roll current for twelve months, I found it led to many other records. The assumption that, to be on the roll with its property qualification, most of the men would have been established in the district and probably married, led to indexes of marriages and births. The birth certificates subsequently purchased revealed many more names – wives, other children, midwives, informants. Family histories identified some deaths, leading to certificates which gave more names than that of the subject, which were then added to the list. Accidental deaths were investigated by an inquest jury – more men. Did any of them have wives? To the immigration indexes to see what could be found! Although there was no local government in my area there were court and school records to follow up. Living in the district also gave me easy access to local historical groups with family files and useful indexes to investigate as well as names to check in formal records.

It became clear that it was indeed possible to find a range of people who roughly corresponded to those found by the census when it was taken in March 1857. By then the database being built up was also beginning to reveal more than had been anticipated. The length of time people had been in the colony was one feature which showed clearly the impact of the gold rushes on what had been previously a little pastoral settlement. Areas of origin and methods of arrival suggested other social divisions in the community.

The people in my database began to acquire individuality and their interactions could be seen in this light. In many of the records of local institutions which then came to life, the forging of community spirit could be seen. The relevance of local events in the context of the wider theatre of Victorian colonial life also became clear. While this proved to be a successful endeavour, one which unexpectedly led to the publication of a book, *Year of hope: Colac in 1857*, it could, for that year, be more difficult for larger areas (Colac in 1856-57 was the smallest electorate in the colony). However, the study of a slice of the population at a chosen time could clearly reap unexpected rewards.

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What was life like in a settlement in rural Victoria immediately following the gold rushes?

The history of white occupation of the Colac district dates back to 1837, making it one of the oldest inland settlements in the colony, and thus one which experienced all the major waves of immigration. A census conducted in March 1857 collected vital statistics about many aspects of Victoria's population, analysed by counties, electoral provinces and electoral districts. Colac was the smallest electoral district in the colony, and the list of its voters was correspondingly small. This district therefore presented both a varied population and an area of manageable size to study.

It was a settlement isolated in many ways by its geographical position. Situated on the southern banks of a large body of freshwater that white settlers named Lake Colac, the small township was on the edge of extensive plains – occupied as grazing land mostly under Crown tenancy by eight squatters. The settlement was 40 miles (64 km) west of the port of Geelong and there was no public coach service from the coast for the last half of the journey. Travellers sometimes took up to three days to complete the trip, so bad was the route at times of the year. Travel further west from Colac was blocked by a stretch of volcanic stony rises, an area of dense scrub and undergrowth, weird geological formations, and also a feared reputation resulting from stories of robberies and attacks that had occurred in its strange environment. As a result, most traffic from the next small settlement, Camperdown, by-passed Colac by travelling north of Lake Corangamite, a large area of shallow saline water, which effectively hemmed in the Colac district from the north-west. The route to Ballarat, 60 miles (97 km) north was a rough unformed track winding over the plains. To the south the Otway Ranges created another barrier. There was therefore a largely enclosed area from Winchelsea to the stony rises, sparsely populated, with the small settlement as its node. This was chosen as the study area.

The 1857 census revealed that while there were 792 people in the small electoral district incorporating the Colac township, 41 per cent of them were under 21 years of age. These included 208 children under seven and another 129 between seven and fourteen. In the surrounding pastoral land there were small clusters of settlement at the station homesteads, scattered shepherds' huts, and a limited area of agricultural land at Larpent seven miles (11 km) west of the town. There were 207 males and 149 females of all ages, 'exclusive of unemployed Aborigines' as the census return stated, in these rural districts.[1]

How to find these people was the first problem. The only official sources of names initially appeared to be the electoral rolls for Colac and the surrounding countryside, and these became the starting points.[2] They yielded the names of 166 men, 127 of whom lived in the immediate Colac area. The franchise included a property qualification and so it was reasonable to suppose that many of these men had been in the district long enough to establish a stake there, and that they had also established families. This led to the index to births being the next resource to be consulted, and by entering the name of the voter it was established that indeed many of the voters were married men whose wives had given birth in the district. The first women were added to the list. As the index could also be searched by location and date, other married women who had given birth in the area during 1857 were identified. When sibling births were found spanning 1857 it seemed reasonable to presume that these were in families who were there in that year. All the birth certificates for Colac in 1857 were subsequently read and these proved invaluable, containing not only the names of the parents and siblings, but also those of witnesses, midwives, accoucheurs and the registrar. More people and their families to pursue! Indexes could not be searched by district for deaths but when these were identified from family histories they led to certificates rich in names – informants, doctors, undertakers, witnesses to the burial and sometimes an officiating minister. Marriages were fewer, but some certificates were sighted, with similar rewards.[3]

A laborious task was finding single men and women who had arrived during the target year. Here the online index to Assisted British Immigration 1839-1871 proved invaluable. It was possible to isolate the ships that had arrived in Victoria that year and in the preceding months, and by scanning the microfiche disposal lists it was possible to find local men who had employed the new settlers and so identify the young men and women who came to the district as their employees. Most new arrivals came on at least three-month contracts, so were in the Colac district for some part of 1857, and very often for longer.[4]

Unassisted immigrants who came to the district were harder to find, there being no convenient disposal lists to suggest where they went after their arrival. Early in the project there was only a card index, in which the arrival date of settlers said to have been in the district in 1857 could be confirmed. The subsequent publication of an online index meant that, if the name of a ship were known, this resource could be used to pinpoint arrival date in the colony.[5]



Benjamin Miller was one name on the list of enrolled voters. He could be identified from a range of sources as a literate assisted migrant, married with three children and active in local affairs. Colac and District Historical Society.

For many migrants the ship on which they had made the momentous voyage across the world remained part of their identity, and was mentioned in obituaries and family histories. People admitted to the Colac hospital had the ship of arrival entered as part of their admission details and searching indexes by ship and date led to names of extended families whose presence in Colac could be further investigated.

Sometimes, when a man had obtained respectability before his death, it appeared that an obituary almost carefully avoided naming a ship or date of arrival. This would indicate that a possible convict past warranted investigation. Tasmanian births and marriages often confirmed that the person had lived in Van Diemen's Land, leading to further searches in the many convict records available that could occasionally reveal more. For some people thus identified it was possible to ascertain when they had crossed the straits to Victoria. [6]

The local court records before 1858 could not be found, but the records of inquests were rich in names. Inquests were conducted in front of a jury, and not only were jurors' names, occupations and degrees of literacy revealed in these documents, but sometimes vivid accounts were given of the circumstances surrounding the death.[7]

A search of the local cemetery records led to the identities of many older people who died later in the century. Their obituaries in the local papers sometimes told how long they were said to have been in the district and, when relevant, this could often be confirmed by the immigrant indexes and disposal lists. Their wills provided leads to family members who could be further checked for their presence in the area. Family histories and pioneer registers provided many useful leads, as did an antiquarian history of the town written in 1888,[8] but no one was included on the list unless contemporary documentation confirmed their presence.

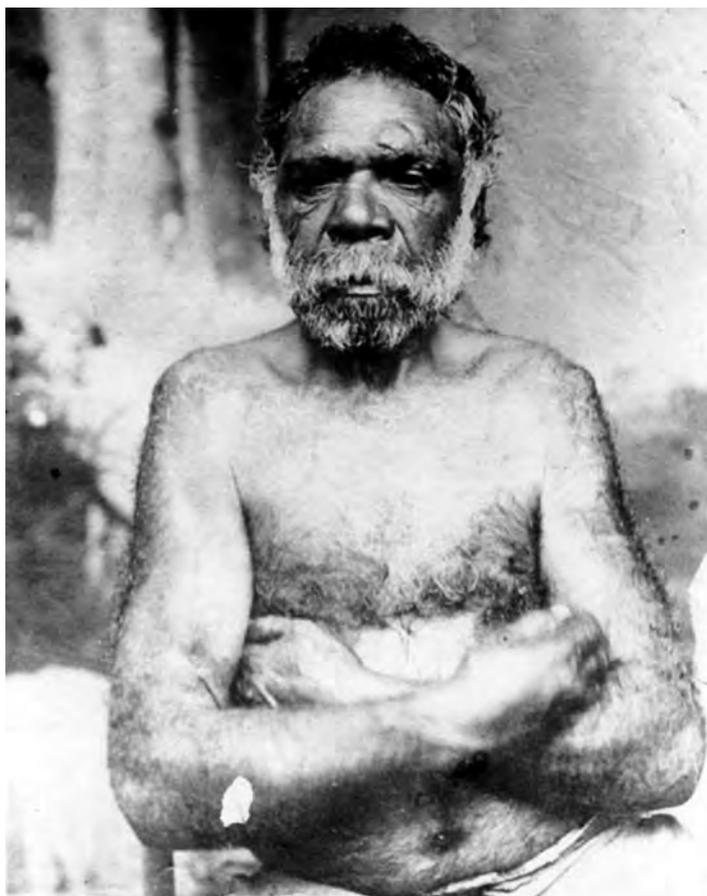
Slowly the list grew and finally contained over 1300 names, including children. This was more than the census-taker had found in the area in March 1857, but included people who had been there before the census and subsequently moved on, and those who had arrived later in the year.

When the list of names was analysed it became clear that over half the adult population was post-gold-rush, having arrived in the colony after the end of 1852. The occupations of the men, as revealed in the census, demonstrated the effect of the demand for housing. While general labourers and those engaged in agriculture and pastoralism were the largest group in the population, the next major male employment category was related to construction. The twenty-eight builders, carpenters and timber merchants were supported by wood-splitters, quarrymen and brickmakers, masons and bricklayers. The skills which the more recent migrants brought with them were also clear. The clergyman, surveyor, coachbuilder, clerk of courts, and teachers were all post-gold-rush settlers.

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Amongst the women, 'wives and widows of no specific occupation' were by far the largest group. Domestic servants followed, then needlewomen and a few farm workers, inn servants and shop assistants.

There was one group of local residents not recognised by the census – the members of the local Aboriginal tribe, the Coladjins. However, a questionnaire returned to the government early in 1858 revealed that the group consisted of twelve men, six women and one boy of six years. The report estimated that when white graziers first arrived, twenty years before, the Colac tribe had numbered about thirty.[9] Most of the Aboriginal men were intermittently employed by the settlers and farmers at a rate of wages about half the current wages of Englishmen. The nucleus of the group camped on a volcanic hillside north of the town.



Co-Co-Coine of the Colac Tribe. Colac and District Historical Society.

While most official documents ignored this group in the target year there was a good deal of information in the official records on interactions amongst the white settlers. It was clear that some events crossed the bounds of origin and class and brought people

together, whilst others demonstrated schisms in the evolving community. Inquest juries, where 'respectable householders' sat 'in sight of the body', were amongst the former.

Despite the property requirement, the jurors had diverse backgrounds, and jury service added to the multiple social relationships developing in the small settlement. The inquest for James Long, a tutor who struck his head after falling from a horse, brought together a carpenter and a builder, both from England; two storekeepers and the poundkeeper, all from Scotland; and an agriculturalist and a storeman from the north of Ireland. [10]

When George Keppell was found dead near Lake Colac in November 1857 the cause of his death was determined by a more varied group of men.[11] John Rea and his brother Adam Rea were literate Scotsmen and Rea's general store was an important landmark on the edge of the town. Another Scotsman was Thomas Hill, educated, combative and outspoken. He had opened the first rough hotel in Colac in 1848. When the first blocks of suburban land were sold it was said that the only buyers were squatters and publicans, and Hill obtained a number of pieces of land. He had at times held a mail contract, and set up a sawmill, and on the 1856 electoral roll was listed as 'miller' as he then had a flour mill. He and his wife had a growing family and he was passionate about the development of the town, going out of his way to attract migrants with skills to Colac, and sometimes renting them their first accommodation.

Also on the jury for Keppel was one of the men Thomas Hill had attracted to the district, Simon Campbell, a skilled blacksmith from County Clare. He had a thriving business in the town, and links by marriage to other families of similar origins. Another Irishman and also well-established in the town and a member of an extended family there was John McGonigal.

William Martin, an orchardist from Yorkshire, John Gibson, a shoemaker from Ayreshire, and another shoemaker, John Black, from County Tyrone in the north of Ireland, were also members of this jury. Other juries were similarly mixed. It is difficult to imagine circumstances which could have brought together such disparate men before their migration, and in the isolated settlement they were jointly brought face to face with raw death.

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Less exceptional deaths also forced a deal of interaction between various local people. Legal requirements surrounding a death involved the deputy-registrar, a doctor or coroner, an informant, an undertaker, a minister or witnesses – usually a minimum of five people. During most of 1857 the local deputy-registrar was Cornishman Henry Nankivell, who usually also certified the death in his role as doctor. The Reverend Hugh Blair from the north of Ireland was the only resident minister of religion and frequently signed the death certificate as one of the witnesses of the burial. Robert Shields, a carpenter from Ireland, co-signed with Blair as a witness to the burial of Donald McDonald, a general servant of Scottish birth, whose father was the informant of the death. There was no official undertaker in the town and Shields provided this service for McDonald. However, in other cases the provision of a coffin and associated duties led to a number of different men, sometimes carpenters, sometimes family members and sometimes friends, acting in this capacity. During four weeks in April 1857 sixteen different people were involved in the legal and physical requirements surrounding local deaths.[12]

Common emotions that might have been part of a shared involvement in local deaths were never enough, of course, to ensure a homogeneous community. Divisions were created by the origins of the settlers, class, religion, and, above all during 1857, by the burning question of access to the Crown land which surrounded the township – land leased to the squatters who were hoping to be able to obtain freehold to it. Many of these divisions reinforced each other, and the birth certificates reveal one of the ways in which people were separated by class and origin.

Mary Anne Johnson was an experienced midwife, in demand among the Colac settlers with links to the convict population of Van Diemen's Land. Poor economic conditions in the island colony had led to numbers of ex-convicts, many with families, making the often difficult voyage across Bass Strait to seek new opportunities on the mainland. Amongst them was a family linked by their connections to a former convict, William Massey. Massey, in 1830, at the age of 33 years, was convicted of theft in the County of Buckinghamshire and sentenced to fourteen years transportation. His wife Susannah and their five children were later permitted to join him in Van Diemen's Land, and by the time of his death in 1841 their family had increased by a further three children. Susannah subsequently married another ex-convict, Thomas East, and by 1857 their large inter-connected family group of seventeen formed a significant part of the population in Colac. They included Susannah's daughter Mary Anne and her husband Edward Johnson,

with their three daughters and four sons. One of the daughters, Louisa, was married to a former convict exile, Charles Merrin, and had by 1857 borne three children. Mary Anne's husband, Edward Johnson, was one of at least seven men on the electoral roll who had been convicted in England, but who, as early settlers in the district, had been able to acquire enough land to entitle them to a vote in 1856-57. Mary Anne Johnson had midwifery skills learnt from her mother Susannah Massey/East. Birth certificates show the extent of her contacts in Colac amongst the former Van Diemen's Land residents, suggesting that people with this background formed a distinct group in the settlement.[13]

Birth certificates also show the other side of the coin. Jane Hebb and her husband, Charles, a well-educated man who had been a bookseller in Leicester, together with their six children, migrated unassisted during 1852. Jane, who was forty-six years of age, was regarded as a skilled midwife, noted for her gentle ways, her healing hands and her knowledge of herbs.[14] The women she helped were all free settlers, and all people who could afford the services of the only practising doctor, Henry Nankivell.

However births, like deaths, called on the settlers' common humanity, so there were also patterns which, while they might indicate distinct groupings in the community, perhaps did so less than it initially appears. The slight tendencies for a birth attendant to have been from the same part of the British Isles, from the same class in society, or of the same religion, could also be accounted for by the fact that many of the helpers were either family members or neighbours.

There was evidence of some co-operation amongst the different religious groups. The subscription list for a new Catholic schoolhouse carried the names of prominent Protestant squatters. Hugh Murray was a staunch Presbyterian. In 1837 he had driven his sheep into the unoccupied land around Lake Colac and established his Borongarook run. Over time he had become the leading citizen of the district, a magistrate, a patron of the school, and the local contact for any government business. He and his brother-in-law, John Calvert of the Irrewarra run adjacent to the town, had worked together to make land available for a new Presbyterian Church and to obtain subscriptions from its supporters. Both these men were subscribers to the fund for the Catholic schoolhouse, as was Murray's brother Andrew of Wool Wool run and his brother-in-law, the squatter Dr David Stodart, of Corunnun. The fiercely independent Thomas Hill was another Presbyterian whose name was amongst the sixty-seven subscribers.[15]



The Presbyterian Church, the only Protestant church building in the settlement. Colac and District Historical Society.

There was no Church of England and the newly-opened Presbyterian Church was the main centre of Protestant worship. Many people who later became part of a Church of England congregation were amongst those who met there on a Sunday. There had earlier been co-operation between the Presbyterians and Methodists, who held services in Hugh Murray's barn, and they later shared a simple building known as Gow's Chapel. When the new Presbyterian Church was built the Methodists were also able to use it. During 1857 they also held prayer meetings in a converted barn. A non-ordained Baptist preacher travelling in the district was asked to dine with Hugh Murray, given hospitality at the manse, asked to preach from the pulpit for the Presbyterians and invited to take a Sunday School class for the Methodists.

Great tensions were apparent in the community, however, over the question of ownership of Crown land, and, surprisingly, this was revealed in the records of the National School. The teacher, Joseph Miskin, had taken on the additional role of secretary of a local branch of a co-operative land society. Such societies enabled men with limited access to capital to pool their resources to obtain credit for the purchase of land. Even though most settlers aspired to own only enough land for agriculture, the very notion threatened pastoralists whose income depended on access to the extensive plains. Already at earlier district land sales squatters had seen small blocks carved from their runs, or been forced to pay well above the expected price for others in the face of the increasingly competitive bidding. Miskin's activities in this sphere angered the local graziers, and, as they were amongst the patrons who supervised the school, they brought pressure on the Board of National Education to have the master dismissed. Joseph Scammel Miskin had been a teacher for fourteen years in England and, with his wife and

family, had arrived in Victoria as schoolmaster on the *Harpley* in 1853. He was appointed to Colac in 1854, where previous teachers had either been unsatisfactory or had found the supervision of the school patrons, led by Hugh Murray, to be too demanding. Miskin was not going to be covered by a colonial grazier, and his wider involvement in local life led to him becoming a spokesperson voicing much discontent.

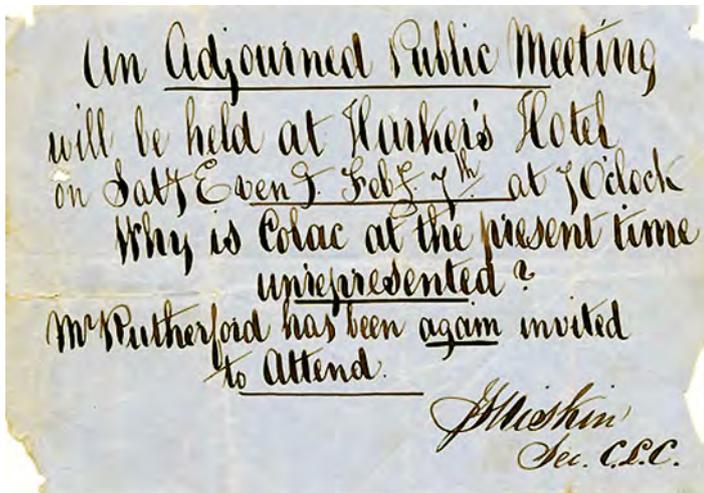


The National School, seen at the top right of this photo, became the focus of much discontent during 1857. Colac and District Historical Society.

When the National School Board did not respond immediately to requests to remove the master, most of the school patrons, including the grazier members and others clearly influenced by them, resigned and a new school committee was appointed early in 1857. In February, Miskin further angered the squatter element in the community by acting as secretary of a local committee pressing for the resignation of Andrew Rutherford as the local Member of Parliament in the newly constituted Legislative Assembly. There was a widely held belief that Rutherford, in parliamentary debates on the land question, had acted in the interests of the graziers.

The views of the former patrons reached the ears of School Inspector Glen, who had often met with them when visiting the school. He reported to Melbourne that the newly appointed group of patrons had too many of its members, 'mere creatures of Mr J. S. Miskin, the Master, ready to support him on all occasions in consequence of certain business relations in which he stands to them out of doors'.^[16] The National Board then sent Inspector Bonwick of the Denominational School Board to obtain an objective view of the troubles. After dining with Hugh Murray, Bonwick was able to elucidate further. He explained that Miskin was said to 'have neglected his pupils, going away on land jobbing tours for a week at a time'.^[17]

The National School Board acted and Miskin was dismissed.



Notice for a public meeting on 7 February 1857 to discuss lack of local representation for Colac. PROV, VPRS 880/P Inwards Registered Correspondence, Unit 11, Colac.

There was a public uproar. Meetings were held and letters flowed to Melbourne. One was quite explicit. After stating that the people were perfectly satisfied with Miskin they claimed that his enemy was a squatter who was trying to remove him because, as the agent of the Colonial Freehold Land Society, Miskin had been the means of procuring some of the squatters' runs for the Colac people.

The issue was finally resolved. Miskin's dismissal remained, but a new set of school patrons, acceptable to both the Board in Melbourne and the Colac people, was negotiated.

The people publicly involved in this issue were men, and mainly men whose presence in the settlement had pre-dated the gold rushes. Not all of them had children and others had children whose education would not have been at the National School. Henry Nankivell, for example, was single and someone who in his role as doctor mixed more widely in the community than the Murray family, with whom he was connected by marriage. Alexander Dennis held an extensive squatting run east of the town, and unlike the other district squatters had not lived in class-conscious Van Diemen's Land. He came to the area with his family directly from Cornwall in 1841 and was a staunch Methodist. The dissident group had suggested him as a new patron. Irish Catholic Patrick Danaher's colonial life dated from his arrival on the *Lady Peel* in 1850 as one of several immigrants sponsored by Lord Monteagle. There had always been a Catholic patron on the board of the local school, and Patrick, although now engaged in the profitable business of carrying to the goldfields, had a family in Colac and was a literate and respected

citizen, and was seen as an appropriate person to be nominated. Thomas Hill, always ready to face up to the squatter class, was also outspoken at meetings of this group. The interconnected issues of land, school, and politics thus revealed both increasing fractures in the local society and disinterested people prepared to act together for the perceived common good.

Presumably there were women of the community vitally interested in the welfare and education of their children, but public records do not reveal this. Apart from the bald numbers on the census returns, and civil registrations, very few official records were found which shed any light on the activities of the women. While there are no extant court records for Colac during 1857, one Colac case did reach the Geelong court. A young girl of eight-and-a-half years had been sexually assaulted after being enticed with sweets into a hayfield on the outskirts of the town. Jane Gears appeared as a witness at the trial, giving an identity to one of the three women storekeepers identified by the census. She told of the child coming into her store with money for a shilling's worth of biscuits. The accused man had been in the store at the same time and the two left together. Gears, a childless, married Irishwoman, signed her deposition in a firm and practised hand. Maria Troy's signature was also firm but perhaps not as confident. She had seen the two in the field and when she came out her door the accused man went the other way. Brigid Anthony, working in her family's hotel, saw the two leave the field separately and recalled the prisoner coming in for a nobbler after being seen with the child. Brigid, too, was literate. Sarah, the child, was taken by her mother, a 46-year-old, well-educated settler of several years' standing, to the doctor for examination on the evening of the assault.

A glimpse into another woman's possible hard lot came in the files of the Geelong Police District. Amelia Pearce had given birth to a son, Robert, in Melbourne, shortly before her husband, Constable Robert Henry Pearce, was transferred with little notice to Colac. Sergeant Cahir in Colac was instructed to advise Pearce about finding a hut as lodging for his family, and permitted him to take the Colac police horse and cart to Winchelsea to collect his wife and child, who would have had to travel there by ship from Melbourne to Geelong and thence by coach to Winchelsea.[18]



The Reverend Hugh Blair and his wife Annie were post gold rush migrants, identified on the list of unassisted passengers and found as signatories on a range of documents in 1857. Colac and District Historical Society.

Another young wife had a very different life. In 1854, at the age of seventeen, Annie Blair and her husband Reverend Hugh Blair, who was sixteen years her senior, arrived in Melbourne aboard the *SS Great Britain*. Blair's appointment to Colac followed and in 1857 the couple moved to the newly completed manse. Here the young woman, now with a one-year-old son, Hugh Murray Blair, was frequently required to entertain official visitors to the town, often accommodating groups of six or seven people. There are occasional glimpses of her witnessing a marriage when a wedding took place at the manse.

Some women appeared as inquest witnesses. We learn that Isabella Pink was married to a timber worker who was away in the forest for up to two weeks at a time, leaving her with two children under three years of age. Mary Doyle was seen staying for a week in the home of a settler outside the town, being prepared to help with an imminent confinement. Another woman was married to a man who had drinking bouts of two to six weeks. Maria James, the wife of a herbalist, had been consulted about the death of a man who suffered 'stoppage of the bowells'.^[19]

Three women, each the mother of a large family, were widowed during 1857. Seven experienced the death of an infant. Over half the women of child-bearing age had a child during the year, many of these infants, particularly those of the pre-1853 settlers, joining families where there were already five or six other children. Perhaps women were elusive when it came to creating a snapshot of the district in 1857 but their presence influenced so much else of what went on. The housing, the standard of the school, the

employment of the men, and even the quest for land at every level of society, was of increased importance because of the substantial number of families making their home in the colonial outpost.

In compiling this snapshot, accounts of co-operation and of conflict in the little settlement were enriched as knowledge of the protagonists' backgrounds, and perceived personalities became part of the story. Family histories and other contemporary sources added depth to the information that emerged from the official records. The particular nature of the Colac area – its discrete geographical boundaries and relatively small population with a stable element stretching back almost twenty years – was a key factor which made such a study possible.

Endnotes

[1] *Census of Victoria, 1857: population tables*, Registrar-General's Office, Melbourne, 1857.

[2] Rolls for the electoral districts of Colac and of Polworth [sic] and South Grenville, and for the divisions of Colac and of Polworth and South Grenville in the South-Western Province, all current from 21 July 1856 to 30 June 1857, both days inclusive.

[3] *Pioneer Index, Victoria 1836-1888*.

[4] *Index to Assisted British immigration 1839-1871* (online index to *Registers of Assisted British Immigrants 1839-1871*), PROV, c. 2003- ; *Immigration: index to assisted immigrants arriving Port Phillip, 1839-51*, Archives Authority of New South Wales, Sydney, 1976; *British immigration to Victoria: resource kit [microform] Stage 1, Assisted immigrants from U.K., 1839-1871*, PROV, Laverton, 1988.

[5] *Immigration to Victoria 1852-1879: Index to Inward [unassisted] Passenger Lists, British and Foreign Ports*, PROV, 2003- (viewed online as it became available).

[6] PROV, VPRS 944/P0 Inward Passenger Lists (Australian Ports), Units 10, 11 and 12; Papers of the Geelong and Portland Bay Immigration Society, held at State Library of Victoria, MS 12232.

[7] PROV, VA 2889 Registrar-General's Department, VPRS 24/P0 Inquest Deposition Files.

[8] I Hebb, *The history of Colac and district*, Hawthorn Press, Melbourne, 1970, reprinted from serial publication in the *Colac Herald*, 1888.

[9] Returns on a Circular on Aborigines, Victorian Parliamentary Papers, (Legislative Council) 1858-59, p. 634 and following.

[10] PROV, VPRS 24/P0, Unit 47, Item 1857/1020, James Long.

[11] PROV, VPRS 24/P0, Unit 47, Item 1857/991, George Keppell.

[12] Deaths in the District of Polwarth, 1857, Death Certificates, Victoria, Nos. 3350, 3351, 3352, 3353, 3354.

[13] L Johnson, *An Australian family*, vol. 2, *Who run beyond the seas*, Rock View Press, Camberwell, 1994.

[14] Family recollections of her great-grand-daughter.

[15] PROV, VA 703 Denominational School Board, VPRS 61/P0 Inward Registered Correspondence, Unit 11, File 57/456, list of subscribers towards the erection of a Catholic Denominational Schoolhouse at Colac.

[16] PROV, VA 919 National School Board, VPRS 880/P0 Inwards Registered Correspondence, Unit 11, Colac, Item 57/774, Report of School Inspector Glen.

[17] PROV, VA 703 Denominational School Board, VPRS 885/P0 Inspectors' Reports, Unit 2, Item 57/645, Report of School Inspector James Bonwick.

[18] PROV, VPRS 1005/P0 Outward Letter Book (Police Department Geelong), Unit 2, 6 August 1857.

[19] PROV, VPRS 24/P0, Unit 54, Item 1858/493, John Pink; Unit 44, Item 1857/651, William Wray.

Wanted! Honourable Gentlemen

Select Applicants for the Position of Deputy Registrar for Collingwood in 1864

Jenny Carter

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'Wanted! Honourable Gentlemen: Select Applicants for the Position of Deputy Registrar for Collingwood in 1864',
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Jenny Carter is a genealogist, family historian and teacher who visits PROV's reading rooms once a week, sometimes more often when working on a research project. The idea for the present article came about during a visit in early 2007 when she was looking through the Chief Secretary's Department files for information on which to base a talk on researching family history. Fascinated by a group of letters that caught her eye, Jenny soon found herself discovering what credentials were needed when applying for a government position in mid-nineteenth-century Victoria.

Abstract

Among the inward registered correspondence of the Chief Secretary's Department for the years 1863-64 is a group of letters by applicants for the position of Deputy Registrar for the district of Collingwood. This article explores the very different life stories behind three of these applications, including that of the successful applicant, Henry William Mortimer. The episode highlights the qualities that favoured one candidate over another in the selection process at the time, and demonstrates the importance of social, economic and political connections – particularly the need for a personal recommendation by an 'Honourable Gentleman'.

There is a wealth of information concerning ordinary people to be found in the correspondence of the Chief Secretary's department of the Victorian Government, dating from 1851 and spanning over a century until the department's demise in 1979. I have taken great pleasure in searching through boxes of files in the series which have been produced by this 'department of everything', particularly those of the mid to late nineteenth century. In these records it is possible to find evidence about the daily lives of a great many Victorians, many of whom have now been overlooked or forgotten. Among the letters of complaint and letters of application for positions in various government agencies such as police, railways, asylums, industrial schools and the military, in the fine grain of the official record, I found records that contained thumbnail sketches of everyday routines, miniature autobiographies, and revealing social vignettes.

As a case study, this article will focus on one of the many forgotten minor episodes of Melbourne's administrative history: the applications received for the position of Deputy Registrar for Collingwood in 1864. These records are contained in units 61-64 of VPRS 3991 Inward Correspondence II, a series which contains correspondence received by the Chief Secretary's department between the years 1864 and 1884.

By 1864 Collingwood had become a densely populated community with a high number of births and deaths to be recorded. At a pay rate of two shillings and sixpence, the Deputy Registrar's position at Collingwood was more attractive than, for example, in some rural districts where the Deputy Registrar was supported by produce from the residents being left on the doorstep. [1] While reading through the records of this episode, three applicants stood out from the others: David Hume Ross, Caroline Charlotte Allen and Henry William Mortimer.

In addition to the information I found on these applicants in the Chief Secretary's correspondence, I have employed the methods and resources employed in the study of family history to create mini (self-) portraits of the aspirations and ambitions of these three individuals, and to open a small window into the life of their family and community. Above all they demonstrate the way in which social, economic and political connections were used in the 1860s when applying for official positions in government.

Through each of these applicants' records we glimpse a different kind of life story: David Hume Ross's is the story of illustrious origins; Caroline Charlotte Allen's documents family hardship and the invisible barriers confronting women in nineteenth-century Victoria; and Henry William Mortimer's reveals an old colonist's travels around the world and his early involvement in the establishment of the colony.

David Hume Ross

In his application, David Hume Ross gave a great deal of background to his illustrious ancestry. He was born in December 1824 in Edinburgh to Dr Adolphus Ross and his wife Catherine Hume.[2] Writing to the Chief Secretary in 1864, Ross began by expressing his humble yet earnest desire to be appointed to the recently vacated position of Deputy Registrar of Births and Deaths.[3] He stated that he had entered Her Majesty's Service in 1834 at the age of eleven, became an Officer, and was rewarded with two honours and medals for his service in the Royal Navy.

Ross hastened to mention that he was the great-nephew of the historian and philosopher David Hume, grandson of the late Chief Judge of the Exchequer in Scotland, Baron Hume, and cousin to the then Lord Advocate for Scotland the Honourable James Moncrieff. Ross had been Moncrieff's private secretary for a long time and was favourably mentioned in his letters. Unfortunately Ross did not have copies of his cousin's letters at his disposal to support his claim. He did however add that he had 'gained the firm friendship of the Chairman of the Royal Hudson Bay Company by his conduct in their first search for Sir John Franklin in 1847'.[4] Ross also observed that he had first arrived in New South Wales, where he had re-modelled the Water Police in 1854, and later served with the City Commissioners of Sydney.

Ross concluded his application by revealing that on his recent voyage to Scotland he was struck by illness, and consequently suffered financial hardship:

Until last January I was completely bedridden with Chronic Rheumatics. My means are all gone and I crave employment to continue the education of my two sons (all my family), the elder on the death of my aunt and myself comes into an inheritance of £3,600 per annum in an entailed estate viz the Hume Estate Ninewells, Berwickshire.[5]

David Hume Ross died in Melbourne in 1879, aged 55.[6] His widow Charlotte Isabella Ross, née Hallam died in 1903 aged 72.

Caroline Charlotte Allen

Caroline Charlotte Payne, née Lagoe, married Samuel Allen in the parish of Mancetter in Warwickshire, England, in 1841. She was born in Atherstone, a small parish adjacent to Mancetter. Samuel was a native of Birmingham. The 1841 census of Warwickshire lists (Caroline) Charlotte aged 20, with her daughter Charlotte Payne aged 4 and Samuel Allen aged 25.[7] The small family lived separately in their own house in Caroline Street, Birmingham. At this time Allen gave his occupation as clerk.

Samuel improved his situation greatly over the following ten years. The 1851 census of Warwickshire shows the family residing at 11 Great Hampston Street in Birmingham and gives Samuel Allen's age as 39. It records that he was a Florentine button manufacturer, employing fifty-six women and four men. Caroline's age was now given as 33. Living with them at the time were a visitor and an apprentice, neither of whom had an obvious connection to the family. Despite having what was an apparently successful manufacturing business, two years later the Allens decided to migrate to Australia.

Samuel and Caroline arrived in Victoria in 1852 aboard the *Covenanter* as unassisted passengers, that is, they paid their own fares. Samuel gave his age as 41 and occupation as 'farmer'. Caroline, whose age was recorded as 34, was listed as his wife. Travelling with them on the same ticket (no. 130) were John Allen, aged 26, a farmer and brother to Samuel, and Henry Allen, aged 24, also a farmer who may or may not have been related.[8]

Samuel Allen took on the role of Deputy Registrar for Collingwood in June 1853, although his official appointment was not announced until 1854.[9] Following his death in 1864,[10] Caroline applied for the position, stating in her application that for the past twelve months she had, with permission, been filling out the certificates which Samuel, who had been an invalid for five or six years, then signed. Caroline argued that this made her well-accustomed to the procedures and hence competent to fill the role. Her husband's very heavy medical expenses meant that she was now destitute and needed the position for her own maintenance. In her support, the inhabitants of Collingwood drew up a petition, which was presented on twenty-five large pages of signatures. These names included the local members of parliament, councillors, doctors, lawyers and stockbrokers down to the merchants and tradesmen – coachbuilder, publican, saddler, butcher and chemist. Almost seven hundred names are listed, with signatures and addresses.[11]

Caroline's nephew, William John Allen, also applied for the position so that he could support his aunt in her need, '[i]n the unfortunate event of her appointment not being favourably received owing to her sex'.^[12] Allen's comments draw attention to the very real obstacles preventing women from securing employment and the independent means to support themselves in 1864. Between 1854 and 1900 there were nineteen women appointed to the position of deputy registrar in the greater Melbourne area, but none before 1867, two in the 1870s and the remainder in the late 1880s and 1890s. About the same number were given temporary positions in the suburbs of Melbourne, but only after 1880.^[13]

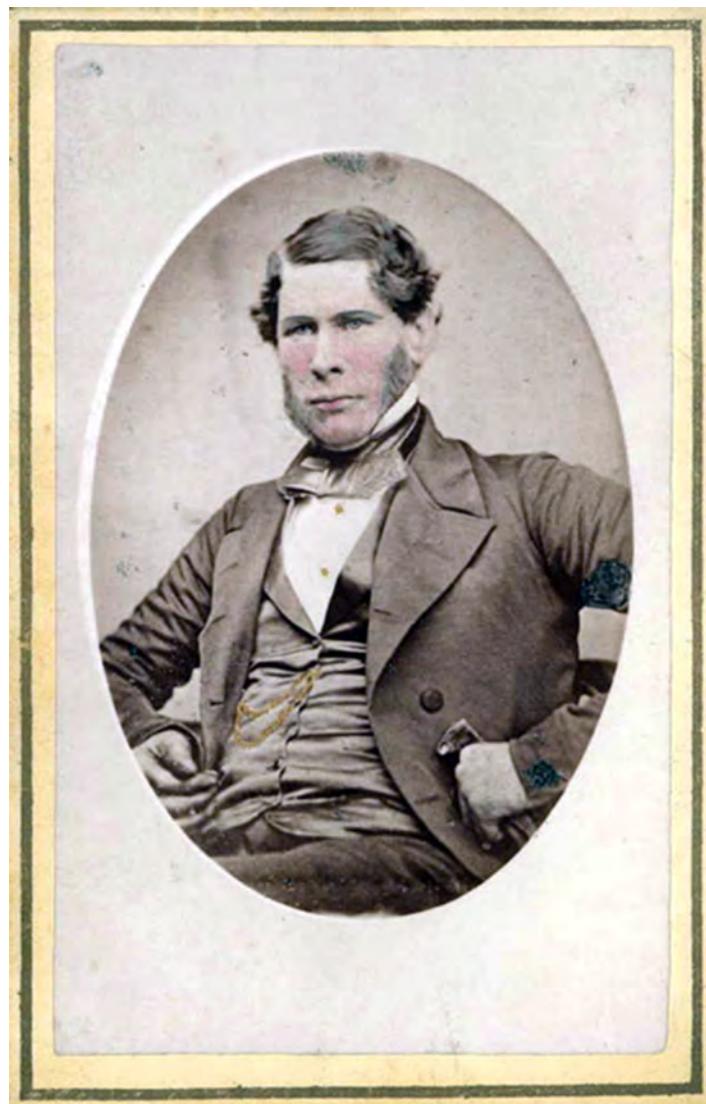
Neither David Hume Ross nor Caroline Charlotte Allen was successful in applying for the position of Deputy Registrar for Collingwood in 1864. The position was filled by Henry William Mortimer.

Henry William Mortimer

When I discovered that Henry William Mortimer was the successful candidate, I wondered at first why he got the job and not the others. He did not have the notable ancestry or, apparently, the wealth of worldly experience that David Hume Ross had. Nor did he have the backing of the local community and job experience of Caroline Allen. However, Henry proved to be a perfect research subject, as every clue followed up and every resource examined provided revealing information. A fellow researcher exploring records about Mortimer's son-in-law observed to me that a whole book could easily be written on him.

Henry was born in London in c. 1797 to Jackson Mortimer and Elizabeth Vaughan, and married Mary Addis in September 1819 in Hereford. By 1825 he had arrived in Hobart with Mary and their sons Matthew Henry and Mark William; daughter Mary Ann died during the voyage. Eight more children were born between 1825 and 1841.^[14] According to family memory, one reason Henry moved to the far-flung colony was the advice of his doctor to relocate to a place with a warmer climate for the sake of his health.^[15]

Two years after their arrival in Tasmania, when Henry was away from home, nine bushrangers came to their house. Mary was sitting with a baby on her knee when the men entered through the door and windows so that there was no escape. Threatening with a pistol they demanded jewellery, men's clothing and drink, of which there was none visible (the keg of home-made beer was in the cellar with the trapdoor covered by a carpet). After ransacking the house they left with their booty, and just when Mary had the kettle boiling one returned to take it from her, saying, 'It's full of water, just what I want'.^[16]



William Henry Mortimer, carte-de-visite with hand-coloured photograph, c.1835-c.1850. Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria.

After this incident Henry taught Mary to shoot and she became quite expert at it. As a future precaution she buried the remaining jewellery under a tree near the house, but could never find it again. Eventually the men were caught and eight were hung. The ninth was saved when it was proved that he refused to shoot someone. The family moved to a two-storey house at Battery Point about twelve months later, but they would frequently return to the farm in one of their two yachts, the *Richmond packet* and the *Cockle shell*. In Hobart the children went to a day school with the children of Henry's sister Charlotte Selina and her husband Alexander Bishop Butler. One day Mary went to the door for a delivery of bread and there encountered the ninth bandit, now doing honest work.^[17]

From his time in Hobart, Henry appears on the Tasmanian Colonial Index as an employer of convicts between the years 1825 and 1835; as a witness at a trial in Richmond in 1833; and on the Jury lists from 1835 to 1840.[18] His land grants from 1831 to 1833 were 1000 acres at York and 500 acres at Ralph's Bay Parish.[19]

In 1839 Henry organised for his family and that of his sister, Charlotte, to leave Tasmania on the brig *Caroline*, which was also carrying timber for their homes in Melbourne. On the way the ship was driven ashore on Swan Reef where it was unloaded, salvaged, and allowed to resume the voyage without the timber, arriving in Port Phillip on Monday 16 December 1839. [20] Henry had intended to leave his wife and children with his nephew John Blanch and his wife Sara. However, the next day two young men, Henry Griffin and Charles Deering, newly arrived in town, wandered into John Blanch's gunmaker's shop to purchase caps for their guns. One of them imprudently fired his gun forgetting that it was loaded. The result was an explosion which demolished the two-storey building and killed the young couple, John and Sara. Henry Griffin also died, but Charles Deering survived. Henry took the three Blanch children, who had been out walking with their nurse, to stay with his family.[21]

Henry and the boys had been in town for a week or so and had pitched their first tents on the south side of the river just below what is now Queens Bridge. During a flood their boxes were carried out into the bay, causing them to move to the other side of the river to where the Customs House now stands. Although Henry could not get a room for his own family he managed to find a new stable for his sister and her children. [22] After a month a room was rented for Mary and baby Edmund until a small place near King Street was purchased. When more timber arrived a cottage was commenced in Flinders Lane between Queen and Market streets and the family was thankful to move in. The Blanch children stayed until March 1841 when Henry advertised for someone who was leaving for England to take charge of 'two stout and healthy boys of the ages of 5 and 7'.[23] A handsome reward was offered by Henry to anyone who was willing to escort the lads; he was sending his orphaned great-nephews, John and William, back to England to be with their grandparents.[24]

Later Henry built a two-storey house at the corner of Collins and William streets, where the family stayed for several years. It was here that his son Matthew Henry died of fever in 1841.

Henry had a barque *Favourite* built on the Tamar River in Launceston, intending to take the family to England. He sold his property and they began the journey, firstly to see Sydney. Loath to let the ship sit idle whilst the family were enjoying themselves on shore, however, he sent her to Newcastle for a load of coal, but she stuck on a bar and did not return for six weeks. By this time Henry had decided that it would be too cold in England for him, and the family returned to Melbourne and 'Cranley Cottage' in Brighton. Henry later took the boys on a trip to California and when they returned the whole family went to Tahiti where they entertained Pomare IV, Queen of Tahiti, onboard the vessel. On their return from Tahiti, Henry gave the vessel to his son William (Mark William) who sailed first to Timor to buy ponies, and then on to Mauritius to sell the ponies, load up with sugar and return to Melbourne or Sydney.

In 1842 Henry stood as a candidate in the first Town Council elections in Melbourne. The election on 1 December 'was a wildly exciting and keenly contested one'. There were four wards, each with a polling booth in a local hotel. The polling for Lonsdale ward was held at the Royal Hotel in Collins Street and those elected were John Orr, Henry William Mortimer and John Pascoe Fawkner.[25] On 9 December the Council met at the Royal Hotel and, behind closed doors, voted for a mayor and four aldermen. In a close election, Henry Condell was chosen as the first Mayor of Melbourne. Henry William Mortimer was one of two aldermen elected for a three-year term.[26]

'Garryowen' reported in his *Chronicles* that Henry was 'intelligent and conscientious, but had a precise and pragmatism, which prevented him from becoming popular', and that he retired from the Corporation 'to take part in the management of the *Patriot* newspaper'. Henry was one the 'chief projectors' of the Victoria Fire and Marine Insurance Company when it was established in October 1848 with capital of £100 000 in 4000 £25 shares.[27]

Henry was interested in church-building and collected a large sum towards the erection of the Baptist Church in Collins Street. Along with Robert Kerr and John Lush he also started the first school for Aborigines at Merri Creek in 1846.[28] He 'had a good deal to do in the securing of Mr. Ham's [a Baptist Minister] valuable services, and though an Independent himself, Mr. Mortimer's energy and liberality on behalf of the early Baptists were as remarkable as creditable to him'. [29] Henry and Mary Mortimer were accepted into the Independent Church, St Michael's Collins Street, on 4 February 1852.[30]



NEW INDEPENDENT CHURCH, COLLINS-STREET—(DUN AND BAKER, ARCHITECTS).

Frederick Grosse, New Independent Church, Collins-Street (engraving), 1867. Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria.

In 1863, when Dr John Dunmore Lang arrived in Melbourne, Henry 'in a few brief, stilted but suitable observations, officiated as the proxy of the ladies, and presented the guest with a minister's elaborately finished gown'.^[31] In 1864 he applied for the position of Deputy Registrar for Collingwood, using references supplied to him for his previous position, that of Inspector of Weights and Measures for the municipality of Fitzroy. In his application he said that

I am an Old colonist of some twenty five years and can refer to most of the men of influence here to say that I have an unblemished character. I have made a considerable fortune but lost it by becoming security for others and in the depreciation of property. At present I am Inspector of Weights and Measures for Fitzroy but the income of £5.18.0 per quarter is too small to live on. If the two positions are incompatible I will gladly resign the former.^[32]

Henry William Mortimer was listed as a new insolvent in 1861. The cause was given as his inability to meet his responsibilities and the depreciation in the value of freehold property. His liabilities were £13 394, his assets

£16 995 and the surplus £3601.^[33] His testimonials show that he was greatly respected and was indeed of an irreproachable and unblemished character. His integrity, energy and general business habits, over a long period in the history of the colony, were remembered, and the first person to sign the testimonial was John Pascoe Fawkner.^[34]

Henry died at the age of 90 in 1887. He was the last of the initial twelve councillors elected in 1842 who formed the Corporation of the City of Melbourne. His obituary records that he was among the earliest of the free settlers in Tasmania, having arrived there in 1825 with the inducement offered by the British Government of a grant of land under land warrants. Once he moved to Melbourne in 1839, 'he commenced a butcher's business, which he carried on successfully for many years, but his favourite pursuit was ship owning. He opened up a lucrative trade in fruit with the South Sea Islands, and subsequently he and his sons were the first to open the sugar trade between Melbourne and Mauritius'.^[35]



Photograph of William Henry Mortimer in T F Chuck, The explorers and early colonists of Victoria, 1872. Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria.

Unhappily the last years of Henry's life were clouded by loss of sight. He was blind for nearly fifteen years and was unable to participate in the active life to which he was accustomed. Yet he retained his mental powers until the last, dying on 21 July at the home of his son-in-law, Mr JR Brennand, JP, Toorak Road, South Yarra.[36]

Conclusion

Most of the twenty-five applicants for the position of Deputy Registrar for Collingwood mentioned their current or previous occupations. Amongst them were two deputy registrars, JE Dobson from Ararat,[37] and John Tulloch from Prahran.[38] DC Forrest had worked in the Department of Roads and Bridges.[39] There were two booksellers: a bookseller/storekeeper and a bookseller/stationer/newsagent. Applicants also mentioned the number of years they had spent in the colony: Mayor TT Greenwood had been resident for fifteen years;[40] Robert Black five years;[41] David Hume Ross twenty-five years; while F Lawrence Webb, late Major 43rd Regiment in India, had been one of the earliest to arrive, in 1842.[42] Names of 'Honourable Gentlemen' were peppered throughout the applications.[43]

Some applicants offered odd endorsements of their suitability, such as 'I am well suited to more arduous duties ... you will believe me when you read my name' (signed William Baxter[44]), and 'it may not be out of place to mention that I am a member of the Collingwood Rifle Club' (signed Thomas Robinson[45]). From the application of JT Tulloch we learn that his son had written his letter of support on letterhead of the Melbourne Railway Company, stating that his father was the 'Oldest Registrar in Melbourne, with a family of young children to support'.

A few applications mentioned a Mr Archer (William Archer was the creator of the Victorian civil registration system). The application of WA Sparling for the position at Prahran is typical: 'Mr. Archer has directed me to apply to you for the application of the Deputy Registrar for Prahran and he kindly promised to use his influence with you to procure for me the appointment'.[46] Mr A Guillaume thought that the job was his when he said 'I was promised the reversion of this position by the late Chief Secretary on the recommendation of Sir Henry Barkly'.[47]

It is evident after examining all the applications for the position of Deputy Registrar of Births and Deaths at both Collingwood and Prahran that while many of the applicants had testimonials or petitions, others only had occupations to boast of and a few stated cases of need, indicating the lack of social services available at this time. Old age pensions did not appear until 1908, and unemployment benefits were not introduced until 1945. However, the most relevant qualification seems to have been the length of time spent in the colony, combined with the importance of the applicant's supporters. Henry William Mortimer certainly had both, hence his successful application. It was then, as it often is today, a case of not what – but who – you know.

Endnotes

[1] 2s 6d was the fee per registration – hence the number of applicants for Collingwood.

[2] David Hume Ross was christened in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1824: information taken from the *Family Search* online database. Details of other British births, deaths and marriages discussed in this article have also been taken from this resource.

[3] The position was for the Deputy Registrar of Births and Deaths, the returns for marriages being sent in by the clergy or authorised marriage celebrants.

[4] PROV, VA 475 Chief Secretary's Department, VPRS 3991/P0 Inward Correspondence II, Unit 62, File G5052, Application of David Hume Ross.

[5] *ibid.*

[6] Registry of births, deaths and marriages, Melbourne, Victoria: David Hume Ross death certificate no. 4320 (1879).

[7] Ages above 15 years were rounded down to the nearest increment of five in the 1841 census, hence the discrepancy in the ages in the 1851 census.

[8] PROV, VPRS 7666/P0 Inward Overseas Passenger Lists (British Ports) 1852-1923 (microfiche copy of VPRS 947), B 023, p. 3, Samuel, Caroline, John and Henry Allen. Although it is likely that Henry was a brother to Samuel and John, who died in 1861, his death has not been identified with the same parents – Samuel Allen and Hannah Crook.

[9] JF Waghorn (comp.), *Index, Deputy Registrars of birth and deaths in Victoria, 1853 to 1901*, JF Waghorn, Thomastown, Victoria, 1991.

[10] Death certificate of Samuel Allen, no. 4232 (1864).

[11] PROV, VPRS 3991/P0, Unit 61, Files H4489 and H4212, Application of Caroline Allen.

[12] *ibid.*, File H4211, Application of William John Allen.

[13] In the rural areas the picture was quite different, with large numbers of women appointed to both permanent and temporary positions: see Waghorn, *op. cit.*

[14] Registry of births, deaths and marriages, Tasmania: children of Henry William Mortimer and Mary Addis.

[15] Memories of Martha Jane Mouritz, née Mortimer, in a written record created in 1900 and obtained from her grandson, Tom Davison. Martha Jane was Henry and Mary's daughter. She died in Sale in 1911 (no. 3024, mistranscribed as 'Mourtiz').

[16] *ibid.*

[17] *ibid.*

[18] *Tasmanian colonial index*, compiled by the Kiama Family History Centre, Kiama, New South Wales, 1997 (microfiche).

[19] T McKay (comp.) *Register of land grants, Van Diemen's Land, 1824-1832*, T McKay, Kingston, Tasmania, 1994.

[20] MA Syme, *Shipping arrivals and departures, Victorian ports, 3 vols*, Roebuck Book, Melbourne, 1984-2006.

[21] The story of Alexander Bishop Butler can be read on the website of Brother Tony Butler at http://www.teachers.ash.org.au/butlera/alexander_bishop.htm (accessed 30 August 2008); see also *Port Phillip Gazette*, 18 December 1839.

[22] Martha Jane Mouritz comments that 'they were much more delicate than we colonials' (Memories of Martha Jane Mouritz). It should be noted, however, that Charlotte was heavily pregnant with her seventh child, giving birth to a son on 29 December 1839.

[23] *Port Phillip Gazette*, 3 March 1841, p. 2.

[24] John and Sara's infant daughter, Ann Eleanor, is not mentioned in the newspaper advertisement. However, she probably accompanied her brothers back to England, as an 'Ann Blanche', born in Van Diemen's Land, was recorded in the 1851 census for London as living with a couple of the same surname who said she was their grand-daughter.

[25] *History of the City of Melbourne*, Records and Archives Branch, City of Melbourne, 1997, p. 16, available online at <http://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/rsrc/PDFs/History/HistoryMelbourne.pdf> (accessed 30 August 2008).

[26] *ibid.* See also 'Garryowen' [Edmund Finn], *The chronicles of early Melbourne, 1835-1852: historical, anecdotal and personal*, 2 vols, Fergusson & Mitchell, Melbourne, 1888, vol. 1, pp. 260-2, 264. 'Garryowen' was an alias for Edmund Finn, journalist and author.

[27] *ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 314, 449.

[28] Memories of Martha Jane Mouritz; ID Clark & T Heydon, *A bend in the Yarra: a history of the Merri Creek Protectorate Station and Merri Creek Aboriginal School 1841-1851*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2004, p. 59f.

[29] 'Garryowen,' *Chronicles*, vol. 1, p. 170.

[30] Information provided by Wilma Bain, archivist, St Michael's Church, Collins Street.

[31] 'Garryowen,' *Chronicles*, vol. 2, p. 863.

[32] PROV, VPRS 3991/P0, Unit 60, File G4257, Application of Henry William Mortimer.

[33] *Argus*, 13 December 1861, p. 6.

[34] PROV, VPRS 3991/P0, Unit 60, File G4257, Application of Henry William Mortimer.

[35] *Australasian*, 23 July 1887. His son, Mark William, died on one of these journeys.

[36] *ibid.*

[37] PROV, VPRS 3991/P0, Unit 60, File G4256 (includes H4386), Application of JE Dobson.

[38] *ibid.*, File H4171, Application of JT Tulloch.

[39] *ibid.*, File H4398, Application of DC Forrest.

[40] *ibid.*, File G5598, Application of TT Greenwood.

[41] *ibid.*, File H4149, Application of Robert Black.

[42] *ibid.*, File H4384, Application of F Lawrence Webb.

[43] At this time it was important to your success to be well connected. 'Honourable Gentlemen' who could be asked for a reference were of great importance in an application, and I am of the opinion that at times there were applicants who could not name these gentlemen and hoped they wouldn't be asked.

[44] PROV, VPRS 3991/P0, Unit 60, File H4360, Application of William Baxter.

[45] *ibid.*, File G4459, Application of Thomas Robinson.

[46] *ibid.*, File J10409, Application of WA Sparling.

[47] *ibid.*, File H4173, Application of WA Guillaume.

‘A lonely, narrow valley’

Teaching at an Otways Outpost

Peter Davies

“A lonely, narrow valley”: Teaching at an Otways Outpost’, *Provenance: The Journal of Public Record Office Victoria*, issue no. 7, 2008. ISSN 1832-2522. Copyright © Peter Davies.

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Abstract

The Victorian Government introduced free, secular, compulsory education in 1872. With the rapid expansion of mining, farming and forest industries in the following years, settlement spread to increasingly distant and remote areas of the colony, and hundreds of small bush schools were established to educate the growing numbers of young children in these ‘pioneer’ districts. Otway Saw Mills was typical of such places. Established in 1909 at Henry’s No. 1 Mill in the Otway Ranges, the school was home to fifteen successive teachers during its nineteen years of operation. Correspondence between the teachers and bureaucrats in Melbourne, preserved by Public Record Office Victoria, reveals many of the challenges and hardships faced by ‘bush schoolies’ in their remote and often lonely teaching lives.

In 1911, Clifford Stanford wrote to the Secretary for Education in Melbourne, complaining that his current teaching post was ‘an out-of-the-way place, and ... far from being a pleasant place to live’.[1] Stanford was head teacher at Otway Saw Mills School 3601, at Henry’s No. 1 Mill in the Otways Forest of south-west Victoria. His comments were typical of almost all the teachers who taught at the school during its existence. They complained about the cold, the isolation, the cramped accommodation, their health problems, and how much they wanted to be transferred elsewhere, as soon as possible. Their views, and the response of department bureaucrats, are preserved in the rich records of the Education Department now held by PROV. The correspondence offers a unique insight into the experiences of teachers posted to isolated settlements in Victoria in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In this paper I use this material to explore how young teachers responded to living and working in a remote, mountain forest environment, and the rewards and challenges that went with the role.

The completion of railway lines to Forrest in 1890, and to Beech Forest by 1902, stimulated a major timber industry in the Otway Ranges.[2] Dozens of bush sawmills were scattered through the forest, linked by timber tramways to roads or rail lines. The steep terrain, wet weather and thick forest meant that many mills formed small, isolated settlements. Henry’s No. 1 Mill was typical of such places, established in 1904, deep in the watershed of the West Barwon River.[3] It was connected by a timber tramline to the railhead at Forrest, ten kilometres to the north, but the mill’s isolation meant that a permanent population of around 100 people lived on site. The mill settlement featured rough timber huts for single men and modest wooden houses for married men and their families, along with a boarding house, stables, post office, school and store. In 1927 the mill shed was destroyed by fire, resulting in the gradual abandonment of the site.



Photograph of Henry’s Mill, c. 1900. Courtesy of Birregurra District Historical Centre.

Agitation for the establishment of a primary school for the children at Henry's Mill commenced within months of the mill's opening in 1904. A range of arguments were made in support of the proposal, including the rent-free provision of a school building and toilets, accommodation for a male teacher, and the availability of pure water at the site. The likely initial attendance was cited as around twelve pupils, but likely to increase to twenty, a margin well above the Education Department's typical minimum of nine children for establishing a school. It was also argued that the timber available to the mill was likely to last at least eight years, and that more married people with children would move to the mill settlement if a school was provided, thereby increasing pupil numbers even further. It was pointed out that the nearest existing school was at Barramunga, five miles away over 'very precipitous country' without roads, and that the parents were willing to accept even an unclassified teacher.[4] In June 1905 the matter was still unresolved, with the mill children 'running wild' and receiving no formal education at all.[5] A few months later, however, the mill community agreed to let the matter stand over, as alternative arrangements appear to have been made, with parents sending older children to Melbourne and elsewhere for their schooling.[6]

Similar arguments were made several years later in 1908 when a formal petition to establish a state school at the mill was prepared.[7] It included the names and birth dates of children likely to attend and details of the proposed school building. The isolated nature of the settlement was again stressed, along with the likely longevity of the sawmill, the number of intending pupils, and the willingness of the mill proprietors to erect a building. Although negotiations took several months to complete, the Education Department eventually agreed to the proposal. It leased the building from the mill owners for a nominal yearly rent of £1, and appointed Leo O'Kelly as head teacher to open Otway Saw Mills School No. 3601 in January 1909.[8]

The school was 26 feet long and 13 feet wide, with a gabled iron roof, four small windows, internal pine lining, a dressed hardwood floor, and a weatherboard exterior. A wooden fireplace, pine door and a small ceiling vent completed the structure. It was equipped with two outhouses and a small fenced playground which abutted the tramline. A 600-gallon water tank was added in 1910, and in the following year a sand tray and observation case for Nature study were obtained. Inside, Department-issue desks and a portable blackboard were in place, along with a master's desk and stool, two book presses, an easel and a notation frame. Increasing enrolments by 1911 had some children sitting on boxes until two more desks arrived.[9]



Henry's Mill site, Great Otway National Park, 1999.
Photograph Peter Davies.

Deterioration in the school building was apparent within a few years. It is unclear whether this was due to poor design and construction, inappropriate materials, weathering, neglect, daily wear and tear or a combination of these. By 1913, 100 bricks were needed to mend the rear of the wooden fireplace, and a few years later the playground fence was in disrepair. In 1916, only eight years after its construction, there were requests from the parents, District Inspector and a local Member of Parliament to replace the 'antiquated little school room'. [10] The lighting, ventilation and floor space were by then regarded as inadequate and unhygienic by the school committee. The Education Department provided no maintenance allowance because it leased, rather than owned, the building. By 1923, however, it had agreed to increase the annual rental to £10 to permit the necessary improvements.[11]

A small wooden hut had been built in the school yard by the mill proprietors, WR Henry and Son. It served as a residence for Leo O'Kelly and his successor, Clifford Stanford. Subsequent teachers boarded with a family nearby, and converted the hut into a woodshed.[12] Such basic accommodation for teachers was typical at bush sawmills. Blanche Murphy's hut at the Rubicon school, for example, was only nine feet square, built of unlined weatherboards, and freely admitted 'rain water and mountain air'. [13] The teacher's hut at the Mississippi Mill was 'nothing much better than a Noah's Ark upon the waters. It is built nearly in the bed of the creek, and water flows right past it and nearly around it'. [14] The very basic teacher accommodation provided at sawmill settlements, however, was probably typical of that available to most teachers appointed to remote rural schools in Victoria during this period. Frank Tate, head of the Education Department at the time, referred to teachers' quarters as being well named, mere 'vulgar fractions' of homes.[15]

Teachers at Otway Saw Mills School also had to cope with increasing numbers of pupils. Enrolments had risen to 16 by 1908, to 25 by 1916, and by 1923 there were 38 pupils crammed into the small schoolroom.[16] Teachers' correspondence indicates not that family sizes were increasing, but that more workers with families were based at the mill, attracted by the provision of a school for their children. Children thus eventually formed about one-third of the mill's population. In addition, several mothers sent their under-age three- and four-year-olds to school as well, prompting teachers to protest that parents were avoiding their responsibilities and that the schoolroom was turning into a nursery as a result.[17]

Teachers

Otway Saw Mills was a single-teacher school. Fifteen successive head teachers taught there during its nineteen years of operation. All were male. Many were young, generally with limited teaching experience. Some were still in the process of gaining formal qualifications, which generally involved a two-year course at the Melbourne Teachers' College. Nevertheless, they all had at least some training in such subjects as English, arithmetic and algebra, domestic science, history, geography and physics. A few of the mill workers, on the other hand, were illiterate.[18] There was thus often a gulf in the education level between teachers and other members of the mill community. Some of the teachers clearly resented their low level of pay, and most felt that their education entitled them to better living and working conditions than those prevailing at Henry's Mill.

Teachers were comparatively poorly paid in this period, especially if they were only qualified to work in small rural schools. In 1912, for example, a 'Class VI' teacher, controlling a school of up to 35 pupils, earned about 46 shillings a week, or £120 per annum, the same as the basic wage. After nine years of service, this could increase to a maximum of £200 a year.[19] In 1918, women teachers' salaries were raised to at least four-fifths of the rate paid to men of the same class, but the 'family obligations' of men continued to be recognised with higher salaries.[20] By 1920 the young male teacher received £3 per week, his female counterpart £2 8s. Annual increments over a five-year period raised this by nearly a pound a week. This meant that after training at the Teachers' College, and with five years of experience, a male head teacher earned only 6s 6d a week more than the basic wage. He earned significantly less than a head sawyer, faller or millwright, and the same as a sawmill labourer.[21]

For the Otway Saw Mills teacher, about one-quarter of his weekly salary was needed for boarding-house meals alone.[22] A correspondent to the *Colac herald* argued that the 'totally inadequate salaries' offered by the Education Department were the main reason for the difficulty in finding teachers to work in rural districts of Victoria. This resulted in the employment of 'an army of temporary or unskilled teachers who are receiving less remuneration than many of the lower paid hands in the timber mills of the Otway forest'.[23] The difficulty the Education Department had in filling the vacancy at Henry's Mill school during the 1920s may thus have been a systemic problem relating as much to unattractive pay scales as to the isolation and poor living conditions.

Initially, female teachers were explicitly excluded from appointment to the mill school. During the earliest negotiations for its establishment in 1905, the District Inspector noted the lack of suitable accommodation for a female teacher, and that a male teacher would be provided with a room rent-free. The boarding house at the mill could provide accommodation for neither men nor women, offering only meals at 13 shillings per week. Over time, male-only appointments became an established practice at the mill. Given the isolation of the settlement, and the generally brief stints of male teachers at Henry's Mill, it may have been felt that the location was too remote for female teachers to cope with. However, single women routinely worked at schools in nearby towns such as Forrest and Barwon Downs, and at other mill schools at least as isolated as Henry's. Blanche Murphy, for example, applied successfully for a position at the Rubicon school in the Central Highlands. Her time at the mill was marred, however, by the climate, poor accommodation, lack of companionship, cost of living, and drunken pranks and language of some of the men.[24] Alice Hartley was the only teacher posted to the Loch Fyne Mine school near Matlock, in the Central Highlands, from 1899 to 1902, an extremely remote and rugged location.[25] The reluctance to appoint women to the school at Henry's Mill is also anomalous because with so many tiny rural schools opening and closing in this era, finding teachers to staff them was a constant challenge for the Education Department. Forest-based mill settlements were not necessarily any more isolated than many other rural settlements at some distance from towns, railways and roads.



Locomotive and horse team on Henry's tramline, c. 1908. Courtesy of Birregurra District Historical Centre.

Comments made by teachers about the isolated location of the mill school reveal a consistently negative response to the local environment. This may also hint at their response to the social environment of the sawmill community. Bernard Flood, for example, in applying for transfer, felt that

For months at a time, a teacher is practically a prisoner in the gully, for he cannot get away, even on weekends, on account of the remoteness of the district.[26]

Even the mill owner, WR Henry, acknowledged that the site was 'in an almost inaccessible Forest',[27] while a District School Inspector noted the 'wet weather, 6 months practically of very wet weather, and the mountainous character of the country'.[28] Another inspector recorded that the school was 'situated in an inaccessible part of the forest. There is no road to it; no horse can get over the mountains. The only way in is from Forrest by a sawmill tram'.[29] As noted earlier, the remoteness of the mill had been used as a justification for establishing the school in the first place, as it was 'situated in a lonely, narrow valley ... The children are quite isolated'.[30] The school's first teacher, Leo O'Kelly, had argued for a full-time position because the mill lay 'in a solitude entirely cut off from Forrest and Barramunga'.[31]

Teachers were constantly asking for transfers. The average length of appointment was fifteen months, the shortest being seven weeks and the longest slightly less than three years, by Clifford Stanford (1910-1912) and Charles Branditt (1919-1922).[32] The range of excuses employed by teachers as grounds for transfer provide further insight into their responses to the social and geographical environment of the mill community. Teachers nearly always requested removal

from the school, rather than pay rises or allowances to compensate for the isolation. In several cases teachers appear simply to have ceased duty without permission or explanation, possibly unable to tolerate the delay in appointing a replacement. Several were unhappy with the board and accommodation available at Henry's Mill, which involved either a hut in the school yard or boarding privately with one of the mill families. William Morris, for example, head teacher for a short stint in 1912 and 1913, was reduced to sleeping in a bed with one of his students.[33] Morris later blamed the damp climate for his contracting influenza and neuralgia, and used this as grounds for transfer to a warmer, inland place such as Ballarat or the Western District.[34]

Bernard Flood was prompted in 1914 to apply for transfer on account of the extreme isolation of the mill settlement and the impossibility of doing further study, along with the poor accommodation, damp climate and its effect on his health.[35] Several teachers were also intent on marriage and were reluctant to bring their brides to a school without a proper dwelling. This was a concern shared by soldier settlers on isolated blocks between the wars, conscious that a tent or humpy was not a fit home for a woman.[36] Cecil Wallis complained of the financial burden imposed by providing separately for his wife and child at Geelong, and himself at the mill.[37] The pursuit or successful attainment of further teaching qualifications, especially the 'Second Class Certificate', was also cited as a reason for transfer to another teaching post.[38]

Charles F Branditt taught at Otway Saw Mills School between December 1919 and October 1922. Alone among teachers at the mill, Branditt appears to have felt some sympathy for the community in which he worked. There is no evidence of him complaining to the Education Department concerning living or working conditions, and he submitted no requests for transfer. The reasons for his departure are not recorded. His portrayal of the mill in two articles contributed to the regional school magazine *Forest, lake, and plain*, while romanticised, is nevertheless sympathetic to the trials and difficulties of life at the remote site.[39] His positive response undoubtedly owed much to the presence of his wife, Nina, and perhaps to the fact that, fresh from the Rural School Training College, he had no previous teaching experience to compare with his first posting. Although their residential arrangements are not known, Nina's annual income of £40 as the school sewing mistress meant that the couple also enjoyed a higher household income than teachers before or after them.

Branditt describes a number of social events at the mill which utilised the schoolroom. One of these was a project to purchase books. This may well have been a common occurrence in this era, when hundreds of rural schools were established across the state to provide education for Victorian children. The Rubicon mill school in the Central Highlands, for example, was supported in 1925 by a donation of 200 books from the Children's Library League of Victoria.[40] Correspondence indicates that the Education Department was generally willing to meet requests for desks and blackboards, but unwilling to provide books for school children. It is unclear whether this was a response to financial stringency, or a reflection of a teaching philosophy which promoted pedagogy over independent reading and learning. Otway Saw Mills had to rely upon social evenings on alternate Saturdays, and a school bazaar at Christmas, to acquire books for its pupils.

Preparations for the Christmas bazaar were under way months before the event. The girls, taught by Nina Branditt, sewed prizes for the occasion. The boys raised young plants to sell to mill residents and made dolls' cradles from lolly boxes. They also erected an 'Aunt Sally', a painted figure of a woman smoking a pipe, and on the day offered small prizes for a knock-down at four shots for threepence. Mothers baked cakes and toffee, and made up jars of lollies and peanuts. The needlework pieces made by the sewing class were auctioned, before the schoolroom was cleared for the dance. Almost £30 was raised to buy books.

Charles and Nina Branditt stand out for the leadership and energy they provided in promoting a sense of common purpose at the mill settlement. None of the other teachers ever made such an investment in community life at Henry's Mill. Edward O'Connor was unusual in being the only teacher at the site ever to request transfer to an even remoter school, apparently because the location of the Old Federal Mill, beyond Warburton at Starvation Creek, was an area with which he was already familiar.[41] It is doubtful, however, whether many of the other teachers at Henry's Mill appreciated the admiration felt for them by the Secretary of Education, Frank Tate. Secure in his Melbourne office, Tate clearly idealised their toils and struggle in remote places. Enduring the 'hardships and lonely life of the pioneers' was probably a fate most teachers hoped to escape as quickly as possible.[42]

Several incidents reveal that the school sometimes attracted less able teachers. Edward Prendergast, for example, accidentally locked seven-year-old William Wilkinson in the schoolhouse after hours.

With the river swollen by winter rains, concern over the boy's disappearance abated only when he appeared hours later, injured, having crawled from a window. Prendergast was severely reprimanded by the Department for his 'gross carelessness' and negligence. [43] Clifford Stanford was required to remedy defects identified in his teaching, while Francis Shine was judged by the District Inspector as 'inexperienced and ... doing fair work only'.[44] Bernard Flood was rebuked for his extreme action in suspending Gladys Butcher for disobedience, and warned to 'use sounder judgment in future in the maintenance of [school] discipline'.[45] Frequent delays in the appointment of replacement teachers for the Otway Saw Mills School also indicate that it was not a highly sought-after appointment, and that most teachers avoided it if possible.

Although complaints by teachers about the isolation of the mill had lessened by the 1920s, the Education Department found it increasingly difficult to attract applicants when the teaching post at Otway Saw Mills fell vacant. It acknowledged the difficulty in keeping a teacher at the school during the winter months, and there were several periods when the school was closed mid-year for weeks at a time while a replacement teacher was sought.[46] In mid-1926 no schooling was provided for more than two months until a temporary teacher could be found to fill the vacancy. The position was advertised at least eleven times before attracting any applicant.[47] A similar situation prevailed early the following year, prompting the school committee to criticise the reluctance of young teachers to leave the city, and thereby depriving 'Country Children of their right to a decent schooling'.[48]

In many respects Otway Saw Mills 3601 was typical of the thousands of one-teacher bush schools dotted around Australia by the early twentieth century. The letters of excuse penned by its teachers have much in common with the fears and anguish expressed by numerous other teachers appointed to similarly remote settlements.[49] The 'bush schoolies' trod a common path in leaving home to attend a training institution before venturing to another community, entrusted with the task of training the young. Many felt trapped in the isolated districts to which they were appointed, cut off from family, friends and colleagues, unable to cash a cheque or visit a shop for weeks at a time. In struggling to adapt to life in tiny, remote settlements and teach a highly regulated curriculum, their efforts provided the basis of an education for many thousands of young Australians in this period.

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- [10] JG Johnstone to Secretary for Education, PROV, VPRS 795/P0, Unit 2812, File 3601, 3 March 1916, 8 March 1916.
- [11] *ibid.*, 27 February 1923.
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- [21] *The timber worker* (journal of the Amalgamated Timber Workers' Union of Australia, Victorian Branch), 26 April 1921.
- [22] Letter from A Cecil Wallis (teacher) to Secretary for Education, PROV, VPRS 640/P1, Unit 2639, File 3601, 3 May 1924.
- [23] *The Colac herald*, 14 June 1920.
- [24] PROV, VPRS 640/P1, Unit 1671, File 4031, 20 January 1921, 4 February 1921.
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- [26] Bernard E Flood to Secretary for Education, PROV, VPRS 640/P1, Unit 2423, File 3601, 27 October 1914.
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- [29] G Parker (District Inspector) to Secretary for Education, PROV, VPRS 640/P1, Unit 2423, File 3601, 1 May 1915.
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The ‘Monster Petition’ and the Women of Davis Street

Brienne Callahan

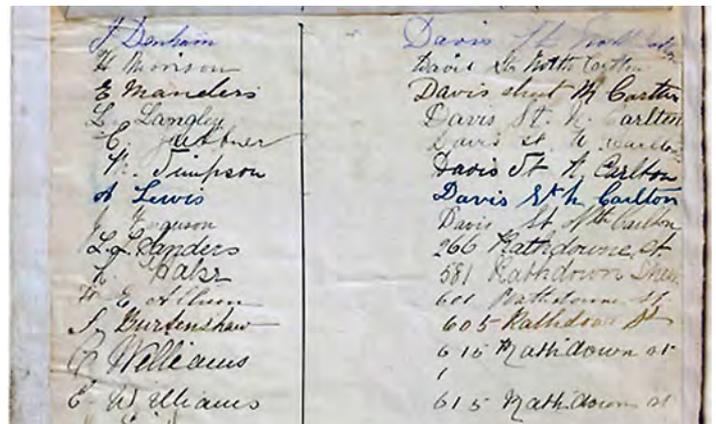
‘The “Monster Petition” and the Women of Davis Street’, *Provenance: The Journal of Public Record Office Victoria*, issue no. 7, 2008. ISSN 1832-2522. Copyright © Brienne Callahan.

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Abstract

In 1891, women’s suffrage advocates collected the signatures of some 30,000 Victorians, all supporting the vote for women. Quickly dubbed the ‘Monster Petition’, it remains one of the largest documents ever presented to Parliament. Some of the most famous names in the suffrage movement grace the ‘Monster’, but the majority of women who signed it were not well-known names. This paper explores the lives of seven women who were left out of the history books. Working-class and living in Davis Street, North Carlton, Agnes, Eliza, Helen, Ellen, Sarah, Ada and Jessie were not ‘history makers’, yet they still made history. Their stories paint a fuller, more accurate picture of women’s history and the history of the suffrage movement in Victoria. This paper argues for the significance of all historical figures, and suggests that the smallest of us can play a role in major historical events.

This year, 2008, marks the centenary of women’s suffrage in Victoria. Some of the greatest names in the history of the movement are being rightfully celebrated across the state. Suffrage, however, did not come about without decades of struggle. In this, our year of remembrance, it is important to contextualise this milestone event. Examining the conditions of the time and exploring the lives of ordinary people are ways to provide a background for the struggle for the vote and to situate the ultimate victory as one step in a historical process. This paper examines the lives of seven such ordinary women who signed a petition for women’s suffrage in 1891, some seventeen years before the passing of the *Adult Suffrage Bill* in 1908. By getting to know these women who participated in the campaign for enfranchisement we can gain a deeper understanding of both their challenges and their achievement.



‘Monster Petition’, 1891, showing eight of the signatures collected in Davis Street, North Carlton. PROV, VPRS 3253/P0, Unit 851, p. 434 (detail). The 1891 Women’s Suffrage Petition database, on the Victorian Parliament website, can be searched by the name and address of signatories.

It took just six weeks in the spring of 1891 to collect nearly 30,000 signatures on the ‘Monster Petition’ for women’s suffrage. Dedicated suffragists collected an average of 5,000 signatures a week (over 700 per day) before the petition was presented to the Victorian Parliament in September 1891. The six-week drive proved the determination of the suffragists, and was one of first major steps along the road to 1908 and the achievement of women’s franchise. Now a prized possession of the State of Victoria, the petition itself was truly a ‘monster’, running 20 centimetres across and 260 metres in length.[1] Several men were required to carry it into Parliament. Its sheer size and unique shape make it a marvel; a stack of paper with an equal number of signatures would not be nearly as impressive as the huge, winding roll presented to Premier James Munro. Yet perhaps even more marvellous is the vast variety of women who backed the effort to expand women’s rights.

Common wisdom has it that women's suffrage was a middle-class movement, that it was a challenge taken on by those with the education and the means to turn their passions into political action. The names of Henrietta Dugdale, Bessie Lee, Vida Goldstein and the like grace the pages of many Australian histories; their sacrifices and achievements have warranted such an honour. But what about the other suffragists? Although Jessie Ferguson of 49 Davis Street may have ruled her home, she was not among the lofty names on the petition; she was the wife of a bootmaker. And in 1891, the year she became a suffragist, she lived in a five-roomed rented house on a small North Carlton street.

In 1891, the one-block Davis Street boasted fifteen signatories to the Monster Petition. This paper will tell the stories of seven of them in an attempt to paint a picture of the working-class women who belie the stereotype of women's suffrage. In doing so, I hope to expand the definition of a suffragist to include what I would call the 'backbone' of the women's suffrage movement. We will also be able to recover from history some of those who rarely warrant a mention. Each of them has something to tell us about the female experience at the time and the extraordinary ordinariness of some of those who stood up for women's rights in 1891.

The Monster Petition

The Monster Petition was presented to Parliament on 29 September 1891 in co-ordination with a bill that included an amendment for women's suffrage. While the campaign had been gaining momentum for some time, the 1891 amendment appears to have been the first time the matter was taken seriously by parliamentary leaders. Premier James Munro, a firm supporter of the temperance movement entwined with women's franchise, spoke on the floor for the proposal. *The Age* noted, however, that 'The House was so unsympathetic that the Speaker had to stop the shower of banter with which the Premier was assailed.' Mr Gillies, Leader of the Opposition, argued against the proposal with classic rhetoric used to oppose the expansion of women's rights. Gillies said that women should not be given the vote as they '[could not] perform some of the services required by the State, such as those of soldiers, sailors and police'. *The Age* refuted his statement, saying, 'the objection raised by Mr. Gillies [does not have] a great deal of force when it is remembered that old and weakly men are not called upon to perform such services, and yet they are not denied the franchise'. The newspaper, however,

did not support the amendment, an interesting stance considering its strong support of women's 'intelligence', the 'tyrannous' effects of 'taxation without representation', and its general thought that there was 'no logical reason why women should not vote at political elections if they are generally minded so to do'. The usually progressive *Age* saw women as a 'wholly untried class of voters' and believed that women's suffrage should be presented to the voters at the next election.[2]

Suffragists, however, saw no reason to wait for the franchise. A contingent of women attending the reading of the bill

even went so far as to depart from the ordinary decorum observed by 'strangers' ... and applauded the more telling points made by the Premier. Mr. Gillies ... aroused the antagonism of his critics in petticoats, who once gave decided expression to their disapproval by hissing the leader of the Opposition.[3]

Not all women were so impressed with Munro's hour-long speech either, which *The Age* notes was 'quite a long speech for the Premier, who is not noted for his word spinning powers'. In the midst of socialite news, *The Sun* stated:

The ladies owe a debt of undying gratitude to the Premier for the almost pathetic manner in which he pleaded their right to vote, on Tuesday night, and especially for his convincing poetic quotation [which follows] ... Without a doubt this alone would have won the day, but for that sad wag, G. D. Carter, who immediately capped it with [another poem].[4]

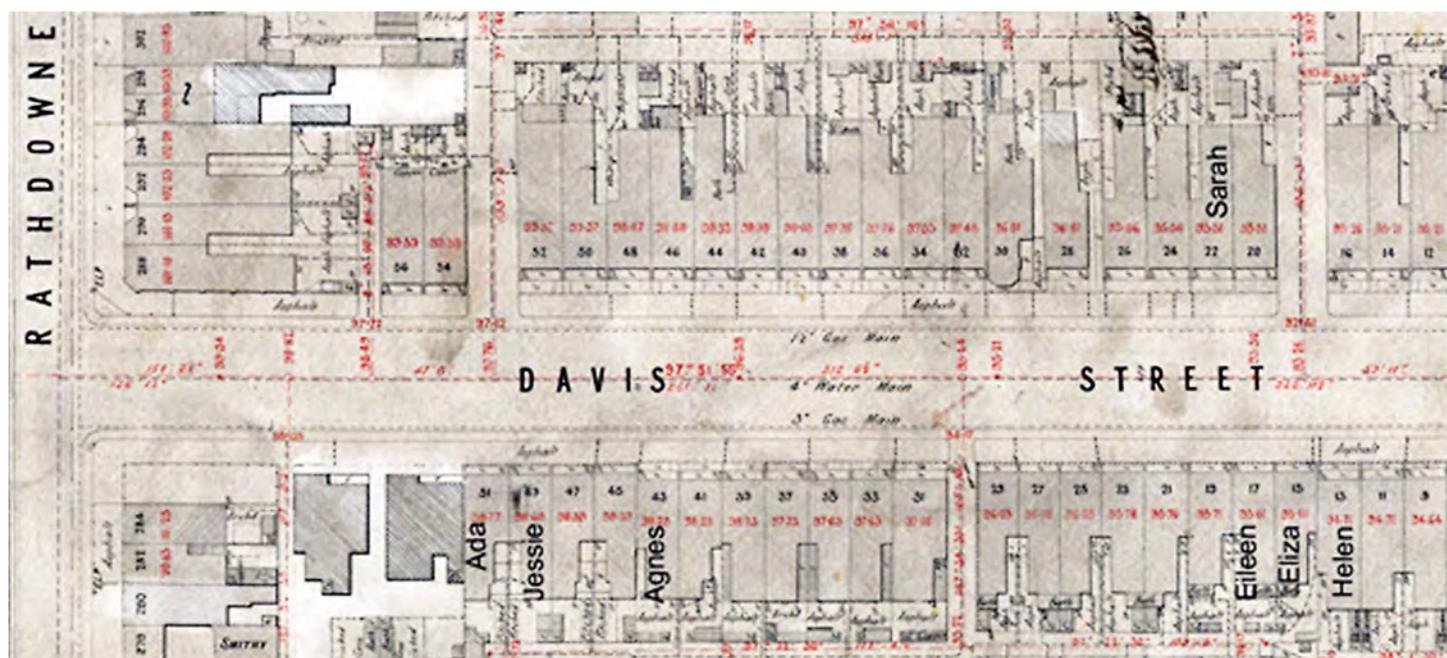
It is difficult to say exactly how this quotation should be read. One could argue that the women were sincere, and that they appreciated Munro's efforts on their behalf. Historians have noted, however, that Munro's attention to women's suffrage may have been a mere 'token gesture', as it was quickly dropped from the bill before it went to the Upper House.[5] Might there be a double entendre in the *Sun*'s 'almost pathetic' or a hint of contempt towards men who attempted to placate the suffragists with poems instead of action? Sadly, we cannot know exactly what went through the minds of women when their calls for suffrage in 1891 were refused. Given the sharp wits and tongues in the suffrage movement, however, it is not surprising that they did not end their struggle there. Suffragists had to fight for another seventeen years to gain the right to vote in Victoria, but in the end, of course, they were successful.

Women's suffrage is generally seen throughout the world as a middle- and upper-class movement. Vida Goldstein in Victoria, Elizabeth Cady Stanton in the United States of America and other well-known names all come from the higher echelons of society. While it may be true that at the leadership and organisational level most suffragists came from middle-class homes, when we look at the Monster Petition these are not the only names we see. The petition is now searchable online, and keying in Carlton, North Carlton, Collingwood, Footscray or St Kilda, all working-class and slum areas at the time, yields many names. There are significantly fewer results when entering Armadale, Kew or Toorak, examples of more affluent suburbs. Perhaps the reputation of Munro, who originally entered the Legislative Assembly as the member for Carlton, encouraged many working-class and poor women to sign. Perhaps the signature collectors took advantage of the women's lack of education. Perhaps they simply wanted to vote! Ironically, many of the women who signed the petition, including the seven on Davis Street, would have been ineligible to vote had the measure alone passed. The women's franchise clauses were tied to a provision that would have removed property restrictions to voting, a tactic decried by many suffragists as a hindrance to their chances. [6] We can only wonder what the signature collectors told the women of Davis Street and those like them. Without property, they would have been as ineligible to vote at the time as their husbands. Did the suffragists

explain this to the women in the rented houses and tenements? Or did they emphasise the 'one-person one-vote' proposal, even though they knew it would be likely to fail? Why was it easier to get the signatures of the poor than the signatures of the affluent? Were working-class women simply bolder than their wealthier sisters? These are broad questions that we may never be able to fully answer. Instead, we can look at a number of the women who did sign, to see what their personalities and lives can tell us about the ordinary women who became suffragists.

Davis Street and North Carlton

Davis Street sits at the southern end of Carlton North. The one-block street is sandwiched between Rathdowne and Canning streets east to west, and Lee and Princes streets north to south. Though Melbourne and surrounding suburbs developed around it, Davis Street did not even exist until 1873. The area bordered by Princes Street to the south, Rathdowne Street to the west, Fenwick Street to the north and Canning Street to the east was known as the Collingwood Stockade from 1853 until 1866. The area included a large bluestone quarry that provided work for prisoners 'not utterly steeped in crime'. [7] The actual prison barracks sat half a block north of later-day Davis Street, but were expanded when the gaol grew from a modest sixty prisoners to nearly 300 in 1854.



Davis Street, North Carlton, showing where each of the seven women featured in this article lived. MMBW Detailed Plan No. 1158, P ROV, VPRS 8601/P1, Unit 24.

When the prison closed in 1866, the City of Melbourne happened to be looking for a place to house some of its overflow: 'quiet, harmless, incurable lunatics'. [8] Originally, the conversion from gaol to asylum was conceived as a temporary arrangement, and few structural changes were made to the buildings. As the barracks had consisted of 'tiered canvas hammocks', this must have been an interesting situation for the new residents and their caretakers! Melbourne's booming growth, however, was quickly converting rural land into city streets. In 1873 the asylum closed and the property was converted into blocks, including Davis Street.[9]

By 1891, Davis Street had forty-five residences, nearly all of them three-, four- and five-roomed brick houses. Most of the people on Davis were renters, while their neighbours on Rathdowne, Canning and Lee tended to own their homes. Of the surrounding blocks, only Princes Street had a comparable number of renters. [10] Many landlords had multiple homes for rent: Jessie Ferguson shared a wall and a landlord with fellow signatory Ada Simpson. Ellen Louisa Langley and Eliza Emma Manders lived down the block; they also shared a landlord and an interest in women's rights. Helen Morrison lived in the smaller house just next door.

Housing conditions at the time were dismal, at best. Houses were small and families large. Melbourne did not have a viable sewerage system until 1897, and Carlton as a whole was known for its dirty water, widespread disease and frequently pungent aroma. [11] North Carlton seems to have escaped some of the fate of the southern part of the suburb. The presence of single family homes, instead of the tenements and share houses of Carlton, would have helped the crowding and resulting human waste. North Carlton, however, would not have been considered an elegant address. It is unsurprising, then, that so many families were transient. Some only lived on the block for a year or two; perhaps they moved on once they could. The Lewis family moved out, only to move back during the Depression of the 1890s. Other families seem to have made a life for themselves on the street: the Fergusons chose to move to a bigger house on the street rather than leave. Perhaps they could not afford to leave, or perhaps they had ties in the community. It is easy to romanticise these women as living simple, honest lives but there can be no question that their day-to-day existence was difficult. Over half the women we will look at lost at least one child; Helen Morrison lost four of her six. Perhaps this can help us account for why so many working-class and poor women signed the

petition. Perhaps they understood better than some of their middle- and upper-class contemporaries how important having a voice would be in legislating to change the conditions of women's lives.

All told, fifteen of the women on Davis Street signed the petition. The number is small compared to 30,000 total signatories, but the one small block of Davis shows the intense interest of women in the franchise. We must remember that signature collectors had only six weeks, and that women's suffrage was in its youth in Victoria and around the world. Given the number of areas they had to cover and the patterns of the signatures (almost all of the Davis Street names are close together on the petition), we have to assume that the collectors only went down Davis Street the one time. Unlike many other streets where mothers and daughters signed together, all the Davis names are those of individual women at individual residences. On that day in 1891, nearly one-third of Davis Street women signed the petition for the franchise. Did Agnes Lewis sign happily? Did Sarah Coulthard need to be persuaded? We will never know the answers, but these are not idle questions. In 1891, these women were willing to challenge the status quo even though they were working-class, immigrants (in the cases of Jessie and Ada) and mothers.

The Women of Davis Street[12]

Agnes Lewis was above all else a mother. She had eleven children over the course of seventeen years. Putting that in perspective, she would have been pregnant for the first time at twenty-one and delivered her last child just before she turned forty. Agnes was the youngest of the women we will get to know, but not by much; she married at nineteen or twenty, and in this was almost perfectly typical of her neighbours. The women of Davis Street were on average a little younger than their peers on the surrounding streets, and this may help us understand why they were also less likely to own their homes.

Agnes and her husband, John James, were new North Carlton residents. They married in the city in 1887, and moved to 43 Davis Street sometime in 1891 with their two children, Ada May, 3, and Mary Adeline, 1. The family lived in a four-roomed brick house that was both smaller and more expensive than those of most of their neighbours. They had moved off the block by 1893, but five years after the signing of the petition they had returned to Davis Street.

Like so many other families during and after the Depression, they needed financial help. By 1897, Agnes and John had moved one house east to number 45, a five-bedroomed house with a bathroom. The building, however, was owned by the Northern Assistance Society, perhaps one of the aid agencies that sprang up to help families in need. Unfortunately, Agnes's historical record is tied almost exclusively to her children; after Doris's 1907 birth record, which shows they were still in North Carlton, the Lewis family virtually disappears until Agnes's death in 1945 in St Kilda.

The story of Agnes, incomplete as it is, is a powerful reminder of how long it took Victorian women to gain suffrage. Between the time she signed the petition and achieved the right to vote, Agnes would have nine more children, losing two of them. Her last child, Doris, would have been a toddler by the time suffrage for women was enacted in 1908. It is a striking fact that the fight for the vote encompassed the entire childbearing years of many women.[13]



Eliza Manders and family, c. 1912. Courtesy of Bernie Manders.

Eliza Emma Manders gave birth to her eleven children over a period of twenty-one years, making her the only woman to stretch her pregnancies out for longer than Agnes. Eliza met her husband, John Edward, when he lived in her family's boarding house in Port Melbourne. John rented a room in the boarding house for ten years, and the two married in 1885, when Eliza was just eighteen. They quickly moved north, and Eliza gave birth to their first two children, William Edward and Florence Beatrice, in Carlton. They moved on to Davis Street in 1890, and had their third child, Robert Cecil,

the year Eliza signed the petition. Nine of Eliza's eleven children were boys, which must have been a challenge in the small houses in which the family lived. Their five-roomed house would have filled up quickly with the four children they had by 1892. Eliza, it seems, had endless patience for children. Family memory indicates that she also served as a wet nurse for a number of children, and may even have fostered them in her home. By 1893 the Manders family had left Davis Street, but they remained in North Carlton until John Edward's death in 1921. When she died in 1947, Eliza was living in East Brunswick with nearly her entire family in close proximity.[14]

Despite its large size, or perhaps because of it, the Manders family seems to have been particularly close. In her will, Florence Beatrice, the eldest daughter, stipulated that although the East Brunswick house was to go to her brother Walter, he must allow three other siblings, George, Eileen and Francis to live in it rent-free. When Walter died nine years later, he also passed the house on, this time to his niece, Florence Eileen. Again, his will required that Francis be allowed to remain. This emphasis on taking care of family, as well as the family names given to Florence Eileen, demonstrates the strong bonds they must have had. When Eliza signed the petition, she may have been pregnant with her second (and last) daughter. Perhaps she signed it for Florence Beatrice and the daughters she hoped to have; little did she know that Eileen would be followed by seven (and seventeen years of) boys. The women in Eliza's house may have been outnumbered by more than three to one, but in 1891 she took a strong step towards levelling the playing field for all Australian women.[15]

Living just to the east of Eliza was Helen Morrison. Helen is unique among our women on two counts: she was older than her Davis Street peers, and she appears to have been part of the gold rush. All the other Davis Street women either came from Melbourne and surrounding suburbs, or moved straight to the city upon their arrival in Australia. We do not know where Helen and her husband, John, married in 1865. It seems likely that it was somewhere in eastern Victoria or in Scotland, as both Morrison and McRae, Helen's maiden name, are traditional Scottish names. They had their first child, John Alexander, in Stanley, Victoria in 1866, followed by four more children in El Dorado (both near Beechworth). The family settled for several years in El Dorado, a town nearly 300 kilometres northeast of Melbourne. Presumably they, like so many others, were prospecting or making their living providing services for other gold prospectors.

Life appears not to have been easy: Helen and John lost two of their five children shortly after birth. Whatever happened in El Dorado, the family had moved to Fitzroy by at least 1881, where they had Christina, their first child in six years. They appear to have moved frequently, as Christina's birth in Fitzroy and death the following year in Carlton suggests.

In 1891 the Morrisons had lived on Davis Street for around a year. Their house was one of the smallest and least expensive on the block, with just four rooms and a rent of £1 8s. Given that their three surviving children would have been 25 (John Alexander), 20 (George), and 18 (Helen), it is possible that they lived on their own, though also likely that Helen, being unmarried, was still at home. The signature on the petition reads 'H. Morrison' and not 'Mrs. Morrison', so perhaps the younger Helen signed rather than her mother. With no small children at home, Helen senior may have found work to support the family's income and missed her chance to make history. Though the family lived on Davis Street for several more years, they had moved on when their son, George, died in 1897.

It seems as though the Morrison family had had their fair share of loss and strife by 1891. Did the elder Helen sign the petition with hopes of putting a sad past behind her? Did the young girl sign with dreams of a bright future? Like Agnes, and probably thousands of other women, Helen's history is tied up in her children. After George's death, no further records exist for Helen, and she quite literally disappears from history.

These stories come from public records, and the variety in the tales they tell is amazing. While details of Helen's birth, marriage and death remain unknown, the early life of her neighbour Ellen Louisa Langley is a virtual open book. Ellen lived two doors down from Helen, just on the other side of Eliza at 17 Davis Street. Her family, the Stokes, was originally from Tasmania, but they moved to Bacchus Marsh, about 55 km from Melbourne, around the time Ellen was born in 1864. The town was a stopover on the way from the goldfields in Ballarat and provided produce for Melbourne markets. Ellen eventually married Thomas Edwin Langley in Collingwood in 1883, and their daughter, Florence Beatrice (apparently a popular name at the time, perhaps in homage to Florence Nightingale), was born the same year in Carlton.

The Stokes/Langleys seem to have been another close family. Ellen's mother, Mary, and father, Henry William, lived nearby until their deaths. It appears, however, that Ellen may have favoured her mother over her father, as two of her children bore her mother's name (Mary

Louisa and Linda Mary), whereas her two boys, though given three names each, had not a Henry or William among them. Then again, the names Thomas and Edwin were also notably left out; perhaps it had become a bit *too close* in their five-roomed house by the time the boys were born in the mid-1890s.

Ellen's family was one of the most stable, at least in terms of accommodation. They lived in their house on Davis Street for at least seven years, far outstripping their neighbours in longevity. Their consistency helps us measure the true effects of the Depression that hit Victoria in the 1890s. In 1891, their house was rented for £1 10s; six years later, they were only paying 18s. Nearly every house on the block saw a comparable decline in rental prices. Similarly, several landlords with multiple houses either lost their property or apparently sold it as best they could. As we saw with the Lewis family, four of the houses on the block were converted into larger homes managed by the Northern Assistance Society. In their variety of experiences, the women of Davis Street are nonetheless extremely average, representative of their time.

Sarah Josephine Whelan was born in 1867 in Sunbury, the eldest of ten children. How she met her husband William Coulthard is unknown, but they married in the Melbourne parish of Boroondara in 1888. William had been born in Boroondara, but the new family relocated to North Carlton in time for the birth to their first daughter, Lillian (Lillie) Mary, the same year they married. By 1891 they had another daughter, Eveline (Evelyn in later records). It appears they lived on Davis Street just long enough to sign the petition; Sands & McDougall only place them on the street for one year. The couple had five more children, losing two of them, in Carlton or North Carlton. As any mother would, Sarah seems to have had difficulty accepting the loss of her children. Veronica Maude was born and died in 1901; another daughter, Elise, died shortly after in 1903, at age nine. Sarah waited another four years before giving birth again, this time to her last child, Albert Joseph, in 1907.

Sarah's will and probate records paint a fractured picture of the Coulthard family in later days. It appears there was a dispute amongst Sarah's children after her death in 1947. Albert Joseph was named executor, but Evelyn, George and Vincent contested her will. They stated that they were her children, 'All of whom are entitled as some of her next of kin to share in her property'. The complaint was withdrawn five months later. It would be unwise to read too much into the family's personal business, but it does paint a sad portrait of Sarah's last days.

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According to an affidavit in her probate record, Sarah was sitting up in bed when she wrote out the will. Both her frail signature and her death a month later indicate that she may have already been bedridden. If she did deliberately exclude three of her children in her final days, we can only wonder at the effect of the years on the woman who had signed the petition in 1891.[16]

Ada Riley married Walter Simpson, a man ten years her elder, in London in 1881. The trip out to Australia must have been challenging, as she gave birth to George Henry in Carlton the following year. Morning *and* sea sickness could not have been a pleasant combination. The couple seem to have moved to the block on Davis Street by the time the last of their five children, Agnes Maude, was born in 1890. The Simpsons, like the Fergusons, Manders and Langleys, lived on Davis Street for a number of years. In fact, they lived next door to the Fergusons, sharing a landlord and a floor plan. Jessie and Ada must surely have known each other. We are left to wonder, however, whether or not they were friends. Between the two of them, there would have been eight children under ten years of age in 1891, six of whom were girls around the same age. We can safely hope that Ada and Jessie had time for tea and a chat while the girls played, though let us also hope – given the sanitation conditions at the time – that they played inside the house.

The Simpsons had their last child before they left Davis Street, so their whereabouts immediately afterwards are a mystery. Eventually they settled on Holden Street in North Fitzroy. Walter must have been a hard worker; he is still listed in the rate books as a confectioner just before his death in 1925 at the age of 73. Like most of his neighbours from Davis Street, he owned his own home at the time of his death. He wrote his will just a day before he died, leaving everything to Ada. She followed him a year and a half later, passing her house and ‘furniture very old in use for 50 years’ to her children.[17]

It seems unsurprising that a woman who travelled halfway around the world for a better life would sign a petition for women’s rights, but each of the 30,000 who signed the Monster Petition did something extraordinary. We must not forget that many of the women at the time could not read or write; there are many places on the petition where several neighbours are all signed by the one hand. We should also remember that for some of them it may have been risky if their husbands were unsupportive. Whether or not Walter would have approved, Ada’s signature moved her towards gaining the right to vote that women in her

native England would have to wait an additional ten years to achieve.[18] The promise of new opportunities is most likely what brought the Simpsons to Australia; Ada found at least two of them in the Monster Petition of 1891 and the *Adult Suffrage Bill* of 1908.

Finally, there is Jessie. Jessie McKay married Adam Ferguson in Glasgow, Scotland in 1885, a bit later than most of her peers. At twenty-four, she would have been a fairly mature woman when she married. Jessie and Adam arrived in Pitt Street, Carlton in time for their daughter Elizabeth’s birth in 1886 after what appears to have been another pregnancy at sea. They had eight children together between 1886 and 1901, including one named Jessie and another named Stanley Adam. The Fergusons appear to have progressed fairly steadily through life. Adam was a bootmaker, and they left Carlton for Davis Street shortly after their arrival. They rented 49 Davis Street, the five-roomed house next to Ada’s, for a few years, before moving to the six-roomed house across the road in 1894. When Adam died in 1926, they owned their home as well as a piece of land in Spotswood.[19]

Jessie’s will, written just two years before her death in 1931, pays special attention to the debtor among her progeny. While Alexandra May received the piano and Olive the dining-room table, William James could only receive his portion of the inheritance after the £26 he owed his brother Stanley Adam had been deducted. Jessie wrote that ‘such deduction is a condition to my said son William James Ferguson receiving anything under my WILL and not subject to any objection by him’.[20] We can only speculate about the origin (and length!) of the debt that required her to intercede, but though her signature is shakier than when she signed the Monster Petition, Jessie Ferguson’s spirit seems just as strong as that day in 1891.

Jessie’s records also tell us something about the Great Depression in Australia. Her son, Stanley Adam, was the executor of her estate and his notes in her probate file paint a sobering picture. Although the family wanted to sell the house and divide the proceeds (minus £26 for William James, of course), they had trouble getting a good price. Stanley Adam wrote that the family had decided to rent the house for a while to see if ‘things will get better and [we] might get a fair price for it’.[21] Jessie’s real estate was valued at £780, but the family eventually took £500 for it nine months after her death.[22]

It is Jessie's forcefulness in her will that makes her stand out, but she was not alone in her attention to detail. Another woman, Louisa Lettis Robb, whose residence on Lee Street leaves her mostly out of this story, also left detailed instructions to her children. Specifically, she left eleven pages of handwritten notes, detailing some two hundred items that were to be doled out to assigned individuals. Door mats were divided up among the children, while the silver smelling salts went to Valerie alone. Next to 'back brush' she has written 'anyone'.^[23] What is striking here is the care with which these women treated their possessions. On the long, slow climb up from renting to owning, they learned the value of their belongings and their familial relationships. It is difficult to imagine that women like Jessie and Louisa took something like signing a petition lightly.^[24] More likely, they thought carefully before signing, understanding the impact of their names on the lines.

Leaving Davis Street

What purpose is there in learning about the lives of seven women who appeared for a moment in history and disappeared again? What do their stories, pieced together through public records and some speculation, have to offer the study of the women's suffrage movement? Despite the fragmentary nature of some of the records and the numerous dead ends, I have been surprised at the attachment I have formed to these women. I was sad going over Sarah's probate records. I smiled when I learned that Ada's husband ran a sweets shop. I laughed out loud at Jessie's will. Too often we forget to look for the extraordinary in people's ordinary lives. While these women were certainly ordinary, average and representative, they were also funny, sad and wonderful. In 1891 they did something extraordinary by anyone's standards: they participated in one the largest petitions ever presented to Parliament. They stood up for themselves, for their neighbours and for women all around the world. Maybe Eliza understood the enormous impact her small signature would have on the lives of future generations of women. Perhaps she had more important things to do that day, and only signed to get the petition collector off her doorstep. That does not make her life any less significant or less worthy of study.

These seven women help us paint a more complete picture of women's suffrage, one that includes all women and not just those who made the headlines and gave the famous speeches. It was working-class women like Agnes, Eliza, Ellen, Helen, Sarah,

Ada and Jessie who formed the basis of the 1891 Monster Petition and, ultimately, the popular support that swayed politicians. The women of Davis Street represent only a tiny proportion of those who made women's suffrage a reality in Victoria. Though they laid only a few small bricks in the road to 1908, we know that every brick was essential. It is important that we thank and remember equally those who laid them.

Endnotes

- [1] Victorian Parliament, 1891 Women's Suffrage Petition – Background, available at <http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/WomensPetition/background.htm> (accessed 30 April 2007).
- [2] *The Age*, 'News of the Day', 30 September 1891, p. 4.
- [3] *ibid.*
- [4] *The Sun*, 2 October 1891, p. 2.
- [5] A Oldfield, *Woman suffrage in Australia: a gift or a struggle?*, Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 140 and K Lees, *Votes for women: the Australian story*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, New South Wales, 1995, p. 118.
- [6] Oldfield, p. 140.
- [7] *The Argus*, 8 April 1857, quoted in *Carlton: a history*, ed. Peter Yule, Melbourne University Publishing, 2004, p. 22. Regarding the Collingwood Stockade, see also Peter Andrew Barrett 'Her Majesty's Collingwood Stockade: A Snapshot of Gold Rush Victoria', *Provenance*, issue 6, September 2007.
- [8] *ibid.*, p. 24.
- [9] *ibid.*, pp. 22-5.
- [10] A comparison of rate books and Sands & McDougall Melbourne directories for 1890-92 (all held by PROV) yields this information. Rate books provide the name of the owner, whilst Sands & McDougall identify the residents of the property at the time.
- [11] Yule, p. 393 and 'Sewage treatment: Melbourne's history', published on the Melbourne Water website http://www.melbournewater.com.au/content/sewage/sewage_treatment/sewage_treatment_-_melbournes_history.asp?bhcp=1 (accessed 30 April 2007).

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[12] The bibliographic information contained in this section comes from a variety of sources. To ease readability, I have compiled some of this information here. The names and addresses on the petition were matched with those listed for Davis Street in the Sands & McDougall directories for the years 1885-97, that is, covering several years either side of 1891. Sands & McDougall clearly compiled their North Carlton information after August/September, when the petition was signed. For instance, Sarah Coulthard is not present in 1891, but is present in 1892. Therefore, I used the 1892 Directory as the basis for my research. Basic bibliographic information, such as birthdates, death dates, marriages, children, etc. comes from the Births, Deaths, and Marriages databases located at both the State Library of Victoria and at PROV. Probate records at PROV were used to find the wills and probate and administration papers of the women and their families. Rate books for various years (1885-97), located at PROV (VPRS 5708/P2, various items and unit numbers), were used to determine house size, rent, landlords, etc. Other sources include MMBW Street Blocks Maps, 1890-1950 and Melbourne Probate Records, 1900-83.

[13] See PROV, VPRS 28/P4, Unit 3598, Item 633/342 (probate and administration of John Cyril Fookes Lewis) and PROV, VPRS 7591/P3, Unit 612, Item 633/342 (will of John Cyril Fookes Lewis).

[14] Some of this information was provided by Bernie Manders, Eliza's grandson, with whom I have been in contact.

[15] Some information provided by Bernie Manders. See also PROV, VPRS 28/P7, Unit 424, Item 787/262 (probate and administration of Florence Beatrice Manders); PROV VPRS 28/P13, Unit 217, Item 924/889 (probate and administration of Walter Leslie Manders); PROV, VPRS 7591/P4, Unit 509, Item 787/262 (will of Florence Beatrice Manders); PROV, VPRS 7591/P9, Unit 45, Item 924/889 (will of Walter Leslie Manders).

[16] See PROV, VPRS 28/P3, Unit 4582, Item 393/906 (probate and administration of Sarah Coulthard); and PROV, VPRS 7591/P2, Unit 1379, Item 393/906 (will of Sarah Coulthard).

[17] See PROV, VPRS 28/P3, Unit 1593, Item 205/014 (probate and administration papers of Walter Simpson); and PROV, VPRS 7591/P2, Unit 723, Item 205/014 (will of Walter Simpson); PROV, VPRS 28/P3, Unit 1764, Item 215/362 (probate and administration papers of Ada Simpson); and PROV, VPRS 7591/P2, Unit 757, Item 215/362 (will of Ada Simpson).

[18] In fact, universal suffrage was not granted in the United Kingdom until 1928. British women over the age of 30, with some property restrictions, were given the vote in 1918.

[19] PROV, VPRS 28/P3, Unit 1691, Item 210/948 (probate and administration of Adam Ferguson).

[20] PROV, VPRS 7591/P2, Unit 842, Item 215/261 (will of Jessie Ferguson).

[21] PROV, VPRS 28/P3, Unit 2180, Item 215/261 (probate and administration of Jessie Ferguson).

[22] Stanley Adam's will, however, demonstrates the upward mobility of the family. With only a small house on Davis Street in 1891 and through the Great Depression, Stanley Adam is listed as 'gentleman' in his will and probate records. PROV, VPRS 7591/P3, Unit 729, Item 665/681 (will of Stanley Adam Ferguson); and PROV, VPRS 28/P4, Unit 4285, Item 665/681 (probate and administration of Stanley Adam Ferguson).

[23] PROV, VPRS 28/P3, Unit 3341, Item 312/281 (probate and administration of Louisa Lettis Robb); and PROV, VPRS 7591/P2, Unit 1100, Item 312/281 (will of Louisa Lettis Robb).

[24] Louisa's surname was mistranscribed as 'Rodd' on the petition. She lived at 75 Lee Street, North Carlton.

