

# Editorial

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Welcome to the 2024 issue of *Provenance*, the free online journal of Public Record Office Victoria (PROV). *Provenance* is a forum through which both professional and non-professional researchers who make use of the extensive collection of records held by PROV and other archival and historical collections can publish their research and writing. Authors have the option to have their work anonymously peer reviewed according to scholarly conventions, or to publish a more informal or general interest article based on their research findings or research journey.

This issue includes eight original articles based on research of Victorian archival collections. These articles draw on a wide range of government records relating to urban planning, land surveying and management, child welfare and the court system, weights and measures administration, and the administration of local government rates. Each article demonstrates how records that were originally created by government agencies to administer their activities can be leveraged to yield evidence and information on a range of contemporary research topics.

Public records contain official evidence that can provide answers to many questions; however, as several of the authors in this issue find, they can also throw up more questions and gaps to be filled. Often, published or online sources can lead to a valuable record in the PROV collection, and, at other times, the collection can show its limitations, providing only glimpses along a road of discovery. The articles in this issue show the multiple ways in which records from many sources work together to enable a researcher to bring information together to form an understanding of past lives and events.

Andrew May's peer reviewed article, 'City views: modelling Melbourne at the Royal Exhibition Building', presents the story of the creation of a significant model of early Melbourne as it was in 1838, built by French immigrant and Victorian Railways draftsman JJ Drouhet 50 years later in 1888 for display at the Centennial International Exhibition held at the new Exhibition Building. The exhibition was attended by tens of thousands of visitors, many of whom were able to ascend a lift to the Exhibition Building's dome promenade and witness real life views of the city for comparison. Although the model itself has not survived, its image has endured through its use and re-use in popular lithographs to present both a nostalgic and progressive view of the city and its first 50 years of development. May examines the model's relevance for contemporary interpretations of the Exhibition Building in the context of the city and its views, including its status as

a World Heritage Site and the 2022 reopening of its dome viewing platform, which had been closed to the public since the conclusion of the International Exhibition in 1889.

In her peer reviewed article, 'The value of rate books and multi-scale analysis: a Hotham/North Melbourne case study', Fiona Gatt seeks to highlight how local council rate records, originally used to administer the collection of levies on dwellings within a particular municipality, are a relatively under-utilised archival collection that can supplement and enhance other record sources to reveal levels of demographic data over time and enrich place-based histories. Focusing on Hotham/North Melbourne during the nineteenth century, Gatt demonstrates the value for historians of rate records for understanding area-specific patterns of housing ownership and the people who lived there over both short and longer periods of time.

Co-authors Peter Davies and Susan Lawrence, in their peer reviewed article 'Land, water and property: surveying the Boort pre-emptive right', explore the complexity of imported British laws and land survey practices related to water involved in the process of alienation of land from the Crown into private ownership in Victoria after 1847. Government surveyor Frederick Byerley lost his job in 1858 amid a dispute over the inclusion of an ephemeral water course in his survey of Boort station in the dry plains of northern Victoria, prompting a parliamentary select committee inquiry into his dismissal. Davies and Lawrence use Byerley's case to show the role and importance of water access for settler colonists in delineating the boundaries of individual ownership over land and securing their own private interests while simultaneously alienating Aboriginal people from their Country.

Erica Cervini, in "'Wayward', 'immoral' and 'evil': dispelling myths about Brookside Reformatory girls', examines the lives of two inmates—Jessie Nairn and Selina Wilson—of Brookside, an institution she first researched decades ago. Newly digitised collections and online tools enabled Cervini to find and follow new lines of enquiry and sources of information, bringing the cruel treatment of girls to light. Through wardship and correspondence records as well as newspaper reports, Cervini explores the workings of a harsh system that, through the regulation of sexuality and work, judged the girls and their actions, and often stripped them of their human dignity and reduced them to moral stereotypes. Cervini's narrative shows how the more recent failings in institutional care have a long history and highlights the importance of prioritising the voices of young people in institutions.

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Kendrea Rhodes, in 'Tracing ancestral voices', likewise uses former ward records for her research, but as part of a quest to shed light on her family's history and to clear up some longstanding family mysteries. In the process, she discovers that her great-grandparents, James and Ethel, had to hide the truth about their personal circumstances to evade societal judgement and moral condemnation. Rhodes's article traces her research journey through the kinds of official records used by many family historians, and provides some lessons about how to deal with the limitations of official records, working with inaccuracies and gaps in the record when confronting contradictory information, and altering expectations along the way.

Charlie Farrugia's research into the life of Antonio Azzopardi explores the biographical details of a well-known Maltese immigrant to colonial Victoria through public records, specifically shipping and rate records as well as other government sources. Farrugia demonstrates how these records can be used to confirm or disprove information in life narratives or throw up even more questions. Records from various sources can be analysed together to build a picture of the events of a life that has been the subject of speculation and myth over time.

Malcolm Campbell's article, 'Victoria's system of weights and measures administration', explores a personal interest that sparked questions and a search for answers spanning decades, morphing from a hobby to a research focus after retirement. Accurate measurements of time, distance, size and weight required an agreed and reliable set of standards that could be used to calibrate measuring instruments. As the colony of Victoria grew rapidly during the goldrushes, the reliability and accuracy of measurements became crucial to the growing commercial activity. Campbell traces the administration of the standard sets of weights and measures that entered the colony and were tracked as they were issued to local authorities and then returned.

Sebastian Gurciullo's article, 'Reshaping the Yarra: unrealised plans and visions for the Port of Melbourne', draws on maps and plans from a variety of infrastructure agencies in the PROV collection to trace the changes made to the lower Yarra as the Port of Melbourne developed, but also to explore some of the proposed changes that were considered but never eventuated.

We hope you enjoy reading the articles in this issue.

Tsari Anderson and Sebastian Gurciullo  
*Provenance* editors