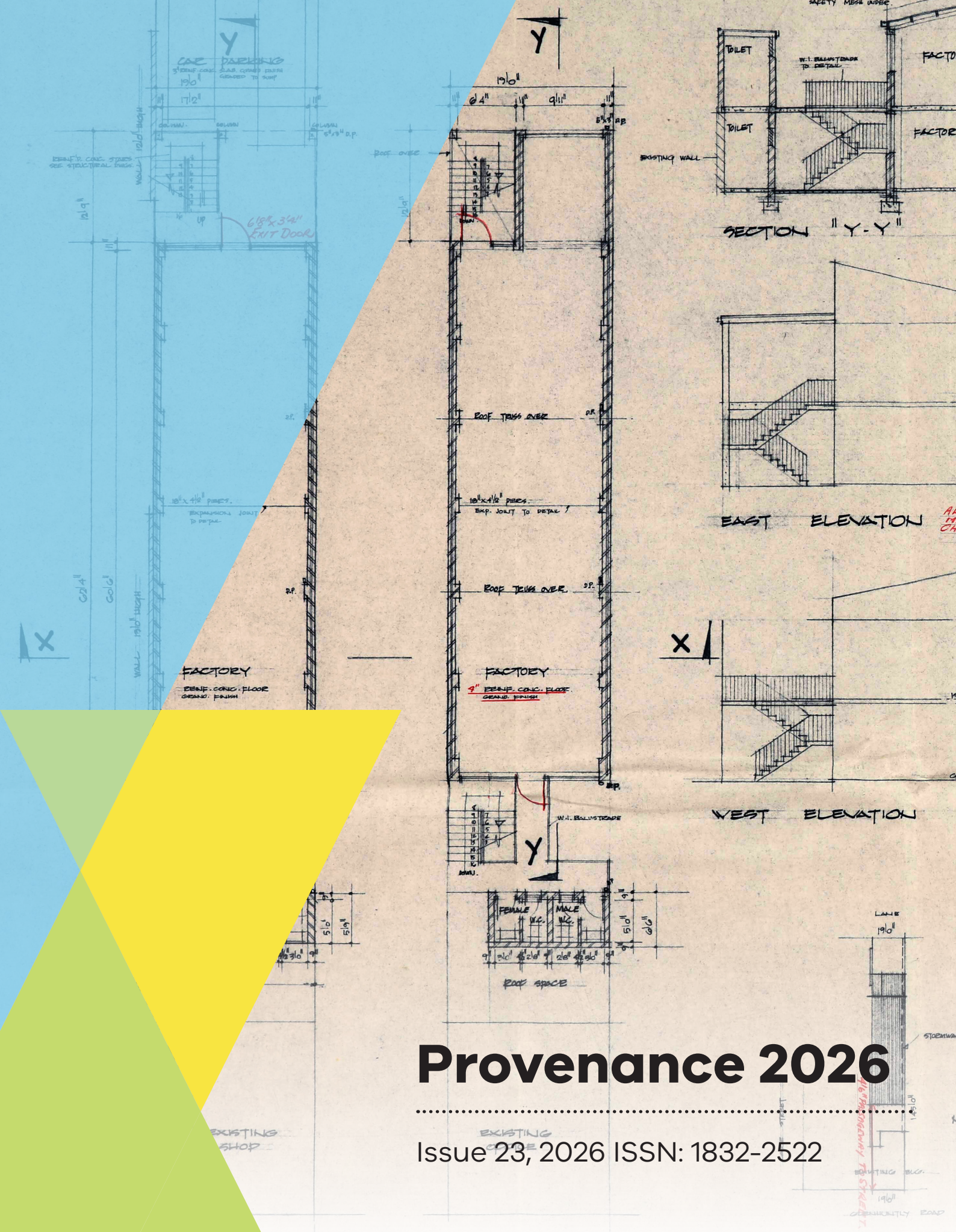

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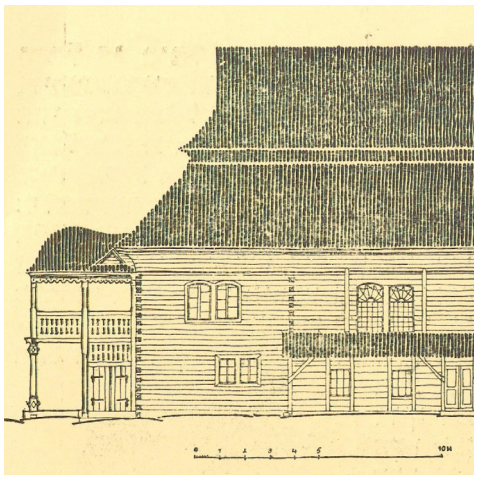
Content



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Editorial 2026

Welcome to the 2026 issue of Provenance.

The history of Victoria since colonisation has been shaped by diverse waves of migration. Archival records in Public Record Office Victoria's collection can help to illuminate these histories through the documented decisions and actions of local and state governments, including records created by and about the people tasked with implementing changing policies and priorities. Four of the five articles in this issue explore stories that reflect the varied impacts of immigration on Victoria's communities, cities and cultures, as well as the multiple transitions that are often associated with the migrant experience.

Ilona Fekete's peer reviewed article explores the production of the *All-Australian calendar*, which was published in Victoria between 1980 and 1987. The result of a collaboration across government and industry, the calendar, Fekete argues, embodied a shift in political thinking and expression of the value and role of multiculturalism in Australia, from multiculturalism as an expression of cultural pluralism and 'unity through diversity' to a later emphasis on migrant skills and productivity within the broader national identity. These conceptual shifts and associated tensions partly emerge through correspondence files of the Ethnic Affairs Commission held in PROV's collection. These records reflect attempts to produce a calendar that was inclusive and reflective of Victoria's migrant cultures and ethnic identities, whilst at the same time serving as an accurate and representative management tool for the industrial workforce, and an educational resource for school students.

In their peer reviewed article, Catherine Townsend and Natica Schmeder bring us the story of Bernard Slawik, a Polish émigré architect who survived the Holocaust and sought to build a new life for himself and his family in Australia. The authors use the fictional Hungarian-American migrant architect and concentration camp survivor László Tóth, recently depicted in the 2024 film *The Brutalist*, as a springboard to explore Slawik's complex experiences re-establishing his life and career in Australia after the war. This is also a story about the struggle for professional recognition in a new country, since, as with other professional bodies in postwar Australia, the Architect's Registration Board of Victoria (ARBV) did not recognise European architectural qualifications. The wealth of information allows this story to be told, including Slawik's application documents to the ARBV for registration as an architect, held at PROV, as well as records at the National Archives of Australia, the Australian War Memorial, private collections and overseas sources.

This issue's third peer reviewed article, 'Exploiting the high country: a case study of European occupation of the Omeo district', examines the passage of successive Victorian Land Acts aimed at opening up Crown land for rural agriculture and private ownership between 1860 and 1885. These Acts had an impact on, and were influenced by, attempts to expand settlement into the isolated and mountainous high country of northern Gippsland around Omeo. Using government and local council records, parish maps and newspaper reports, Beggs-Sunter and McCoy show how Gippsland's varied terrain and climate posed unique challenges in implementing a British agrarian ideal of settled farmers on productive farms. Significantly, legislation requiring the centralisation of Aboriginal people onto missions and reserves following the 1869 *Aborigines Protection Act*, operating concurrently to Victoria's state-legislated expansion into the Omeo district, were twin factors in the formal dispossession of the traditional owners of the area, the Yaitmathang people.

Through a life story of a house in Melbourne's central business district (CBD) during the second half of the nineteenth century, Erica Cervini tells stories of immigrant history. Cervini's article uses a range of records, including passenger lists, rate books, divorce proceedings and wills to tell the story of the owners and renters of 45 Mackenzie Street, a two-storey Victorian terrace at the northern edge of the CBD that borders onto Carlton. The owners of the house were the Moodys who emigrated from Nottingham in 1841 and amassed considerable wealth by purchasing land and building houses for rental in Melbourne. The renters of the property from the late 1880s to 1960 were the Jacobses, the author's family, who sought a place to live among other Jewish émigrés – arriving initially from England and later Europe – that called this part of the city home. Cervini also documents the subsequent owners of the property, which eventually became the property of the Victorian Police Association in 1954 and was demolished to make way for an office building for the association during the 1960s.

The fifth article in this year's issue tells a different kind of story. Focusing on an unsolved murder case that happened in Maryvale in Victoria's west in the 1870s, it tells the story of a lingering mystery that shrouded the burial location of the victims. Through a close examination of inquests and police records held at PROV, and other sources including ground-penetrating radar, Nick Manganas retraces the likely burial location, thereby giving the descendants of the murder victims some measure of closure.

We hope you enjoy reading the articles in this issue.

Tsari Anderson and Sebastian Gurciullo
Provenance editors

Refereed articles

Productive multiculturalism and the *All-Australian calendar*

'Productive multiculturalism and the *All-Australian calendar*', *Provenance: the Journal of Public Record Office Victoria*, issue no. 23, 2026. ISSN 1832-2522.

This is a peer reviewed article.

Ilona Fekete received a PhD from the University of Queensland in 2025. Her dissertation examines case studies of identity maintenance within the Hungarian diaspora in Australia, investigating the triangular relationship of the diaspora with Australia and Hungary and its influence on identity maintenance. Her research interests include diaspora heritage and diaspora nationalism.

Author email: feketeilona49@gmail.com

Abstract

The *All-Australian calendar* was published in Victoria between 1980 and 1987—a literal A2-sized poster child of a failed multicultural idea. The calendar aimed to enhance the productivity of migrants and contribute to multicultural education in schools. This article explores how the idea of multiculturalism changed in the 1980s, transforming from cultural pluralism into productive multiculturalism, and how the calendar embodied this transformation.

Figure 1: Extract from the *All-Australian calendar 1980*, Victorian Department of Education, Melbourne, 1980. Source: State Library Victoria, P 291.36 Al5. Photographed by the author.

Introduction

The *All-Australian calendar*, published in Victoria between 1980 and 1987, aimed to promote a productive multicultural society by targeting both industrial workers and primary school students (Figure 1). This article investigates how the calendar embodied the transformation of multiculturalism in the 1980s, particularly the concept of 'productive multiculturalism'. The calendars were born on the threshold of cultural diversity as a preferred multicultural signifier and enabler of productive multiculturalism, while masquerading as a promoter of workers' rights. This analysis is based on records of the Victorian Multicultural Commission (formerly Ethnic Affairs Commission) related to the calendars.

I argue that the production of the *All-Australian calendar* from 1983 can be seen as an early example of 'productive multiculturalism' within a neoliberal economy—one that blended cultural pluralism with an apparent promotion of workers' rights. Ghassan Hage detected the productive migrant trope at play after the election of Bob Hawke's Labor government in 1983. He argues that being productive as a migrant meant being assigned a more active role than merely providing rich culture for consumption by Australians, which is what most migrant communities expected. Cultural diversity became an asset in this essentially economic approach, both for the state to advance the country's global economic connections, and for the migrant's own individual and economic growth. Patrick Brownlee argues that the aims of productive multiculturalism—or productive diversity—were adjusted for the transnational workforce of the 1980s and, thus, did not have a connection to the labour migration of the 1950s and 1960s. While the original concept of the *All-Australian calendar* would have allowed certain workers to express their cultural heritage, this special, limited right was inseparable from the idea of cultural pluralism.

This article surveys the background of multicultural politics that encouraged the creation of the calendars; examines the introduction of the first calendar, the circumstances surrounding its production and reactions to it; and traces the evolution of the calendars until the final one in 1987.

Background to the calendars

Following World War II, the composition of the Australian population changed due to postwar migration, the Displaced Persons program, and the arrival of economic migrants from Italy, Greece, Malta, Yugoslavia and Turkey. Construction and manufacturing industries rapidly expanded due to this influx, and most of the new migrants took unskilled or semi-skilled labouring jobs. The concentration of non–English speaking migrants in blue-collar jobs continued to grow after the 1960s with the arrival of Italians, Greeks, Yugoslavs and migrants from Latin America and Asia.[1] By the early 1980s, overseas-born workers represented around one-third of the workforce in low-skilled or unskilled industries such as manual labour, construction and manufacturing.[2] Migrant workers tried to represent their interests through existing trade unions, forming the majority of members in many influential unions, such as the metal workers, public transport and clothing trades unions.[3] Another avenue of representation for Italian and Greek migrants was welfare organisations, like the Italian CoAsIt (Comitato Assistenza Italiani, founded in 1967) and the Australian Greek Welfare Society (Pronia, founded in 1972).[4]

Running parallel to these demographic changes, the vision of the 'Family of the Nation', introduced by Al Grassby, minister for immigration in the Whitlam Labor government, emphasised the idea of 'unity through diversity'. This meant that, while new migrants were encouraged to maintain their heritage, they were also expected to uphold democratic values and become part of the Australian nation.[5]

Multiculturalism was present at a bureaucratic level by the mid-1970s. In 1976, Victoria became the first Australian state to create a Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs. At the federal level, the creation of the Australian Ethnic Affairs Council in 1977 was pivotal in defining and implementing public policy on multiculturalism.[6] That year, the federal government commissioned Frank Galbally to review post-arrival programs and services for migrants. The resultant committee, chaired by Galbally, was mainly made up of migrants, like Nick Polites, co-founder of the Greek Australian Welfare Society in Melbourne.[7] The committee produced a report that provided strategies to implement changes in policies catering for migrants' needs.[8] According to Andrew Jakubowicz, the report's most important contribution was its focus on cultural characters, which harshly separated economic factors from migrant experiences.[9] For conservative critics like Raymond Sestito, the report was overly vague and superficial and only attractive to ethnic voters.[10]

Multiculturalism was prone to criticism, in part because it lacked an official ideology. By contrast, the government's previous policy of assimilation was often portrayed as a project with clarity—yet, in reality, this amounted to little more than extending Australia's labour force. Postwar immigration policies often chased after scaffolding ideologies like assimilation. However, as Andrew Markus has shown, none of the promises associated with assimilation—such as alien registration, control of the ethnic press, avoiding enclaves and providing social workers—were fully or successfully implemented.[11] The only well-funded and realised assimilatory service was English language education.

The new bureaucracies of multicultural governance that emerged in the 1970s discouraged criticism of social issues and removed migrant workers' issues from the mainstream political agenda.[12] They also began recommending new services for migrants, including settlement services, English language classes and translation services, and the establishment of migrant resource centres. These governing bodies used 'ethnic' as an essentialising term (in preference to 'race'). As a result, ethnic came have particular connotations in Australia: being 'ethnic' was often associated with being working class and disadvantaged. As Alexandra Dellios has pointed out, migrant workers used the term to describe themselves in relation to their communities, the state and trade unions.[13]

The early 1980s saw the expansion of multiculturalism into policies and practices that have been classified by Andrew Jakubowicz as 'conservative multiculturalism'. He explains that, through conservative multiculturalism, the neo-conservative state aimed to maintain and extend the status quo of the Australian ruling class. Encouraging ethnic consciousness through expressions of cultural identity was part of this conservative multicultural idea.[14] Patrick Brownlee, in his study of the political economy of Australian migration, argues that cultural identity as a means of ethnic consciousness was constrained to an individual (instead of a class or group) who was assumed to be economically self-reliant.[15] According to Sneja Gunew, official multicultural policies often produced restrictive definitions of ethnicity adapted from extant assimilatory and racist beliefs.[16] She claimed that the version of multiculturalism constructed by the state relied on legacies of colonialism.[17]

Mark Lopez characterises these tensions within 1970s multiculturalism as stemming from four theoretical

approaches: cultural pluralism, welfare culturalism, multiculturalism.[18] Of these, cultural pluralism, which recognised the importance of cultural preservation and maintenance of migrant cultures, and ethnic rights multiculturalism, which understood that most migrants were working class and disadvantaged by existing structures and institutions, were the most successful.[19] These two competing approaches were present in the *All-Australian calendar*, and this inherent tension was one reason for its ultimate demise.

By the early 1980s, multiculturalism was being criticised from both sides of the political spectrum. The political left argued that multicultural policies merely promoted superficial displays of cultural identity, which did not address social discrimination. The criticism from the right was often aligned with anti-Asian migration, as exemplified by the historian Geoffrey Blainey.[20] Blainey claimed that while multiculturalism gave migrants' rights, such rights could amplify social divisions and weaken national cohesion.[21] Bipartisan support for multicultural approaches disappeared after 1984, and the multicultural space became overtly politicised.[22]

In 1989, Prime Minister Bob Hawke launched the *National agenda for a multicultural Australia*, shifting the official policy of multiculturalism.[23] The *National agenda* emphasised that multiculturalism not only included migrants' cultural heritage and rights to social justice, but also 'economic efficiency', which was 'about harnessing the skills and talents of all Australians'.[24] During the 1990s, the *National agenda* resulted in a new, skilled immigration program targeting businesses and professional, skilled migrants.[25] Arriving before the fully-fledged productive multiculturalism of the late 1980s and early 1990s, I argue that the *All-Australian calendar* is a hybrid phenomenon. It celebrated the cultural heritage of Australia's migrant groups, but its purpose was to serve the neoliberal market by making its workforce more productive via the acceptance of their heritage into the national ethos.

Reactions to first calendar

Let us turn to the first calendar. In 1978, the Victorian Ministry of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs proposed the idea of a 'high quality calendar for the community'; however, without financial resources, the project was shelved. When, the following year, the Productivity Promotion Council of Australia (PPCA) approached the ministry with funds for the calendar, it seized the opportunity to cooperate.[26] THE PPCA had been established in 1969 to research the human factors related to productivity and work.[27] It envisioned a calendar for industry that would enable businesses to plan schedules around important dates for migrant communities. Involving the Ministry of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs expanded this original vision to include migrant education. The ministry invited the Child Migrant Education Services (CMES) of the Victorian Department of Education, later Ethnic Education Services (EES), and Australian Consolidated Industries Ltd (ACI) to cooperate on the project. ACI was involved as a financial backer because its predecessor—Australian Glass Manufacturers Ltd, based in Spotswood, Victoria[28]—had expressed interest in a calendar that recorded the dates of migrant communities' celebrations.[29]

The *All-Australian calendar* was not the first multicultural calendar. Two predecessors were the 1978 *Ethnic calendar* and the 1979 *Dates to remember*. Mainly detailing days of religious significance to migrant communities, these two calendars were produced in Melbourne by CMES, in conjunction with EES and the Department of Education, as a guide for classroom teachers.[30] Funded by the Australian Government, CMES's programs started in 1971, and its focus was to provide ESL (English as a second language) teachers and materials to mainstream schools. Due to the efforts of teachers, union groups and so-called 'multiculturalist' academics like Jean Martin at La Trobe University and Michael Clyne at Monash University, Commonwealth funding for child migrant education programs expanded from $1.8 to $26.4 million between 1970 and 1977.[31] By 1979, the aim was to give 'opportunity to all our citizens to study the language, customs and habits of a variety of cultures'.[32] Another prototype was issued in 1979 by the Inter-Church Trade and Industry Mission Victorian Division, a central body for industrial chaplaincy, which provided a calendar insert for the newsletter of the Victorian Employer's Federation, showing national and state holidays, as well as ethnic religious holidays from a variety of migrant cultures.[33]

The Victorian Department of Education contributed to the project by providing researchers and two EES employees, Irene Donohue-Clyne and Varvara Athanasiou-Ioannou, who were involved from the outset. They were chosen because they had 'extensive experience in preparing materials for ethnic calendars', as they had researched the two previously mentioned calendars at EES.[35] The purpose of the *All-Australian calendar* was made clear in the first press release announcing the new initiative. This emphasised that the aim of the calendar, besides helping to make all Australians aware of the rich cultures of migrants, was to

encourage cooperation. The calendar would make employers aware of national and religious holidays, flagging possible work allocation issues for management.[36] It was meant to be used to improve morale, reduce labour turnover, and, perhaps, avoid stress, fatigue and accidents. For example, employers could use the calendar to schedule shift work so that employees could attend religious activities or keep their fasting periods during work.[37] Although its original audience was industrial migrant workers, its educational–cultural objective became as important as its original aim, due to the involvement of the Department of Education.

The first *All-Australian calendar* was published in 1979 for the year 1980. In the accompanying description, it was explained that the calendar had been prepared in consultation with members of migrant and religious communities, and that it recorded 137 days of significance to six world religions, 133 days of significance to members of migrant communities and 135 days of general community interest. It also recorded 20 public holidays celebrated in the various states of Australia.[38] Approximately 40,000 copies were distributed to schools, hospitals, community organisations, government departments and companies throughout the country. The Productivity Council distributed 16,000 calendars to companies, and the EES assisted with the distribution in schools.

While some conservative politicians criticised the calendar for perpetuating 'foreign cultures instead of helping them [migrants] to develop one which is uniquely Australian',[39] the public initially applauded the calendar. The organising committee received 2,000 letters and phone calls of thanks: only 16 letters expressed criticism.[40] However, the calendar would not remain uncontroversial. A few dates were contested or questioned, based on political and/or ethnic conflict between the homeland and the diaspora. Australia's trade and diplomatic relations with Eastern Bloc countries expanded in the 1970s due to United Kingdom's entry into the European Community. Calendar date disputes forced Australia, on a few occasions, to move from its stance of diplomatic neutrality to take a side with either the diaspora or the homeland.

One date in particular attracted criticism: 10 April, which was marked in the calendar as 'National Day, Croats'. On 10 April 1941, the German and Italian armed forces had set up the Independent State of Croatia (including Bosnia and Herzegovina), and Ante Pavelic's Ustaša, a previously supressed pro-fascist group, had taken control of the 'independent' state. Between 1941 and 1944, the Ustaša killed nearly 100,000 Serbs, Jews, Gypsies and anti-fascist Croats in concentration camps.[41] Ian Cathie, an Australian Labor Party politician and shadow minister for immigration and ethnic affairs in the Victorian parliament, described the inclusion of 10 April as 'an insult to many Yugoslav migrants and those Australians who died in the war', and demanded that the calendar be withdrawn.[42] Donohue-Clyne was responsible for the Yugoslav dates in the calendar.[43] She was affiliated with the 'multiculturalists' in Melbourne, being the wife of the linguist Michael Clyne who advised government on language education policies.[44] Donohue-Clyne had included all dates of significance to Yugoslav groups, not wanting to privilege any one particular view. Such editorial caution can be understood in the context of ongoing anti-Yugoslavian sentiment and 'politically motivated violence' initiated by Croatian extremist groups.[45]

Other individuals and community groups also expressed discontent regarding the inclusion of 10 April in the *All-Australian calendar*.[46] For example, the claims officer of the Australasian Meat Industry Employees Union worried that the inclusion of 10 April not only offended Yugoslavian migrants, but also hindered their integration into multicultural Australia.[47] The issue reached the level of foreign diplomacy: Peter Lombardic, acting consul general of the Yugoslavian Embassy, raised it at a senior foreign affairs meeting.[48] The issue was later raised in the Senate, too.[49] Due to such reactions, the date was removed from subsequent calendars amid the complaints of pro-fascist Croatian organisations.

A journalist from the Greek newspaper *Nea Patrida* identified a cause for disapproval in the Greek community: the inclusion of the Macedonian National Day or the Day of the Republic on 2 August.[50] This day, also called the Ilinden (St Elijah) Day Uprising, commemorates a failed revolt against the Ottoman Empire organised by Macedonian and Bulgarian revolutionaries, and the short-lived Kruševo Republic in 1903. The journalist, GS Iakovidis, stressing that a Macedonian nation had never existed, wrote that the date 'was included only after a lot of pressure from the anti-Greek movement group'. According to the Greek narrative, Macedonia 'was the state and civilisation of the ancient Macedonians which, beyond doubt, are part of Greece's national and historical heritage'.[51] In fact, it took until 2018 for the Macedonian issue to be settled: that year, Macedonia and Greece agreed to rename the former the Republic of North Macedonia, acknowledging with the new name both the cultural heritage of ancient Greek Macedonia and the existence of a distinct Macedonian language and nationality.[52]

Another journalist, editor of the Russian newspaper *Unification*, objected to the inclusion of the National

Day of the Soviet Union on 7 November, as it was 'a day of destruction of democracy in Russia, [the] day of the establishment of the GULAG Archipelago'.[53] Likewise, president of the Hungarian Veterans' Association of Victoria expressed shock at the inclusion of 4 April as Hungary's National Day. Since many Hungarians recognised 4 April as a day of mourning, being the day when Soviet troops occupied Hungary in 1945, to him:

> it appears that the feared infiltration of the left into key positions already took place I can find no explanation, how on earth such a bad mistake was allowed to happen. One has to wonder, are we supporting the right side?[54]

A similar complaint was sent to the Ministry of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs from the Council of Hungarian Associations in Victoria ,and from Reverend Kemeny in Western Australia. Kemeny illustrated the gravity of the date's inclusion by likening it to the inclusion of 'Pearl [Harbor] Day December 7 as a National Rejoicing Day in Japan'.[55]

In addition to such controversial date inclusions, there were a few notable omissions from the 1980 *All-Australian calendar*, including Türkiye's Victory Day and Lebanon's St Maroum's Day. A few concerned citizens also noticed that the Queen's Birthday was missing, which the publisher explained only occurred because the date had not been gazetted prior to publication.[56]

Overall, Alan Wood, minister for immigration and ethnic affairs, was satisfied with the response to the calendar from schools. He acknowledged that there had been insufficient consultation with migrant communities, but emphasised that Australia recognised the governments and national days of various countries. The minister hoped to find a compromise between honouring dates of significance to Australia's migrant communities and those that were important to the nation's diplomatic partners.

Consecutive calendars until 1987

The organising committee wanted to avoid any cause for criticism with the second *All-Australian calendar* in 1981. As such, it requested from the Department of Foreign Affairs a list of national holidays of countries recognised by the Australian Government.[57] The committee also circulated a community questionnaire asking about 'days of major significance celebrated by your community in 1981'.[58] Each community was able to suggest four dates of significance. In total, 117 migrant organisations responded to the questionnaire.[59] Four dates were not enough for many organisations, some of whom misunderstood the assignment and listed dinner dances and picnics as 'days of significance for the community'.[60]

The editors of the calendar also sought to learn from practices in other multicultural countries. Ivan Kolarik, senior research officer at the Victorian Ministry of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, approached Marie F Zielinska, head of the Multilingual Biblio Service at the National Library of Canada. Ontario had initiated a similar publication, called *Days to remember*, which was well received; however, it was created specifically to help the police 'identify special gatherings or understand ethnic group behaviour'.[61]

Hoping to learn from past mistakes, the calendar committee asked Donohue-Clyne to summarise the lessons learned from the first publication. She recommended that contested dates be observed in the context of 'the ethnic groups to which [they] belong, not in light of protests from others'. In the Hungarian case, it was suggested that the contested date, 4 April, be replaced by 20 August, being the date Hungarians celebrated the feast day of the medieval founder of the Hungarian nation. Regarding the Croatian National Day, Donohue-Clyne suggested that it should be accurately labelled as 'Croatians in exile or some Croats in Australia' or as 'proclamation of the independent state of Croatia 1941'. As for the Russians, she proposed the inclusion of 7 November, because it was 'important to the national consciousness of Russians'.[62] However, this suggestion did not resolve the inherent dilemma of avoiding causing offence to migrant communities while simultaneously recognising the national days of regimes from which those communities had sought refuge in Australia, particularly migrant communities from the Soviet Bloc.[63] From 1981, the committee added a disclaimer to the calendars: 'It should be understood that this calendar is neither an exhaustive nor a comprehensive list of celebrations or holidays.'

In 1982, Michael Cigler, a multicultural historian and editor of the Australian Ethnic Heritage book series (1983–89), joined the calendar committee.[64] The committee commissioned Cigler to write a multicultural history of Victoria, focusing on multicultural elements in the past—from the hundreds of languages of Indigenous peoples to the peak period of contemporary multicultural Australia. As Frank Bongiorno has argued, this approach—seeking multiculturalism's roots in the past—aimed to legitimise the concept by providing it with a deeper and longer history.[65]

From 1982 onwards, an overarching theme was chosen for each year's calendar. In 1983, the theme

was communication, in 1984 it was sport, in 1985 it was music, in 1986 it was peace and in 1987 it was the future.[66] Each year, the calendar team was led by George Said from ACI, who acted as ethnic advisor, and a researcher commissioned by the Department of Education. Researchers used previous calendars and new sources to decide which dates to include.

The calendars' production fees were covered by various organisations, including research, sponsorship and/or in-kind contributions, such as EES distributing the calendars to all public and private schools in Victoria.[67] The schools received the calendars free of charge, as did many community and welfare organisations, libraries, hospitals, members of parliament, government departments, educational institutions, hostels and members of the PPCA.[68]

The first four calendars (1980–83) were designed by Flett Henderson and Arnold; the fifth, in 1984, was designed by Hodja Educational Resources Co-operative Ltd. Flett Henderson and Arnold was an influential Australian design studio that, besides designing the logo for the Australian Productivity Council,[69] would have a long-lasting impact on Australia's visual culture by rebranding Telstra and creating the visual identity for the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games.[70] Beyond financial reasons, the decision to change designers may have been influenced by the establishment of the Victorian Ethnic Affairs Commission in 1983, and a desire to promote the calendar's educational value, as Hodja, a multilingual publishing cooperative, also worked on multicultural educational curriculum material in the 1980s.[71] The final two calendars were designed by Peter Viska,[72] a cartoonist known for creating children's pages for Australian newspapers.[73] His whimsical illustrations not only appeared on the 1986 and 1987 calendars, but also on the cover of the calendar book for 1986 (Figure 2).[74]

The success of the Victorian initiative soon led to plans to make the calendars into a federal project.[75] The PPCA was supportive,[76] but the *All-Australian calendar* never expanded beyond Victoria—although the Western Australian Department of Education ordered 5,000 copies in 1982.[77]

Despite the editors' best efforts, some editions of the calendar contained errors or omissions. In 1983, for example, all the diacritical marks were missing from the typesetting and had to be added by hand after printing. The problem was pointed out by Taki Eftis from Polyprint, a foreign language specialist printer, who considered the omission disrespectful of ethnic communities.[78] In 1987, several major dates were

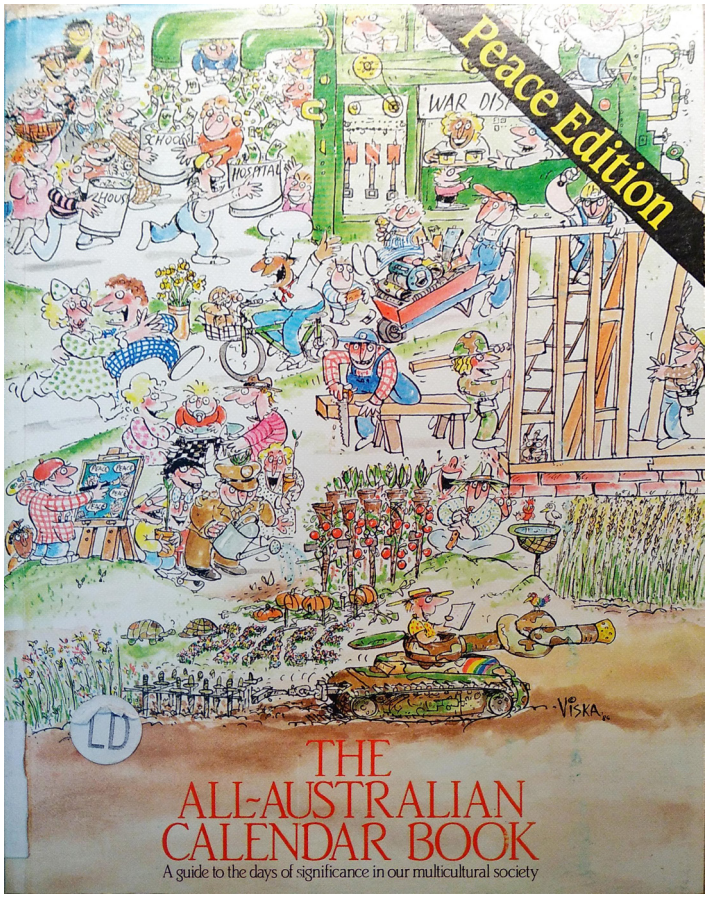

Figure 2: Cover, *The all-Australian calendar book: a guide to the days of significance in our multicultural society*, Hodja, Richmond, 1986. Source: State Library Victoria, SLT 394.26994 N62B. Photographed by the author.

missing, like the Chinese and Vietnamese New Year, the national days of the Soviet Union and Chinese Republic, and even Remembrance Day.

The 1987 *All-Australian calendar* was the last to be produced, a decision that could have been induced for many reasons. From its inception, the project's main financial contributor was the PPCA, which also distributed most of the calendars to its members annually.[79] Although there is no documentation regarding the decision to discontinue the calendars, I suggest that PPCA's decision to cease funding the project was key. It is likely that the initial aim of the calendars—to raise productivity—was not met, and their educational value would not have been a major factor for the PPCA. Recurring budget problems, criticisms and complaints, and changes to the organisations involved may have contributed to the demise of this multicultural project.

By 1988, the focus of multiculturalism had shifted from encouraging migrant productivity through cultural engagement to a program specifically targeting skilled migrants. The Hawke Labor government (1983–91) was the last to propose federal

Figures 3a and 3b: Extracts from *All-Australian calendar 1987*. Source: PROV, VPRS 11790/P1, 87/041. Photographed by the author.

multiculturalism legislation. The Howard Coalition government (1996–2007) opposed multiculturalism.[80]

Conclusion

The *All-Australian calendar* has several important legacies. It was an initiative created by several Victorian groups to assist employers in managing migrant workers while facilitating migrants' cultural needs. Conservative versions of multiculturalism focused on tolerable aspects of the migrant presence—features that might enrich the Australian nation but would not overtly challenge Australian sensibilities. The controversies associated with the *All-Australian calendar* acted as an uncomfortable reminder of the divisiveness that could accompany the migrant experience. As we have seen, contested dates were handled differently depending on the political or economic context, but, ultimately, it was expected that migrants would leave their differences behind them in becoming Australian. At the same time, the calendars were widely used in schools around Victoria—and in Western Australia—to contribute to a multicultural curriculum, essentially a celebration of difference, which lay outside of the scope of economic productivity.

The *All-Australian calendar*, despite its short lifespan of eight years, is an important historical artefact and hybrid cultural document of Australia's engagement with multiculturalism. The calendar illustrates the inherent tension around multiculturalism in the early 1980s—appearing to recognise the diversity of working-class migrant communities while projecting the future of productive multiculturalism.

The *All-Australian calendar*'s dual audience—migrant workers and school students—manifested neoliberal understandings of migrant identity. The calendar was at once a visual and conceptual embodiment of 'unity through diversity' and cultural preservation, and a means of fostering a more efficient workforce. This aligns with Ghassan Hage's observations on the productive migrant trope of the late 1980s, and Patrick Brownlee's definition of 'productive diversity'.

Putting financial considerations to one side, the demise of the *All-Australian calendar* also reflects the conflict between competing approaches to multiculturalism that characterised the 1980s. If any attempt was made to measure the productivity of migrant workers in light of the *All-Australian calendar*, no data remain. The content of the calendars reflected a multiculturalism that embraced cultural pluralism and workers' rights; however, it also served emerging ideas of productive multiculturalism—that is, supporting a more efficient work environment through acceptance of migrant workers' heritage. As productive multiculturalism came to focus more on skilled migration in the latter part of the 1980s, the cultural wellbeing of industrial migrant workers became less of a priority. The calendar had ended before Australia's bicentenary in 1988, when productive multiculturalism became solely an economic project of the neoliberal state. Multiculturalism, often framed ideologically as Australia's new national identity, has always integrated an economic dimension.[81] By the end of the 1980s, multiculturalism not only defined the new national identity, but also, as Paul Ashton argues, left unanswered the legacies of colonialism, nationalism and inequalities in Australia (Figures 3a and 3b).[82]

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Bernard Slawik, the real brutalist:

a Holocaust survivor architect builds a new life in the New World

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Catherine Townsend graduated from the Bachelor of Architecture at the University of Melbourne with first class honours and is a PhD candidate in the Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning at the University of Melbourne. Her doctoral research focuses on the global spread of modern architecture, specifically the diaspora of architects who fled Europe leading up to, and in the aftermath of, World War II. Her most recent research in collaboration with professors David Nichols and Robert Freestone is published in *Planning Perspectives* and examines decentralisation and 'new town' proposals in postwar regional Victoria.

Orcid ID 0000-0002-3679-1233

Author email: catherinetownsend@gmail.com

Natica Schmeder is an architectural historian and buildings conservator who has trained and worked in the United States and Europe. She has worked as a built-heritage consultant in Victoria for the past 20 years and is the principal at Landmark Heritage. Prior to emigrating to Australia, she worked as a translator in Poland, specialising in architectural and historical texts, and is now applying her linguistic skills to research the training and early work of Polish architects and their contribution to Australia. She has published articles on architectural history and conservation in *Spirit of Progress* and *Historic Environment*.

Author email: natica@landmarkheritage.com.au

Abstract

Propelled by Brady Corbet's award-winning cinematic representation of fictional Hungarian Holocaust survivor and architect László Tóth in *The Brutalist*, émigré architects, their architecture and migration experiences are again receiving media attention. In contrast to the superabundance of research on émigré architects who migrated prior to the outbreak of World War II, there is scant research documenting the experiences of those who survived the war years in Europe. This article discusses the phenomenon of migrant Holocaust survivor architects, in particular, Janowska concentration camp–survivor Bernard Slawik, who migrated to Melbourne, Australia, comparing his career to the fictional representation of Tóth. Slawik's biography and career, like the fictional Tóth's, had an epic cinematic quality and demonstrates the sheer diversity of experiences, homelands, migration journeys and architectural practice among émigré architects and their transnational stories.

Introduction

Propelled by Brady Corbet's award-winning cinematic representation of fictional Hungarian Holocaust survivor and architect László Tóth in *The Brutalist*, émigré architects, their architecture and migration experiences are again receiving media attention.[1] 'Émigré architect' is the term architectural discourse has embraced to denote the group of architects from Central Europe who fled Hitler's Europe.[2] Central figures of architectural modernity, Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe and other Bauhaus figures, such as Marcel Breuer who migrated to the United States of America in the 1930s, epitomise the émigré architect. Canonical architectural histories often characterise these architects and their migration as a pivotal narrative whereby avant-garde modern architecture was transferred to the United States and across the world.[3] While the understanding of émigré architects in Australia is somewhat different, most research here similarly focuses on the transfer of modernism and the most successful individual émigré architects, such as Harry Seidler, Frederick Romberg and Ernest Fooks.[4]

Despite the superabundance of research on émigré architects who migrated prior to the outbreak of World War II, documentation of the experience of those who survived the war years in Europe is scant, both in Australia and globally.[5] Starting from member files of the Architects' Registration Board of Victoria (ARBV) at Public Record Office Victoria (PROV), this article discusses the phenomenon of migrant Holocaust survivor architects, in particular Janowska concentration camp–survivor Bernard

Figure 1: Bernard and Alma Slawik, Monash Hotel-Motel, Ariem Studios, c. 1955–66. Source: Slawik Family Collection.

Slawik (Figure 1), who migrated to Melbourne, Australia, comparing his career to that of the fictional Tóth.[6] Other key primary sources utilised in the preparation of this article are naturalisation and migration records held at the National Archives of Australia, the Slawik family's archive (some of which is now held at the Australian War Memorial), and Polish sources about Slawik's education and early work.

The Brutalist has amassed praise from film critics, award givers, and those who warm to the film's depiction of the immigrant experience, trauma, art, patronage, and the relationship between the United States and Europe.[7] In contrast, the architectural community has, for the most part, denounced and disparaged the film and its depiction of László Tóth, a Hungarian Bauhaus-educated architect who migrates to Philadelphia in the late 1940s after surviving Buchenwald concentration camp.[8]

Architectural opposition to the film has centred around three main themes. First, critics have noted the anachronistic depiction of architecture in the film. Rather than reflecting designs of the 1940s and 1950s, much of Tóth's work is representative of architecture of the late 1990s and the new millennium. Similarly, architectural critics have noted that while the film's title references brutalism, an architectural style best known for its use of expressive concrete structure throughout the 1950s–70s, this style is entirely unrelated to Tóth's output. Indeed, it is difficult to ascertain any connection between the architectural style brutalism and Corbet's film beyond the use of concrete, a material ubiquitous to twentieth-century architecture. Second, many architectural critics object to the film's hackneyed portrayal of the architect as a lone, tortured genius, rather than the collaborative reality of architectural production. A third, and more debatable, architectural criticism levied at the film is that László Tóth's difficulties establishing himself in America are improbable given the network of highly successful émigré architects in the United States, in particular those from the Bauhaus.[9] Critics posit that any architect with Tóth's background would have readily found work with appreciative clients in the United States and not the abusive relationships he endured.

While many of these criticisms are accurate, this article argues that the certainty with which architects and others have damned the characterisation of Tóth is misplaced. The dearth of research on, and built work by, Holocaust survivor architects shows that they were not as successful as Mies, Gropius, Breuer, Seidler or Romberg—architects who managed to leave Europe ahead of the war's outbreak. Moreover, it is difficult to imagine that the deprivations and trauma of years in Nazi concentration camps would have no effect on an architect's life and career. Thus, the presumption of the easy assimilation of survivor architects into postwar American careers is misplaced. This is not to say that *The Brutalist*'s depiction of Tóth is accurate; rather, given the absence of research into émigré architects who spent time in concentration camps, it is difficult to say whether the Tóth character is implausible or not.

PROV holds records amid the files of the ARBV of a number of Holocaust survivor architects who migrated to Australia, including Bernard Slawik, John Beer and Erwin Kook.[10] Like *The Brutalist*'s protagonist Tóth, they attempted to rebuild their careers in the new world. Instead of drawing attention to the deficiencies of *The Brutalist*, this article initiates a discussion of one of these Holocaust survivor architects, Slawik, drawing out thematic aspects of his life that are foreshadowed in *The Brutalist*, such as the difficulty of re-establishing an architectural career and finding patronage in a new country, Jewish identity, visual Holocaust testimony, the ongoing difficulties of life as a Holocaust survivor and architectural expression in the postwar era. Unlike the easy assimilation of prestigious Bauhaus architects in America and canonical stories of the transmission of modernism, Slawik's biography and career, like the fictional Tóth's, demonstrates the 'extremely diverse social, professional and intellectual contexts' in which émigrés practised architecture, both in their homelands and destination countries.[11]

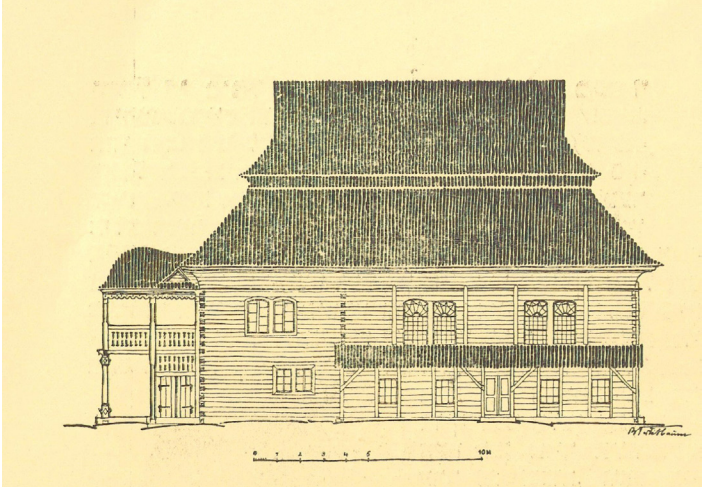


Figure 2: Elevation of the Kamionka Strumiłowa Synagogue (now Kamianka Buzka, Ukraine), drawn by Bernard Teitelbaum as part of his work with the Kuratorium (note his distinctive signature at lower right). Source: *Sprawozdanie Kuratorjum Opieki nad Zabytkami Sztuki Żydowskiej przy Żydowskiej Gminie Wyznaniowej we Lwowie*, 1928, p. 16.

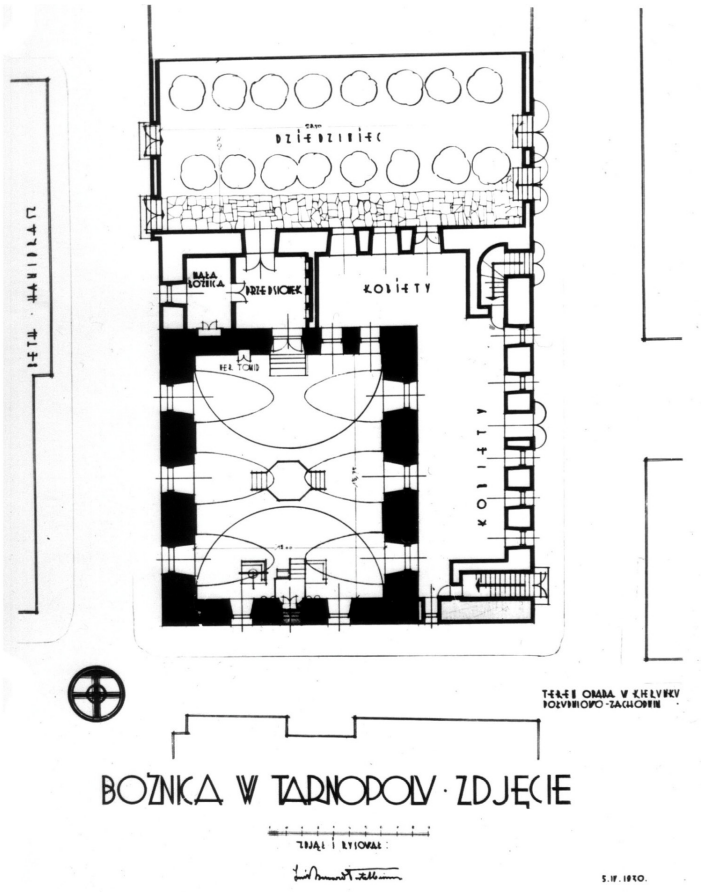


Figure 3: 'Synagogue in Tarnopol – Survey. Surveyed and drawn by: Eng. Bernard Teitelbaum, 5 May 1930' as part of his work with the Kuratorium. Source: Museum of Ethnography, Arts and Crafts in Lviv, Kuratorium File U, Tarnopol: the synagogue and old cemetery, call no. 12617.[20]

Biography

Bernard Slawik was born Bernard Teitelbaum on 27 April 1904 in Gliniany (now Hlyniany), a small town near Lwów, Austro-Hungary (now Lviv, Ukraine), a region that, at the time, had a large Jewish population. Teitelbaum's early life was disrupted by fighting on the Eastern Front during World War I. His family evacuated westward, moving to Kraków, Vienna and Brno, finally resettling in Lwów after the war. Involved in Hashomer Hatzair (a Zionist youth movement) from the age of 13, Teitelbaum left school aged 17 and became a member of the Jewish youth movement Hehalutz (The Pioneer) at the Hachsharah (literally 'preparation', an agricultural training centre that taught skills necessary for migration to Palestine) in the Lwów suburb Sygniówka. The Polish–Soviet War (1919–21) interrupted this training and Teitelbaum returned to, and graduated from, high school. Teitelbaum then studied architecture at the Lwów Polytechnic from 1924.[12] This course was, like most in Europe at the time, traditionally focused: the first years were devoted to foundational studies including fine arts, with design and technical subjects introduced in the final years.[13] Teitelbaum graduated in 1930; he took six years to complete the four-year course so he could work, first as a tutor, and then for local Jewish architect Józef Awin between 1928 and 1932.

Awin was an important Lwów architect in the early twentieth century whose influence stretched well beyond the Jewish community. He was the only Jewish board member of the Association of Polish Architects, Lwów Branch, and is recognised as a leading Lwow designer in the Secessionist and Modernist styles.[15] He was the driving force behind the establishment of the Lwów Commission for the Preservation of Jewish Art in 1925 (also known as the Kuratorium).[16] The Kuratorium's activities were counterparts to the preservation and documentation of historic synagogues undertaken by Professor Oskar Sosnowski and art historian Szymon Zajczyk from 1923 with the help of their students at Warsaw Polytechnic.[17] The Kuratorium was hailed for documenting Jewish cemeteries, synagogues and contents, as well as 'scientifically and knowledgeably' conserving them.[18] Teitelbaum was the Kuratorium's assistant conservator. He spent his summers documenting synagogues (Figures 2, 3 and 4) and gravestones, participated in the Exhibition of Jewish Art (part of the 1928 Lwów Book Exhibition) and presented a paper on the Kuratorium's work at a conference on the preservation of Jewish art at Mainz, Germany.[19]

In 1930, Teitelbaum undertook a study tour of Roman and Renaissance architecture in Italy that left a deep impression. More than 50 years later, he wrote page upon page lauding the architectural treasures

Figure 4: Tarnopol Synagogue (now Ternopil, Ukraine), 1921. Source: Polish National Digital Archive, Collection of photographs of Lwów and environs, call no. 3/41/0/-/1178/1/.

Figure 5: Apartment building at 5-5A Basztowa Street, Kraków, designed by Bernard Teitelbaum in 1934. Of Slawik's Polish-built work, this apartment block is the most inspired by International Style architecture; his other works are more conservative. Even so, this apartment block can be read as a modernist adaptation of a neoclassical urban typology, and was perhaps influenced by Teitelbaum's travels in Italy and the Novecento architecture of Giovanni Muzio and Marcello Piacentini. Source: Photograph by Tomasz Tomaszek, 2025.

of Venice ('like in a dream'), Florence ('absolute harmony') and Rome ('a city of cities').[21] While working for Awin, Teitelbaum assisted with the design of the Jewish Students' Sanatorium in Worochta (now Vorokhta, Ukraine), completed in 1934, and supervised works to the Lwów Jewish Academic House in 1930–31.[22]

In 1932, Teitelbaum established his own private practice in Warsaw. His work included refurbishing insurance company office buildings across Poland, and he designed a group of new apartment buildings in Kraków (Figure 5). In the late 1930s, Teitelbaum returned to Lwów for several industrial projects and, in 1939, prepared to defend his doctoral thesis on the fortified synagogues of eastern Poland.[23] During this decade, he also made regular study tours to see new residential architecture, hospitals, industrial buildings and multistorey garages across Europe.[24]

After German troops reached Warsaw in September 1939, Teitelbaum and his new wife, Alma Parnes, set out on foot to Lwów.[25] They left behind the only copy of Teitelbaum's unsubmitted doctoral thesis, which is presumed destroyed (Figure 6). Russia seized command of Lwów shortly after their arrival. Teitelbaum managed to find work as an engineer at a tannery, but, on 30 June 1941, German troops entered Lwów. A pogrom took place the following day, 1 July. Teitelbaum was attacked and thrown into a prison, watching as German soldiers photographed the horrors. He later described seeing an unconscious older Jewish man: 'Two Ukrainians grab him by the legs and drag him across the cobblestones across the courtyard. It leaves a bloody trail. His head surrenders helplessly, bouncing up and down.' Teitelbaum approached a German soldier to explain that 'innocent people were grabbed from their homes or kidnapped off the street'. The soldier smiled and responded: 'You Jews are all communists; the war is your fault'[26]—a trope frequently used by participants to justify the pogrom.[27] While

ZAŚWIADCZENIE.

Zaświadczam niniejszym, że p. Bernard Teitelbaum urodzony dnia 27 kwietnia 190[illegible] w Gliniance zdał dnia 13/III 1930 egzamin dyplomowy na Wydziale Architektonicznym Politechniki lwowskiej z ogólnym wynikiem bardzo dobrym i uzyskał akademicki stopień INŻYNIERA-ARCHITEKTA.

Lwów, dnia 19 października 1939 r.

Przewodniczący Komisji Egzaminu Dyplomowego

DZIEKANAT WYDZIAŁU ARCHITEKTONICZNEGO POLITECHNIKI LWOWSKIEJ

Dziekanat stwierdza wiarygodność niniejszego zaświadczenia.

Lwów, dnia 25 PAŹ. 1939

Figure 6: Certification that Bernard Teitelbaum, born 27 April 190[4], in Gliniany, passed the graduation exam on 13 March 1930 with honours at the Architecture Faculty, Lwów Polytechnic, and earned an engineer-architect degree. This was issued on 19 October 1939, replacing Teitelbaum's original diploma, left behind in Warsaw. Source: Australian War Memorial, Slawik, Bernard (b.1904–d.1991), AWM2016.810.4.

Teitelbaum was freed thanks to a Ukrainian co-worker from the tannery who identified him as a 'Pole' (i.e. a Catholic), the day weighed heavily on him, leading him to question his belief in humanity and to conclude that: 'Man is a beast and a vile one.'[28]

German troops established the Lwów Ghetto in early November 1941. Hoping to evade capture, the Teitelbaums split up, placing their baby daughter Ewa into the care of a Catholic family. Alma exchanged her engagement ring for Catholic identify papers and went to Warsaw under the name Maria Kołtuniak.[29] Despite these steps, Teitelbaum was incarcerated in the Janowska concentration camp in Lwów, where he was set to work in the drafting office (Figure 7). Fortuitously, this work included site management of barrack construction, which enabled Teitelbaum to leave the camp regularly. Alma managed to send him false papers, which he hid on the building site. When he believed his forged papers had been discovered he fled, hiding for days in a snowdrift in nearby woods.[30] Bernard Teitelbaum then took on a new identity with the counterfeit papers: he retained his original birthdate, but became the Polish Catholic Zygmunt Sławik (Figure 8).[31] He kept this surname, even in Australia, leading to confusion about his original name (often cited as 'Zygmund [sic] Teitelbaum') and whether he survived the war.[32]

After his escape, Sławik reunited with Alma in Warsaw. They arranged to be sent to Germany for forced labour, as they believed they could better pretend to be Catholic Poles there. Sławik worked as a carpenter's assistant for the remainder of the war. After Germany surrendered in May 1945, the Sławiks

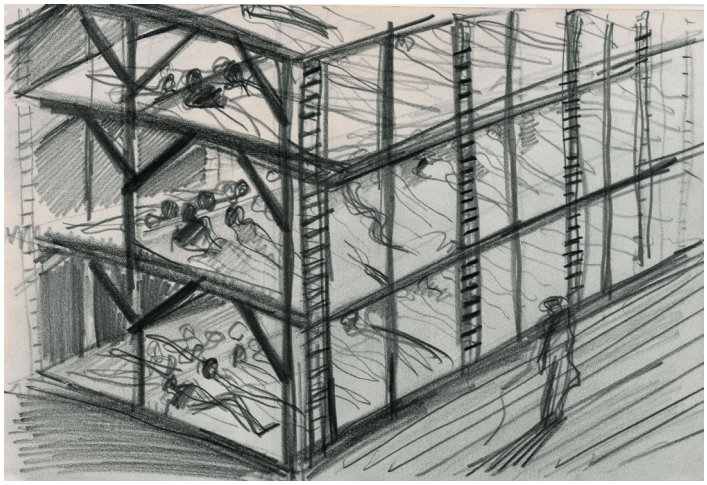


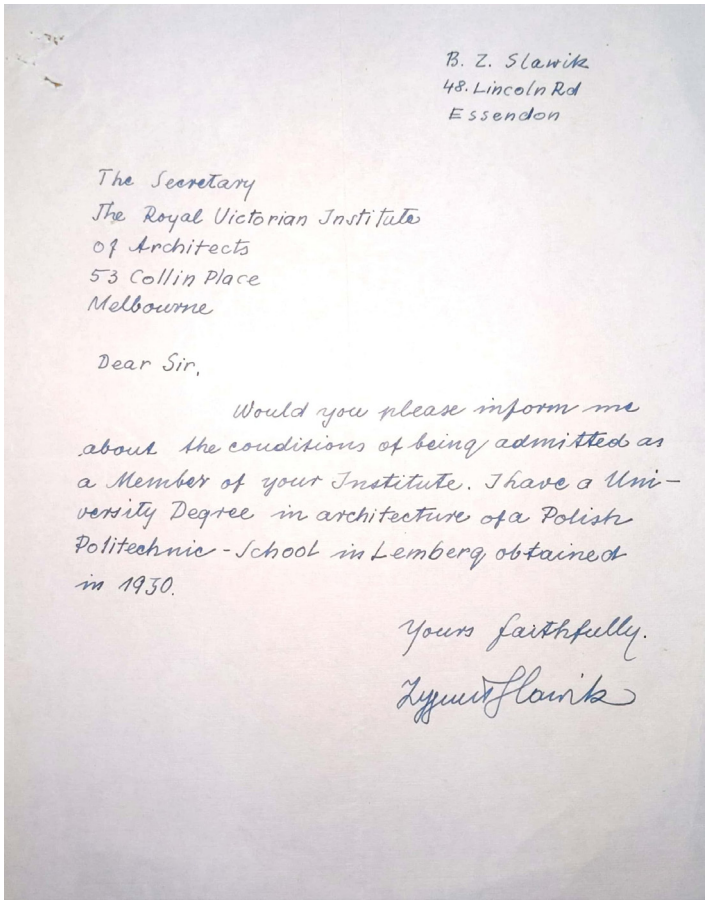
Figure 7: 'Bunk beds', by Bernard Teitelbaum, c. 1943. This sketch depicts three-storey bunkbeds in the Janowska concentration camp, constructed of wooden planks, with barely enough room to sit up. When Teitelbaum was in the concentration camp, in 1943, he had not yet adopted the name Slawik. Source: Australian War Memorial, cited as Bernard Slawik, 'Bunk beds', c. 1943 (Pencil on paper, 16.0 x 24.0 cm) AWM ART 90351, available at <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C287259>.

Kennkarte
Kreish Distrikt Warschau
657153
Gültig bis 26. August 1948 sierpnia
Name Slawik
Vornamen Zygmunt
Geboren am 27.4.1904.
Geburtsort Łomża
Kreish Łomża Distrikt Białystok
Land eh. Polen
Beruf Bautechniker
Religion röm.kath. rzym.kat.
Besondere Kennzeichen keine-nie ma.
Unterschrift des Kennkarteninhabers
26. August 1943
Ausstellungsbehörde
Dienstsiegel
Unterschrift des ausfertigenden Beamten

Figure 8: Teitelbaum's false German General Gouvernement ID, dated 26 August 1943 and valid until 26 August 1948. It gives his name as Zygmunt Sławik, a Catholic structural engineer born in Łomża, Poland, on 27 April 1904. Source: Australian War Memorial, Slawik, B, AWM2017.1330.1[33]

travelled to Kraków, and then Alma retrieved their daughter from Lwów.[34]

Once reunited, the family, now known as Zygmunt, Alma and Ewa Sławik, moved to Warsaw, which had been bombed in 1939 and then largely destroyed by German troops after the Warsaw Uprising. Sławik was engaged as an engineer-architect and then, from June 1945 to July 1946, as deputy chief of the Economic Planning Department within the Warsaw Reconstruction Office. The Warsaw Reconstruction Office's aims included returning Warsaw to a



B. Z. Slawik
48. Lincoln Rd
Essendon

The Secretary
The Royal Victorian Institute
of Architects
53 Collin Place
Melbourne

Dear Sir,

Would you please inform me about the conditions of being admitted as a Member of your Institute. I have a University Degree in architecture of a Polish Politechnic - School in Lemberg obtained in 1930.

Yours faithfully.
Zygmunt Slawik

Figure 9: Letter to the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects, enquiring about registration, signed 'Zygmunt Slawik', 1948. Slawik notes his architecture degree from the Polytechnic in Lemberg, the German name for Lwów/Lviv. Source: PROV, VPRS 8838/P2, Unit 13, File 'Slawik, Zygmunt Bernard 1952-1981'.

functioning capital and reconstructing its historic centre, which was intended as an act of resistance against the Nazis' attempts to erase the city and the Polish nation.[35] Slawik supervised the 'plan of rebuilding [which] included detailed schedules for restoration of the power, light, water mains, sewerage, for rebuilding schools with a time table for each job'. He also helped to develop gruzobeton (rubble concrete), a 'method where rubble was mixed with concrete—and building blocks formed on the site'.[36] Entire suburbs were reconstructed using this rubble concrete.[37] Sławik also took on independent commissions, designing warehouses for the Central Depot for Buildings Materials. Later he assisted Rabbi Dawid Kahane (at that time chief rabbi of the Polish Army, later chief rabbi of Argentina) to repair the only surviving synagogue in central Warsaw, the Nożyk Synagogue, for the 1946 High Holidays.[38]

Despite improving fortunes, the Sławiks could see the impact of antisemitism on their daughter and decided to leave Poland, hoping to settle in the British Mandate of Palestine. In late 1946 they went to Sweden, where Sławik worked for the municipal architect of Gavle, preparing plans for an aged care home, kindergarten and theatre. In his spare time, he sketched Gavle's Old Town.[39] Migration to the British Mandate of Palestine was illegal at this time and was considered too risky for young Ewa, thus the Sławik family considered other potential destinations. In 1947, Sławik placed advertisements in the Australian Jewish press seeking Leopold Weintraub, a friend from Lwów, who, after contact was made, sponsored the family's immigration to Australia in September 1948.[40]

Once settled in Melbourne, Sławik anglicised his name to Slawik and found a temporary post with prominent modernist architects Yuncken, Freeman Brothers, Griffith and Simpson. Five months later, he was engaged by architect-planner Frank Heath for the remainder of 1949.[41] Heath helped many émigré architects relaunch their careers in Australia, including Ernest Fooks, Kurt Popper, Charles Lipsett, Slawik, Oscar Gimesy and others.[42] After leaving Heath's office in 1950, Slawik spent six months unsuccessfully attempting to establish his own private practice, designing a doctor's surgery and residence (client and location unknown).[43]

For the next five years, Slawik was employed by the Public Works Department (PWD) of Victoria, first in a temporary role then, from December 1954, as a permanent architectural assistant.[44] During this time, he participated in developing the standardised design for Light Timber Construction school buildings,[45] a method used to establish dozens of new high schools and technical schools from 1953.[46]

European architectural qualifications were not recognised by the ARBV, thus, in 1948, Slawik began the arduous process of architectural registration (Figure 9).[47] He sat many of the ARBV's exams over the coming years, finally achieving the status of a registered architect in May 1952. Over these years, he referred to himself as Zygmunt Bernard Slawik, then Z. Bernard Slawik, and finally Bernard Z. Slawik, reclaiming his first name.[48]

While at the PWD, Slawik also designed private commissions, such as a weekender in Kalista, and promoted his expertise more broadly. In 1953, Slawik and Bernard Joyce, a British migrant colleague at the PWD, entered a design to the Small Homes Service competition that was awarded a special prize (Figure 10).[49] Slawik also spruiked his idea for a 'permanent building centre which would concentrate on the collection and dissemination of all the world's latest information on building materials and methods'.[50] Slawik was professionally active in the Jewish community, delivering lectures on art, architecture and planning.[51] He was a founding member of both the Technion Society of Australia, which brought

Figure 10: Bernard Slawik and Bernard Joyce's award-winning Small Homes Service design of 1953, Model V256. Undated photograph of an example erected in Dromana. Source: Australian War Memorial, photograph album related to Bernard Slawik, AWM2016.810.8.

Figure 11: Ilin House, 52 Walbundry Avenue, Balwyn North, 1958. Source: Slawik Family Collection.

together Jewish architects, engineers, scientists and technicians, and the Jewish Association of Galicians and Silesians.[52]

In 1956, Slawik left the PWD and successfully established his own private practice.[53] Most of his clients were compatriots: Jewish émigrés, often Polish, who commissioned Slawik to design their residences (Figures 11 and 12). Slawik also designed a number of apartment buildings (Figure 13), several light-industrial buildings (both his own investment property and factories for others) (Figure 14), and a shopping centre, location unknown.[54] His greatest satisfaction was the Stanmark Reception Centre,

Figure 12: Maurice and Stephanie Fast House, 35 Larnook Avenue, Prahran, 1959. Source: Photograph by Natica Schmeder.

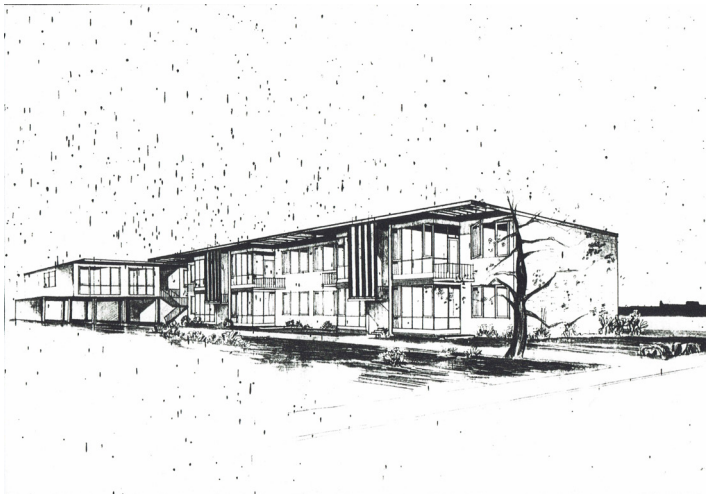


Figure 13: Perspective of Edme Court flats, 578 Glenferrie Road, Hawthorn, c. 1962–63. Source: Slawik Family Collection.

East St Kilda, completed c. 1957, which served as an important gathering place for the Melbourne Jewish community for many years.[55]

After 1967, Slawik's design output dropped due to ill health, and he considered giving up his architect's registration. He fully retired in 1981. While he had never abandoned fine arts, in the late 1960s, Slawik seriously studied printmaking. He spent his final years focused on his art practice, exhibiting in Victoria and Queensland. His work was collected by museums in Australia, Britan, Israel, Sweden and Switzerland.[56] He died on 7 February 1991, leaving behind Alma, Eva and two grandchildren.[57]

Re-establishing an architectural career

Slawik's biography demonstrates a similarly winding professional career to that of Tóth. Central to *The Brutalist* are the difficulties Tóth encounters re-establishing his architectural career—his periods working as a labourer loading coal, designing and building furniture, as well as his varied architectural

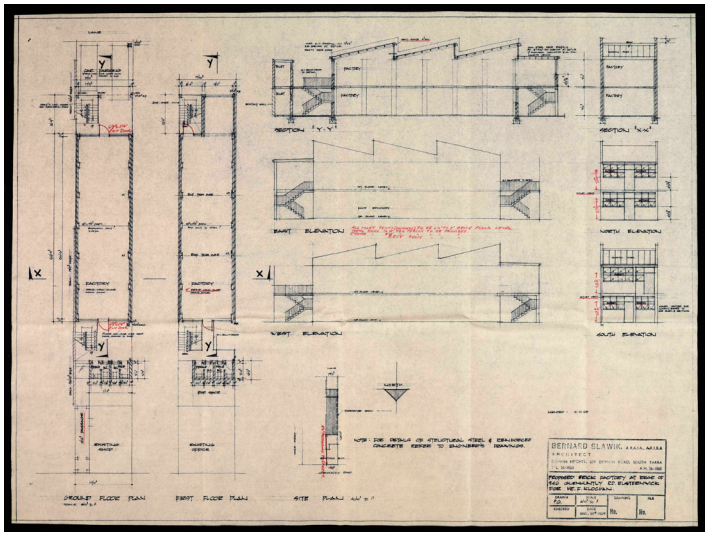


Figure 14: Plans of a clothing factory at 346 (rear) Glenhuntly Road, Elsternwick, for F Klocman, 1964. Source: PROV, VPRS 10150/P0, Plan 8526 File Red 5290.

Figure 15: Coffee table of glass, metal and cord, designed by Slawik under the Arden Design label. The address, 125 Bambra Road, Caulfield, was the family's home from 1953, and Slawik's design studio from 1956 to 1959.[59] This coffee table from Arden Design bears a strong similarity to the work of then Melbourne-based Clement Meadmore's industrial design, employing his signature Venetian blind cord windings and rubber knobs, alongside glass and painted steel.[60] Source: Photograph by the Kenneth Ross Studio, Melbourne, Slawik Family Collection.

practice. Slawik's career was even more wide-ranging. In Poland, his early professional work included historic preservation work on Jewish art and architecture, and his postwar years in Warsaw were devoted to reconstructing the city, including repairing the Nożyk Synagogue. Slawik's prewar private practice in Poland included modernist design and more conservative outputs. During the war, he worked cleaning rifles for the German army in Warsaw, at Janowska concentration camp as a draughtsman and building supervisor, and as a carpenter's assistant in Germany.[58] In Sweden, his output was largely civic. In Melbourne, Slawik worked for large- and medium-sized private firms and in the public service (in the PWD) before ultimately establishing a successful private practice. Slawik even turned his hand to furniture design, as does Tóth in *The Brutalist*, establishing a short-lived furniture company, Arden Design, as part of his private architectural practice (Figure 15).

Careers as diverse as Slawik's and Tóth's were not uncommon among émigré architects. Many other émigré architects in Melbourne needed to adjust their professional output to maintain an income: for example, prewar émigré architect Herbert Tisher diversified into furniture design and construction, and, at the end of his career, sold church organs.[61] Prewar émigré architects Hermann and Anneliese Baum, and Andor Meszaros, changed their careers entirely, becoming, respectively, a wooden toy manufacturer, a domestic cleaner and a sculptor in Australia.[62] Such career changes were primarily driven by the lack of professional recognition afforded to émigré architects in Australia. While not as obstructive as the medical field, none of the professional architectural bodies in Australia recognised Continental European qualifications.[63] Thus, to join the architectural profession, and receive concomitant financial remuneration, émigré architects needed to pass the ARBV's examinations. The financial burden of retraining weighed especially heavily on those with children, and many émigré architects—like the Baums—could not afford the process.

Similarly, the expertise émigré architects arrived with was not always recognised or rewarded with comparable job opportunities. When Slawik arrived in Australia in 1948, few, if any, local architects had as much experience as he in architectural preservation, restoration and reconstruction. Certainly, none had undertaken doctoral theses in these areas. Even so, Slawik's involvement in historic art and architecture in Australia was limited to lectures on Jewish art and synagogues delivered to Jewish groups and as an organiser of the 1964 'Hebrew Art and Culture' exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria.[64] When Slawik was establishing his architectural career in Australia, organisations such as the National Trust of Australia (Victoria) were dominated by white Anglo-Saxon Protestant members from 'the intellectual wing of the Australian establishment'[65] who showed little interest in Jewish heritage or Slawik's skills.[66] There is no record of Slawik working in heritage conservation in Australia.

Postwar conditions in Australia and the United States were not analogous. Yet it is clear from Slawik's career, and that of many other émigré architects recorded in the files of the ARBV, that, at least in Australia, re-establishing careers could be a circuitous process. Critics of *The Brutalist* overlook the fact that, even in the United States, Mies van der Rohe faced difficulties registering as an architect in New York, such that he had to enter into an architectural partnership of sorts with Philip Johnson to allow him to design the Seagram Building, now considered one of the iconic buildings of the International Style.[67] Once removed from the professional associations and patronage networks of Europe, happenstance, patronage, and economic and regulatory conditions in the migration country played a significant role in career paths for architects, and *The Brutalist* is not wrong in highlighting these impediments to architectural practice.

Jewish identity

Another element frequently overlooked in discussions of Jewish émigré architects, but present in *The Brutalist* and Slawik's biography, is the importance of Jewish identity, both personally and professionally. Tóth's religious commitment is an important aspect of his character throughout *The Brutalist* and the epilogue reveals that the project that meant the most to him was a synagogue he designed. While many of the twentieth-century's Jewish diaspora led assimilated lives prior to Hitler's rise to power, Slawik's biography makes it clear that Jewish identity was a central force throughout his entire life. From his early involvement with Zionist groups, his synagogue and Jewish art–focused heritage practice and research in Poland, to his private practice dominated by work for Melbourne's Jewish community, Slawik's Judaism was only relegated when he assumed a false identity to survive Nazi persecution. Both architects saw the foundation of Israel as of paramount importance for Jewish people. Years after the outbreak of the 1967 Arab–Israeli War, Slawik remembered his passionate desire to serve in the conflict.[68] Like Tóth, the buildings Slawik took most professional pride in were for the Jewish community: in Slawik's case, it was repairing the Nożyk Synagogue in Warsaw and designing the Stanmark Reception Centre. To discuss these émigré architects' careers without attending to their Jewish identity would be to overlook a fundamental underpinning of their work.

Similarly, Jewish identity was important for émigré architects professionally. Both the fictional and the real architects' careers were bolstered by Jewish patronage, with substantial numbers of their private practice commissions designed for Jewish clients. Slawik's clients were mainly drawn from his social circle, which consisted almost exclusively of Polish and Austrian Jewish émigrés.[69] The overlap between Slawik's clients and friends makes it difficult to ascertain whether his clients hired him primarily based on friendship, a shared aesthetic sensibility, or in an ethno-supportive fashion due to shared Polish and/or Jewish backgrounds. In Melbourne, 12 single-family homes have been identified as designed by Slawik: of these, eight were for Polish–Jewish clients,[70] two were for Jewish émigrés from other countries,[71] and two were for Anglo-Australians.[72]

Slawik also designed a number of apartment buildings and these tended to have a more varied clientele (one Polish–Jewish client, two from other Central European countries and two for Anglo-Australians), hinting that European-trained architects may have been recognised more widely for their knowledge in this sphere.[73] Despite such strong correspondence between Jewish identity and the careers of émigré architects, this aspect is often omitted from scholarly discourse.[74] In part, this may be because, frequently, the émigré architects who were the most successful in the United States, Australia and elsewhere were not Jewish. This, in itself, is a notable feature largely unexplored among current émigré architect scholarship that warrants further attention. For all its deficits, *The Brutalist* does not shy away from representing Jewish identity and highlighting its centrality for Tóth. As such, the film gives expression to a vitally important aspect of the life and experience of the majority of architects displaced from Europe by Hitler's rise to power.

Surviving the Holocaust and visual testimony

Concentration camp experiences left indelible imprints on both Slawik and Tóth. A solemn and serious man, Tóth turns first to heroin, and later to obsessive work in his architectural practice to stave off the horrors of his memories. As a form of a visual testimony to his Holocaust experience, Tóth encodes the dimensions of his cell and camp in the institute he designs for the Van Burens.[75] Equally serious minded, Slawik documented his time in the Janowska concentration camp via sketches that bore visual witness to the architectural form of the camp and the atrocities he experienced (Figure 16).[76] As Janet Blatter and Sybil Milton demonstrate in *Art of the Holocaust*, artists and architects have used various artforms to bear witness to, and emotionally process, their Holocaust experiences.[77] Slawik wrote of his art practice and its role in managing his memories and emotions in a short memoir penned in c. 1978:

> The everyday tasks of the profession did not stop me … [pursuing] my need for expression in other spheres of art.
>
> Weekends, holidays, times between other work were devoted to active work in painting drawing sculpture and later in etching and lithography & this diversion from constant work in architecture, did give an outlet of the need to express myself … despair, would draw my attention, and hundred [sic] of drawing, sketches in black and white or colour would stay [sic] be gradually collected in drawer.[78]

Janowska was a significant theme in Slawik's artistic output throughout his life, along with architectural sketches and biblical-themed works.[79] Eminent art curator Betty Churcher believed that the Janowska sketches donated to the Australian War Museum by the Slawik family were drawn during Slawik's incarceration in the camp.[80] Slawik's ability to contemporaneously document the camp was rare; unlike most inmates, he had access to drawing materials in the camp drafting office. The larger amount of Holocaust art was produced after war ended. Even so, Slawik was not the only incarcerated architect to record the atrocities at Janowska. Wilhelm Ochs (later Ze'ev Porath), another graduate of Lwów Polytechnic where Slawik studied, also worked in the Janowska drafting office and used his skill with a pencil to record the traumatic events surrounding him.[81] The horrors Slawik, Porath, and the fictional Tóth endured while incarcerated stand in marked contrast to the lives of émigré architects who were already rebuilding their careers in new countries in the late 1930s. Slawik's memoir demonstrates that, like Tóth, the memories of his experiences in Janowska required ongoing active management. While we can quibble with the cinematic choice of heroin addiction in *The Brutalist*, Corbet, unlike the majority of architectural critics of the film, was right to realise that camp experience would leave its mark on all who endured its terrors.

Slawik's modern architecture in postwar Melbourne

Perhaps the only way that Slawik's and Tóth's lives, careers and experiences correspond to canonical notions of émigré architects is in the last successful stage of their careers in private practice. Critics of *The Brutalist* are correct to note the improbability of Tóth's designs. Slawik's work of the 1950s and 1960s adopted the architectural modernism promulgated by architects such as Mies and Gropius in the United States. Even so, Slawik's work does not slavishly adhere to the strictures of the International Style; his architectural experiences in Sweden, Poland and Melbourne moderated his approach. His early work in partnership with Joyce is among that most mediated by Australian architectural practice. Slawik and Joyce

Figure 16: 'Pile of skulls and shoes', by Bernard Teitelbaum, c. 1943. Source: The Australian War Memorial (Pencil on paper, 16.1 x 24.2 cm) AWM ART90358.

captured the Small Homes Service's approach in their competition-winning design (Model V256, 1953), which was later built in Dromana (Figure 10). Their small, economically and pragmatically built house met the local architectural establishment's notions of what constituted correct planning and modern design, and was the only architectural competition Slawik won in Australia.

Once Slawik established his own private practice, he diverted from the local profession's orthodoxy, designing buildings in the manner of other locally based émigré architects such as Ernest Fooks and Kurt Popper. Colloquially known among the local Jewish community as 'Yiddisher Modern', these brick dwellings of one or two storeys had asymmetrical facades with balustraded terraces, corner porches, large windows, flat roofs with expansive eaves and stonework feature walls.[82] Influenced more directly by Southern Californian Case Study houses than Australian sources, Slawik and other émigré architects designed houses that were often constructed with rich and lavish interiors; had intricate timber cabinetry, screens and built in furniture; and, à la Tóth, had lustrous decorative marble—all features and materials their European clients expected.[83] Slawik's work ranged from the stripped modernism of the Caroline Street Batchlor Flats and the Baker House, Caulfield (1963), to the more eclectically decorated and suburban vernacular–infused Ward House, Eaglemont, c. (1960–63) and the Abrahmovits House, Caulfield North (1964). All his works show an aesthetic process of mediation rather than direct transplantation of European modernism. As his client, Olivia Criseide Coates, noted about Slawik's elegant design for a block of bachelor flats for single women in Caroline Street, South Yarra, in 1967: 'I think the flats are

Figure 17: Batchelor Flats, 115 Caroline Street, South Yarra, 1967. Source: Slawik Family Collection.

very modern, but not ugly modern' (Figure 17).[84] Despite the quality of design, and perhaps because of the previous paucity of research, only a few of Slawik's buildings have received heritage protection.[85]

Conclusion

Slawik's life, like Tóth's, had an epic cinematic quality: the numerous swings, turns and reversals of fortune he experienced, and ultimately triumphed over, aptly illustrate a monomyth or hero's journey. Remarkably, Slawik is only one of several such little-known Holocaust survivor architects whose story is housed in the files of the ARBV at PROV and State Library Victoria.[86] This suggests that, at least in part, critics of *The Brutalist* are incorrect as to the plausibility of the Tóth character. The individual member file records carefully collated and preserved by the ARBV, and files of the ARBV and Royal Victorian Institute of Architects' Board of Architectural Education, provide a springboard from which émigré architects, both Holocaust survivors and those who arrived before the war, can be investigated. The sheer diversity of experiences, homelands, migration journeys and architectural practice among these architects means that there can be no straightforward template for understanding their transnational stories. However, the proliferation of record keeping in the twentieth century, and the archival storage of it, facilitate the recovery of these stories, allowing more complex, and, in this instance, cinematic, stories to be told about the architectural diaspora of the twentieth century.

Endnotes

[1] The awards the film has won include Best Director and the Arca Cinema Giovani Award for Best Film at the 2024 Venice Film Festival; Best Motion Picture, Drama, Best Director, Performance by a Male Actor in a Motion Picture, Drama at the 2025 Golden Globe awards; Best Director, Best Cinematography and Best Original Score at the 2025 BAFTA awards; and Best Actor, Best Cinematography and Best Original Score at the 2025 Academy Awards. See below for examples of media attention the film has received.

[2] See, for example, Roger Butler (ed.), *The Europeans: émigré artists in Australia 1930–1960*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 1997; Stephanie Barron with Sabine Eckmann (eds), *Exiles + émigrés. the flight of European artists from Hitler*, Harry N Abrams, New York, 1997.

[3] See, for example, Nikolaus Pevsner, *Pioneers of modern design: from William Morris to Walter Gropius*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 4th ed., 2005 (first published 1936); Sigfried Giedion, *Space, time architecture: the growth of a new tradition*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 5th ed., 1967; Henry Russell Hitchcock, *Architecture: nineteenth and twentieth centuries*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 4th ed., 1987; Vincent Scully, *Modern architecture: the architecture of democracy*, G Braziller, New York, 3rd ed. 1979; Kenneth Frampton, *Modern architecture: a critical history*, Thames & Hudson, London, 5th ed. 2020; William JR Curtis, *Modern architecture since 1900*, Phaidon, London, 3rd ed., 1996; Spiro Kostof, *A history of architecture: settings and rituals*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2nd ed., 1985; Colin Davies, *A new history of modern architecture*, Laurence King Publishing, London, 2018.

[4] A full literature review of the extensive field of émigré architecture research in Australia is beyond the remit of this paper. The first to locate the phenomenon as a distinctly Jewish one was Harriet Edquist. See Harriet Edquist, 'The Jewish contribution: a missing chapter', in Ronnen Goren (ed.), *45 storeys: a retrospective of works by Melbourne Jewish architects from 1945*, Jewish Festival of the Arts, 1993, pp. 6–11. Key examples, which, like the majority of the field focus on the transfer of modernism, include Butler, *The Europeans*; Rebecca Hawcroft (ed.), *The other moderns: Sydney's forgotten European design legacy*, New South Books, Sydney, 2017; Kenneth Frampton & Philip Drew, *Harry Seidler: four decades of architecture*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1992; Harriet Edquist, *Frederick Romberg: the architecture of migration 1938–1975*, RMIT University Press, Melbourne, 2000. In recent years, three Australian studies that take broader thematic views have been published. See, Catherine Townsend, 'Making modern Jewish Melbourne: schools, synagogues, aged care facilities and community buildings 1938–1979', in *Remaking Cities: Proceedings of the 14th Australasian Urban History Planning Conference 2018*, Melbourne, 2018, <https://apo.org.au/node/212861>; Philip Goad, Ann Stephen, Andrew McNamara, Harriet Edquist & Isabel Wünsche, *Bauhaus diaspora and beyond: transforming education through art, design and architecture*, Miegunyah Press, Melbourne, 2019; *RMIT Design Archives Journal*, special issue 'Vienna Abroad', vol. 9., no. 1, 2019.

[5] The only book dedicated to a Holocaust survivor architect is the German language work by Andreas Schenk, *Fritz Nathan—architekt: sein leben und werk in Deutschland und im Amerikanischen exil, Birkhäuser*, Berlin, 2015. Not architecturally focused but written by a Holocaust survivor architect is Norbert Troller's memoir of his incarceration in Theresienstadt: Norbert Troller, *Theresienstadt. Hitler's gift to the Jews*, translated by Susan E Cernyak-Spatz, edited by Joel Shatzky, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1991. A rare example of discussion of an émigré architect who survived WWII in hiding is Rebecca Hawcroft, 'Ferdinand Silberstein-Silvan: loss and legacy', in Rebecca Hawcroft (ed.), *The other moderns: Sydney's forgotten European design legacy*, New South Books, Sydney, 2017.

[6] PROV, Architects Registration Board of Victoria, VPRS 8838/ P0002, Individual Architects Registration Files, Slawik, Bernard.

[7] See, for example, Gwilym Mumford, 'Why *The Brutalist* should win the best picture Oscar', *Guardian*, 1 March 2025, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2025/feb/28/why-the-brutalist-should-win-the-best-picture-oscar>, accessed 1 May 2025.

[8] Oliver Wainwright, 'Backlash builds: why the architecture world hates *The Brutalist*', *Guardian*, 30 January 2025, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2025/jan/29/architecture-the-brutalist-marcel-breuer>, accessed 1 May 2025; Architecture Writers Anonymous, 'Why *The Brutalist* is a terrible movie', podcast, 20 December 2024; Owen Hatherley, 'The loneliest Bauhaus in America—*The Brutalist*, reviewed', *Apollo Magazine*, 6 February 2025, available at <https://www.apollo-magazine.com/brutalist-film-brady-corbet-bauhaus-architecture-review/>, accessed 1 May 2025; Edwin Heathcote, 'What the movies get wrong about architecture', *Financial Times*, 30 January 2025, available at <https://www.afr.com/life-and-luxury/arts-and-culture/what-the-movies-get-wrong-about-architecture-20250129-p5l7z9>, accessed 1 May 2025.

[9] For this criticism, see, in particular, Architecture Writers Anonymous, 'Why'; Wainwright, 'Backlash'.

[10] PROV, Architects Registration Board of Victoria, VPRS 8838/ P0002, Individual Architects Registration Files, Beer, John and Kook, Erwin.

[11] Andrew Leach, 'Helmut Einhorn: dislocation and modern architecture in New Zealand', *Fabrications*, vol. 14, nos. 1–2, 2004, pp. 59–82, doi:10.1080/10331867.2004.10525194.

[12] Bernard Slawik, '8-page letter to Rabbi John Levi, Temple Beth Israel, c. 1982', AWM2016.810.4; photographs of the Sygniówka Hehalutz training farm in the 1920s are reproduced as H-009 to H-013 at <http://www.eilatgordinlevitan.com/>, accessed 1 January 2026.

[13] 'Zygmunt Bernard Slawik-Teitelbaum's syllabus at Lwów Polytechnic, Faculty of Architecture' (sworn translation), AWM2016.810.4.

[14] Bernard Slawik, 'Professional Qualifications', c. 1953, AWM2016.810.4.

[15] Bohdan Cherkes & Andrzej Szczerski, *Lwów: miasto, architektura, modernizm*, Muzeum Architektury, Wrocław, 2016, pp. 46, 59, 448.

[16] Sergey Kratsov, 'Józef Awin on Jewish art and architecture', in Jerzy Malinowski, R Piątkowska & T Sztyma-Knasiecka (eds.), *Jewish artists and Central-Eastern Europe*, Wydawnictwo DIG, Warsaw, 2010, pp. 131–144.

[17] Marta Ziętkiewicz, 'Discussing shared heritage: politics of photomechanically illustrated publications on synagogues in Poland (1895–1957)', *Photography and Culture*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2025, pp. 203–228, doi:10.1080/17514517.2025.2560162.

[18] Mejer Bałaban, *Zabytki historyczne Żydów w Polsce*, Spółdruk, Warsaw, 1929, pp. 29–31.

[19] *Sprawozdanie Kuratorjum Opieki nad Zabytkami Sztuki Żydowskiej przy Żydowskiej Gminie Wyznaniowej we Lwowie*, 1928, pp. iv, 6, 16, 28 (thank you to Sergey Kratsov for pointing us to this invaluable resource); Bernard Slawik, 'Letter to the *Jewish News*, c. 1982', AWM2016.810.4; *Jüdisch-liberalen Zeitung*, 28 January 1931, p. 5.

[20] Photograph of the original taken by Marek Münz (1872–1936), reproduced by Sergey Tartakovskii (1942–2010) and kindly shared with us by Sergey Kratsov.

[21] Bernard Slawik, '25-page autobiographical manuscript, c. 1978', AWM2016.810.4.

[22] PROV, VPRS 8838/P2, 'Slawik, ZB', 'Personal and Professional Statements', c. 1948; Sergey Kratsov, 'The Life of Józef Awin', *The Galitzianer*, vol. 26, no. 3, 2019, p. 29; *Sprawozdanie Roczne Wydziału Towarzystwa Rygorozantów (Żydowski Dom Akademicki) we Lwowie, Ul. Św. Teresy 26A. za rok administracyjny 1931*, 1932, p. 5.

[23] Eight apartment buildings on Sereno-Fenna Street, and at 5-5A Basztowa Street, Kraków; PROV, VPRS 8838/P2, 'Slawik, ZB', 'Personal and Professional Statements', c. 1948; Andrzej Szczerski (ed.), *Modernizmy. Architektura nowoczesności w II Rzeczypospolitej, vol. 1, Kraków*, Dodo Editor, Kraków, 2014, p. 83.

[24] Bernard Slawik, 'CV on 125 Bambra Road letterhead', c. 1983, AWM2016.810.4.

[25] Slawik, '8-page letter'.

[26] Bernard Slawik, 'Niemcy, pierwszy dzień we Lwowie' (The Germans, first day in Lwów), 3-page Polish manuscript, n.d., Slawik Family Collection (transcription from Polish by Wisława Pisz; translation Natica Schmeder).

[27] John-Paul Hinka, 'The Lviv Pogrom of 1941: the Germans, Ukrainian Nationalists, and the carnival crowd', *Canadian Slavonic Papers/ Revue canadienne des slavistes*, vol. LIII, nos. 2–4, June–December 2011, pp. 225, 237.

[28] Slawik, 'Niemcy, pierwszy dzień we Lwowie'.

[29] Slawik '8-page letter'; Alma Slawik, personal testimony, AV 661, video interview by Paul Kaufman at Melbourne Jewish Holocaust Centre, 12 July 1995, Melbourne Holocaust

Museum; Maria Kołtuniak, birth certificate and General Gouvernement identity card, AWM2016.810.4.

[30] Alma Slawik, personal testimony; Karen Rosauer, interview by Catherine Townsend & Natica Schmeder, 30 September 2024; Betty Churcher, *The art of war*, Miegunyah Press, Melbourne, 2005, p. 94. Churcher presents a different version of events in which it is the discovery of sketches of the Janowska concentration camp that provoked Teitelbaum's flight from the camp. Our extensive archival research cannot confirm this version of events; therefore, we rely on Alma Slawik's personal testimony in this article.

[31] German General Gouvernement identity card for Zygmunt Slawik, AWM2017.1330.1; Zygmunt Slawik birth certificate, AWM2016.810.4.

[32] Bernard Teitelbaum, born 1904, graduate of Lwów Polytechnic in 1930, was listed among Polish architects who died in WWII in *Komunikat SARP* [Association of Polish Architects Communique], no. 8, August 1999, p. 10. This has since been corrected on SARP's 'In Memorium' website.

[33] 'General Gouvernement' refers to the part of Poland controlled by Germany during WWII (the General Governorate).

[34] Alma Slawik, personal testimony; travel permit, 18 May 1945, notarised statement, 4 June 1945, and travel certificate, 19 June 1945, AWM2016.810.4.

[35] Grzegorz Piątek, *Najlepsze miasto świata: Warszawa w odbudowie 1944–1949*, Warsaw, GW Foksal Ebooki, 2020.

[36] Employment reference from Warsaw Reconstruction Office, 17 August 1946; Slawik '8-page letter'.

[37] Adam Przywara (ed.), *Zgruzowstanie. Przeszłość i przyszłość ruin w architekturze*, Muzeum Warszawy, Warsaw, 2023.

[38] Employment reference from Central Depot for Building Materials Pty Ltd, Warsaw, 14 September 1946, AWM2016.810.4; plans on tracing paper for previous bakery and new warehouse at 5–7 Prądzyńskiego Street, Warsaw, Slawik Family Collection; David Kahane, interview, 1995.A.1272.28 | RG Number: RG-50.120.0028, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

[39] PROV, VPRS 8838/P2, 'Slawik, ZB', 'Personal and Professional Statements', c. 1948; employment reference, 2 March 1948, AWM2016.810.4.

[40] *Sydney Jewish News*, 18 July 1947, p. 9; *Hebrew Standard of Australia*, 16 October 1947, p. 5; 'Report on Application for Naturalization [sic] or Registration as an Australian Citizen', NAA A435, 1950/4/6624; Alma Slawik, personal testimony. See also William Rubinstein, 'Australia and the refugee Jews of Europe, 1933–1954: a dissenting view', *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal*, vol. 10, no. 6, 1989, p. 503, for a discussion of the reasons Holocaust survivors migrated to Australia. The majority were sponsored by relatives.

[41] PROV, VPRS 8838/P2, 'Slawik, ZB', 'Personal and Professional Statements', c. 1948.

[42] Catherine Townsend, David Nichols & Robert Freestone, 'Advancing regional and community planning in Australia: the contribution of the Office of Frank Heath 1939–1948', *Planning Perspectives*, March 2025, pp. 1–27, doi: 10.1080/02665433.2025.2478556; Catherine Townsend & David Nichols, 'European modernism and town planning in wartime Australia', in Zaida Garcia Requejo & Kristin Jones (eds), *Silent collaborators: on authorship in architecture*, London, Routledge, forthcoming.

[43] PROV, VPRS 8838/P2, 'Slawik, ZB', 'Personal and Professional Statements', c. 1948; plans of a doctor's surgery and residence, 5 June 1949, Slawik Family Collection.

[44] PROV, VPRS 8838/P2, 'Slawik, ZB', 'Personal and Professional Statements', c. 1948; *Victoria Gazette*, no. 854, 22 November 1955, p. 6170.

[45] This attribution is based on a c. 1991 typescript biographical text about Bernard Slawik's career in the Slawik Family Collection. This states that Slawik's designs included 'the prototype of a high-school, later built in many locations'. The only corresponding project is the PWD's LTC design, developed for technical and high schools. Files of the PWD and Department of Education held by PROV do not document the person(s) responsible for the LTC school prototype. PWD Chief Architect Percy Everett (who retired in June 1953) and Commissioner of Public Works Sam Merrifield are noted as having 'evolved' the LTC design. See LJ Blake (ed.), *Vision and realisation*, vol. 1, Education Department of Victoria, Melbourne, 1973, p. 530; Charles Peterson, 'Historic government schools: a comparative study', Victorian Department of Planning and Development, 1993, p.2/13. Slawik's biographical

text demonstrates that he believed he also played some role in the evolution of the LTC schools.

[46] Twenty-three new LTC schools were constructed in the first financial year of the scheme, 1953–54. See *Report of the minister of education for the year 1953–54*, Victorian Government Printer, Melbourne, 1955, p. 6.

[47] Catherine Townsend, 'Architects, exiles, "new" Australians', in Philip Goad, Andrew Hutson & Julie Willis (eds), *Firmness commodity de-light? Questioning the canons: papers from the 15th SAHANZ Conference, Melbourne, 1998*, University of Melbourne, 1998, pp. 379–387.

[48] PROV, VPRS 8838/P2, 'Slawik, ZB'; *Australian Jewish News*, 9 May 1952, p. 15.

[49] Slawik, 'Our forefather our family and our own life', undated manuscript, AWM2016.810.4; *Age*, 26 October 1953, p. 6.

[50] 'Time we used world's best brains in our new building projects', *Argus*, 18 July 1953, p. 7.

[51] Transcripts of lectures in the Slawik Family Collection; *Australian Jewish News*, 3 July 1953, p. 11, and 27 November 1959, p. 8.

[52] *Australian Jewish Herald*, 16 October 1959, p. 3; *Australian Jewish News*, 19 December 1952, p. 11.

[53] *Australian Jewish News*, 25 May 1956, p. 15.

[54] Plans of 33 Korong Road, West Heidelberg, 1965, Slawik Family Collection; PROV, VA 1027 Department of Labour and Industry, VPRS 10150/P0 Factory Plans Standard, Plan 8526, File Red 5290 and Plan 7730 File Red 5292, 'F Klocman 346 Glenhuntly Road Elsternwick; New Factory Bernard Slawik', 1963; Bernard Slawik, undated CV, Slawik Family Collection.

[55] Since demolished. Stanmark Reception Centre's official opening was recorded in *Australian Jewish Herald*, 25 June 1954, p. 4. It is not clear if this occurred in the building of Slawik's design or in 'Tutuila', the mansion that was demolished to make way for it. Slawik's authorship and the construction of Stanmark is noted in *Architecture and Arts*, October 1957, p. 40. Stanmark became the City of Caulfield's Arts Centre from 1975 to 1987. See Geulah Solomon, *Caulfield's cultural heritage*, vol. 2, City of Caulfield, 1989, pp.123–124.

[56] Slawik, 'CV on 125 Bambra Road letterhead', c. 1983, AWM2016.810.4.

[57] *Australian Jewish News*, 15 February 1991, p. 32.

[58] Alma Slawik, personal testimony.

[59] *Australian Jewish News*, 25 May 1956, p. 15, and 11 December 1959, p. 2. In 1959, Slawik moved his office to Domain Heights, 259 Domain Road, South Yarra, a building he had designed.

[60] The Industrial Design of Clement Meadmore: The Harris/Atkins Collection, 23 March – 14 July 2024, TarraWarra Museum of Art.

[61] PROV, Architects Registration Board of Victoria, VPRS 8838/ P0002 Individual Architects Registration Files, Tisher, Herbert; Frank and Miriam Tisher, interview by Catherine Townsend, 10 May 2025.

[62] PROV, Architects Registration Board of Victoria, VPRS 8838/ P0002 Individual Architects Registration Files, Tisher, Herbert; Veronika Baum, interview by Catherine Townsend, 31 March 2025.

[63] Townsend, 'Architects, exiles'; Suzanne Rutland, *Take heart again: the story of a fellowship of Jewish doctors*, Australian Jewish Historical Society, 1983.

[64] ZB Slawik delivered a lecture on 'Monuments of Jewish art' to the Jewish Students' Study Group (*Australian Jewish News*, 3 July 1953, p. 11) and another on 'Jewish art' to a discussion group (*Australian Jewish Herald*, 27 November 1959, p. 8). See also Bernard Slawik, 'Synagogues of Eastern Europe', illustrated typescript, undated, Slawik Family Collection; Bernard Slawik, introduction to *Hebrew art and culture*, exhibition catalogue, National Gallery of Victoria, 1964.

[65] Graeme Davison, 'A brief history of the Australian heritage movement', in G Davison & C McConville (eds), *A heritage handbook*, Allen & Unwin, North Sydney, 1991, p. 18.

[66] Founded in 1956, the National Trust of Australia (Victoria) was the first heritage organisation formed in the state. It relied on volunteer honorary architects for its restoration projects until the 1980s. See James Lesh, *Values in cities: urban heritage in twentieth-century Australia*, Routledge, New York, 2022, p. 66. Among the 640 historic buildings the trust registered during the first 10 years of its activities, only one was explicitly related to Jewish heritage: the Ballarat Synagogue. See David Saunders (ed.), *Historic Buildings in Victoria*, Jacaranda Press, Melbourne, 2nd ed., 1967.

[67] Jean-Louis Cohen, *Ludwig Mies Van Der Rohe*, Birkhäuser, 2018, p. 141.

[68] Slawik, '8-page letter'.

[69] Alma Slawik, personal testimony.

[70] Buckstein House, 62 Stevenson Street, Kew, c. 1956; Ilin House, 52 Walbundry Avenue, Balwyn North, 1958; Fast House, 35 Larnook Avenue, Prahran, 1959; Czapnicki House (demolished), 50 Lucas Street, Brighton East, c. 1960–64; Baker House, 2 Edinburgh Avenue, Caulfield, 1963; Debinski House (demolished), 635 Inkerman Road, Caulfield North, 1964; Bursztyn House, 1 Lansell Court, Toorak, 1965; Klepfisz House, 52 Lumeah Road, Caulfield North, 1967.

[71] Abrahamovits House, 6 Labassa Grove, Caulfield North, 1964; Silberberg House, 34 Maxwell Grove, Caulfield, 1962.

[72] Ward House, 32 Mount Eagle Road, Eaglemont, c. 1960–63; Sherratt House, 14 Mount Eagle Road, Eaglemont, c. 1964. The two clients were business partners, owners of foundry Ward & Sherratt PL, according to an undated article by Harry Perrott, 'Partners build at Ivanhoe', *Herald*, clipping in Slawik Family Collection.

[73] For a Polish–Jewish client: Domain Heights (flats and addition to Victorian house), 259 Domain Road, South Yarra, c. 1958. For other European Jewish clients: Anita Court flats, 55 Alexandra Street, St Kilda East, 1959–60; Edme Court flats, 578 Glenferrie Road, Hawthorn, c. 1962–63. For Anglo-Australian clients: Clearview Flats, 27 Hill Street, Hawthorn, 1958–59; Batchelor Flats, 115 Caroline Street, South Yarra, c.1967. See Slawik Family Collection; 'Photograph album related to Bernard Slawik', AWM2016.810.8.

[74] Prominent Jewish émigré architects Ernest Fooks and Kurt Popper similarly had client groups that were almost entirely from Melbourne's Jewish community. See Harriet Edquist, *Ernest Fooks: architect*, RMIT, 2001; Harriet Edquist, *Kurt Popper: from Vienna to Melbourne, architecture 1939–1975*, RMIT School of Architecture and Design, c. 2002.

[75] Tóth designs the institute in direct correspondence to the dimensions of the cell and camp he was interned within.

[76] Bernard Slawik, ART90341-ART90360, AWM.

[77] Janet Blatter and Sybil Milton, *Art of the Holocaust*, Rutledge Press, 1981.

[78] Bernard Slawik, '25-page autobiographical manuscript'.

[79] Department of Veterans' Affairs, 'Stolen years: Australian prisoners of war', Anzac Portal, available at <https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/resources/stolen-years-australian-prisoners-war>, accessed 17 June 2025.

[80] Churcher, *The art of war*, pp. 93–96.

[81] Waitman Wade Beorn, 'Unravelling Janowska: excavating an understudied camp through spatial testimonies', in Christopher R Browning (ed.), *Beyond 'ordinary men'*, Leiden, Boston, 2019. According to Department of Veterans' Affairs, 'Stolen years', Slawik's drawings were the only contemporaneous visual record of Janowska camp. This is incorrect, as both Porath's sketches and contemporaneous photographs of the camp taken by Herman Lewinter are still extant. See Herman Lewinter photographs, 1990.135, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

[82] Built Heritage Pty Ltd, 'City of Glen Eira Post-War & Hidden Gems Heritage Review 2020 Stage Two Citations', draft dated 11 February 2020, p. 174.

[83] See, for example, Baker House, 2 Edinburgh Avenue, Caulfield, 1963; Bursztyn House, 1 Lansell Court, Toorak, 1965, prior to its alteration.

[84] Robert Clarke, 'These flats are for bachelor girls, too', *Sun News Pictorial* (Melbourne), property guide, 13 May 1967, p. 1.

[85] Slawik's designs are protected by Victorian municipal heritage overlays as of 2 January 2026. This applies to Baker House, 2 Edinburgh Avenue, Caulfield; Abrahamovits House, 6 Labassa Grove, Caulfield North (assessed by Built Heritage PL); Fast House, 35 Larnook Avenue, Prahran; Buckstein House, 62 Stevenson Street, Kew (assessed by Lovell Chen).

[86] Series III: Minute Books, Board of Architectural Education Minutes, Records of the Victorian Chapter of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects, MS 9454, State Library Victoria.

Exploiting the high country:

a case study of European occupation of the Omeo district

'Exploiting the high country: a case study of European occupation of the Omeo district', *Provenance: the Journal of Public Record Office Victoria*, issue no. 23, 2026. ISSN 1832-2522.

This is a peer reviewed article.

Anne Beggs-Sunter has a long association with the Ballarat district as a historian working at Federation University and its predecessors. She has examined the history of the Victorian gold rushes, and the occupation of farming lands around Ballarat as a result of the Selection Acts of the 1860s. In particular, she has analysed farming on the volcanic soils around Buninyong.

Author email a.beggs-sunter@federation.edu.au

Jennifer McCoy's PhD thesis in history, completed at Federation University in 2023, drew on the experiences of Scottish selectors to study the impact and effectiveness of the Selection Acts of northern Gippsland. She is working with an editor to publish this research.

Author email: jennifermccoy03@gmail.com

Abstract

The question of land in Victoria, its availability and its value, consumed the attention of waves of British colonials from the beginning: squatters from the 1830s claimed vast tracts of land as pastoral estates for their sheep and cattle; next, miners arrived, and when their attempts to wrestle fortunes from gold proved elusive, their attention turned to the land. Their struggle to access Victoria's Crown lands led to political contest, which led to the Land Acts of the 1860s. These Acts gradually made land available for purchase; however, the costs and conditions effectively denied access to miners and small farmers. Moreover, the acreage envisaged was based on British farming conditions and were inappropriate for the land and climate in Victoria.

The high country of northern Gippsland around Omeo, a goldmining area, was one of the last areas to be opened for selection. Examination of the Land Acts passed between 1860 and 1885 reveals how isolation, climatic conditions and the quality of the land tested the selectors and the legislation. The unexpected difficulties eventually led the government to a more realistic assessment of the land and the conditions that could be placed on selectors. Some small selectors eventually succeeded in establishing their families, but only at the expense of unsettling the original custodians of the land, the Yaitmathang people.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, an attempt was made to legislatively convert the colony of Victoria into an agrarian paradise for families. This social engineering dream of land settlement for people irrespective of personal wealth was predicated on the dispossession of the First Peoples of Victoria. Intruders from Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) had occupied First Peoples' lands from the 1830s, bringing sheep and cattle to establish pastoral estates. From 1851, new arrivals from many nations descended, intent on winning a fortune from gold. In reality, most did not win the gold lottery and soon turned to the dream of making a future through establishing farms and transforming the bush into a patchwork of farms and villages.

This article examines the success of a series of Land Acts passed by the Victorian Government between 1860 and 1885, focusing on the high country of northern Gippsland, around the goldmining settlement of Omeo, one of the last areas opened to selection. Geographically remote, isolated by its terrain and challenged by climate, this area would prove incompatible with the dreams of parliamentarians due to the quality of the land. This

article illustrates the challenges posed to European settlement; considers the appropriateness of the legislation; and examines, in combination with Aboriginal protection legislation, the impact of selection on the First Peoples in the area. Our aim is to determine whether the Land Acts of 1860–85 were effective in settling agriculturalists upon productive farms, and what impact this had on First Peoples.

Historical and methodological approaches

Since the publication in 1970 of JA Powell's classic study of land settlement in Victoria, *The public lands of Australia Felix*, numerous studies have focused on specific areas of Victoria, including the Mallee, the Otways and Gippsland.[1] Peter Cabena's study of grazing in the high country is especially significant.[2] Among studies of the land management strategies of First Peoples, Ruth Lawrence's and Peter Gardner's works stand out.[3] In the 1990s, scholars such as Henry Reynolds and Patrick Wolfe helped to draw attention to the impact of settler colonialism on First Peoples.[4] More recently, the legal implications of colonialism have been investigated by Lisa Ford, culminating in the Yoorrook Justice Commission's *Truth be told* in 2025, a foundation stone for the Victorian Treaty.[5] James Belich and others have highlighted the importance of setting land settlement within an international context.[6] Environmental history has also strongly influenced historiography in recent years, with an emphasis on the damage caused to landscapes by European farming practices, the introduction of feral pests and the impacts of goldmining.[7]

This study uses a conventional historical methodology, drawing evidence from archival material – government records and legislation, parish maps, records from the Omeo Shire Council,[8] and regional and local newspapers – supported where possible by secondary interpretations.

Colonial takeover

When John Batman arrived near Geelong in 1835, he attempted to do a deal with local First Peoples, producing a quasi-legal document that purported to buy 600,000 acres of land. Batman's deed was declared illegal by the British Government, which had decreed by the notion of terra nullius that Australia was 'unoccupied land' and, thus, claimed in its entirety by the British Crown. In any case, Batman's negotiations were only with the Wathaurung and so had no relevance to other parts of Victoria.[9]

In the initial phase of the colonisation of Australia, land was given away by the government to favoured colonists; however, by the 1830s, the sale of Crown land in populated areas was becoming established. In rural areas, squatters held sway, securing vast tracts of land for pastoral use on the payment of an annual licence fee of £10 per year.

Access to land was the single driving focus of the European settlement of Australia and, apart from a few years during the gold rush, this was true of the Omeo region too. Taking ownership of the land meant assuming that it was vacant and available, despite the presence of First Peoples. Henry Reynolds points out that the concept of terra nullius has two different meanings, which are usually conflated: 1) 'a country without a sovereign recognised by European authorities' and 2) 'territory where nobody owns any land at all, where no tenure of any sort exists'.[10] According to Reynolds, while the European powers would have approved the exercise of political power over Australia, the claim that it was a land without occupiers would not have been justified in international law. In other words, the British claim that they were the first occupiers was always questionable.[11] In Victoria, successive Land Acts from 1860, in combination with the Aboriginal 'protection' Acts of 1869 and 1886, effectively formalised dispossession.

When the new colony of Victoria was promulgated on 1 July 1851, a small group of white men secured rights over much of the land, as Margaret Kiddle shows in her history of the Western District.[12] However, soon after that proclamation, Victoria was irrevocably changed by the discovery of gold. The flood of gold seekers into the new colony swamped the tiny population of 77,000 white settlers in 1851.

As Geoffrey Serle demonstrates in *The golden age*, the 'golden generation' was formed by the prevailing social, economic and political values of Europe in the 1840s, and many of the new arrivals immigrated in the hope of achieving a better life in the New World. Many were influenced by the ideals of the Chartist movement in Great Britain, which sought democratic political reform and access to land. These ideals became key tenets in the goldfields reform movement of the early 1850s, when organisations like the Ballarat Reform League sprang up to demand changes to the prevailing power system in the colony.[13]

Confrontation over access to land

The demands of reformers overflowed into desperate confrontation at the Eureka Stockade at Ballarat on 3 December 1854 when diggers came into armed conflict with soldiers and police representing the British government. The diggers were quickly subdued, but the causes of the confrontation were taken up in a Goldfields Commission of Inquiry, which

reported to parliament in March 1855. The inquiry recommended sweeping changes to the system of administering the goldfields, including a strong recommendation for the sale of land:

> 24. Out of complaints innumerable on the land question, the Commission will deal, in the first place, with what appears the most important, and upon which their views were most unanimous. These are with regard to the inadequate supplies of the Crown lands to the mining population, and the infrequency of the opportunities afforded to them for purchasing.[14]

The inquiry also recommended that 'reserves are desirable, as commonage until otherwise required'.[15] This was the first reference to the concept of the goldfields common, which would be incorporated into the Land Acts of the 1860s. The concept of commons surrounding townships was derived from medieval England; commons allowed townsfolk to graze their livestock and cut fuel for their fires.

The call to 'unlock the lands' strengthened in 1855–56 with the advent of responsible government in Victoria. The Melbourne Chamber of Commerce met and produced a special report, calling for the colony to be surveyed and land made available in blocks of 40–640 acres, along the American model, with a requirement to cultivate the land. There were strong echoes of the ideas of the English farmer and journalist William Cobbett, who had called for access to rural landholding for labourers impacted by the Industrial Revolution.[16] William Westgarth was critical of the requirement to cultivate the land, arguing that the nature of the land and the climate would determine its best use. He also suggested a tax on unused land, foreshadowing a debate that would rage at the end of the nineteenth century.[17]

When Victoria's first democratically elected parliament sat at the end of 1856, one of its chief aims was to 'unlock the lands' from the hold of the squatters. According to Serle, during this turbulent first sitting, the democratic Legislative Assembly locked horns with the conservative Legislative Council.[18] It would take 13 years for Victoria to secure legislation that safeguarded and encouraged the settlement of genuine small farmers.

Outside parliament, in December 1856, a provisional committee was established for a people's organisation, the Land League, to fight for democratic land legislation. Thomas Loader, an iron merchant from Melbourne, was its chair, along with the bookseller JJ Walsh.[19] The league's banner was the Southern Cross and its motto was 'Advance Australia'.[20] The government responded, in 1857, with the Haines Land Bill, named after William Clark Haines, the first premier of Victoria, whose aim seemed to be to secure the tenure of squatters. With unemployment rising, a popular movement rose against the Haines Land Bill and in favour of government assistance to the unemployed.[21]

A series of public meetings about the proposed land legislation were held at the end of June and early July 1857. Ballarat was caught up in the debate, as many diggers, faced with declining returns from mining, looked to agriculture to supplement their mining activities. The Land League dissolved and became the Land Convention, meeting for three weeks at the Eastern Market in Melbourne, its orderly proceedings reported in the press. Petitions flooded parliament, signed by 70,000 Victorians, calling for land reform, equal electoral districts and payment of members of parliament.[22]

Around Ballarat, miners and timber workers began taking up small blocks of land from 1856, as the government, sensitive to the demands of the Land Convention, began offering parcels of land around the goldfields for auction.[23] Turner claims that 500,000 acres were sold in 1857 'at absurdly low prices'.[24] More land was surveyed and put up for sale by auction in 1858 in blocks of 80–160 acres. However, the system favoured existing squatters, who had the capital resources to secure the land.

The beginning of selection

In October 1859, the first parliament elected under manhood suffrage assembled under the leadership of William Nicholson.[25] In December 1859, Minister for Crown Lands James Service introduced a new land selection Bill.[26] The draft Bill met many of the demands of the Land Convention, but heated debate between members of the Legislative Assembly and Council resulted in so many amendments that Nicholson and Service would eventually disown the legislation. Dismayed at the behaviour of the Legislative Council, members of the Land Convention – 'a clamorous mob', according to Turner – 'invaded the Legislative Chambers during the sitting of the House' on 28 August 1860.[27] This dramatic act broke the deadlock, but the Land Convention members' violent behaviour turned public sympathies against them. In the end, the Nicholson government accepted the squatters' 250 amendments and allowed the unrecognisable Bill to pass and be proclaimed on 18 September 1860.[28]

Reviewing the first few months of operation of the 1860 Land Act, Conventionist John Henry Brooke described it as a total failure due to the continuation of the auction system, which consistently advantaged the squatter.[29] Brooke moved a vote of no

confidence in the Nicholson government, resulting in a change of government. Richard Heales took office, with Brooke as lands minister. The mobilisation of miners on the goldfields and their increasing influence in the wake of the Eureka Stockade prompted Brooke to approach the auction system in a different way. The Heales government was, in fact, a Convention government. As such, it allowed a liberal interpretation of section 68 of the 1860 Land Act, which granted residence and cultivation licences (originally designed for inns, bridges and ferries) to small holders for up to 20 acres of land.[30] In total, 172,000 acres of land around the goldfields was made available to 1,700 genuine small selectors, including 210 timber workers in the Bullarook forest near Warrenheip, close to Ballarat.[31]

Importantly, the 1860 Land Act also allowed for the reservation of lands for public purposes, and the reservation of town and goldfields commons near townships. As reported in the *Ballarat Miner and Weekly Star* in December 1859:

> But besides these there are some very important provisions affecting commonage reserves, which it is necessary to allude to. There will be 'town commons' and 'gold fields Commons' the former to be used by the inhabitants of the towns for which the commons may be reserved, and the latter by the holders of miners' rights, business licenses, and carriers' licenses, under certain regulations to be made hereafter. Graziers' licences will also be issued for the purpose of depasturage on gold fields' commons.[32]

Due to the accommodations forced by squatters, the 1860 Land Act did not allow miners and others of low capital to select land; however, the provision for commonage helped existing small farmers and miners to gain access to land. According to Serle, over two million acres were proclaimed as commonage.[33]

Colonial settlement in northern Gippsland

The high country of northern Gippsland – a remote mountainous area – was challenging for Europeans.[34] The area was traversed by European explorers, including Johan Lhotsky, George MacKillop, James Macfarlane, Angus McMillan and Paul de Strzelecki, from around 1834.[35] From around 1835, its vast grazing lands were controlled by a handful of squatters, who moved stock onto what would become known as the Omeo High Plains. None appeared to live there permanently, relying instead on station managers and stockmen.[36] South of the Great Dividing Range, other parts of Gippsland were more accessible for development, as Watson and others have observed.[37]

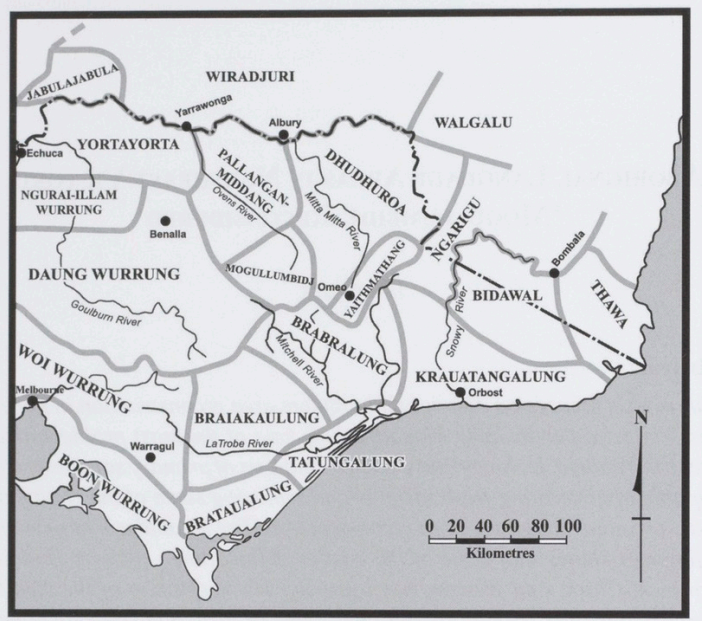


Figure 1: Diagram of eastern Victorian Aboriginal languages and dialects. Source: Ian Clark, 'Aboriginal language areas in Northeast Victoria: "Mogullumbidj" reconsidered', *Victorian Historical Journal,* no. 274, vol. 81, 2010, p. 182. Reproduced with permission from Ian Clark.

For the Yaitmathang, the Traditional Owners of the area, the land was a living entity. It was fundamental to their identity, culture, spirituality, language, law, kinship and sense of belonging (Figure 1). It is a concept unlike European ideas of ownership.[38]

Gold was discovered in the high country in 1851 and miners quickly moved to the area, negotiating the difficult terrain on foot and with limited access to supplies. In 1856, the European population was estimated to be about 100; by 1861, 900 people were recorded as living in the area, including Europeans, Americans, Chinese and First Peoples. Omeo, known initially as Livingstone, became the administrative centre of the area, with several outlying mining settlements serviced by the smaller townships of Benambra and Swifts Creek (Figure 2).

There were tensions between squatters and miners, as the miners activities upset stock and despoiled land and water sources. However, the main disputes seem to have been confined to squatter Edward Crooke, who was a fierce opponent of the miners.[42] His Hinnomunjie run, which stretched along the Mitta Mitta River and the Livingstone Creek, was the most impacted by the gold rush.[43] As alluvial gold declined, miners focused their attention on land. In April 1858, probably at the behest of miners in the Livingstone Creek area, the *Gippsland Guardian* reported a petition by 'the most influential residents of this Creek, and district' for agricultural land to curtail the 'present exorbitant prices of carriage for goods'.[44]

Figure 2: View of the township of Omeo, 1877. Source: Photograph by NJ Caire. State Library Victoria, H24898.

In May 1858, Surveyor Skene compiled a comprehensive report on the extent of Crown land still available in Victoria, including in Gippsland. However, he did not distinguish clearly between different classes of land deemed suitable for agriculture. Instead, pastoral land was defined as first, second and third class, based on its sheep carrying capacity.[45] Skene did not visit Omeo. Nevertheless, he recorded a small area of agricultural land around Lake Omeo and noted that the absence of an accessible market for produce prevented the development of agriculture in the area. He also claimed that surveying was far ahead of demand and that, consequently, surveyors had been directed to other projects.[46] That decision would delay surveying and the availability of land in the Omeo area for some time.

Land Acts in northern Gippsland

The 1860 Land Act marked the beginning of the selection era in Victoria, but only successful miners and squatters could afford to purchase land. Land could now be owned but the conditions were difficult. Available land would be surveyed into allotments of between 80 and 640 acres and each allotment would be divided into two equal parts. The purchase of one part at £1 per acre and lease of the other part was obligatory. A deposit of £1 per acre was required and auction followed if there was more than one applicant.

As mentioned, the provision of a goldfields common enabled less successful miners and settlers to access land. However, in northern Gippsland, the commons were problematic from the beginning. The goldfields commons for Omeo and Swifts Creek, gazetted in February 1861, were each allocated 2,560 acres

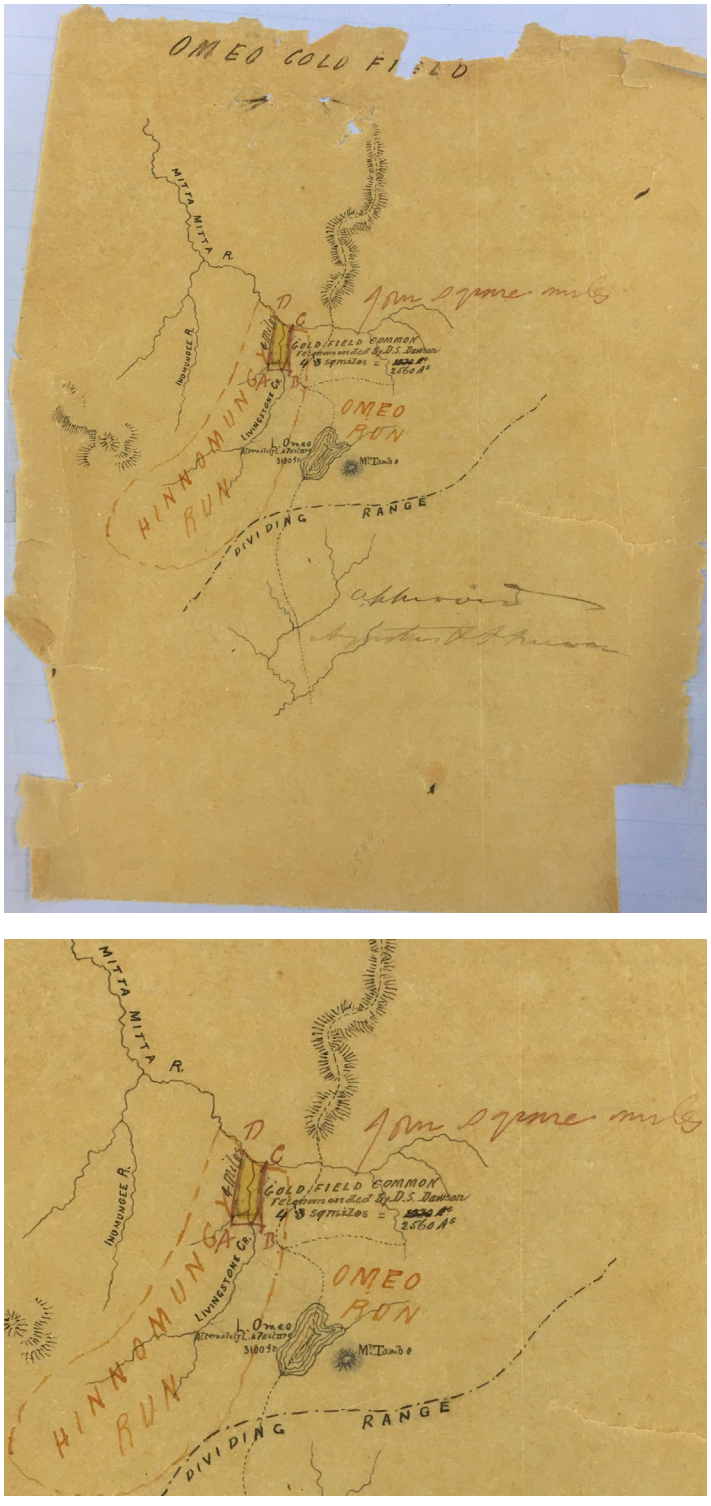


Figure 3: Sketch map showing the location of the Omeo Goldfield Common (above) with inset showing detail (below). Source: PROV, VPRS 242/P0 Crown Reserve Correspondence, C91890, Omeo Goldfield Common Abolition, Omeo, available at <https://prov.vic.gov.au/archive/A9D70F0A-FA4D-11E9-AE98-1F2E3477BA04>, accessed 5 March 2026.[51]

of Crown land (around 4 square miles),[47] much less than the average size of commonage, which was around 7,000 acres.[48] The total area of the

Omeo goldfields was estimated to be 640,000 acres (1,000 square miles).[49] Further, as the *Gippsland Guardian* reported, the location of the Omeo common (Figure 3), which was situated in the centre of Hinnomunjie run, now owned by Matthew Hervey, the representative for Omeo in the Legislative Council, was highly contentious:

> Will it be believed that this is the very spot selected to locate the Livingstone [Omeo] diggers' common? Thus, by a perverse ingenuity doing the utmost possible injustice to both diggers and squatter. In the one case, by placing the common 10 miles from the diggings and camp (which are at that distance up the Livingstone); in the other, by locating it in the midst of the squatter's fenced and cultivated land.

The *Land Act 1862* extended the definition of 'commonage' to serve multiple purposes for multiple people, including residents within five miles of the goldfields. Subsequently, dairy farmers were allowed to run up to 100 head of cattle on common land.[52] Five petitions were raised to increase the size of the Omeo common,[53] but there were only three minor increases until 1909 when all Victorian commons were abolished.[54] People needed land of their own and a genuine opportunity to build a life on that land.

The first Land Acts valued land at £1 per acre, regardless of quality, and the auction process attracted successful miners, business owners or pastoralists. Pastoralists could also take advantage of the Order-in-Council of 7 October 1847 that allowed them pre-emptive rights to 640 acres.[55] In 1861, three pastoralists in the Omeo region took advantage of this right.[56].

In this remote area, the availability of surveyors and administrators was critical. In November 1861, a *Gippsland Guardian* correspondent wrote, somewhat cynically, about a:

> public notification that the government was going to survey 100,000 acres around Lake Omeo and the Bindi country … [But] when? … [The] assistant surveyor is employed in marking out pre-emptive rights, settling boundary disputes of squatters' runs and chiefly in surveying and marking out a new line of road to Omeo.[57]

The 1862 Land Act offered little improvement on the previous Act. On 19 December 1862, a journalist noted that 'a survey of the 25 square miles of so-called agricultural land at Omeo Plains is nearly completed'; however, 'what is not open plain is either a swamp without an outlet or a thick gum forest … how such a spot came to be selected is a mystery.'[58]

In April 1863, WH Foster was appointed lands officer at Omeo.[59] Following a survey by Assistant

Figure 4: Township and suburban lands at Livingstone Creek, Parish of Cobungra, 1864. Source: State Library of Victoria.

Surveyor TW Cooper, sales of Crown land were held in December that year[60] and several miners – Thomas Easton and his partner Clarke; Hans Haas; and James Day, a publican at the diggings – bought multiple allotments at Livingstone Creek/Omeo (Figure 4).[61]

The 1862 Land Act was revised in 1865, offering some hope for small settlers. For example, it allowed full leaseholds of 320 acres instead of immediate purchase, selection and occupation before survey, improvements of £1 per acre to be made after two years and the option to purchase after three years at £1 per acre.[62] These conditions, although something of an improvement, were still challenging. On 4 December 1865, after attending an auction in Omeo, Cooper wrote: 'There was not one single individual attending the land sale today.'[63]

The selection Acts from 1860 have generally been condemned for failing to successfully establish small farmers on the land.[64] In northern Gippsland, an isolated location with access challenges, the reluctance of government officials to visit probably contributed to the low rate of settlement. The poor quality of the land for farming would be realised later.

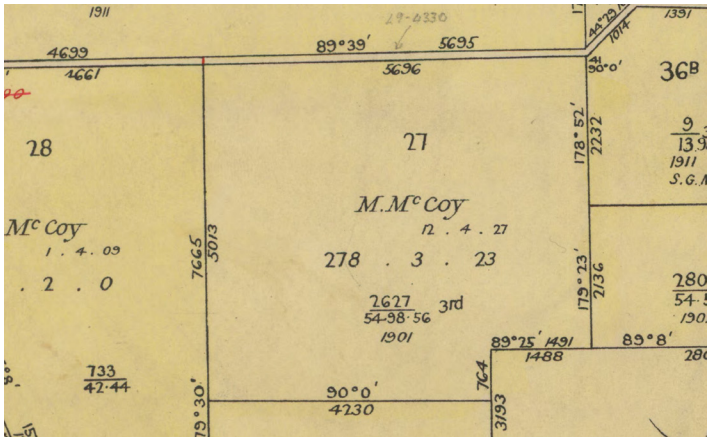


Figure 5: This detail from a cadastral plan for the parish of Tongio-Munjie East shows allotment 27, purchased from the Crown on 12 April 1927 by M McCoy. Directly beneath the date is the size of the land parcel (278 acres, 3 roods and 23 perches). Below that is the land selection file number (which looks like a fraction): 2627 over 54.98.56. The first number is the file number and the latter numbers relate to the relevant sections of the *Land Act 1901*. '3rd' indicates that this allotment was classified as being third-class pastoral land. Source: PROV, VPRS 16171/P1 Regional Land Office Parish and Township Plans Digitised Reference Set, Tongio-Munjie East (Psh)LOImp3606.pdf, available at <https://prov.vic.gov.au/archive/89A5D5F3-F427-11EA-BE8C-4BD9DFD5547C>, accessed 5 March 2026.

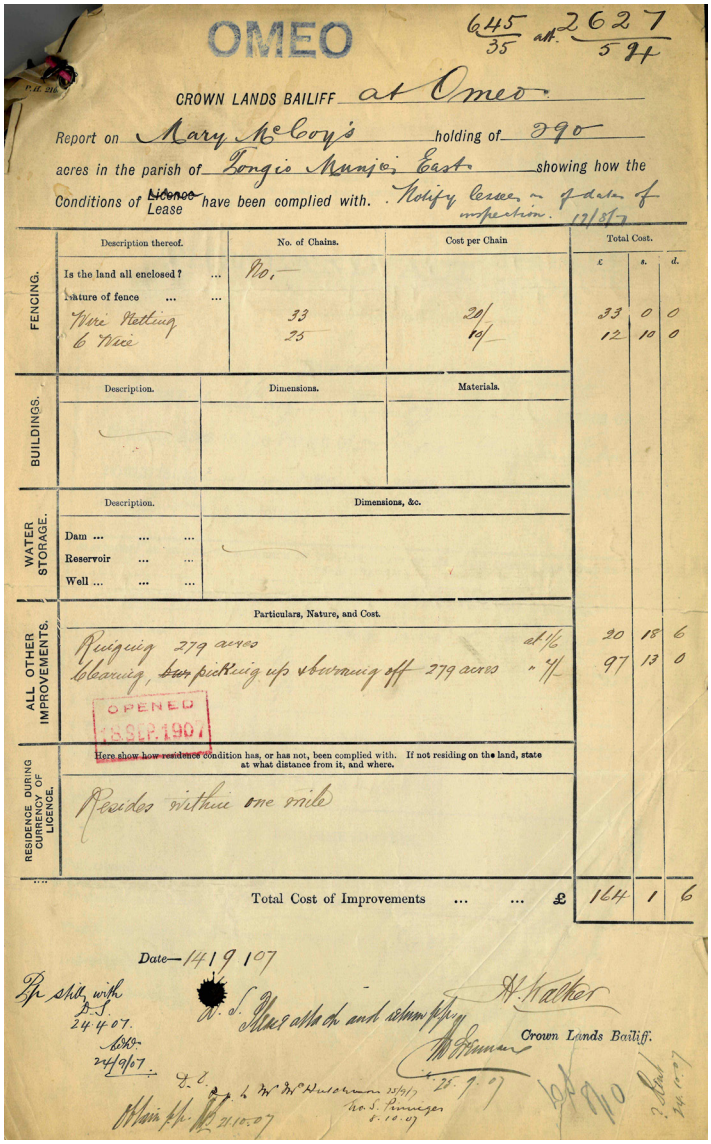


Figure 6: A form from the land selection file (no. 2627) for Mary McCoy documenting improvements to the land she held under lease in 1907. Source: PROV, VPRS 5357/P0 Land Selection and Correspondence Files, 2627/56.98, Mary McCoy; Tongio-Munjie East; 27 1; 278-3-23, available at <https://prov.vic.gov.au/archive/42799D2F-F98A-11E9-AE98-2367F1AC22B8>, accessed 5 March 2026.

The *Land Act 1869* was more supportive of small farmers, although, in northern Gippsland, the agricultural dream of 320-acre farming remained elusive. The new Act allowed selection before survey, and rental payments now contributed to the purchase price. It provided an initial licence for three years, dependent on complete enclosure of the land, 10 per cent cultivation, a house built and lived in for three years, all noxious weeds and vermin destroyed, and improvements to the value of £1 per acre. The Act made reference to different types of land being used for different purposes (i.e. agricultural, grazing, pastoral) but it did not explicitly classify soils.

Selection was still slow. According to a report in 1873: 'There has been very little selection of land for agricultural purposes within the district, but it is fully occupied by pastoral tenants.'[65] More than 12 months later, a group of ratepayers met at the Golden Age Hotel to press for the appointment of a local land board and a district surveyor. They were concerned about inadequate surveys, travel distances and unpredictable administrative postponements.[66]

In 1874, the Department of Crown Lands and Survey was reorganised, and an Occupation Branch with 18 survey districts, each with a District Lands Office, was established. Applications from the Omeo area went first to the Bairnsdale District Lands Office before being referred to the local land board at Omeo to investigate and make recommendations to Melbourne.[67]

Selectors began to arrive, but they still faced huge challenges. Just making their way to the area was difficult. The journey from Geelong took up to three months, with swampy country, multiple creek crossings, floods, and numerous 'tortuous' steep tracks, where wheels had to be chocked for descent and branches of trees dragged behind to act as a brake, making the journey dangerous as well as difficult.[68]

Moreover, the process of selecting land was still not straightforward. Settler Patrick Reid, having marked out, or perhaps estimated, an allotment on the Omeo High Plains, had to ride 100 miles on horseback to Bairnsdale to make an application. Long delays

Figure 7: Omeo, 1890. Source: Photographer unknown. Courtesy Omeo Historical Society.

accompanied applications and survey costs followed approval.[69]

Some selectors succeeded, but many failed to meet their financial commitments, abandoning their selections. Much of the land was identified as third class pastoral land, as shown in cadastral plans, such as the one for the parish of Tongio-Munjie East (see Figure 5).[70]

The 320-acre limit was insufficient for agriculture, and although cattle grazing was a more appropriate use for the land, it was still not enough. The responsibilities of selectors under the licence and lease conditions increased their woes. The basic improvements they were required to carry out included 'ringing', 'scrubbing', and 'picking up and burning off', which was defined as fencing, removal of noxious weeds and the burning of waste (see Figure 6).

A local assessment of the northern Gippsland area was bleak:

> Bindi was on a bit of limestone, Ensay is on a big granite magma, Tambo is on a small granite magma … In the early days you did two things, you cleared the granite country for grazing and you ran cattle in the bush.[71]

A Crown Lands Commission of Inquiry was established in May 1878 to examine the effectiveness of the 1869 Land Act. The commissioners did not visit northern Gippsland; however, experienced officials were probed on the climate, accessibility and quality of the land for agricultural development, the 320-acre limit for allotments and the value of grazing leases for selectors. The Commission of Inquiry's final report included a review of land in the Omeo district by James Stirling, the local lands officer and surveyor. Stirling estimated the quantity of land suitable for grazing or agriculture (or neither) and provided detailed descriptions of the area's climate, soil quality and vegetation.[72]

This report led to the *Land Act 1884*, which focused on leasing, rather than selling Crown land. Unalienated Crown lands were categorised into eight classes of land based on productive use, including pastoral, agricultural and grazing. Differences in pastoral land quality were acknowledged, but no attempt was made to classify the quality of agricultural land. Leases for agricultural and grazing lands were set for a fixed term of 14 years, at one lease per person and a maximum of 1,000 acres, at an annual rent of 2–4 pence per acre. The conditions of lease included fencing, the destruction of vermin and restrictions on cutting timber. Women were now permitted to hold a grazing lease or an agricultural licence, depending on their marital status. The amount of purchased land could not exceed 320 acres.

In January 1885, the Omeo Shire Council sent a councillor to Melbourne to press for an alteration to the Act because all the land surrounding Omeo had been classified as first class and valued at £1 per acre, placing settlers there at a disadvantage.[73] In 1889, 'Vagabond', a travelling reporter, wrote of the Omeo Plains (Figure 7):

> These are all divided and fenced off, every bit of available country … taken under the 320-acre clause, and most of the selectors have also 1000-acre blocks away in the mountain valleys. The selector of old has become a grazier, like the original squatter king.[74]

The architects of Victoria's Land Acts had hoped to establish small settlers on farms, but this proved to be a type of 'yeoman myth'.[75] Vagabond's comment might have been exaggerated, but time would tell that sheep and cattle grazing was the only way to farm in northern Gippsland. Although many selectors were unsuccessful, some of their descendants still farm there today.

Selection and First Peoples

One issue that has mostly been overlooked by historians is how Victoria's Land Acts formalised the process of assuming ownership of First Peoples' traditional land. The Central Board for Aborigines was established in 1860 for the 'protection of Aborigines' who were to be segregated onto mission stations or reserves.[76] First Peoples could apply for a selection, and, in its 1864 report, the Central Board noted, approvingly, that several applications had been received.[77] However, relatively few First Peoples seem to have applied for, or taken up, selections.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, 'protection' grew more restrictive. The *Aborigines Protection Act 1869* was issued the same year as the *Land Act 1869*. The latter made selection more realistic for colonial settlers; the former increased the powers of the Central Board. The 1869 Protection Act required the segregation of all First Peoples on reserves, including those of mixed descent, and allowed for the removal of children. Under the next iteration, the *Aborigines Protection Act 1886*, First Peoples of mixed descent were removed from reserves. Although such people were theoretically entitled to government assistance in selecting Crown land,[78] the 'cultural and financial barriers would have been prohibitive for most'.[79] Only a few cases have been documented of First Peoples as selectors, including William 'Billy' Thorpe, formerly of Lake Tyers Mission, Gippsland.[80]

Charles Hammond, although not a Yaitmathang man, is generally recognised as belonging to the high country area. He worked at Tongio Station for many years and some of his children worked in Omeo.[81] Twice, in 1864 and again in 1879, he sought to acquire 10 acres of land.[82] On the first occasion, the Central Board advised him to make a formal application to the Board of Land and Works, noting 'that he might say that the Central Board approved of the application and were prepared to support it'.[83] His application was rejected.[84] In 1879, he applied under the 1869 Land Act.[85] This time the Central Board:

> did not think it was advisable that the application should be granted as past experience of several like cases have shown that in no case have the experiments eventuated in anything but failure.[86]

This view was incorrect, as there was evidence at the time of First Peoples being selectors.

Conclusion

According to Tony Dingle, Victoria's 'Selection Acts were a triumph of idealism over common sense'.[87] After great struggles in the 1850s and 1860s, the cry went up to 'unlock the lands' from the control of a small group of squatters. The Land Acts from 1860 to 1885 sought to allow men of limited capital to buy land and develop productive farms. This idealistic intention was best realised around strong goldfields centres, such as Ballarat. Put to the test in the remote mountainous area of northern Gippsland, the Land Acts proved a failure. Northern Gippsland was not Britain: it was not the place for yeoman farmers. Isolation, difficult terrain and climatic conditions ensured that only pastoral pursuits would succeed there.

Amendments to the Land Acts provided access to women and small farmers. First Peoples also had access – in theory, if not in reality. Ultimately, however, the Land Acts formalised the dispossession of First Peoples from their customary lands. By 1900, most First Peoples in Victoria had been removed to 'protectorates', where, according to popular belief, they, as a 'dying race', would end their days. In this way, the pastoral lands of Victoria were indeed 'unsettled', to use Kate Grenville's telling phrase.[88]

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Forum articles

Revisiting the “Maryvale murders”:

a circumstantial reconstruction of a century-old burial

‘Revisiting the “Maryvale murders”: a circumstantial reconstruction of a century-old burial’, *Provenance: the Journal of Public Record Office Victoria*, issue no. 23, 2026. ISSN 1832-2522.

Nicholas E. Manganas has been a history teacher in Sydney high schools for over 24 years. He has researched and written numerous historical podcasts on the local history of the Burwood and Ashfield areas in Sydney, where he currently lives. Nicholas is interested in Australian life during the colonial period and the early twentieth century, and has visited national, state and private archives all over Australia. This is his first published work.

Author email: mangonick415@gmail.com

Abstract

This article attempts to establish the likely burial location of the human remains associated with the Maryvale murders. Through archival research, local history interviews and the use of ground-penetrating radar, the likely location of a pauper grave at Edenhope cemetery is proposed as the place of burial, and the likely circumstances surrounding the burial in 1918 are reconstructed. It is my contention that the skeletal remains of Maria Cook, née Langley, and her infant daughter Louisa Jane, are buried in this pauper’s grave at Edenhope cemetery, along with the remains of a third person, a male whose identity was never established. The burial took place 34 years after the discovery of the human remains at Maryvale Station, during which time they were held at the Edenhope police station stables, seemingly forgotten. Although the murderer was never brought to trial and the identity of the male human remains continues to be a mystery, the likely resting place of the murder victims has given family descendants some solace and the opportunity to commemorate their place of burial.

The pastoral property of Maryvale Station lies north-east of Edenhope, 25 km from the Edenhope–Horsham Road, now known as the Wimmera Highway. There, on 21 June 1884, the skeletal remains of an adult female and an infant were discovered in the fork of a fallen tree (Figures 1a and 1b). Fears of a double murder spread throughout the district. The adult female had a saddle strap around her neck and the infant’s skull had a hole, thought to have been caused by a blow from a hammer or tomahawk. The news horrified the local community and shocked the colony.

Following the discovery of the human remains, the *Kowree Ensign and Harrow Advertiser* ran an article entitled ‘Terrible discovery at Maryvale’, noting that ‘the awful discovery made on the Maryvale Station this week has engrossed a large amount of public attention in the Edenhope and Harrow district’ (Figure 2).[1]

An inquest held at Edenhope in August 1884 concluded that the remains were those of Maria Cook, née Langley, and her infant daughter Louisa Jane Sugars Langley (Figure 3).[2] At the time of the discovery of their remains, Maria and Louisa had been missing for 10 years. The man suspected of killing them was Robert Cook, Maria’s husband and Louisa’s stepfather. The couple had only been married for three days when Maria and Lousia disappeared.

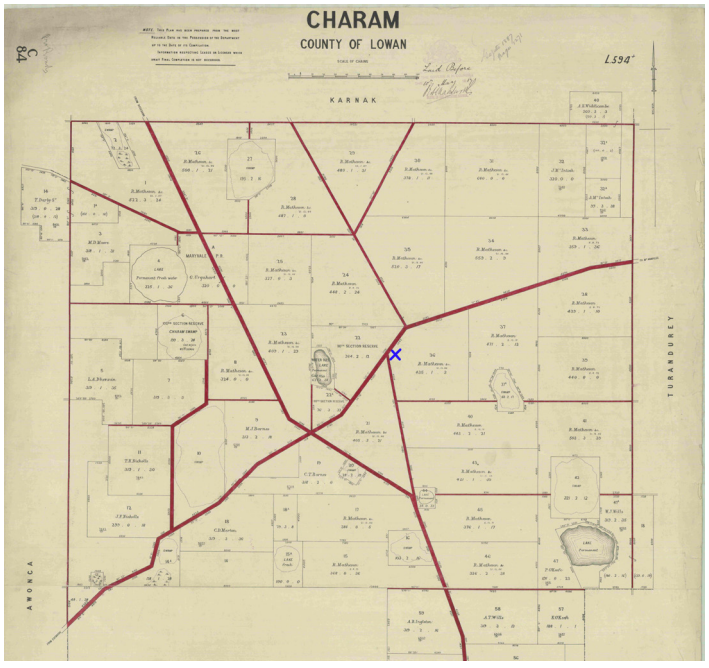


Figure 1a: Map of Charam, County of Lowan, showing the rough location of the skeletons found on Maryvale Station. The location is marked with a blue X. Source: PROV, VPRS 8168/P2 Historic Plan Collection, PROCC84; CHARAM.

In 1886, the remains of an adult male were also found at Maryvale.[4] These remains were dated to the same period as Maria’s and Louisa’s, raising suspicion that it was the missing Robert Cook. The man’s skull had been cut through above the right ear and splintered by a blow from an axe or tomahawk.

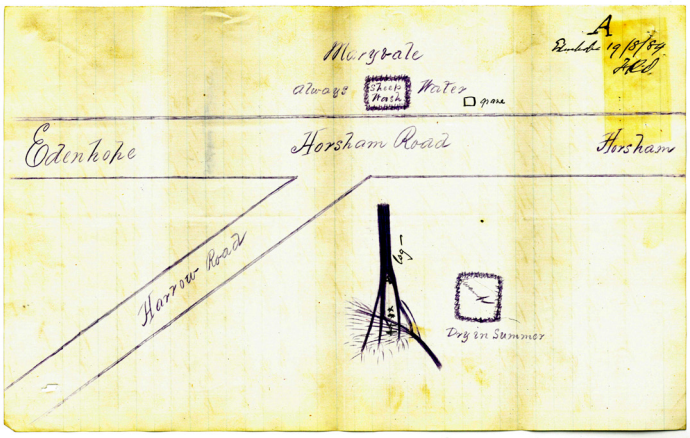


Figure 1b: A sketch produced by Constable Toohey in 1884 that was provided as evidence at the inquest into the Maryvale murder victims, showing the location of the skeletal remains relative to the junction of Harrow and Horsham roads. Source: PROV, VPRS 24/P0 Inquest Deposition Files, 1884/831 Maria Cook, Louisa Jane Sugers: Inquest.

Terrible Discovery at Maryvale.

The awful discovery made on the Maryvale Station this week has engrossed a large amount of public attention in the Edenhope and Harrow district. It appears that a party of clearers have been employed on the Maryvale Station for some time past and while engaged in their work they came across a large log with a lot of small timber around and over it. Having cleared away the latter they found that the heavy log had two forked branches, and looking closer they were horrified to discover the grinning skeleton of a woman with a strap round the neck jammed up into the fork of the two branches. Close by, they also found the skeleton of a child in a sitting posture, with the skull fractured. On recovering from the shock they sustained at this awful discovery a careful examination of the surroundings was made which resulted in a wedding ring being found, stamped 18 carat; also a purse containg a bank note and some silver, one shilling bearing the date 1872. Close by the bodies was a woman's thimble and the remains of a piece of cloth which suggested the supposition that the victim was engaged at needlework just prior to her death. From the appearances of the log it is

Figure 2: The article 'Terrible discovery at Maryvale' reflects the concern of the local community following the discovery of the remains of an unidentified woman and child. Source: *Kowree Ensign and Harrow Advertiser*, 27 June 1884, p. 3.

Figure 3: Photograph of Maria Langley taken in 1872, about one month after giving birth to Louisa and 16 months before her marriage to Robert Cook in March 1874. Source: Langley family archives, courtesy of Bev Langley.

The male skeleton was never positively identified; however, the possibility of it being Cook was ruled out, as the remains did not match his known height and hair colour. Nevertheless, it was clear that Maryvale had been the scene of three murders in 1874.

For over 30 years, the remains of all three victims were held at Edenhope police station as exhibits in the case known as the 'Maryvale murders'. By the end of the century, the case remained unsolved. No active investigations took place after 1898 and Robert Cook was never found. Despite repeated requests by the Langley family and the wider community for a 'Christian burial' (Figure 4), the remains were not released until 1918. That year, the premier of Victoria ordered their immediate interment, closing the chapter on one of Victoria's best-known manhunts. However, while the bones were put to rest, the burial unwittingly sparked another mystery that would prevail for over a century, as, remarkably, no records were kept of where, exactly, the remains were buried.

The Maryvale murders were well known in the Western and Wimmera districts and have remained

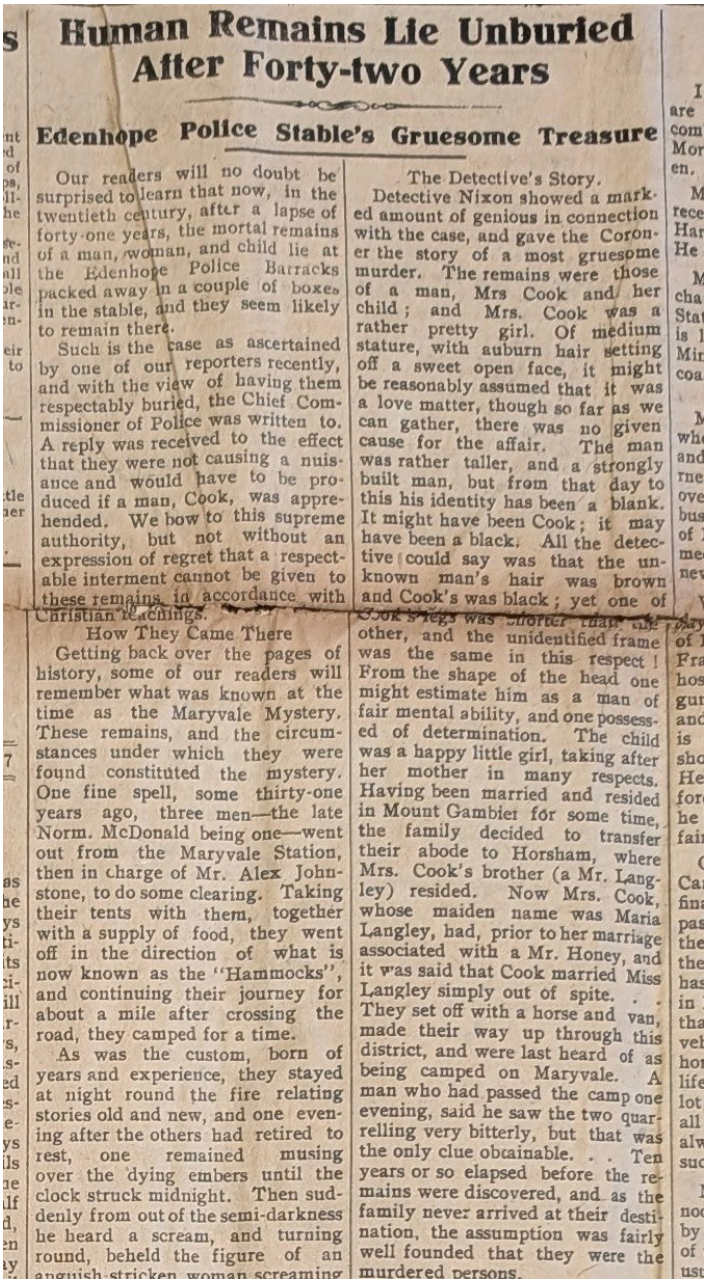
a part of the area's history. News about the Maryvale murders frequently made the local and colonial/state newspapers, reflecting wide interest in the case at the time. For the Langley family, the mystery surrounding the location of the graves has been a source of enduring uncertainty and unresolved loss. Today, the case is still remembered by the local community and the Langley family. Offering a small amount of closure to the Langley family, this article attempts to establish the likely burial location of the human remains associated with the Maryvale murders.

A box is buried

Over time, the Maryvale murders became legend. The case evolved from the documented killing of a woman and her daughter to a ghost story in which, in one version of the story, Maria appeared as an apparition to a party of clearers, beckoning them to find her bones and hunt for her murderer.[5]

The burial in 1918 was quietly done, without ceremony or media attention. In the more than 100 years that followed, the facts were forgotten, misremembered and conflated. According to one story, the bones of the victims were stored in lead boxes at the Edenhope police stables.[6] In other versions, their remains were buried in 1927. Neither family history nor the official inquest recorded the location of the burial of Maria's and Louisa's remains. Maria's death certificate, issued in 1884, included no information about her burial.[7] According to *The true story of the Maryvale murders and the Langley family ghost*, published in 2013, the Langley family understood that Maria's and Louisa's remains lay 'in the pauper's part of the cemetery', but nobody knew exactly where.[8]

During the COVID-19 lockdowns in 2020 and 2021, I frequently surfed Trove, the National Library of Australia's online research portal, while preparing my online lessons. I stumbled across the story of the Maryvale murders and quickly became captivated by the historical details: three skeletons kept in the stables of a police station for 34 years, awaiting the capture of a murderer who was never found. I read *The true story of the Maryvale murders* and was further intrigued by the mystery of the unknown grave site. So, between the lockdowns of 2021 and 2022, I flew to Melbourne and visited Public Record Office Victoria (PROV) numerous times to see if I could find the police files relating to the case. I hoped these would shed some light on where Maria and Louisa were buried and why it has been so difficult to find their grave. Through the kind assistance of the staff in the reading room, I was able to navigate my way through the Inwards Correspondence Files of the Chief Commissioner of Police.



Human Remains Lie Unburied After Forty-two Years

Edenhope Police Stable's Gruesome Treasure

Our readers will no doubt be surprised to learn that now, in the twentieth century, after a lapse of forty-one years, the mortal remains of a man, woman, and child lie at the Edenhope Police Barracks packed away in a couple of boxes in the stable, and they seem likely to remain there.

Such is the case as ascertained by one of our reporters recently, and with the view of having them respectably buried, the Chief Commissioner of Police was written to. A reply was received to the effect that they were not causing a nuisance and would have to be produced if a man, Cook, was apprehended. We bow to this supreme authority, but not without an expression of regret that a respectable interment cannot be given to these remains in accordance with Christian teachings.

How They Came There

Getting back over the pages of history, some of our readers will remember what was known at the time as the Maryvale Mystery. These remains, and the circumstances under which they were found constituted the mystery. One fine spell, some thirty-one years ago, three men—the late Norm. McDonald being one—went out from the Maryvale Station, then in charge of Mr. Alex Johnstone, to do some clearing. Taking their tents with them, together with a supply of food, they went off in the direction of what is now known as the "Hammocks", and continuing their journey for about a mile after crossing the road, they camped for a time.

As was the custom, born of years and experience, they stayed at night round the fire relating stories old and new, and one evening after the others had retired to rest, one remained musing over the dying embers until the clock struck midnight. Then suddenly from out of the semi-darkness he heard a scream, and turning round, beheld the figure of an anguish-stricken woman screaming

The Detective's Story.

Detective Nixon showed a marked amount of genious in connection with the case, and gave the Coroner the story of a most gruesome murder. The remains were those of a man, Mrs Cook and her child; and Mrs. Cook was a rather pretty girl. Of medium stature, with auburn hair setting off a sweet open face, it might be reasonably assumed that it was a love matter, though so far as we can gather, there was no given cause for the affair. The man was rather taller, and a strongly built man, but from that day to this his identity has been a blank. It might have been Cook; it may have been a black. All the detective could say was that the unknown man's hair was brown and Cook's was black; yet one of Cook's legs was shorter than the other, and the unidentified frame was the same in this respect! From the shape of the head one might estimate him as a man of fair mental ability, and one possessed of determination. The child was a happy little girl, taking after her mother in many respects. Having been married and resided in Mount Gambier for some time, the family decided to transfer their abode to Horsham, where Mrs. Cook's brother (a Mr. Langley) resided. Now Mrs. Cook, whose maiden name was Maria Langley, had, prior to her marriage associated with a Mr. Honey, and it was said that Cook married Miss Langley simply out of spite. . . They set off with a horse and van, made their way up through this district, and were last heard of as being camped on Maryvale. A man who had passed the camp one evening, said he saw the two quarrelling very bitterly, but that was the only clue obtainable. . . Ten years or so elapsed before the remains were discovered, and as the family never arrived at their destination, the assumption was fairly well founded that they were the murdered persons.

Figure 4: The *Kowree Leader* brought the story of the Maryvale murders into the public consciousness in 1917. Versions of this article would be reprinted throughout the country over the next 16 months, sparking a campaign to give the remains a 'Christian burial'. Source: 'Human remains lie unburied after forty-two years', *Kowree Leader*, 6 July 1917.

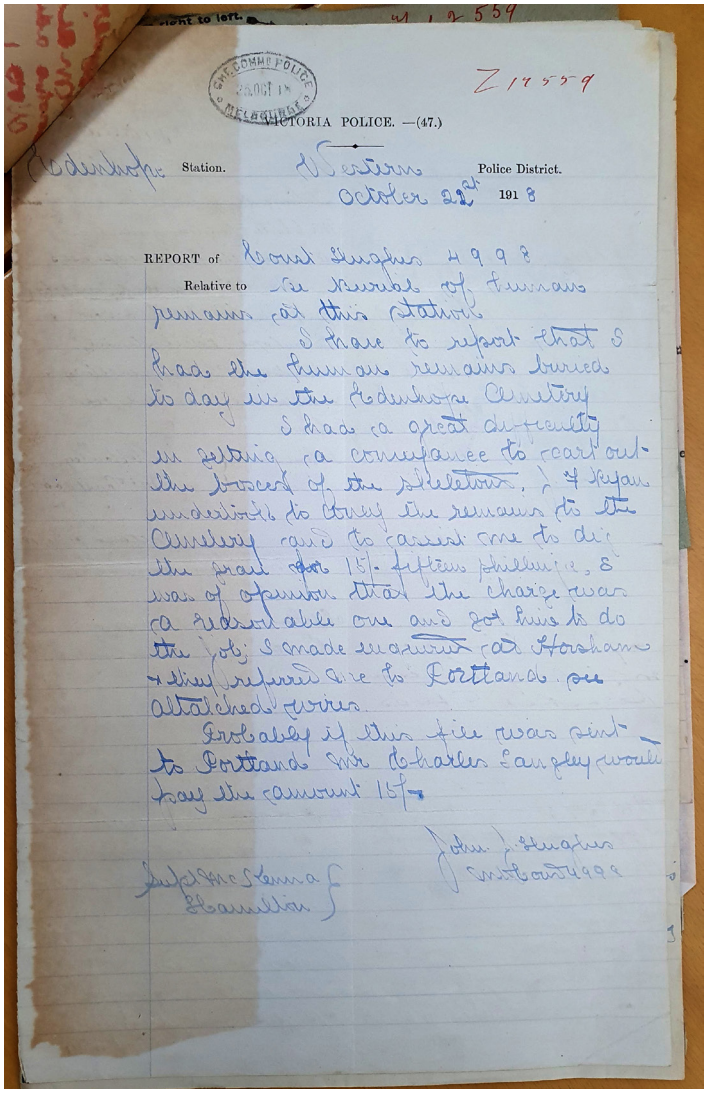
Since most of the newspaper reporting stated that the burial had taken place in 1918, I concentrated on that year. After a crash course on using the Register of Correspondence, I ordered the relevant registers for 1918, of which there were two—a 'Y' Register and a 'Z' Register. Scanning through the 'Y' Register, I was disappointed to find no mention of the remains from Edenhope. There were so many thousands of entries occupying police time and resources that I began to fear that the burials had not been recorded at all.

Finally, on page 540 of the 'Z' Register, I found a file with an entry dated 17 October 1918: 'Edenhope, re 3 skeletons supposed to be at [station] since 1875 of persons alleged to have been murdered.'[9]

The reference to 1875 was incorrect (likely sourced from a major article in the *Kowree Leader* published in 1917; see Figure 4). Despite this discrepancy, this was very likely the report I was looking for. I ordered the box containing the police correspondence file and found the report from the Edenhope police station, dated 22 October 1918 (Figure 5). The report was written by Constable John James Hughes who was stationed at Edenhope. Needing a way to convey the remains to the cemetery, Hughes had engaged James Francis Ryan, a local man with access to a cart, to assist him. Hughes wrote:

> I have to report that I had the human remains buried today in the Edenhope Cemetery. I had a great difficulty in getting a conveyance to cart out the boxes of the skeletons. JF Ryan undertook to convey the remains to the cemetery and to assist me to dig the grave for 15/- fifteen shillings, I was of the opinion that the charge was a reasonable one and got him to do the job.[10]

Tantalisingly, Hughes's report answered three broad, interrelated questions: when; by whom; and where, generally speaking, were the remains buried? The remains were buried on 22 October 1918 by Constable John Hughes and James Francis Ryan in the Edenhope cemetery. However, two further questions remained: how and where, exactly, were they buried?


VICTORIA POLICE. —(47.)

Station. Edenhope Police District. Western

October 22nd 1918

REPORT of Const. Hughes 4998

Relative to the Burial of human remains at this Station

I have to report that I had the human remains buried to day in the Edenhope Cemetery. I had a great difficulty in getting a conveyance to cart out the boxes of the skeletons. J.F. Ryan undertook to convey the remains to the Cemetery and to assist me to dig the grave for 15/- fifteen shillings, I was of opinion that the charge was a reasonable one and got him to do the job. I made enquiries at Horsham & they refer me to Portland. See attached letter.

Probably if this file was sent to Portland Mr Chas Langley would pay the amount 15/-

John J. Hughes 4998

Supt McKenna Examination

Figure 5: Constable Hughes's report confirming burial of the remains held at Edenhope police station in October 1918. Source: PROV, VPRS 807/P0, file no Z12559.

No lead boxes

On the basis of these reports and further research, I am confident that the remains were neither stored nor buried in lead boxes. For the 34-year period during which the remains were stored at Edenhope, the surviving documentary records, though fragmentary, are strikingly consistent regarding their storage and location. A report from the 1884 inquest published in the *Herald* contains the following significant observation: 'All the bones of both skeletons were brought into court in a small common deal box, from whence they were produced as required.'[11] Further corroboration is found in a report from the South Australian *Advertiser*, which stated that the remains of the female victims were produced in court 'in a small box, being handed out as required'.[12]

On 31 December 1897, the *Herald* speculated that 'the bones of the three skeletons—those of Mrs Cook and her child and that of the unknown man—are still, we believe, kept in a box at the Edenhope police station'.[13] This is confirmed by statements in the police correspondence file. Kirkby Robinson, editor of the *Kowree Leader*, wrote to the chief commissioner of police on 18 December 1915 enquiring whether the remains of the victims of 'the Maryvale Mystery' could now be buried. The letter was referred to Mounted Constable Colin Arblaster, who, on 29 December 1915, wrote on the back that 'the remains of the deceased persons mentioned are at present in two boxes in the stable at this station'.[14] Additional annotations by various officers in charge of Edenhope police station during the period in which the remains were held there confirm Arblaster's claim. Constable James Byrne stated that 'the human remains referred to in attached letter were in boxes in the Edenhope police stables when I took charge of that station in 1900'.[15] Likewise, Constable Pickett, in charge of Edenhope police station from July 1906 to August 1913, recalled that the 'remains were at the Edenhope station

during the time I was in charge. They were in boxes in the stable.'[16] Read collectively, these newspaper and police statements produce a consistent interpretation: the remains were not buried in a lead box, but in the same box (or boxes) in which they had been stored for more than three decades.

Loss of knowledge of the grave

In the years that followed the burial of Maria's and Louisa's remains, knowledge of the exact location and manner of their interment was quietly forgotten. John Hughes died in 1955, aged 75, and James Francis 'Butcher' Ryan died in 1957. With their passing went knowledge of the exact location of the grave of Maria and Louisa, as there is no record of them having ever communicated its location to anyone.[17]

In early 2023, I was put in touch with Kevin Ryan, Maria's great-great-great nephew, from her older brother Charles Langley's side of the family. Kevin invited me to Edenhope to share some of my research with him and his family. This took place in April 2023 at the Edenhope Council Chambers in the presence of members of the Langley family, academics and members of the council. It was encouraging to see that the case had the interest and support of so many people.

One of the things discussed that day was the possibility of a joint venture between Edenhope Council and Edenhope Tourism for a grant for the use of ground-penetrating radar (GPR) to locate the unmarked graves at the cemetery. The grant application process took more than 18 months to complete, pushed along by the energetic support of people like Helen Mulraney-Roll, local historian and lifelong Edenhope resident; James Bentley, director, Corporate and Community Services, West Wimmera Shire Council; and Kevin and Ricki Ryan. Finally, Dr Andrew Frost from Flinders University and S.E.E. Spatial & Geophysics in South Australia was engaged to do the work. Frost attended Edenhope cemetery on 23 and 24 January 2025. He scanned the monumental (oldest) section of the cemetery and detected at least 67 unmarked graves. Among these resting places, in a location not previously known to contain any graves, a reflection in the shape of a small box was detected by the radar.[18] The top of the box was approximately 50 cm beneath the ground and it measured 60 cm x 63 cm at a depth of 80 cm (Figure 6). The measurements did not match the shape or size of a normal coffin, either for an adult or a child. Was this the box buried by Constable Hughes in 1918?

A pauper burial

In an article printed in the *Age* on 18 October 1918

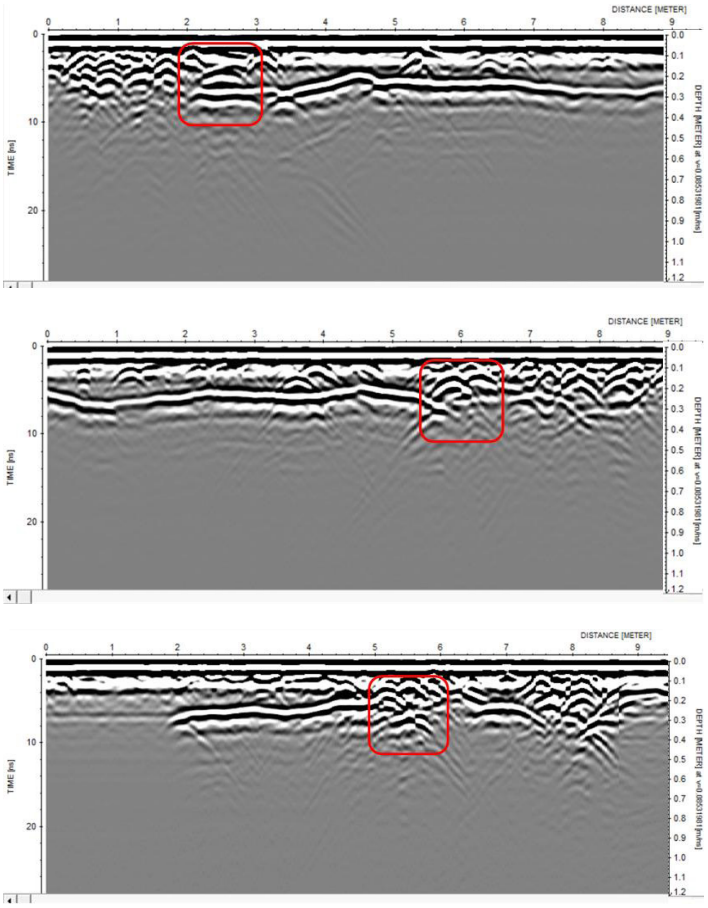


Figure 6: GPR imaging showing disturbed soil over a single location in the Edenhope cemetery. According to Dr Andrew Frost, the measurements are 60 x 63 cm. The reflections start at a depth of approximately 50 cm and reach a depth of 80 cm.
Source: images courtesy of Andrew Frost.

entitled 'Boxes of bones', an unidentified government source stated that 'accumulations' of human remains in police stations were 'no uncommon thing' and were usually buried 'with the first available pauper'.[20] In the early years of policing, human remains were frequently stored at police stations as part of an inquest or inquiry. In modern times, such remains would usually be stored in specialist forensic storage facilities, depending on the stage of the investigation and the type of evidence being preserved. A December 2021 media release by the Australian Federal Police stated that more than 850 sets of unidentified human remains were stored in police and forensic facilities across the country awaiting DNA identification.[21] Some of these had been in storage for up to 70 years. More recently, in 2023, human remains stored for over 40 years by South Australia Police were formally identified as William Henry Hardie, who had been missing since the 1970s.[22] His remains were identified using DNA technology under the National DNA Program for Unidentified and Missing Persons.[23]

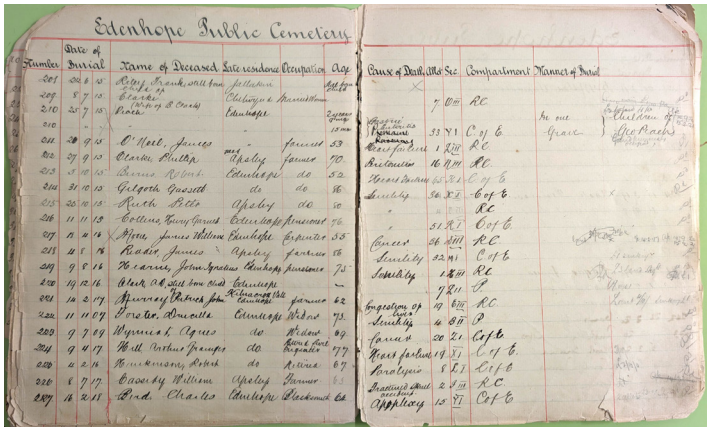


Figure 7: Edenhope cemetery's burial register showing records of burials conducted between 1915 and 1918. Source: Author's photographs.

Maria's and Louisa's remains were initially retained as evidence of their murder. The remains would have been presented at trial should the suspected killer, Robert Cook, have been apprehended. Sometime between May 1900 and July 1906, Constable Byrnes requested that the remains be removed from the Edenhope police stables. However, the chief commissioner of police, believing that Cook was still alive, denied the request. Byrnes recalled: 'I requested that the remains should be removed, but the Chief Commissioner of Police (Mr O'Callaghan) stated that as they were exhibits and that the offender Cooke [sic] was still at large the bones would have to be retained.'[24] When Kirkby Robinson wrote to the chief commissioner in 1915 about the possibility of the remains being buried 'out of respect for the victims',[25] he was also told that they could not be buried because they would need to be produced should the suspect ever be caught: 'As these remains would have to be produced if Cooke were arrested, I do not feel justified in ordering their burial.'[26]

This explains why the remains were kept for more than three decades after their discovery: they were evidence in an open, but dormant, murder case. The procedural explanation is understandable within policing logic, but what about the victims' family and community? The lack of a burial resulted in decades of uncertainty, delayed mourning and social silence for the family. Growing up, Lynette Van Vondel, née Langley, was warned by her grandmother against asking too many questions about her family's history 'for fear of what would be uncovered'.[27] In his foreword to *The true story of the Maryvale murders*, Neil Langley, son of Nelson Langley, Maria's youngest stepbrother, intimated that the family's grief over the loss of Maria and Louisa was private and hidden, rather than communal and open:

> In 1925, my eldest sister, Isabel, and her siblings were put to bed early as an Uncle and Auntie were visiting. Isabel's bed, being against the hessian wall adjoining the sitting room, she was able to listen to the adult conversation. They were reading newspaper cuttings regarding our father's sister, Maria, who at the age of 19 had been murdered along with her 18 month old daughter, Louisa, near Edenhope in 1874.[28]

Lost burial register

The usual way to research burials and their locations is by consulting a cemetery's burial register. Edenhope cemetery's burial register was believed to be missing for a long time, supposedly destroyed in a fire in the 1960s.[26] However, there was evidence to contradict this, including eyewitness sightings of the register in the early 1980s and references to the register in a Department of Health file from the 1970s.[30] This information was relayed to Edenhope Council and, as a result, the burial register was located in late 2023.[31] Unfortunately, no burial was recorded in the register for the month of October 1918, the date given in Constable Hughes's report (Figure 7). This is not surprising, as the burial register only recorded *paid* burials. As mentioned, Hughes stated that he paid JF Ryan 15 shillings for assistance with cartage and burial; however, there is no record of payment to the cemetery trust for the burial.

Further evidence for a pauper burial can be inferred from how the police correspondence file that contains Hughes's report of the burial was indexed.[32] As shown in Figure 8, the police recorded the details of deceased individuals whose names were unknown under separate headings for males, females and unknown sex. In this last section, one of two entries in 1918 was: 'Re skeletons at Edenhope [Station]'.[33] This entry confirms the burial of the human remains that had been stored at the Edenhope police station and, in doing so, reveals the last tragic development of the Maryvale murders story.

Following the discovery of human remains at Maryvale Station in 1894, the case had stalled, frozen in 'official oblivion', as the *Argus* complained in 1896.[34] When political and social pressure finally resulted in the order to bury the remains, the police correspondence index referred to them anonymously as the 'skeletons at Edenhope' and filed the matter under 'deceased unknown' and 'sex unknown'. Yet the identities of two of the victims were known. Maria and Louisa had not been forgotten by the locals of Edenhope. Why were their names not recorded? Was it a matter of carelessness or intentionality?

The records reveal that the police contacted Charles Langley junior, then living in Portland, to arrange

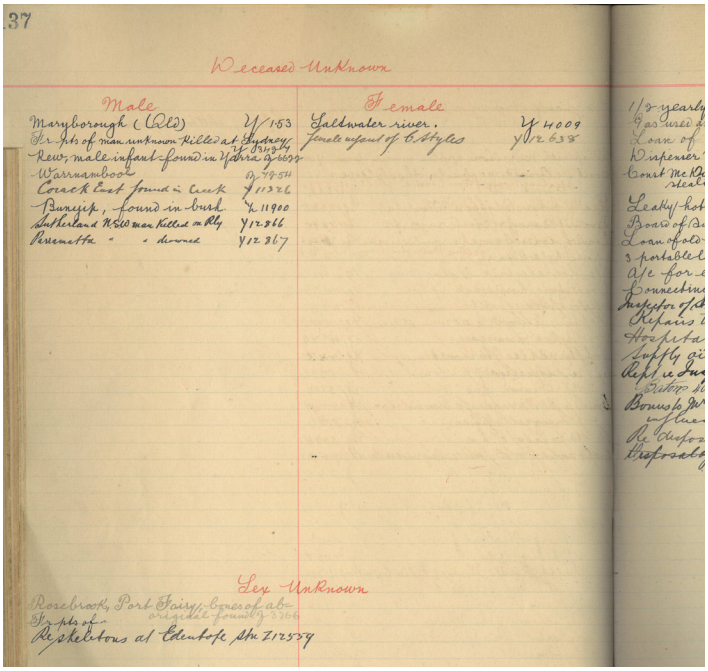


Figure 8: Entries in the Victorian Police Index to Correspondence for 1918, listing the burial of deceased persons whose identities were unknown. The burial of Maria, Louisa and the unknown male is listed under the heading 'Sex Unknown' at the bottom of the page, suggesting that, by 1918, the identity of the remains and the reason for their long storage had been obscured.
Source: PROV, VPRS 10257/P0, 1918, p. 137.

the burial and defray the costs, but he refused to do so unless Maria's clothing, jewellery and money were handed over to him.[35] Among the evidence presented at the 1884 inquest was a gold wedding ring and brooch belonging to Maria, and these items were still at Edenhope police station when Constable JC Pickett was in charge (1906–13).[36] However, by 1918, only a pair of women's boots and the leather strap believed to be the murder weapon remained. Consequently, and understandably, Langley refused to pay for the burial. Therefore, the police appear to have proceeded with a pauper burial. Constable Hughes recorded that all three victims were buried in the same grave, along with the boots and the strap.[37]

Examples of other pauper burials

A study of pauper burials conducted by the police during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries reveals a process and procedure that is consistent with the one undertaken by Constable Hughes.[38] For example, the pauper burials of ER Mills, who died on 23 March 1897 when the dray he was travelling on overturned near Cobram East, and William Richard, a swagman who likely died of heat stroke on 27 November 1919 at Avanmore, share features with the remains buried at Edenhope in 1918.[39] When no living relatives of a deceased

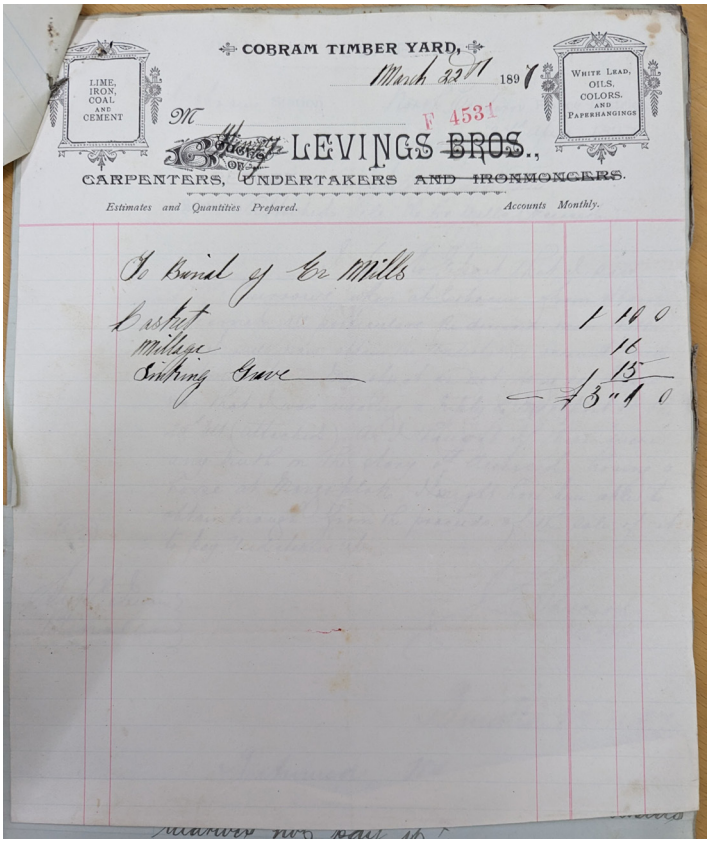


Figure 9: Receipt for pauper burial of ER Mills.
Source: PROV, VPRS 807/P0, Unit 1216, File F4531.

person could be found, or were found but were unwilling or unable to pay the costs of the burial, police had no option but to undertake a pauper burial. In Mills's case, a receipt from the Cobram Timber Yard was attached to the police report indicating the particulars of the burial costs, which typically included three distinct charges: casket, conveyance of the body and sinking (i.e. the digging) of the grave (Figure 9).[40]

The invoice from undertaker W Hagedorn for Richards's funeral, forwarded to the chief commissioner of police on 29 November 1919, included the same services and added a small charge for a clergyman:

Supplying coffin for one Adult Pauper	£4/ 0/ 0
Conveying Remains to Elmore Cemetery	£1/10/0
Grave Sinking	£0/17/6
Clergyman's fee	£0/10/6
Total	**£6/18/0[41]**

These services were usually itemised separately, and, where not listed, were almost certainly not purchased. The only expense listed in Constable Hughes's report was 15 shillings, stated to be for mileage and grave sinking. Both services were provided by JF Ryan. No coffin was itemised. Further, as already discussed, it

is highly unlikely that a lead box was purchased for the internment of the remains.

Not a normal burial

Was the box discovered using GPR in January 2025 the same one buried by Constable Hughes and JF Ryan in 1918? The box lay at a depth of almost exactly 80 cm (2.62 feet)—an unusual depth according to Edenhope cemetery's burial register. Where 'manner of burial' is recorded in the register, the depth is typically '4 feet' (121 cm). Confirming this, Edenhope cemetery's scale of fees and charges, published in the *Victoria Government Gazette* in 1915, shows that the least expensive graves were between 121 cm (4 feet) and 244 cm (8 feet) deep.[42] The shallow depth of the box suggests that it was buried by someone inexperienced with grave digging or unfamiliar with the regulations.

Gravedigging at Edenhope cemetery is an extremely difficult task, even for an experienced team of diggers. According to Evan Arnold, a retired sexton of Edenhope cemetery, the process is complicated by water seepage, which occurs at a depth of 60 cm (2 feet), causing mud and clay to cake to digging equipment and making shovels heavy, resulting in exhausting work for a traditional team of three. A 'turnabout' system was usually employed, enabling a 1.2 metres (4 feet) deep grave to be dug in two to three hours with one man digging at a time and changing over as needed.[43]

Several factors could explain the shallowness of the box discovered at Edenhope cemetery in January 2025. First, it is likely that neither Hughes nor Ryan were experienced at gravedigging. Second, data from the Bureau of Meteorology show that Edenhope experienced rain in the days leading up to the burial, increasing the probability of water seepage and mud at the cemetery, for which neither man would have been prepared.[44]

Local knowledge of Edenhope cemetery

Written sources on the history of Edenhope cemetery are scarce.[45] For the most part, I relied on newspaper articles, Department of Health files held at PROV and oral history interviews with long-time Edenhope residents. These enabled me to determine the location of the original entrance to the cemetery (Figure 10) and details about local gravedigging practices.

Figure 11 shows the location of the box discovered in 2025, being a short distance from the end of Langford Street. According to local knowledge, this was the original street entrance to the cemetery.[46] The

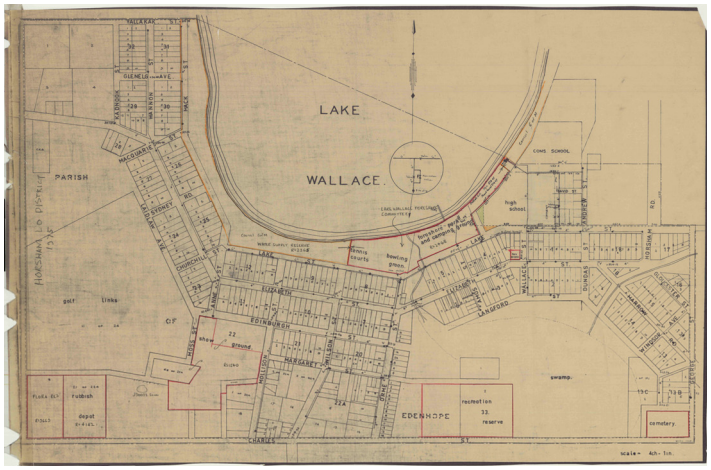


Figure 10: In this 1975 plan of the parish of Edenhope, the location of the cemetery can be seen in the lower right-hand side of the town, at the end of Langford Street. Source: PROV, VPRS 16171/P1 Regional Land Office Parish and Township Plans Digitised Reference Set, Edenhope Township Plan 1, imperial measure 5266.

original fence line marking the cemetery's western edge ran from this entrance towards the centre of the current western edge, along Charles Street.[47] Local accounts suggest that the pauper section occupied a single row of graves along this original fence line, marked by wooden grave markers. These markers were visible to visitors up until the early 1980s, as recalled by local resident Carolyn Gemmel: 'When I was a young teen there were definitely wooden grave markers … they were scorched and half burnt away, but definitely still there [in the] early 1980s.'[48] The box discovered in 2025 lies within the original fenceline of the cemetery.

The shortest and most direct route from the police station stables to the cemetery is also indicated in Figure 11. As conveyance costs were calculated by

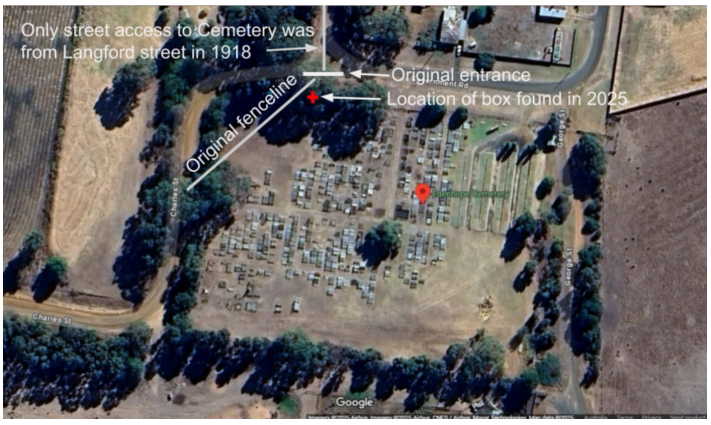


Figure 11: This annotated map of Edenhope cemetery shows the location of the box found in 2025 in relation to the original fence line, original entrance and original street access from Langford Street. Source: Google Maps, [Edenhope cemetery], available at<https://www.google.com/maps/@-37.0418618,141.3040045,220m/data=!3m1!1e3?entry=ttu>, accessed 27 April 2025.

Figure 12: Photograph of Edenhope cemetery. The open section in the background is one of the large areas scanned for unmarked graves. A small white cross on the far right marks the recently discovered unmarked grave that is likely to be that of Maria Cook, née Langley, and Louisa Jane Sugars Langley, buried in 1918. Photograph taken by Nick Manganas, 25 January 2025.

the mile, this is the route that Hughes and Ryan are likely to have taken.

Conclusion: a circumstantial case

The contents of the box discovered under the ground at Edenhope cemetery in 2025 are currently unknown. Exhumation and DNA analysis could offer certainty but that is not currently under consideration. Nevertheless, the evidence presented here forms a powerful circumstantial case, suggesting that the box contains the remains of Maria Cook, Louisa Jane Langley and an unknown man, solving a mystery that has endured for the last 107 years (Figures 12 and 13).

Would further forensic, archaeological and historical investigation help shape a more conclusive answer? Yes; undoubtedly. However, disinterring the graves is not desired. Regardless, much good has resulted from the research for this article. The discovery of police records about the burial of human remains has added to our understanding of the conclusion of the case known as the Maryvale murders. The records have shed new light on the lives of the victims, of whom scarcely any records previously existed, as well as the lives and hardships of the families of the victims, and of the suspects and witnesses, weaving an even more fascinating story that deserves to be told. A book is currently being written that includes all newly found information. The long-lost burial register of Edenhope cemetery was found and steps are underway for its digitisation so that it can be shared with the entire community, enabling researchers of family history to locate burial plots that may have been previously lost. In total, 67 unmarked graves have been found and, even though their identities are not known, steps have been taken to commemorate

Figure 13: A rectangular tracing marks the location and dimensions of the box discovered by GPR in January 2025. A cross was placed on the site in January 2025 by the Langley family. Note the cemetery fence and Langford Street in the background. The fence now blocks what was once the original entrance to Edenhope cemetery. Constable Hughes and JF Ryan most likely travelled directly down Langford Street, through the entrance and dug a grave in the first available place. Source: Photograph taken by Nick Manganas, 25 January 2025.

the lives of these farmers, merchants, residents and travellers buried without record in the cemetery. Finally, interviews with locals revealed aspects of the history of Edenhope cemetery that risked being lost forever and helped to forge friendships for which the author is very grateful.

Endnotes

[1] 'Terrible discovery at Maryvale', *Kowree Ensign and Harrow Advertiser*, 27 June 1884, p. 3.

[2] PROV, VPRS 24/P0 Inquest Deposition Files, 1884/831 Maria Cook, Louisa Jane Sugers: Inquest.

[3] Ibid.

[4] PROV, VPRS 24/P0 Inquest Deposition Files, 1886/1305 Unidentified man: Inquest.

[5] 'Human remains lie unburied after forty two years', *Kowree Leader*, 6 July 1917, p. 2.

[6] Neil Langley, interview by Ben Knight, ABC Radio, August 2000 (printed transcript provided to author by Langley family).

[7] Births, Deaths and Marriages Victoria, death certificate 8668/1884 (Maria Cook), and death certificate 8669/1884 (Louisa Jane Langley).

[8] John Henry Ellen, *The true story of the Maryvale murders and the Langley family ghost*, John Henry Ellen, Rupanyup, 2013, p. 120.

[9] PROV, VPRS 675/P0, Register of Correspondence, Z26-15165, 1918, p. 540.

[10] Constable Hughes's report on burial of human remains, 22 October 1918, PROV, VPRS 807/P0 Inward Correspondence Files, Unit 673, File no. Z12559.

[11] 'Double murder in the western border district', *Herald* (Melbourne), 20 August 1884, p. 3.

[12] 'The Maryville mystery', *South Australian Advertiser* (Adelaide), 20 August 1884, p. 5.

[13] 'Maryvale murders. An old crime. An important detail. Apparently forgotten', *Herald* (Melbourne), 31 December 1896, p. 1.

[14] Arblaster's annotation (dated 29 December 1915) on the back of Kirkby Robinson's letter to the chief commissioner of police, 19 December 1915, PROV, VPRS 807/P0, Unit 673, File no. Z12559.

[15] Constable Byrne's annotation (dated 9 January 1916) on the back of Kirkby Robinson's letter to the chief commissioner of police.

[16] Constable Pickett's annotation (dated 5 January 1916) on the back of Kirkby Robinson's letter to the chief commissioner of police.

[17] Births, Deaths and Marriages Victoria, death certificate 10489/1955 (John James Hughes), and death certificate 21882/1957 (James Francis Ryan).

[18] GPR operates by transmitting electromagnetic waves into the ground and detecting the reflected signals from subsurface features. These reflections produce detailed images of buried objects and structures, allowing for the precise identification of forms beneath the surface, including tree roots, water pipes, coffins and other disturbances.

[19] Andrew Frost, *Square box report*, S.E.E. Spatial & Geophysics, unpublished, copy provided by email attachment to author 25 January 2025.

[20] 'Boxes of bones', *Age*, 18 October 1918, p. 9.

[21] Australian Federal Police, 'AFP DNA program to help identify unknown and missing Australians', 3 December 2021, available at <https://www.afp.gov.au/news-centre/media-release/afp-dna-program-help-identify-unknown-and-missing-australians>, accessed 24 February 2026.

[22] James Wakelin and Jessicah Mendes, 'DNA discovery: police are using genetic genealogy to solve some of Australia's coldest cases', *ABC News*, 8 October 2023, available at <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-10-08/how-genetic-genealogy-is-solving-australias-coldest-cases/102870058>, accessed 24 February 2026.

[23] Australian Federal Police, 'AFP DNA program'.

[24] Constable Byrnes to Superintendent Knox, 9 January 1916, PROV, VPRS 807/P0, Unit 673, File no. Z12559.

[25] Kirkby Robinson's letter to the Chief Commissioner of Police, 19 December 1915, PROV, VPRS 807/P0, Unit 673, File no. Z12559.

[26] Chief commissioner of police, letter in response to Kirkby Robinson, 12 January 1916, PROV, VPRS 807/P0, Unit 673, File no. Z12559.

[27] Gillian Aeria, 'Grave hunter finds burial site believed to be of murdered mother and child', *ABC News*, 15 March 2025, available at <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-03-15/unmarked-grave-found-in-search-for-langleys-final-resting-place/105035954>, accessed 26 February 2026.

[28] Ellen, *The true story of the Maryvale murders*, p. 2.

[29] Gillian Aeria, 'Regional Victorian family attempts to solve century-old mystery to find burial plot of Maria and Louisa Langley', *ABC Wimmera*, 23 February 2023, available at <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-02-26/grave-hunters-maria-louisa-langley-edenhope-cemetery/102020750>, accessed 25 March 2026.

[30] Carolyn Gemmel, interview by author, April 2023; PROV, VPRS 14836/P1 General Correspondence Files (General Health Branch ?1944–1978; Public Health Division 1978–1986), Unit 47, H.CEM.176-01.

[31] Edenhope Burial Register, 1918, currently held at West Wimmera Shire Council Edenhope office.

[32] PROV, VPRS 10257/P0 Index to Correspondence, 1918.

[33] PROV, VPRS 10257/P0 Index to Correspondence, 1918, p. 137.

[34] 'Undetected crimes', *Argus*, 31 December 1896, p. 5.

[35] SC Rowley (Portland) annotation (dated 31 October 1918) on the back of Constable Hughes's report, 22 October 1918, PROV, VPRS 807/P0, Unit 673, File no. Z12559.

[36] A list of the personal belongings found with the human remains can be found in the inquest file: PROV, VPRS 24/P0 Inquest Deposition Files, 1884/831 Maria Cook, Louisa Jane Sugers: Inquest. This is confirmed by newspaper reporters who attended the inquest hearing and sighted the items. See 'Double murder in the western border district', *Herald*, 19 August 1884, p. 3. Constable Pickett's sighting of the belongings during his tenure can be found in his annotation (dated 5 January 1916) on the back of Kirkby Robinson's letter to the chief commissioner of police.

[37] Constable Hughes's report, 6 November 1918, PROV, VPRS 807/P0, Unit 673, File no. Z12559.

[38] This is based on numerous pauper burials I came across in VPRS 937 and VPRS 807 during my research that established a pattern of procedure in regard to these kinds of burials. I chose two examples to show that the procedure remained essentially the same over a long period of time.

[39] For further details about the death and burial of ER Mills, see the various police reports and other documents contained in PROV, VPRS 807/P0, Unit 1216, File F4531 and the deposition of William Corbett in PROV, VPRS 24/P0 Inquest Deposition Files, File 1897/361, E Mills: Inquest. For further details on the death and burial of William Richards, see the various police reports and other documents contained in PROV, VPRS 807/P000, Unit 1259, File A17431.

[40] Burial of ER Mills, PROV, VPRS 807/P0, Unit 1216, File F4531.

[41] Report of Constable Hinkley on cost of burial of Pauper Richards, 29 November 1919, PROV, VPRS 807/P0, Unit 1259, File A17431.

[42] 'Scale of fees and charges, Edenhope cemetery', Victoria Government Gazette, 18 April 1889, available at <http://gazette.slv.vic.gov.au/view.cgi?year=1889&class=general&page_num=1367&state=V&classNum=G45&id=>, accessed 26 February 2026.

[43] Evan Arnold, interview by author, 21 April 2024.

[44] 'The weather', *Leader*, 26 October 1918, p. 26, available at <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article89074539>, accessed 26 February 2026. See also daily rainfall data for Edenhope (Elizabeth St) for October 1918, Bureau of Meteorology, available at <http://www.bom.gov.au/jsp/ncc/cdio/weatherData/av?p_display_type=dailyDataFile&p_nccObsCode=136&p_stn_num=079011&p_c=-1248665591&p_startYear=1918>, accessed 17 September 2025. Constable Hughes's report was first dated 21 October and later amended to 22 October, indicating a possible postponement of the burial, possibly due to rain, though the reason for the change is not recorded: PROV, VPRS 807/P0, Unit 673, File no. Z12559.

[45] The research is currently being undertaken by Helen Mulraney-Roll and Toni Domaschenz of Edenhope.

[46] Helen Mulraney-Roll, interview by author, 2024.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Carolyn Gemmel, interview by author, April 2023.

Life of a house:

45 Mackenzie Street, Melbourne

'Life of a house: 45 Mackenzie Street Melbourne', *Provenance: the Journal of Public Record Office Victoria*, issue no. 23, 2026. ISSN 1832-2522.

Erica Cervini is an award-winning education journalist who currently writes for *Eureka Street*. In 2019, she was awarded a PhD. Her thesis examined family history and life-writing. Until recently, she taught media writing at the University of Melbourne, and she has also taught life writing at the Australian Catholic University. The Australian Historical Association has awarded Erica three prizes for her work. In 2024, her forum article, '"Wayward", "immoral" and "evil": dispelling myths about Brookside Reformatory girls', was published in *Provenance: the Journal of Public Record Office Victoria*. She participated in a PROV podcast about that article.

Author email: ecervini@bigpond.com

Abstract

This article explores the early life of 45 Mackenzie Street, a house in Melbourne's central business district (CBD), from the late 1860s to 1903, to tell the 'upstairs, downstairs' story of its owners and renters. The latter, a Jewish family who lived there for 74 years, were my family. The research and resultant story illuminates the different socio-economic and religious and cultural lives of the owners and renters, and retrieves lost stories about the CBD's early identities and its small but vibrant Jewish population, as well stories about the CBD's changing landscape. It also highlights the connection the renters and owners had to the CBD through living in the city.

Introduction

What can the ghosts of a vanished house tell us? This question guides my research about the life of a house that once stood on the edge of Melbourne's central business district (CBD) at 45 Mackenzie Street. Specifically, I examine how a house and its owners and renters can illuminate the story of the CBD's changing social and economic landscape, migration stories and stories about the growth and disappearance of the city's once vibrant Jewish community. To achieve this, I tell an 'upstairs, downstairs' story about the house's wealthy owners and the Jacobs family, my Jewish ancestors, who rented it for 74 years from 1887 until it was demolished in 1961.

The significance of my research lies in its novel approach—exploring the life of a house and its owners and renters across time. The research brings the house alive by using archival materials from Public Record Office Victoria and State Library Victoria, and family memories and photographs, finding and weaving the narrative threads together to produce a story about a house and its occupants. Bringing the house alive prompts questions about the emotional relationship of the renters (and owners) to the house that became their home, as well as their various connections to the CBD. Excavating 45 Mackenzie Street in this way—an address just 350 metres from State Library Victoria—may prompt an emotional response from readers as they reflect on their own connections to lost homes and the people who lived in them.

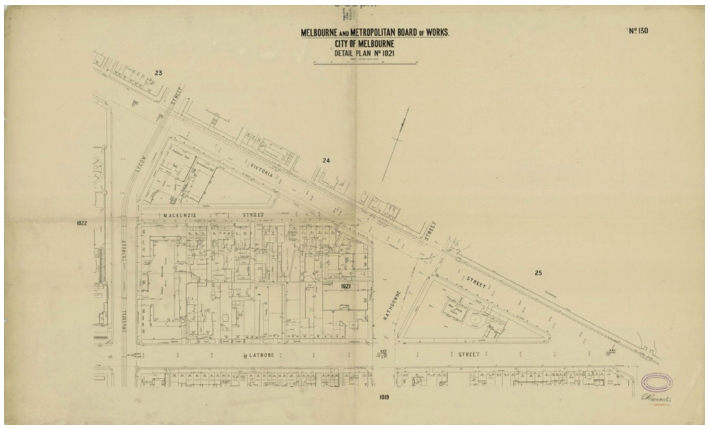


Figure 1: The Jacobs family was living at 45 Mackenzie Street at the time this map was produced in 1895. Mackenzie Street was the gateway to Carlton, where many Jews also lived at the time. The original police barracks are also shown. Source: Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works, Detail Plan, 1895, State Library of Victoria.

My larger research spans the 1860s to the early 1960s; however, due to space limitations, this article presents only a small section of my research, focusing on the beginnings of 45 Mackenzie Street until 1903. For context, I provide a brief overview of the house's history up to the early 1960s. The body of the article reveals a contrast between the socio-economic circumstances and religious affiliations of the house's early owners and renters, the Jacobs family. I explore why the house was built, provide details about its early owners, and uncover how the home was central to the Jacobs family's religious and cultural life.

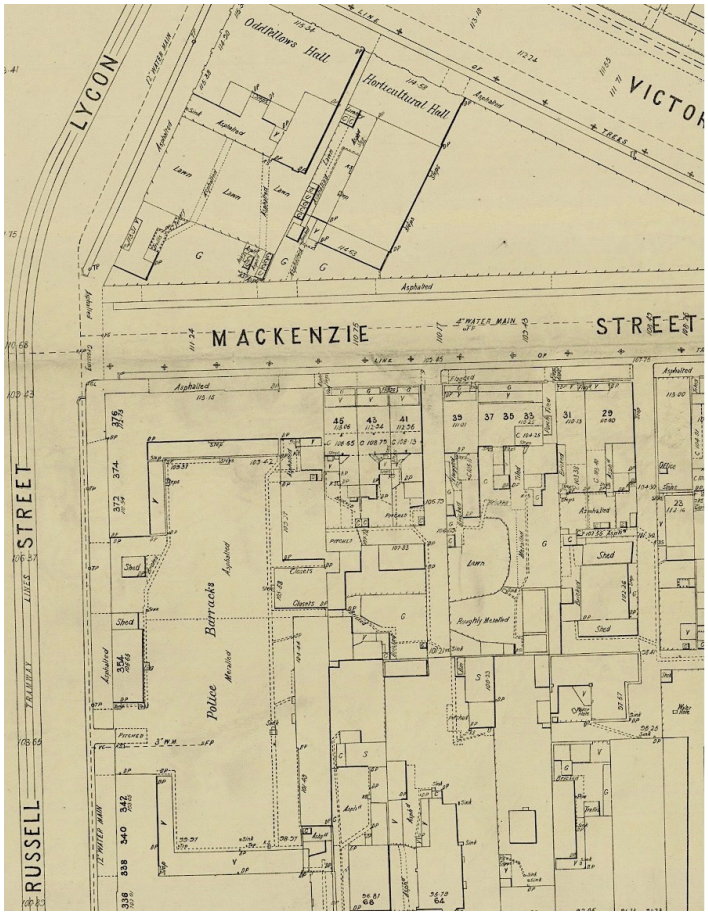


Figure 2: This detailed section shows important buildings, such as the hall of the Victorian Horticultural Society (see Figure 18), on Mackenzie Street. It also shows the dimensions of numbers 41, 43 and 45 Mackenzie Street that were built and owned by the same person, George Moody. Source: Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works, Detail Plan, 1895, State Library of Victoria.

Maps

To help readers familiarise themselves with the streets and landmarks mentioned in this article, I have provided three maps that show Mackenzie Street in 1895 and today. Figure 1 is an 1895 Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works map showing Mackenzie Street and the streets surrounding it. Figure 2 is a detailed section of this map that shows Mackenzie Street and its proximity to Victoria and La Trobe streets. Figure 3 is a modern-day map that shows Mackenzie Street and important landmarks such as the East Melbourne Synagogue, which I refer to later in the article.

The builder and owner: George Moody

On 4 June 1873, just after 9 am, George Moody, aged 63, and his wife Sarah Moody, aged 59, sailed through the Port Phillip Heads on the steamship *Lord Warden*.[1] It was the —beginning of winter, but the day was fine with only moderate waves, which was lucky for the passengers and the captain because

Figure 3: This modern-day map shows Mackenzie Street to the east of the Old Melbourne Gaol (left-hand side). The East Melbourne Synagogue on Albert Street is identified with a Star of David. Source: City of Melbourne.

the heads are notorious for appearing calm and welcoming but actually being treacherous. The last time the couple had sailed through the heads was in 1841, more than 30 years earlier.[2] With their five children, they had emigrated from Nottingham, England, that year to the Port Phillip District of New South Wales—the land of the Kulin Nation. It was a heady time: 272 ships from 'British possessions' arrived in 1841 compared to just 140 in 1837.[3] In 1841, the settler population was estimated at 11,733, whereas it had only been 3,511 four years earlier.[4] The Indigenous population was not counted.

After they migrated, the Moodys amassed considerable wealth through buying land, building houses and renting them. The Port Phillip District separated from New South Wales and became the colony of Victoria in 1851. During the 1850s and 1860s, George Moody, builder and contractor, routinely advertised in the *Age* and *Argus* for quarrymen, plasterers, slaters and plumbers. 'None but good workmen need apply', his 1856 advertisement announced.[5] By the 1870s, he owned tracts of land in the inner-northern suburbs of Carlton, Fitzroy and Collingwood, and in Melbourne's CBD. Some of his land was vacant; however, on other parcels, he had built houses, seven in total, although two were in a bad state of repair. Nevertheless, he still rented these neglected cottages to families. In 1870, George Moody sold three freehold allotments on Smith Street in Collingwood.[6] By this stage, he had acquired the title 'Esq.' after his name. George Moody Esq. had savings, shares, fine furniture and, importantly, no debt.[7] He was a shrewd man.

By 1872, the population of Victoria had swelled to 731,528.[8] This included an estimated 1,330 First Nations people (although this figure is rubbery because many Indigenous people had been forced from their land by squatters) and about 17,935 Chinese people.[9] The goldrush of the 1850s had

Figure 4: Terrace houses on MacKenzie Street with Russell Street Police Headquarters in background. Number 45 Mackenzie Street is on the right next to the old police complex. The Jacobs family shopped at Victoria Market, which was a 12-minute walk along Victoria Street. Source: Mark Strizic (photographer), State Library of Victoria, 1955, available at <https://viewer.slv.vic.gov.au/?entity=IE7240044&mode=browse>.

produced a migration boom that saw people from countries such as China, Ireland and Italy head to the Victorian goldfields. While some would leave the colony when the gold ran out, others would stay and move to Melbourne, producing a great demand for houses. There were simply not enough brick or stone cottages for the new arrivals, forcing many to live in tents, and mud and calico homes.[10]

During the 1860s and early 1870s, George and Sarah Moody lived just off Mackenzie Street in a five-room brick home that George had built.[11] George also owned land on Mackenzie Street, a narrow and short street bookended by Russell and Victoria streets in the north-east section of Melbourne's CBD. When

Figure 5: The back of terrace houses 41, 43 and 45 Mackenzie Street. Source: Mark Strizic (photographer), State Library of Victoria, 1955.

George began building houses on the street, only homes on one side of the street were numbered. This quirk would continue throughout the life of the street. The odd-numbered buildings comprised Victorian brick homes with wooden or lace balconies, a stone cottage, a boarding house and a hotel. The large and brilliant white Victorian Horticultural Society's hall backed onto Mackenzie Street's 'even' side, as did the once grand Victoria Hall. Both these buildings still stand today (see Figure 18).

I suspect that many of the advertisements George placed in newspapers in the 1850 and 1860s were to find workers to build the Mackenzie Street homes. By 1867, he had built three, two-storey terrace houses, numbered 41, 43 and 45 Mackenzie Street (Figure 4).[12] They each had six rooms and a cellar, a frontage of 8.5 metres and a depth of 25.5 metres.[13]

The houses' sloping slate roofs supported chimneys balancing circular clay stacks that were designed to expel smoke quickly to prevent it going back inside. Attics with small sash windows poked out of the slate, too. The backyards only had room for a clothesline and a small table and chairs, having also to accommodate a washhouse with a copper and an outside kitchen (Figure 5). My mum visited the home as a young girl with her mother in the 1950s and she distinctly remembers the kitchen: 'We would sit in the kitchen out in the backyard … I did like the kitchen because you went up an iron spiral staircase to get into the larder. There was always chocolate in there.'

Number 45 had a special position on Mackenzie Street. It was next door to the rambling police offices on Russell Street. The police complex would go through numerous evolutions and would play a significant role in the demise of Number 45.

The renters: the Jacobs family

While the Moodys were content to rekindle memories of Nottingham, another family, the Jacobses, worked

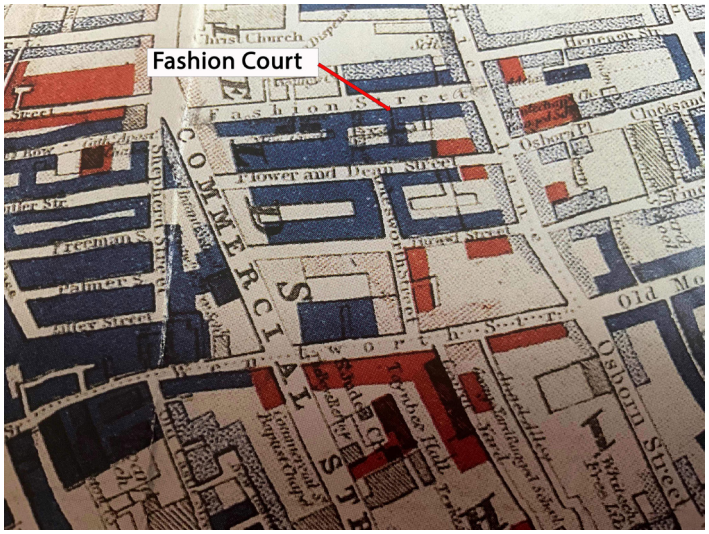


Figure 6: Fashion Court is where Rose Jacobs and her family lived. It backed onto the 'notorious' Flower and Dean Street. This street and the surrounding streets and courts had a reputation as the poorest and most dangerous in London's East End. All five of Jack the Ripper's victims lived in or had connections to Flower and Dean Street and the immediate area. Source: The Street Map of Jewish East London, 1899, Old House Books, Museum of London (purchased by the author in 2017).

hard to forget their experience of being discriminated against in Kovno, part of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, because they were Jewish.[14] Solomon and Annie Jacobs had married in Kovno but fled to England along with thousands of other Jews who left Lithuania, Russia and Poland to escape persecution and poverty during the second-half of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. Many Jews, including Solomon and Annie, ended up in London's crowded Spitalfields, living in tiny houses and cramped and damp tenements in the East End. George Arkell's map of the Jewish East End indicates that the part of London that the Jacobs family lived in was inhabited almost exclusively by Jews.[15]

Solomon and Annie Jacobs had six children, all of whom were born in the Spitalfields. Rose, the second eldest and my great-grandmother, was born on 1 May 1875 at 2 Samuel Street, south of Commercial Road in the Spitalfields.[16] A few years later, the family moved to 5 Fashion Court in the heart of the Spitalfields, where Solomon worked as a boot finisher.[17] Fashion Court (Figure 6), a small curl of a lane, ran off Fashion Street, which was lined with tiny neighbourhood synagogues[18] and sweatshops.

Solomon Jacobs was the first in the family to sail to Melbourne. Aged 36, he left London in November 1886 on board the *Winifred* with a 'fair complement of passengers' and a large cargo of general merchandise, including 300 cases of brandy, 100 cases of wine, and, importantly, building materials

Figure 7: There is no way of knowing what Solomon Jacobs thought when he first saw Melbourne after living in the Jewish area of London's East End. This photograph of Swanston Street in c. 1887 gives us some idea of what Solomon would have seen, including the Melbourne Town Hall. Source: State Library Victoria, available at <https://viewer.slv.vic.gov.au/?entity=IE401960&mode=browse>.

such as nails, screws, bolts and cement.[19] Solomon arrived in the colony of Victoria on 15 February 1887 (Figure 7). I suspect he emigrated first to earn money to pay for his family's passage to Melbourne, and to find a home to welcome his wife and six children.[20]

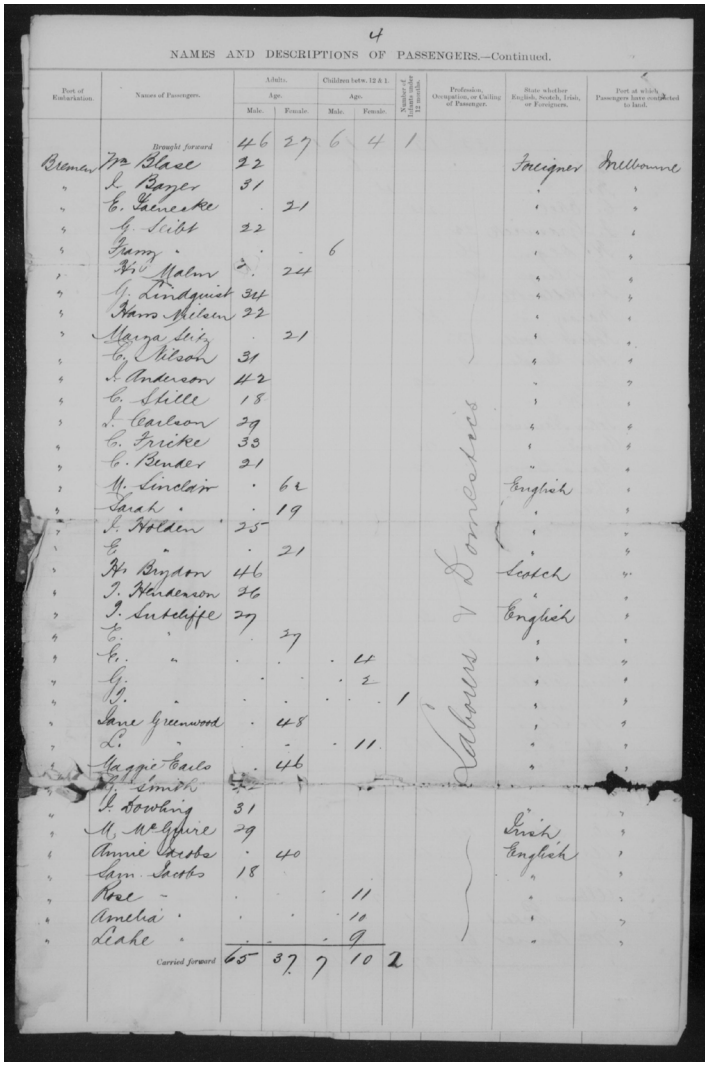
Eighteen months after Solomon left London, Annie Jacobs, aged 40, and her six children—Samuel (18), Rose (13), Amelia (10), Leah (9), Morris (7) and baby Celia—set sail for Melbourne (Figure 8).[21]

The Jacobses did not get to meet the man who built their home. George Moody died in September 1873 during a visit to Nottingham.[22] His wife, Sarah, stayed in Nottingham for another six months and then returned to Melbourne on board the *Windsor Castle* in 1874.[23] Sarah inherited George's property portfolio, including 45 Mackenzie Street (Figure 9).[24]

Sarah lived at 3 Mackenzie Street, in one of five Lingwell Terraces built by George Chambers. Another early colonist and builder, Chambers also lived on Mackenzie Street.[25] Sarah was the sole occupant of the eight-room brick house she rented from Chambers for a small sum compared to what he charged other tenants.[26]

A religious and cultural life

George Chambers was a Protestant and Sarah Moody followed Wesleyan traditions, but the Jacobses were not the only Jewish family living on Mackenzie Street: Morris Mosely, Alfred Hyman, Isidore Holtz and Abraham Stern and their wives and children also called Mackenzie Street home.[27]



4

NAMES AND DESCRIPTIONS OF PASSENGERS.—Continued.

Port of Embarkation	Names of Passengers.	Adults. Age. Male.	Adults. Age. Female.	Children betw. 12 & 1. Age. Male.	Children betw. 12 & 1. Age. Female.	Number of Infants under 12 months	Profession, Occupation, or Calling of Passenger.	State whether English, Scotch, Irish, or Foreigners.	Port at which Passengers have contracted to land.
	Brought forward	46	27	6	4	1			
Bremen	Mr Blasé	32						Foreigner	Melbourne
"	L. Bayer	31						"	"
"	E. Zaneske		21					"	"
"	G. Seibt	32						"	"
"	Fanny "			6				"	"
"	Mr Malow	2	24					"	"
"	G. Lindquist	34						"	"
"	Hans Nilsen	32						"	"
"	Maria Seitz		21					"	"
"	C. Nilsson	31						"	"
"	A. Anderson	42						"	"
"	C. Stille	18						"	"
"	L. Carlson	29						"	"
"	C. Fricke	33						"	"
"	C. Bender	21						"	"
"	M. Sinclair		62					English	"
"	Sarah "		19					"	"
"	L. Holden	25						"	"
"	E. "		21					"	"
"	Mr Bryden	46						Scotch	"
"	J. Henderson	26						"	"
"	J. Sutcliffe	29						English	"
"	E. "		29					"	"
"	C. "				11			"	"
"	G. "				2			"	"
"	G. "					1		"	"
"	Jane Greenwood		48					"	"
"	L. "				11			"	"
"	Maggie Eales		46					"	"
"	Emma "							"	"
"	J. Bowling	31						"	"
"	M. McGuire	29						Irish	"
"	Annie Sachs		40					English	"
"	Sam Sachs	18						"	"
"	Rose "				11			"	"
"	Amelia "				10			"	"
"	Leake "				9			"	"
	Carried forward	65	37	7	10	2			

Figure 8: Annie Jacobs and her children were listed as passengers on board the *Hohenstaufen*. Source: *Hohenstaufen* passenger list dated 29 September 1888, PROV, VPRS 947/P0 Inward Overseas Passenger Lists, Sep – Dec 1888 British and Foreign Ports.

The Jacobses and their Jewish neighbours were part of an ongoing Jewish migration to Australia. There were at least eight Jewish convicts on the First Fleet that arrived at Sydney Cove in 1788.[28] Subsequently, more convicts and free Jewish settlers arrived, mainly from England, and by 1828 there were about 100 Jews in New South Wales and 50 in Van Diemen's Land.[29] After this time, particularly from the 1870s, an increasing number of Jews came from Eastern Europe.

The original Jewish settlers who came to Melbourne in the 1830s and 1840s lived on Collins, Bourke, and Elizabeth streets, near Jewish businesses selling clothes and 'British and Foreign Merchandise'.[30] By 1848, there were about 200 Jews in the burgeoning city, and they decided to open a synagogue in Bourke Street.[31] Their numbers continued to grow as they tried to find fortune during the gold rush or

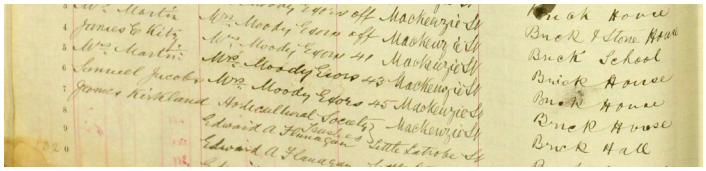


Figure 9: City of Melbourne rate book showing the Moody Estate owning 41, 43 and 45 Mackenzie Street. Sarah Moody died in 1889. Source: PROV, VPRS 5708/P0 Rate Books, 1892, p. 35.

open shops for the gold diggers. Jews, particularly those from Germany and Eastern Europe, continued to settle in Melbourne in suburbs such as Carlton, Fitzroy and the north-eastern end of the CBD where the Jacobs family lived. By 1891, there were 2,272 Jews living in the City of Melbourne.[32] However, this number only represented a small percentage of the total population of the city, which was 73,000 that year.[33] After 1891, the city's Jewish population continued to fall, as Jews moved to suburbs such as St Kilda and Caulfield.

Apart from the comfort and familiarity of living among other Jewish families, who, like the Jacobses, would probably have spoken Yiddish, Mackenzie Street also offered the family stability and freedom, compared with living under the threat of persecution in Kovno. The family could celebrate their Jewish traditions in Mackenzie Street, and, after settling into number 45, they began attending the East Melbourne Hebrew Congregation, also known as the East Melbourne Synagogue, a six-minute walk from their home (Figures 10 and 11). In the late nineteenth century, the synagogue, which has been located at its present site on Albert Street since 1877, became known as the *shule* (house of prayer) for Jews from Eastern Europe who had settled in the CBD, Carlton and Fitzroy.[34] It had a Hebrew school, which some of the Jacobs children, including Rose, attended for a short time. In 1898, Rose and her sister Millie volunteered at a 'Bazaar Fancy and Doll Fair' to raise funds for the Melbourne Hebrew School, then operating out of the Old Trades Hall, Carlton.[35]

Due to the number of Jews in the city, the Jacobses were able to buy kosher foods, just as they had done in the Spitalfields. In 1888, the year Annie and her children began living at 45 Mackenzie Street, David Goldstein, who had qualified as a *shochet* (ritual slaughterer), opened a butcher's shop at 170 Exhibition Street, a short walk away.[36] Goldstein promised to supply the Jews of Melbourne with kosher meat of 'good quality, smallgoods, such as sausages, corned and smoked beef, killed and dressed poultry, all at a cheaper rate than that which the Jews have been paying hitherto'.[37]

Nor did the Jacobses have to rely solely on Goldstein's meats. They could walk or take a cable

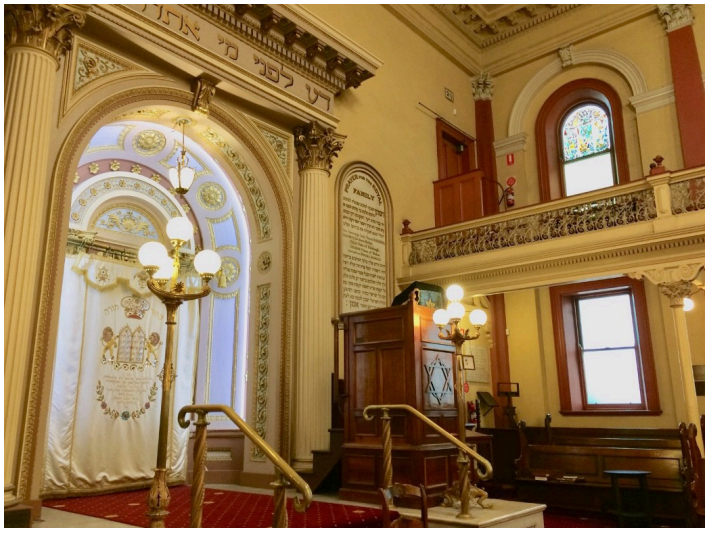


Figure 10: The interior of the East Melbourne Synagogue. Little has changed since my great-grandmother Rose Jacobs married Baron Pearlman there in 1900. The piano, according to Chief Rabbi Dovid Gutnick, would have been the same one at the synagogue when Rose and Baron married. Source: Erica Cervini, 2017.

Figure 11: Rose (Jacobs) Pearlman on her wedding day. It is not known whether Rose and Baron met at the East Melbourne Synagogue or at dances, organised by the Society of Judeans, at the Cathedral Hall in Fitzroy, now part of the Australian Catholic University. Rose's two younger sisters also married at the East Melbourne Synagogue and would return later with their children to live at 45 Mackenzie Street. One sister's husband deserted her and the other became a widow. Source: Family photograph.

BUTCHER, כשר POULTERER,
AND SMALL GOODS.

ISAAC ROTENBERG,

Authorised by the BETH DIN and Board of SCHETA to supply the Jewish Community of Melbourne and Suburbs with KOSHER fresh meat and all kinds of ordinances. Garlic and plain Worsht Sausages Smoked Beef and Mutton, Ox and Sheep Tongues Tripe, Rolled Beef, Pressed Beef and Brawn.
A first-class man engaged on the premises.

Mr. Rotenberg has been also appointed Butcher for the East Melbourne Hebrew Congregation, and their *Schochet*, Mr. Loehr, will be in attendance daily to kill poultry.

349 AND 351 SWANSTON STREET.

Weddings and Banquets receive special attention Families waited upon for orders and supplied at shop prices. Nothing but KOSHER sold on premises.

Figure 12: Many advertisements for kosher food appeared in Jewish and non-Jewish newspapers. This advertisement for Issac Rotenberg's butcher's shop shows the variety of meats available. Source: *Jewish Herald*, 6 April 1894, p. 11, http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article149756488.

tram to the kosher butcher on Little Collins Street at the rear of the old Eastern Market, where they could buy spiced beef. Alternatively, a three-minute walk from their home would take them to Issac Rotenberg's butcher's shop at 351 Swanston Street, where they could choose from a large selection of kosher meats and smallgoods such as 'garlic and plain Worsht Sausages' and sheep's tongue (Figure 12).[38]

Benzion Lenzer, from the East Melbourne Synagogue, killed the poultry at Rotenberg's butcher between 8 and 11 am most days.[39] Then a small group of women would pluck the birds dry (rather than loosening the feathers with hot water, which was the habit of non-Jews), readying them for customers to take home. Birds intended for soup—the older hens or fowls that had stopped laying egg—would be salted and washed clean before being boiled with peppercorns, onions and carrots. Although they took longer to cook, the older birds were cheaper than roasting chickens and made a more fulsome soup.

The Jacobses did not have far to walk to buy *matzo* (unleavened bread) for the Passover Festival, as it was available at 196 Elizabeth Street in the CBD. They could be assured that the bakehouse kept to Jewish regulatory food preparation rules because rabbis would visit the bakehouse and other food premises to ensure compliance.[40] The family could also walk to nearby Carlton to buy bakery items, their home on Mackenzie Street acting as a gateway to the inner-

city suburb that housed many Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe before World War II.

In fact, sometimes the Jacobses did not have to walk to the shops at all—the food came to them. Due to its number of Jewish residents, Mackenzie Street and neighbouring streets attracted Jewish hawkers selling fruits and wares in the late 1880s and 1890s.[41] From the laden carts, the Jacobses could buy apples and walnuts and spices to make *charoset*, a sweet, dark-coloured mixture of finely chopped fruits and nuts, for the Passover Seder meal. Hawkers also sold kosher wine, which was added to the spiced apples in *charoset* to symbolise the mortar used by the enslaved Israelites in Egypt, and for the Shabbat meal each Friday night. The apple and walnut version of *charoset* made by Ashkenazi Jews from Eastern Europe would have been the recipe the Jacobs family used.

By the mid-1890s, the Jacobses were secure in their home at 45 Mackenzie Street, and Solomon and his son Samuel had gone into the boot manufacturing business as Jacobs & Son. While it is unclear how long the partnership lasted, Solomon spent many years working as a boot finisher from his front room at 45 Mackenzie Street.[42] Samuel left home during this time and lived in nearby Carlton with his wife Nellie, who would later establish a profitable perfume business, the Perfecta Manufacturing Company. She named a rose-scented solid perfume after my great-grandmother Rose. The rest of the family remained at Mackenzie Street: Rose and Leah were boot machinists for Jacobs & Son,[43] Millie was a housekeeper, Morris was learning how to make boots and Celia was still at school. Annie was busy caring for her family. Every year she and her husband would send Jewish New Year greetings in the *Jewish Herald*: 'Mr and Mrs Solomon Jacobs and family wish all their relatives and friends a Bright and Prosperous New Year, all well over their fast, 45 Mackenzie-street City Melbourne'.[44] In 1897, Solomon Jacobs was listed in the *Age* as one of two members of the local Jewish community from whom synagogue seats for the Jewish New Year could be purchased. His contact address was listed in the newspaper as 45 Mackenzie Street.[45] Clearly, during the 1890s, 45 Mackenzie Street was the centre of the Jacobs family's universe.

Another owner: Charles Wright

The Jacobs family may have experienced a sense of unease in the mid-1890s when lawyers acting for the Moody Estate put 41, 43 and 45 Mackenzie Street on the market. Newspaper notices indicate that the homes were sold to another Mackenzie Street 'lord', Charles Wright, for £1,825 at auction on 5

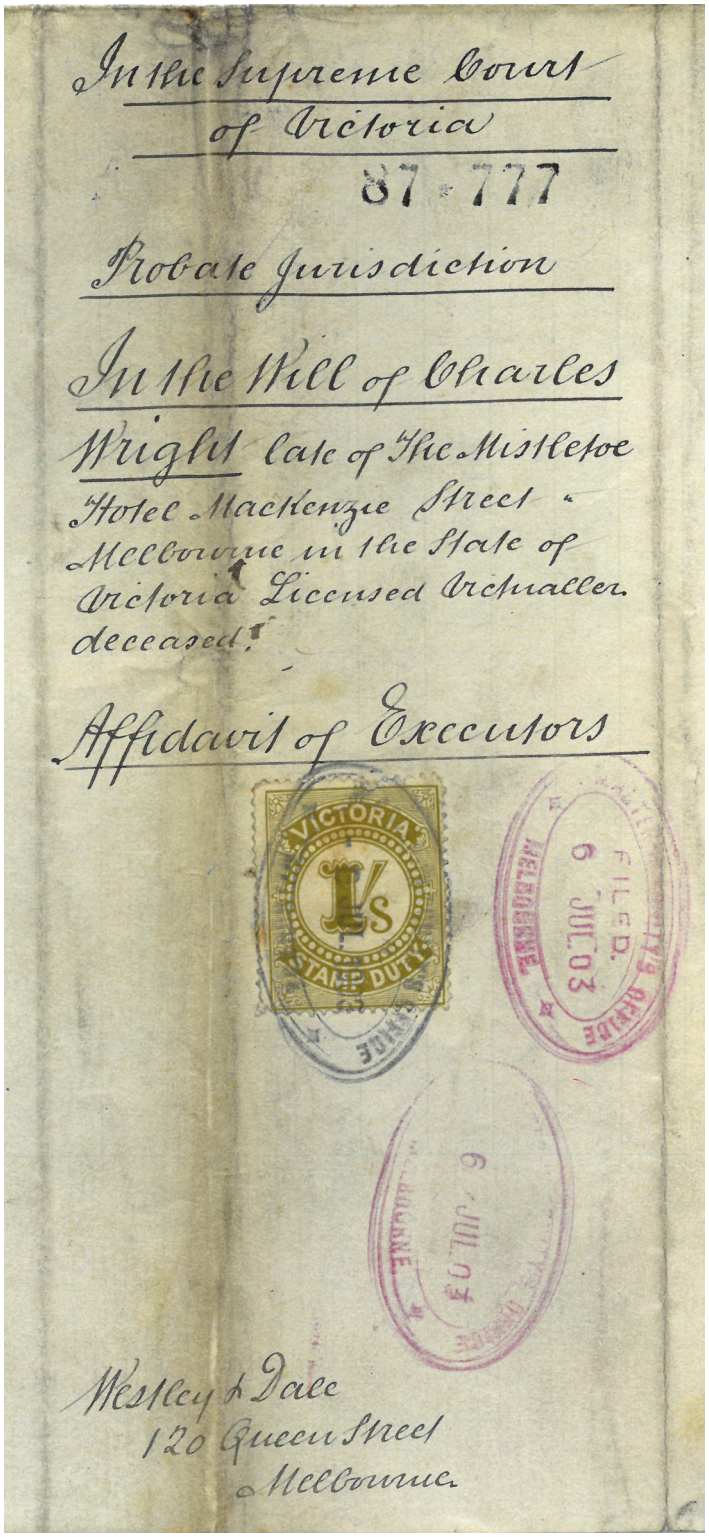

In the Supreme Court of Victoria
87/777
Probate Jurisdiction
In the Will of Charles Wright late of The Mistletoe Hotel Mackenzie Street Melbourne in the State of Victoria Licensed Victualler deceased.
Affidavit of Executors
VICTORIA
1/6
STAMP DUTY
FILED
6 JUL 03
Wesley & Dale
120 Queen Street
Melbourne

Figure 13: Charles Wright's will. Source: PROV, VPRS 7591/P2 Wills, 87/777 Charles Wright: Will; Grant of Probate , available at <https://prov.vic.gov.au/archive/B54F76D8-F53B-11E9-AE98-058DDCBB-181B?image=1>.

June 1895.[46]

Wright had lived on Mackenzie Street, in the 14-room Mistletoe Hotel, since the 1860s.[47] With this

Figure 14: When Letty and her mother Leah returned to 45 Mackenzie Street in 1900 they would have seen cable trams, tearooms and businesses, including dentists and lawyers.

purchase, he continued the tradition of landlords owning multiple properties on the street and living alongside their tenants. Wright would continue renting number 45 to the Jacobs family.

Wright had amassed great wealth, much more than George and Sarah Moody, through owning hotels, dance halls (the Colosseum in Bourke Street)[48] and houses in the CBD and inner city. He had been married and divorced twice and was considered a colourful character. In 1933, a letter writer to the *Age* reminisced about the music played at the Colosseum and its owner Charles Wright: 'I fancy I can see him riding around the city in his dog cart curling his moustache. He always had a young woman with him.'[49] Wright died at the age of 81 in his room at the Mistletoe Hotel in June 1903. He left all his money—£40,000—to charity and was buried in the Mornington Cemetery, 77 kilometres from Melbourne's CBD (Figure 13).[50]

After Charles Wright

Forty-Five Mackenzie Street would continue having new owners, but, after Charles Wright, they would live in more salubrious suburbs and the home would eventually be managed by trusts. The Victoria Police Association owned 45 Mackenzie Street from 1954 until the 1960s, when it demolished the residence, erecting a new brown-brick building to house its association. In June 2025, a Singapore-based company bought the former police association building, which had remained empty for years, with a view to erecting student accommodation.[51]

Letty Cohen, the granddaughter of Solomon and Annie Jacobs, was the last member of the Jacobs family to live in the home. She had been born there and returned to 45 Mackenzie Street as a two-year-

Figure 15: High-rise apartment blocks on Mackenzie Street. Source: Erica Cervini, 2025.

Figure 16: The two-storeyed Italian Renaissance Revival–style former police office stands on the corner of Mackenzie and Russell streets (now apartments). Next to it stands the empty, brown-brick former Victoria Police Association Building, where 45, 43 and 41 Mackenzie Steert once stood. Source: Erica Cervini, 2025.

old with her mother Leah in 1900 (Figure 14) when her father deserted them and moved to Sydney.[52]

Letty, who worked in administration at Myer on Bourke Street, would have stayed at 45 Mackenzie Street, but she was forced out by the Victoria Police Association. She moved to St Kilda in 1960. By the time she left, there were few Jews living in the CBD and inner north. By contrast, but the number of Jews

Figure 17: Mackenzie Street showing the Victoria Police Association Building in 1969. By this stage, other houses along the street had been demolished for parking bays. The Russell Street Police Headquarters, built between 1940 and 1943 (now apartments) is in the background. Source: Victoria Police Historical Society Facebook page.

Figure 18: Close-up of the Victoria Police Association Building, with smashed windows. Erica Cervini, 2025.

resident in St Kilda in 1961 had grown to 6,931 (from 705 in 1901). My mum says that Letty never recovered from having to move: 'She didn't survive for much longer after the move'. Mackenzie Street is unrecognisable today: it mainly comprises multistorey, glass-fronted apartment blocks (Figures 15–19).

Conclusion

Through examining the life of a house and its early owners and renters, I have retrieved lost stories about early settlers and my ancestors who lived in Melbourne's CBD. Moreover, telling the story of a house has brought to life a lost landscape, bridging the gap between the present and past. Walking up and down Mackenzie Street, collecting photographs and perusing archival materials helped me to build notions of my sense of place in the present and the past, connecting me to family—both living and deceased. The research helped me understand that knowledge and whispers of stories reside in, and can be derived from, fragmentary and partial historical records and artefacts, and that these can be used to produce a compelling narrative.

The story does not end here. To the contrary: the story of the life of 45 Mackenzie Street is a story of time. As new archival material becomes available, I am writing micro-biographies of the owners and my ancestors and their relationship to 45 Mackenzie Street, and I am continuing to examine how the Great Depression, the two world wars and a dwindling CBD population affected the owners and renters of 45 Mackenzie Street.

Despite the CBD's changing landscape and the rise

Figure 19: The premises of the Victorian Horticultural Society is the only building to survive the street's transformation. Source: Erica Cervini, 2025.

and fall in the Jewish and wider city populations between the 1860s and early 1960s, there was one constant in my family: 45 Mackenzie Street. It was a home where babies were born and where Solomon and Annie Jacobs died. It was welcoming to family members who were widowed or divorced, and to extended family members who needed a place to stay. This is a story of how a home was lost and found.

Endnotes

[1] PROV, VPRS 948/P1 Outward Passengers to Interstate, UK and Foreign Ports, Jan–June 1873, *Lord Warden* passenger list dated 2 June 1873, available at <https://prov.vic.gov.au/archive/23B692F2-F7F0-11E9-AE98-A129A05C3564?image=391>. See also 'The Lord Warden', *Herald*, 4 June 1973, p. 3, available at <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/245371445>.

[2] PROV, VPRS 14/P0 Register of Assisted Immigrants from the United Kingdom, Book /No. 1, p. 27, available at <https://prov.vic.gov.au/archive/E289FC3D-F1B1-11E9-AE98-4F5884FEEC7B?image=44>.

[3] *Kerr's Melbourne Almanac and Port Phillip Directory: A Compendium of Useful and Accurate Information Connected with Port Phillip, 1842*, p. 289, available at <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-2913110945/view?partId=nla.obj-2913166619#page/n300/mode/1up>.

[4] Ibid, p. 291. See also 'Census of Port Phillip', *Geelong Advertiser*, 17 July 1841, p. 2, available at <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-page8432080>; PROV, VPRS 4/P0 Inward Registered Correspondence, Folder No. 60, 38/211 Census of Port Phillip – Sept 1838, available at <https://prov.vic.gov.au/archive/540ADE4D-F7F4-11E9-AE98-9BF746893740?image=1>.

[5] [Advertising], *Argus*, 27 August 1856, p. 1, available at <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/7135559>; [Advertising], *Argus*, 5 October 1858, p. 6, available at <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/7302224>; [Advertising], *Argus*, 27 January 1858, p. 6, available at <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/7145650>.

[6] [Advertising], *Argus*, 15 January 1870, p. 3, available at <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/5810031>.

[7] See PROV, VPRS 28/P2 Probate and Administration Files, 12/002 George Moody: Grant of Probate, available at <https://prov.vic.gov.au/archive/7F0B51AF-F1DF-11E9-AE98-4114854CBCBD?image=1>.

[8] *Census of Victoria, 1871, Part I: Inhabitants and houses*, p. 2 (January 1872), available at <https://archive.org/details/vic-census-1871-part-2>.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid, pp. 8–12.

[11] For example, PROV, VPRS 5708/P0 Rate Books, 1868, p. 75, available at <https://prov.vic.gov.au/archive/7E97F1EA-F4D1-11E9-AE98-0F92F5D360A1?image=75>.

[12] The three, six-room homes owned by George Moody are listed in PROV, VPRS 5708/P0 Rate Books,1867, p. 87, available at <https://prov.vic.gov.au/archive/7E89E81F-F4D1-11E9-AE98-4146F53C5E89?image=87>.

[13] For a description of the houses at 41, 43 and 45 Mackenzie Street, see [Advertising], *Age*, 3 June 1895, p. 2, available at <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/203617847>.

[14] Solomon Jacobs's naturalisation certificate identifies the town he is from. See National Archives of Australia, A712, 1900/M2212.

[15] A hard copy edition of the map was published in 2012 by Old House Books and Maps. Image @ Museum of London. Reproduced from George Arkell's map of 1899.

[16] Rose Jacobs, birth certificate, General Register Office, England BXCG 473447, folio 44, p. 24.

[17] The 1881 census of England shows the Solomon and Annie Jacobs and their children living at 5 Fashion Court. Accessed via ancestry.com.au.

[18] For information about synagogues on Fashion Street/Fashion Court, see Jewish Community Records UK, available at <https://www.jewishgen.org/jcr-uk/london/EE_bikkur-cholim/index.htm>.

[19] Solomon Jacobs's naturalisation certificate gives the name of the ship and when he arrived in Melbourne. See National Archives of Australia, A712, 1900/M2212. Also see 'Shipping intelligence. Hobson's Bay', *Argus*, 17 February 1887, p. 4, available at <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/11590511>.

[20] For further information on Jewish chain migration to Melbourne, see Margaret Taft & Andrew Markus, *A second chance: the making of Yiddish Melbourne*, Monash University Publishing, Clayton, 2018, pp. 12–16.

[21] PROV, VPRS 947/P0 Inward Overseas Passenger Lists, Sep–Dec 1888 British and Foreign Ports, *Hohenstaufen* passenger list dated 29 September 1888, available at <https://prov.vic.gov.au/archive/426B1A03-F96C-11E9-AE98-DB924F6A1A19?image=16>.

[22] See George Moody: Grant of probate.

[23] PROV, VPRS 947/P0 Inward Overseas Passenger Lists, Jan–Jun 1874 British and Foreign Ports, *Windsor Castle* passenger list dated 16 February 1874, available at <https://prov.vic.gov.au/archive/3B4A4D5B-F96C-11E9-AE98-9777796065C5?image=206>.

[24] See George Moody: Grant of probate.

[25] City of Melbourne rate books held at PROV show George Chambers owning homes on Mackenzie Street since 1868. See, for example, PROV, VPRS 5708/P0 Rate Books, 1888, pp. 75–76, available at <https://prov.vic.gov.au/archive/7637EE8C-F4D1-11E9-AE98-5D0D6156D8C6?image=76>.

[26] The low rent Sarah Moody paid compared to other renters is reflected in City of Melbourne rate books held at PROV (VPRS 5708).

[27] See, for example, PROV, VPRS 5708/P0 Rate Books, 1892, p. 35, available at <https://prov.vic.gov.au/archive/763E0911-F4D1-11E9-AE98-3164095C2D2C?image=35>.

[28] John Levi, *These are the names: Jewish lives in Australia 1788–1850*, The Miegunyah: Melbourne, Melbourne, 2013.

[29] CA Price, 'Jewish settlers in Australia 1788–1961', *Australian Jewish Historical Society*, vol. 5, no. 8, 1964, p. 8, available at <https://collections.ajhs.com.au/Detail/objects/52798>.

[30] Ibid., p. 38.

[31] Australian Jewish Historical Society, *AJHS timeline*, available at <https://ajhs.com.au/timeline_ajhs/>.

[32] Price, 'Jewish settlers', p. 89.

[33] Peter Mcdonald, 'Demography', *eMelbourne*, available at <https://www.emelbourne.net.au/biogs/EM00455b.htm>.

[34] Morris C. Davis, *History of the East Melbourne Hebrew Congregation, 'Mickva Yisrael' 1857–1977*, East Melbourne Hebrew Congregation.

[35] 'Our Victorian letter', *Hebrew Standard of Australasia*, 30 December 1898, p. 5, available at <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/121636714>.

[36] 'Local and general items', *Jewish Herald*, 8 June 1888, p. 9, available at <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/149550247>.

[37] Ibid.

[38] [Advertising], *Jewish Herald*, 30 September 1895, p. 14, available at <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/149757434>.

[39] 'Melbourne Hebrew congregation', *Jewish Herald*, 8 September 1893, p. 8, available at <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/149756219>; [Advertising], *Jewish Herald*, 30 September 1895, p. 14, available at <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/149757434>.

[40] For details about the provision of kosher food in Melbourne (and squabbles over the manufacture of *matzos*), see Davis, *History of the East Melbourne Congregation*.

[41] My great-great grandfather Hyman Pearlman and his son Baron, who married Rose Jacobs, were hawkers who sold wares on the edge of the CBD, in Carlton and in Fitzroy. They sold the type of foodstuffs mentioned in this paragraph.

[42] Series of interviews with 99-year-old Lloyd Pearlman about his grandfather Solomon Jacobs conducted in 2017–18. Lloyd died in 2018. He often visited 45 Mackenzie Street and stayed there for a period of time after moving from Ballarat to Melbourne. Samuel was leasing a small factory, owned by the Moody Estate in Grange Lane, which runs off Mackenzie Street. Sarah Moody had died in 1889.

[43] Ibid. Rose's occupation is also listed on her marriage certificate. See Births, Deaths and Marriages Victoria, marriage registration Rose Jacobs and Baron Pearlman, 4236/1900. Their marriage record is also held at the East Melbourne Synagogue.

[44] See, for example, 'New Year Greetings', *Jewish Herald*, 10 September 1920, p. 11, available at <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article149673001>.

[45] [Advertising], *Age*, 18 September 1897, p. 9, available at <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/188147905>.

[46] 'Sales of property', *Age*, 6 June 1895, p. 4, available at <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/203616559>. The properties are also listed in the will and probate of Charles Wright, PROV, VPRS 7591/P2 Wills, 87/777 Charles Wright: Will; Grant of Probate, available at <https://prov.vic.gov.au/archive/B54F76D8-F53B-11E9-AE98-058DDCBB181B?image=1>.

[47] PROV, VPRS 5708/P0 Rate Books,1868, p. 75, available at <https://prov.vic.gov.au/archive/7E97F1EA-F4D1-11E9-AE98-0F92F5D360A1?image=75>.

[48] There are multiple news articles about Charles Wright's run-ins with the law over his license at the Colosseum. There are also stories about him mixing with prostitutes.

[49] 'To the editor', *Age*, 4 November 1933, p. 6, available at <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/203364310>.

[50] Charles Wright in 'Australia and New Zealand, Find a Grave® Index, 1800s–Current', accessed via ancestry.com.au.

[51] Marc Pallisco, 'Developer swoops on ex-Victoria police building', RealEstate Source,19 June 2005, available at <https://www.realestatesource.com.au/developer-swoops-on-another-melbourne-site/>.

[52] Details about Leah and Solomon Cohen's divorce were obtained from PROV, Petition for Dissolution, Cohen v. Cohen, 1904, no. 167. The document is 44-pages long. See also 'Divorce Court', *Age*, 10 August 1905, p. 8, available at <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article198589771>.