

Media Release

Public Record Office Victoria

Date: 1 January 2025

Daring crimes and Violet Town's devastating disaster in files opened by Public Record Office Victoria

Every year on the 1st of January, hundreds of Victorian archival records are made public as part of Public Record Office Victoria's Section 9 openings. Under Section 9 of the *Public Records Act 1973*, records of a private or personal nature are closed to prevent the violation of privacy.

On the 1st of January 2025, files opened for the first time include files of a 1949 Ferntree Gully bank robbery and Pentridge prison escape. Also opened for the first time are files collated by the Victorian Railways Commissioners Board of Inquiry into the 1969 Violet Town train crash.

On 7 February 1969, the Sydney to Melbourne Express passenger train, the Southern Aurora, collided with a Melbourne to Albury goods train near Violet Town. Nine people died and 117 people were injured.

Contained within three archival boxes are various photos and maps of the site, train controller charts, reports on staff, witness statements, track and signal plans, log books, as well as the coroner's and commissioner's findings. Many of the photos show rescue efforts of crew and volunteers. Station Master McQuillan and Conductor Hyatt are singled out in the reports as two who "worked heroically and tirelessly and without regard to their personal safety."

Criminal trial briefs opened for the first time include the 1949 trial of Albert Edward Skeggs, accused of a daring Ferntree Gully bank robbery. Though police traced stolen cash certificates back to Skeggs, the jury found him not guilty. Unfortunately for Gordon Thomas Howard, the jury didn't believe his excuses. They found him guilty of escaping from Pentridge, his second successful prison escape in two years, and stealing explosives while on the run.

Director and Keeper of Public Records, Justine Heazlewood, says the records opened will be invaluable to family and community historians.

"Public records provide Victorians with an insight into the past. The records now available for researchers date back as far as the early 1900s revealing much about what our ancestors and communities experienced at the time. From the heroism of first responders to the devastation of lives lost, it's important to remember and continue to learn from the past."

A broad guide to time periods for closure under Section 9 is:

- Records primarily concerning adults may be closed for 75 years from the year created.
- Records concerning children as the primary subject may be closed for 99 years.

- Records such as staff records where the individuals concerned may still be in the workforce may be closed for a lesser period such as 30, 40, or 50 years as appropriate.

See below for the full list of records opened. More information can be found at prov.vic.gov.au

- Geelong divorce case files, 1949
- Attorney-General's Department inward registered correspondence, 1949
- Melbourne divorce case files, 1949
- Criminal trial briefs, 1948-49
- Malvern children's court register, 1949
- Criminal trial brief register, 1949
- Alfred Hospital master patient index cards, 1949
- Children's ward register, 1924-25
- Divorce cause book, 1948-49
- Index to divorce cause book, 1949
- Divorce case files (Supreme Court and Ballarat), 1949
- Oakleigh District and St Albans Hospital inpatient admission registers, 1947-49
- Fitzroy children's court register, 1922-25
- Korumburra children's court register, 1907-25
- Kew Asylum head attendant's daily report books, male, 1948-49
- Royal Park Psychiatric Hospital trial leave register and escapes, 1940-49
- St Helens, Pleasant View and Sunnyside Licensed House Asylum records, 1906-49
- Kew Asylum head nurse's daily report book, female, 1948-49
- Bound circulated photographs and criminal offences of convicted persons, 1948-49
- Register of appeals to County Court, 1944-49
- Sunbury and Ballarat asylum discharge registers, 1942-49
- Sunbury female admission warrants, 1947-49
- Caulfield children's court registers, 1920-25
- Buln Buln Shire council minutes, 1989-94
- Public Service Board correspondence, 1987-94
- Supreme Court presentments, 1949
- St Kilda children's court register, 1922-25
- Richmond children's court register, 1923-25
- Healesville children's court register, 1908-25
- Euroa children's court register, 1907-25
- Prahran children's court register, 1922-25
- Capital sentence files, 1949
- Buln Buln short committee minutes, 1989-94
- Tramway employees record cards, 1968-69
- Sponsored migrants' records, 1951-69
- Richmond register of infectious and contagious diseases, 1931-49
- Correspondence with Australian Railway Union regarding industrial issues, 1968-69
- Board of inquiry into Southern Aurora Violet Town train accident, 1969
- Victorian railways accident compensation claim book & register, 1968-69
- School council employees dead books, 1965-74
- Swinburne Technical College examination results, 1948-49
- Country Roads Board minutes, 1974
- Nurse record cards, 1925-74
- Dental Board minutes and papers, 1972-73
- Royal Children's Hospital index to admission and discharge registers for in-patients, 1907-25
- Royal Children's Hospital in-patient admission and discharge register, 1922-24
- Melbourne County Court criminal presentments and final orders, 1948-49
- Royal Women's Hospital extern case book, midwifery, 1924-25
- Country Roads Board wages records, 1948-49
- Fairfield Infectious Diseases Hospital admission and discharge register of patients, 1924-25
- Ballarat Asylum admission register of patients (Dana Receiving House), 1935-49
- Ballarat Asylum discharge register (Dana Receiving House), 1936-49
- Beechworth Asylum male ward books, 1929-49
- Ballarat Asylum clinical notes and patient files, up to 1949
- Royal Park Psychiatric Hospital employee history cards, 1948-74
- Royal Melbourne Hospital secretary's and manager's subject correspondence files, 1947-1974
- Prince Henry's Hospital inpatient books, Jul 1920 to Jun 1924