



**COMMUNITY
TREASURES**



William BARAK
(c.1824–1903)
Wurundjeri leader
Untitled (Figures in corroboree) c.1900
pencil, wash, charcoal
solution, gouache and
earth pigments on paper
with a cardboard backing
RHSV Collection

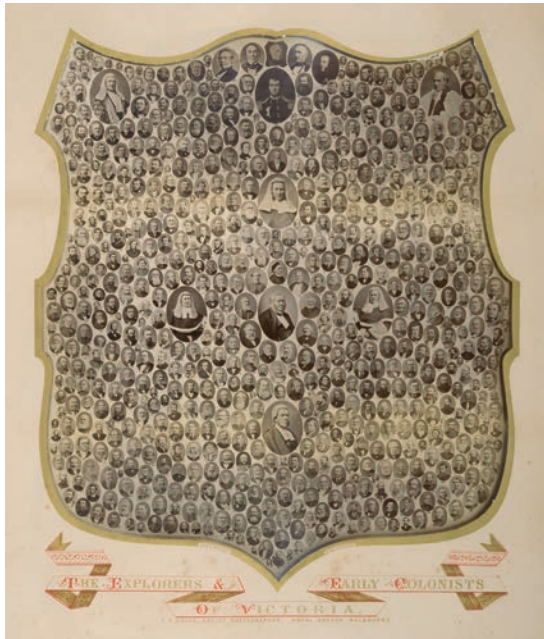
Albert Charles COOKE
Melbourne, 1882 (detail)
lithographic print
RHSV Collection

COMMUNITY TREASURES: 100 YEARS OF THE ROYAL HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF VICTORIA

The Royal Historical Society of Victoria is one of the oldest community-based collecting institutions in Melbourne.

Founded in 1909, the Society has had a continuous history for the last 100 years. Collecting policies have focussed on Victoria and its history, and members have gathered a comprehensive collection of manuscripts, artworks, photographs, ephemera and books. The Society is now the custodian of the most significant historical collection held outside the State collecting institutions.

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3. Thomas Foster CHUCK
(1826–1898)
The Explorers and Early Colonists of Victoria, 1872
photographic collage
RHSV Collection

4. JOHNSTONE,
O'SHANNESSEY & CO.
*City of Melbourne,
Jubilee of the Incorporation
of the City, 1842–1892*
photographic collage
RHSV Collection



3.

4.

5. Cecil SMITH,
graphic artist
In Freedom's Cause, c.1917
certificate
RHSV Collection

6. *Illuminated Address*
Given to Sir Arthur
Snowden by the merchants
of Melbourne when he left
the City Council in 1895
RHSV Collection

7. PARLIAMENTARY
RECRUITING
COMMITTEE,
MELBOURNE,
c.1915–1918
*Britain's strong arm
and yours will carry us
through. Enlist now!*
poster
RHSV Collection



5.



6.



7.

8. James KEARNEY,
draughtsman
David TULLOCH and
James BROWN, engravers
*Melbourne and
its Suburbs*, 1855
ink on canvas
RHSV Collection

BEGINNINGS AND ROLE

The Royal Historical Society of Victoria (the RHSV) was formed as Victoria's goldrush generation was dying. There was an urgency about its task to memorialise the early European settlers: 'the old pioneers ... who have the whole history ... in their heads.' Their reminiscences were to be sought without delay, and members were encouraged to 'write down everything you can hear ... the old people's feelings when they first landed, the impressions of their childhood. Get hold of the spirit of the time!'

The second objective of the Society was to collect and preserve 'all other information connected with the early history of Victoria'. Historians at Melbourne University under Professor Ernest Scott were encouraging students to seek out original records, the primary sources, to find out 'what actually happened'. The State Library had collected the Batman Deeds in the 1870s, but it held few other Victorian records. Scott and the historian Jessie Webb were founding members of the Society and they, along with other academic historians who joined the Society, encouraged the collection of original documents.

1. W.J. Hughston:
'Vanishing records',
Argus, 20 March 1909

The Society's founders were largely professional members of the middle classes – politicians, academics, teachers and businessmen whose families had already been in Victoria for several generations. Prominent public figures including Prime Minister Alfred Deakin, bibliographer Edward Petherick, and Speaker of the Legislative Assembly Frank Madden were founding members. Membership of the Society conferred prestige. Successful and well-established settler families embraced the new Society as a suitable place for their family records. Public men donated their papers and book collections: the first manuscripts received were the notebooks of Melbourne's earliest resident judge. The collection grew.

Family history remained important. In 1917 the Society conducted a public campaign to obtain details about families who migrated to Victoria before 1856. In 1923 it sent letters to forty newspapers





Dance Card in the shape of a fan
Cards like this were given to ladies who attended the Lord Mayor's Ball in the Exhibition Building, William Street, in 1863.
RHSV Collection



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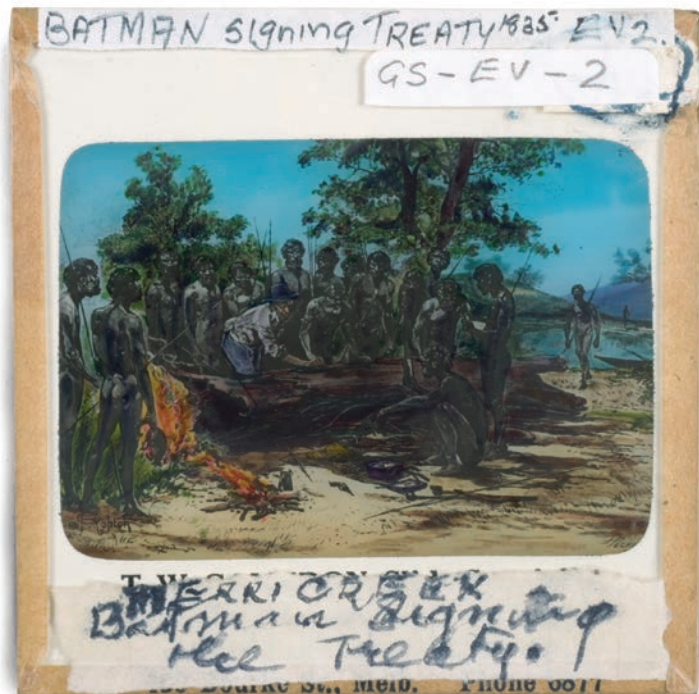


11.

10. *Juror's Pass, Melbourne International Exhibition, 1880*
This small leatherbound pass gave the holder access to the Exhibition at all times.
RHSV Collection

11. **Charles SUMMER**, designer
W. CALVERT, manufacturer, 1866
Framed gilt medallion, International Exhibition, Victoria, 1866-67
copper, cedar, glass
RHSV Collection

12. *Glass Slide 'Batman Signing Treaty'*
Part of the Isaac Selby collection of glass slides on Victorian subjects, used by him to illustrate public lectures on the settler history of nineteenth century Victoria.
RHSV Collection



12.

in Britain appealing for records relevant to Victoria, and many manuscript collections were returned to Australia. Donations began to come from less-prominent families, and the Society's collections became more democratic in nature.

The interest was wider than personal stories. The Society has always had a strong advocacy role. In 1910 members lobbied the Government to retain its old records. Over the next decades, the Society kept up its lobbying, encouraging the deposit of Government records in the State Library, and working for a 'State Records Office'. The importance of regional history was also recognised, and the Society promoted the founding of local historical societies. The RHSV has supported the formation of the National Trust, the History Council of Victoria, and the Public Records Office of Victoria.

For many years 'the pioneers' held sway. Much ink was spilt on whether John Batman or John Pascoe Fawkner was the real 'founder of Melbourne'. Members gave illustrated lectures on historical topics, organised memorials to Batman, Matthew Flinders and other famous men, conducted excursions to sites of historical interest, and promoted the study of Australian history within schools. Research papers were published in the Society's *Victorian Historical Journal* which has been produced since 1911.

Gradually the RHSV expanded its scope to include the history of businesses, landscapes, buildings and towns, professions and environments. The Society was well-placed to respond to the growth in family and social history from the 1960s, and it is now the peak body for more than three hundred local historical societies. More recently, it has published significant work on childhood, 'music, migration and multiculturalism', women's suffrage, and Melbourne's streets and lanes.

THE COLLECTION

From the beginning, the Society has received donations of manuscripts, books, pamphlets and other records from its members, and from others who have chosen the Society as the preferred home of their family's papers. The collection includes maps and early lithographs, an extensive library of Australian imprints, important personal papers, and an art collection of varied quality. The Society's research files contain newspaper cuttings and information gathered by volunteers over many years; they are arranged by subject or geographical area. The Society has also collected pamphlets, photographs, plans and ephemera, and it received the valuable collection of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia, Victorian Branch in 1920.

The reading room of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria, at 239 A'Beckett Street in the city, is a very pleasant place to work, with something of the air of a private club. Researchers have open access to the Library and the Society's research files. Access to the Society's programmes and collections is open to all, although non-members must pay a fee. The Society's members who volunteer their time are both knowledgeable and passionate about Victoria's history, and are glad to share their knowledge. Together, they have an unrivalled knowledge of Melbourne and its past.

The collections, and the volunteers who administer them, are truly among the treasures of our community.

Elizabeth Willis, curator

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Kate Prinsley, Executive Officer of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria, together with Christine Cooze, Gerardine Horgan, Daisy Searls, David Thompson, Brian Ward and other members of the Society, for their enthusiastic assistance with this exhibition. Thanks are also due to Eddie Butler-Bowdon, Program Manager, Collections, and Catherine Hockey, Collection Manager, at the City of Melbourne.

The RHSV is at 239 A'Beckett Street Melbourne. Ph: 9326 9288

Photography by Louis Porter

13. Arthur Victor GREGORY (1859–1957)
The Victorian Fleet, 1888
watercolour, pencil
and ink on paper with
a canvas backing
RHSV Collection

14. William TIBBITS
(1837–1906)
Birdseye view from Newport Estate showing Government Railway, 1882 (detail)
watercolour
RHSV Collection



13.



14.

EXHIBITION DATES

20 March – 30 June

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GALLERY TIMES

Mon 10am–2pm

Tue–Thu 11am–6pm

Fri 11am–6.30pm

Sat 10am–4pm

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FREE ADMISSION

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CITY GALLERY

Melbourne Town Hall
Swanston Street

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This exhibition was developed for the City
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