

INTRODUCING

Caroline Lovell & Susan Lloyd, Archivists, Colonial Secretary's Papers project

Caroline Lovell & Susan Lloyd commenced work in October 2002, as part of a long-term project to ensure the preservation and accessibility of the *Colonial Secretary's Papers, 1826–56*, comprising well over 2000 boxes and containing an estimated two million documents. This is the most important group of colonial records from the period before Responsible Government was established in 1856. Caroline & Susan are involved in checking and verifying the archival order of papers related to land applications to the Colonial Secretary, from 1826 to 1856.



↑ Susan Lloyd (left) and Caroline Lovell (right)

What is it about working with manuscript material that attracts you?

CAROLINE & SUSAN: It is fascinating to work on original documents dating back to the foundations of the colony and to trace the colony's development through the documents. Despite the occasional difficulty in deciphering handwriting in a manuscript, a typewritten sheet just doesn't give the same sense of history and is not as personal as manuscript material.

In this project we have the opportunity to work with material relating to famous early Australian colonists, such as Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson. It is very rewarding to know that our work on this project, which includes identifying conservation requirements, will assist in the long-term preservation of the documents as well as enabling better access for researchers.

What are some of the challenges of the project from your perspective?

CAROLINE & SUSAN: The major challenge is the scale of the project, which is estimated to take 10 years due to the sheer quantity of material. Also the complexity of arranging and identifying the relationships between the papers, so that we can reconstruct the original order and create more detailed and accurate indexes. As many of the early colonists were illiterate, they used scribes, and it can be a real challenge to identify the correct name of an applicant whose name is spelt in three different ways in their papers, which they have then signed with a mark.

PHOTOS: ALEXANDER CRAIG



Where have you worked before State Records and how do you think it has helped you with this project?

CAROLINE: I have worked at the Surrey Heritage Centre (in the UK), where some of the material dated back to the 13th century. This is where I gained most of my experience in deciphering earlier forms of handwriting and also where I learnt about 19th-century government recordkeeping in England—the system upon which the Colonial Secretary's is based.

SUSAN: I have worked in the Manuscripts Section of the Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW. My work included collections of 19th-century family papers, which contained large quantities of private and business correspondence. Working on these collections I gained experience in reading 19th-century handwriting. I also became familiar with many of the individuals applying to the Colonial Secretary for land, which is very useful for trying to unravel the complex relationships between papers and people.

What are your impressions of the process of obtaining land from the Government in the 19th century?

CAROLINE & SUSAN: The demand for land was so great during the period we are covering, 1826 to 1856, that the Colonial Secretary's office and the Surveyor General were overwhelmed by applications. The surveyors could not survey land quickly enough and deeds were often issued many years after the original grant.

The system of granting land was subject to strict regulations, which favoured free settlers, retired veterans and native-born applicants. However women and Indigenous people are poorly represented amongst land grantees; women usually only inherited land grants from their husbands or fathers.

It is also evident that it was easier to obtain land in the newly opened and more remote areas of the Colony, such as Port Phillip Bay and Moreton Bay. In the meantime, grants of land in areas such as Sydney and Parramatta were in increasing demand and were frequently changing hands during this period. Consequently the volume and complexity of paperwork increased.

What has been your most exciting 'ColSec' discovery to date?

CAROLINE: A very eloquent and passionate letter from a man called Hugh Cameron who was born in Strathearn, a valley in Scotland close to Scone. He petitioned the Colonial Secretary to name the area he settled in Strathearn in such persuasive terms that the Colonial Secretary agreed to his request. Today the parish is still called Strathearn and the nearby village Scone!

[see *State Records NSW: Colonial Secretary; CGS 907; Letters from individuals re Land, 1826-1856; letter no. 29/6352 in 2/7819 with Cameron, Hugh; reel 1106*]

SUSAN: I was excited to find an 1835 application for land by James and William Macarthur, sons of John Macarthur. At the bottom of the page is a section where the applicant is required to declare that they are free and give the name of the ship and year of their arrival. Those born in the Colony usually state that they are 'native born'. Interestingly, James and William Macarthur proudly write 'We are Australians by birth'. This is the only usage of the term Australians that I have seen in this context.

[see *State Records NSW: Colonial Secretary; CGS 907; Letters from individuals re Land, 1826-56; letter no. 35/7529 in 2/7917 with, Macarthur, James and Macarthur, William; reel 1157*]