THE RESOURCES OF THE QUEENSLAND STATE ARCHIVES FOR USE IN CREATIVE WRITING

an address given at a meeting of the Queensland Branch of the Fellowship of Australian Writers on 17 May 1966

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The preservation in a systematic way of public records in Queensland dates only from 1959. But the records go back to about 1829, five years after the first settlement was established on the Brisbane River. They are far from complete, of course, for those very early days when Brisbane was a convict outstation; a subsidiary settlement from Sydney, and established only as a place of punishment for criminals.

From the early 1840s, when free settlement was allowed in the area close to Brisbane, and when the New England squatters began to push forward into Cunningham's marvellous Darling Downs country, the records become more complete, but it is not until Queensland became a separate colony on 10 Dec 1859 that the records begin to give an adequate coverage for those matters which come under the purview of the Government.

Public records are, of course, created by public departments. There is no point in looking in public records for evidence of things which are completely outside the scope of departmental responsibility. I have been asked for information as to whether the daughter of one of our colonial governors rode astride or side-saddle. It seems to me extremely unlikely that a decision on this matter would have been made by any government department. It is therefore extremely unlikely that public records would give the answer.

On the other hand government records do preserve a great deal of information about a great number of subjects. Birth, death and marriage records tell us about the initial and the ultimate events in a person's earthly life; they do not come under my jurisdiction, except in some very isolated instances, so there is no need for me to dwell on them. Electoral rolls, on the other hand, do find a place in the Queensland State Archives, and these (from about 1864) form a valuable source of information about where people lived, and who lived where; about their occupations, and even, in some cases, their ages. However, women were not given the vote in Queensland till about 1906, and so previous to that date the electoral rolls are useful for tracing the movements of only half the population. Indeed, the further you go back, the smaller the sector of the population covered, for earlier on there were limitations in the franchise, and one had to have a property or income qualification in order to be on the roll.

Records included in the Archives are those of the Colonial Secretary's Office (later the Home Office), the Governor's Office, the Education Department, the Department of Lands and its predecessors, the Survey Office, the Works Department, the Treasury, the Premier's Office, the Justice Department, the Crown Solicitor's Office, the Supreme Court, some district Courts, the Public Curator Office, the Titles Office, the Companies Office, the Department of Harbours and Marine, the Immigration Department and many others. There are records of quite a lot of local courts, of district land offices, of mining wardens, of some shire and town councils. On the other hand there are some departments whose records we have scarcely touched. We have practically nothing from the Department of Primary Industries, and not very much from

the Mines Department. We have no records of the Native Affairs Department, though we have many references to aboriginal affairs in our Colonial Secretary's Office record group. We have nothing from the Transport Department or the Main Roads Department and very little from the Railway Department. Our records do not include much on forestry or on the work of the Irrigation and Water Supply Commission. We would certainly have accepted records from most or perhaps all of those offices, had we had space in which to accommodate them.

I suppose the members of an organisation of writers could possibly visit the Archives with a view to securing aid for either

(a) a theme,
(b) a plot, or
(c) historical information to verify particular descriptions or events to be mentioned in a historical novel.

As far as the theme is concerned, I suppose most government archivists could make certain suggestions, although these same ideas would probably occur just as readily to any other person with a knowledge of our history. If the treatment were to be purely factual, then the theme becomes the subject, and it may well happen that all the research that needs to be done will be done in the archives. The need for a plot disappears, though the need for interpretation does not. Authentication of historical details becomes of paramount importance. But treatment need not be purely factual; historical novels can be written and the theme could be life on a Queensland squatting property in the 19th century; or living with beche-de-mer fishers on the islands off Queensland's tropical coast; or the Royal Flying Doctor Service; or the "blackbirding" industry and the pioneer days of the sugar industry; or any one of many different themes that could be chosen.

As far as help with a plot is concerned, I daresay there is little likelihood of this being required. An author's plot is, or should be, very much his own work, and the archives is probably the last place he would go to if he wanted help.

There remains the problem of authentication of historical details. Authors have sometimes asked me questions such as: "Would there have been a 100-square mile cattle station near Maryborough in the 1860s?" "How would a convict assigned servant have been dressed?" "What would life have been like on a migrant ship from Great Britain to Queensland in the 1870s?" I have to try to answer them.

Answers to questions like these are sometimes found in the most unlikely places. I was once asked "Where exactly did George Elphinstone Dalrymple pitch his tent when he arrived overland with his party from Rockhampton in 1861, to establish the town of Bowen, Port Denison?" Those who enquired wanted to know the exact spot. I searched through page after page of Dalrymple's rather prosy reports. I suffered his rather sycophantic style as he addressed those superior to him. I bore with his wounded surprise when he answered charges of inefficiency that had been made against him. It was revealed that he had pitched his tent near the aboriginal wells, from which, before the coming of the white men, aborigines had drawn fresh water. A map I had showed these wells. But the precise detail I wanted was not discovered until I called at the Survey Office. In their plan room they had the original

survey plan, drawn by Clarendon Stuart in 1861. On a certain town allotment, there was clearly indicated the site of the Commissioner's Tents.

I'm not going to take on the task of writing a novel myself, but I often wonder if there is not material for a good story in many of the historical records in the Archives. A woman from New Zealand wrote to me this month, to enquire whether or not I could find a record of the arrival of an ancestor of hers, who, she thought, came to Queensland on the ship "City of Brisbane" leaving London 19 Feb 1862, and arriving here on 30 June of that year. It happens that her ancestor was not on that ship. However, I found evidence in a file[1] of the Colonial Secretary's Office records that this was an interesting voyage, and without a doubt there were some fascinating stories to be told of the 140 days the "City of Brisbane" spent at sea. She was a ship of 978 tons, belonging to Mackay, Baines & Co., and of Liverpool register. Her master was David Morris, and she brought 340 passengers and a crew of 38. There were 21 cabin passengers, 50 second class cabin passengers, and the rest were intermediate, paid steerage and Queensland Government Immigrants.

She left London, as I said, on 19 Feb 1862, and called at Plymouth, where more passengers were taken on, and which port she cleared on 25 February. She was not a ship specially chartered for the conveyance of migrants by H.M. Emigration Commissioners, so the surgeon was merely ship's doctor — he was not a Surgeon-Superintendent, with authority over the emigrants in matters of discipline. The doctor's name was Frederick Margetts, and he seems to have been a man who lacked resolution. He was dumbfounded, so he said, when additional passengers were taken on at Plymouth, and there was no room, either in the cabins, or between decks, for them. There were two hospitals on board, one forward for the steerage passengers, and government emigrants, and one aft for intermediate passengers. Both these hospitals had to be used for the accommodation of ordinary passengers. Later on, when babies were born, they were delivered in the ordinary sleeping accommodation of the passengers. There were four births on board. Yet the surgeon seems to have made no remonstrance, and his later attempts to enforce some sort of moral standard on the passengers, when they were rebuffed, seem to have led him to retire (at least figuratively) to his own cabin, and to take no further interest in any activities on board, except attending to those cases of illness which were forced upon his attention.

Early in the voyage trouble began to develop between the cabin passengers and some of the others. In the first instance it concerned only the first and second class passengers. Of these latter, Major Stevens, whose wife and eight children were also on board, became the leader. He demanded that the second class passengers should be allowed to share the poop deck with the cabin passengers. B. R. Letham, a cabin passenger, testified in an enquiry that took place after the ship arrived in Brisbane. —

> [Mr Letham, in answer to a question from the Master of the vessel] . . . Some of the second class passengers hissed me off the poop — one or two of them. When we left Plymouth there was a discussion as to our having the poop [deck], or part of . . . [it], & Mr Cross came on board & told the saloon passengers that they were to have the sole use of the poop . . . I was laid up for two or three weeks, after the vessel left Plymouth.
> [A further question from Captain Morris].

> Did Mr Pimm, Mr Landon & Major Stevens [all second class passengers] demand the poop, & did not that cause the grievance? I was two or three weeks ill, & when I came on deck, I found that the second cabin passengers had half the poop, contrary to the rules. When I was in my cabin, one of the passengers, whom I did not know, came and asked whether "Mr & Mrs Letham had any objection to the second cabin passengers having the use of one side of the poop" . . . we said we had no objection, if the other passengers were agreeable, and I was all along under the impression that the use of the poop by the second cabin passengers was a gift, till about two months after we sailed, when I found that they insisted upon it, & claimed it as a right.

Pimm, Landon and Stevens seem to have become the leaders of an upstart group. Having secured the right to use the poop deck, they began to make themselves the arbiters of conduct for the whole vessel.

Stevens gave evidence to the Board of Enquiry respecting the excessive consumption of alcohol on board ship; and one can be sure that at the time that he witnessed the events he later described he was far more vehement in his condemnation of them than he was some weeks later, in giving the following evidence before the Board:

> . . . in the first place there was a sailor's concert on the 11th of April, and on that occasion a most inordinate quantity of liquor was available, which struck us all as remarkable, because many of the passengers, who required it for medical purposes could not obtain any; where the sailors got it from we could not say. One passenger, Mr Lewis, was desperately drunk, & placed in irons that night. On the 14th of April Mr Williams & Mr Sprattley were both drunk on deck; the same thing occurred with these passengers, Mr Williams & Mr Sprattley on the 15th, the next day. On the 21st April Mr Lewis was again drunk, and placed in irons. On the 27th April, on Sunday, there was a very serious row with a sailor who was drunk, and who ill-treated the chief mate. On the 29th of April there was a meeting of the passengers in the saloon for the purpose of taking steps to prevent these disgraceful scenes occurring again. This meeting was forbidden by the Captain in the first instance, but afterwards assented to with certain restrictions, namely, that we should only go into the circumstances of the case that occurred on the Sunday previous.

The evidence on this score seems fairly conclusive, but it also seems conclusively proved that the master took measures to punish those who behaved publicly in a drunken manner. However, he seems to have been less successful (or perhaps less concerned) in suppressing evidence of sexual immorality. Major Stevens was outraged:

> I have seen a great deal of the sort of thing I have described — of men lying on the deck with women in their arms, hugging & kissing them, before young females brought up to expect other things.

Evidence of these practices is not given consistently, and one cannot be sure whether or not they happened frequently, or whether there were just occasional examples of it which sensation-loving scandal-mongers went out of their way to observe and report.

One passenger, Samuel Peach, did not see any immoralities at all, he said. In testifying before the Board he implied that the immoralities existed only in Major Stevens's mind. He was asked:

> Was there a prevalent feeling on board against Major Stevens for protesting against these immoralities?

and he answered:—

> There was a feeling among the whole of us against him. — he interfered in every possible way. If we did not dress ourselves up for a ball, he grumbled about our going on the poop.

He was asked:

> What do you mean by dressing yourselves up for a ball?

His reply was:

> If we went with only a shirt & trousers on, and a band round the waist, and a straw hat, he did not consider it respectable, and I think that costume was very convenient when we were on the line.

Not only Peach, but quite a number of others objected to Stevens's conduct, and the Major was well aware of this.

> The only [other] thing I wanted to mention [he said in evidence] was one that I doubt whether I could bring before the Board — namely, the circumstance of a meeting having been held by twenty-two gentlemen on board the ship, at which my conduct was criticised and called disgraceful. I am aware that Captain Morris knew that the meeting was to take place — whether he sanctioned it or not I could not tell . . . Two of the officers were present at the meeting and voted . . .
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> What was meant by your "disgraceful conduct"? My conduct was called disgraceful in the paper published on board my conduct was called, I think, disgraceful. It was said that I had endeavoured to make the voyage as disagreeable to everybody as possible . . .
> I was considered a leading individual among the party who set their face against anything indecent and improper.

The paper published on board was called "The Times", and the editor was a man named Maclaren. He was an opponent of the Major, and found an opportunity to annoy and even to scandalize his enemy through the columns of "The Times". The Stevens family lived in a house on deck, and one night about midnight a passerby noticed a young man, who was later identified as a 2nd class passenger named Stanley Hill, with his head inside the cabin window. Hill had developed an amorous interest in one of Major Stevens's daughters, and was talking to her as she lay in bed. Maclaren published a reference to this in "The Times", but he did not openly accuse Hill of being the culprit. Stevens takes up the story before the Board of Enquiry.

> My attention was called by Mr Hill himself to an article that appeared in the paper published on board the ship, in which it was stated that a person had been seen at one of the cabin windows of the house on deck. I afterward found that Mr Hill was the party alluded to: there being other persons present, Mr Hill at first denied his having been there: he, however, immediately afterwards sent for me privately, and acknowledged that such was the case — that he had been speaking to my daughter late at night . . . He expressed great

> sorrow and contrition for his indiscretion, and apologised for it; he said he was very much attached to my daughter, & that his intentions were perfectly honorable. I gave him full credit for that, because I knew him to be a thorough gentleman, but at the same time I prohibited any further communication between him and my family, while on board. Since landing he has asked my permission to visit my family, & I have granted it.

Hill had a habit of appearing to deny charges that were laid against him. During the enquiry, the Captain asked him:—

> Were you at Miss Stevens's window between one and two o'clock on a certain morning, with your head and shoulders inside the window?

Summoning up all his righteous indignation, Hill replied:—

> No, I could swear that I was not; my head was in, but not my shoulders.

Stanley's brother Cecil was also on board, and he corroborated much that other witnesses said about the immorality on board. The Chairman of the Board asked him:—

> Have you ever seen women in what you would call an indecent position for persons in respectable society?

He answered:—

> I have seen them under the same rug with men, in fact, they were so covered, that I could hardly see, but I have known that they were there, covered up by the rug.
> Am I to presume [he was asked] it was very cold weather, that they were covered up by the men's rugs?
> No [he replied], it was some time just after we crossed the line.

Another passenger, Thomas Hodgson, was more coy. "I have seen [disgusting scenes] all through the voyage. I have been so disgusted that I have not known where to put my face."

The Major also brought forward evidence on this score.

> I should like to state this: we occupied a house on deck, and the top of that house was called by the people on board the Haymarket, on the top of that house parties used to be guilty of all sorts of acts of impropriety. On the 11th of May I asked whether parties were allowed on deck after ten o'clock, and was told that they were, if they made no noise.

A great deal seemed to depend, in the minds of the Board, on the origin of the name Haymarket. Those who came forward with evidence to support Captain Morris were sure that it was so called because there was, in the early part of the voyage, some hay stored there. Others averred that it was called Haymarket in reference to the disreputable part of London of that name, and because of association between that part of London and the "oldest profession". Similarly, there was a cabin occupied by six single Scottish girls, and this was referred to as "The Bush", presumably because it reminded some of the passengers of a Glasgow house of ill fame called by that name. If witnesses suggested that these associations existed, the Board was inclined to accept their evidence. If they testified that, to the best of their belief, the names "Haymarket" and "Bush" had been quite innocently conferred on these places, the Board tended to reject their evidence as untrue, or to excuse it as having come

from "a countryman from Yorkshire who had never seen the Haymarket in London in his life".

There were witnesses, however, who stood by the Captain and affirmed that the ship was a model of propriety. H. Stockham, one of the steerage passengers, answered an unequivocal "Yes" to the question "In your judgement . . . do you think the ship 'City of Brisbane' . . . was a pattern of morality, propriety and decency?" Some passengers had great personal regard for Captain Morris. Mrs Talbot gave her evidence without hesitation:—

> I am one among many others, who can say that they had no complaint whatever to make. I experienced a great deal of kindness from the Captain — I was very seriously ill, and received great kindness from him, and used to have things sent me from his own table: he even fetched with his own hands the sponge he used himself, to sponge me with, because I had none myself . . .

Even the sanction that was given to passengers between decks to sleep on top of the deck in the hot weather — the very thing that some passengers considered the cause of much immorality — was considered by some to be an act of kindness on the Captain's part. Maclaren, the Editor of the newspaper on board, said that Morris had shown great compassion "in allowing them to sleep on deck, instead of in the crowded berths; many women were carried up fainting, and, had they been kept below, the consequences would have been serious." Other witnesses added that many passengers would have died had the Captain not allowed them to sleep on deck. It was a voyage quite free from deaths, and, as it lasted longer than the average of such voyages, and the ship was, by all accounts, very crowded, it is somewhat remarkable that no fatality occurred on board. It would seem unlikely that the credit for this death-free voyage could be given to the surgeon, for much evidence, both that favourable to the captain and that tending to discredit him, agreed that the surgeon had done less than his duty towards the sick. Medicines were probably not in short supply (though evidence on this point is contradictory) but it was often hard for the poorer passengers to get issues of these comforts. Two witnesses at least testified to the fact that, if the purser (whose job it was to issue medicines on the doctor's prescription) were asked for any, his invariable reply was "Go to hell!"

A lot of the time at the enquiry was devoted to trying to discover whether or not the Captain carried on an improper relationship with a married female passenger, whose husband was also on board. It is interesting to note that the husband, whose name was Williams, gave very vehement testimony in support of the Captain. Whether he was a deceived husband, or whether he did not mind the attentions his wife received from the Captain, or whether it was a very much exaggerated affair is not clear. However, the Captain was concerned to show that he observed at least the minimum proprieties. After the ship had discharged her passengers in Brisbane, some of them, including Mrs Williams, found it hard to locate accommodation on shore. The Captain searched around the city on her behalf, and booked her into the North Australian Hotel. The Board of Enquiry wanted to know whether or not this was also the Captain's place of residence in Brisbane. He replied that Mrs Williams had one of the rooms below, but he had a room upstairs.

The Board of Enquiry was called in consequence of a letter written by some of the passengers to the Immigration Agent, A. C. Kemball. At first, the

passengers' complaint seemed to relate to "ill-treatment they had received". The Board that assembled, however, was concerned about "the alleged gross immoralities and abuses which existed" on board the vessel. There were twenty-two signatories to the petition. The witnesses before the Board were not, however, mostly people who supported the petition. There were fifty-seven witnesses altogether; the evidence of four of these may be considered neutral; that of fifteen may be considered on the whole to react to the Captain's discredit; and that of thirty-seven may be considered as tending to exonerate him. The other witness was the Captain himself. The surgeon's evidence was equivocal to say the least, and has been counted as one of the neutral ones.

The Board met on eight separate days during July, and presented its report on the last day of that month. Members of the Board were A. W. Manning, of the Colonial Secretary's Office, Dr Hobbs, the Health Officer for Brisbane, and A. C. Kemball. The Board admitted that

> they have found it expedient, in the conduct of this investigation, to depart in many instances . . . from the rules observed in judicial examination, and to admit hearsay, and much collateral evidence, the exclusion of which would have materially weakened their means of arriving at truth.

This might have been expressed in other terms. The Board could have admitted that they were intent upon proving Captain Morris guilty of gravely immoral conduct, and of having condoned a lot of irresponsible behaviour, so they admitted all sorts of evidence that tended to prove these accusations, and ignored a lot of evidence that tended to disprove them. Many of the Board's questions were loaded ones. For instance, the Chairman asked one witness (who was clearly hostile towards the Captain) "Have you anything more to say, on this particular subject, of the immoral and disgusting scenes, & the drunkenness that took place on board?" This was on the first day of the enquiry, when the only other witness who had given evidence was also highly hostile towards the captain, and only one incident of drunkenness had been brought to the Board's attention.

The way in which the Board sought to extract hearsay evidence is well illustrated in the following question, asked of a passenger called John J. Brown, who had already stated that he had no personal knowledge, from his own observation, of any immoral conduct on board:—

> Are you aware that it was notorious on board, and a matter of discussion, observation and conversation, that the scenes alluded to in the petition took place — are you aware that they were notoriously talked of, whether you witnessed them or not?

To this, Brown replied "Oh, most decidedly so".

In view of this prejudice relating to the matter before it, it is scarcely surprising that the Board arrived at the decision that the "City of Brisbane" was a ship "where unbridled licentiousness, an uninterrupted course of demoralisation, in fact, seems to have prevailed". They said that their conclusions led them to regard

> the Master of the "City of Brisbane" as the most unfitting person that could possibly be selected to have charge of a vessel carrying a number of people of both sexes — The Board venture to express a hope that you [i.e. the Colonial Secretary] will take steps in order to deprive him of the opportunity of ever again serving in the like, or any other capacity.

So ended an enquiry which might well not have been held. There was no specifically-stated charge against David Morris under the Navigation Acts. At this stage no gratuity could be paid to masters, surgeons or matrons on the satisfactory completion of migrant voyages (this system was introduced later) so there was no bonus which they could refrain from paying over to the master. The "City of Brisbane" had not been chartered by H.M. Emigration Commissioners, so this latter body was not in a position to refrain from engaging Morris as the master of one of its chartered vessels. The owners of the vessel might well have been informed of the Board's recommendation but it is to be hoped that, rather than act on this, they first of all took the trouble to institute an impartial enquiry.

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1. Colonial Secretary's Office in-letter 1994 of 1862. COL/A31.

BOOK REVIEWS

Guide to the State Archives of New South Wales. Record Groups NBNE and NDSB. The Administration of Education under Two Boards, 1848-66: A Preliminary Inventory of the Records of the Board of National Education and the Denominational School School Board. Sydney, the Archives Authority of N.S.W., 1966.

The inventory itself should prove a useful guide for students wishing to study the earlier educational system in N.S.W. Not only does the Inventory make the files more easily accessible by providing a key to the description of the various records, but it also gives what appears to be a comprehensive account of the contents of the various files, which should act as an incentive, and an enormous time-saving device for the would-be student.

From experience, I would say that many students are uncertain as to what they wish to study; many others have definite ideas, but they are confronted by a lack of meaningful material. These predicaments are both discouraging and time-consuming. Because they now have a guide in such an historically interesting field as education, students will now be able to see just what records are available, whether the records are pertinent to the questions they have in mind, and how they should set about using them.

The inventory is preceded by a twenty-one page introductory account of the history of the two Boards. The emphasis is placed on the administrative initiative and creativity against a back-drop of a rather apathetic and not too generous society.

The Churches were our first educators. By 1838 there was a duplicate system of financial assistance on the part of the Government — one whereby the Government paid the master's salary, and a half-penny a day for each child whose parents could not afford to pay school fees — the other being a pound for pound subsidy system to the various churches. A Church had to have a minimum of £300 in hand before it could receive assistance for a school.