

THE LA TROBE LIBRARY

State Library of Victoria

BY PATRICIA REYNOLDS, B.A., A.L.A.A.

Librarian-in-charge, La Trobe Library.

Although the La Trobe Library opened its doors for the first time on 29 March, 1965, plans for its establishment were initiated as early as 1951. At that time, and at the suggestion of Professor R. M. Crawford, the Committee established to recommend the most fitting means of celebrating the Centenary of the State of Victoria, proposed that a new Library should be built to house the Australiana collections of the Public (now State) Library. This was intended as an enduring monument to the pioneers of Victoria, which would also provide encouragement and facilities for the study of Australian history and literature, and awaken a sense of responsibility among Victorians for preserving the records of the past.

With the acceptance of the suggestion by the Government, and the Trustees of the Public Library of Victoria, the foundation stone was laid on 2 July, 1951, by the then Premier, the Hon. J. G. B. McDonald, M.L.A. Building operations began in 1962 and finished in 1964. After some months in use, the new Library was officially opened by the Premier of Victoria, the Hon. Sir Henry Bolte, M.L.A., on 6 September, 1965.

The La Trobe Library performs the dual role of providing a popular reference service, in a ground floor reading room with books on open access, in addition to servicing the "research" collections, for access to which a Reader's Ticket admits to a restricted reading room on the first floor. In addition to book and newspaper stacks, special rooms house the Pictorial Collection, the Manuscript Collection, and the collection bequeathed to the Library by the late J. K. Moir, a well known Victorian collector of Australiana. A large Exhibition Hall on the ground floor, equipped with specially designed show cases and screens, provides facilities for changing displays on different themes. The building also houses the public records held by the Archives Division, which is administered by the Senior Archivist, Mr H. Nunn, but all other collections are the responsibility of the La Trobe Librarian.

The geographical scope of these collections covers not only Australia, but New Zealand, New Guinea, the South Pacific and the Antarctic, and physically they fall naturally into four main groups — books and pamphlets, newspapers, pictorial material and manuscripts. While the latter are obviously more pertinent to the interests of readers of *Archives and Manuscripts*, some brief account of the strength and organisation of the collections which support them, may also be of interest.*

The Book Collection

Some 9,000 volumes of Australian history and literature were previously housed in a small "Australian Reading Room" in the main Reference Library. An effective collection of some 40,000 volumes has now been brought together in the La Trobe Library, and the process of extracting these from the Reference Library's holdings and organising them for effective use in the new building, was one of the major initial tasks confronting the

* A valuable summary of Victorian historical resources is to be found in C. A. McCallum's "Historical Sources in the Public Library", in *Victorian Historical Magazine*, Vol. 29, No. 2, May 1959.

staff, particularly since this was necessarily accomplished with very little interruption to readers' services. Subject fields such as discovery and exploration, history and travel, biography, native peoples, language and literature, together with related bibliographies and indexes, were comparatively easily identified. To these were added general periodicals, directories and electoral rolls, parliamentary papers, debates and gazettes. To these again, it was necessary to add related historical works in other subject fields such as theology, banking, geology, mining, architecture, etc., which in themselves, remained the responsibility of the Reference Library. Usage in the La Trobe Library and in the Reference Library, is proving that this has been accomplished to a more successful degree than was first thought possible. However, in many cases, the servicing in the La Trobe Library of important works basic to Australian historical studies, is made possible only by comparatively easy access to the reference Library's collections — for example, to British Parliamentary papers, to sets of collected voyages and series such as those of the Hakluyt Society, to the proceedings of the Royal Societies, to British Admiralty charts, and many other works.

While the depth of the Library's Victorian holdings is due principally to the legal provision for deposit in the State Library of a copy of all works published in Victoria, which has existed since 1869, the foundations of the collection were undoubtedly laid in the earliest days of the Library's existence — the first important purchase, for instance, when the Library opened in 1856, was Gould's *Birds of Australia*, bought for £140. In those days too, the Library acquired the first Victorian imprints, the *Melbourne Union Benefit Society: Articles and Rules*, 1839, and George Arden's *Latest Information with Regard to Australia Felix*, 1840. Subsequent decades laid the foundations of the basic collection of all the principal works in Australian history, biography, travel and exploration, and of the collection of Australian literature. The bequest of the J. K. Moir Collection in 1958 greatly strengthened the Library's holdings of Australian poetry and fiction, many of the volumes being signed copies with author's annotations, and also of the works of Australian private presses.

In addition to the current purchase by the State Library of all Australian publications not lodged under the Legal Deposit provision, the collection of La Trobe Library material should be strengthened by the recent addition to the staff of the Acquisitions Department of the State Library, of a Legal Deposit Officer, enabling a closer supervision to be exercised over the lodging in the Library of Victorian publications — especially those privately printed and ephemeral items often difficult to acquire through normal channels. Current bibliographies and numerous journals are regularly checked for La Trobe material, and the staff is also endeavouring to fill gaps in the holdings by regular checking of Australian and overseas booksellers' catalogues, by the systematic checking of Ferguson's *Bibliography of Australia*, and the compilation of lists of works still required — which are to be distributed to booksellers and local collectors. The Library is fortunate that several well known collectors are interesting themselves in building up the collection, and a number of rare volumes have been lent for copying by Messrs Ivo and Rollo Hammet, the Hon. S. Merrifield and others.

The Catalogue

Owing to the maintenance of a separate card catalogue of the State Library's Australian holdings, begun in the last century, some basis for a La Trobe Library catalogue of books and pamphlets already existed.

Many entries however, still bore the old "fixed location" symbols abandoned many years ago with the introduction of the Dewey Decimal Classification, and were handwritten on non-standard cards. Some months before the La Trobe Library opened, the Catalogue Department of the State Library, which is still responsible for all La Trobe Library cataloguing, began a revision of this Australian catalogue, without which it would not have been possible to provide public access to any form of modern card catalogue in the ground floor Reading Room of the new building. The revision provides very full bibliographical entries, annotations and notes on authors, and many newly introduced subject headings, while the adoption of period and geographic extensions to D.D.C. (together with modifications, mainly for literature and children's books), provides a much closer classification of material — nowhere more marked perhaps, than in the re-grouping of local histories by regions. But it is necessarily a long term project, and not yet complete. Eventually it should enable the publication of a book catalogue of the State Library's Australian holdings. Meanwhile, the catalogue available in the La Trobe Library itself, is in two sequences — the newly revised catalogue, and the diminishing older Australian catalogue, but all entries are incorporated also in the main Reference Library catalogue, and the staff have access to this by an "inter-com" system at each service point.

The Newspaper Collection

Some 20,000 volumes of newspapers have been moved into an electrically operated compactus stack in the new building. This includes all holdings of Australian newspapers up to and including 1920, later files being housed in the basement of the State Library's building. The collection is obviously strongest in Victorian metropolitan and country newspapers, beginning with Melbourne's first paper, Fawkner's *Melbourne Advertiser*, 1838, and is known through the *Union List of Newspapers in Australian Libraries*, but large holdings of interstate papers include interesting files of comparatively rare papers such as the *Pastoral Times* (Deniliquin), the *Australian Republican* (Charters Towers), the *King Island Record* (Currie), and others.

A systematic attempt is being made to fill gaps in the holdings of Victorian newspapers, and microfilm has recently been made, for instance, of a long outstanding gap in the *Geelong Advertiser*, 1849-50, 1852-57, but the Library still lacks the issues for 1851. Similarly, work is being done on microfilming files of Portland and Port Fairy papers not previously held, and it is hoped that in the next few years, if the papers are available in Australia, other gaps will be filled in the same way. A detailed card catalogue of newspaper holdings is maintained in the Library, and there is also available, in typescript, a useful chronological listing of Victorian papers.

So far as newspaper indexing is concerned, the La Trobe Library holds the index to the *Argus*, 1846-58, compiled by the late Mr J. A. Feely, former Chief Librarian, and the C. A. Cooper index to early Port Phillip newspapers. A substantial and growing card index to illustrations in the nineteenth-century weeklies such as the *Australasian Sketcher*, the *Illustrated Australian News*, etc. provides some lead to the news of the day, since the engravings were invariably accompanied by text. It is intended to carry on this index up to 1910, when the published index to the *Argus* begins. A "Biography Index" now containing some 50,000

entries, is largely based on obituaries and biographies in Victorian newspapers, though material from periodicals is now being included.

Pictorial Collection

The main collection of paintings, drawings, engravings and photographs is located on the third floor of the new building, while some 500 large framed pictures are housed in a Picture Store in the State Library basement. A large part of the collection is arranged by subject in the flat drawers of map cases, while portraits are arranged alphabetically in vertical files. Framed pictures are housed on numbered wire mesh screens, and on specially built shelving. In addition, a compactus stack area houses bound volumes of prints and photographs, many hundreds of boxes of glass slides and negatives, and certain objects of historical interest which the Library has acquired over the years. A card catalogue provides a subject index, and entries for painters and engravers, and in some cases — where identifiable — for photographers.

Considerable attention is being paid to the restoration, cleaning, mounting and — where suitable — framing, of pictures, with original material being given priority. A number of valuable oil paintings have been cleaned by Mr Harley Griffiths, and some of these now hang on the walls of the Reading Rooms. Items most frequently used for reference purposes, are being mounted and encased in transparent envelopes for preservation.

The collection is strong in original Victorian works of S. T. Gill, Robert Russell, Eugène von Guerard, W. F. E. Liardet, William Strutt, Henry Burn, and other early painters, in engravings by Ham, Thomas, Cogie, Calvert; in photographs by Fauchery, Caire, Lindt, Nettleton and others; while the shipping material is greatly strengthened by the collections of Malcolm Brodie, A. C. Green, and David Little.

Acquisitions are mostly by donation, but works are also bought from private individuals, dealers, and auction rooms. A Kodak-Retinette camera has been bought for the use of the staff, and photographs have been taken of historic sites and buildings.

Map Collection

Housed in the same area is the Australian Map Collection, at present being transferred to "Vertiplan" cases. Provision for a Map Catalogue, attached to the State Library's Catalogue Department, has recently been made, but the re-organisation and cataloguing of the Map Collection has not yet been possible.

Australian Manuscript Collection

While many of the Library's larger holdings will be known to scholars through the *Guide to Manuscripts in Australian Libraries*, much still remains to be done in organising the collection for effective use by the provision of a card catalogue and by the provision of inventories (accompanied by indexes where necessary); and other guides to the different collections of papers. A number of large collections still await detailed processing, including the papers of J. J. Shillinglaw, J. P. Fawcner, Redmond Barry and George Coppin, but with the establishment of the new Library, there is provision for the first time; for staff who can devote their undivided attention to the manuscripts (in fact, much useful work is already being done on some of the older collections such as the Henry Gyles Turner papers and the Louis Lavater collection), and it is expected that considerable progress will be achieved in the next few years. Indeed it is through the

Manuscript Collection and its expansion, that the La Trobe Library might expect to make its most significant contribution to local historical and literary studies.

The collection at present amounts to approximately 1,540 running feet of shelving. A "roneod" catalogue to the Private Collection (as it was previously called, to distinguish it from the public records now in the Archives Division) is long out of print, but provides some guide to the smaller collections not included in the Union Guide, and it is hoped that the new card catalogue in the course of preparation, will form the basis for a printed catalogue of manuscript holdings. This new card catalogue will be housed in the restricted first floor Reading Room, where "research" collections are used, and will give brief descriptive notes, an indication of inventories, indexes, etc. available, and will also include brief entries for unsorted collections awaiting detailed processing.

When sorting of a collection has been completed, documents are numbered and placed between double foolscap sheets, collections of these being filed in envelopes which are housed in boxes and shelved "flat". Each box is numbered, the envelope and box number being the location symbol noted on the catalogue entry. Collections of records held in bound volumes are interspersed with boxed collections, and shelves and bays are numbered. Inventories to the collections are housed in vertical files.

Special application must be made to use the manuscripts, and a brief statement of the purpose for which access is required, helps to pinpoint the relevant papers and save unnecessary handling. Xeroxing and photo-printing of much used collections such as the Gipps-La Trobe correspondence, and of the most valuable early diaries and journals, proceeds steadily, and contributes to the preservation of the collections.

The new Library has undoubtedly given impetus to the acquisition of manuscripts, and the 1965/66 Annual Report of the State Library, the first to include the La Trobe Library as a separate Department, shows that 164 collections were added in that period as against 81 for the previous year. These included interesting Victorian material relevant to labour history, such as the Federated Brick, Tile and Pottery Industrial Union's Minute Books (1900-1950); Federated Engine Drivers' and Firemen's Association of Australia, Minute Books (1921-1949); Australian Tramway Employees' Association's, Minute Books (1911-1932), and a collection of tape recordings donated by the Hon. S. Merrifield, M.L.C. Other comparatively recent acquisitions include the papers of the Association of Professional Engineers, and the papers of Francis Henty and John Lang Currie.

Tape-recording equipment has enabled the recording of a number of interviews with Australian writers and artists, and through the generous assistance of Mrs. Douglas Carnegie, manuscripts of Australian painters are being acquired in greater depth, supplementing records such as those of the Victorian Artists' Society, held for many years. (Supplementing the manuscripts on Australian Art, but supervised by the Art Room staff of the Reference Library, is rapidly increasing collection of exhibition catalogues, some of them briefly annotated by the artists, and of considerable value to future historians in this field). Music manuscripts of Dorian Le Gallienne, and Clive Douglas are also comparatively recent additions to the La Trobe Library Collection.

Microfilming of Victorian material held in other libraries, is limited by finance, but through the courtesy of the Mitchell Library and National Library, film has been obtained of C. J. Tyers papers, records of the

Victorian Socialist Party, Burke and Wills papers supplementing the La Trobe Library's own important collection of this Expedition, and other useful records. From material in private hands, microfilm has been made of the Log Books and Smeaton Journals of Capt. John Hepburn, the war diaries of General Brudenell White, and innumerable smaller items.

The Jungwirth *Report of the Board of Inquiry into Library Services in Victoria* states:

“State supported institutions, such as universities, should channel Victorian historical and literary manuscript material to the La Trobe Library, rather than establish fragmentary collections of their own”

and it is hoped that the new premises and facilities in the La Trobe Library will encourage them to do so.

Publications Programme —

It is proposed to publish, as a La Trobe Library Series, some of the important manuscript holdings which have not appeared previously in print. This has been made possible by a gift from the Carlton and United Breweries Ltd., of \$15,000 over a five-year period. An Advisory Committee, on which historians, Professor A. G. L. Shaw, Dr. G. Serle, and Mr. P. L. Brown, are included, has been appointed to consider the choice of manuscripts and suitable scholars to edit them for publication. Until publishing arrangements have been made, however, it is not possible to announce any details of the programme, but the first two works have been planned in detail, and further publications will be chosen from amongst some thirty items under discussion.

Friends of the La Trobe Library

A “Friends of the La Trobe Library” Society was formed on 16 November, 1966, with the principle objects of assisting the collecting activities of the Library, and stimulating interest in its affairs. It is planned to publish a Bulletin, perhaps twice a year, giving scholarly articles about the collections, accessions lists, and wants lists, with news of the Library and the Society. At the time of writing, the first General Meeting has yet to be held, but although only in its infancy, the Society is being received with considerable enthusiasm.

Exhibitions.

Exhibitions are proving successful means of attracting interest in the Library and displaying under very safe conditions, rare works from the collections not normally seen by the general public. Each has resulted in useful donations. The first Exhibition was the “Centenary of Bernard O’Dowd” and included the O’Dowd-Walt Whitman correspondence and original manuscripts of the poet. This was followed by “Victoria — the First Years” which covered the earliest discovery, exploration and settlement and included some of the earliest manuscripts — e.g., the Port Phillip Association papers, the “Batman Deeds”, and the journals of Batman, Todd and Wedge. “La Trobe’s Melbourne, 1839-1854” and “The Early Years of Ballarat” have followed, both displaying over 300 items, and have attracted large attendances and interest.

Hours of Opening

The Library is open on Mondays from 2 p.m. - 10 p.m., and Tuesdays-Fridays, 10 a.m. - 5 p.m., and not the full six days a week (10 a.m. - 10 p.m.) as the Reference Library. If the staff establishment is increased in the future, it is expected that the La Trobe Library's hours of opening will be reviewed.