

CONGREGATIONAL ARCHIVAL MATERIAL IN AUSTRALIA

by

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Until they are reminded that covetousness is not a Christian virtue Australian Congregationalists tend to go green with envy when they contemplate the possibilities open to nationally or regionally structured churches for centralizing their archives. As inheritors of a tradition in which emphasis is laid on the autonomy of the local congregation they have learned that it is only by a process of persuasive eloquence that local source material can be lured into central repositories. And they have also learned that eloquence, like patriotism, is not necessarily enough. Much of the material for the construction of Australian Congregational history remains, without guarantee of safety, in the vestries of local churches or even in the china cabinets of local church officers. It is hardly possible to write of Congregational archives in any technical sense; all that can be done is to locate and describe the major primary sources for a denominational history.

The first Congregational church was established in Hobart in 1830, but, prior to that event there is a 'pre-history' in which individual Congregationalists were active and not unimportant from 1798 to 1830. The evidence for this period is fragmentary but reasonably copious. The story belongs largely to agents of the London Missionary Society who were resident in New South Wales as refugees from the South Pacific or were detained in the colony for varying periods on their way to or from the islands. Documentation of their activities is to be found mainly in their correspondence and in their reports to London. It has been examined and interpreted by Joseph King¹ and the present writer².

The London Missionary Society³ was founded in 1795 to take 'the Glorious Gospel of the Blessed God to the Heathen'. While very many of the early European inhabitants of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land might well have been reckoned within that category, the Society did not consider that its mandate ran to them. However, when non-heathen individual Congregationalists appeared in the colonies they had no other organized body of fellow-churchmen in Britain to which they could turn for assistance. In consequence the bulk of the archival material for this period is held by the L.M.S. in London, particularly in the collections labelled 'Australia', 'Drafts of Letters to N.S.W.', 'Home Letters', 'Home Odds', 'Journals — Australia', 'Journals — South Seas', 'Miscellaneous Documents', 'South Seas Letters', 'South Seas Odds', 'South Seas Personal', and in items scattered through other files. To these must be added the Board Minutes, Minutes of the Committee of Examination (later the Candidates' Committee), and Candidates' Papers. As a facility for research all these papers are now available in microfilm in the National Library, Canberra⁴. A fair selection of copies and extracts is held by the Mitchell Library, Sydney, in the Bonwick Transcripts (Missionary Papers), and that Library's holdings of the Hassall, Haws, Lang and Marsden Papers, the South Seas Missions MSS, and the Hassall Correspondence, add primary sources not necessarily available in London.

From 1830 Congregationalism was represented in Australia by churches of its own faith and order, but its adherents continued to look to England for help. The foundation of the Congregational Union of England and Wales in 1832 and, in particular, the establishment of the associated Colonial Missionary Society in 1836, obviated the necessity of seeking the good offices of the L.M.S. But the habit of corresponding with and reporting to the Society had become so deeply ingrained that its archives can be consulted profitably for several decades beyond 1830.

From 1836 the papers of the Colonial Missionary Society⁵ provide major source material for Australian Congregationalism. Unfortunately the records are incomplete. It is rumoured that, when office shelves and files were becoming cluttered at the end of the last century, a secretary allowed the destruction of practically all the nineteenth century correspondence and minute books; the minutes for the period 1836-69 miraculously survived the holocaust. There is, however, a complete range of printed Annual Reports. It would be expected that these would contain digests of the transactions recorded in the destroyed minutes, and they do. But, even more valuably, the Reports retain long selections from the reports of colonial missionaries. At the not infrequent junctures where Australian records are defective (as, for instance, in Queensland) these Reports are often the only sources available⁶.

Exhaustive research would involve consultation of the Minute Books of up to a thousand local churches, living and defunct. These books provide the parish plump material, but it is in the papers of colonial or State Congregational Unions that the synoptic view is more nearly possible. In spite of emphasis on local autonomy the churches voluntarily formed such Unions to co-ordinate and extend their work.

The first Union was brought into being in Van Diemen's Land in 1837, less than half a dozen years after its prototype in England and Wales. Perhaps it is the pride of Tasmanian Congregationalists in their comparative colonial antiquity that has led them to preserve their records probably more completely than elsewhere in the Commonwealth. The Tasmanian Union holds intact its full range of Minute Books, supplementing them with those of its Missionary Society from 1832 to 1880, and its Home Mission Board since 1932. Alongside these it has preserved the second Minute Book (1839-44) of the V.D.L. Colonial Missionary and Christian Instruction Society formed in 1834 as an interdenominational home missionary agency, but with such dominant Congregational participation that in 1842 it became a denominational body⁷. Year Books were published by the Union with reasonable regularity from 1870 until 1930 (with a further edition in 1963) and, with some missing issues, a fair range is held in the Union office in Hobart.

The Tasmanian Union does not itself hold files of locally published denominational periodicals. These were limited to the *Tasmanian Messenger* (1859-68), the *Tasmanian Independent* (1870-73) and the [Tasmanian] *Christian Witness* (1872-77, 1878), and must be consulted in public collections.

In the course of checking holdings for this article it was discovered that a large collection of letters and reports had been held for many years by a private family in Hobart; the collection has now been handed to the Union for safe keeping. It contains 433 items and covers

correspondence from Congregational missionaries at work in the island for the period 1838-56. As this was the era of the churches' most rapid expansion the correspondence, upon examination, should yield much additional information. To this valuable collection must be added the recently rediscovered manuscript volume which appears to be the personal record of Frederick Miller, the first Congregational minister to serve in Australia; it covers events from his arrival in 1830 until 1861, the year prior to his death.

A short-lived Congregational church was formed in Sydney in 1810, but it was not until 1833 that the first persisting church emerged. The number of churches in New South Wales increased very slowly over the first quarter of a century and their members appear to have been somewhat reluctant to enter into co-operative enterprises. Ultimately a Home Missionary Society was formed in 1850, but it was not until 1866 that the Congregational Union of N.S.W. was established. Once established it maintained its activities with commendable consistency. One result of such consistency is that it has preserved its Minute Books, its Year Books (from 1876), and its files of denominational journals in reasonably complete series. Of the latter, the *N.S.W. Independent*, first published in 1875, merged into the *Australian Independent* for the period 1888-1905, and re-emerged as the [N.S.W.] *Congregationalist* from 1906 to 1968.

In 1909 the N.S.W. Union created a Historical Committee which, across the years, gathered material on the local churches in that State. The Committee disbanded a few years ago, and its fairly large collection of miscellaneous papers has been transferred to the Mitchell Library.

Victoria was still the Port Phillip district of New South Wales when, in 1838, the Rev. William Waterfield, the district's first Congregational minister, arrived in Melbourne. There, as in Sydney after the foundation of the initial church, progress was slow. In 1852 a Union was formed, but, from its inception its proceedings were less than harmonious because of conflict of opinion on the propriety of receiving State aid in the form of land-grants, and it was on this issue that the Union foundered in 1856. A new Union was entered into in 1860 and has persisted. It holds its series of Minute Books, including that of the unsuccessful Union of 1852-56. The first Year Book was published (under the rather pretentious title of *The Australasian Congregational Year Book and Calendar*) in 1867 and the Union holds a complete set of them. With the assent of other Unions the first Congregational periodical was produced in Victoria under the title of the *Southern Spectator* and was published from 1857 to 1859. It was followed by the *Victorian Independent* (1870-1943) which then became the *Southern Congregationalist* (covering Victorian and Tasmanian interests) and finally appeared from 1960 to 1968 simply as *The Congregationalist* with news coverage for Victoria, Tasmania, Western Australia and Nauru. The Union holds files of its journals from 1870 with a gap of half a dozen years in the 1890s.

The first South Australian church was founded by Thomas Quinton Stow in 1837 and, largely under his inspiration, a Union was formed in 1849. Across its first century its records became massive and in the 1940s an honorary archivist was appointed and a serious attempt was made to sort, file and catalogue the papers. This archival material is held at present at Parkin College, Kent Town, but the College will be transferring

to a new site in the near future. The impending removal temporarily prevents complete access to the books and documents held. Subject to the proviso that items missing in a recent incomplete check will be located in their new environment, the Minute Books are held down to 1933. The Union itself still holds Minute Books from 1933, together with the whole range of Minutes of the separately incorporated Parkin Mission (1888 to date) which, since 1891, has done memorable work in locating Congregational ministers in sparsely settled areas of the State where no ministry could be maintained from local resources only. The Union also holds the Minutes of the Parkin Trust (1876 to date) which, since 1910, has provided for the training of the ministry in South Australia. Again subject to the proviso mentioned above, the holdings of Year Books are from 1878 with some missing (but probably temporarily missing) issues in the 1880s and the first decade of this century.

The South Australians published a series of periodicals: the *Christian's Penny Magazine* (1869-70), *S.A. Independent* (1870-74, 1879-82), *S.A. Independent and Presbyterian* (1874-79), *Congregational Record* (1884-86), the *S.A. Congregationalist* (1905-19, 1922-68); the archivist has located the relevant issues for 1870, 1884-85, 1905-10, 1913-19, 1922 to date. The archives also contain the diaries of the Rev. F. W. Cox for the years 1879-1903; these make available the detailed day by day record of the man who for a quarter of a century was the most prominent leader of his period.

Congregationalism appeared in the Moreton Bay district of N.S.W. in 1849. The creation of the colony of Queensland in 1859 was quickly followed by the formation of a small Congregational Union in 1861. This Union seems to have been constitutionally incapable of preserving its records. A series of attempts to safeguard them culminated in their destruction when the old Wharf Street [Brisbane] church was demolished in the 1920s. Minute books are now held only from 1926 onwards. Some light, however, is thrown on the years 1861-79 by extracts made from the now missing minutes by the late G. F. Scott in a note-book in the writer's possession. The Union has Year Books from 1886 to the present with a number of issues missing from the earlier volumes. A *Congregational Magazine* (1897? -, 1901) has not survived in Union holdings, and volumes of the *Queensland Congregationalist* (1902-49) are held only for the period 1915-37. There is, however, a complete set of the duplicated periodical *Contact* for the years 1950-68.

The Union of Congregational Churches in Western Australia currently poses for an investigator problems similar to those in South Australia. It is in the process of gathering and sorting records for transfer to the W.A. State Archives and is at present unable to confirm all holdings. In the West Congregationalists first met for worship in 1843, but it was not until 1896 that the few churches which had emerged by that time entered into a Union. Minute books are held for the period since its inception, but of the one Year Book published (in 1917) no copy is retained by the Union. However it retains from 1908 onwards volumes of the *Western Congregationalist* (1903-11, 1913-59), but has no knowledge of earlier publications (the *Congregational Circular* of 1864, the *Free Church Advocate* of 1870, or the *Christian Herald* of 1880).

Such central organization as the local churches achieved was on a colonial or State basis. Consultation on an Australian-wide scale was confined to a short series of Intercolonial Conferences (1855-59) and to similar gatherings as each colony celebrated its jubilee from 1880 onwards. Late in the nineteenth century the existing Congregational Unions decided to confer regularly and, with the Congregational Union of New Zealand, formed the Congregational Union of Australasia for this purpose. The first Assembly was convened in 1892. By a series of oversights it did not meet again until 1904 (under the title of the Congregational Union of Australia and New Zealand); from that date until 1925 Assemblies met every three years; since then they have been biennial. As Dominion and Commonwealth interests diversified the value of a meeting of Australians and New Zealanders diminished and in 1960 'and New Zealand' disappeared from the title. The *Volume of Proceedings* of each Assembly (sometimes with a variant title) aids in viewing the Congregational family in its national setting. The Union's Minute Books are held by its secretary. From 1956 to 1968 the journals mentioned above were supplemented by a duplicated *C.U.A. Bulletin*, but from July 1968 the *Bulletin* and the four periodicals then published in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Brisbane were all incorporated in a new national monthly, the *Australian Congregationalist*⁸.

The whole apparatus of minute books, reports, Year Books and periodicals must, of course, be supplemented with the correspondence files retained in varying states of completeness by the various Unions. Local church histories, usually in pamphlet form, add much detail and are normally interpretations of a church's life drawn from the Minutes of its Church Meetings. For churches in N.S.W. there is a fairly complete collection of these among the papers transferred to the Mitchell Library, and for all States in the writer's private collection.

Behind all printed sources are the unpublished records of individuals who were active in local church and Union life. The diaries of Frederick Miller and F. W. Cox have been noted above. Any selection from those available would include, for instance, George Charter's 'Journal' (held at Chalmers House, 41 The Boulevard, Petersham, N.S.W.), F. W. Cox's 'Brief Record... of the Parkin Congregational Mission' (S.A. Union archives, Adelaide), Ernest Davies's 'In the Golden Days' (W.A. State Archives), J. Johnston's 'Journal' (microfilm, National Library), L. E. Threlkeld's 'Journal 1824-25' and his 'Papers', and W. Waterfield's 'Journal 1838-68' (Mitchell Library).

Within the total context of the Church in Australia Congregationalism has at no time been other than a minority movement. It has never attracted more than 5 per cent of the population and currently serves only 1 per cent of it. It might seem that the effort of examining and interpreting the widely scattered sources alluded to in this article is barely justifiable. This would be so if it were not that the influence of small denominations has frequently been markedly out of proportion to their numerical strength⁹. Numerous statements by non-Congregationalists about Congregationalists would seem to justify research into the life and attitudes and influence of this small group. A typical statement of opinion is that made by Chief Justice Way of South Australia late in the nineteenth century:

The influence of Congregationalists in my own colony at all events is all-pervading, and it is quite out of proportion to the number they bear in the colony in general. They are keenly intellectual and wonderfully enthusiastic in all matters affecting the higher citizenship¹⁰.

REFERENCES

1. *Ten Decades: The Australasian Centenary History of the London Missionary Society* (Lond., n.d. = 1895), pp. 9-88.
2. 'An Estimate of the Contribution made in New South Wales by Missionaries of the London Missionary Society arriving there between 1798 and 1825' (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Sydney); 'The Foundation, Development and Influence of Congregationalism in Australia' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Queensland), pp. 1-113.
3. Incorporated since 1 July 1966 in the Congregational Council for World Mission, but retaining its headquarters (and its archives) at Livingstone House, 11 Carteret Street, Westminster, S.W.1.
4. In two series: 'L.M.S. Records relating to the South Seas, 1796-1906' (118 reels), and 'L.M.S. New Series' (63 reels).
5. Renamed the Commonwealth Missionary Society in May 1955 and, since 1 July 1966, incorporated in the Congregational Council for World Mission.
6. The writer holds the Australian sections of these Reports from 1837 to 1910 in microfiche.
7. Christ Church, Launceston, has preserved among its local records the Minutes of the Northern Auxiliary of the Society for the period 1846-57.
8. Access to the papers of Congregational Unions may be sought through their Secretaries at the following addresses:
Australia: 15 Russell St., Eastwood, N.S.W., 2122.
Tasmania: Box 766H, G.P.O., Hobart, Tas., 7001.
New South Wales: 250 Pitt St., Sydney, N.S.W., 2000.
Victoria: Independent Hall, Collins St., Melbourne, Vic., 3000.
South Australia: Box 1207K, G.P.O., Adelaide, S.A., 5001, and the Hon. Archivist, Parkin College, 64 North Terrace, Kent Town, S.A. 5067.
Queensland: 446 Ann Street, Brisbane, Qld., 4000.
Western Australia: 563 William St., Mt. Lawley, W.A., 6050.
9. E. H. Burgmann, 'Religion', in C. Hartley Grattan, *Australia* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1947), p. 326.
10. Quoted by S. B. Capen, *Vol. of Proceedings, Second International Congregational Council . . . 1899* (Boston, 1900), p. 6.

A NOTE ON THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN CHIEF SECRETARY'S OFFICE

By

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The Chief Secretary's Office (formerly Colonial Secretary's Office) originated in the appointment of Robert Gouger as the first Colonial Secretary in South Australia by an Order in Council of King William IV, dated 13 July 1836¹. Gouger had been prominent in England in the promotion of the province of South Australia through the South Australian Association of which he had been secretary². His appointment as Colonial Secretary in the new province might be seen as a due reward for his important role as one of the founders of the province. He formally assumed his office at Glenelg, South Australia, on 28 December 1836. The Colonial Secretary's Office can be said to date from this event.

No explicit instructions have yet been found about the work and office procedures of the Colonial Secretary, but, from its inception, the office was the main executive and co-ordinating authority of government administration. It had a special function as the correct channel of communication with the governor by other government departments and by the public generally. The business of the office touched on nearly