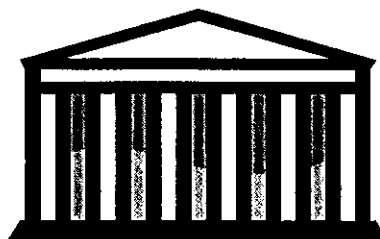


The State Library of Victoria : an introduction



Lynn Pryor

This paper was presented as an extended Site Insight at the July 2000 Conference, prior to the visit by delegates to the SLV, particularly the Religion Collection and Rare Books department.

In this short presentation, I propose to give you a brief overview of how the State Library of Victoria came into being, placing its development in the milieu of Melbourne in the 19th century. A summary of the collection development and acquisition principles and policies will precede a brief outline of the religion collection and Rare Books which will be a focus of this afternoon's visit.

Before you ascend to the entrance of the State Library of Victoria this afternoon, pause for a moment on Swanston Street, to observe the magnificent façade of this public building and take particular note of the proud effigy of Sir Redmond Barry, looking down upon you. This is the man who was largely responsible for the establishment of this public institution. The history of the library is inextricably bound in this personage.

Sir Redmond Barry was born in County Cork, Ireland in 1813, graduated in law from Dublin University in 1837 and emigrated to New South Wales in 1839. By 1841 he had moved to Melbourne, where he began practising law. Barry involved himself in the cultural and literary life of the settlement. He attended lectures, visited museums and libraries, listened to parliamentary debates and read constantly and widely in books, journals and newspapers.

A journalist, named Garryowen, described Barry as a "remarkable personage [who] threw in his lot with the destiny of the Province when it was a weak struggling settlement in 1839, and identified himself with every stage of its progress until he left it at his death, a bright and brilliant colony in 1880. He became solicitor-general in 1851 and was always prominent in social, cultural and philanthropic activities." (Victoria Illustrated, p 99)

From his personal love of literature emanated his "desire to cultivate in all citizens, through the standard works of the time, the character of the well-bred Englishman". (Wight p 7) Barry was "resolved to build institutions in his new country that would educate, unite and civilise a fragile society tainted by convict settlement and Irish lawlessness". (Smith, p 9)

As our particular interest in the SLV collections is the early religious materials, it is good to note what has been said of Barry's religious interests. In the Redmond Barry Centenary oration, delivered on 14th October 1980, Sir Zelman Cowen stated that "Barry was not a formally religious man". Ann Galbally in her biography of Barry published in 1995, describes him as "a man of the Enlightenment ... [who] supported the Church of England as a matter of civic duty". One writer states : "In his Irish and English days, Redmond Barry was a dutiful Anglican church-goer, and some Sundays he would go to church twice if the preacher happened to be a particularly good one. He was never bigoted or over-zealous in religious matters and the squalid sectarian bitterness he ... found in the colonies disgusted him. He tried to remain on good terms with the clergy and the congregations of all churches,

but when Charles Perry became Melbourne's first bishop, Barry's attendance at the Church of England almost ceased. He could not abide the dour sabbatarianism of the time." (Ryan)

By the early 1850s men such as Barry, Lt Governor Charles Latrobe and H G E Childers (one of the original Trustees of the Library) had become Victoria's leading citizens, firmly determined to maintain the values they had brought with them and also to attempt to civilise and educate the members of the new colony in order to create a stable and harmonious society.

The Melbourne community of the period.

Melbourne must have been an interesting place to live in its formative years. In the 1850s, it had a population of approximately 125,000, living mainly in what we now consider to be inner city areas. In the city itself were to be found a number of flourishing industries and burgeoning businesses.

The 'Metropolis of the Southern Hemisphere', as it claimed to be, had "an unbounded confidence and faith in the future, [which rested on its] wealth, and the youth and vigour of its population". It was a period of phenomenal growth and achievement. Social and recreational activities abounded - theatre (Theatre Royal opened in 1856) and later opera; horse racing (the preserve of publicans!); picnics and boating on the Yarra were popular, as also aquatic activities on Port Phillip Bay. Railway excursions were a novelty; both cricket and "Aussie Rules" football were developing at this time.

Until the mid century the Church of England had been dominant but by the 1870s this pre-eminence was waning. The gold rush years brought many immigrants into Victoria - professional men of good education who laid the foundations of Melbourne's cultural and intellectual life. An influx of middle class townsfolk and artisans among the migrants who arrived during this period greatly strengthened the Methodist and other Protestant churches. As well as the Methodists, the Roman Catholics grew in number; Anglicans and Presbyterians seemed to lack the enthusiasm which inspired other denominations - they were particularly affected by current scientific discussion and doubts. It was the Presbyterians who became largely responsible for determining the character of Melbourne's Sabbath.

In summary, the Melbourne of Barry's day bore an atmosphere of optimism and expectation, of independence and social equality. People from all parts of society challenged the old ways with confidence. By the 1870s, wealth not position was setting the tone of Melbourne, now boasting a population of 200,000. Solid achievement was seen to be the basis of Melbourne's development into the future. This was the Melbourne which inspired and encouraged Redmond Barry in his determination to assist in the development of facilities which "would play a vital role in the cultural, moral, economic and political life of the colony" which he had made his home.

Melbourne Public Library : establishment, collection policies

While Redmond Barry was probably the dominant influence behind the establishment of the Melbourne Public Library, it is also recorded that "the provision of a public library was an early consideration of the first Governor, Charles LaTrobe [Catalogue of the MPL]. He was 'convinced of the need for "sound religious and moral institutions without which no country can become truly great". (Wight, p 9)

Members of Melbourne's upper class looked to the government to provide for the literary and educational needs of the people - exerting sufficient pressure to result in the foundation of the MPL and the University of Melbourne. H G E Childers was a member of the Legislature, and thus was

able to influence the government. Childers and Barry supplied the ideas; LaTrobe had the power to put them into effect. Barry also had the energy and persistence to establish and shape these institutions in their early years.

Thus, the Public Library of Melbourne was opened on 11th February 1856, with a collection of 3846 volumes. Barry was the senior of the first five Trustees of the Library, and acted as the Chairman of the Board. As Head of the institution, he dominated the affairs of the Library until his death in 1880. The Trustees had definite ideas concerning the role of the Melbourne Public Library, and Barry actively and vocally promoted those ideas.

Augustus Henry Tulk was appointed the first Librarian of the Library on 5th May 1856. In keeping with the ideas and policies of Barry, Tulk was keen to continue the tradition of "collecting the works of the great men of letters".

It was Redmond Barry who was the primary shaping force behind the Library's growth and development. His acquisition policy was based on his own very definite ideas of the role of a free public library in a fledgling colony, and the contribution of books to such a role. "The Library would help to reproduce British culture and society." (McVilley, p 57.)

Barry believed the Library should "stimulate 'intellectual culture'" and "elevate the general public taste ..." While Barry himself did not express strong views on moral matters, some believed that the Library could be a means of attracting away from 'other temptations' those 'who frequent public houses and indulge in strong drink'.

Barry's political and civic awareness is expressed in his idea that the Library 'would help to make good citizens, useful and faithful subjects of Her Majesty'. As "the greatest dangers of freedom arise from the prevalence of ignorance and vice, ... provision must be made for the cultivation and expansion of the public mind ..." The Trustees considered that the Library "ought to contain all works required to meet the demands of all ordinary readers, the wants of men of every profession, trade, calling, and occupation ...". (Catalogue of the MPL) The Library was to be one of "deposit and research"; it was not intended to "attract the idle and inquisitive and to entertain the frivolous".

Because Barry and the other Trustees believed that the Melbourne public had a right to influence the development of the library collection, as early as 1853, Barry inserted advertisements in the newspapers requesting the public 'to favor the Trustees with catalogues and lists of such works as might be required'. However the public did not respond, so Barry proceeded to prepare a 'catalogue of works of established merit' and sent it to the Agent-General in London with instructions to purchase the works listed through a London bookseller. The remainder of the £2500 budgetted was to be used for the purchase of works published since 1840 'as may be esteemed of a standard character'. (McVilley, p 58) The materials so acquired formed the Library's original collection.

Barry's preface to The Catalogue of the Public Library of Victoria published in 1880, illuminates the Library's history and includes insights into the trustees' conception of the collections and their selection criteria. As already quoted, they believed that the library should cater for the demands and interests of readers from all walks of life. The Library ought to contain expositions of every view of questions interesting to the public, and of every phase of opinion. They deemed it necessary also to acquire the most approved editions of all standard works, and such books as are highly valuable in yielding information of a special nature, in cultivating the taste and improving the intellectual refinement of the readers, but which by their cost are placed beyond the reach of

individuals, professional men, and the general public. Regard for the quality of the literature was always the dominant rule.

When Barry died in 1880, the dominance of one man in the affairs of the Library came to an end. From this time more is heard of the Librarians than the Trustees. "By 1881 the collection was already one of the great collections of the world." In 1878 Barry had boasted that 'it may ... be affirmed without unseemly exultation that the library with its 100,000 volumes now daily open for unrestricted use to a quarter of a million readers in the year, may deservedly take rank amongst those which in other countries justly assert their claim to high renown' (McVilley, p 62)

The Religion Collection in the State Library

I turn our attention now to the Religion Collection in the Library. In the article which Philip and I jointly prepared for Lawrence's Festschrift (in 1995), we attempted to give an overview of the Religion Collection of the library, asking : what special collections were held? What works of particular note had been acquired in the early years?

I have already referred to Barry's endeavour to enlist the assistance of the public in determining what should be included amongst the first works acquired for the library. In the lists which Barry subsequently prepared, having received absolutely no public response, "of the twenty headings Barry worked from, Religion and Christianity are conspicuous by their absence. Bibles, etc, appears with 35 subheadings" (Harvey & Pryor, p 108).

Close examination of the collection ... reveals concentration of acquisition in areas of particular interest, much of which reflect Barry's ideas. The society of the period ... clearly accepted the Bible as at least one major influence in the formation and development of the cultural, moral and possibly political philosophies of the young colony. (Harvey & Pryor, p 109)

McVilley asserts

The Library in its first twenty-four years reflected the values of the nineteenth century English ruling classes, with utilitarianism and evangelism being the most obvious influences. The Trustees are clear that what they wish to produce is a British institution, yet in achieving the objectives of those twin activities the religious collections are neither especially utilitarian nor devotedly evangelising. (Harvey & Pryor, p 110)

Here I have time only to summarise the collection's contents, and I divide them into four areas, as in our Festschrift article (pp 111-113) :

Biblical Studies: Numerous Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias were published around the middle of the nineteenth century. Of course Cruden's Concordance was included in the collection, though the 1867 edition did not appear on the shelves until 1888. Also Expositor's Bible, T&T Clark's International Critical Commentary series, Matthew Henry commentaries; a full set of Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges, very few works dealing with critical analysis. (We could perhaps speculate that at least some of these works may well have been considered to be standard texts for theological training undertaken in the various denominational institutions which began in the closing decades of the century.)

Theology : The works of well-reputed writers enhance the collection of works on systematic, dogmatic and philosophical theology. Students will find no shortage of materials on the nature of God, the work of the Holy Spirit, justification by faith, life after death and future punishment.

While important theological publications of the period were represented, it could be observed that current material was not given priority, while the past was unduly emphasised. (see Harvey & Pryor, p 110.)

Church History "appears not to have featured prominently in the interests of either acquisitions librarians or library users". Philip Schaff's *The history of the church* features alongside of similar multi-volume sets. Denominational and regional church history has a particularly British focus. With the development and expansion of Christian missionary activity, particularly in the Pacific region, holdings of mission histories and reports increased.

Special Collections include:

Numerous Bible translations, many languages represented as well as English.

Lecture series such as Gifford, Bampton and Hibbert Lectures

Sermons : there is evidence that R Barry himself donated some of the volumes of sermons, an indication no doubt of his determination that the Public Library had a responsibility to contribute to the moral fibre of the colony.

Pamphlets : Approximately 300 "in-house" bound volumes of theological and religious pamphlets, covering a wide variety of subjects – synod addresses and reports, essays and treatises, correspondence between theologians, sermons and exhortations, etc. It is noteworthy that these materials are particularly interesting as sources of valuable insights into Australian (and Pacific) religious history, especially the significant issues under discussion in the society of the time.

Australian denominational newspapers and magazines

During your visit you may like to observe what you see as the gaps in the collection, and then refer to the Festschrift article and read Philip's comments on what appear to be significantly weak areas.

I have concentrated mainly on the historical foundation of the State Library, and the philosophies behind its development. Your visit will be divided into the tour of the Main Library, and then a visit to the Rare Books department. When I did my research 6 years ago, I made some interesting discoveries and would love to have the time to explore further the questions which surfaced for me. I would like to know more about the people who donated material to the collection, and why. I hope I have whetted your appetite to discover some of the mystery of this section of the public collection.

Enjoy your visit this afternoon!

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