

Part Two

Thematic history of maritime infrastructure



Melbourne and Hobson's Bay Railway Company's Pier, Sandridge, 1860.

La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria.

1. Improving Victoria's ports and harbours

Australian Historic Theme:
3. Developing local, regional
and national economies

Major works

Vast amounts of money were expended on improving Victoria's port facilities in the nineteenth century. In some cases, jetties or breakwaters were inadvisably placed and had to be replaced. In some cases the improvements were not sufficient to keep up with the changing size of sea transport and the ports fell by the wayside. Sometimes the improvement of the ports and waterways involved large-scale engineering works, such as the altering of the course of the Yarra River and excavation of Victoria Dock, the creation of the artificial entrance to the Gippsland Lakes at Lakes Entrance and the building of breakwaters and training walls at Warrnambool, Port Fairy and, much later, Portland.



Aerial View of Victoria Dock, including the central pier in 1927.
Public Record Office Victoria, VPRS 12800 P1, H1240.

Infrastructure to load or unload cargo often began with simple jetties or piers to replace the dangerous system of 'lightering' goods to and from vessels. While a jetty, with attached tramway, crane or storage shed was sufficient for the carriage of goods in smaller settlements, the increasing traffic in some Victorian ports in the nineteenth century, along with the complexity of cargoes coming into and out of the ports, demanded port improvements on a larger scale. Some harbours, such as Warrnambool or Port Fairy, could be dangerous for ships lying at anchor when gales blew in from the south-west. Improvements to harbours such as these aimed to improve protection for shipping, as well as offering increased berthage.

Victoria's economic development in the second half of the nineteenth century came at a time when ships were evolving from wooden sail-powered vessels to larger, iron steam-powered ships. In that century, as well as during the twentieth century (and the twenty-first century) there were imperatives to constantly improve port facilities to accommodate ever larger vessels. Port facilities have also had to keep up with changing methods of loading and carrying cargo. The need to constantly adapt the major ports over the last one hundred and fifty years has meant that the shape and facilities of such ports have constantly evolved. The axes of maritime activity have shifted and major pieces of infrastructure, such as wharves, docks and jetties have been twisted, improved, extended, replaced or demolished to suit new purposes. Very little of the maritime fabric of Melbourne, for instance, would be instantly recognised by mariners or stevedores who used it one hundred or even fifty years ago. By contrast, Port Fairy, which had its heyday between the 1830s and the 1870s and then declined in importance, retains many of the features that were put in place by harbour works in the 1870s.

Major developments in the Port of Melbourne

The gold decade added several piers to Williamstown and the Railway and Town Piers at Port Melbourne. Despite the major developments at Williamstown and Port Melbourne, the Yarra remained the favoured site for unloading imported cargo in Melbourne. It was here that warehouses and commercial activity were concentrated. Moreover, the siting of a railway reserve at Spencer Street, gave close access to potential rail transport from the wharves. The government spent considerable amounts of money expanding and improving

the Yarra wharves in the 1850s and 1860s. Sheds and cranes were added and the wharves extended along both sides of the Yarra downstream from the Falls. Constant dredging was carried out to keep the Yarra navigable for ships but the increasing use of steam-powered vessels, which were often larger than sailing craft, meant that, despite the dredging, many vessels could not make it up to the Yarra wharves. Many imported goods still had to be double-handled, unloaded at either Sandridge or Williamstown and moved by rail or smaller vessels to Melbourne. Double handling increased the cost of imported goods.

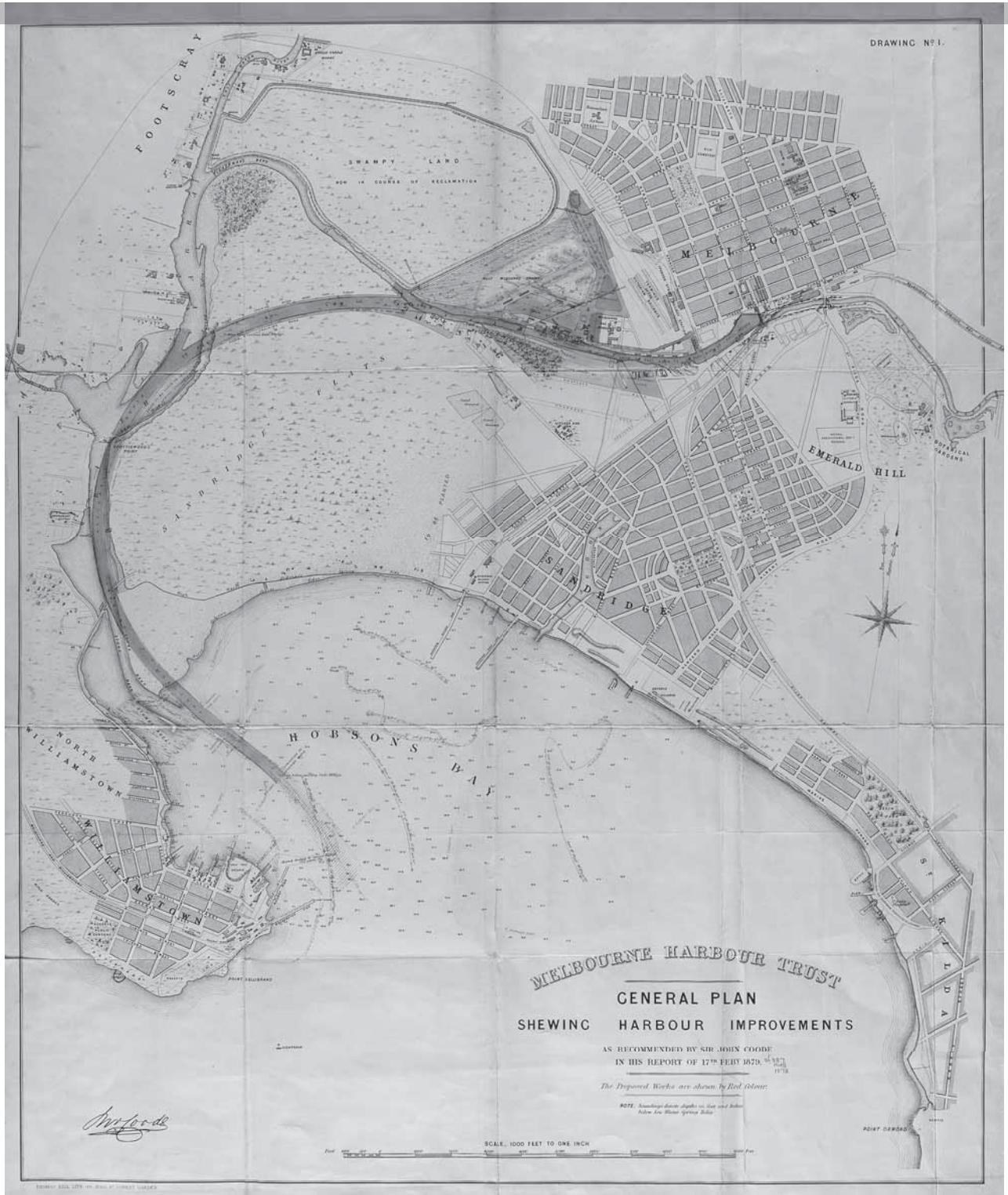
In 1860 a Royal Commission on Harbour Improvements joined the Melbourne Chamber of Commerce in strongly recommending the formation of a harbour trust which could oversee all facilities in the port of Melbourne. In addition the Royal Commissioners reiterated earlier views that a canal connecting Hobsons Bay with the river wharves was desirable. The considerable expense involved in creating such a canal, however, was not thought justified at the time. In the meantime, the Yarra would be deepened yet again.

It was not until 1877 that an Act of Parliament established the Melbourne Harbor Trust. The Trust's wide powers covered shipping and shipping-related infrastructure on the Yarra and Saltwater (Maribyrnong) Rivers up to Hopkins St, Footscray and in Hobsons Bay. Though this area encompassed Williamstown and Port Melbourne, the Trust was determined to make it easier to bring cargo directly to the hub of Melbourne. Soon after its formation, the Trust engaged Sir John Coode, a British Engineer, to report on possible engineering improvements to the port. In contrast to earlier commentators, who had recommended cutting a straight canal from Hobsons Bay to the city wharves, Coode recommended that the Yarra River's course be altered and therefore shortened, by cutting a new canal below the Yarra's natural junction with the Saltwater River. The river would also be deepened and widened and the falls at Queens Street blasted away. Coode also recommended the formation of a series of docks north of the new canal on the West Melbourne swamp and adjacent to the Spencer Street railyards. The creation of the canal, which became known as the Coode Canal, was a major public work, taking from 1884 to 1887 to complete. But work did not begin on a dock, to be named Victoria Dock, until 1888. Built on the West Melbourne swampland, it enclosed 96 acres of water. It was not until 1896 that the dock was ready to be inundated with water, unfortunately at the height of probably the worst

Sir John Coode's plan for improvements to the Port of Melbourne, 1879.

Map Collection, State Library of Victoria.

Coode's proposed new course for the Yarra River is shown in blue. This plan also features jetties, piers and sea baths along the coastline at Williamstown, Port Melbourne and St Kilda.



Geelong wheat silos, wharf and loading equipment on the North Shore circa 1939.
Public Record Office Victoria
VPRS 12903P1 Box 313-12F.



Aerial View of Port Melbourne Piers circa 1926 when Station Pier (centre) was under construction. *Public Record Office Victoria, VPRS 12800 P1, H1239.*

The piles of the old Railway Pier can still be seen extending at an angle from the new pier, while the wing piers constructed for the bay steamers are already in use. Princes Pier is in the bottom of the picture and Town Pier above Station Pier. The small boat harbour constructed at the Sandridge Lagoon is above Town Pier.

depression that Victoria has experienced. But the role of Victoria Dock soon became clear. By 1908, 90 per cent of Victoria's imports came through it.⁴⁵

The opening of Victoria Dock did not spell the end of traffic at the Yarra River wharves. Indeed added wharfage and a 'swinging basin' were constructed in the 1880s.⁴⁶ Smaller vessels, on the interstate or coastal trade, supplying coal or timber to industries along the river, to the Melbourne Gasworks or to the railways, continued to make the river wharves a busy scene. It was not until the construction of the low-lying Spencer Street Bridge across the Yarra in 1927-1928, that the river upstream of here was effectively blocked to river traffic.⁴⁷

Nor did Victoria Dock mean the end of the use of piers at Port Melbourne and Williamstown for export cargo. At the request of the Victorian Railways Department, which supervised railway piers at both Port Melbourne and Williamstown, the Melbourne Harbor Trust deepened and widened the Port Phillip Bay channels in the late 1880s and early 1890s. The channel to Port Melbourne - 600 feet wide, and 28 feet deep - was blamed for diverting much of the export traffic away from the Williamstown piers.⁴⁸ But even with this improvement, by the first decade of the twentieth century Melbourne's berthage facilities and channels were becoming inadequate for the increasingly larger overseas shipping.⁴⁹

Between 1914 and 1920 a central pier was added to Victoria Dock, enlarging its capacity. In 1925 its entrance was widened to allow for larger ships to enter. Plans for further and far reaching improvements were interrupted by World War I, which saw a decrease in trade at the Port of Melbourne because of the restrictions on international shipping.⁵⁰ Plans for the 1920s included the extension of wharves on both sides of the Yarra from Victoria Dock down to the river mouth.

In the same decade the Melbourne Harbor Trust began excavating a new dock on the north of the river. This dock, not completed until 1956, was named Appleton Dock. It was only three years later, in 1959 that a third large dock, at Fishermen's Bend at the entrance to the Yarra, was opened. This dock had been years in the planning and when it was opened in 1959, named Webb Dock, offered a new kind of cargo handling. Facilities at Webb Dock offered a 'roll on/rolloff' system, in contrast to traditional methods of loading cargo onto ships by crane.⁵¹ The rollon/rolloff method of handling cargo, developed by military authorities during World War II, allowed cargo to be driven directly into a ship's hold from the wharf.⁵² But even as Webb Dock was opening, there were further developments in the loading of cargo. In 1957 the world's first 'container ship' sailed between New York and Miami. This marked the beginning of a revolution with far-reaching consequences for the Port of Melbourne. Loading cargo by container rather than the traditional 'break bulk' meant a change to new and more powerful wharfside cranes, the end of the need for wharfside goods and storage sheds and a far smaller dependence on manpower to load and unload ships. But containerisation demanded far larger open storage areas adjacent to wharves.

To accommodate this new method of handling cargo, yet another dock was begun at Melbourne. Swanson Dock, carved out of land on Coode Island, was begun in 1966. The first stage of this new dock was opened in 1969, but improvement and extensions of the berthage and facilities continued until the late 1980s. As these newer docks came into use, the usefulness of Victoria Dock for cargo shipping declined and thoughts turned to reusing the old docklands area for other purposes. Since 1997 when the Bolte Bridge across the Yarra finally removed access to Victoria Dock for larger vessels, the dock has been progressively developed as the gleaming new Docklands.



Remains of the Corio Freezing Works and Abattoir Wharf (H7721-0147) in 2004. *Heritage Victoria.*

Major developments in the Port of Geelong

The bar at the entrance to the inner harbour at Geelong was blamed for the lack of early development at that site, in comparison with the early port of Melbourne. In the 1860s a 'South Channel' was dredged to a depth of 18 feet, but this channel constantly silted up. Sir John Coode, when consulted in 1879, prepared plans for a channel following a different course. Work began on dredging this channel in 1881 and continued until 1895. Named the Hopetoun Channel after the Victorian Governor, the Earl of Hopetoun, it unlocked the Port of Geelong to larger ships. Unfortunately, the depth of water at the existing piers at Geelong: at Moorabool Street, Yarra Street and Railway Pier, was not sufficient for these larger ships. The north shore of Corio Bay was found to offer much deeper water. In 1905, the Victorian Government purchased 195 acres of land at North Shore, adjacent to the North Geelong Railway Station. This was handed over to the newly-formed Geelong Harbor Trust which began to plan for new wharves and facilities, while continuing to dredge the Hopetoun Channel, to provide access for even larger vessels.⁵³ The main axis of the port began to move from the old piers at Geelong to the north shore where new wharves, called Corio Quay, were gradually constructed.

One of the aims of establishing the Geelong Harbor Trust was to decentralise port facilities, especially for the handling of primary produce, such as wheat, from the western portion of the state. The GHT began work on a grain shipping wharf at Corio Quay, also establishing a meat freezing works and wharf and a log pond for the Oriental Timber Company, which leased land from the Trust at Corio Quay.⁵⁴ The Trust also had plans for expanding and modernising existing Geelong piers, such as Moorabool Street Pier, which was used mainly for passenger traffic. Railway Pier, an inconvenient shape, was rebuilt. Today it is still in use as Cunningham Pier.

Despite the intention to develop Geelong as a port for primary produce export, it was industry that really provided the impetus to improve facilities in the twentieth century. A wharf was constructed for the Ford Motor Company in 1927. The Grain Elevators Board Pier was built in 1939. But it was not until after World War II that port facilities on the North Shore at Geelong really began to take shape as wharves were constructed or lengthened to provide facilities for refineries, wire industries, and fertiliser plants.

Moorabool Street Pier was demolished in 1949, its site having been reclaimed and now serving as a park. The old Stony Pier, the first stone jetty erected at Geelong in 1842, is still in existence.

Portland

Portland harbour offered deep water that was relatively calm, except when winds prevailed from the unprotected southwest. The second pier, built here in 1857, was extended in 1880, soon after the Hamilton-Portland railway line was completed. The railway line was carried out onto the pier, allowing for the direct transfer of cargo onto vessels. Nevertheless, this extended jetty did not offer much accommodation for the increasingly large steamers that called along the Australian coastline and some cargo continued to be 'lightered' out to vessels anchored in the harbour. In 1902 a third pier, called the long pier, was extended 3,200 feet out from the railway station.

From the 1850s, the need for a breakwater to protect the harbour at Portland, had been discussed by select committees of the Victorian Parliament, but the prohibitive cost of the work delayed it. Sir John Coode's advice was sought on how to make the harbour safe for all vessels at all times. Coode submitted a number of plans for a Portland breakwater and jetties. In 1887 he submitted his third modification, which extended an existing breakwater that had been built near the mouth of the creek in 1878-1880. This breakwater offered shelter for fishing boats, but not larger ocean-going vessels. A series of other engineering plans proposed solutions to the problem of providing shelter in deep water, without inducing silting or sand drift in the bay. But the immense cost involved meant that they were never carried out. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Victorian Government, in the interests of decentralisation, made plans, once again, to construct the necessary infrastructure to make Portland a modern port. Just as construction had commenced on a new pier, World War I broke out and works were put on hold. Despite the fact that little progress had been made, during the 1920s, Portland played a role as wheat export port. Wheat was conveyed to Portland by rail from the Wimmera and about 55 ships transported it from the port. But when the transition came from bagged wheat to bulk handling of wheat, Portland lost out in favour of Geelong, which offered much calmer water.⁵⁵

Finally, near the end of World War II, the Victorian Government once again investigated whether Victorian port facilities would



Postcard of the entrance at Lakes Entrance (Cunninghame) circa 1900–1909 before the entrance was reconstructed in granite.

La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria.

be enough to cater for increased trade in the post-war period. In the light of this investigation, Portland finally achieved the infrastructure that had been suggested for almost a century. The Portland Harbour Trust was established in 1950 and two years later work began on a new breakwater and wharf. The new harbour facilities were unveiled in 1960. Portland then became an export location for grain, wool and other commodities and an import location for petroleum products. However, it was the decision to locate an aluminium smelter here in the 1980s, that boosted the port's activities.

Warrnambool

Improvements made to Warrnambool harbour in the 1850s aimed at making it safe for shipping. There were problems here with shallow water, siltation, and openness to the sea. Two jetties had been constructed here by the time it was decided that a breakwater was needed. Although work began in 1878, it soon halted and Sir John Coode was called in to submit modified breakwater plans. This work was completed in 1890, but the breakwater's effect was to increase the siltation in the bay, and constant dredging was required. Although Warrnambool interests urged the continuing improvement of the harbour facilities, by this time railway connections had been made to Warrnambool, providing an alternative for the transport of local produce and inward supplies. In 1914 the breakwater was extended about 300 feet, but the work done was unsatisfactory. Built on sand, not stone, the extension subsided within a few years and large bluestone boulders had to be placed on one side to bolster it.⁵⁶

By the 1920s the siltation problem meant that two thirds of the harbour was unsuitable for the increasingly larger shipping. Ironically, this was at a time when soldier settlement of the Wimmera and parts of the Western District was occurring. Royal Commissioners argued that improving the harbour would assist the 'struggling' soldier settlers, by offering access to coastal transport via the railway line to Warrnambool. In 1930-1931, the Port of Warrnambool was exporting more overseas than Portland was, although the major incoming cargo appeared to be coal.⁵⁷ But by 1942, the Shipping Control Board had prohibited even coal delivery ships from entering Warrnambool Harbour because of the 'restricted depth of water there'.⁵⁸

Port Fairy

Despite the bustle and activity at Port Fairy in the 1850s, it was not until the 1870s that engineer John Barrow's plan to remove a bar on the River Moyne and construct training walls to carry silt into the bay beyond the mouth of the river, were put in place. This work continued until the 1890s, by which time a railway line linked Hamilton to Warrnambool, making that port far more convenient for moving goods and people into and out of the hinterland.

The Gippsland Lakes and Lakes Entrance

Port Albert had been a busy coastal port in the 1840s and 1850s. But when a navigable entrance from the ocean into the Gippsland Lakes complex was discovered in the late 1850s, Port Albert's role as an important port declined. Private companies began to offer steamer services on the network of lakes and rivers in East Gippsland and, at least one trader, Malcolm Campbell, operated between the lakes settlements and Melbourne, using the lakes entrance.

The natural entrance to the sea at Cunninghame (Lakes Entrance) was unreliable. It moved about and, in some years, disappeared altogether as sands shifted. In 1868 the Government Inspector-General of Public Works prepared a plan for an artificial entrance. This involved cutting a 400ft wide channel through the sand hills and reinforcing the sides with timber and stonework. The work on this began in 1870, but in 1874 a storm filled the entrance with sand.

Sir John Coode was then called upon to present a proposal for an artificial entrance, which was opened in 1889. Immediately there was drastic erosion at the entrance and siltation at the lakes. In the early 1920s the entrance was reconstructed in granite.

At the same time as work was carried out on creating Coode's artificial entrance, other infrastructure was installed in the lakes network. River wharves were built at a number of locations, such as Sale, Bairnsdale, Paynesville, McLennan's Straits, and Mossiface. In 1883 a swing bridge was erected on the La Trobe River at Sale to allow vessels to get closer to the heart of the town. And in 1888 a canal was dredged connecting the Thomson River with the new Sale Railway Station. Cargo could now be ferried via the river to Sale, then despatched by rail to Melbourne.

2. Migrating to Victoria

Australian Historic Theme: 2. Peopling Australia

First European immigrants

It was individual enterprise that brought the first permanent non-aboriginal migrants to the shores of Victoria. These migrants came across the sea from Van Diemen's Land. Though the first arrivals in 1834 and 1835 represented only a trickle, by 1837, when Governor Bourke visited the Port Phillip District, he found that the non-aboriginal population 'exceeded 500 souls' and more than 100,000 sheep.⁵⁹ Bourke recognised the reason for this migration from Van Diemen's Land, reporting to his superiors that many of the residents of Port Phillip had found that it was '*difficult to extend their possessions or to establish their families to their liking on the land remaining for selection in that Colony*'. He noted that in the Port Phillip District the '*general character of the country is such as to render it a very desirable position for settlers, whether graziers or agriculturalists and there is I think little doubt of its soon becoming the resort of emigrants from Europe*'.⁶⁰

After the initial wave of migration from Van Diemen's Land and then New South Wales, a third wave of immigrants, also intent on making a fortune through pastoralism, arrived directly from Great Britain. Edward Kerr sailed on the *Midlothian*, the first ship to sail directly from Great Britain to Port Phillip, in 1839. He remembered that, as well as cargo the *Midlothian* '*bore away a living freight of many young and hopeful human beings, who were carrying their energies to the new land which was dawning in the far antipodes*'.⁶¹ By 1840 there were over 10,000 non-aboriginal residents of Victoria.

Assisted immigrants

These early migrants spread quickly across much of the Port Phillip District, leasing tracts of land from the government for their sheep runs. They were followed by many other

immigrants who had the means to make the long and quite expensive journey from Britain. Once in Port Phillip, however, their greatest need was for labour to help shepherd sheep and reap crops. There were few immigrants of the labouring classes in the district because they could not afford to pay for their passages from Great Britain. To meet the need for labour, immigration schemes were implemented. From 1839 two methods of assisted immigration were practised in the colony. One was operated solely by the government which appointed Emigration Commissioners in England to select suitable applicants to emigrate to the colony. Their passages to the colony were paid from the proceeds of the sale of Crown Land. The first immigrant ship, the *David Clarke*, arriving directly from Greenock in Scotland in October 1839, though some unemployed immigrants in New South Wales had been forcibly moved by the Governor to Port Phillip earlier that year. Some employers, unhappy with the government scheme, operated their own 'bounty' system, employing their own agents in Britain to select migrants and then claiming back most of the cost of their passage from the government. Bounty immigrants were bound to work for a certain period of time for their employers on arrival in the colony. By the mid-1840s squatters in the Port Phillip District were so desperate for labourers that two 'immigration societies' had been formed, at Melbourne and Geelong, to transport workers, who were usually ex-convicts, from Van Diemen's Land. It was to Geelong that 200 'exiles', Pentonville prisoners and youths from Parkhurst Reformatory arrived in 1847. Many were hired immediately, their freedom depending on their staying out of trouble, preferably in a country district.⁶² Between 1839 and 1850 28,632 assisted migrants arrived in the Port Phillip District.⁶³

The immigrants found ready employment. Georgiana McCrae, an unassisted migrant who arrived here aboard the *Argyle* in 1841, noted that as soon as the ship anchored off Williamstown, 'All kinds of people came on board, chiefly for the purpose of hiring servants; but our emigrants aren't yet at liberty to engage'.⁶⁴ The immigrants, however, were supposed to be landed and processed through an immigration depot before they were able to be employed.

Gold era immigrants

The discovery of gold in Victoria in 1851 hastened a huge rush of unassisted immigrants, at first from other colonies, then



Portsea Quarantine Station hospital buildings, 1983. Photographer John T. Collins. *La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria.*

from Britain and Ireland, and then from Europe, America and China. Despite this increase in people entering the colony, there was almost a greater need for assisted immigrants than before, as most immigrants, as well as workers already resident in Victoria, were more interested in seeking gold than minding sheep, reaping crops or constructing urgently-needed buildings. Of the 584,000 immigrants who arrived in Victoria between 1851 and 1859, 86,227 were assisted.⁶⁵ Furthermore, the Victorian Government attempted to encourage the landing of assisted immigrants in rural areas needing labourers, investigating the safety of the harbour at Warrnambool for the direct transport of immigrants to this port and building immigration depots and barracks at a number of the 'outer ports'. Not all of the immigrants arrived in Victoria by sea. In 1855, in an effort to limit the immigration of Chinese goldseekers, the Victorian Government imposed limits on the number of Chinese a ship could bring into Victorian ports, as well as a £10 tax on each Chinese immigrant. As a result many ships landed their Chinese passengers in adjacent colonies and the Chinese made their way into Victoria on foot.

After the gold rush

Immigration declined in the 1860s and 1870s and assisted immigration was discontinued in 1873. During the booming 1880s, Victoria again attracted large numbers of immigrants, but in the depression of the following decade far more people left the colony than migrated into it. It was the loss of population around the turn of the century, and the fear that rural Victoria was underpopulated and underdeveloped, that led to calls to reintroduce assisted immigration. A modified form of assisted migration was introduced in 1907, to settle immigrants in the irrigation districts of the state. In the 1920s, the Commonwealth and British Governments shared the cost of assisting British immigrants to settle in Australia. 80,414 immigrants arrived in Victoria between 1921 and 1929.⁶⁶

Post-war migrants

Commonwealth Government policy after World War II was based on the motivation to 'populate or perish'. Under Immigration Minister, Arthur Calwell, both British and non-British (European) migrants were assisted to migrate to Australia, among them refugees and others displaced during and just after the war. In the first two decades after the war, 1.7 million migrants came to Victoria, though not all of them

stayed. In the 1970s the 'White Australia Policy', which had restricted Asian immigration into Australia since Federation, was broken down, but so was the assisted immigration program into Australia. Numbers of migrants into Victoria dropped dramatically.

Quarantine

Early migrants by sea to Victoria faced a perilous journey. From Britain the journey by sail took an average of fifteen weeks,⁶⁷ with assisted passengers often confined together in cramped spaces below decks, with few opportunities to go above for fresh air. The better off, who paid for their own passages, could dine with the captain and have the relative luxury of their own cabins, but even they still had to endure the weather, sea-sickness, and the fear of the ship going down at sea. For many the Victorian coastline, which should have been greeted with relief, was a source of tragedy as ships foundered and were wrecked within sight of the shore.

Infectious diseases aboard ship also posed a great danger. In 1840, for instance, one in every 51 adults and one in every ten children among assisted immigrants died en route to the colonies.⁶⁸ The government paid ships' surgeons and officers a gratuity for every live immigrant they landed.⁶⁹ Nevertheless crowded conditions, inadequate ventilation in steerage and the impossibility of keeping clean made mortality by infectious disease a real possibility. From the earliest years authorities at Port Phillip attempted to prevent infectious diseases from entering the colony by placing ships carrying fever victims, into quarantine.

One of the earliest immigrant ships to Port Phillip, the *Glen Huntly*, arrived in Hobsons Bay in April 1840, carrying typhus fever sufferers. Passengers were put out at Red Bluff (Point Ormond) and housed in tents. Those who died are said to have been buried there.⁷⁰ In 1841 another quarantine camp was set up at Point Gellibrand, close to an early burial ground for fever victims. The camp housed typhus victims from the *Agricola* and at least one victim from this ship is said to have been buried at Point Gellibrand.⁷¹ The following year the *Manlius* arrived, with 44 passengers already dead from fever. All passengers were landed at the public jetty at Williamstown and transferred by cart to the quarantine camp at Point Gellibrand. Here, where the survivors spent two months, another 17 victims died. They were buried in the adjacent burial ground, which became the 'Old Williamstown'



Relatives greeting newly-arrived immigrants at Station Pier in the 1960s.
Public Record Office Victoria, VPRS 8362/P2, Unit 4, P6878021.

cemetery.⁷² (The remains of those buried in this cemetery were exhumed and reburied at Williamstown Cemetery in 1899.)

By 1849 another quarantine site was reserved on the Yarra River at Spotswood. At least one ship, the *John Thomas Forde*, was quarantined here. But the great fear of 'plague', which had led government authorities to enforce quarantine in the first place, motivated public objections to the siting of quarantine stations so close to settled areas and by 1852 the Victorian Government had decided on a site for a permanent quarantine station that was remote from settlement, but close to the entrance to Port Phillip Bay. The site was Point Nepean at the tip of the Mornington Peninsula. The Colony's Health Officer, Dr Thomas Hunt, thought its isolated position, good anchorage and accessibility to both Shortlands Bluff and ships entering the Heads, made it 'admirably adapted' to the purpose of a sanitary station (quarantine station).⁷³

The decision to establish a new quarantine ground coincided with the increased overseas shipping occasioned by the gold discoveries. It has been said that fever was more likely to occur on the gold rush immigrant ships than on those that had previously entered Victoria waters. Because many of the gold rush ships carried unassisted immigrants, the conditions on board were less likely to be supervised. Also the huge demand for fast passages from Britain meant that some obsolete ships were brought back into service. In addition, ships from non-British ports were often less strictly inspected than British ships. In 1852, the death rate on Victorian-bound ships doubled.⁷⁴

Before the government's plans for Point Nepean had proceeded very far, the *Ticonderoga* arrived in port, with 300 passengers ill with fever. One hundred had died on the voyage out.⁷⁵ The Harbour Master directed the ship to the Point Nepean sanitary station where limeburners, who occupied the area under lease, were hastily moved to adjoining properties. Tents and the lime burners' cottages formed the accommodation for the *Ticonderoga* passengers. William Kelly, who entered Port Phillip Bay in 1853 remembered noticing the 'few ragged tents' of the quarantine station as his ship passed through the Heads. Six years later he was able to report that a 'fine capacious stone structure of handsome architectural elevation, has lately been erected for a hospital, laid out and fitted up in the most liberal style, and embracing all those sanitary improvements and adjuncts which the latest scientific and professional skill in the old countries has

found to be beneficial'.⁷⁶ This 'structure' consisted of five dormitory buildings: one to house the sick and four for healthy passengers of quarantined ships. Like the ships themselves, the 'healthy' dormitories were divided along class lines for saloon, second class and steerage.⁷⁷ To these were added a jetty, doctors' quarters and police quarters. In 1900 a disinfection and bathing block was added.⁷⁸

After the emergency of the *Ticonderoga*, there was never a need to accommodate so many passengers from one ship at a time. A leper colony was located within a section of the quarantine station between 1885 and the 1930s, while a Tuberculosis Colony was also located there in the 1880s. But, once passengers were offered the choice of vaccination or quarantine, from the 1880s, there was little need to quarantine whole ships.

The post World War I flu pandemic temporarily altered this situation. It was feared that Australian servicemen, returning from overseas, would carry the flu with them. Almost 300 ships, carrying over 11,800 passengers were quarantined at Point Nepean at this time and twelve emergency huts were built to house them.⁷⁹

From 1951 the main buildings at the Quarantine Station were occupied by the Officer Cadet School of the Australian Army, with the proviso that they vacate the premises should they be needed for quarantine.⁸⁰ The last quarantine patient spent three days at Point Nepean in 1977. After it was officially closed, quarantine cases were sent to Fairfield Infectious Diseases Hospital for isolation.

Landing places for immigrants

The landing places used by the earliest non-Aboriginal pioneers to the Port Phillip District continued to be used by immigrants for some time. Melbourne, Geelong, Portland and Port Fairy were all points of landfall during the 1830s. While Melbourne became the dominant landing place for ship loads of immigrants in the 1840s, there were also some direct arrivals of immigrant ships at Geelong and Portland Bay. In the 1850s the Victorian Government's Immigration Agent recommended that more assisted immigrants be landed at Geelong, Portland, Port Fairy and Port Albert and the government also investigated the improvement of Warrnambool Harbour so that immigrant ships could land

there. Landing assisted immigrants at ports distant from Melbourne was one way of distributing labourers and servants to the country areas where they were needed. It also cost less to have ships sail directly to ports such as Portland, than to have immigrants landed at Melbourne and then transported by another vessel to one of the 'outer ports'. Many immigrants landed at Geelong, Portland and Port Fairy in the 1850s. Some landed at Port Albert.

But Melbourne was the predominant landing place for immigrants in the 1850s and became the major landing place after that decade. There were three choices for landing once large ships had anchored in Hobsons Bay and passengers had transferred to smaller vessels or lighters. Apart from those early pioneers who brought stock ashore, very few passengers seem to have alighted at Williamstown. If they did land at the jetty here, they soon transferred by smaller boat or ferry, either up the Yarra River or across Hobsons Bay to Sandridge. Williamstown was an inconvenient place to land because it was not the population centre.

Women and children and migrants with some means appear to have often chosen to be ferried up the river to the wharves at the city centre. Strong winds could make a landing at the beach at Sandridge precarious.⁸¹ The river journey was slow and tortuous as well as expensive. Nevertheless, even during the 1850s, many passengers chose to be landed at the Yarra wharves and 'official' arrivals, such as that of Lieutenant-Governor La Trobe, in 1835, took place on the river.

The first assisted immigrants to arrive in the district were ferried to the beach at Sandridge, to walk along 'a well-defined track, which was the only visible path through the wilderness of sober-coloured verdure [that] led straight to Melbourne'.⁸² The government began building a pier, known as Town Pier, here in 1849, extending it in the 1850s. The Colonial Engineer expected that this pier would be most useful for passengers and their luggage.⁸³ The completion of the Melbourne and Hobson's Bay Railway Company's pier and railway line from Sandridge to Melbourne in 1854 increased Sandridge's convenience for passengers and it gradually became the focal point for overseas arrivals and departures

By the beginning of the twentieth century, most overseas passengers arrived at the Railway Pier at Port Melbourne,⁸⁴ though it had become obvious that the pier was becoming inadequate for the larger passenger steamers then in use. The larger vessels towered over the Railway Pier, the deck

of one being '19 feet above the floor of the pier' and the pier was too narrow to allow for shelter sheds for baggage or accommodation of the public.⁸⁵ Though there were delays, a new railway pier was built between 1912 and 1916, with passenger accommodation provided in the upper levels of central sheds erected on the piers. Passengers could thus embark and disembark via moveable gangways on this upper level, while cargo was handled on the lower level of the pier.⁸⁶ In 1921 this new railway pier was renamed Prince's Pier in honour of the Prince of Wales, who had been aboard HMS *Renown* when it had docked at the pier the year before. Between 1923 and 1930 another new pier, Station Pier, was built on the site of the old Railway Pier. This pier also offered facilities for passengers that separated them from cargo and, once it was completed, became the primary embarkation and disembarkation point for passengers arriving in the Port of Melbourne.⁸⁷

For many Victorians, the Port Melbourne piers, particularly Station Pier, were their first point of contact with their new home. In the decades after World War II, when 735,000 displaced persons or assisted immigrants arrived in Victoria, their usual place of arrival was at Port Melbourne. But the increase in migration after World War II, coupled with the increasing size of passenger vessels, meant that further facilities were developed in the post-war period. This included not only extension of the wharf space, but also, in 1956-58, the remodelling of the outer passenger terminal, which included baggage hall, customs' checking section and waiting hall.⁸⁸ It was not until 1965, however, just before the annual intake of post-war migrants peaked, that facilities such as a cafeteria were included in another modernisation.⁸⁹ Improvements to the inner terminal building (now used for the Bass Strait passenger ferries) waited until the 1970s.

It was not long after this that the Port Melbourne piers' role as landing sites for migrants began to decline. In 1969 Prince's Pier was closed to passenger shipping.⁹⁰ The following year Melbourne's Tullamarine airport opened for international flights and the number of passengers arriving at Station Pier declined from 86,700 in 1970 to 6,944 in 1979.⁹¹ At the same time, changes in federal immigration policy limited the number of arrivals in Victoria during the 1970s. The last immigrant ship to call at Melbourne, the *Australis*, berthed at Station Pier in 1978,⁹² though the pier continued to be used for occasional visits by cruise liners and, from 1985, by the Bass Strait ferries. As the twenty-first century dawned, there was a resurgence of

cruise ship visits to Station Pier. At the same time, the Victorian Department of Infrastructure carried out much-needed improvements, replacing decking on many areas of the pier's surface, refurbishing the terminal buildings and constructing a new gangway at the outer berth.

Sheltering the immigrants: immigration depots and barracks

Early assisted immigrants usually secured employment as soon as they arrived in Port Phillip and did not, therefore, desperately need accommodation. Nevertheless, William Lonsdale requested his superiors to have a building erected for the reception of immigrants. He hoped that this would assist him to supervise the immigrants, but also that it would offer them shelter. Many of those who had arrived on the first immigrant ships from New South Wales *'who were not engaged upon leaving the ship were without a place to go to and were the first night sleeping in the open air'*.⁹³ Two of the immigrants, who were ill when they landed, died. The Colonial Government was reluctant to allow Lonsdale to erect any permanent buildings for immigrants, perhaps fearing that they would remain at the government's expense, rather than seek employment. By late 1839, when the first immigrants from Great Britain were expected, Lieutenant-Governor La Trobe was permitted to accommodate them in tents. The tents were pitched on the south bank of the Yarra, 'opposite the town'⁹⁴ (of Melbourne). This site, or one nearby, continued to be used as a camp for immigrants until the early 1850s. On the west side of St Kilda road, it accommodated 7,000 gold seekers in 1852.⁹⁵

Assisted immigrants were channelled through immigration depots, where prospective employers could hire them. In the crisis days of the 1850s, the Victorian Government established immigration depots at Geelong, Portland and Port Fairy, possibly to encourage direct immigration of labourers and servants in rural areas away from the goldfields. Soon, the need for accommodation for immigrants seemed to surpass the need for depots. The government established two immigrants' homes in Melbourne in 1852. One was in a converted abattoir on Batman's Hill (Spencer St), the other was at Princes Bridge. Hastily-constructed immigration barracks went up in Geelong, Portland and Port Fairy in 1852. At Geelong, the pressing need for accommodation for immigrants meant that an imported prefabricated 'iron house'

was used as an immigration barracks until a more permanent building could be built.⁹⁶ At Portland, temporary additions were made to the Customs House to accommodate immigrants. The shortage of building supplies meant that 'broad palings and bush stuff' had to be used.⁹⁷

Immigration barracks came later in the 1850s at Warrnambool and Port Albert. The first evidence found for Warrnambool's immigration barracks is in 1862. The Port Albert Immigration barracks were constructed in 1857, following requests from local residents. Perhaps because they were built after the crisis years of the early 1850s, they were built of brick. They were little used by immigrants, and were later handed over to the Police Department. Possibly the fabric of the Port Albert barracks (H498) made them more durable than the others, because they appear to be the only 1850s immigration barracks to have survived.

After the crisis of the 1850s, immigration barracks often reverted to other uses. The Princes Bridge Barracks, in Melbourne, became an immigrants' home for destitute people and, for a while, an industrial school for neglected children. Geelong's immigration barracks were also used as an industrial school in the 1860s.

It was not until the massive immigration programs after World War II that accommodation again had to be found for large groups of migrants. Assisted migrants were then often placed in disused army or prisoner of war camps, many of them very distant from the sea, though one, Wiltona, was fittingly sited not very far away from the early landing place at Point Gellibrand, on the old Williamstown Racecourse at the mouth of the Kororoit Creek.

Moorabool Street Pier, Geelong, circa 1892–1902.
Photo Charles Rudd.
*La Trobe Picture Collection,
State Library of Victoria.*



3. Moving people

Australian Historic Theme: 3.8. Moving goods and people

Moving people along the coast and in Port Phillip Bay

In the nineteenth century and for much of the early twentieth century water travel was often more convenient, faster and cheaper than road or rail around Victoria. To begin with, roads were non-existent, rough, or impossible to traverse in winter, when they became boggy and in fact many all-weather roads in some remote parts of Victoria were not completed until the twentieth century. The timber, farming and holiday settlement of Apollo Bay, for instance, was mostly accessed by sea until the late 1920s when an all-weather road through the Otways connected Apollo Bay to the railway line at Forrest. Swamps and unbridged rivers and creeks also made overland travel difficult, making water transport, where it was available, more desirable. When gold was discovered on the Nicholson River in East Gippsland in the 1850s, prospective miners had to make their way from Port Albert via Sale and Bairnsdale, crossing several rivers, until a local hotel owner began using a whaleboat to ferry passengers and cargo between the Nicholson River via Lakes Victoria and King, to Lake Wellington. Travellers still had to then go overland to Port Albert, but this way avoided major rivers. In 1858, when Malcolm Smith managed to manoeuvre a ship through the natural entrance to the Gippsland Lakes at Cunninghame, an even easier route, by water along the coast and then via the Lakes network, was opened up. This was soon complemented by a road from Melbourne to Sale, which connected to the lakes network.

Even after rail services became available from Melbourne to coastal districts, some people preferred to travel by coastal steamer. The journalist, John Stanley James, who wrote as

the *Vagabond*, seemed especially keen to promote the virtues of coastal travel over rail travel through Victoria. In 1884 he advised that:

*One approaches Portland either by land or sea. In the former case the metropolitan visitor has a 13 hours' journey via Geelong, Ballarat, Ararat, and Hamilton, the fare 45s. By water the passage money is ridiculously low, the cabin fares being only 12s 6d and 10s, meals of course extra, time of voyage about 24 hours. ...Calls are made at Warrnambool and Belfast, and the traveller can have a few hours ashore at the former place. The coast scenery is very wild and picturesque, and, altogether, I advise visitors to the west to travel by sea...*⁹⁸

The railway line from Melbourne to Sale which opened in 1880, was an example of how nineteenth century rail lines often connected to passenger water transport services. Almost as soon as the Melbourne and Hobson's Bay Railway Company opened the pier and railway line at Sandridge, it began an hourly train and ferry service from Melbourne to Williamstown. Trains from Flinders Street connected with the steamer *Comet* at Sandridge Railway Pier. This service (using different vessels) continued until 1930. Ferguson Street Pier at Williamstown was built in the 1920s at the request of the Williamstown Council who wished for a new pier to be run in conjunction with the ferry service to Port Melbourne.⁹⁹ The third ferry to operate on the Port Melbourne - Williamstown route, which carried vehicles as well as foot passengers, was in service until 1974, when it was rendered redundant by the West Gate Bridge. From 8th January 1855 morning and afternoon trains connected at Sandridge with the steamers *Duncan Hoyle* and *Citizen* for Geelong.¹⁰⁰ At Geelong, the steamers berthed at Moorabool Street Pier.¹⁰¹

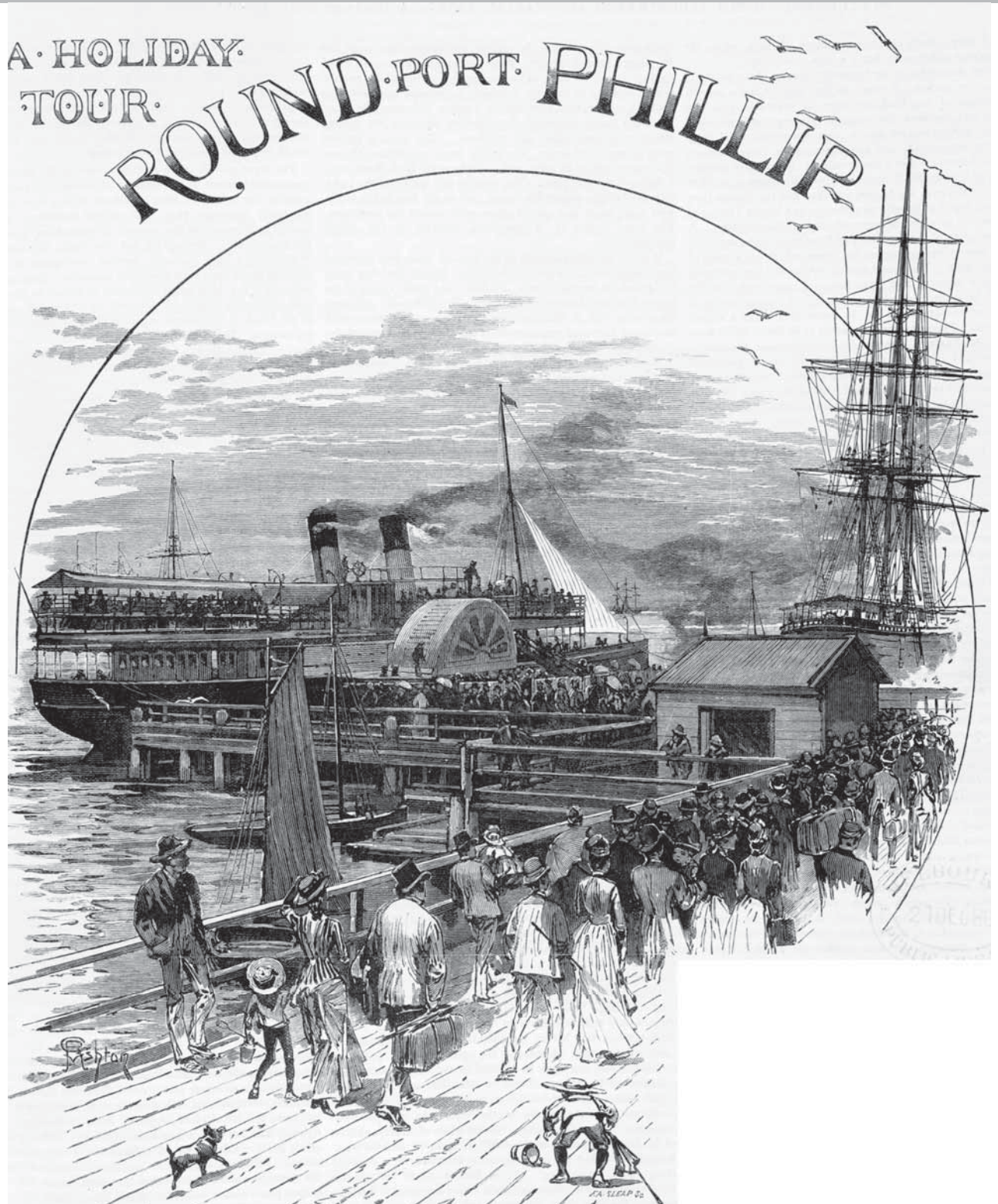
Bay paddle steamers

Within Port Phillip Bay, regular services between Melbourne, Geelong and other smaller sites were augmented, from the 1850s, by 'excursion' steamers, which carried passengers between Sandridge and settlements dotted around Port Phillip Bay.

In 1872 the first regular first class service was established between Queenscliff and Sorrento.¹⁰² The best remembered of the Bay steamers are the *Ozone*, the *Hygeia* and the *Weeroona*, paddle steamers capable of conveying enormous numbers of people, but at times there were eight excursion steamers operating on Port Phillip Bay.¹⁰³ The steamers carried holiday-makers, day-trippers and often trade picnics to resort

*A Holiday Tour Round Port Phillip Bay,
F. A. Sleep engraving from original drawing
by George Rossi Ashton, 1886.
La Trobe Picture Collection,
State Library of Victoria.*

Crowds descend on Sandridge Railway
Pier to embark on the bay paddle steamer
shown at left.



towns such as St Kilda, Mordialloc, Queenscliff, Sorrento, Portsea and Mornington. The popularity of the coastal steamers lasted from the 1870s to 1942, when the last of the steamers, the Weeroona, was sold to the United States Navy.

Steamers' affect on infrastructure

In Melbourne the excursion steamers left from the Sandridge Railway Pier. When Station Pier was built to replace this pier in the 1920s, two 'wing piers' protruding from the main pier near the shore were included to accommodate the bay steamers. The steamer trade was essential to the development of many of the Port Phillip Bay resorts in the nineteenth century. At Queenscliff, which began to develop as a resort in the 1850s, one thousand people arrived via steamer in one day in 1855. A number of grand hotels were built in the ensuing two decades. Though travellers could arrive at Queenscliff by train after 1879, the trip by steamer was shorter and much cheaper. Queenscliff, in the 1880s, acquired a second pier, complete with a shelter shed to accommodate the steamer trade.

Entrepreneur George Coppin promoted the resort development of Sorrento from the late 1860s, building the Continental Hotel, swimming baths and a tramway to transport visitors between the back and front beaches. He also invested in the Bay Excursion Company Limited, which purchased the steamer, *Ozone*, in 1885 to ply between the Port Phillip Bay resorts. The government built a jetty at Sorrento in 1870.

Other developers of coastal resorts also hoped to rely on the steamer trade and built piers to accommodate them. At Clifton Springs near Geelong, the healthful qualities of the mineral water springs, discovered here in 1870, prompted the construction of a hotel and swimming baths in the late 1880s. At the same time a jetty was constructed to allow the bay steamers to ferry visitors to the resort.¹⁰⁴ An attempt to market Altona as a seaside resort in the same decade included the construction of a pier so that coastal steamers could call at the resort. Though the pier remains, Altona itself did not really develop until the twentieth century.

Some pre-existing piers were modified to accommodate the enormous traffic associated with the bay steamers. Special 'wallings and moorings' for excursion steamers were added at the St Kilda pier in 1893.¹⁰⁵ Mornington jetty acquired an

'L-shaped' extension (now removed) early in the twentieth century to enable greater accommodation of steamers and passengers.¹⁰⁶

Intercolonial/state travel

Passengers travelling outside the metropolis usually shared their journey with assorted cargo in the nineteenth century, as steamers plied regularly along the coast of Victoria, stopping at the various ports along the way. Many of these vessels also worked on interstate routes and in fact, even in the early twentieth century, most interstate travel in Australia was done via the sea.¹⁰⁷ Though this form of travel declined after World War II in the face of improved rail connections, air travel and more widespread car ownership, vessels specifically allocated to interstate travel continued to operate until 1961, when they were replaced by international liners that called at various Australian ports.¹⁰⁸ The exceptions, of course, were the Bass Strait ferries which continue to operate between Tasmania and Victoria, nowadays berthing at Station Pier, Port Melbourne.