

Transport – Ships and Shipping Movements

Public Record Office Victoria holds records of the administration of Victorian ports, from as early as 1839, which relate to controlling vessel movement into and out of Victorian ports; regulating loading and discharging of goods including the collection of wharfage rates; providing pilot services; constructing and maintaining of government marine vessels; maintaining navigational aids and operational lighthouses and lightships and signal stations.

Port Phillip had been surveyed and charted, basic ports and harbour facilities installed, and the first bay pilot licensed between 1835 and 1839.

Until 1851 the Superintendent of Port Phillip District was responsible for ports and harbours, operational responsibilities resting with the Harbour Master. In 1855 the Harbour Masters (located at Melbourne and Portland) became part of the Department of Trade and Customs. The Harbour Masters together with the Immigration Agents were part of what became known as the Ports and Harbours Branch of the Department.

In 1877 the newly established Melbourne Harbour Trust Commissioners assumed responsibility for ports and harbours functions within the port of Melbourne. The Trust was responsible for the management of the port facilities, making improvements to the port and the regulation of the trade of the port. The latter included overseeing landing or shipping of merchandise, arrivals and departures of vessels and wharfage rates. In 1978 the Melbourne Harbour Trust Commissioners was reconstituted as the Port of Melbourne Authority.

Responsibility for Victoria's regional ports and harbours remained, after the establishment of the Melbourne Harbour Trust Commissioners, with the Ports and Harbours Branch first of the Department of Trade and Customs ([VA 606](#)) until 1900 and then of the Public Works Department ([VA 669](#)) until 1986.

It was not until 1986 that the Ports and Harbours Branch was integrated with Victoria's three port authorities (Port of Melbourne Authority, Port of Geelong Authority, established in 1905 as the Geelong Harbour Trust, and Port of Portland Authority set up in 1951 as the Portland Harbour Trust). The Port of Melbourne Authority became responsible for all ports of eastern Victoria while responsibility for the ports to the west was divided between the Port of Portland Authority and the Port of Geelong Authority.

A significant part of the records of these authorities relate to the movement of ships in and out of Victorian ports and harbours. These registers and indexes vary in scope. Some record shipping activity in all ports, some are limited to one port, others to certain wharves within a port. Listed below is a selection of the more substantial series. The amount of information each contains varies. Some record little more than movement dates while others have considerable information about each ship.

The records can be used to track movements of ships and their captains, to determine the rig, tonnage and owner of a vessel, the size of its crew, the cargo and number of passengers it carried.

[Inward Shipping Index 1839 – 1900 \(VPRS 3504\)](#) [microfilm copy of [VPRS 13](#)]

This series comprises an alphabetical index of shipping arrivals in Victorian ports. Each arrival of the ship is then listed in chronological order by date of arrival. Entries include name of vessel, tonnage, master, port of embarkation and date of arrival.

[Inward Shipping Arrivals 1880 – 1924 \(VPRS 3503\)](#) [microfilm copy of [VPRS 953](#)]

This series comprises a self-indexing chronological record of ship arrivals at Victorian ports. It is possible to search by name of the ship within a span of years covered by each volume. Ships are not listed in strict alphabetical order. Entries comprise the following details: date of ship's arrival, tonnage, name of ship, name of ship's master, port sailed from.

[Customs, Shipping and Immigration Records 1839 – 1898 \(VPRS 22\)](#)

These records include shipping registers that were created to document the arrival and departure of vessels arriving at Victorian ports. Some registers can be identified as having been maintained at specific ports such as Williamstown, Geelong, Portland and Port Fairy.

[Inward Shipping Reports 1843 – 1885 \(VPRS 38\)](#)

Details vary but usually include date of entry, name of ship, country of vessel, tonnage, number, date and port of registry, name of master, country of master, number of crew, cargo, place of discharge, from where vessel came, owner or agents name, tonnage dues paid, and number of passengers.

[Record of Passenger Ship Arrivals 1869 – 1924 \(VPRS 954\)](#)

This series comprises a record of passenger ship arrivals at Victorian ports. Entries are arranged in the volumes firstly by the month of the ship's arrival, secondly by the port of departure and thirdly by date of ship's arrival. Entries for arrivals at Melbourne are listed first followed by arrivals at Geelong and Port Albert. Entries include port of arrival, date of arrival, name and vessel, tonnage, port of departure and number of cabin, intermediate and steerage passengers.

[Record of Passenger Ship Departures 1869 – 1924 \(VPRS 955\)](#)

This series is arranged identically to Record of Passenger Ship Arrivals (VPRS 954) above and includes the same information about each ship.

[Register of Shipping 1856 – 1983 \(VPRS 8005\)](#)

Entries mostly relate to berths within the Yarra River and are in all but one register in chronological order by date of the vessel's arrival. Information relating to the following matters is consistently given: arrival and departure times and dates, names of vessels and their masters, nationality of the vessel and/or where the vessel arrived from, berthing times and locations, tonnage of cargo and type of rig.

[Daily Lists of Vessels Discharging and Loading 1877 – 1906 \(VPRS 8008\)](#)

This series, maintained by the Melbourne Harbour Trust commissioners consists of daily lists of vessels discharging and loading at various Harbour Trust and other wharves and piers within the Port of Melbourne (Williamstown, Yarraville, Footscray and Hobsons Bay). Information recorded includes date of arrival, vessels name, tonnage berthed, rig, master's name, loading berth, date sailed, length and draught of rig, type of cargo, length of pier, whether loading or discharging.

[Alphabetical Card Register of Shipping Overseas Vessels 1930 – 1990 \(VPRS 8639\)](#) [microfilm copy of [VPRS 8003](#)]

The registers contain brief information about each overseas vessel (tonnage, length, oil or coal burner) records arrival and departure dates, where berthed and for how long, charges made for port services and vessel's agent. If a vessel's name is known this series can be used to determine dates of arrival and hence can provide a means of access to the fuller shipping information which is arranged chronologically by date of arrival in Register of Shipping ([VPRS 8005](#)) above.

[Alphabetical Card Register of Shipping Interstate Vessels 1930 – 1990 \(VPRS 8641\)](#) [microfilm copy of [VPRS 8004](#)]

The registers contain brief information about each interstate vessel (tonnage, length, oil or coal burner) records arrival and departure dates, where berthed and for how long, charges made for port services and vessel's agent. If a vessel's name is known this series can be used to determine dates of arrival and hence can provide a means of access to the fuller shipping information which is arranged chronologically by date of arrival in Register of Shipping ([VPRS 8005](#)) above.

As well as those records summarised above other records of the Melbourne Harbour Trust Commissioners ([VA 2799](#)); the Port of Melbourne ([VA 1426](#)); the Port of Geelong Authority, formerly Geelong Harbour Trust Commissioners ([VA 1425](#)); the Port of Portland Authority, formerly the Portland Harbour Trust Commissioners ([VA 1427](#)) and the Marine Board of Victoria ([VA 1424](#)) may be useful in researching ships and shipping movements.

Some Published Sources

Please note: these publications are not held at PROV

David Day, *Smugglers and Sailors. The Customs History of Australia 1788-1901*, AGPS, Canberra, 1992. Chapters 18 and 19 deal with customs in the Port Phillip District of New South Wales and the Colony of Victoria.

Ian Nicholson, *Log of Logs. A catalogue of logs, journals, shipboard diaries, letters and all forms of voyage narratives, 1788-1988, for Australia and New Zealand and surrounding oceans*, Roebuck Society Publication No 41, 1989(?).

Ian Nicholson, *Log of Logs. A catalogue of logs, journals, shipboard diaries, letters and all forms of voyage narratives, 1788-1993, for Australia and New Zealand and surrounding oceans*, Roebuck Society Publication No 47, 1993.

Ian Nicholson, *Log of Logs. A catalogue of logs, journals, shipboard diaries, letters and all forms of voyage narratives, 1788-1998, for Australia and New Zealand and surrounding oceans*, Roebuck Society Publication No 52, 1999.

Marten Syme, *Shipping arrivals and departures, Victorian Ports, Volume 1: 1798-1845*, Roebuck Society Publication No 32, Melbourne, 1984.

Marten Syme, *Shipping arrivals and departures, Victorian Ports, Volume 1: 1846-1855*, Roebuck Society Publication No 39, Melbourne, 1989.

Michael Cannon and Ian Macfarlane (eds), *Historical Records of Victoria, Foundation Series, Volume 4: Communication, Trade and Transport 1836-1839*, Victorian Government Printer, Melbourne, 1985. See in particular "Part I, Shipping and Customs", pages 3-252.

Photographs of ships

The Public Record Office does not have a collection of ship photographs. Researchers trying to locate photographs of ships should search the "Pictures Catalogue" at the State Library of Victoria (www.slv.vic.gov.au) or "Picture Australia" (www.pictureaustralia.gov.au). "Picture Australia" is an Internet based service developed by the National Library of Australia that allows you to search a number of significant online collections of images at the same time. When you undertake a search using "Picture Australia", you are in fact searching the collections of the participating institutions.