

## Transport – Public Transport – Railways

This guide to railway records held at Public Record Office Victoria is a revised version of the guide originally compiled by railway researchers M. Guiney, T. Rigg, and D. Jowett in 2002.

The early development of railways in Victoria was undertaken by private enterprise. Companies such as the Melbourne and Hobson's Bay Railway Company and the Melbourne, Mount Alexander, and Murray River Railway Company were incorporated in 1853. In 1858 the first Railways Department ([VA 2877](#)) was established to administer the infant network. The State Government purchased the rights and property of the private companies that had been incorporated in the previous four years. The development, operation and maintenance of the rail system was successively under the control of Department of Railways I, 1857-1871, Department of Railways and Roads, 1871-1877; the Department of Railways II, 1877-1884; the Victorian Railways Commissioners 1883 – 1973 and then Victorian Railways Board 1973 – 1983. In 1983 the government of the day amalgamated metropolitan rail and tram services under the Metropolitan Transit Authority ([VA 1044](#)).

The records held by the Public Record Office Victoria can be used to undertake research on the historical development of railway lines and/or structures. They can also be used for family history research by identifying persons communicating with, employed by, or contracting to the Victorian Railways.

### Suggested record series for family history research

The following series, used in conjunction with their indexes and registers, can provide information on individuals via the use of the surname:

- Secretary's Inward Correspondence 1859 – 1962 ([VPRS 421](#))
- Inwards Correspondence Registers 1859 – 1871 ([VPRS 422](#))
- Engineer in Chief Minute Books 1859 – 1904 ([VPRS 423](#))
- Engineer in Chief Inwards Correspondence 1859 – 1980 ([VPRS 425](#))
- Engineer in Chief Indexes to Inward Correspondence 1867 – 1956 ([VPRS 427](#))
- Existing Lines Branch Inwards Correspondence Registers 1878 – 1904 ([VPRS 433](#))

### Suggested records and topics for researching railway line history

Research into railway line history can be viewed from a number of different perspectives. The following are some suggested topics and record types that could be used.

- Tenders, contracts, construction progress reports, and records of Railway Construction Trusts, final returns to contracts.
- Operation of train services, accidents.
- Alterations to and development of individual stations, depots, track work, signalling, bridge.
- Traffic returns, specialised services (eg. grain) withdrawal of passenger or goods services.
- Closure investigation reports.
- Dismantling railways and disposal of equipment and land.

### Using correspondence to research general railway subjects

The Inwards Correspondence of the Secretary for Railways ([VPRS 421](#), 1852 – 1962) contains a wide range of correspondence created in the day-to-day operation of the railway system. It includes files on railway staff involved in matters other than their normal day-to-day work and correspondence from people or companies writing to the Department.

### Examples of these files are:

|                                       |   |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Private railway companies             | Train operations                          |
| Provision of new locomotives          | Proposed railways                         |
| McKeen Petrol Railmotors              | Signalling alterations                    |
| Steam Services on country lines       | Locomotive and rollingstock development   |
| Private sidings                       | Requests for alterations to station sites |
| Alterations and new works at stations | Renaming of stations                      |
| Bridge construction                   | Grain rates                               |
| Regrading schemes                     | Fares and freight rates                   |
| Cemetery railways                     |   |

Each file has an annual single number (eg. Sec. 32/5649) representing the year and progressive number, which can be obtained from the Inwards Correspondence Registers, [VPRS 422](#) or from references on other correspondence.

## Inwards Correspondence Registers [VPRS 422](#)

These register inwards correspondence to the Secretary for Railways ([VPRS 421](#)). From 1872 to 1911 letters were registered in alphabetical sections by surname or organisation for each year and so the registers are a good starting point for family history research.

In addition to surnames and company names, correspondence from municipalities, government departments, and internal railway branches is recorded alphabetically. From 1889, there is a separate volume each year for government departments and railway branches.

The following are examples using listings under "L":

- Lancaster W.K., Requests refund on unused portion of return ticket
- Lancefield residents seek an earlier train service to Melbourne
- Long Gully Gold Mining Co ask permission to mine under railway property
- Longwarry Timber Co ask for a siding to load timber from their mill

Following the general entry pages but still under "L", separate pages are provided for:

- Lands Department
- Law Department
- Leigh Shire Council
- Locomotive Superintendent

## Suggested records for researching construction of railway lines and structures

The records listed on page one of this guide, with the exception of [VPRS 1349](#), can be searched under the name of the contractors, (details of contracts can be obtained from Government Gazettes), the name of the railway under construction, or location of the station.

### Series containing additional material relating to railway construction:

|   |                           |
|---|---------------------------|
| Contract books 1857-1968  | <a href="#">VPRS 419</a>  |
| Victorian Railways Line Plans and Sections 1878-1929  | <a href="#">VPRS 5751</a> |
| Commercial Branch Proposed Lines Files 1890-1930  | <a href="#">VPRS 437</a>  |
| Parliamentary Standing Committees on Railways Reports 1891 – 1972   | <a href="#">VPRS 5399</a> |
| Victorian Railway Building Plans 1909-1961  | <a href="#">VPRS 4986</a> |
| Victorian Railway Building Index 1909-1961  | <a href="#">VPRS 4987</a> |
| Final Returns of Construction Costs of Lines 1892 – 1929  | <a href="#">VPRS 428</a>  |
| Correspondence and Administration Records, Engineer in Chief and Existing Lines Branch (includes Rough Diaries of Robert Watson, Engineer in Chief) 1854-1930 | <a href="#">VPRS 418</a>  |

## Minister of Railways and Minister of Transport

Unregistered Correspondence 1893 - 1902  
Ministers General Correspondence Files 1930-1971

[VPRS 617](#)  
[VPRS 10217](#)

### Miscellaneous railway series: (listed by subject)

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Melbourne and Hobson's Bay Railway Company        | <a href="#">VPRS 1281</a>                               |
| Melbourne and Suburban Railway Company            | <a href="#">VPRS 1282</a>                               |
| Accident Reports                                  | <a href="#">VPRS 3619</a>                               |
| Frankston Railway Station Records                 | <a href="#">VPRS 4963</a>                               |
| Railway Commissioner's Policy Files               | <a href="#">VPRS 10214</a> , <a href="#">VPRS 10706</a> |
| Books of Instruction                              | <a href="#">VPRS 5752</a> , <a href="#">VPRS 5753</a>   |
| Special Timetables                                | <a href="#">VPRS 4056</a>                               |
| Rollingstock drawings                             | <a href="#">VPRS 3426</a>                               |
| 1928 Royal Commission into the Victorian Railways | <a href="#">VPRS 2564</a>                               |

### Records in Other Places

[University of Melbourne Archives](#) - Accession Number: 76/85 Melbourne Mount Alexander and Murray River Railway Company, Minute book April 1853 - August 1856.

### Published sources

#### Information sources about railway employees

|                       |        |        |        |
|-----------------------|--------|--------|--------|
| Parliamentary Papers: | 1880-1 | Vol. 3 | p. 138 |
|                       | 1882-3 | Vol. 1 | p. 693 |
|                       | 1886   | Vol. 1 | p. 753 |

#### Triennial List of Railway Employees in the Government Gazette

| Year | Vol | Page | Year | Vol | Page |
|------|-----|------|------|-----|------|
| 1884 | 1   | 1459 | 1911 | 2   | 4457 |
| 1887 | 2   | 2055 | 1914 | 2   | 3267 |
| 1890 | 1   | 1237 | 1918 | 1   | 887  |
| 1893 | 1   | 387  | 1921 | 1   | 1189 |
| 1896 | 1   | 621  | 1924 | 1   | 1167 |
| 1899 | 1   | 433  | 1926 | 1   | 1233 |
| 1902 | 3   | 4099 | 1929 | 2   | 1931 |
| 1905 | 3   | 4719 |      |     |      |
| 1908 | 2   | 2333 |      |     |      |

Researchers can consult [PROV's Online Catalogue](#) for more information on records related to railways.

### Published sources at the State Library of Victoria

- Petitions from districts, towns, Railway Leagues seeking railway communication.
- Surveys of routes.
- Parliamentary authorisation:
  - Railway Standing Committee Reports
  - Progress of Bill
  - Construction Act

Information regarding the above three areas can be found in Victorian Parliamentary Papers, Parliamentary Debates and Victorian Statutes, which are available at the [State Library of Victoria](#).

There is a set of statutes in the Victorian Archives Centre Reading Room.

## Photographic Sources

Public Record Office Victoria holds a large collection of Railways photographic images. You can use an [online database index](#) to locate photographs.

Researchers can also search the "Pictures Catalogue" at the State Library of Victoria ([www.slv.vic.gov.au](http://www.slv.vic.gov.au)) or "Picture Australia" ([www.pictureaustralia.gov.au](http://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 agencies.