The Research Collection

Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century School Textbooks in
the Australian National Museum of Education

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Abstract
This paper focuses on the role of nineteenth and early twentieth century school textbooks in the development of Australian primary and secondary school curricula. School textbooks from the special research collection of the Australian National Museum of Education are selected to illustrate the emergence of school textbook publishing in the Australian Colonies during the nineteenth century and how Australian based authors adapted English school textbooks to meet the challenge of change during the establishment of Australian colonial education systems. Contemporary with the emergence of Australian colonial departments of public instruction in the last few decades of the nineteenth century was the emergence of Australian colonial textbook publishers such as Robertson & Mullins, William Brooks, Whitcombe & Tombs and Angus & Robertson, who contracted numerous Australian based school teachers as authors for their expanding schoolbook market. The Australian National Museum of Education has sought to compile a collection of school textbooks representative of the changes in curriculum, policy and practice in Australian schools during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Purposes of the Collection
Schools have histories and like all other institutions in modern society such as hospitals, churches and court houses, an approach to understanding what happened in these institutions in the past and how they evolved to what they are today is to examine the remaining evidence of their operation in the past. To find out what was taught in Australian schools over a hundred years ago and understand what and how children learnt in past decades we need to look at the school text books and readers children and their teachers used in classrooms during the nineteenth century and early decades of the twentieth century. Thus, one of the main reasons for compiling a collection of school text books from these periods is to offer an insight into aspects of Australian schooling and the adaptation of English, Scottish and Irish school texts to Australian social conditions and local educational trends.

The collection of nineteenth and early twentieth century school textbooks maintained by the Australian National Museum of Education has been compiled as a resource for the study of the history of schooling in Australia, during the colonial and early Federation eras. It is a research collection which is available to students and the general public interested in curriculum change in Australian primary and secondary schools over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These changes are evidenced in the content, format, style and place of publication of school textbooks used by students and teachers in Australian schools during that important period of population growth with its consequent rapid expansion of school building following the introduction of the free compulsory primary Education Acts of the Australian colonial governments, 1870s - 1880s.
This is a reference collection of non-fiction school textbooks, with the exception of those used in the teaching of English literature at various levels of the curriculum. It is used by teacher education students at the University of Canberra, by volunteers in school museums and by local historians seeking information about schooling in past eras. From time to time items in the collection are made available for displays arranged by the Museum on special occasions such as Open Days, history and education conferences and seminars.

The Context of the Collection
The school textbook collection of the Museum is accommodated in the Faculty of Education at the University of Canberra. It is part of a much wider collection of education related items acquired by the Australian National Museum of Education which encompasses the following strands or themes of Policy, Administration, Curriculum, Practice and Innovation. Its collections, totalling over 6500 items include school textbooks, histories of schools, a representative collection of annual school magazines and year books of Australian schools, an educational ephemera collection, educational documents and reports, student exercise books and work books, school syllabuses across subjects taught in Australian state and colonial schools. A digital photographic collection of nineteenth and twentieth century school buildings and files on distinguished educators is also being developed. The Museum has compiled a number of electronic databases relating to the above categories.

Composition of the Collection
The collection contains approximately 5000 school text books and school readers of which about 1000 belong to the nineteenth century special collection. Over 3000 books in the text book collection were published during the early decades of the twentieth century. The majority of the nineteenth century text books were published
in Britain, as it was not until the latter decades of that century that Australian publishers of school text books, such as Angus and Robertson and William Brooks, began to dominate the domestic market. However the Melbourne firm of George Robertson, (later Robertson & Mullen) was one of the first Australian publishers to enter the domestic school text book market in the 1850s and 1860s. The collection generally comprises more secondary school level books than those for the primary school grades.

Initially, during the period 1840-1870, the large majority of school textbooks available in Australian colonial denominational and non-denominational schools were published in Britain and written by English, Irish and Scottish authors. A few notable exceptions such as James Bonwick’s1 *Geography for the use of Australian Youth* was believed to be the first Australian published school text book in the 1840s. However, Ferguson records that a school spelling book was published by the Howe’s Press in Sydney in 1810.2 By the end of the nineteenth century a number of Australian school textbook authors began to appear, such as Alexander Sutherland, William Wilkins, H.B. Wall and C.R. Long. Because the main users of the collection are interested in school textbooks as indicators of content of the school curriculum as well as teaching method in particular subject areas, the school text books are arranged by curriculum subject, and within each subject, by primary and secondary level. The sections containing primary school readers and secondary school grammars are extensive, however the history and geography categories are also larger components of the collection. It appears that far fewer school textbooks were published in the subject domains of music and art.

**The Emergence of Australian School Text Book Publishers.**

During the period 1850-1890 colonial authors and publishers had to compete with the dominance of English publishers of school textbooks in the Australian colonial market. An important motivation for the emergence of locally written and published schoolbooks was the introduction of colonial government supported National Schools in the 1850s and the enactment of colonial Public Instruction Acts introducing “Free,
Compulsory and Secular primary schooling during the period 1870s-1890s. The contributions of James Bonwick, William Wilkins, George and Alexander Sutherland and W. R. Guilfoyle are of particular significance. The ANME has examples of the three latter abovementioned Australian based authors, together with selected examples of the colonial publishing contributions of George Robertson in Melbourne and Angus and Robertson in Sydney during the latter decades of the nineteenth century.

The Commissioners for National Education in Ireland published, during the nineteenth century, a large series of school readers and school textbooks from the 1830s to the 1870s designed to meet the needs of the Irish National school system. This series of school readers and textbooks became the foundation for school readers and textbook usage throughout the schools of the Australian Colonies during the mid and latter decades of the nineteenth century. They were highly suited to the NSW and Victorian “National Schools” which were established by these colonial governments beginning in 1849. This government assisted school system was based on the Irish National School model and initially relied on the importation of thousands of copies of the Irish National Readers Series before Australian based school textbook publishers became established in Sydney and Melbourne during the latter half of the century.

Almost all Australian colonial schools, National and Denominational, from the mid-nineteenth century used the Irish National Readers at some stage. Examples of the titles of these readers were simply, Third Reading Book of the Commissioners of National Education, Ireland, and, The Fourth Reading Book, etc. In addition to the readers, the Commissioners also published school textbooks in other subjects of the curriculum, for example, Compendium of Geography, compiled for the use of the
teachers and advanced classes of the National Schools in Ireland. All of the Readers and other textbooks were initially published in Dublin by Alexander Thom. However, in the 1870s special editions of the readers adapted for the Australian market were published to meet the needs of Australian colonial schools. For example the Advertisement opposite the title page of the Third Reading Book, 1878 states,

"The publisher hopes that the special editions of the Reading Books of the Irish Board of National Education, which have been revised and adapted for schools in Australia, Tasmania and New Zealand will be appreciated, not only for cheapness, but also as being better suited than any other series for the use of colonial youth."
A TREATISE
ON
MENSURATION.
FOR
THE USE OF SCHOOLS.
SECOND EDITION.

DUBLIN.
PUBLISHED BY DIRECTION OF THE
COMMISSIONERS OF NATIONAL EDUCATION.
At their Office in Marlborough-street.
SOLD BY R. GROOMBRIDGE, LONDON, AND
FRASER AND CO. EDINBURGH.
1837.

The preface goes on to state that these adapted editions were undertaken under the supervision of Mr. Archibald Gilchrist who was Inspector of School for Victoria, and each volume carries the title page inscription, "Published under the Sanction of the Education Department, Victoria".

The ANME is fortunate to have in its nineteenth century text book collection two examples of the school books of the National Commissioners for Education in Ireland, the most significant being a very early publication from the 1830s titled, "A
Among the common English school textbook series to be found in Australian colonial schools during the second half of the nineteenth century were the Collins’ School Series publications. Written and initially published in London and Glasgow, William Collins Sons & Company Ltd. published text books for infants, primary and secondary (grammar) schools across all subjects of the school curriculum. In such series as the “Infant School Primers and Readers” and “The Illustrated English Readers”, Collins was one of the predominant suppliers to the market for primary and infant school readers. These series initially included stories specifically suitable for schools in England, Scotland and Wales. In addition to school readers, their Educational Publishing series was particularly strong in the curriculum domains of arithmetic, (First Lessons in Arithmetic), music (Songs for Infant Schools), geography, history and modern languages (First French Course).

The ANME collection includes a representative selection of school readers especially published by state departments of education. Following are examples from different decades: The Adelaide Readers Series, published for the South Australian Department of Education by Whitcombe & Tombs during the 1930s; The Tasmanian Readers, published by the Tasmanian Department of Education in the 1940s; The Western Australian Readers Series, published by the W.A. Department of Education.
Some Examples of School Text Books Popular in Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Australian Schools.

In addition to the popular Irish School Readers Series published by the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland described above, the ANME holds a representative sample of some of the most common English and Australian published school text books during this period of education history. Among the oldest school textbooks in the ANME collection is the English grammar textbook by Lindley Murray titled, *English Grammar Adapted to the different classes of learners with an Appendix containing rules and observations for assisting the more advanced students to write with perspicuity and accuracy*. The ANME collection has a revised edition of this textbook published by T. Tegg in 1825, however the first edition of this book was published in 1795 and it went through many editions and reprints. The “Dr. Morell” English Grammar series for secondary, or “Grammar” Schools was also
ENGLISH GRAMMAR,

ADAPTED TO THE

DIFFERENT CLASSES OF LEARNERS:

WITH

An Appendix,

CONTAINING

RULES AND OBSERVATIONS,

FOR ASSISTING THE MORE ADVANCED STUDENTS TO WRITE
WITH PERSPICUITY AND ACCURACY.

"They who are learning to compose and arrange their sentences with accuracy and order, are learning, at the same time, to think with accuracy and order." Blair.

BY LINDLEY MURRAY.

With Corrections and Additions.

LONDON:
PRINTED FOR T. TEGG AND SON, 73, CHEAPSIDE;
R. GRIFFIN AND CO., GLASGOW; T. T. AND H. TEGG, DUBLIN;
ALSO, J. AND S. A. TEGG, SYDNEY AND HOBART TOWN.
most common. *A Grammar of the English Language* by J. D. Morell, also went through many editions in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. This series was published by Longmans & Co. in London. *The Principles of English Grammar* by William Lennie went through over eight editions between the 1860s and 1900, the ANME holding the 1886 edition which was published by the Edinburgh firm of Oliver & Boyd. One of the most popular school geography text books in Australian schools was that by Alexander Sutherland, *A New Geography for Australian Pupils*, published by the Melbourne firm of George Robertson in 1885. This author, who was headmaster of Carlton College Grammar School in Melbourne was also the co-author of one of the early histories of Australia suitable for schools. Sutherland’s *The History of Australia from 1606 to 1876* was also published by Melbourne’s George Robertson, in 1878, and by 1888 was in its twelfth edition.

One of the most notable teachers and school administrators of the NSW Department of Public Instruction during the latter decades of the nineteenth century was William Wilkins, the author of *The Geography and History of New South Wales*, which was first published by J.J. Moore in Sydney in 1863. This school text book was to be found in most Australian secondary schools during the 1860s-1880s.
The firm of Collins Brothers was a most prolific publisher of school text books and they adapted for Australian schools a popular series of reading books, for example, *The Australian Reading Books, Third Book*. Collins School Series, published in
Sydney in the 1890s. The Australian firm of William Brooks & Co. was also most active at the turn of that century in publishing school readers such as, *The New Australian School Series, Second Reader*, c. 1910. They also published a series of primary school readers especially for use in Catholic schools, titled, *Approved Readers for the Catholic Schools of Australasia* during the first decade of the twentieth century. W. R. Chambers published school text books across a number of subject areas under their “Chamber’s Educational Course” series, such as *Introduction to the Sciences* (1879). By the turn of the century one of the most popular Australian publishers of school text books was the Sydney firm of Angus & Robertson, which produced cheaper publications in card covers, such as *Geography: Australasia Part I*, published in 1910, small format, 64 pages, priced two pence.

Many school textbooks in the ANME’s research collection have interesting provenances, one of the most significant of which links us with one of Australia’s very early schools, the Parramatta Female Orphan School (established 1819), later to become the Protestant Orphan School Parramatta in 1860 when it was merged with the Male Orphan School. This school book bearing the book stamp, “Protestant Orphan School Parramatta” is titled *The School Anthology or Selections for Reading and Recitation in Prose and Verse*, by James Hews Bransby, a first edition published in 1831 by Baldwin & Cradock, London.
THE

SCHOOL ANTHOLOGY;

or

SELECTIONS

FOR READING AND RECITATION,

IN PROSE AND VERSE.

BY JAMES Hews BRANSBY.

"See, I have called the flowers that promised best."

LORD BYRON.

BEING A SECOND EDITION OF

"SELECTIONS FOR READING AND RECITATION,"

CONSIDERABLY AUGMENTED,

AND WITH MANY NEW PIECES.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR BALDWIN AND CRADOCK.

1831.

Price 5s. bound.
There are now a number of research collections of school text books in Australia, the largest being The Australian School Textbook Collection in the Deakin University Library. The Doris Chadwick Collection of History of School Education in Australasia is located at the Wollongong University Library. The HOPE Collection, (History of Primary Education) in South Australia, may be found at the University of South Australia Library. The University of New England Museum of Education at Armidale maintains an extensive school text book collection, perhaps one of the first such special collections to be established, when the Armidale Education Museum was initially established in the later 1950s by the Armidale Teachers’ College which transported to its site the original “beehive” 1880s school building, the Pallamallawa Public School, from the Moree district of NSW.

In addition to the nineteenth century school textbook collection the ANME holds a number of other special collections including: Australian School Ephemera Special Collection, School Readers and School Grammars Special Collection, Australian Published School Histories Collection; Annual School Magazines and School Yearbooks Collection; and School Student Exercise Books and Notebooks Collection.

The Australian National Museum of Education does not operate a school museum as such. However, in addition to the heritage collection of school text books, it offers a number of services to students, teachers, local historians, education historians and school museum volunteers and enthusiasts. The ANME provides a number of research opportunities as it maintains databases of information on the history of education in Australia and especially information relating to school museums around Australia. It provides field trips to education museums, old school sites and school archives. The ANME arranges an Annual Lecture by a noted Australian educational
historian each year. The Museum has a publishing program and has recently 
published School Museums: a Handbook for their Planning and Management, which 
has been written specifically for volunteers and sponsors of school museums in 
Australia, of which there are currently over eighty. The ANME also offers 
professional advice and expertise in the domain of the history of education and school 
museums in Australia, and may be contacted on 02 6201 2473 or via email at 
ANME@canberra.edu.au. See website at: www.anme.org.au

1 Bonwick, James, Geography for the use of Australian Youth, Tegg, Hobart 1845, 
was the first of this prolific author's Australian school textbooks.
2 Ferguson, John, Bibliography of Australia, National Library of Australia, Canberra, 
Vol. 1., Item 507, page 203, Spelling Book, George Howe, Govt. Printer, 1810. 
Ferguson states, "The first school book printed in Australasia. Unfortunately no copy 
appears to have survived"  
3 Bonwick, James, op. cit.  
4 Wilkins, William, Senior Inspector and later Undersecretary for Department of 
Public Instruction, was also noted for his authorship of school textbooks written for 
Australian schools and published in Australia including, The Geography and History 
of New South Wales, J.J. Moore, Australian Book Mart, George St. Sydney, 1871. 
5 Sutherland, Alexander and George, The History of Australia from 1606 to 1876. 
George Robertson, Melbourne, 1878.
George Robertson, Melbourne, 1878.
7 Commissioner of National Education, Ireland, Third Reading Book for the use of 
Schools in Australia, Tasmania and New Zealand, by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors 
of Schools Victoria, Dublin, Alexander Thom, 1878, see "Advertisement" adjacent to 
title page.
8 Commissioners of National Education Ireland, A Treatise on Mensuration for the 
Use of Schools, Dublin, 1837.
9 Burkhardt, Geoffrey and Beazley, Malcolm, School Museums: A Handbook for 
their Planning and Management, Australian National Museum of Education, 
Canberra, 2008.