LIMITS OF LOCATION
Limits of Location
Creating a Colony

Edited by Gretchen Poiner and Sybil Jack

SYDNEY UNIVERSITY PRESS
Australia is inside our heads, your Australia in yours, my Australia in mine; they have been put there by what we have read, learned, and seen, and insidiously, by the media and their image-makers, to which we all succumb in part and resist in part.

George Seddon 1997

For certainly, as you all know so well,
He who repeats a tale after a man
Is bound to say, as nearly as he can
Each single word, if he remembers it,
However rudely spoken or unfit,
Or else the tale he tells will be untrue,
The things invented and the phrases new.

Geoffrey Chaucer 14th century

… although Philothei was my best friend, I can no longer separate my own memories of her from all the stories that people liked to tell about her.

Louis de Bernières 2004

Those dark-skinned people who once named Cooloolah
Knew that no land is lost or won by wars,
For earth is spirit: the invader’s feet will tangle
In nets there and his blood be thinned by fears.

Judith Wright 1955

Sir! You have disappointed us!
We had intended you to be
The next Prime Minister but three:
The stocks were sold; the Press was squared;
The Middle Class was quite prepared.
But as it is! … My language fails!
Go out and govern New South Wales!

Hillaire Belloc 1908

And though the men on the front of the stage in our documents speak of food, of shelter, of loneliness and isolation, and squabble over trifles, this is the period in which the shape of things to come is first formed.

Manning Clark 1957
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Foreword
The survival of the archives, documents, records and personal papers which constitute
our historical record is a matter of chance, fate and circumstance. As a corollary, it is
also a matter of luck as to whether these records find their way into publicly accessible
repositories such as libraries and archives for use by scholars and researchers who are
investigating the records and piecing together the fragments of the past to make
sense of and reinterpret them for the future.
David Scott Mitchell was an exception to the general rule in that he consciously
and obsessively collected Australian historical records for decades with the express
purpose of forming the basis of a public collection to further scholarship and research.
He was born in Sydney and never left his birthplace, travelling very little even within
New South Wales. For Mitchell his journeys were in the mind and the imagination.
Limited attention had been given to the collecting of Australiana up to the time
Mitchell made it his sole pursuit, although it is not correct to assume that he was
the only pioneer in the field. Some notable predecessors were Justice Edward Wise
who, in 1865, bequeathed his book collection to the Australian Library and Literary
Institution (formerly the Australian Subscription library) which four years later
became the Free Public Library and precursor of the present State Library. Others
are Alfred Lee and Dr George Bennett, many of whose books eventually went to
David Scott Mitchell.
An interest in Australian historical records at the time of the centenary of the
founding of the colony of New South Wales in the late 1880s led a far-sighted project
for the compilation of published series of transcripts of early official documents in
Historical Records of Australia and New South Wales—essential to this day for access
by scholars to these primary sources.
However, in an apparently contradictory and contemporaneous trend, some of
the unpublished evidence in manuscript records from earlier decades of the century
about European settlement had become confronting to certain citizens who did
not wish their convict antecedents to be revealed. When Mitchell came on the
scene as a collector, Australian history, particularly of the country’s relatively recent
past as a colonial enterprise, was a subject some people, including a number in high
places, especially in New South Wales and Tasmania, preferred to forget rather
than to celebrate.
At the height of his collecting passion in the last years of the nineteenth century,
Mitchell had no patience with such distortions of the facts: ‘The main thing is to get
the records. We’re too near our own past to view it properly, but in a few generations
the convict past will take its proper place in the perspective, and our historians will
pay better attention to the pioneers,’ he is said to have proclaimed.
David Scott Mitchell died on 24 July 1907 and was buried with a few mourners
present under lemon-scented eucalypts at Rookwood Cemetery. Before he died,
after having resolved initial Government opposition, he knew that his collection
was safe and would be kept in perpetuity as a gift to the people of New South Wales
in its new purpose-built building. He also gave precise instructions in his last will
and testament where, with admirable clarity and perspicacity, he defined the future
of his collection of Australiana:
...I give and bequeath to the Trustees of the Public Library of New South Wales all my books, pictures, engravings, coins, tokens, medals and manuscripts ... upon the trust and condition that the same shall be called and known as “The Mitchell Library” and shall be permanently arranged and kept for use in a special wing or set of rooms dedicated for that purpose ...

His far-sighted philanthropy provided the means for any person who wishes to consult original source material to do so, and for this material to be reconsidered and re-assessed by generations long into the future. His public-spirited example was rare in his own era in this country, as it remains a century after his death.

In 2007, the year of the centenary of Mitchell’s death and of the great bequest of his collection to the people of New South Wales, there could be no more appropriate tribute for the celebration of this anniversary than the compilation of this collection of essays in *Limits of Location*, all of which are based on different aspects of the holdings of the Library where Mitchell’s collection now rests and which bears his name.

It is even more fitting that the essays in *Limits of Location* have been researched and written by members of the Independent Scholars Association of Australia (New South Wales Chapter). The authors have all been familiar with the collections of the Mitchell Library and used them extensively for reference and research purposes in a range of fields and disciplines from their university days, throughout their varied and eminent careers, and now as independent scholars examining and writing about our past from original source documents.

In *Limits of Location*, the members of ISAA exemplify the desire and purpose of David Scott Mitchell that his collection should illuminate the past for an understanding of the present through a publicly accessible library of rich resources describing every facet of our history and culture for all who wish to use it, without fear or favour, whatever their individual views or opinions. The Mitchell Library was established with this basic ethos as its simple and unequivocal raison d’être and it is as true now as when David Scott Mitchell was considering how to ensure that his collection would survive beyond his death.

It is a matter of great pleasure and pride for all the staff of the Mitchell Library who have been associated with the writers of *Limits of Location* that the publication has come to fruition in the year of the centenary of the bequest of David Scott Mitchell. The essays in *Limits of Location* are testimony to the scope and depth of the Mitchell collection.

As the centenary in 2010 of the opening of the Mitchell Library approaches and the Mitchell Library enters its next 100 years of existence, the dedication of the essayists in *Limits of Location* demonstrates by example the immeasurable benefits of Mitchell’s bequest to the research and the writing of the history of our nation.

Elizabeth Ellis
Mitchell Librarian
Why This Collection?

This book is a collection of stories that are not well known—some largely unknown. They weave in and out of lives and times in nineteenth-century New South Wales.

We have been asked the question: why were we drawn to the project?

Reflecting on the available but under-recognised wealth of skills and material in our society, two different strands of thinking converged—both circling about our desires to promote forms of cultural capital dear to us. We have long been keen to make the research talents and creativity of the members of the New South Wales Chapter of the Independent Scholars Association of Australia more widely known. Then, as users of the Mitchell Library, we were also alive to the richness of the material it holds. The treasures of the library are well acknowledged and that knowledge has a far reach, but it deserves to be extended. The possibilities for interpretation that the records in their various forms hold and the insights that they offer into so many aspects of how this nation and its cultures came into being are inestimably important. Here then the two lines of thinking dovetailed most beguilingly.

Why focus on nineteenth-century New South Wales? Time defies stasis but this really was a period of extraordinary social change as a new society was transplanted on to the face of an old land and its people and over the years culturally transformed itself and its hosts. In their various magnitudes most of the shifts in political and social orientations that occurred after the turn of the eighteenth century were not truly revolutionary but a page in history had been turned. Public narratives set out those shifts and give form and context to endeavours to capture and understand less striking processes, private lives and personal writings, but the stories of our past that we wanted to explore lay in the day-to-day existence of the people, difficult to catch even when reading between the lines of more official records. The stories lie in letters, diaries, photographs, poetry and out-of-the-way records—so easily lost in grander narratives, yet a paper trail hard to ignore.

As for closing at Federation, we felt it important to contain these transformations in a frame that would give coherence to the diverse perspectives that we hoped contributions would bring to interpreting the times.

We have been carried along by the excitement of the idea of this project and the satisfactions of its coming into being. To this has been added the forging of a sense of community among the essayists.
**Acknowledgments**

It is surprising how much administrative work has been necessary to bring this collection together. There is no mention of Jane Burns' name as a contributor but, from the very beginning, she has managed the project and shepherded it through to its conclusion. Without her labour and her efficiency, understanding and good humour we would have mired many a time. We are all most grateful.

Nor does Catherine Rogers' name appear up-front as a contributor, which she most certainly is, for this book is a reflection of her design skills and sensitivities in the transformation of words and images. The work achieved its physical form through the ministrations of Sue Wiles and we are thankful for the professional attention to detail in layout and editing that she brought to her task.

The co-operation and support of the Mitchell Library has been pivotal in translating the idea of the book into reality. Elizabeth Ellis, Mitchell Librarian & Director Collection Management, saw a future for the work from the time of our first meeting and smoothed the path for it. We are indebted to all Mitchell Librarians for their assistance. They have been unfailingly helpful. They deserve medals for remaining courteous and unperturbed by even the strangest of questions, and their knowledge and specialisations have been invaluable in the detective work of research. We are especially thankful for the help that Jim Andrighetti, Jennifer Broadbent, Alan Davies, Cheryl Evans, Helen Harrison, Mark Hildebrande, Warwick Hirst, Linda West and Robert Woodley gave us time and again and again. As well, we are pleased to acknowledge the various 'in kind' contributions that the Mitchell has made without which costs of production would have soared.

We are most grateful to the State Library of NSW, the Royal Australian Historical Society, the Office of the Status of Women and The School of Philosophical and Historical Inquiry, Faculty of Arts at The University of Sydney for their financial sponsorship of this work. Beyond supporting the research, these contributions have eased our way to publication and carry an imprimatur of perceptions of its worth.

Jan Todd most courageously offered to read all essays on their completion. We are indeed thankful for this, for her eagle eye, and a fine sense of language that filtered out a good deal of dross, and that with wit. Elspeth Browne spent time and care in cleaning up the bibliography, an eye-glazing exercise of great value. Beyond the call of duty Marie de Lepervanche gave time and attention in trawling through and making sense of sets of chaotic endnotes.

Some time ago Sue Wagner gave good advice on structuring the collection so that it would have coherence from a publisher's viewpoint. For this we are indeed grateful.

There are also thanks to be extended from essayists individually. Marilyn Dodkin expresses her indebtedness to the Benevolent Society of NSW for permission to examine their records; Helen Hewson gratefully acknowledges the Centre for Plant Biodiversity at CSIRO for providing her with full use of their facilities in her research; Marie de Lepervanche thanks Anna Munster for guidance in dealing with electronic mysteries; Gretchen Poiner thanks Hilary Golder and Vivienne Kondos for reading drafts of her essay and Kay Williams and Dorothy Bremmer for sharing their family knowledge of Elizabeth Yabsley; Audrey Tate is grateful to the local History Research Centre, Exeter, UK, for their support.

*Map 2*

The colony of New South Wales, from John Arrowsmith, 1842
Introduction
Setting the scene

Are early memories of the world around us born of personal experience or imposed by others? Whatever the source they are crucial to a sense of identity and an essential part of human self-awareness. The question is central for understanding history, for making sense of present events and processes and who we are as social actors. Dominant memories, usually of people with power or influence, are the building blocks of history. Understanding history requires us to unpack these memories and the memories of the less fortunate.

But neither society nor history is of a piece and there cannot be one understanding of it. Certainly many narratives and even analyses of the past give impressions of coherence. That is as much a consequence of collapsing different events, processes and experiences into chronological summaries as it is an encompassing reflection on lives and times. Until quite recently the history of Australia and what white citizens saw as Australian society took little account of Aboriginal Australia—past or present. Nor was much attention given to the attitudes and experiences of ‘others’—those people who were not deemed to be makers of history or society. This category drew heavily from the ranks of immigrants—Jews, Muslims, Blacks, women, the working class and, with a sectarian skew, those who did not qualify as being from an accepted Protestant culture, the latter well represented among the lower orders. Yet important ‘others’ of mixed origins, despite their birth, were treated as white; for example George Howe (1769–1821). He was born in the West Indies to an Irish father and a West
Indian mother but became the second government printer and printed the first book in Australia—*New South Wales General Standing Orders* (1802)—two copies of which are held in the Mitchell Library.

The development of a sense of who we are as persons and as a society owes no less to the perceptions of individuals and groups of individuals than it does to officially decreed attitudes. It is maintained by memory, personal and collective, and shaped by reflection on the stories, true or false, that can be told. The way in which people keep or abandon the records of their personal past is itself a potent shaper of identity and community.

Each of the essays in this book bears testimony to the kaleidoscopic nature of the ways in which people saw the natural and the cultural world around them. More than that, they reveal selectivity in ways of seeing and remembering and then recording what was observed. They also expose the vicarious nature of much of that seeing and recall since so much perception of the world around them was focused through the eyes of others—as it is for us. Then, of course, there is always the question of how we, and they as observers, consciously choose to see our subjects. Nor are these issues of perception exclusive to the early days of the establishment of New South Wales. In other places and at other times observations on how women and men have grappled with alienation, isolation and insecurity as well as revelled in achievement, reflect the selectivity of social constructions.

There is a great deal to celebrate in the 200 years and more since white settlement in New South Wales—vision, creativity, tenacity and commitment have been vital in developing more than a penal colony. From early days, socially, economically, politically, administratively and physically a nation was in the making. It is also true that the record is sometimes discomfiting, embarrassing and even shameful. But just as the lives of individuals cannot honestly be graphed on a continuously positive curve, neither can history.

As we contemplate life in the nineteenth-century settlement of New South Wales the letters and journals of newcomers provide a guiding thread through inherited thoughts and perceptions and the reality of a society in flux. Struggles to understand the cultural expectations and attitudes of those whose writings have survived in these forms expand interpretations of history and the record. The evidence is neither complete nor perfect. Here as elsewhere the literate are nearly always better served. The voice of the poor or subjugated is rarely heard at first hand. The barriers of language and culture often put an extra filter between the reader and the past as others saw it. What, for example, are we to make of defences offered in law courts by non-English-speaking defendants? Structural inequality biases all our thoughts and actions—expressed more clearly in personal than in official records. Yet greater silences remain in the unvocalised experiences of those perceived as of no consequence; the people who have fallen out of history or to whom have been attributed a history not necessarily consonant with their experiences.
INTRODUCTION

There are resonances in the way that the processes of colonisation in New South Wales were implemented with those experienced in other parts of the world. The business of claiming new country inevitably involves usurpation, for few lands holding promise of development and settlement are uninhabited. Nor has Australia been free from the seemingly insoluble problems of multiple claims to a single territory, claims that continue to wreak tragedy in other countries and states. Displacement of the original inhabitants and dislocation of their culture is an inevitable consequence of colonisation and the concept of terra nullius has a long history; it has, for example, provided the justification for the appropriation of land from the earliest Spanish invasion of the Americas.

THE ROLE OF THE MILITARY

A triggering purpose for the establishment of the colony of New South Wales was to relieve the congestion in British gaols. Whatever the longer-term objectives, the initial form of control was military in procedures and personnel. The governor had the power to convene the court in criminal and civil matters. Judge advocate was, however, a military position, hence since a civil court consisted of a judge advocate and two ‘fit and proper persons’ it was effectively another military court. The irony was that some governors permitted those convicts who had legal training and experience to present cases in the civil courts. Because military power was dominant it led to political disagreement and a fractured white society. John Macarthur’s friend Richard Atkins, Judge Advocate from 1794, wrote bitterly of the military fetters on government and quarrelled therefore with several later governors. The two friends were subsequently involved in the Rum Rebellion that arose from free settler complaints that the governors were abusing their powers.

Military structure is essentially hierarchical, in this case largely tied to European social forms. Yet the trouble for members of the officer class was that their aristocratic ambitions—and sometimes ties—were not supported by the resources of privilege. The officers dispatched to the new colony were mainly those who could not afford the price of commissions in prestigious regiments and whose aims were to establish their fortunes. Service in the NSW Corps provided a platform for appointment and preferment in the colony. While originally land grants were made to marines prepared to stay in New South Wales, their officers had no such entitlement since it was not considered that they would seek to remain, although that system changed on Phillip’s departure in 1792. The system of land grants and selling commissions opened possibilities for lower-ranking officers. Adjutant John Wild, for example, husband of Mary (see Gretchen Poiner, this volume), could otherwise not have come to enjoy financial security and independence.

Members of the lower ranks were not elite troops. The rank and file of the marines who sailed with Arthur Phillip, first governor of the colony, had been taken from military gaols where they were confined for various offences but even they could
entertain some expectation of modest economic advancement. Some of the convicts were better educated and more skilled than members of the military and were employed by the governor in a quasi-professional capacity. James Meehan (see Sybil Jack, this volume), for example, was one of the number of political prisoners who arrived in Australia in February 1800 and was immediately made assistant to Charles Grimes, the surveyor-general. During Grimes’ absence for about three years, Meehan did much of his work with the title of Assistant-Surveyor and on his retirement in 1821 boasted that he had surveyed every farm in New South Wales. With other ‘98 veterans he acquired a considerable land holding in the south-west of Sydney, then known as Irish town—now Bankstown.2

After the end of the Napoleonic wars the government was able to draw on many military men on half pay for various professional positions. Thomas Livingstone Mitchell (see Jack, this volume), who had produced a useful manual on surveying after his Peninsular experience, brought these skills to Australia and gained a place in history as one who helped shape the image of the country. Non-military younger sons of well-established families, men such as William Charles Wentworth or William Romaine Govett, also hoped to make their fortunes in the less rigidly structured society of the colony. In these circumstances the needs of the settlement and the opportunism of individuals, spiced with a modicum of good luck, favoured the bold. Yet, as it often is with history, others whose names never made it to the records, or whose identity has dropped out of memory, were no less important: their skills, their imagination and their toil were critical in building the idea of what was to become Australia. Even if we do not know their names, many are central characters in the stories that follow.

AN UNEQUAL SOCIETY

For all our pious belief that a core characteristic of Australian culture is the ethic of egalitarianism, the society that grew from the settlement in Sydney Cove was marked by social inequality, an inequality that the privileged were at pains to maintain. As an outpost of the British Empire, and a penal colony, New South Wales society was stamped with social differences. It was not only the military nature of its governance that assured the principles and practices of hierarchy; inequality constituted the ground for the use and often exploitation of labour—convict, indentured and free. Waves of migration brought people of different backgrounds to the colony. As official attitudes turned away from the convict system and sought to redress the imbalances of the sexes, the British Government instituted a system of bounty immigration managed by the London Emigration Committee. In 1835 the Government of NSW added a colonial bounty system. The primary beneficiaries of the scheme were the employers. They could apply for permission to import labour and were then paid a bounty by the colonial government to cover most of the associated costs. As Hilary Golder points out, it developed into a productive business for shipping entrepreneurs.3
Before 1840, 28,000 people were brought out in this way although over 70 percent of the workforce remained convict in origin. At its peak in 1841 the bounty system brought in 21,000 free settlers and added 15 percent more British labourers to the existing population. The objective was a virtuous as well as a skilled labour force.

The woeful experiences of Indian labourers (Marie de Lepervanche, this volume) provide distressing evidence of the ways in which individual pastoralists abused cheap coolie labour for personal economic gain. It was a practice supported by many an eminent colonist including some already involved in the British bounty system. Even in the face of official discouragement such men persisted in trying to import coolie labour. The practice was not confined to New South Wales; indentured Indian labour had long been exploited in Bengal and elsewhere in the Indian subcontinent and it was exported on a larger scale to other parts of the empire.

In the early nineteenth century the British Government was abandoning the regulation of social welfare, not only moving towards laissez-faire but also positively endorsing the idea that charity was a matter for private individuals and religious institutions. Philanthropy itself affirmed and reproduced social inequality for, notwithstanding the charitable purpose in its founding, admission to The Female School of Industry brought with it an intention of training destitute girls for domestic service in the houses of the privileged. From a reading of Marilyn Dodkin’s essay this was also an expectation of the Benevolent Society. Yet it should be noted that social inequality was not necessarily construed as a problem but rather accepted as God’s ordinance. Neither did inequality inevitably betoken the harsh subjugation of those who worked for wages whether assigned or free. Take the cases of George Howe the printer, James Meehan, Georgina Murray and John Thompson (Jack, Poiner and Helen Hewson, this volume). Beverley Kingston points out that ‘those who did develop a taste for work, especially if combined with a skill, or natural cleverness, prospered, and work became a route not so much to salvation as to freedom and a better life.’ Thus transportation brought with it opportunity for some who were ultimately able to forge a life of respectability and reasonable comfort—a possibility denied them in the land of their birth. Since respectability was considered a moral and social virtue its achievement paved the way to social acceptance within the stratified society and was, no doubt, accompanied by considerable personal satisfaction.

It is also true that, when expressed as oppression, inequality led some in their desperation to seek escape, albeit the chances of success were slight. Absconding presented as perhaps the only option although, in a strange environment and without networks of support, seldom viable. And it was one way in which assigned or indentured labour, members of the lower ranks of the military, Aboriginal people in employment, and sometimes those ‘in care’ sought to exercise a measure of control over their lives. It promised liberty and release from draconian control or sometimes simply unpalatable confinement. This is a theme that surfaces in several essays whether
it was convicts or Indians hoping to reach China or Calcutta by crossing the Blue Mountains or girls trying to escape the discipline exercised by the Benevolent Society or The Female School of Industry. Such hopes of freedom were generally unrealistic in the conditions of settlement where the absconders had no lines of support and were ignorant of the country and climate. Aborigines, decamping in response to other cultural responsibilities, inevitably had greater success since the country was familiar. The few convicts, mainly Irish, who escaped often had an advantage in stolen firearms, and help from Aboriginal groups.

Even the most utopian of societies harbour social inequalities in multiple forms. In Australia we have comforted ourselves with a credo of egalitarianism but we continue to condone the exploitation of labour in various ways. Nor can the problems of discrimination, exploitation and being out of place be neatly separated and compartmentalised—in the past or now—as reference to the experience of many migrants in the workforce (officially registered or not) attests.

**RELIGION IN THE COLONY**

As well as the baggage of hierarchy, early immigrants—in Australia as elsewhere—also brought with them religious beliefs based on Christianity and the intention of imposing them on indigenous people. British churches of all denominations were much occupied with raising money for missions, inspired by the belief that the immortal souls of those to whom the gospel had not yet been preached were in dire danger. Missionaries often had difficulties in accepting the practices of those amongst whom they came to live although, as Ian Keese relates, in Australia this was not one of the challenges confronting Lancelot Threlkeld. Yet friction often characterised the interactions of accepted Christian practices with religious behaviour that did not fit the pattern of ‘enlightened’ Western thinking. The desired conversion of Aboriginal people was a challenging process demanding changes to their social patterns as well as beliefs, and the missionaries who came were not always sympathetic to the practices of those they came to live amongst. Christine Jennett writes that even concerned Christians lacked respect for Aboriginal cultures. Their particular understanding was underpinned by a paternalism that required Aboriginal people to change. There was a paradox in the certitude that forfeiting hitherto successful lifeways was the key to survival. The strains appear in an uneasy balancing act between equality in the sight of God and the Pauline injunction of obedience to secular authorities. There were also other causes of tension, for the attitudes of clergy like Lancelot Threlkeld and William Bedford were often in opposition to those more influential representatives of the Protestant church such as Samuel Marsden and John Dunmore Lang, although the latter was far from consistent in his views.

For the faithful among settlers, religious observances formed a basic pattern of daily, or at least weekly, life. Such indeed would have been expected of Sarah
Broughton and others of her family since her father was Bishop of Australia. His appointment and position would have inspired strength of faith among members of his domestic circle as well as their demonstrations of it. Pious ritual was also an integral element in the life of Eleanor Stephen, the daughter of a clergyman. Audrey Tate and Margaret Bettison, who tell her tale, make it clear, nonetheless, that she was alive to the pomposity of much of the ceremony and many of the clergy. Family connections aside, religion was a source of consolation and support to Eleanor in her grief and loss. And so it must have been to many women, given the distressing infant mortality rates. More generally, and as the diaries and letters of settlers reveal, church attendance acted as a social glue and added dimension to community connection. Formal prayers constituted keystones in the organisational regime of charitable institutions providing residential care.

MAKING A PLACE
The history of colonisation has been scarred with oppressive practices but it was not all beer and skittles for all immigrants. Over the time it took to establish a new society the experiences that make up hardship, deprivation and isolation dogged many a colonist. These conditions persisted for families and individuals in remote locations although, in her book, Maggie MacKellar cautions us to be aware that frontier myths in both Australia and Canada (and, we would add, probably elsewhere) have overshadowed the experiences of settler women. The circumstances of settling may have changed from one country to another but over time and continents they must surely have had much in common. Take, for instance, the development of sentiments of belonging, critical for the well-being of individuals and necessary for a society to flourish.

Many of the themes tracking through these essays are not confined to yesteryear and colonial enterprises. The very notion of being out of place is one that knows no time. It has disconcerting relevance today plaguing asylum seekers and refugees worldwide. Nor does absconding from modern detention centres and closed institutions promise happier outcomes these days. An intriguing twist is that to allay feelings of being out of place it is not always necessary to change location but rather to rework sentiments of attachment. To effect such change was the avowed purpose of nineteenth-century missionary endeavours: today, perhaps more radically, the objective is for ‘others’ to become ‘more like us’.

In the chapter on belonging, Poiner proposes that social networks registered as key in the development of community and place in the early days while the physical environment and location took on greater and more positive significance with the passage of time as settlers saw the world around them as their own. A persistent theme in this collection is the ways in which the country, its inhabitants, flora, fauna, landscape and climate were initially but unsurprisingly viewed through European eyes. As Hewson observes, ways of seeing and thinking about the landscape were
decidedly Eurocentric. As time passed, however, things Australian were recognised as having a legitimate identity that was different and specifically theirs—one that could be accepted on its own terms and with its own integrity. A nation was in the making.

CLAIMING THE COUNTRY
The process of change was not simple or uniplanar. The land itself eroded some European cultural preconceptions. Individuals maintained or reshaped their identity in the face of the unfamiliar, an unfamiliar that obstinately refused to resemble their expectations. Initially the migrants had differing visions. What they saw was what was in their heads not on the land before them. Watkin Tench commented:

… the opinions of those who had inspected the adjoining country (of which number I was not) were so various, that I shall decline to record them. Some saw a rich and beautiful country; and others were so unfortunate as to discover little else than large tracts of low land, covered with reeds, and rank with the inundations of the stream.6

Initially emotionally inaccessible to those who wrestled with it in seeking their livelihood, the land was more than curious and unfamiliar. It took on other characteristics—harsh, resistant and often heart-breaking. Little wonder that ‘home’ was idealised in sentiment and yearning that was expressed through poetry and images as well as recorded in diaries and letters. Later, as a rudimentary idea of ‘Australian-ness’ emerged, acceptance of the uncompromising character of the country began to develop. Those Australian-born, increasingly a majority, who had knowledge of the country and had come to terms with, or were reconciled to, its capricious character were pleased to identify as Australian.

Cultural and attitudinal reorientation and adaptation was a two-way struggle. The place was shaping the people but the migrants were also determined to shape the countryside in their own image of home. They strove to introduce the familiar into the strange and topsy-turvy land. As Jack reveals, early surveyors had both the inclination to and the responsibility of imposing the idea of New South Wales on the country. They measured and laid out the terrain in European ways and with the assumption that European law would apply. There is a wider imperial sub-text and practice under such an Australian experience.

To mark the country as claimed and as useable (at least in the eyes of those appropriating it) involves more than hoisting the national standard. The common practice of mapping it in the ways of the newcomers was an early objective for colonial administration. The marks made on paper thus defined geographical possibilities of expansion and development and constituted the legal framework within which this could happen. But as white settlement spread beyond Sydney and the more remote developing population centres in the colony so did an uncouth, lawless and often brutal lifestyle come to flourish in the bush. In 1826, partly as a means of reducing the incidence of disorder, Governor Darling established the area known as the ‘limits of location’ within which white settlers could seek land
grants but beyond which they could not. The line on the map, however, presented no real containment. In 1829 the area designated for settlement was increased to encompass the Nineteen Counties. Even so, in the search for good grazing land there was much illegal squatting beyond the lines on paper which could not be considered as successful in controlling the population spread and hence in achieving their social purpose. Indeed by 1861 nearly one million acres (ca 404,858 hectares) had been claimed outside the limits of location. Of course, in the context of these essays examining aspects of a boundary-pushing society, there are numerous other ways in which to read the 'limits of location'.

Approaches to bringing British order to the landscape by mapping and naming took little account of the actual physical environment. In its strangeness the messages the country carried about productivity, control and predictability did not register. Nor did the relationship to the land of the people who originally inhabited it, but who were physically separated from it in the course of white settlement, convey meaning. Colonial courts did not recognise the connections between the land and its Aboriginal occupants since this was not a familiar proprietorial relationship. Aborigines were frequently invisible, either because they prudently sought to be so or simply because they were filtered out of the gaze of the colonists who saw the country either through a lens of optimistic expectation or resigned struggle. Early attitudes coloured by romantic notions of the primitive became scarred by the need to justify aggressive appropriation of land and exploitation of its inhabitants. And while individuals may have benefited from benign but often patronising intervention, more broadly, Aboriginal culture did not.

Jennett makes clear that the 'terms of inclusion' disregarded the diversity in Aboriginal world-views and the relationships that sustained them culturally and physically, and indeed quite discounted the essential character of Aboriginal societies. Little understanding could come from public attitudes that were either patronising or reflecting self-interest, and in official written records the diminution or distortion of an Aboriginal presence has clouded appreciation of their part in the development of New South Wales. At a personal level, photographs give clues to another story that Gaynor Macdonald tells of the contribution of Aboriginal labour in the rural economy of the colony in the nineteenth century. There are two sets of uncontested wisdoms about the role of Aboriginal people in the economic development of the country that stand in contradiction: on the one hand Aboriginal people are believed to have contributed nothing to that development and on the other their labour is believed to have been exploited. Macdonald challenges both propositions and argues that mutuality—which does not imply symmetry in power—was common in many Aboriginal/pastoralist labour relations; indeed, some of the photographs appear to have been staged in order to make that very point. Tragically, the trust and friendship that characterised these relations was brought to an end at Federation when Aborigines were explicitly excluded from the benefits planned for the new nation.
It was not only Aboriginal people who were so long invisible to selective social vision. Many others, if recognised at all, were at best a shadowy presence. Yet from the beginning the ethnic mix was diverse, including, for example, Indians, Pacific Islanders, Africans and other immigrant groups—people who were sometimes sought for their economic value but who were deemed to have no social position. Historians’ concentration on migrants from the British Isles has obscured the contributions and the fate of those from other parts.

WAYS OF SEEING
Artistic and literary representations of the new land were heavily influenced by European cultural ideas of the Enlightenment and the Romantic Movement. These early Europeans wanted, perhaps expected, to see in the ‘new land’ the strange and the striking, the picturesque and the imposing—‘unspoilt nature’. Imagination was the critical interpretative function that their culture required the educated class to exercise upon the world around them in order to fit the differences they encountered in the new culture with the common romantic topos used by writers at that time. Hewson uses the poetry of W C Wentworth and Barron Field to great effect demonstrating the burgeoning of an aesthetic appreciation of the country. There is, however, a meaningful difference between the gaze of a native son (Wentworth) and that of the British-born Barron Field. Appreciation of the very different flora is evident in botanical illustrations that grew more discerning over time. It is also expressed in the collection of botanical specimens, a practice that drew women especially to connect with the land as they settled into it.

Visitors inevitably brought with them a Euro-centred perspective and the Frenchman Albert Tissandier was no exception, notwithstanding that at the time he recorded his observations—the end of the nineteenth century and 80 years later than Barron Field—a vibrant sense of an independent cultural identity was flourishing in Australia. It is evident from Susan Steggall’s interpretations of his words and images that the technical nature of much of his interest was counterpoised by a sharpened appreciation of the exotic, but what he saw, and how he saw it, reflected a particularly Gallic sensibility. In travellers’ tales the often-distancing prism through which outsiders view landscapes, people and cultures may not only sharpen the pleasure of exotica but also increase disappointment when difference fails to excite.

KNOWLEDGE, UNDERSTANDING AND COLLECTIONS
By the time of Tissandier’s visit, most residents were Australian born and no longer saw the country as strange and exotic. As a colonial grandson, this was R H Mathews’ country. His fascination for Aboriginal culture was deep and enduring and his dealings with Aboriginal people familiar. The legacy of Mathews’ ethnographic work that Martin Thomas describes as ethnomania is a reminder of the importance of collections and their preservation in establishing a ground not simply for seeing but
also for understanding past ways and other people. Thomas writes of a resonance between Mathews and Mitchell. It reaches beyond their time in history and reveals a shared delight in the evidence of documents. Just as the information that Mathews assembled on Aboriginal culture was eclectic, so a great value of the Mitchell collection is its breadth and diversity, positively inviting multiple responses in reading. It is cautionary, for the ground from which history is mediated is ever shifting, resisting certitude or a belief in but one way of seeing.

The Europeans brought with them a complex form of written material and a long habit of storing such materials in public or private archives. Public records have a greater chance of long-term survival as the bureaucracy preserves those it wants, sometimes inscribing them on stone; private records that give a different, personal and less stereotyped perspective are more vulnerable to destruction because there is no necessary mechanism for their retention. Individuals collected material that interested them and such collections might be passed on to others but it is only in the last few centuries that collections of private materials open to public scrutiny have been brought together in libraries like the British Library, the Bibliothèque Nationale or the Library of Congress. The Mitchell Library follows in the great tradition of such libraries and over the years has collected the minutiae and memorabilia of those whose lives were tied up with the land and society around them. Almost as soon as it was established some families saw it as a safe and appropriate home for the chronicles and stories of their kin. (The notes and correspondence of Sir James Dowling were acquired by the Library in 1909 and the Papers of Sir Alfred Stephen in 1910.) The collection of essays in this book is designed to celebrate the many ways in which the Mitchell’s holdings illuminate the past and the present.

There are not only recurrent themes that draw together the chapters in this book, the names of many people also crop up in different contexts. But perhaps it is the ever-present nameless, the so often voiceless members of the communities in colonial Australia who, in their triumphs and tragedies, constitute the connecting tissue of the work. They are the continuing social presence, the people with whom history is made whether they will it or no.