

## DESCENT

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Book Notes

**Victoriana Sydney 1837-1901: a journey in photography by Stephen Thompson, 2016,**

Softcover, 22 cm, 169 pages ISBN: 9780992467166; SAG Ref: B4.000/35/3 Available from the SAG bookshop for \$35.00 and \$11 P&H.

The spectacular growth of Sydney during the last half of the nineteenth century was paralleled by similar progressive innovations in the world of photography. Stephen Thompson, in his introduction to Victoriana Sydney, points out that Sydney, with its inner suburbs, is one of the few largely intact Victorian cities left in the world. It was photographed as it grew. In his introduction Stephen lists a number of photographic collections used in compiling the book and discusses the types of photographs taken during the Victorian period. This brief illustrated introduction may well help the family historian identify the types of photographs they may have in their own collection. The book is beautifully laid out. After discussing the photographic technology, the following chapters look at images of the city, the suburbs, and then the recreational facilities in the great outdoors now that public transport could get you there. The population of Sydney has always been composed of a wide variety of people living in different types of homes and following a variety of occupations. Many were recent immigrants and the biggest divide in the population at the time was religion. As photography improved people were often photographed in an appropriate context, on the verandah, in the garden or out shopping and we reach the final chapters; out yachting or visiting the beach. The photographs selected for the book are crisp and clear and it is well worthwhile having a look at them with a magnifying glass. The early chapters are devoted to the city and show streetscapes, and quiet corners, and images of Sydney people celebrating. The adventurous Victorian photographers even took their cameras into the slums where respectable people never went. Here we see buildings being demolished, the rubbish in the street, the washing hung in a vacant lot and children playing, or posing for the camera.

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As the population of the city increased the quality of inner city life began to decline and as the Victorian era proceeded suburbs began to be created around the city and you could travel to work from these new suburbs by tram or ferry. The book includes photos of Double Bay and Moore Park when the suburbs were bushland or open space. There are photos of the new public schools and suburban town halls which were built in the 1880s and 1890s. With the expanded infrastructure people could have an interesting day out on the harbour or at the beach. They went by ferry and photos of a number of ferry wharves are included. The photographer went along too and captured images of people bathing, yachting, fishing and riding donkeys on the beach. If you could go out for a day, why not go out for the weekend and the Blue Mountains, Hawkesbury River and Port Hacking were just the place to go. The photographer not only documented the bushland and waterways around Sydney but publicised them as well as people shared images of where they'd had their holidays. Ralph Hawkins