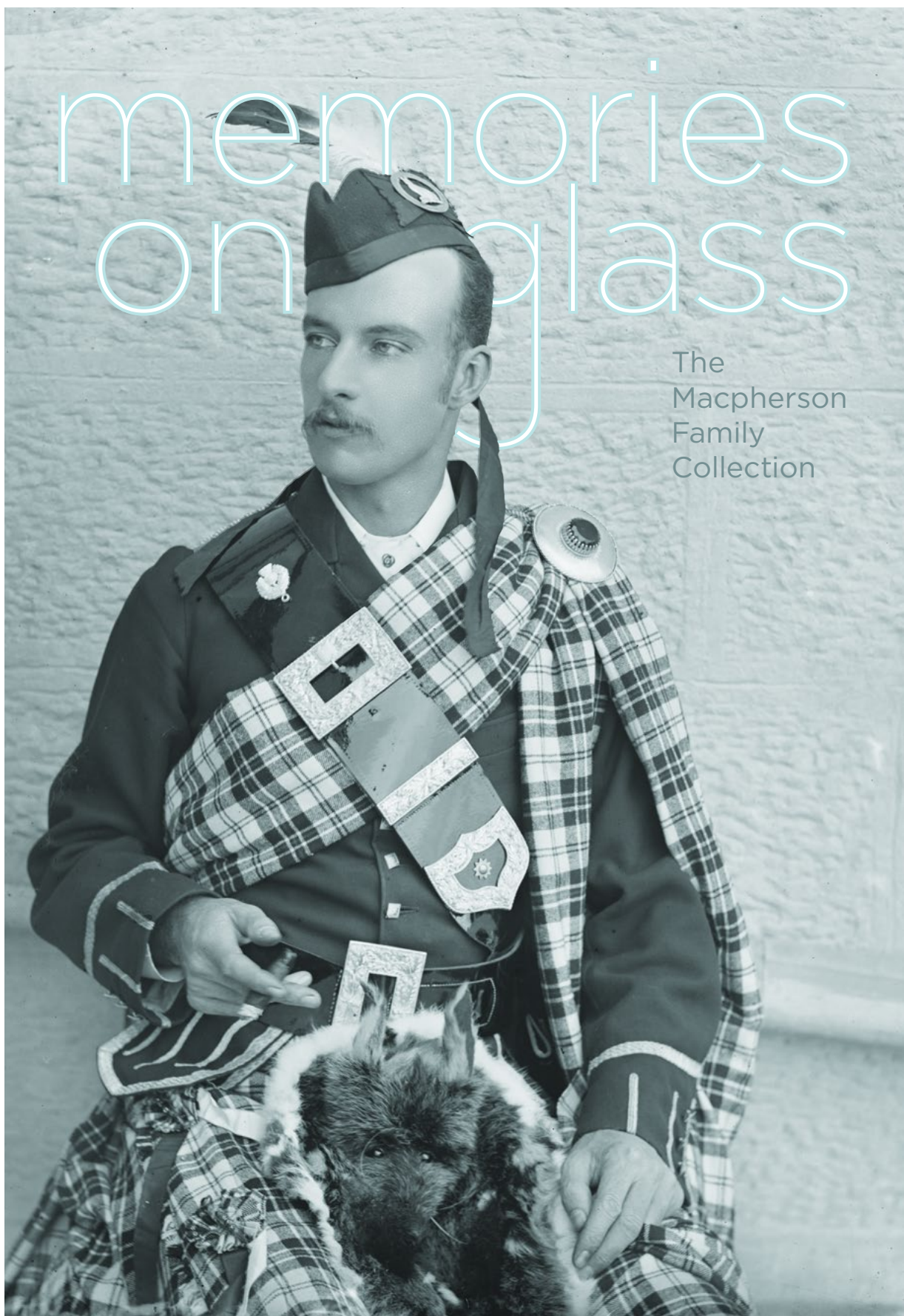


memories on glass

The
Macpherson
Family
Collection



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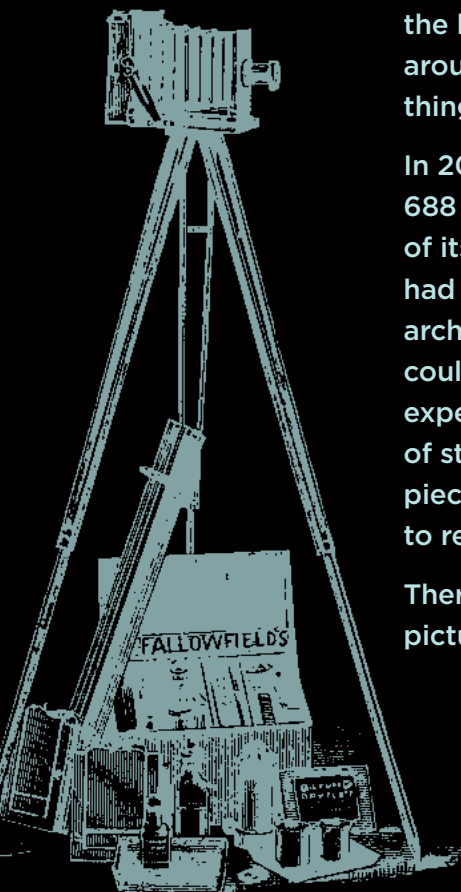
The Macpherson Family Collection

British immigrants made good, the Macpherson family lived in Sydney from 1833. As their prosperity grew through canny real estate investments over several generations, so did the symbols of their success — magnificent mansions and luxury pursuits such as boating, motoring, travel and photography. Enthusiastically recording their leisured lives, the Macphersons also photographed the bush, the beach and strangers in the street, capturing the world around them before modernity and world war changed things forever.

In 2014, when the family donated their collection of 688 glass-plate negatives to the Library, little was known of its contents. Over time, vital links in the family's history had been broken, silencing the stories inside this rich archive. But after careful cleaning and digitising, the images could be examined closely in new ways. Harnessing the expertise of the online community, the detective work of studying faces and places, analysing evidence and piecing together fragments of information began to reveal identities, locations, times and events.

There are gaps which we may never fill — but if every picture tells a story, then this is the story so far ...

All images are digital prints from original glass-plate negatives presented to the State Library by David Macpherson, 2014



family album



Macpherson group (right) with the Samora family (left) at Warringah Lodge, North Cremorne, c 1886

Edward Augustus Macpherson hired Francis Benedict Samora and his family of stonemasons to build a holiday retreat on Sydney's lower North Shore. Using local sandstone, they constructed a distinctive two-storey harbourside mansion in the Victorian Italianate style, with rusticated blockwork, semicircular arched windows, turned timber balustrades, red terracotta roof tiles and a high, central tower. The first and only house in the area at the time, it remains the largest property in North Cremorne today.

ON 588/BOX 17/2

FL3426356

Family folklore credits William Joseph Macpherson as the creator of this photo archive. But a thorough survey of the collection reveals a more complex story, with fathers and sons, brothers and nephews, sisters and daughters, taking turns behind the camera. As in many family collections, close physical resemblances between relatives also make exact identification of individuals difficult.

William's father, Edward Augustus Macpherson, had arrived in Australia with his parents as a 10-month-old child. In 1862, Edward married Catherine Wiseman, a tailor's daughter, and brought his bride to his family's home at Wimbledon Hall in Bourke Street, Sydney. Four of their six surviving children, including William, were born there. In 1875, the family bought the Hawthornden estate at Edgecliff. In 1879, Edward built Warringah Lodge, an ornate holiday home overlooking Middle Harbour, having paid £120 for the land at North Cremorne six years earlier.

William and his brother Edward Hume trained as solicitors, but classed themselves as gentlemen. In 1892, William married Gertrude 'Buddie' Fletcher and they soon had three children. As the Macpherson family grew, so did their property portfolio, often housing up to four generations across an ever-expanding network of prime Sydney real estate.



Horse-drawn omnibus on Oxford Street, Paddington, c 1895

Sydney's first public transport system included several fleets of horse buses. Servicing most of the eastern suburbs, the Sydney Tramway & Omnibus Co charged a fare of two pence each way for the Macquarie Place to Paddington route. Each bus could carry 24 passengers and was usually hauled by two horses, with a team of four needed for steeper routes or during peak hour. Upstairs seats were the domain of male passengers until the 'safety stairway' allowed women to enjoy top-deck travel in the 1890s.

ON 588/BOX 03/12

FL3425243

As Sydney entered a new century, the Macphersons had their cameras at the ready. Captivated by social and technological change, they recorded the chaos of city streets at peak hour, with jostling crowds weaving their way through traffic jams, and gearing up for the 1901 Royal Visit. Using a surprisingly modern documentary photo style, they also created pictures of breaking news unfolding around them.

By 1900, Australia's largest city had grown from a colonial outpost into a busy metropolis, and was also the fifth largest port in the British Empire. Its rapidly increasing population led to the spread of new suburbs, supported by an ever-expanding network of public transport.

In sharp contrast, redevelopment of the waterfront neighbourhood of The Rocks after the outbreak of plague in January 1900 sought to erase evidence of Sydney's less-than-sanitary past. The threat of demolition drew amateur and professional artists and photographers to the area. Keen to document the old houses and laneways before they disappeared forever, they also captured business names and landmarks that offer important clues for setting images in time and place.

getting away



Five women stepping into a punt at Narrabeen Lagoon with [Macpherson] man at stern, c 1905

This charming waterscape was probably taken at Deep Creek, near Narrabeen Lakes, where Tertius Horatio Macpherson lived with his family. One of the most picturesque spots on the Narrabeen Lagoon and only about an hour's trip from Sydney, its fern-fringed foreshores, rocky caves and mirror-like waters offered ample snapshot opportunities. The photographic intent of one young woman is clearly evidenced by the collapsible camera she holds in her hand.

ON 588/BOX 04/26

FL3425350

More affordable and accessible travel in the 19th century gave many Australians the chance to 'get away from it all'. Well-heeled holidaymakers like the Macpherson family, with more leisure time and higher incomes than most, took full advantage of new travel options, venturing over mountains, up and down the coast, and even further afield to destinations such as Norfolk Island, New Zealand and Fiji.

A land boom in the 1880s saw Sydney prices rise by up to 80 per cent. The Macphersons' lucrative property speculation gave them the perfect chance to combine business with pleasure, through travel and photography. Rural excursions to inspect prospective land purchases were made by rail or horse and cart before the family purchased an expensive, imported French 1900 model 'dog cart' automobile — the ultimate early 20th-century accessory.

As easy-to-use cameras got cheaper and smaller, they became the sightseer's prime record-keeper, changing what tourists saw and did when they went on vacation. The Macpherson brothers often took friends and family members along for the ride, planning side visits to scenic attractions in search of picturesque camera views. Rocky coastlines and rolling waves, majestic peaks rising above steep valleys, deep clear rivers, cascading waterfalls and glassy lakes all offered spectacular photo opportunities.



summer days



Donkey rides at Manly Cove, c 1900

Manly was Sydney's premier harbourside resort in the pre-surf bathing era. Easily accessed by public transport, it offered a broad range of amusements. 'Prancing ponies and dumpy donkeys' were available for hire on the beach, carrying 'laughing little lads and lasses over the silvery sands', along with motor cars for joy-riding, boats for rowing and sailing, an aquarium, tented picture shows and 'any amount of sideshow attractions'.

Quotes from 'Downing donkeys', *Truth*, 19 June 1904, page 5.

ON 588/BOX 04/25

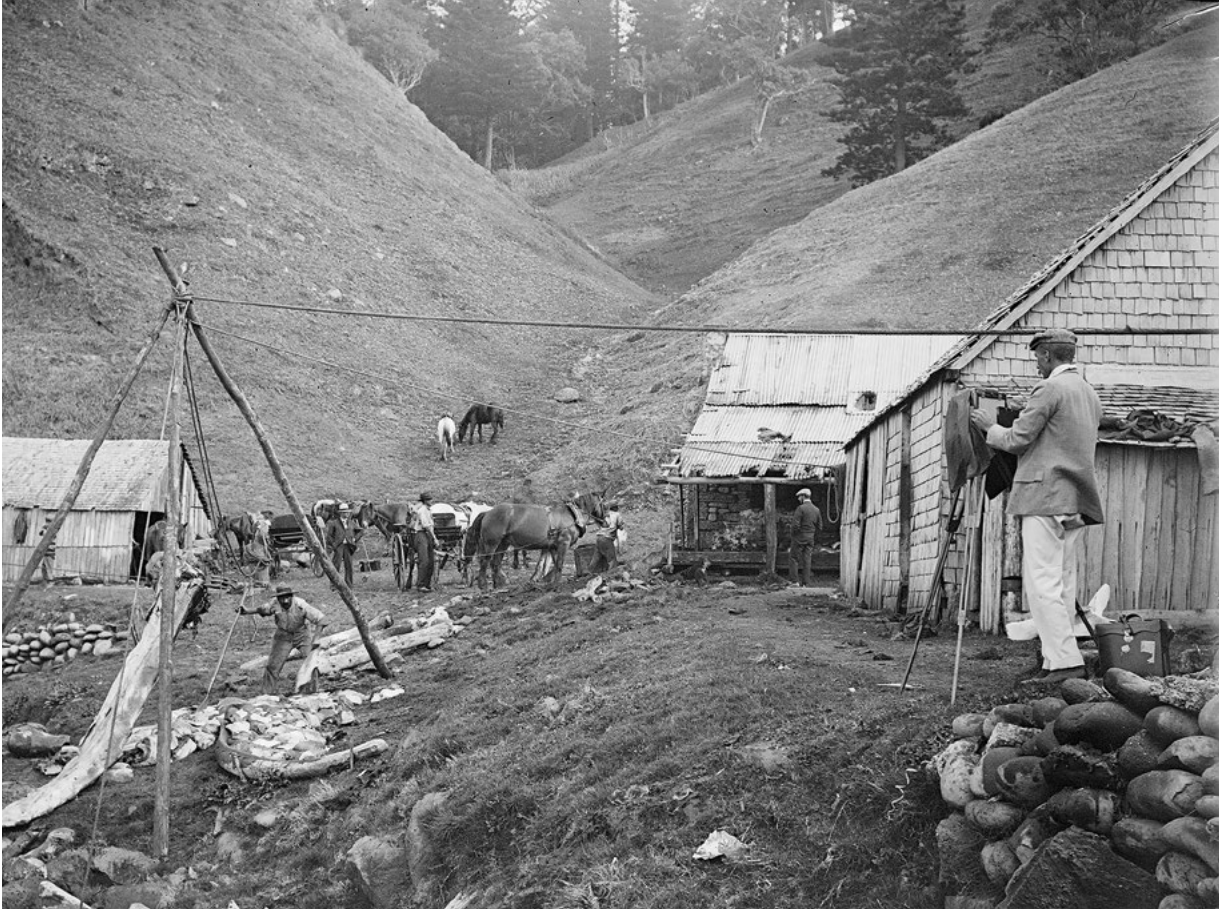
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By the turn of the 20th century, many Sydneysiders were discovering the pleasures of the beach in new ways. Flocking to the seaside, they revelled in leisure activities such as picnicking, paddling and strolling along the promenade. Well-to-do families with waterfront properties, like the Macphersons, also had the spare time and income to pursue more expensive hobbies such as sailing.

The steam-powered tram to Bondi Beach opened in 1894, while ferries and horse-drawn buses provided easy transport to ocean beaches and harbourside resorts — a favoured destination for social gatherings. Families were attracted to the 'pleasure palaces' and affordable amusements on offer. This public spectacle of people enjoying themselves in the surf and on the sand provided amateur and professional camera artists with great photo opportunities.

Despite the popularity of the beach, public bathing in daylight hours was still strictly outlawed on city beaches. By 1902, bathers began to flout these restrictions with little fear of arrest, as long as they were decently clothed. In 1903, when the laws were relaxed, mixed surf bathing during the day was finally permitted. But, as purpose-designed swimwear was still rare, most people swam in their underwear or nothing at all.

photographers



Edward Hume Macpherson photographing the whale processing works at Cascade Bay, Norfolk Island, c 1904

This image, possibly taken by William Joseph, documents his brother Edward Hume using a large field camera mounted on a wooden tripod. Popular for the outdoors, this camera was designed to fold down for compact storage, with its lens, plates and cloth hood in the leather case seen near the photographer's feet.

ON 588/BOX 12/1

FL3426266

As the Macpherson collection was catalogued and digitised, it became clear that the negatives had been produced over a longer timeframe than first thought. It also became clear that there were several photographers in the family, rather than just one, William Joseph.

Several pieces of evidence support these conclusions. Most significantly, among the 688 negatives, one is much earlier than the rest. Dating to about 1875 and created by the technically complex 'wet plate' process, it is unlikely to have been made by 10-year-old William. Another negative has the photographer's initials — 'EHM' — scratched into the emulsion. Edward Hume Macpherson, William's older brother, was an active member of several NSW camera groups. Images showing the brothers as they carried and set up their equipment would also have been taken by other photographers — perhaps the young woman shown holding a collapsible, handheld camera as she steps into a punt. A third negative, taken of the family grave at Waverley Cemetery, records William's name on the tombstone, so must have been taken after his death in 1923.

crowdsourcing



Fire brigade and crowds at 40 City Road, Chippendale, 22 February 1905

The *Daily Telegraph* reported 'An Exciting Fire' at the premises of Eugene Viau & Co's dry-cleaning business in City Road. The place was already a mass of flames when the alarm sounded just before noon, drawing a large crowd of spectators and causing considerable commotion. The building was known to contain highly flammable chemicals, and firemen feared it might explode. But several engines were soon on the scene and the flames were brought under control within 30 minutes.

ON 588/BOX 03/18 FL3425249

In September 2017, over 300 digitised images from the Macpherson collection were uploaded to the Library's Flickr page. This crowdsourcing venture immediately caught the interest of a group of enthusiastic digital volunteers, who individually (and collectively) identified many undescribed images and details.

The usual approach to cataloguing is to research material coming into the collection before it is digitised and displayed to the public. By digitising first, the Library gave the online community a chance to see these images sooner and add to our understanding of them.

Crowdsourcing gave the Library answers to difficult questions and offered firsthand insight into the interests of our online audience. We would like to take this opportunity to celebrate the loyalty of our online community and applaud the valuable contribution that virtual visitors can make to cultural knowledge.

This publication accompanies the State Library of NSW's exhibition *Memories on Glass: The Macpherson Family Collection*.

The State Library's exhibitions onsite, online and on tour aim to connect audiences across NSW and beyond to our collections and the stories they tell.

www.sl.nsw.gov.au/galleries



Memories on Glass: The Macpherson Family Collection is a free exhibition at the State Library of NSW from 4 October 2018 to 5 May 2019.

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