

# The National Bank of Australasia

---

In 1977, the President of the Kew Historical Society received two historic 'Signature Books' from the Kew branch of the National Bank of Australia. These books were added to a number of other important documents held in the Historical Society's collection.

The National Bank of Australasia was formed in 1857. It began commercial operations in Queen Street, Melbourne in 1858. Twenty-six years later, in 1885, the Bank's first bank at 87 High Street opened. A second bank, on the corner of Walpole and Brougham Streets, designed by Inskip & Robertson, replaced the first bank in 1888. The second bank remains, albeit in a somewhat altered state.

In May 2014, a presentation was made to students in Grade 2 at Kew Primary School. As part of the presentation, students were invited to identify the difference between 19th Century (lower right) and contemporary photographs of the Bank. Students could detect that the original High Street frontage had been truncated, the final bays replaced and now occupied by a contemporary Commonwealth Bank building.

The 'Signature Books' of the National Bank of Australasia are two large bound volumes covering the years 1885 to 1922. The first entries date from the opening of the first bank in High Street in 1885 and were subsequently used in the second bank after 1888. They record a customer's name, address, occupation if relevant, and signature. The first signatories included Edward Ball, Robert Blake, Helen Cooper, George Dike, Albert Fenton, Thomas Foley, the Kew Omnibus Company, Francis Kellett, Maurice Neligan, Frederick Ratten, Ellen Shirwin, and William Woollard. Over time, additional signatories were added; none seem to have been deleted.

Prominent Kew citizens who opened bank accounts after 1885, included Harry King of 'Madford' in Wellington Street, and James Venn Morgan; the publicans Denis Scanlon, Harry Madden, John Malone, John Dougherty and Patrick O'Shaughnessy the undertaker Alfred Padbury; the draper Edward Quick; the dairyman Charles Ragy; George Rimington; the trustees of the Boroondara General Cemetery; the bootmaker, John Witchell; and Arthur Wills; to name but a few.

The Signature Books also contain instructions from account holders, such as that from Arthur Wills of Barry Street, instructing the Bank to allow his wife Clara to access both his account and also the tin box that he had placed in the Bank's care.

In 1893, the National Bank of Australasia and its customers were to experience a major crisis when the acting Governor, Sir John Madden, declared a 'banking holiday' for a week. The National Bank of Australasia suspended trading on 1 May 1893, and following a reorganisation, re-opened eight weeks later on 26 June as the National Bank of Australasia Limited. The first new account holder listed after the crisis appears to be Eliza Quale, the wife of the coachbuilder John Quale, in August 1893.

In a separate section of the first volume (1885-94), there is a list of 159 individuals, organisations and companies with trust accounts. These range from Dr. Walsh of 'Wilton' in Cotham Road to Miss Luisa (sic) Henty of 'Field Place' in Studley Park Road.

The Signature Books may be viewed for research by appointment

**Robert A. Baker, 2014**