

The power of the 'miscellaneous' and the skies of Queensland

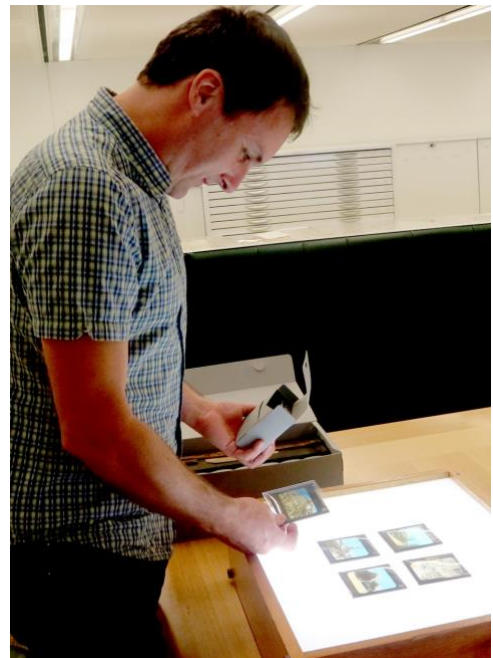


Lantern slide of flood-damaged Brisbane, State Library of Queensland Collection

Lead CI Martyn Jolly recently visited the State Library of Queensland to explore their lantern slide collection with Collection Building Librarian Reuben Hillier, conservator Kelly Leahey, and Senior Conservator Rachel Spano. Like many libraries, the SLQ has a wide range of lantern slides awaiting further research, many of which have entered the collection as part of larger acquisitions of diverse manuscript material from families or organisations. Sets that are already available for viewing online include a set of slides documenting Brisbane in the mid 1890s from the Bartlett Family; a small set of amateur, but dramatic, hand coloured slides documenting the disastrous Brisbane Flood 1893; and a large

collection used by pioneering Queensland conservationist Romeo Lahey around 1910 to promote the tourism potential of the [Lamington Plateau](#). Another collection which have been identified as important and awaits digitisation is a set of slides by J Bain documenting Queensland towns in 1893. Meanwhile, other large boxes of slides, so far only catalogued with that intriguing word 'miscellaneous', await exploration.

Reuben Hillier has already done some fascinating work within the 'miscellaneous' of the SLQ's magic lantern slide collection. He has uncovered the amazing biography of the 'vital spark' Bella Sutherland, a much travelled and much married singer. She toured the Australia theatrical circuit from the 1880s with a variety company called 'The Vital and Electric Sparks'. But by the 1900s, Reuben discovered, Bella was entertaining Brisbane with the 'loudest and most expensive gramophone', as well as 'Edison's latest duo-kinetoscope', showing animated pictures 'absolutely without flicker', which were advertised with lantern slides. Read more about [Bella at Reuben's blog](#), where he also discusses a 1920s theatre slide advertising 'the best meal in town' for two shillings at the [Central Station Café](#).



Reuben Hillier with some of the SLQ lantern slide collection

Library researchers have also recently unearthed a large set of magnificently hand coloured slides from about 1910, advertising Queensland and its railways. As we looked at the slides we began to notice a peculiar thing, into the virulent aniline-blue sky of virtually every slide the slide-maker has printed in flocks of black birds, giving sunny Queensland a decidedly Hitchcockian air!



Queensland railway slide, as part of State Library of Queensland Collection



Reuben Hillier, Kelly Leahey and Rachel Spano sorting Daintree lantern slides on a light box at State Library of Queensland

The SLQ also holds a small but significant collection of collodion lantern slides by the great geologist, photographer and promoter of Queensland in the 1860s and 70s, Richard Daintree. These twelve slides include portraits of Aboriginal people, thought to be taken in the studio of the Brisbane photographer Daniel Marquis, including two which were enlarged, hand painted, and displayed in the Queensland Annex of the London International Exhibition in 1872. The set also includes Daintree's familiar views of Queensland geology and pastoral country. The sharp-eyed SLQ conservator, Kelly Leahey, noticed something very interesting about the scenery slides. Although shot on blue-sensitive collodion, which usually results in white skies, they all have magnificent pillows of clouds added. This combination was achieved by using the cover glass, normally left clear, as an additional support for a second layer of collodion emulsion, the top half of which was printed with clouds from a separate negative. The resulting glass sandwich gave the impression of cloud-topped Queensland scenery. This kind of combination printing was used from the 1860s onwards (Frank Hurley being a notable Australian enthusiast), but this discovery is further evidence of just how innovative Richard Daintree was in the 1870s when it came to producing compelling images to promote migration to Queensland.

The SLQ has been at the forefront of developing innovative ways to bring their collection to audiences digitally. (Just try their slightly addictive [Photo Roulette](#)). And they are currently engaged with a crowd funding campaign called Reel Rescue to help digitise amateur films and video from Queensland. There remains potential to also bring their diverse collections of magic lantern slides to larger audiences.