

# Introduction

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The University of Melbourne's cultural collections, which have been assembled over more than a century and a half, were acquired for a variety of important purposes. Some (such as the thousands of plant specimens in the University of Melbourne Herbarium) formed the basis of scientific research, some (such as the minute books, student record cards and other records held in the University of Melbourne Archives) documented the history of the university itself, while others (such as many of the sculptures in the grounds), were commissioned, donated or purchased to make the campus a more interesting and beautiful place to work and study.

Many of the collections continue to serve their original purpose. But for others, their use has changed. The purpose-built object-based learning spaces that will be located in the new Arts West Building are evidence of a growing interest at the university in using cultural material as a teaching tool to engage students in complex cross-cultural and interdisciplinary enquiries.

Such programs demonstrate that the cultural collections can serve new purposes in teaching, research and engagement. As with historic buildings, the key to ensuring that collections are preserved is to identify

a viable use, which serves a practical purpose for the community and does not cause physical damage or deterioration to the collection. The University of Melbourne has been singularly successful in identifying, preserving, and putting to new uses its many cultural collections, and the articles in this issue of *University of Melbourne Collections* provide evidence of this. Sheet music originally used for singing around the parlour piano now gives researchers valuable information about social attitudes, the music trade, and changing musical tastes—Jennifer Hill's article on songs from the Great War illustrates this vividly. Sarah Charing and David Nichols discuss a fascinating collection of glass slides created for teaching purposes. The technology of glass slides has long since been made obsolete by PowerPoint and other common software, but the information in the slides tells us much about teaching topics and methods in the first half of the twentieth century. The beautiful *Flora de Filipinas* was created as a record of the plants of the Philippines, but even as it was published its scientific basis was flawed. Nevertheless, Augustine Doronila shows that, as a fine example of botanical publishing and an important part of Philippine art history, it is a valuable source indeed.

The Grimwade Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation, housed in a new, purpose-built facility on Swanston Street (discussed in this volume by my colleague Tim Ould), plays an important role in helping to preserve these and the other cultural collections of the university, so that they can serve current and future generations of students, researchers and the community at large.



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