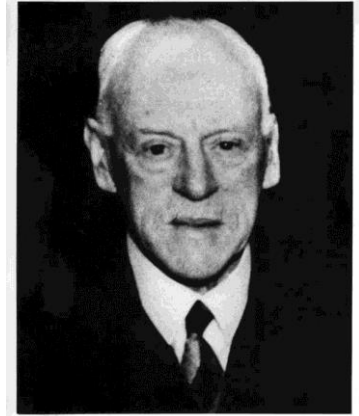


Art and Chess:

The Passions of a Library Donor

One of the pleasant surprises for the State Library since the opening of its various new reading rooms has been the public reaction to the new location of its Chess Collection. What was previously known only to aficionados is now located in an easily accessible area where at almost any time of the day it is common to find several games of chess in progress. The Chess Collection was the gift of a man with a deep enthusiasm for the game, but it was not his only passion. Magnus Victor Anderson (1884 – 1966), a successful and wealthy Melbourne accountant, was a lover of art as well as chess. In 1958 – 59, when he was in his mid-seventies, he gave his private library of books on art to the Ballarat Fine Arts Gallery, and during the same period the State Library received his even larger collection of books on chess. When he died in 1966 the Gallery and the State Library were among the major beneficiaries of his will. This article looks at both of these donations, and in particular, how Anderson's chess library became one of the world's major public chess collections.



Art...

When the Ballarat Fine Arts Gallery issued its annual report for 1959 it listed among the year's donations M.V. Anderson, Esq. Art Library'. The donor was no stranger to the Gallery. The accounting firm of MV Anderson & Co had a branch in Ballarat at the time, and Anderson's name had previously appeared several times as a donor of drawings and etchings – but books were something new.

In a History of Ballarat Libraries (Ballarat, 1978) Austin McCallum recalls how, after a series of discussions with the Art Gallery Council, Anderson agreed that the collection would be more appropriately housed in the Ballarat Library (which was then just behind the Gallery in Camp Street). The Collection was therefore re-gifted, and over the next few years – in what McCallum called 'a never ending stream of books for the library' – Anderson made a significant number of additions to it.

McCallum gives a delightful description of what he calls 'the ritual for the receipt of the Anderson collection':

When called, the librarian would drive to Anderson's office in King Street, than walk with him to the State Library and wait just a few minutes while he looked for information he needed from a volume or periodical in the chess collection. Then off to his Toorak residence; first tea and scones, next the handing over of the books – one at a time, each one described and checked off in three voluminous catalogues – one subject: one author and artist, one title. When darkness fell, the station wagon was hard on the springs and the road home slow and hazardous.

His art library, now known as the M.V. Anderson Art History Collection, is one of the special collections in the new 'library at Ballarat'. The result of some 60 years of collecting, it contains almost 2000 volumes ranging from the standard encyclopaedias of art, art journals and works of art criticism, through to books on jade and cartoons. Although it has a wide range of subject matter, the main thrust of the collection is on painting, drawing, and etching.

It has its beginnings with the books of a young man of about twenty whose interest in art would, a year or so later, be strong enough for him to join the night classes in painting at the National Gallery of Victoria's Art School. He was a student there from 1906 to 1908, but the collection begins a little before that.

Among the books is a 1905 catalogue of the National Gallery of British Art (a forerunner of the Tate Gallery, London) which has the signature 'M. Victor Anderson, '05' on the flyleaf. Apart from the record of his birth, this is the first reference so far found to him. 'Victor', his middle name, was the one by which he was known to his family and friends, but it was only in the first few years of collecting that his books were signed that way – his later signature is usually the essentially private 'M.V. Anderson'.

This use of the name Victor allows us one of the few personal glimpses we have of him. He was descended from a fishing family in the Shetland Islands and, although he rarely used it, his first name came from his grandfather. The elder Magnus Anderson was born in Shetland and arrived in Melbourne, via Durham, with his wife and young family on the *Sir John Franklin* in July 1857.

He established himself as a 'tent and tarpaulin maker' in Elizabeth Street and he and his family lived in Carlton.

The younger Magnus was born in Carlton in October 1884 as the first child of John James and Emily Anderson. A few months later his father, a tobacco-worker, bought a small timber cottage in what was then the newly developing area of Laura Street, Brunswick. It was to be the family house until 1905 and so the place where young Anderson and his sister Ada grew up. As yet we know nothing of the first part of his life, but it is possible that his early education was at the Central Brunswick State School in Albert Street, just a few minutes' walk from his home.

That 1905 catalogue, however, puts us on firmer ground, and from then on it becomes possible to get some picture of him and the nature of his lifelong interest in art. A number of the books in the Ballarat Library come from his art student days. They include John Ruskin's *Element of Drawing and Perspective* (London, 1907), and, from the same year *Masterpieces of Titan*. We also know that in April 1908 he visited the Exhibition of the British Art Gallery held in Melbourne's Exhibition Buildings because the exhibition catalogue, with his dated signature, is in his collection.

It wasn't all high art. During his student days he was evidently interested in the work of the well-known artist and cartoonist Phil May. In addition to a number of cuttings of drawings and cartoons culled from various sources, the collection at Ballarat holds at least five volumes of Mays books. Two of them, a Phil May picture book and his sketches from *Punch* (both 1903) were bought by Anderson in 1906.

The interest in drawings and cartooning was still there fifty years later because in 1957, when David Low's Autobiography was published in instalments in the *Bulletin*, Anderson cut and pasted them into separate volume for his art library. It is just one of the collection's 20 or so carefully organised volumes of cuttings put together over 30 years.

When his time as an art student was over Anderson was commissioned as a lieutenant in the Royal Australian Artillery in August 1909, and was to spend almost 15 years as an artillery officer. After a brief spell at the Victorian headquarters in Queenscliff he went to Western Australia in 1902 and spent

the war years there, serving in the coastal batteries in Albany and Fremantle. In Perth in 1914 he married Lucy Butcher, the daughter of the former Albany Harbor Master, and returned to Victoria with her in 1923. He transferred to the Army's Reserve List in 1924 and then, at the age of 40, began his career as an accountant.

Although, as McCallum somewhat ungraciously puts it '*he admitted to being a failure as an artist*', the fascination of art remained with him. Throughout his life, whether as a student, artillery officer or accountant he continued to collect art books.

The largest individual section of the Ballarat collection is some six or seven hundred volumes on painters and painting. It includes most of the major artists up to his time, with a particular emphasis on British painters. One of the more unusual features of Anderson's collection is the way in which he almost instantly able to lay his hands on a reproduction of any particular painting. He had compiled a meticulously detailed work that he called *Catalogue and Index: Coloured Prints in Various Publications*. In 140 leaves (280 pages) of closely written manuscript it gives the precise location in his collection of the works of hundreds of artists, famous or otherwise, from C.A. Abbey to Francesco de Zurbaran.

The two hundred books on etching in the collection have a special significance in discussing Anderson's interests. One of the books, which comes from his time in Western Australia, is a work entitled *On Making and Collecting Etchings*, edited by the awkwardly named E. Heskith Hubbard. Singed on the cover 'M.V. Anderson, Nov. 1920', it was an early indication of what would become one of his major interests and one which would later be of considerable benefit to the Ballarat Fine Arts Gallery. An indication of the nature of his donations of etchings and drawings to the Gallery over the years can be seen in the list of his final bequest in 1967.

McCallum reports that the library had made some additions to the collection but it is relatively easy to distinguish them from Anderson's books. After his return to Melbourne Anderson himself rarely put any identification mark in his art books but there are the occasional clues: a slip of paper tucked between the pages with some notes in his distinctive hand, a twopenny tram ticket used

as a bookmark, or a lightly pencilled annotation on the rear flyleaf, such as the one in Art and Commonsense which reads: 'p – 100 – Cezanne, potentially a great artist; actually a very bad painter.

The additions made during a re-organisation of Ballarat's reference collections in the 1960s on the other hand, usually have the pencilled note 'B. ref. move to MVA' on the flyleaf, whilst books published after Anderson's death are quite obviously additions. In neither case did the additions change the basic characteristics of the collection. The practice of adding to the collection ceased when it was moved to the boardroom of the old library in 1977. There was no longer any room for expansions.

Although Anderson's twin collection of art and chess went their separate ways in 1958 – 59, they were briefly seen together again in his centenary year of 1984 – 85 when the Australian Chess Championship was played in Ballarat. On that occasion, most of the first floor of the old library was given over to the exhibition from the M.V. Anderson Chess Collection in Melbourne and next to it, in the old boardroom, was the M.V. Anderson Art Collection. Uniting both chess and art, as the centrepiece of the exhibition, was the State Library's 15th century woodcut from Caxton's Game and Playe of the Chesse.

.... and Chess

For many people the game of chess has an extraordinary fascination, whether it is played simply as a pleasant game between friends or in the strongly competitive atmosphere of an international tournament. With a literature going back over a thousand years to the Arabic writers of the ninth and tenth centuries, and a history extending back even further to sixth or seventh century India, the game exerts a strange appeal. Anderson, the founder of the State Library's internationally recognised Anderson Chess Collection, was one of the people to have been captured by it.

Some idea of the significance of his collection can be seen in the entry for 'Libraries' in *The Oxford Companion to Chess*. 'Three outstanding collections exist in libraries open to the public. The J.G White Collection in Cleveland, Ohio and the van der Linde-Niemeijer collection in the Royal Library at The Hague

are of comparable size and have no rivals. The Anderson Chess Collection in Melbourne, Australia, donated by M.V. Anderson, is probably the largest chess library in the southern hemisphere.

Anderson's chess collection began in Western Australia at the end of the First World War when, as Captain Anderson, he was the Commanding Officer of the Royal Australian Garrison Artillery at Fremantle. He gave his own account of the beginnings of his collection in the introduction to his Numerical List of Books:

The list was commenced in 1949. The books were listed as they stood on my bookshelves and comprised 528 items – from my first purchase in 1918. My first book was Staunton's Chess Player's Handbook, purchased Nov.1918 after a holiday in Yallingup, W.A. where I received some advice on study. I had learned a little chess in 1902, but not systematically.

In 1949 I purchased the late Professor Gundersen's books from Hall, the bookseller, and, a little later those of Mr. (later Judge) Woinarski.

From the Gundersen collection I sent the books on problems and the duplicates from both, to Holings and A.S. Pinkus, receiving other books in exchange...

In the year he commenced his list Anderson, at 65 was moving towards retirement. Although he maintained his city office and continued some professional activities, it was then that his interest in chess became a major activity in his life and he developed into an enthusiastic collector of chess books.

In May 1959, ten years after he began his list, he wrote to Meindert Niemeijer (then the driving force behind the great Dutch chess collection at The Hague).

I think I am the only serious chessbook collector in Australia. I know several men with small number of books – say a hundred or so. Mr. Koshnitsky has a number of books which he uses an "Academy" and Mr. Purdy has a number but he sells those he does not wish to keep. The chess section of my library now number over two thousand items and I am presently in process of transferring them to the Melbourne Public Library as a gift. (Anderson correspondence, Rare Books Collection, State Library of Victoria)

The gift to the Library had been initiated in January 1958 when the Chief Librarian received a letter from M.V. Anderson which asked:

Would your Trustees welcome the offer, by bequest or earlier gift, of my chess collection? The collection consists at present of nearly 1700 books (in various languages)... They occupy nearly a hundred feet of shelf space...and comprise the largest collection of the kind in Australia. About 6000 games, published in newspapers, are separately indexed, and there is a collection, in three large volumes, of about 2000 games played in one variation, with its own separate index. As many of the books are of special character – Tournament books, and are impossible to replace – I have in mind the establishment of a research centre, apart from your ordinary collection of chess books... I would be prepared to keep the collection up to date, and to endow it with such an income as would allow additions as I have made them, and to enable binding and repairs to be done to ensure that the collection would be in good shape in the future. (Anderson correspondence, Rare Books Collection, SLV)

The offer was made partly because Anderson was having difficulty in finding space in his home for his growing collection. He made a reference to this difficulty a few years later, in September 1963, in a letter to Gregorio J. Lastra, a fellow-collector in Buenos Aires (with whom he frequently corresponded): *“I sympathise with you on the lack of space in which you hold your collection. I was faced with the same difficulty and gave my whole collection to the Victorian State Library.”*

Once the Library accepted his offer, Anderson had both the space and the personal wealth to set about building his chess library into a major collection. By the time he died in 1966 he added another 5000 volumes to the original gift of 1700 books. The last entry in his own hand in the *Numerical List Of Books* reads: *6767 – 6768 – L'Eco degli Scacchi. \$11.25.”*

With his death in December 1966 the responsibility for the collection passed to the State Library. The Library already has what Anderson had termed the ‘ordinary collection of chess books’, but it proved neither practical nor desirable to keep the two collections separate and up-to-date. When the two were united in 1972 it was found that a surprisingly large number of items in

the 'ordinary' collection (some 70%) were actually new additions to a collection already very strong in material from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The collection originally held only a few early works. When Anderson donated his collection the earliest work it held was Phillip Stamma's *The Noble Game of Chess* (London, 1745). He had concentrated his attention on the modern period of 'tournament chess' which began in London in 1851, but during the 1963 – 65 under the influence of Holland's Dr. Niemeijer he had purchased a small number of works of the sixteenth – eighteenth centuries. When the chess items in the Library's other collections were placed alongside his own the outlines of a collection of significant early works began to emerge.

The Sticht Collection, for example, contained a single illustrated leaf from Caxton's 1486 *Game and Playe of the Chesse*. In the Rare Books Collection there was a copy of the first edition of Marco Vida's much-admired poem on chess *De ludo scacchorum* (Rome, 1527) It also held the collection of openings and games by the important seventeenth-century Italian player Gioaschino Greco published in London in 1956 as *The Royall Game of Chesse-play*.

When to these were added Anderson's 1745 copy of Stamma, his first edition of A.D. Philidor's very influential *L'Analyse des echecs* (London, 1749) and Richard Twiss's 2-volume anthology *Chess* (London, 1787 – 89), the groundwork for a representative collection of early chess books had been laid. It was a good basis on which to build, and by the mid-1990s the Library had acquired original copies of almost all of the major chess authors to the end of the eighteenth century.

Among the significant items it acquired were the works by two of the leading players of the sixteenth century whose names are commemorated in the Damiano Gambit and the Ruy Lopez – two chess openings well-known to modern players.

The first of them, Damiano of Odmeira, was a Portuguese player whose *Questo libro e imparare giocare a scachi e de le partite* (Rome, 1512), with its text in both Italian and Spanish of the 1528 printing of it (the 5th ed.) as well a facsimile copy of the original 1512 version.

The second author was Ruy Lopez de Segura, a Spanish priest who discovered Damiano's book when he visited Rome in 1560 and decided to write his own. In Alcalá, in 1561, he published *Libro de la invención liberal y arte del juego del axedrez*. The Library celebrated the centenary of Anderson's birth in 1984 by purchasing an original 1561 copy of Lopez de Segura's book.

As a brief aside, one might add that a couple of years ago these two books provided one of the highlights of a young Canadian backpacker's visit to Melbourne. A keen player who had stumbled upon the chess collection, he was thrilled to be able to handle the original works written by the two players he felt he already knew.

After nearly 40 years of continuous addition by the Library, Anderson's chess collection today, with about 15,000 volumes, is able to provide most of the important texts spanning the six centuries of the game from Caxton in the fifteenth century to the computer age of the twenty-first.

"I have in mind the establishment of a research collection..." In 1958, when he wrote to the Chief Librarian, Anderson hoped that his library would become a research collection. Given the astronomical number of possible moves on a chessboard, it is not surprising that the serious chess player needs access to a very large body of games. To meet that need, Anderson not only gathered together the collected games of all the great modern players, he also acquired more than 600 individual chess periodical titles and several thousand tournament reports. With their international scope they constitute the research heart of the collection.

But the collection also aims to meet the needs of those wanting to research the various aspects of Australian chess history and literature. A problem for local researchers is that the information about the people, the clubs, and the games of Australian chess up until the mid-twenties, is confined almost entirely to chess columns in newspapers. So in response to the need for reliable information the Library has produced a complete listing of all nineteenth-century Victorian chess columns and their editors, and from the contents of the columns has itself been able to produce articles on nineteenth-century Victorian chess.

The collection also holds some important manuscript materials, amongst them the records of the Melbourne Chess Club from its beginnings in the 1860s. Before the formation of a national organisation the Melbourne Chess Club was a pivotal part of Australian Chess; and Anderson, as a former secretary and committeeman, managed to deposit the club's records in his collection. More recently the Library has been able to add to those club papers a significant number of the records of the Australian Chess Foundation, the governing body of Australian Chess, as well as those of its stable mate, the Victorian Chess Association.

A major researcher into Australian chess, who both used the collection and became an important donor, was John van Manen (1922 – 2000). He was a Dutch actuary who migrated to Australia in 1961 and became, in the words of the English Chess historian Kev Whyld, 'the guardian of Australian Chess History'. Van Manen is best described in his own words as 'a chess data collector', but he organised his data into a form that made Australia's chess history much more accessible to those who came after him.

One part of his work has become a very important addition to the collection. It is a 23-volume manuscript collection of some 10,000 Australian games gathered while he was preparing his *Records of Australian Chess*. The van Manen collection, a chronological record of the games of Australian chess championships, matches and tournaments dating from the middle of the nineteenth century to near the close of the twentieth century, is in frequent demand.

Chess Literature of Australia and New Zealand, another outcome of van Manen's data collecting, involved the Library in an extensive correspondence with him. From his researches emerged the fact that only a bare dozen nineteenth-century Australian chess items have been identified. Life for Australian researches is made a little difficult when two of them have failed to survive, and six exist only in single copies – with one of those in German. Fortunately, three of the singles are amongst the Melbourne Chess Club papers, and of the others there are photocopies of all but the German one. To round off his brief account of *Intercolonial Chess Match, Melbourne versus Adelaide* (Melbourne, 1868), of which only a few possibly the finest copy of the pamphlet was in the hands of a Melbourne collector interested in telegraphy.

His collection was auctioned earlier this year and the Library was able to purchase his copy – after waiting nearly 20 years to get it.

Although Australia is not a major chess-playing country, occasionally requests for information on Australian chess come from overseas researchers. Among them have been the editors of *The Oxford Companion to Chess* asking for information on the Charlick Gambit, an opening named after a nineteenth-century Australian champion; a researcher in Ohio wanting the earliest Australian game using an American-invented opening; someone wanting to know whether the notoriously self-promoting player G.H.D. Gossip brought his wife and children with him from England; and an English chess journalist e-mailing for details about 'Chesscat', Melbourne's unique weekly 2-hour radio chess program. Fortunately, in each case, they got their answer – including a Gossip child they had missed.

In looking over Anderson's gifts to the public of both art and chess, one is reminded of an annotation in the file that the Commonwealth Investigation Branch set up in 1928 when his name appeared in *Dun's Gazette*. Penned by an unidentified official it read:

'I know Anderson & he may useful to us someday'