



Family History

A guide to the Blue Books

The *Blue Books* (also known as Civil Establishment, Returns of the Colony, or Statistical Returns) were usually published annually. They listed most of the public servants currently employed by the government.

If your ancestors were government employees, you may be able to trace their careers through the *Blue Books*.

What information can I find in the *Blue Books*?

The information found in these publications varies from state to state but may include:

- Name
- Position and department within the public service
- Salary (including allowances)
- Date when first appointed to current position
- Date when first appointed in the public service

Example from 1869 *Blue Book* of Queensland

Colonial Secretary - Police Department

Office	Name	Date of Appointment	By Whom Appointed	Annual Salary	Date of first appointment
Inspector of Police in St. Lawrence & Marlborough	Frederick Wheeler	22 July 1864	Governor & Executive	345 pounds (plus 55 pounds travelling expenses)	1 June 1858

This publication contains a wide variety of public service occupations including teachers, police, members of parliament, customs officials, postmasters and stationmasters. Each *Blue Book* contains an index of names at the beginning or end making it easy to locate individuals.

The *Blue Books* are usually (but not always) arranged by government department such as Marine Board, Treasury or Postmaster-General.

The *Blue Books* do not provide a comprehensive list of all government employees. They list mainly those positions that have higher status or perform clerical / administrative duties. For example, in the railway department lengthsmen and labourers are not usually listed.

How can researchers access the *Blue Books*?

Most of the State Library of Queensland's holdings of the *Blue Books* are found within government annual publications (usually the *Votes and Proceedings* for the Legislative Assembly). A list of these publications and State Library's holdings are outlined later. Sometimes the *Blue Books* are difficult to locate within these government publications and may require some searching.

A Biographers' Index of Parliamentary Returns (New South Wales, Queensland & Victoria) 1850-1889 compiled by H.J. Gibbney & N. Burns (FAMHIS 015.944 1969) contains the year, volume and page number reference to easily locate the *Blue Books* within in the Legislative Assembly *Votes and Proceedings* for Queensland, NSW, and Victoria between 1850 and 1889.

Queensland

Queensland blue book for the year ...

Years: 1869 to 1916.

Available [online](#) through State Library One Search catalogue <http://bit.ly/QldBlueBooks>

Also available on microfiche. (FICHE/B 354.943 que). This series of microfiches is available on level 3. Each year contains an index of names.

Legislative Assembly Votes and Proceedings – Queensland [microfilm] (MFL 328.9431)

Years: 1860 to 1916.

This series of microfilm usually contains the *Blue Books* for each year. If you are looking for dates between 1869 and 1916 it is easier to search the titles listed above first.

*NB: For government officers in Queensland pre-1859 please search New South Wales *Blue Books*.

New South Wales

Museums of History NSW State Archives Collection Guide – Blue Books (Returns of the Colony) 1822-57 (<https://mhns.wa.gov.au/guides/blue-books-returns-the-colony-1822-57/>)

Returns of the Colony... [microfiche - located in white folders] (FICHE/B 994 ret)

Years: 1822 to 1857.

This series of microfiches is available on level 3. Each year contains an index of names.

Public Service lists, 1858-70 [microfiche] (MFC 929.3944 1985 – AO fiche no. 807-819)

Extracted from the *Statistical returns of the Colony (Blue books)* 1858-1861, 1862-70

Legislative Assembly Votes and Proceedings - New South Wales [microfilm] (MFL 328.9441)

Years: 1860 to 1897.

This series of microfilm usually contains the *Blue Books* for each year.

Victoria

Legislative Assembly Votes and Proceedings – Victoria [microfilm] (MFSCA 328.9451)

Years: 1860 to 1902.

This series of microfilm usually contains the *Blue Books* for each year.

Tasmania

Tasmanian Blue Books, 1822-1858 (AJCP reels 1194-1201)

This series of microfilm contains copies of Colonial Office (London) returns C.O.284, which have been made available through the Australian Joint Copying Project. It has been digitised and is available online through National Library of Australia. <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-728202615/findingaid?digitised=y#nla-obj-728369208>

Journals – Tasmania. Parliament. House of Assembly and Legislative Council

[microfilm] (MFSCA 328.9461) Years: 1856 to 1902.

This series of microfilm usually contains the *Blue Books* for each year.

South Australia

Proceedings of the Parliament of South Australia [microfilm] (MFSCA 328.9421)

Years: 1869/70 to 1901

This series of microfilm usually contains the *Blue Books* for each year.

Western Australia

Western Australia. Blue book set 1: 1871-1905 [CD-ROM] (QCFS 351.941 2009)

This CD-ROM contains high quality scanned images of the original books. Each year contains data that may include office, name, date of appointment, appointed by, instrumentality, salary and date of appointment.

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