

Finn Family Papers

Australian Manuscripts Collection MS 12821

Acquired 1991

Edmund ‘Garryowen’ Finn was born at Tipperary, Ireland, in 1819.¹ He studied for the priesthood but did not take religious orders. After arriving in Melbourne on 19 July 1841, he took a position as a private classics tutor.

From 1845, Finn was employed for 13 years as a journalist on the *Port Phillip Herald* – at times reporter and editor – and became well known around town. While working on the newspaper, Finn gave the name Emerald Hill to the suburb now called South Melbourne.

In 1858, Chief Secretary Sir John O’Shanassy appointed Finn (a friend from school days) as clerk of the Legislative Council papers, a position he held until 1886, when failing eyesight forced him to resign. Victorian statesman Charles Gavan Duffy encouraged Finn to write.

Finn’s first book, *Der Eggsberiences ov Hans Schwartz (with humorous interleaves)*, has been digitised and can be viewed online.² This was followed by a collection of his newspaper articles about early Melbourne life, published in 1880 as *The ‘Garryowen’ Sketches: Historical, Local and Personal, by an Old Colonist*. His pseudonym had associations with his native Ireland: Garryowen (Owen’s Garden) is on the outskirts of Limerick. However, the work for which Finn is best known is the two-volume *The Chronicles of Early Melbourne 1835–1852*, published in 1888.³ His eye-witness accounts of events and anecdotes are considered a valuable record of the time, providing an interesting picture of the foundation years of Australia’s biggest city during the Victorian age.

In the early 1860s, Finn’s private life was in turmoil because his first wife, Anne, was suffering from a mental illness and he was having trouble with his eldest son. He admits that he took refuge in the ‘demon drink’, and, realising that the situation was getting out of hand, he took the pledge of total abstinence. Edmund Finn died on 1 April 1898, survived by his second wife, Mary Ann, and several children.

State Library Victoria holds various manuscript sources on Finn and his family.⁴ These comprise scrapbooks, his memoranda book, which contains a diary covering the years 1841–51 and 1857–61, and notes about his first marriage and the births and deaths of his children. His papers also hold his signed pledge of abstinence, dated 18 January 1869. Some of the papers were acquired with support from the Friends of the State Library.

At my own house
Leicester Street, Fitzroy
Friday 1st January 1869.

After repeated trials I have arrived
at the fixed conviction of the absolute
necessity for my leading a life of
abstinence from intoxicating liquors
of every description —

I now hereby under my hand solemnly and
sincerely promise that henceforth I shall not
drink of any of the usually known spirituous
or fermented liquors coming under the denomination
of intoxicating fluids, and including all
Continental and Colonial Wines unless
prescribed for me medicinally by a
duly qualified Medical Practitioner —

Edmund Finn