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From Claude Lorraine to your camera roll: early panoramic photography

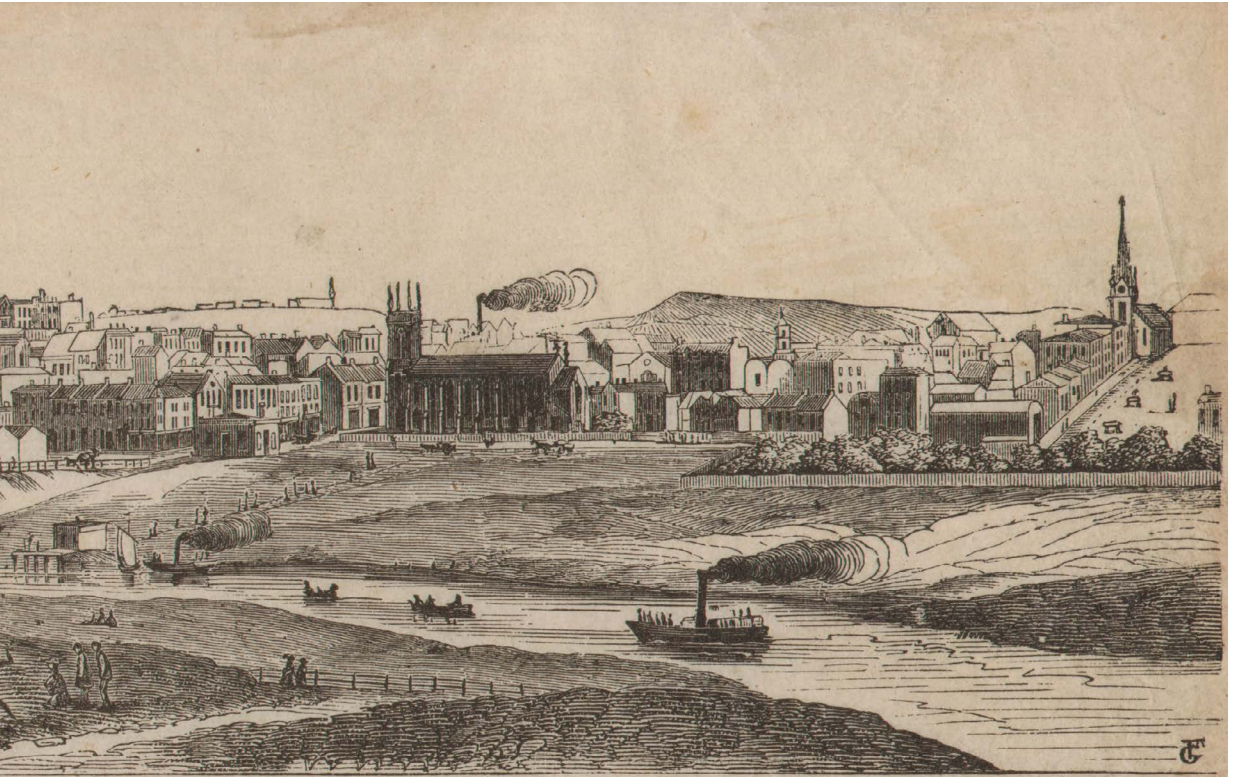
These days, millions of people around the world can take high-quality panoramic photographs with their phone camera. But panoramic photography didn't arrive with smartphones; it's been around almost as long as photography itself.

Before the invention of photography, panoramas were a popular format for landscapes in other media. Think of colonial depictions of Sydney, Hobart or Melbourne, like Frederick Grosse's 1858 engraving of Melbourne from the south side of the Yarra.

Photography became the dominant form of image-making in the late-19th century, and photographers attempted to reproduce the wide format of traditional landscapes using the new technology. Some of the earliest and simplest attempts to do this were literal 'cut-and-paste' jobs: photographers would take a series of photographs, panning across the landscape, and then paste or tack these beside each other, as in the pictured scene of clearing and settlement made around the turn of the last century. Other pictorial techniques carried over into early panoramic photographs, such as placing figures in the landscape to give viewers a sense of scale, like the three people placed in the foreground of the pictured settler landscape.

Framing devices are another technique sometimes translated from painting to landscape photography. In Robert Scott's *Lake Weeroona, Bendigo*, the drooping branches of willows in the upper foreground and at the left edge





Top Frederick Grosse, *View of Melbourne from south side of River Yarra*, wood engraving, 1858, H2148. Bottom Panoramic bush scene, gelatin silver photographs, 9 x 11.5 cm. or smaller each, date unknown, H82.288/99.



Robert Scott, *Lake Weeroona, Bendigo*, gelatin silver photograph, 8.3 x 29.3 cm, 1905, H96.160/1176.





R SCOTT Melb

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Row, Melbourne 1920, showing Elizabeth and Collins Streets, gelatin silver photograph, 16.5 x 94 cm, 1920, H3788.



of the picture, and the boathouses to the right, act as a frame or *repoussoir* for the composition. Scott used other classical landscape techniques, such as a prominent foreground (the jetty and willows), midground (the rowers) and background (the trees on the horizon line). These techniques date as far back as the explosion of landscape painting in Europe in the 17th century, codified by artists like Claude Lorraine. While early panoramic photography was most often used for land surveys and cityscapes, Scott was a pioneer of more artistic uses of the technology.¹

Scott used Kodak Panoram cameras released in 1899 and 1900 that had a rotating lens, enabling him to capture views between 112 to 140 degrees.² Kodak released the Cirkut camera a few years later, which was used by



professional photographers into the post-war era. Rather than using only an internal rotation mechanism, the film and the whole camera rotated 360 degrees on a platform.³

Many panoramic photographs have a characteristic distortion because objects at either edge of the image are further from the lens. This can make straight streets like Elizabeth Street, seen here in a Cirkut photograph from 1920, appear to bend away, despite being parallel to the camera. This could be corrected for large group portraits by arranging the group in a semicircle around the camera.⁴ Next time you pull out your phone to snap a group shot of your family or friends, you could give this technique a try. After all, you're part of the long history of panoramic photography.