



Top: 'Farewell banquet to the French Consul' (with John William Ploos van Amstel at centre), wood engraving by Nicholas Chevalier published in the *Illustrated Australian News*, 25 July 1863. Pictures Collection, IAN25/07/63/8

Above: 'Acclimatisation. Animals in the Royal Park.', wood engraving published in the *Illustrated Australian Mail*, 25 September 1862. Pictures Collection, IAM25/09/62/172

Nineteenth-century illustrated Australian newspaper collection

Newspapers Collection

Acquired 1984

There was much interest at the Library in May 1984 when long runs of the *Australasian Sketcher*, *Illustrated Australian News* and *Illustrated Melbourne Post* and a unique set of the *Illustrated Australian Mail* were to be auctioned in Melbourne. What was so appealing about the volumes was that they were in such excellent condition. Other than the *Illustrated Australian Mail*, the Library already held complete or near-complete runs, but they had been heavily used over the years and were generally in poor condition.

Approval was obtained to bid for them at the auction. The Baillieu Library at the University of Melbourne, with its own Friends group, was also interested in bidding for the collection, but generously agreed, through informal discussions just before the auction, not to compete with the State Library. The collusion was in vain, as the Library was outbid by a then-prominent Melbourne print dealer, who bought the collection with the intention of breaking it up and selling the images as individual prints.

However, shortly after the auction, the dealer was asked at what price he would be willing to sell the collection as a lot. His asking price was close to double what he had just paid for it. This appeared to put the Library's acquisition of the collection out of the question. But the University and the Library decided to pool resources and buy the collection together. The joint purchase was quickly agreed to, much to the credit of the various staff and senior management at both institutions, and the collection was acquired and saved from being broken up for the prints. Half of the volumes went to the Baillieu Library and the other half to the Pictures Collection at the State Library.

Detailed examination of the papers indicated that they had been regularly posted from Melbourne to a member of the Ploos van Amstel family in the Netherlands, most likely by three brothers who were successive Dutch consuls in Melbourne. The papers had been bound and then returned to Australia, where they entered the collection of noted bibliophile HL White.

The State Library's funding for the purchase came partly through the efforts of the Friends of the Library. Subsequently, the RE Ross Trust funded a long-term digitisation program, enabling all images in these wonderful 19th-century illustrated newspapers to be freely accessible via the State Library's online catalogue.