

John Pascoe Fawkner Papers, 1832-71

Australian Manuscripts Collection MS 13273

Acquired 1998

John Pascoe Fawkner (1792–1869)¹ and John Batman (1801–39) are the principal claimants as the founders of Melbourne. Fawkner's papers are therefore highly significant to understanding Melbourne's early colonial history. They were acquired in 1998 with support from the State Library Foundation and the Ivor Ronald Evans Foundation, and complement a much larger collection of material Fawkner himself donated to the Library shortly before his death, in 1869, and additional material acquired in 1931.²

The papers comprise such items as Fawkner's detailed directions for navigating Port Phillip Bay in a sailing vessel, a petition to establish Melbourne's first market, proposed land regulations, guidelines for town planning and some observations on education, social order, drunkenness and religion. One document, 'Constitution and form of government', is a miniature political manifesto for the new settlement. It begins by declaring that 'all men have equal political rights', providing they are of 'sane mind'. Fawkner then outlines some essential constitutional arrangements, such as a Legislative Council with elected members and a president, frequency of elections and meetings of the council. In keeping with Fawkner's egalitarianism, he believed no property qualification should be required to hold political office, and that 'all persons of ability and moral deportment' be eligible for such public positions. Fawkner even envisaged mass meetings of the citizenry to resolve issues that became deadlocked in the Legislative Council. His vision also showed a practical approach when he considered how the more tiresome positions of public office should be allocated:

Those offices thought more irksome than honourable shall be decided by the Council selecting a certain number of, say, ten persons who shall cast lots [for] who is to serve for the office required.³

After a one-year term an exemption would apply until all other citizens had served in a similarly irksome role. This record of Fawkner's political vision is important, as it appears to have been written in the 1830s, just prior to or during the early period of European occupation of Port Phillip. It informs us about the political ideology of one of the key participants in the early development of the settlement of Melbourne.

