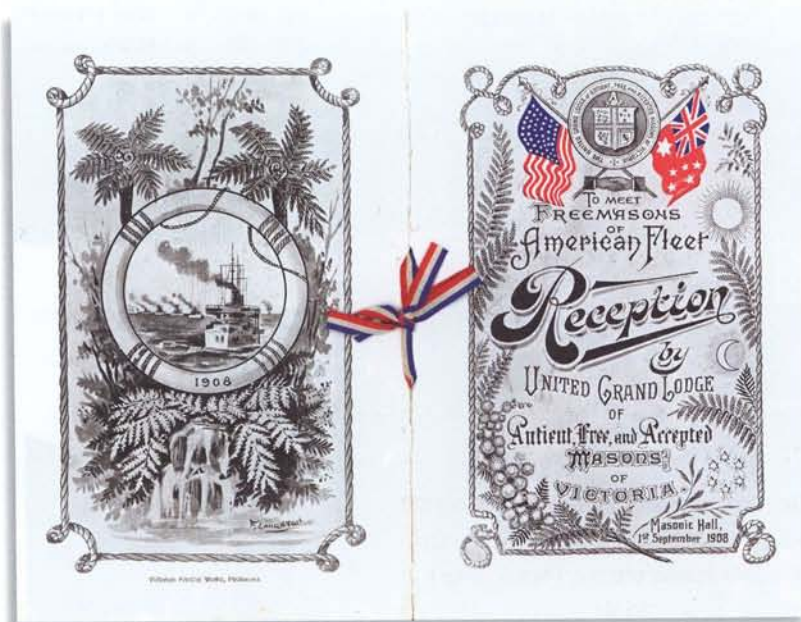


Welcoming the Fleets



above:
Reception to Meet Freemasons of the American Fleet, Masonic Hall, Melbourne, September 1, 1908. Program. (Melbourne: United Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons of Victoria, 1908)
Ephemera Collection

Richard Stone sifts through the Ephemera Collection in search of material that documents American naval visits

The largest public event in Australia since Federation commenced on 20 August 1908. Sixteen American battle ships with seven auxiliary ships bearing over 14 000 officers and men steamed into Sydney Harbour. Ten days later the Great White Fleet, as it became known, sailed south to Melbourne. On September 11 it stopped briefly at Albany in Western Australia for coal refueling before sailing on to Asian waters. Seventeen years later, in July and August 1925, another friendly American naval invasion of similar proportions took place when the United States Pacific Fleet made a goodwill visit to Sydney, Melbourne and Hobart.

Vivid impressions of these visits are revealed through the National Library's Australian Ephemera Collection. The files contain over 150 individual items including invitations, programs, postcards, menus,

orders of service, tickets, passes, entrée cards, instructions, and seating plans. Celebrations and functions in each of the Australian ports of call for both visits are represented, except for Albany, where the shorter stay probably resulted in fewer, and even more elusive, items of ephemera.

More than any other format, printed ephemera is the product of a moment in time. As soon as the event is over ephemera is redundant and vulnerable to loss, unless items are kept by individuals as personal souvenirs, or gathered by a private collector or heritage institution. Properly collected and organised, ephemera, such as that from the US Pacific Fleet visits, constitutes a rich supplementary resource for traditional printed, pictorial and manuscript documentation.

The 1908 fleet visit was part of the power play between the American President Teddy Roosevelt and various naval powers in Europe, Russia and Japan. What commenced as a manoeuvre to relocate the American Atlantic Fleet to the Pacific coast evolved into an 18-month journey around the world that included Peru, California, Hawaii, New Zealand, Australia, the Philippines, Japan, Ceylon and the Mediterranean. It was an epic logistical feat, particularly as the ships relied on massive supplies of coal to continue their journey.

In 1907 Australian Prime Minister Alfred Deakin quickly extended an invitation to have Australia included in the itinerary. His direct approaches to American diplomats in Melbourne and London were part of the post-colonial assertion of independence. Such a visit to Australia traditionally needed approval by the British Government, which in fact strongly disapproved of the American visit. In contrast, the 1925 fleet visit was a goodwill gesture and carried little of the diplomatic baggage of the earlier visit.

Regardless of political machinations, Australians welcomed both fleet visits with great enthusiasm. In 1908, Sydney turned

Accepted as
the Head Navy.



left:
State Banquet in Honor of the
Visit of the United States Fleet,
Sydney Town Hall, August 21,
1908. Invitation. (Sydney: New
South Wales Government, 1908)
Ephemera Collection

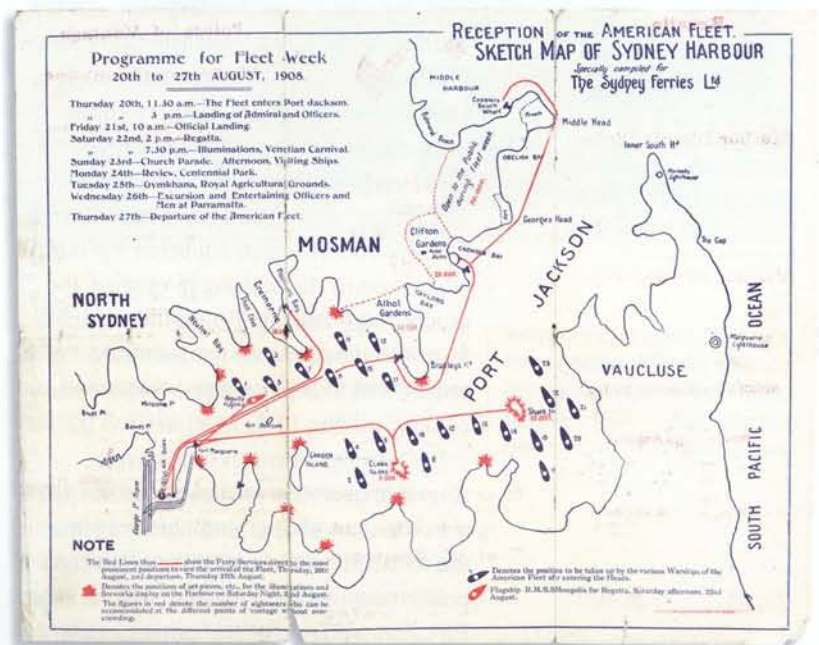
below:
'Sketch Map of Sydney Harbour',
reproduced from *How to View the
American Fleet*. (Sydney: Sydney
Ferries, 1908)
Ephemera Collection

out *en masse* to watch the fleet's arrival. A spectacular piece of ephemera is a fold-out photographic panorama, published as a souvenir by Sands & Co., showing thousands of people lined up around South Head with the American battleships grouped outside The Heads and inside the harbour. Other photographic illustrations of the US ships and their commanders, as well as photos of city sites, appear in programs and on commercially produced souvenir postcards. There are 13 fine examples of postcards from the 1908 visit, but curiously none from 1925.

Both visits featured many ceremonial events and a daunting array of social functions hosted by the Federal Government, the two state governments, local mayors and special groups such as the Masonic Lodge and churches. Ephemera in the collection records most of these separate functions including the arrivals and landings and departures of the fleets, formal presentations, welcomes, processions, parades and marches, receptions, dinners, banquets, balls, afternoon teas, entertainments, luncheons, concerts, smoke concerts and reviews. Special public events occurred, such as illumination displays, a 'Grand Fete and Display of Fireworks', a 'Grand Pyrotechnic Display', a Venetian Carnival on Sydney Harbour, a torchlight procession and display by local fire brigades, and children's demonstrations in both cities. Sport featured, with special days at the

Flemington Races in 1908, and, in 1925, a baseball carnival involving state and national teams playing teams from the various American ships.

Ephemera informed the public about the events. A guide was published in 1908 by Sydney Ferries promoting viewing of the fleet, detailing where the ships were moored in the harbour and giving estimates of the number of people that could be accommodated in various locations—for example 10 000 around Cremorne, and 10 000 on Shark Island. Sydney Ferries offered many extra services as viewing the





above:
American Fleet Visit 1925, International Baseball Carnival, July 25–August 1, Official Programme.
 (Melbourne: Victorian Baseball Association, 1925)
 Ephemera Collection

top:
 Tickets and passes issued for functions associated with the visit of the American Fleet to Australia, 1925
 Ephemera Collection

fleets was a popular activity for both visits. There are several invitations from host governments which hired flotillas of boats for guests to view the US ships in Sydney Harbour and Port Phillip Bay.

The organisational minutiae of large public events is exemplified by seating plans, temporary police passes, marching formation arrangements, and entrée cards or admission passes. This latter group of small cards is a feature of the collections, sometimes as the only representation of an event, or accompanying other pieces. For example, there is an invitation for a dance on 30 July 1925, in Melbourne's Exhibition Buildings, 'To meet the Petty Officers and Men of the United States Fleet ... under the auspices of the Australian Natives Association and the Australian Women's Association! Accompanying it is an 'Entrée Card for Parent' which admitted the dutiful chaperone to the balcony to observe the proceedings. The fox trot was very popular, as revealed by a dance program card for the same event, complete with a 'rendezvous' column waiting to be filled in.

The visiting American sailors were extended generous privileges. For the 1925 visit there are several small green cards which authorised access to free travel on public transport, sporting fixtures, Taronga Park Zoo, 'certain Theatre privileges and

race club meetings', and free admission to the stalls or family circle in cinemas in Sydney and Melbourne.

Details of food consumed is revealed in menus. At a state banquet held in the Sydney Town Hall on 21 August 1908, eight courses were offered involving 26 different dishes. At the other end of the social and gastronomic spectrum was a luncheon for journalists travelling with the 1925 fleet, which was a modest repast of just five dishes. Most of the dishes are the standard fare of soup, roasts, vegetables and desserts, usually listed in a hybrid of French and English, with a few local flourishes. A banquet in Melbourne in July 1925, boasted a very assertive Australian bill of gastronomic fare—Sydney rock oysters, Port Phillip schnapper, South Australian capon, Geelong asparagus, Peach Melba, and an intriguing dessert called simply 'Commonwealth'. All wines served at this banquet, and at several others, were Australian.

Australian music did not fare as well as Australian food. The music played for the American visitors at concerts and social functions was routinely English, American or European. Melbourne's vast Exhibition Building was the venue for two massive choral concerts in 1908 and 1925. Both had choirs of between 850 and 900 voices

and orchestras of between 100 and 140 instrumentalists. In 1908, no less than six conductors took turns in controlling these forces through Wagner, Haydn, Sibelius and Handel's 'Hallelujah Chorus'. Australian music achieved an incongruous moment in the spotlight with 'Australia, Land of Ours', by Dudley Glass, which was performed in the patriotic finale of a Pageant of American History. This spectacle was inserted between acts 1 and 2 of a gala performance of the American musical comedy *Kid Boots* staged by J.C. Williamson in Melbourne in July 1925 for officers of the fleet.

Decoratively speaking, official invitations and entrée cards are a dour genre of ephemera, and the 1925 fleet ephemera is no exception. However, the 1908 material is more diverse in design. Continuing the late-Victorian tradition, some large, florid invitations appeared, usually with a classically draped female figure holding flags or foliage, or both. The use of flags on ephemera for both visits showed a degree of post-colonial schizophrenia, with the American flag, the Australian flag and the British Union Jack appearing on many items. Some 1908 ephemera boasts art nouveau patterns, and local Australian iconography is evident. Non-threatening Australian birds and animals appear alongside the mighty American eagle. Symbolic clasped hands of friendship feature, sometimes stretching across a map of the Pacific, as do the American battleships with their distinctive triple funnels. The most common American emblem used was the Stars and Stripes flag. However, two masculine American human emblems also appear—a drummer from the American revolutionary period decorates a military tattoo program in 1925, and elsewhere the venerable Uncle Sam appears on a postcard holding an American flag opposite an Australian stockman with his own national flag, and a stock whip.

The US Fleet visits were large-scale, major public events which impacted significantly on the young Australian nation early in the twentieth century. The surviving ephemera provides additional flavour and colour to the historical record, as we can sense officials, politicians, socialites, the general public and the visiting officers and sailors tackling a hectic ceremonial and social calendar.



(NB. Material from the Ephemera Collection, including the US Fleet visits, may be accessed through the Petherick Reading Room.)

above:
Postcards issued for the visit of the United States Fleet to Australia, 1908
Ephemera Collection

RICHARD STONE is a former librarian. He is currently a consultant on ephemera and performing arts resources and is completing a book on the National Library's Ephemera Collection.