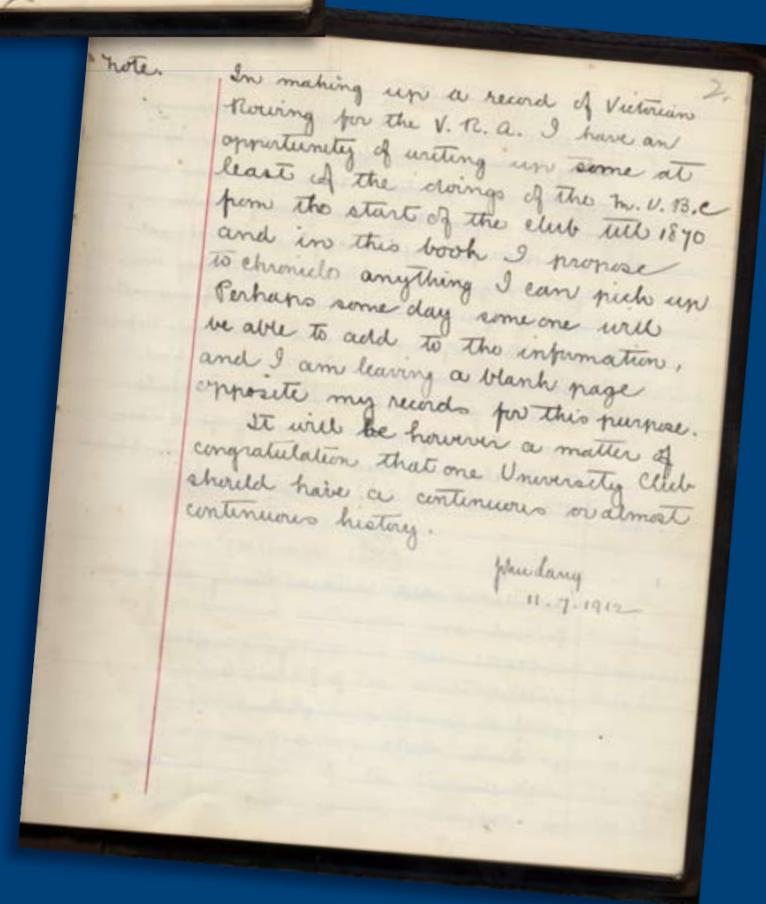


The front page and accompanying note to the reconstructed records of the Club 1859-70, completed by John Lang in July 1912



Well Rowed University

MELBOURNE UNIVERSITY BOAT CLUB

THE FIRST 150 YEARS

Judith Buckrich

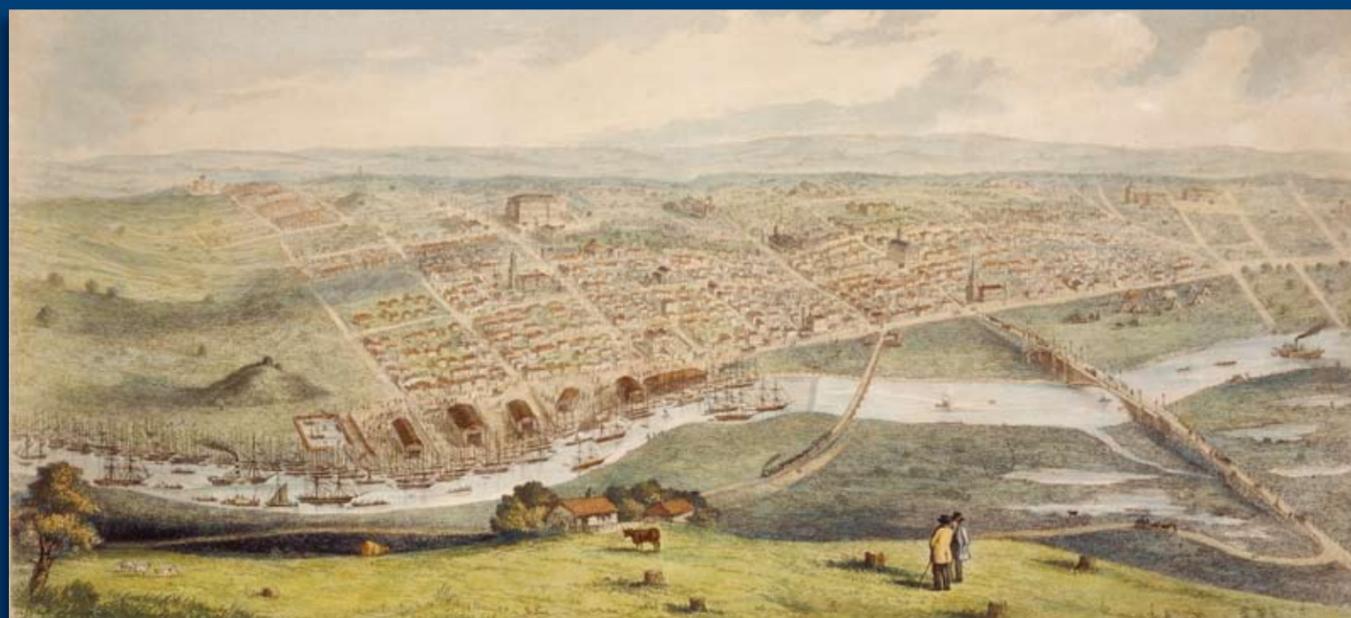


MELBOURNE UNIVERSITY BOAT CLUB INC.



CHAPTER ONE

Down to the Yarra



'The City of Melbourne, Australia'
1855 N Whittock artist State Library of Victoria picture collection

Establishing a boat club, Martin Irving

The establishment of Melbourne University Boat Club (MUBC) in 1859 was the achievement of Martin Howy Irving, a graduate of Oxford University and one of its great oarsmen. Irving was Melbourne University's second Classics professor. When he arrived in Melbourne in 1856, he was just twenty-five years old. Born in London in 1831, his father was a famous Scots preacher, Edward Irving, who had been declared a heretic by the Church of Scotland and founded the Irvingite or Catholic Apostolic Church.¹

From King's College School, London, Martin won a Balliol College scholarship and matriculated in November 1848. An outstanding student, he was the University junior mathematics scholar for 1850, and obtained first-class honours in Classics and second-class honours in Mathematics (B.A., 1853; M.A., 1856). In 1854, he became Classics master of the non-denominational City of London School.²

An adventurous spirit brought him to the colonies and to the fledgling Melbourne University that had been established just three years before. Irving was chosen to succeed the first professor of Greek and Latin Classics with Ancient History, Henry E Rowe, who had died soon after Martin's arrival in Melbourne.

There could hardly have been a finer example of a mid-nineteenth-century gentleman than Irving. Over six feet tall, wiry and handsome, he had been one of the leading oarsmen of Balliol College. In 1851 he was a member of the Balliol Eight which won Head of the River and in 1852 he won the coveted 'University Sculls'. He believed that playing sport was as important to educating young men as academic training. Four months after arriving in Melbourne (in July 1856) he helped organise the first recorded cricket match (with Emerald Hill) for a university team. This was quite a feat, considering there were only sixteen men enrolled at Melbourne University in 1855.³

However, Irving's passion was rowing and he soon discovered the gentlemen's boat clubs on the Yarra—the Ariel and Elswick. According to the tireless record keeper of Victorian and MUBC rowing, John Lang, the early clubs were Elswick—the first club in Melbourne—and then in order, Ariel, University, Leander, Melbourne, Richmond, Young Australia, Banks, Civil Service and Prince of Wales.⁴ In the 1850s most competitive rowing on the Yarra was done by professional watermen.⁵ Irving not only took up the challenge to establish a university boat club, but he also established an amateur rowing regatta that would forge the ideals of nineteenth-century manhood brought with him from England.

His energy and optimism enabled him to set up Melbourne University Boat Club, despite the few men enrolled. In terms of numbers, it was fortunate that most rowing at this time was done in boats for singles, pairs or four oarsmen, rather than eight. He soon organised a 'raison d'être' for the Club by setting up a race between 'a crew of men from the metropolitan Banks'⁶ and the University. Irving himself would be in the University crew's stroke seat. The race was to take place on 3 September 1859, the official recorded date for the founding of Melbourne University Boat Club.⁷ The course for the race was from the Botanical Gardens Bridge to Princes Bridge. According to Lang, the boat used by MUBC was an outrigger lent by Mr Smith of the tannery, one of the many businesses established along the busy Yarra River.⁸ Mr Smith's boat was the *Victory*, which had won

the Coppin Challenge Trophy in successive years at the Upper Yarra Regattas of 1857, 1858 and 1859. It was built in Melbourne by TR Evans, an apprentice of the boatbuilder Searle on the Thames in England.

The MUBC crew were dressed all in white and looked fairly well on the water though Professor Irving their stroke was far and away the best oarsman—the others rowing in crude form compared to him. In the bows of the boat was a small white flag with 'M.U.B.C.' embroidered on it ... The course of the race was from the Botanical Bridge to Princes Bridge. The Banks crew got off to a good start but hugged the bank too closely—the sharp curve at the Baths Corner favoured University who took full advantage of it. The Banks ran too close to the bank and their rudder became almost submerged in the wash of the wake as the coxswain jambed [sic] it hard on to get clear. University, by judiciously keeping to the other side of the curve increased the lead they had and were never seriously pressed. They won by three lengths.⁹

The crews were C Farewell (bow) 10st 8½lbs, VE Giblin (2) 9st 4lbs, JJ Bowman (3) 10st 5lbs, MH Irving (stroke) 11st 10lbs and C Browning (cox) for University and TW Palmer (bow), W Wood (2), J Long (3), RW Wilkinson (stroke) and RF Hollick (cox) for Banks. Lang credited the University crew as being 'the first winning crew in a race between amateurs on the Yarra.'¹⁰

Pair oar races were held by the University on the same day, won by CP Greene (bow), R Molesworth (stroke) and F McDonnell (cox).

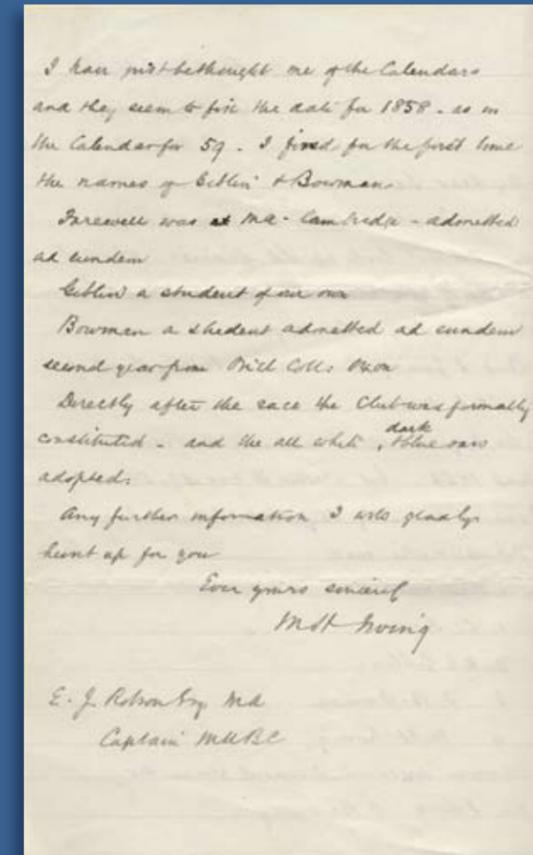
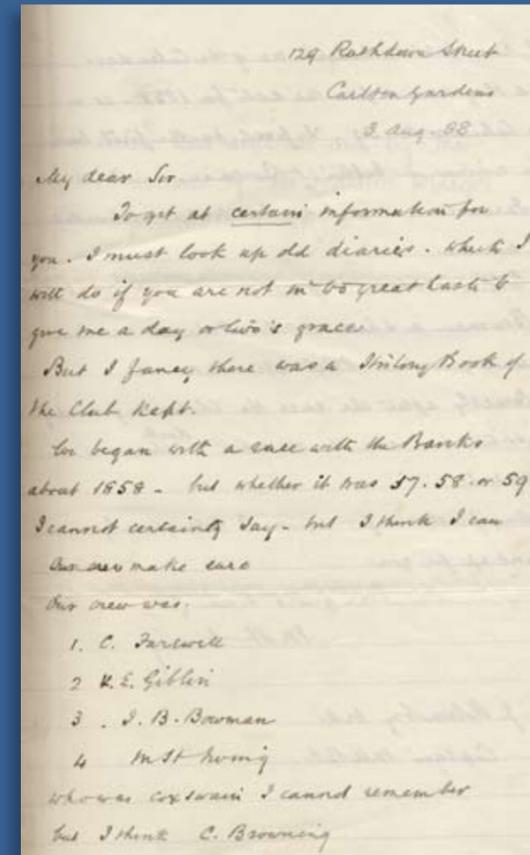
In his letter to Mr EI Robson, dated 3 August 1888, Irving recalls that 'Directly after the race the Club was formally constituted—and the all white & dark blue oars adopted.'¹¹

On 10 October 1859, barely a month after the foundation of the Club, Irving wrote to the Chief Commissioner of Public Lands and Survey, seeking approval for a grant of permission for MUBC to occupy land 'on the west side of the northern embankment of the Botanical Gardens' Bridge' (close to the site of the present-day Morell Bridge, but on the course of the old Yarra) for the purpose of erecting a boatshed. He was clearly a man on a mission with a vision for the future.

Melbourne in 1859

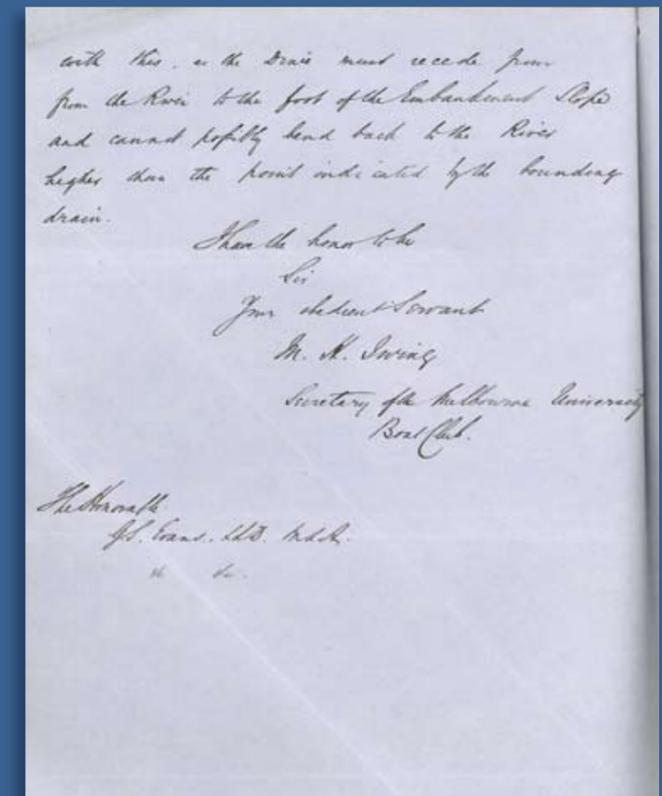
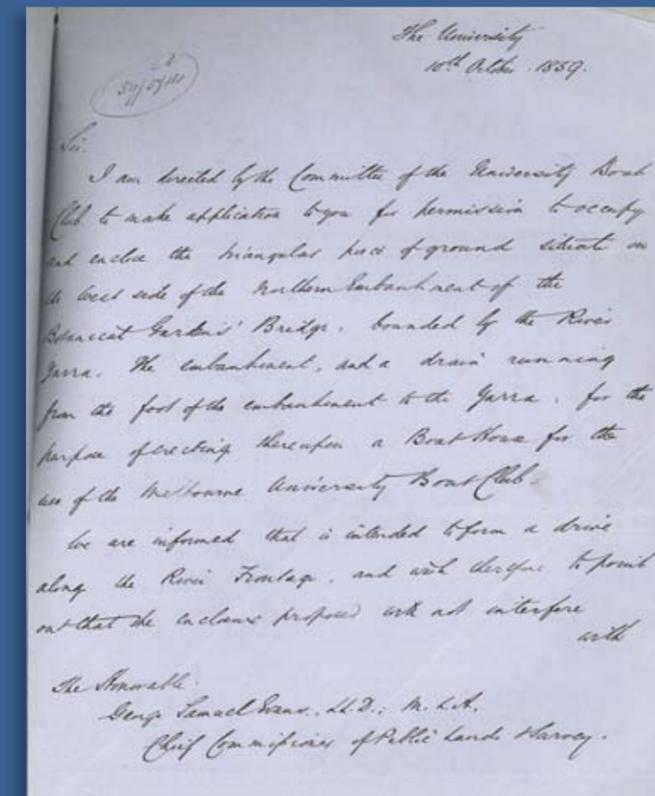
The 1850s were the making of Melbourne. The settlement had been established in 1835 as an agricultural port for exporting locally produced wool. But it was the discovery of gold in 1851 that brought hundreds of thousands of people to the colony of Victoria in just a few years. From just 71,000 souls in 1851, the population grew to 237,000 by 1854 and 410,000 by 1857. By 1861 it was 540,000. About a quarter of these people lived in Melbourne, while the rest were mostly located around the central Victorian goldfields.

Gold created an entirely different city than anything previously imagined or planned. The rate of development was breathtaking and public works proliferated. In the ensuing decades roads, bridges and wharves were built and a piped water system—but, until 1900, no sewerage system—leading to ever-worsening pollution problems for the Yarra River. By the time the first University students rowed on what would come to be known as the Lower Yarra (i.e. downstream from the falls which used to be situated near where



LEFT Irving's recollections written to the Captain of the Club, EJ Robson, on 3 August 1888 regarding the founding of the Club on 3 September 1859

BELOW Irving's request dated 10 October 1859, addressed to the Chief Commissioner of Public Lands & Survey, for a grant of land to the Club Courtesy Public Record Office Victoria



Queen's Bridge is today); the banks of the river were full of tanneries, abattoirs, boiling down works, and of course all manner of boatbuilders, dry docks and other businesses that used the river. It was a far cry from the Yarra of the city's founding only twenty-five years before. The Upper Yarra (i.e. upstream from the falls) towards the Botanical Gardens, Richmond and Kew still retained some of the beauty described by one of Melbourne's early chroniclers, Garryowen, who wrote this description of the river as it had been in 1835 in his *Chronicles of Early Melbourne*:

Wild and Wayward Beauty

The site and surroundings of the embryonic city, when in a state of nature, formed a picture of wild and wayward beauty. The River Yarra from its embouchure was so half-choked with the trunks and branches of fallen trees and other impedimenta as to render its navigation a matter of difficulty and delay even to the smallest of coasters. Its low sides were lined with thick ti-tree [sic] scrub and trees over twenty feet high, and skirted with marshes covered with a luxuriance of reeds, wild grass, and herbage.¹²

Compare this with an account of the area written just eighteen years later, in 1853, by William Kelly, a visiting British travel writer:

Although the current of the Yarra-Yarra is sluggish, it took nearly two hours to breast, not cleave, that tortuous river. For seven miles above its junction with the Saltwater River, its southern bank was thickly and deeply fringed with tea-tree scrub, which could be impenetrable but for its suppleness; and within about a mile of the city its northern bank was lined with an unbroken chain of slaughter-houses and fellmongery establishments which filled the circumambient air with the most sickening odours, that were prevented from stagnating by huge dropsical-looking pigs that kept constantly wallowing in decomposed offal. Prodigious rats also patronised that quarter, seemingly divested of that timorousness which characterises their genus in most other countries. When at our destination, the boat was made fast to a weather-worn stake ... We managed to land without leaving our boots as hostages in the mud ...

The north bank of the Yarra, at that time, from the falls down to the slaughter-houses, was a slough of dark mud in a state of liquidity, only a very few degrees removed from that of the river, and along the entire distance was a line of lighters and intercolonial vessels, four deep, discharging promiscuously into the mire bales of soft goods, delicate boxes of dry goods, cases of brandy, barrels of flour, packages of Glenfield's patent starch, "warranted used in the royal laundry," mixed pickles, real Havannahs, Cossepore sugar, Mocha coffee, Bass's pale ale, Barclay's brown stout, double-rose Cork butter Scotch oatmeal, and a hundred-and-one other and sundry articles piled high in mountains in the muck, of which the "dry goods" not infrequently constituted the lower stratum or foundation.¹³

The effect of European settlement was evident. In the 1850s engineering works began on the river and new government buildings were planned. Gold brought with it the possibility of reproducing the institutions that most of Melbourne's population had left behind in Europe. That decade saw the construction of more than 800 churches built

under the newly revised *Church Act* of 1853 and the establishment of the University, museum, mechanics' institutes, hospitals, banks, theatres, hotels and gentlemen's clubs. These institutions were the skeleton upon which Melbourne's flesh and blood could grow and develop.

In the early 1850s Victoria's government was led by Lieutenant-Governor Charles Joseph La Trobe who had arrived as superintendent of the Port Phillip District in 1839, twelve years before the separation of Victoria from New South Wales. La Trobe was a cultured and humane man whose family had been involved in the campaign for the abolition of slavery in Britain. His preference for cultural and natural occupations was of great benefit to the emerging district.¹⁴ He left Victoria in May 1854, having borne the impact of the arrival of thousands of gold seekers from 1851, and overseen the establishment of some of Victoria's important institutions.

La Trobe had been fortunate in that several early colonists shared his passions, but none was more significant to the burgeoning community than Redmond Barry. Arriving in the same year as La Trobe, Barry soon became prominent in every social, cultural and philanthropic activity.

When Victoria separated from New South Wales in 1851, Barry was appointed its first solicitor-general, a position which he held briefly, for he was elevated to the new bench of the Supreme Court of Victoria in January 1852.¹⁵

Soon after, he was instrumental in the founding of Melbourne University, of which he was first Chancellor (1853), a position he held until his death in 1880. It was largely thanks to Barry that the University was able to attract outstanding men as its first professors and during Barry's lifetime its degrees grew to command worldwide respect.¹⁶

Both La Trobe and Barry would have recognised the importance of a university for its civilising force in a new and brash settlement. With a relatively small professional class—only 5000 of a total of 540,000 people counted in the 1861 census—the belief that a university could thrive was perhaps a leap of faith. Initially, only four faculties were established: Mathematics, Classics and Ancient History, Natural Sciences and Modern History and Literature and Political Economy. The total number of enrolments in the first year of operation in 1855 was sixteen. Law was introduced in 1857 and Medicine and Engineering in the early 1860s.¹⁷ Thanks to the new faculties, student numbers increased to around 200 in the 1870s.

Sport and spectators

In Melbourne, cricket and horseracing had been popular spectator sports since the late 1830s. The Melbourne Cricket Club, established in 1838, finally found a permanent home in its present location, east of Melbourne, in 1853. Horseracing too was firmly established and the first Melbourne Cup was raced in 1861. Melburnians loved to be entertained and a flood of young men into the city led to a flourish of games being played on land and water, with the first regattas being staged in Melbourne on 21 January 1841 and Geelong in 1847. According to the early chronicler of Australian rowing, John Lang, the competitors at these events were mostly watermen, 'of whom there was a numerous class plying for hire from Princes Bridge to the Baths and Cremorne Gardens'.¹⁸

Rowing had been popular since the early days of settlement. A city on a river where

paddle-steamers, lighters, ferries and rowboats of all kinds took cargo and people up and down and across the Saltwater (now the Maribyrnong) and Yarra Rivers was bound to give rise to competitions between the men who worked on the boats.¹⁹

Amateur competition had begun in England towards the end of the eighteenth century. The Monarch Boat Club of Eton College and the Isis Club of Westminster School were both in existence in the 1790s. The Star Club and Arrow Club in London for gentlemen amateurs were also in existence before 1800. At Oxford University bumping²⁰ races were first organised in 1815, while at Cambridge the first recorded races were in 1827. The boat race between Oxford University and Cambridge University first took place in 1829; this was the second intervarsity sporting event (following the first Varsity Cricket Match by two years).²¹

The first Melbourne Amateur Regattas

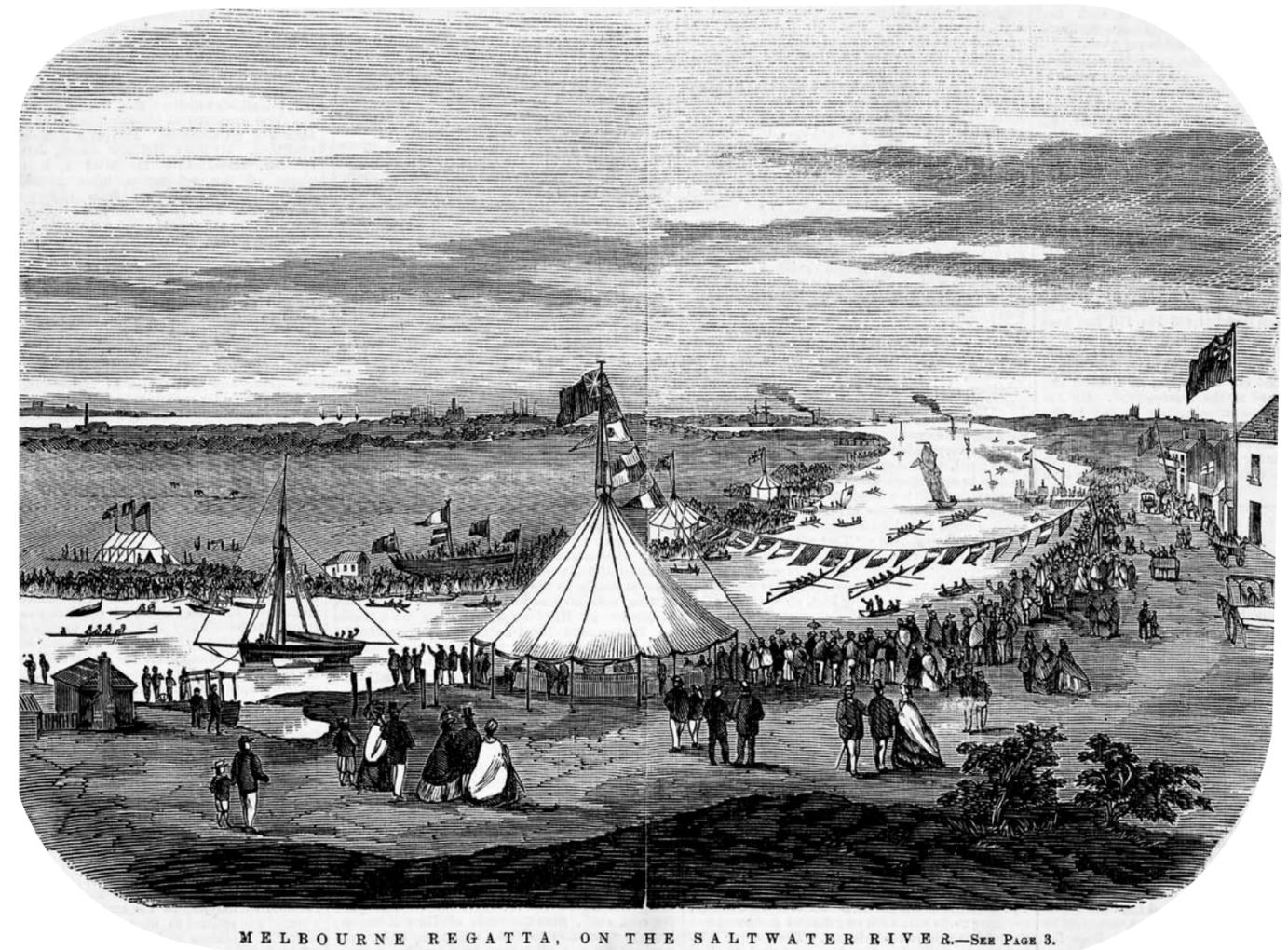
In 1860, following MUBC's first race and its foundation on 3 September 1859, Irving organised the first 'Melbourne Amateur Regatta'. This was the first boat race of its kind in Australia. It was held on the 4 and 5 May on the Upper Yarra²² over a course rowed upstream about a mile and a quarter, starting at 'Morgan's Ferry' which was just up from what would become the Henley finish and ending at the corner above the Richmond Punt (now Punt Road) on the old Yarra. An Upper Yarra Regatta, chiefly for watermen but with some competing amateurs, had been held since 1857; but this was the first regatta explicitly for amateurs. The Grand Challenge Cup was the trophy for four-oar outriggers or any boat. There was also a challenge race for amateur scullers, pair oars and a senior gig race.²³ About 2000 spectators attended the event.²⁴

Among the ideals that Irving sought to instil in his students and fellow oarsmen was the idea of amateurism, and its effect of building leadership. Thus men earning their living on the water were separated in competition from those who pursued rowing for its own sake.²⁵ But, unlike in Britain, men earning their living with manual labour were allowed to row in amateur competitions.

The 1860 regatta was the first public event in which MUBC participated. The other clubs competing in the Grand Challenge Cup event for four-oar outriggers were United Boat Club, the Elswick Rowing Club and a 'combination' crew (the equivalent of a modern composite crew).

The Grand Challenge first heat was between MUBC and United Boat Club. Rowing for University were C Bromby, R Molesworth, JT Smith and Martin Irving (stroke) with C Browning (cox). The popular *Bells Sporting Life* newspaper carried a description of the race. And perhaps it is good to remember that the Yarra was much narrower then than it is now.

This until the unfortunate contretemps which finished the heat was a beautifully contested race. The United were the first to feel the water and went off with a slight lead. At the Botanical the crews were parallel. By the time they were off that portion of the gardens where "the willows dip their pendent boughs stooping as if to drink"—the University was leading by a length. A curve of the river however brought them close together again. When under the bridge the University had nearly drawn clear.



Rounding the point near the Sir Henry Barkly [a hotel near the old 'punt' river crossing at Richmond]—rather a short curve—the boats collided. By mutual consent, for an instant, they left off, and then University cleared away and were never caught.²⁶

'Melbourne Regatta, on the Saltwater River' 1863 *Illustrated Australian News*, State Library of Victoria picture collection

The final of this race between University and Elswick was won by Elswick by three lengths.

The Challenge Sculls event rowed at the same regatta, being the 'Amateur Championship and "Australasian" Cup' for senior sculls was won by Martin Irving of University. In his heat, Irving 'took such a lead from Bishop that his opponent never saw him after the first bend.' The final was a row over for Irving because his opponent Coster 'sprained his wrist in launching his boat.'²⁷

Lang noted that University's only entry in the 1861 Melbourne Regatta was Irving in the Challenge Sculls event, for which four other competitors had entered. In the final, Irving's rival McCutcheon was disqualified because 'a foul occurred soon after the start in Professor Irving's water'.²⁸

University did not compete in either the 1862 or 1863 Melbourne Regattas proper, but Lang noted that on 24 April 1862, 'R Fuller launched from his boathouse the first four-

Martin Howy Irving

1831–1912

FOUNDER OF THE MELBOURNE UNIVERSITY BOAT CLUB

Irving was Chair of Classical and Comparative Philology and Logic from 1856 until 1871, when he resigned to take over as headmaster of Wesley College. In 1876 he left Wesley, after leaving his mark as a fine scholar and teacher, and acquired the private school known as Hawthorn Grammar School, which flourished under his leadership. He handed over the school in 1884 to his eldest son Mr EH Irving, who remained there for two years until departing to become a journalist in Western Australia. The school ceased to exist in 1908.

He was appointed to the University of Melbourne and commenced teaching in 1856, the second year of the University's existence. He was a member of the University Council from 1875–1900, and Vice-Chancellor from 1887 to 1889. In 1884, he was appointed by the Premier, Mr Service, as a member of the first Public Service Board in Victoria, a position which he held for ten years.

He remained an involved and active member of the Club until he left Australia in 1900 and maintained his contact with the Club until his death at Albury, Surrey, in England in 1912.

John Lang said of him: 'Professor Irving was in all things the life and spirit of the club for many years.'



John Madden was the first of many MUBC men who would become important members of the Melbourne community. He arrived in Melbourne with his attorney father, mother and brothers in 1857. Born in 1844 in Cloyne, County Cork, Ireland, John attended preparatory school in London and the Marist College at Beauchamps, France; he mastered the French language and learned some Italian and German. In Melbourne he and his brothers attended St Patrick's College. John preferred outdoor activity to study. He entered the University of Melbourne in 1861, a graduating B.A. with third-class honours in 1864, and LL.B. with the Billings medal as one of the first four law graduates in 1865. He went on to become a Chief Justice, was knighted in 1893 and appointed K.C.M.G. in 1899 ... He became Victorian Lieutenant-Governor in 1899.

Madden preserved links with the University of Melbourne. In 1864 he had been acting-registrar for five weeks; in the early 1870s he helped to administer matriculation examinations and in 1873 he applied unsuccessfully for a lectureship. From 1875–82 he was warden of the senate. ... In 1889 the council elected Madden unpaid Vice-Chancellor ... Madden succeeded Sir Anthony Brownless as Chancellor in 1897 ...³²

oared, single streak²⁹ boat ever built in Victoria or in the Southern Hemisphere.' The boat was built for the University Boat Club.³⁰

Lang observed that although University crews did not compete in the 1863 Melbourne Regatta, 'in Christmas week a four-oar and sculling race with the Elswick R.C. were [sic] rowed.' In the sculling race, Irving and McCutcheon competed again and Irving won by thirty yards. The crew for the four-oared outrigger race included John Madden as stroke, Irving took 3, and JC Tyler, C Bromby and J Williams as cox made up the rest of the crew.³¹

The race was a 'post to post'. According to Lang, this meant that there were two sets of posts, one set at the start, precisely a hundred yards apart, and the other set at the finish, also a hundred yards apart.

Each crew started from a post and the race consisted in seeing which crew got first to the respective post belonging to it at the finish. The crew that started from the rearmost post had to race to the rearmost post at the finish, and if it got there before the front starter got to its front post at the finish, it won the race. And vice versa.³³

Lang, writing in 1912, found this an extraordinary proceeding, and explained that it was necessitated by the narrowness of the winding river. Elswick beat University 'by getting to within 20 yards of them so they (Elswick) won by 80 yards or 4 lengths.'³⁴

1863 saw some regattas in Footscray in which the University Boat Club participated. One was a maiden four for amateurs against Elswick and Leander Rowing Clubs. Elswick won by fifteen seconds with University beating Leander by a length. The Queen's Birthday races of 23 May 1863 saw the University row against Elswick in maiden four-oared gigs: 'The University coxswain steered wildly and collided with Elswick who cleared out of the tangle and were never caught.'³⁵ These were very often crude races which resulted in collisions.

In 1866 the University Boat Club again competed in the Melbourne Regatta in a maiden gig four on the Saltwater River against the Young Victorian Rowing Club. Rowing for MUBC were JH Hood, J Johnstone, J Barker, R Hope (stroke) and JW Phillips (cox). University won and also competed in a maiden pair race at the same Regatta. JH Hood and B Hope (stroke) won against Leander, who led for a mile when University passed them, and won a close race by a length.³⁶

An intercolonial boat race

1863 saw the first boat race, albeit an unofficial one, between a New South Wales and Victorian crew, in four-oared, string-test gigs over a three-mile course on the Parramatta River. The Victorian crew included men from Elswick and Melbourne Clubs, as well as Martin Irving (who rowed in the 3 seat) from Melbourne University Boat Club.³⁷ The race resulted in a win to New South Wales in the time of 18mins 30secs, which Lang notes as being very fast for string-test boats.

Gigs were in-rigger boats. The reference to a string-test gig according to later VRA rules was the following:

17. The words "string-test gig" shall mean a boat pulling four oars, and shall agree with the following test, viz.: A string from the junction of the lower planks to the top of every rowlock must touch every streak in the boat.³⁸

After the race there were allegations by Victoria that the New South Wales crew were watermen, who should have been excluded from the competition.³⁹ The definition of amateur racing was a controversy which dogged intercolonial competition for some years.

Intraclub racing

It was in 1862 that the first 'Scratch Fours' event is recorded in Lang's notes. This event became an intraclub regular competition well into the following century. An early participant describes the importance of this event in those days:

There is so much hard compulsory, and routine work connected with training for more important races, and so much anxiety about training for and rowing in them, that to me, from the standpoint of mere enjoyment, they ever suffered in comparison with "Scratch Fours," which, with all their pleasurable excitement of "drawing" etc. brought with them a smaller responsibility and greatly lesser anxiety.⁴⁰

The most significant event of 1863 was the inaugural presentation by Martin Irving of the President's Oars. These were a pair of small silver oars to be rowed for in pairs. It became a notable competition within the Club. They were first raced for on 4 June 1863.

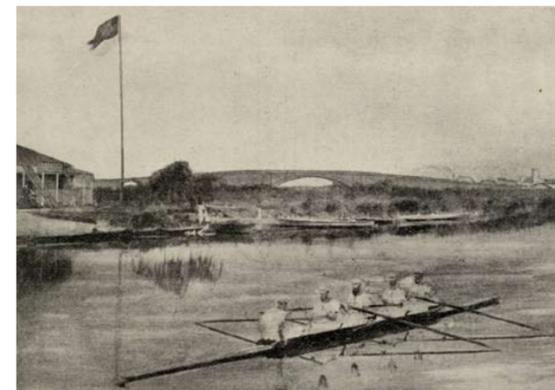
Conditions of competition for the President's Oars were:

The competition is open to any two members of the club. The holders shall be open to a challenge and must row for them once a term or three times a year. Any two members of the club who win 4 races not in succession necessarily shall be entitled to take absolute possession of the trophy.⁴¹

Irving was trying to engender good habits in members by setting up a competition that fostered year-round rowing.

BELOW LEFT: Yarra River at Morgan's Ferry in the 1860s, the old Princes Bridge in the background and Leander Rowing Club in the foreground (see maps on page 18) *The Victorian Oarsman*, p.313

BELOW RIGHT: Botanical Gardens Bridge, at Anderson Street, South Yarra, about 1862, connecting the Botanical Gardens and the Zoological Gardens (later, Amateur Sports Ground). The Melbourne Regatta finish on a number of occasions was at the point where this photograph was taken (see maps on page 18) *The Victorian Oarsman*, p.26



RIGHT: The participants in the inaugural President's Oars race of 4 June 1863
From MUBC Record Book, vol.1 p.38

Inaugural 'President's Oars', 4 June 1863

Eight pairs competed on the first occasion of this competition.

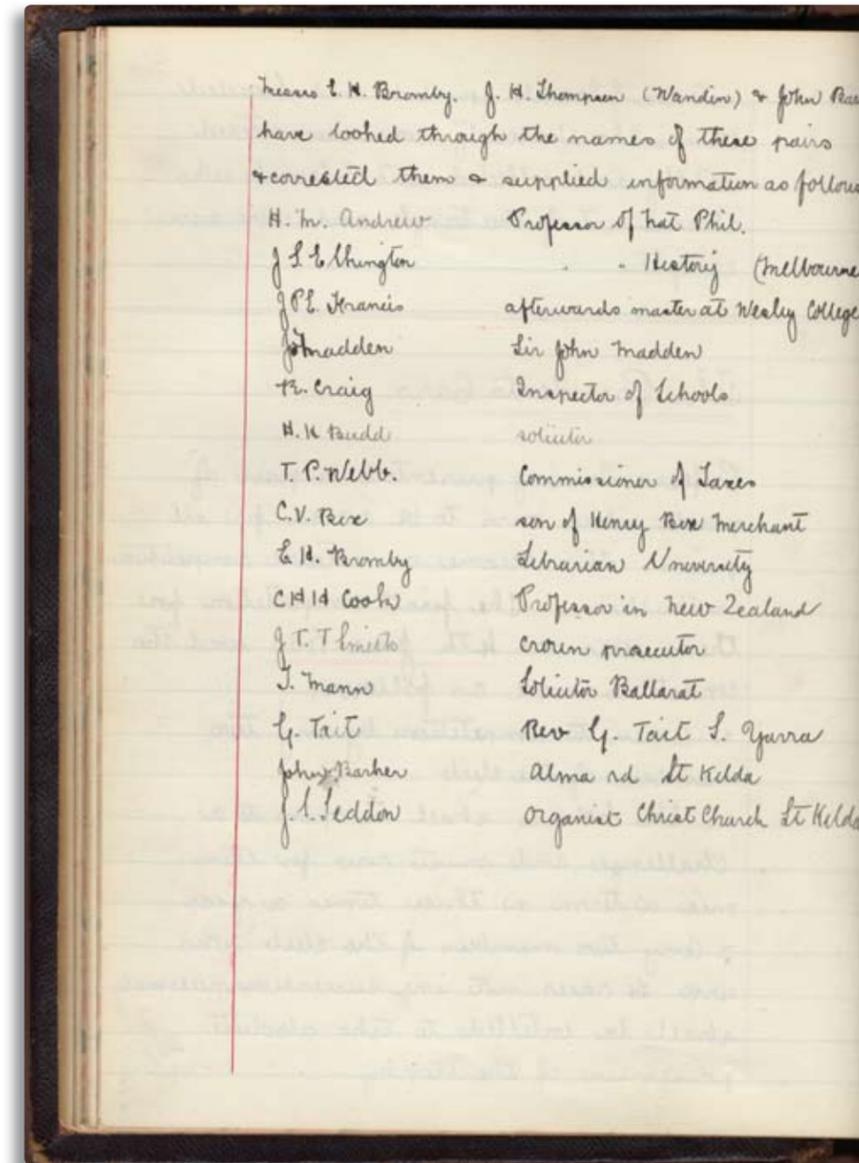
FIRST HEAT		
CE Dean (bow), HM Andrew (stroke), Colin Campbell (cox)	BEAT	JS Elkington (bow), JB Gregory (stroke), JPE Francis (cox)
SECOND HEAT		
AA O'Mullane (bow), J Madden (stroke), R Craig (cox)	BEAT	J Nicholson (bow), HH Budd (stroke), T Webb (cox)
THIRD HEAT		
CV Box (bow), JH Thompson (stroke), EH Bromby (cox)	BEAT	CHH Cook (bow), JT Smith (stroke), S Mann (cox)
FOURTH HEAT		
G Tait (bow), John Barker (stroke), A Smith (cox)	BEAT	JS Seddon (bow), H Delahey (stroke), R Craig (cox)
FIFTH HEAT		
Thompson's pair BEAT Andrew's pair		
SIXTH HEAT		
Barker's pair BEAT Madden's pair		
FINAL		
Thompson's pair BEAT Barker's pair		

[Note: the fifth and sixth 'heats' would today have been called 'semi-finals'.]

Until the establishment of residential colleges at the University and the intercollegiate and intervarsity races that became the focal point of varsity rowers; the President's Oars was the foremost competition for university men.

What a deal of rowing there was for these oars. They kept rowers going for them some six or seven years, two or three times a year generally ... These "Challenge Oars" had more to do with the brilliant success the University Club attained at the period when contests for them were taking place than anything else.⁴²

Lang gives us the following description of one of the heats of the President's Oars held on 30 May 1865 in which the challengers to the title holders first rowed off for the right to



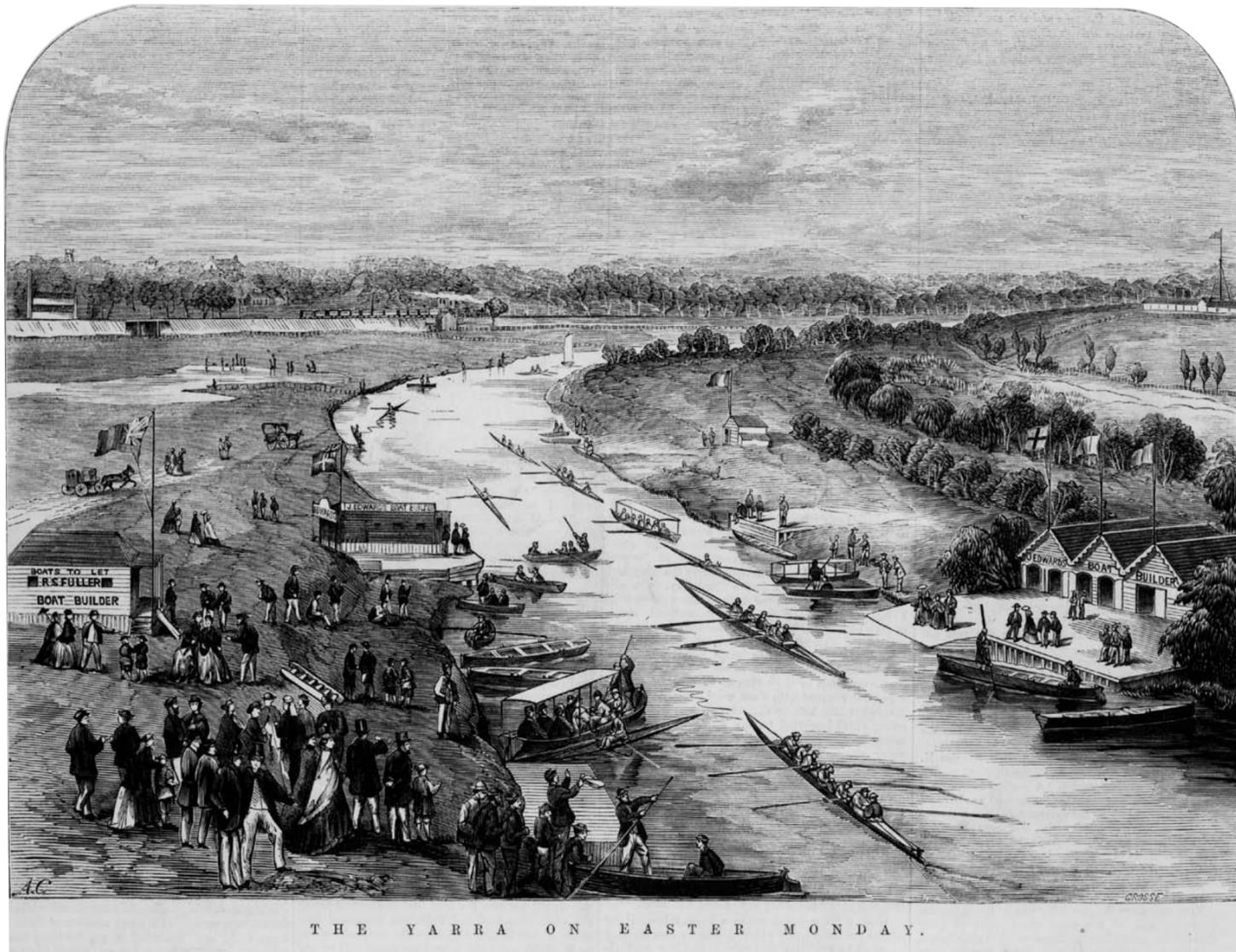
The first race between Victorian public schools, Scotch College and Melbourne Grammar School, 18 June 1868.

The race was brought about through the efforts of two members of MUBC who were on the staff of the schools. Mr JH Thompson [the stroke of the winning President's Oars crew of 1863] of Melbourne Grammar School and Mr JG Johnstone, a member of the Scotch College staff. They coached the respective crews. Crews had been rowing on the river for some time, but the challenge for the race issued by one of the Scotch College rowers was only made on 17 June. It was promptly accepted by Melbourne Grammar School, and even in those far-off days, the contest aroused no little interest. Scotch won. The course was the Upper Yarra from the Botanic Gardens corner to the Edward's Boatshed near Princes Bridge. The bend in the river at the Botanic Gardens prevented serious racing above that point. Both schools would have boated from the commercial boatsheds at Princes Bridge.⁴⁴

LEFT: The subsequent occupations of the participants in the inaugural President's Oars race of 4 June 1863
From MUBC Record Book, vol.1 p.37

challenge. The challengers were a'Beckett (bow) and Barker (stroke), versus Hope (bow) and Johnstone (stroke):

Barker on the south led soon after the start—both pairs travelled at a great pace. A dead cow got in Johnstone's course and caused some bad steering so that Barker got 3 lengths lead. Johnstone spurted, and opposite the entrance to the Botanical Gardens the leading boat getting the full force of a strong current, Johnstone drew up level. Within 500 yards of the finish the crews were racing level and going hard. Johnstone had however to stop rowing when leading a little as his wrist became painful from a sprain of rather recent origin.⁴³



THE YARRA ON EASTER MONDAY.

'The Yarra on Easter Monday'
1867 Frederick Grosse engraver
Illustrated Australian News
State Library of Victoria picture
collection

In the 1866 Club Fours event (a term which seems to have been used in the records of the Club almost interchangeably with 'Scratch Fours'), the winning crew was R Hope (stroke), J Johnstone, GH Neighbour, T Mann and Richard Barker (cox). The coach was Professor Irving. A pewter pot was the trophy. Richard Barker became Irving's son-in-law; he weighed eleven stone and Irving apparently told him 'Now Barker, take off your collar and tie and make yourself as light as possible.'⁴⁵

The Club's first annual meeting

The first recorded annual meeting of the Club was held on 16 March 1868. The office bearers elected were President: Professor Irving, Captain: JH Hood, Hon Secretary and Treasurer: TC Hope and Committee: D Wilkie, GW Neighbour and D Campbell.

The Melbourne Regatta and the various clubs in 1868

The Melbourne Regatta had been rowed on the Saltwater (Maribyrnong) River for several years, 'but the Footscray course had become unpopular because the general public would not attend the regatta, the sightseers comprising about 300 people embracing the lowest riff-raff thimble-riggers & card-sharps ad nauseam who hung about the miserable public house at Footscray.'⁴⁶

The Melbourne Regatta returned to the Upper Yarra on 11 and 14 April 1868. The Grand Challenge was rowed on the first day of this Regatta. Richmond Rowing Club beat the University Boat Club. The University crew was D Wilkie, JH Thompson, Martin Irving, TC Hope (stroke) and G White (cox).

University went off with a slight lead. Richmond with the stream soon got level and led by half a length at the first bend. At Branders (ferry) Richmond led by a length and then increased their advantage and with the inside running at the Baths Corner, the race was virtually theirs and they won easily by 5 lengths. Time good 7.51.⁴⁷

In case there is any doubt in the mind of the modern reader as to how seriously these races were competed for, John Lang writes that in the senior four-oared gig race at the same Regatta, eventually won by Melbourne from University, 'University got a lead soon after the start and at the Willows [they] were a length to the good, both crews rowing well. Melbourne 38, University 41.'⁴⁸ Not bad for fixed seats and heavy in-rigged boats.

University was more successful in the maiden pair race beating Richmond Rowing Club. The University crew was D Campbell and T Colles, the latter becoming one of the Club's stalwart oarsmen and supporters.⁴⁹

John Lang records in his notes some characteristics of Melbourne rowing clubs in 1868, quoted in a newspaper of the day:

The Styx does not pretend to be a rowing club. Civil Service – one of the largest ... display gaudy colours to the Sun very often. The noisy University, victorious Melbourne, ultra-respectable Banks, Union has vanished. The Scotch and Grammar are not as virulent as they used to be, the former not being able to recover from the surprise of beating the latter.⁵⁰

John Grice makes his first appearance

The 1868 Scratch Fours were rowed on 31 May and the winning crew were John Grice (bow), GWG Butler (2), D Campbell (3), D Wilkie (stroke) and Morris (cox). The entries were 2s 6d an oar and the prizes were pewter pots. John Grice, who became one of the Club's greatest oarsmen, was born in Melbourne in 1850 and educated at Melbourne Grammar, spending his last school year in 1867 at the newly opened Wesley College, from where he matriculated to Melbourne University. His first year at the University was 1868.⁵¹

He was one of a new generation of men born in the colony whose parents had arrived in Australia before the gold rushes and had, by the late 1860s, become men of substance. Grice and others of his social group grew up in sizeable houses in the pleasant suburbs of Melbourne and attended one of the new public schools.

Grice began keeping a diary in May of 1869⁵² in which his first entry was about rowing. He wrote of ‘Scratch Fours’ that were held on 29 May 1869. There were five crews and he rowed with Wilkie (stroke), Butler and Brady. He noted the results of the three heats of the race. Grice’s crew won the final heat by a quarter of a length. He even noted that on 17 June, he walked to the engraver with Butler to get the pewter cup he had won. Through the winter months he rowed often in the afternoons and divided his days between study and rowing, which was very popular by this time. On 1 July he wrote:

As soon as breakfast was finished I went down to the boathouse where there were a lot of fellows ready to pull in the Scratch fours. We got up 8 crews but if we had delayed making up the crews for ½ an hour we might easily have made 12.⁵³

1869 was a bumper year for the Club

The 1869 Melbourne Regatta took place from 17 April, beginning with the first heat of the maiden pair, in which University easily beat Warehousemen’s Rowing Club. University won the final on the second day against Civil Service by two lengths in nine minutes. JP Francis and C McCracken (stroke) rowed for University. Both these clubs, which University rowed against, and many others mentioned in this history during these early days, were subsequently disbanded. A full list is given in Appendix 1.

In the maiden sculls, Thomas Colles beat AT Blackson of Albert Rowing Club (another subsequently disbanded club) in the first heat. According to MUBC records, ‘The varsity boy received quite an ovation from his friends as he passed the judge. Time 9.29.’ Colles also won the final of this event in an even better time, 8mins 54secs.⁵⁴

University also did well in the maiden four defeating the Commercial Rowing Club by several lengths and the Argus Rowing Club in the fifth heat by a length. The favourites, Warehousemen’s Rowing Club, beat University in the final.⁵⁵

Thomas Colles was also part of the crew for the Gardiner Challenge Cup for senior four-oared gigs at the same Regatta. University beat the Melbourne Rowing Club in their heat, but were ultimately defeated by Richmond Rowing Club, only because of mischance:

Richmond got away well and in Branders reach were nearly 3 lengths ahead. University made their final effort rounding the Baths corner and had almost drawn level when their stroke managed by mischance to unship his oar and lost all chance of winning the cup. Richmond winning a hard fought race by a length. Both crews were knocked right out and stopped before they got to the judge allowing the way on the boats to carry them past the line.⁵⁶

Later in the Regatta, University won the Grand Challenge Cup for senior fours against Richmond, and the Challenge pair race against Civil Service with David Wilkie and TC Hope (stroke) as crew.

John Lang noted that University’s efforts in this Regatta was ‘a magnificent performance ... of mere boys compared to some of the men rowing against them’ and was unequalled ‘... down to the present year 1912.’ They won the Grand Challenge, the Challenge Pair, the maiden pair and the maiden sculls.⁵⁷



Thomas (Tom) Colles, an early MUBC champion and member of the Victorian four-oared gig which won the first ‘official’ intercolonial boat race in 1873
GA Hope collection

First eight-oared boat in Victoria

1869 saw the launch of the first eight-oared boat in Victoria on 23 October. The boat was built by a local maker Edwards, but not for MUBC. Its first crew were JC Tyler, G Coates, TW Mason, EM James, WM Orr, J Mitchell, MH Irving, HA Williams (stroke) and A Nichols (cox). The boat was christened *Victoria*; its length was between fifty and sixty feet, and its beam about two feet and clinker built.⁵⁸

The 1870 annual meeting

The 1870 annual meeting re-elected Professor Irving as President and TC Hope Captain of the Club. GWG Butler was re-elected Hon Secretary but requested that the positions of Secretary and Treasurer be separated. John Grice was elected Treasurer. The committee elected were Colles, McCracken and Adams.

The first intervarsity boat race

In 1869 the University Cricket Club was formalised through the efforts of Martin Irving and Robert Denham Pinnock (who occasionally coxed for MUBC). In early September of that year Pinnock received a letter from the Hon Secretary of the Sydney University Cricket Club, Richard Teece, proposing a cricket match between the universities.⁵⁹ Teece had been a student at Sydney University but had not finished his degree, having been offered a job with the Australian Mutual Provident Society in 1866.⁶⁰ He was a sporting enthusiast and enjoyed organising events. His letter to Pinnock suggested that the cricket match would ‘be heightened by a Boat Race.’⁶¹

In the correspondence that ensued, they discussed the financial viability of the cricket game and boat race and their timing, eventually deciding to hold them in Melbourne, but not until 23 December 1870, because an intercolonial cricket match and a visiting eleven from England would be the focus for Melbourne spectators earlier in 1870. At first Teece thought that Melbourne teams should come to Sydney, but Pinnock was unable to secure agreement of the very new Cricket Club. It was clear that the boat race would be an interesting addition to the cricket match, not the chief focus.

They also discussed publicising the events and a public meeting held in October was usefully reported in the *Australasian* on 22 October 1870.⁶² Both men were able to use their connections to generate reports in newspapers.

In the build-up to the intervarsity race, the senior four of MUBC, consisting of Tom Hope, John Grice, Thomas Colles and David Wilkie, and a second crew consisting of McCracken, Butler, Pennefather and Adams entered the Ballarat Regatta on Lake Wendouree in a four-oared gig race. Hope and Wilkie also entered the senior pair race.

Lake Wendouree presented to the eyes of Melbourne rowers a course very different from any they had been accustomed to—being “2 miles about” as described in the official programme, of horseshoe shape & being cut out of the rushes with which the Lake is usually filled.⁶³

Victorian Rowing Fifty Years Ago (1869)

by Thomas Colles from *The Victorian Oarsman*, pp. 43–44



Fifty years ago the Upper Yarra Regatta Course had a very different appearance from what it presents in 1919. The River was practically in the same state as when the black fellows roamed its banks. It was much narrower than at present. Steep banks rose on the north side some eight or ten feet above water level. On the south side there were lagoons and swamps. The first turn above Princes Bridge was much sharper than it now is; there was another slight turn southwards at Brander's Ferry, and then came a very severe turn known as the Baths Corner, from the fact that the City Corporation had erected some sheds and dressing rooms for bathing, and many used to make it a practice of going for a dip every morning. This corner was, in a close race, a severe test for the crews, and especially the bow sides, as the angle formed by the River at that point was about a half a right angle. After that corner was rounded, a short straight run took the crews to the winning post, which was situated a few yards below the Botanical Gardens Bridge. That bridge was west of the present structure and the Botanical or eastern end of it would reach to about the western end of the existing bridge. I doubt if the breadth of the River was more than half of what it is now. At any rate, no more than two boats could row abreast. At the Baths Corner the River projected itself close to the gate immediately below the Temple of the Winds. On the south side were lagoons and swamps, and at Princes Bridge the lagoons extended from the foot of the rise, where King Edward's statue is to be erected, to the River, and fowl of all sorts used to congregate there. There was a path running close along the bank on the south side to the gardens.

The sides of the River were considered unequal for racing purposes, the south side being the most favoured. Devices were tried to obviate the difference. One was bumping races, but they never took on. Then time races were tried; that is, both boats started on the same side, one boat 100 or 150 yards behind the other, and the respective winning posts were a similar distance apart, and stop watches were put on each crew, but whatever the merits of this method of racing, it did not thrive. Rowing men preferred starting level.

For some years prior to 1868 the Regatta used to be held at Footscray, the boats starting down about the Sugar Works and finishing about an eighth or a quarter of a mile below the bridge

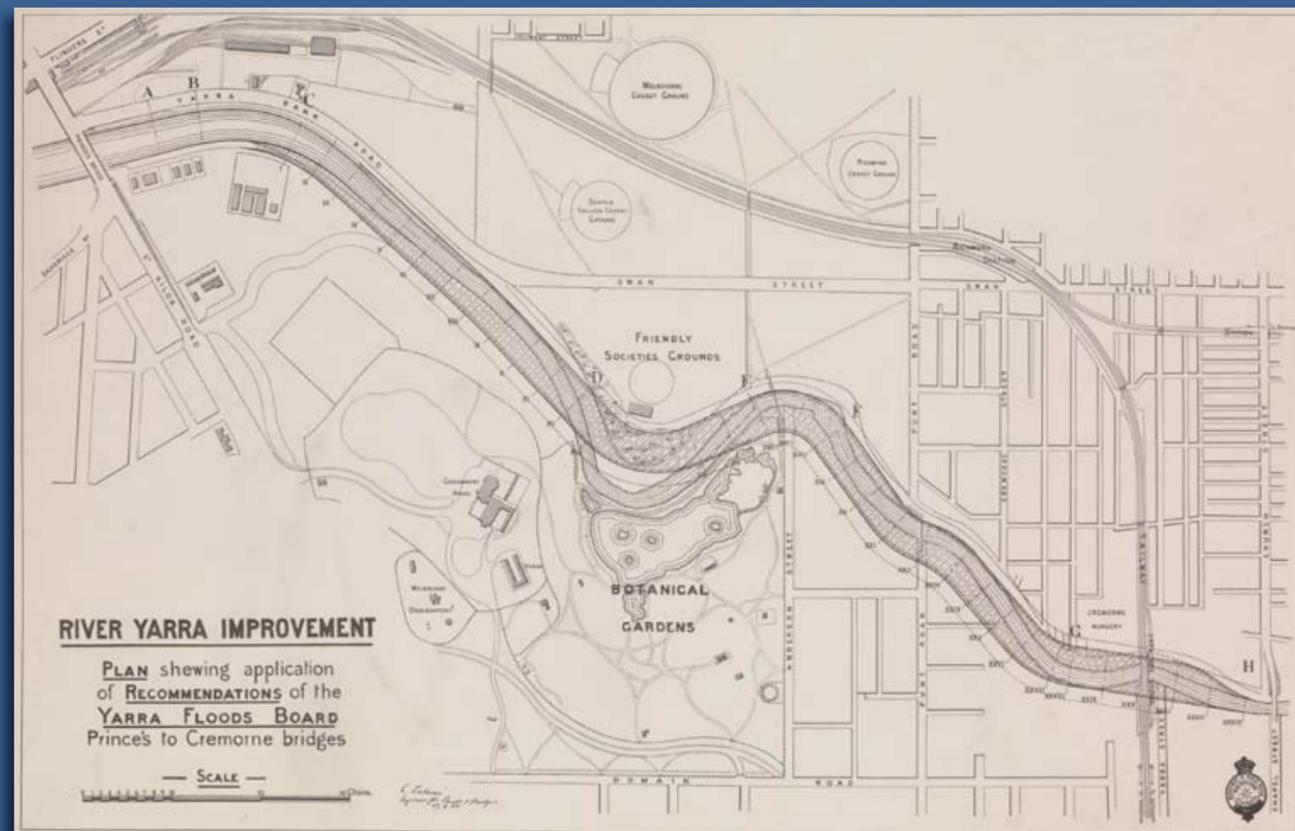
over the Saltwater River. But for many reasons the Upper Yarra was preferred, and from 1868 to 1874 the Regattas were held on the latter course. They then reverted to the Lower Yarra, and were held there until 1878, when they returned to the Upper Yarra, and have remained there.

There were three boatbuilders at Princes Bridge: RS Fuller, James Edwards, and WT Greenland—all excellent builders. In those days (1868) eight-oared boats had not appeared on the River. The first was a clinker-built boat by James Edwards somewhere about 1869. It was never used for racing; it was merely a pioneer. Professional scullers there were practically none. One or two attempts to get a professional race met with no success. There was no waterman who could compete with James Edwards. He was the build of a sculler, and had a finished and powerful style.

In the sixties the athletic amusements were confined practically to Cricket, Football, and Rowing, and the last-named was well patronised. The men were keen and devoted to the sport. It was not then merely a case of training for six or eight weeks, rowing a race, and leaving the River till the next regatta. The men used to work all the year round, so that a crew, when it came to training, had fallen into each other's stroke and swing, and the rowing in the Regatta was of a high order. There are nowadays so many other attractions that a similar course is impracticable. The best coaches of these days were Professor Irving and Mr. AF Ross.

Professor Irving was an old Oxford rowing man and an enthusiastic follower of the sport. He had a good eye for a promising oarsman, and went to any trouble to knock him into proper shape. The Professor was a splendid specimen of an athlete, standing 5 feet 11 inches, with well-developed muscles in legs, arms, and back. He was one of the early pioneers in the amateur rowing circle, and tried hard but unsuccessfully to popularise bumping races.

Rowing as an exercise is one of the best of sports for those whose constitutions are sound, but if there be a weak spot the hard work is apt to develop it. In the writer's opinion, rowing races should be discontinued, as a rule, at twenty-five years of age.



OPPOSITE TOP: 'New Plan of Melbourne and Suburbs' 1873 *Sands & McDougal Directory*.

Note the lagoons on both sides of the river, the old Church Street Bridge, the old Cremorne Bridge (more familiarly known as 'the railway bridge'), the old Botanical Garden's Bridge, the location of the Baths corner, and further downstream Brander's Ferry, shown on the map in the approximate position of today's Swan Street Bridge. The ferry crossing shown between Brander's Ferry and Princes Bridge is Morgan's Ferry *State Library of Victoria map collection*

OPPOSITE BOTTOM: 'River Yarra Improvement' 1896 Carlo Catani. Catani was the public works department engineer in charge of the 1896 river improvement plans. The diversion of the Yarra's flow away from the Botanical Gardens is known as 'New Cut' corner *State Library of Victoria map collection*

Melbourne University senior four lost their race largely due to inexperience with the course. Their only opponents were the Ballarat Rowing Club. The senior pair race was unsatisfactory because of a series of fouls, but the result was decided in favour of University.⁶⁴

Interestingly, Lang in the *Victorian Oarsman* refers to the fact that racing on Lake Wendouree had to be abandoned for a number of years in the 1860s and 1870s because the lake had dried up, and the southern part was used as a horse training ground. It would seem that climate change is not a recent occurrence after all.⁶⁵

The Sydney crew arrived in Melbourne well before 23 December to prepare for the race. They were Allan Yeomans (stroke), Richard Teece (3) who had organised it all with Robert Pinnock, Edmund Barton (2), EA Icton (bow) and Thomas Icton (cox).⁶⁶ Edmund Barton would go on to become Australia's first Prime Minister.⁶⁷

Melbourne University was represented by Hope, Grice, Colles, Wilkie and JW Phillips was cox.

The committee had arranged for two steamers to follow the race the first of which started from Queens Wharf at 4.30 & contained the Umpire, Professor Irving, the starter Mr JH Hood, the representative of Sydney Mr HA Williams and the committee. The second followed with the general public.

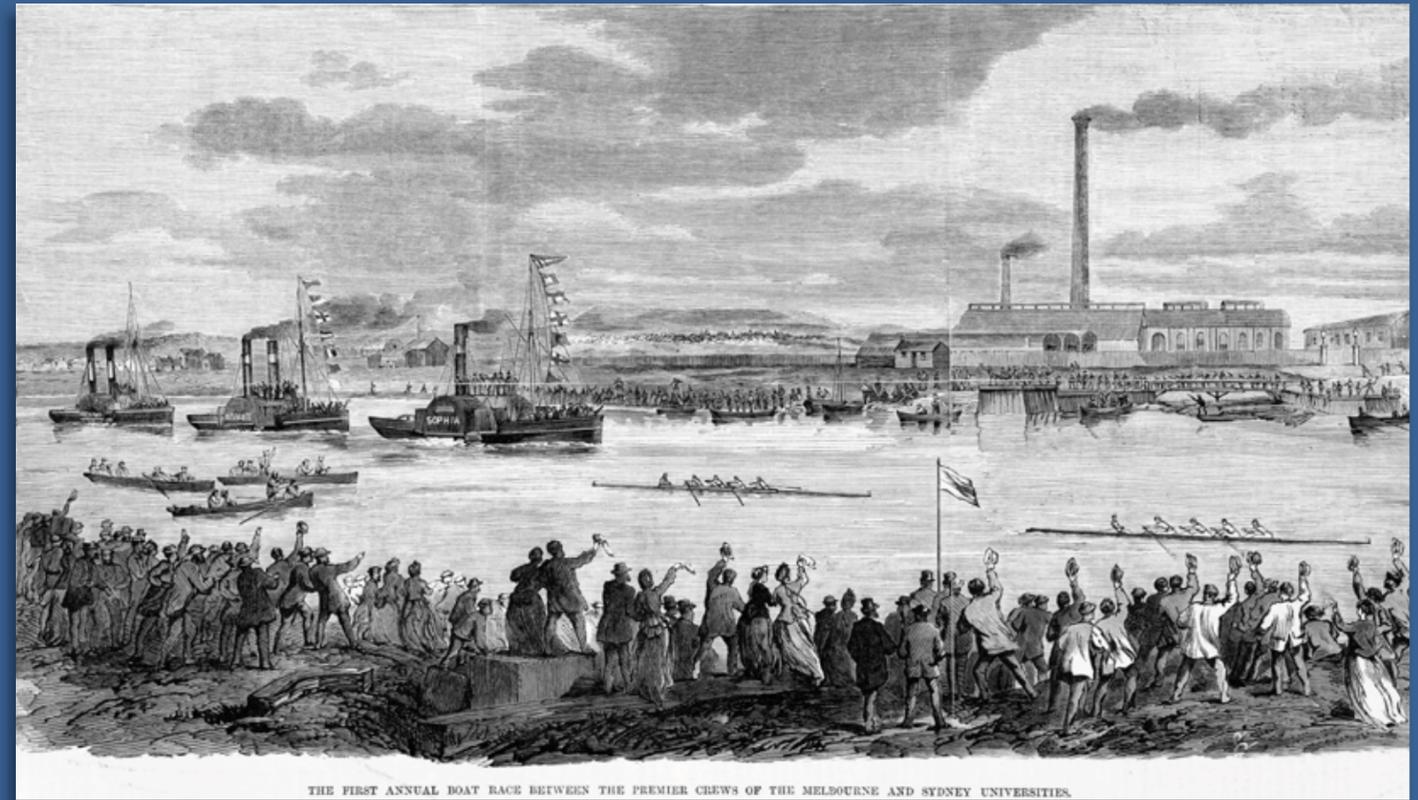
The course was fixed by mutual agreement at 3 miles and a half & was rowed from a point in the Lower Yarra marked by the "2nd black dolphin" to the Gas Works where the Judge Mr RW Pennefather took his stand. A few minutes after 5 after one false start the two crews went away but the visitors were evidently overmatched from the beginning. Hope's stroke was counted at 33 and Yeoman's at 35.

At the first course unfortunately the Sydney cox came too near a solitary pile and brought No 3's oar sharply against it: this accident however did not interfere with the race in as much as in spite of many gallant effects on the part of Yeomans, well backed up by his crew, they were never near Melbourne except by sufferance.

The race was finished by a pretty spurt from Hope leaving many boats' length between him and the Sydney crew. The time as taken by Mr Walsh was 31'4".

A return race was rowed a year later on the Parramatta River on 23 December 1871, when Melbourne University, stroked by Tom Colles, won again. This was a surprise to everyone, especially as Goldsmith, who was to row in the 3 seat, developed lumbago just two days before the crew departed for Sydney. John Barker substituted for Goldsmith. Barker had been a captain of the Club and was a first-class oarsman. According to the 23 December 1871 entry in the Club's record book: 'When the race started, the Sydney people were very willing to back their own representatives and offered bets of two or three to one on them which were whenever offered in the hearing of any Melbourne men readily taken up'. *The Leader* newspaper reported the race:

The Sydney crew were favourites – the general impression being that they must win. Young Barker of the Melbourne crew was called from the bush at the last minute to take Goldsmith's place. The form of the Melbourne crew as they went to the post favourably impressed the spectators but Sydney were the favourites. The boats started evenly



Inter University Boat Race
1870

The Subcommittee in account with *G.W. Butler Hon Secretary*

1870	Receipts	£	s	1870	Disbursements	£	s
	To sold 87 red tickets of admission to Steamer as per Statement A	21	16	24	To paid "Argus" for advertisement	1	14
	additional admittances	1		"	" "Argus" do	1	
	To sold blue tickets of admission as per Statement B	26	16	"	" Daily Telegraph do	1	
				"	" Extracts do		10
				"	" Abbott, printer proportion for printing posters	2	4
				"	" Abbott for printing "Umpire" placards &c		7
				"	" Waterman (2) at 15/-	1	10
				1871	" Mason Perth Co printing tickets		11
				Jan 3	" proportion same tickets		2
				"	" Edwards Boatbuilders hire of boats for Sydney crew		6
				"	" for keel 16 - proportion of 16/-		8
				"	" Key of oar on race day		10
				"	" Boston Graham Co Hire of Sloop and Rowlocks	2	2
				"	" Hire proportion of 2 S. Steamers		5
				"	" Fuller, housing Sydney Boat	2	10
				"	" Greenland hire of 99 for Melbourne crew	2	4
				"	" proportion of Dinner expenses Sydney	6	5
				"	" Balance on hand	25	3
				1871			6
				Feb 24			11

Audited & found correct
Goldsmith
W. A. Craker
16 Dec 1871

ABOVE: 'The first annual boat race between the premier crews of the Melbourne and Sydney Universities' *Illustrated Australian News for Home Readers*, 31 January 1871. The first intervarsity race held in Melbourne on the Lower Yarra in December 1870 and won by MUBC
State Library of Victoria picture collection

LEFT: The Club's statement of receipts and expenses for the 1870 intervarsity race

together and for the first quarter mile they were nose to nose. Sydney got a slight lead which was maintained to the ¾ mile mark. Melbourne there spurted and passed Sydney and they were never afterwards headed winning easily by 3 lengths. Time: 22mins 55secs. Distance: 3 miles. Thousands of people were present to witness the race.⁶⁸

The race was rowed in string-test gigs pulling four oars with coxswains on the Champion Course of the Parramatta River. Coxswains had to weigh at least eight stone, and any deficiencies in weight had to be made up with a dead weight carried between the coxswain's seat and the stroke's stretcher.⁶⁹

Despite the initial enthusiasm, no further intervarsity races took place until 1888 when eights would replace fours. Two letters were sent from Edmund Barton who, at this time, was Hon Secretary of the Sydney University Boat Club stating that there would be no rowing or cricket team competing with Melbourne University in 1872.⁷⁰

There are several possible reasons for this hiatus in intervarsity competition. First, the difficulty and expense of sending teams from Melbourne to Sydney or vice versa was great. Also, although possibly not directly affecting intervarsity competition, there were at that time differences between the colonies concerning amateur status. As was the case with the first intercolonial boat race, the Victorians from time to time alleged that New South Wales crews competing in the intercolonial races were to all intents and purposes professional watermen. The New South Welshmen, for their part, objected to the willingness of Victorians to allow manual labourers to compete in amateur races. Finally, there was friction between MUBC and the colleges, particularly Trinity College during the 1880s, the effect of which is explained in the following chapter.

First trial fours and first interfaculty races

Other firsts for the Boat Club in the run-up to the intervarsity occurred in 1870.

Another intraclub competition was initiated by Irving in May 1870 under the name of 'Trial Fours'. He offered prizes for 'the best crew of junior rowers'. The Club's committee formulated the rules and stipulated that the races were open to all members of the Club who had never rowed in a senior race. The course was from above Brander's Ferry to the regatta starting post, near the present judge's box, and crews were to be drawn by lot. The competition proved popular and continued through almost to the First World War.

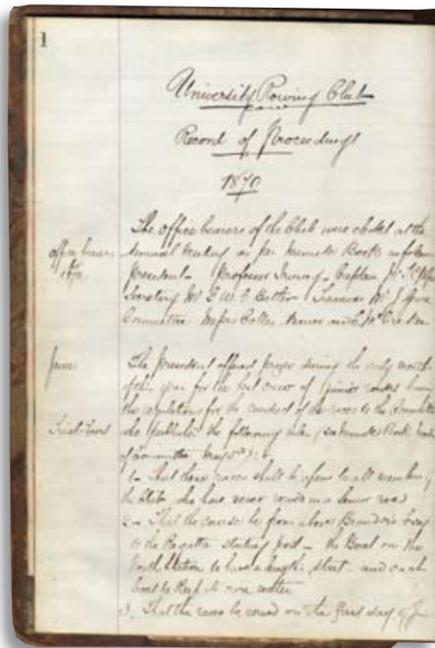
Hot on the heels of this initiative was the establishment of annual races between faculties. The committee took up the idea with enthusiasm and a set of conditions was drawn up for the management of these races. The first race between Arts, Law and Medicine took place on 30 July. The eagerness of members for new events was evident in the speed with which they were organised. The course was (as for most Scratch Fours) from Brander's Ferry to Edward's Boatshed. Starting races at Brander's Ferry gave all events a festive start. It was a place for picnics and concerts to draw the crowds.

Though there were several weeks allowed for training for the event, the opportunity to prepare for them was not taken up by the men 'who can scarcely be said to have trained at all in the proper (regatta) meaning of the word' and the weather did not help in stirring the crews' enthusiasm:



ABOVE: Robert Hope, an early MUBC oarsman and brother of Tom Hope
GA Hope collection

BELOW: The first page of the Club's original Record Book for the period commencing 1870



Thomas (Tom) Hope c.1868, stroke of the winning MUBC crew in the first intervarsity race, 1870
GA Hope collection

... the Captain secured two boats for the afternoon from Greenland. The lots settled the first heat between the Arts & Medicine crews. In the toss for choice of stations "Medicine" won and chose the north station. The choice of boats was left then to the Arts.⁷¹

Saturday July 30 was a bleak wintry day with a strong northerly wind blowing and a greater 'fresh' than usual in the river. At about half past three the two first competing crews moved off from the staging as follows:

Medicine (North Station) Stroke Hope, 3. Wilkie, 2. Teague, 1. Llewelin, cox'n Phillips.
Arts (South) Stroke C McCracken, 3. GWG Butler, 2. N Barker, 1. R H Adams, cox'n Davidson.⁷²

Arts were favourites for this race but Medicine, to the surprise of many, proved the victors. This was because Arts on the south station felt the full force of the wind, whilst Medicine was sheltered by the bank and had the current in its favour.

One of the conditions of the race was that an hour at least should lapse before the next heat, so Medicine did not meet the Law crew till nearly 5pm. In the meantime, it had been settled by a toss between them that Law should row on the north station. Medicine thus lost the advantage they had in the previous heat.

The Law crew consisted of the following members, 4. T Colles, 3. J Grice, 2. Nillan, 1. Pennefather, cox'n JH Hood. The Law crew started & went fiercely to the corner where the Medicine crew began to show signs of want of training in the bows. The Laws rowed in victors by about 3 lengths, their opponents having stopped short on finding their chance hopeless. The Law crew therefore had the honour of being the first faculty for 1870.⁷³

Rowing rivals football

Interest in rowing was strong now, not only with the growing number of participants generally, but also as a public spectator sport. The Scratch Fours of 13 August, 1870 (they had been postponed from the original date of Saturday 16 July 1870) attracted forty-two entries. The course was changed to run between the Corporation Baths Corner and Fuller's Bend (Brander's Ferry) to obtain a nearly straight reach. The committee also arranged 'that the coxswain who took the prize should steer the winners in the greatest number of heats and that no crew should be required to row more than two heats on the same day.'⁷⁴ The final winners were McCracken, Goldsmith, Wolfe Fink and R Davidson, with Johnston as cox.⁷⁵

However, the fascinating aspect of this particular race for the modern Melburnian lies in the reason for its postponement. The Club's minutes of a special meeting of the committee held on 12 July 1870 record that a letter had been received from the Captain of the Melbourne Football Club (MFC) requesting that the Club postpone the date for the Scratch Fours Race from the proposed date (16 July) so as 'not to injure MFC's chances of success in an important match they had to play on that day.' Quoting a *Melbourne University Review* article of 1885 about this incident, 'How Times Have Changed', and

About Wolfe Fink

Wolfe was the middle brother of the better known Benjamin and Theodore Fink. Born in 1853, he was the academically brilliant brother while Benjamin was the brilliant businessman and Theodore was a journalist, supporter of the arts, newspaper proprietor and politician. Wolfe won the 1872 Supreme Court Scholarship given to the best law student at the University of Melbourne. The Finks were an outstanding nineteenth-century Melbourne family.

16

July 12 - Special Meeting of Committee
Present Messrs Hope in the Chair, Mr McCracken
Colles Adams and Butler

The Secretary read a letter he had received from
the Captain of the Melbourne Football Club requesting
a postponement of the Scratch Fours (fixed for the 16th
inst) as they would injure the MFC's chances of
success in an important match they had to play on that
day

1870
altered - Mr Colles moved Mr Adams seconded
That the Scratch Fours be postponed
Carried

Mr Butler moved that the Scratch Fours be rowed
on the 23 July inst

Mr Colles moved as an amendment that the Scratch
Fours be rowed on the 13th August
seconded by Mr McCracken

Carried by majority of 2
Confirmed 10/8/70
Thos C Hope

The original minute of 12 July 1870 tabling the request by the Melbourne Football Club to MUBC to postpone the date of the scratch fours event so as not to 'injure the MFC's chances of success'

MUBC Minute Book, vol.1 p.16

writing in 1911 at the height of the Henley-on-Yarra Regatta's public popularity, when crowds of 100,000 or more were not uncommon, John Lang remarked: 'What would they have thought of Henley-on-Yarra?' How times have changed indeed!

First onset of financial difficulties

Despite the breathtaking series of firsts in the decade—or perhaps because of the constant developments—the Club was experiencing financial difficulties. At a committee meeting on 27 January 1872, there was discussion concerning Mr Fuller, the boatbuilder, who 'wanted to be paid something'. As usual, many members were behind in subscriptions and they were to be pressed for payment, assuming they had not already left the colony at the end of the university year. McCracken and Grice had to negotiate a loan of £40 to get rid of the Club's debts. Despite these difficulties, the committee decided they would buy the boat they had hired from Edwards, and used in Sydney for the intervarsity race for £26. At the 1872 annual meeting held on 10 April at the Port Philip Club Hotel in Flinders Street, Thomas Colles was in the chair and twenty-six members were present. The Treasurer read out the balance sheet which showed a debit opening balance for the year of £59 19s 5d. Club assets were about £86 including the boats. Despite the strong crews, Club membership was small and there was little income. This was the beginning of the constant financial strain due to the high price of boats.

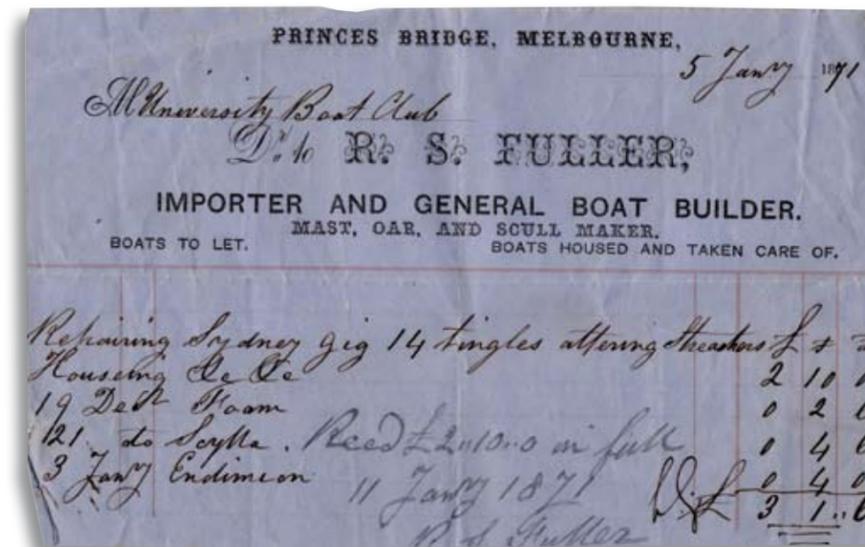
However, despite financial problems, this was one of the periods of glory for the Club. The Secretary, McCracken, congratulated the Club on its successful year, calling it 'the premier Club on the Yarra'.

Growing success on the water

Melbourne University won the Challenge Cup (Grand Challenge for senior fours) at the Melbourne Regatta of 1872 rowed on 23 March. The University crew on the south station consisted of D Wilkie (bow), GWG Butler (2), John Grice (3), Thomas Colles (stroke) and JW Philips (cox). They beat Melbourne Rowing Club. The excitement of the race and enthusiasm of Melbourne spectators was conveyed to readers of the *Leader* on the occasion:

Without exception this was one of the best contested races we have had on the Yarra for some time. Sharp to time the two crews paddled up to the Starting post and after giving the Starter (Mr Badge) a good deal of trouble, were sent off on really equal terms. Up the first reach the boats jumped together but the inside running had placed the University men slightly in advance but not clear of their opponents. Colles knew that now was his only chance to snatch a lead from the Melbourne to make up for his crew having to round the outside of the Baths Corner. The Melbourne men knew this also and tugged and pulled accordingly, but Colles was equal to the occasion and set his crew such a magnificent Stroke that it made the crowd perfectly mad with excitement. When the crews were fairly in Brander's long reach, it was expected to see the quick killing stroke of both fours fall off a little but nothing of the kind ...

As the two boats went at the Baths Corner it was doubtful which would prove the victor. The Melbourne men were only a length behind on approaching the Baths



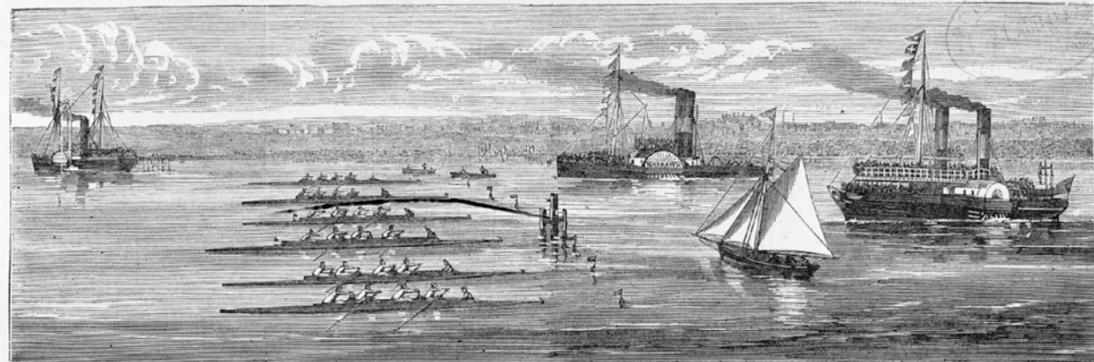
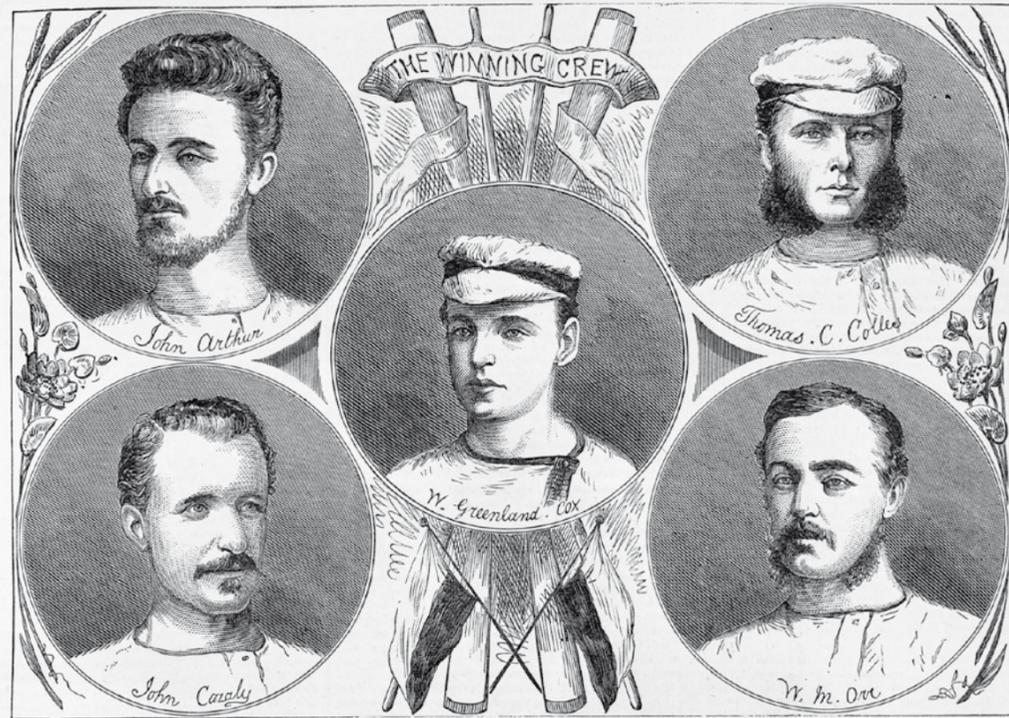
Fuller's bill for services rendered relating to the 1870 intervarsity race

Corner but so unflinchingly and powerfully did Messrs Wilkie and Grice the bow side of the University crew pull that on entering the straight run it was found that the Melbourne crew had only gained half a length. The home stretch was done in gallant style by both crews, the University jumping their boat in first by a short half length. The ovation which the winning crew received from the crowds on the Bank is something to be remembered. Cheer upon cheer went ringing up in the air accompanied with numerous offers from friends & strangers to row the boat or carry the men down ...⁷⁶

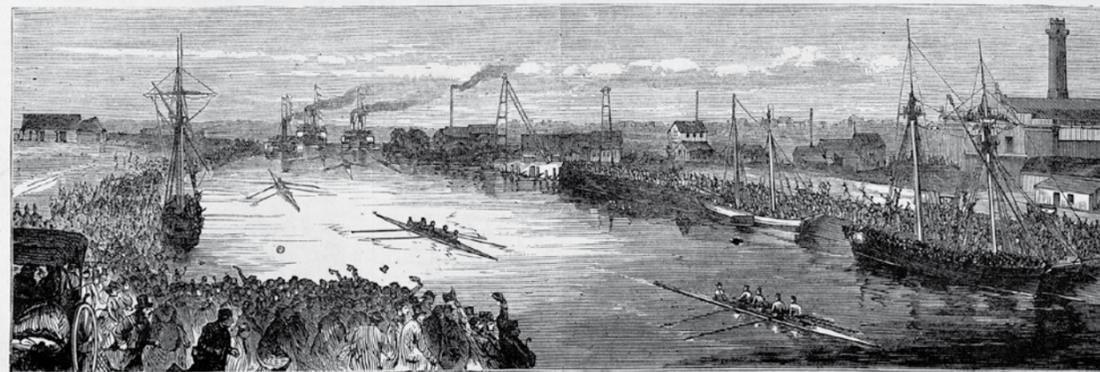
At the 1872 annual meeting, Professor Irving presented yet another set of silver oars for competition, this time to be called the University Challenge Pairs. The Pairs were to be rowed once every term. No two men who had rowed in a regatta were eligible to compete for them, or any two men who had previously won the oars together.⁷⁷ As at each annual meeting, office-bearers were elected. Professor Irving remained President, Thomas Colles was elected Captain, McCracken re-elected Secretary and H Tait elected Treasurer from a field of three. Grice, Taylor, Butler and Wilkie were elected to the committee along with Davidson, who was the member still attending lectures.⁷⁸

There were races of an intercolonial nature in 1872 and members of University, Civil Service and Melbourne rowing clubs rowed in a crew which competed unsuccessfully in that year against two Sydney Rowing Club crews. In 1873 Thomas Colles rowed at bow for the victorious Victorian crew on Saturday, 29 March. The other members of the Victorian crew were from the Melbourne and Warehousemen rowing clubs. The race over about four miles on the Lower Yarra was rowed in a time of 25mins 30secs. According to John Lang, this was generally recognised as the first 'official' intercolonial boat race.

Continued enthusiasm for the Club led to yet another prize being offered in 1874. In September George Gordon offered a prize of silver oars 'to be rowed for in gigs'. The competition was called the Gordon Challenge Oars and it was open to all but senior members of MUBC. The oars had to be won three times in succession to become the absolute property of the winners.⁷⁹ The first contest for the oars on 17 October was won by



THE START.



THE FINISH.

Hope (bow), Campbell (2), Cook (3), Lang (stroke) and Hood (cox) in a race between four crews after three heats.⁸⁰ Initially, these races proved to be much more popular than the President's Challenge Pairs, which were simply too difficult to get entries for owing to the stringency of the conditions imposed on competitors.⁸¹ In the February 1875 contest nine crews entered for the 'Gordon Oars and Rudder'.⁸² However, the Challenge Pairs competition became more popular after the rules were relaxed, and it long outlasted the Gordon Challenge Oars, which petered out in 1879 due to lack of entries.⁸³

The Melbourne Regatta of 1875 saw the University Boat Club represented in three races: a maiden pair, maiden gig and junior sculls. University was not able to complete the course in the maiden pair; in the maiden gig there were twelve entries but so many fouls that it was 'impossible to say what took place'⁸⁴ and University was not able to complete the course in the junior sculls. This was the first Victorian regatta in which there was an eight-oared race. Melbourne University did not compete in the race, but in 1876 a donation was received towards the purchase of an eight-oared outrigger.⁸⁵

New Club rules

Rowing was news and the Boat Club's change of rules were important enough to be reported in *The Australasian* newspaper's 'Rowing Notes' of 24 May 1873. Except for Professor Irving's letter requesting the grant of land in 1859 in which he used the title Melbourne University Boat Club, Rule 1 of the new rules contain the first recorded instance of the official adoption of the Club's modern name, Melbourne University Boat Club. In previous years it had been referred to variously as University Rowing Club, Melbourne University Rowing Club, University Boat Club etc., names which continued to be used informally.

Establishment of the Victorian Rowing Association

The Club played a pivotal role in the founding of the Victorian Rowing Association (VRA) at a meeting of oarsmen on 7 October 1876. The Association was the suggestion of JH Hood (later Justice Hood) who had been Captain of MUBC in 1868, had rowed in many races during his time as a student and who had drafted the Club's rules. The Association consisted of Albert, Albert Park, Ballarat, Ballarat City, Banks, Barwon, Boroondara, Civil Service, Corio, Footscray, I Zingari, Melbourne, Murray, Richmond, University, Warehousemen, Williamstown and Yarra Yarra Clubs. The first Secretary was also a University man, Frank Shew. The first Melbourne Regatta managed by the VRA was on the Saltwater (Maribyrnong) River on 31 March 1877.

MUBC's first eight-oared race

The first eight-oared race in Melbourne was held at the Melbourne Regatta of 1875. It was the beginning of a change that would see events for eight-oared boats become pre-eminent in rowing for the next century.

Lang notes that MUBC's first eight-oared boat *Alexandra* was launched on Saturday 4 August 1877.⁸⁶

Barwon Regatta 12 March 1879

'In the final heat [of the maiden eight] we obtained a wretched start, both the opposing crews starting before the word 'Off' was given. In addition to this misery we were wretchedly cold and miserable, the rain having poured down all the way from the sheds to the starting post. The race was however an excellent one, Ballarat winning by a length, Barwon second, a bare quarter of a length in front of us. Perhaps we should have saved even this quarter of a length had not a flock of geese rashly crossed our path about 100 yards from home. One of these poor unfortunates came to an untimely end, the valorous Brown smiting it a mighty blow with his swift-moving oar. The hapless goose met its death with calm resignation.

For the Junior eight the only change in our crew was that Anderson took Brown's place. Three crews started, University, Barwon, Hawthorn. It was regarded as a moral for Hawthorn inasmuch as being quite fresh – their previous race having taken place about 4 hours before – they met two crews that had only a few minutes before rowed a most desperate race.

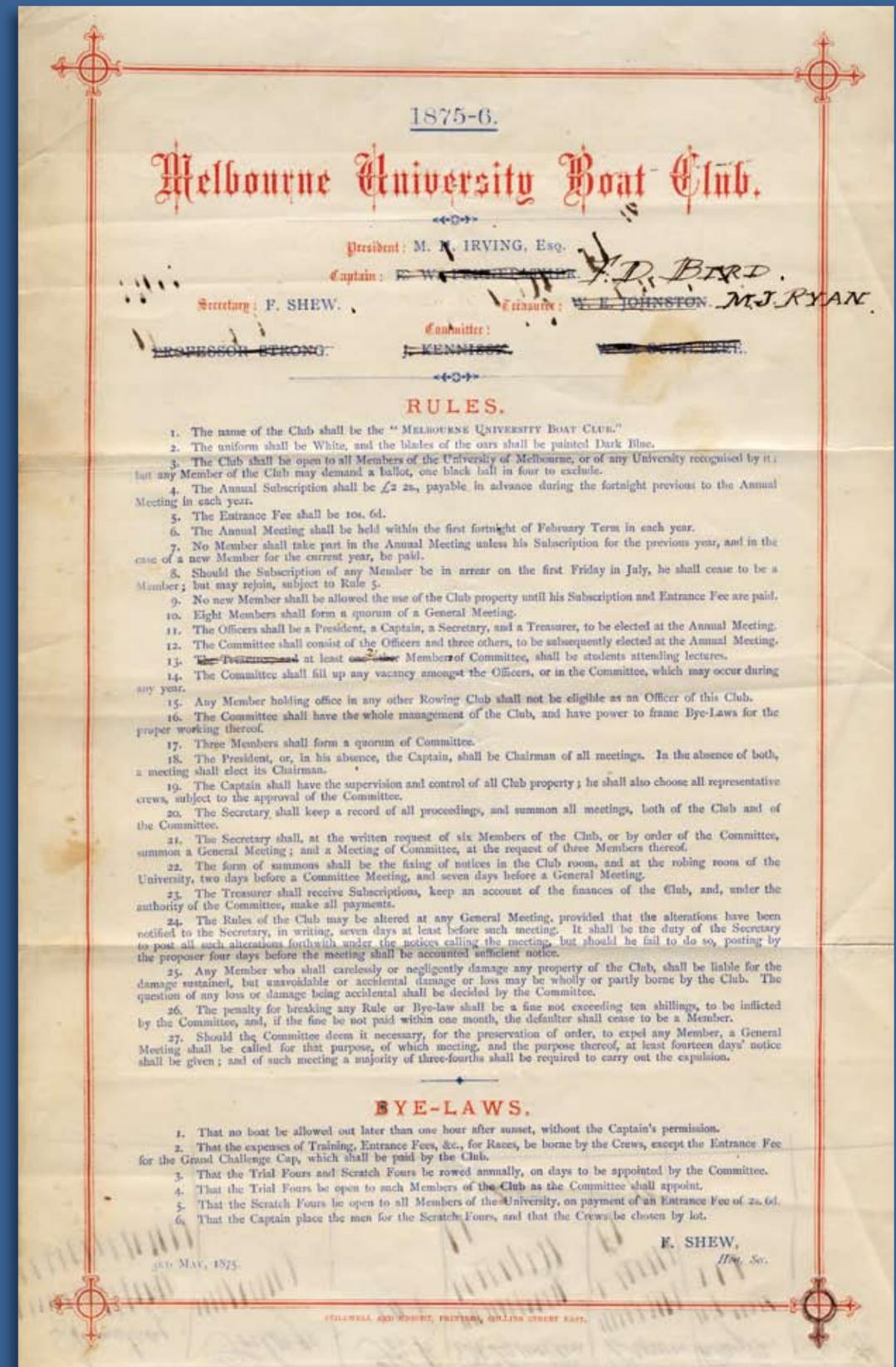
From the start we showed in front, our stroke Lang pulling very vigorously. When nearing the bridge we still led by a half-length. Visions of prizes were flitting through our brains. Victory was we thought at last about to crown our efforts. Alas, it was not so. Barwon spurred magnificently. Inch by inch they gained – they were level with us 150 yards from home and won by perhaps 5 feet. *Vae victis!* ['Woe to the vanquished'] Shall I speak of the miserable time that we had afterwards taking our boat home to the train? No, let it be buried in oblivion. O for a draught of Lethe's stream!

From the account written by the Club's Hon Sec Frank Shew (also the first Hon Sec of the VRA and a member of both crews referred to above) in the Record Book of the Club, vol.2, pp.97–9

The first race in which MUBC competed with an eight-oared boat was in the Geelong Regatta on 21 March 1878. Other crews in the race were Barwon and Corio Bay. The event seemed more an attempt by the other crews to disable University than win the race, with Barwon running across and fouling the University boat, and when this did not stop them, Corio Bay ran into MUBC's boat. The committee in charge of the race did not answer MUBC's protest until it was too late. By the time they decided that the race should be rowed again on the following day, the University crew had left.⁸⁷ MUBC did get their revenge just a few days later at the Melbourne Regatta of 24 March. In the junior eight race Barwon had stronger rowers than they had had in Geelong, but was still left far behind. University came in a close second to the Melbourne Rowing Club.⁸⁸ The Club continued its participation in the annual Melbourne Regatta with entries in the maiden clinker outrigger four, the junior four and junior eight events. They did especially well in the junior four race, where they were just beaten at the end by the Footscray Rowing Club (on their own turf at the Saltwater River). It was noted in the Club's records that the Footscray crew were 'all labouring men and that later on in the afternoon they won the challenger outrigger four, beating Warehousemen, Melbourne, Ballarat City and Civil Service Clubs.'⁸⁹

The transition to a new era

Unfortunately the Club's continuing success in competitions did nothing for its financial state. The annual meeting of 22 April 1879 saw the Club's debt increased to £93. A decline in the number of members and the 'disinclination of some members to pay their subscriptions'⁹⁰ was blamed for the chronic problem. Mr Fuller was owed £29 for the rent of the boatshed, where the Club kept its boats, and another £43 for the purchase of a four-oared clinker. Only £78 was received, compared to £175 for the previous year. The Hon Secretary, Frank Shew, put the small membership of the Club (just thirty-two at that time) down to arduous study requirements. But there was dissatisfaction in the way the Club was being run. Wolfe Fink expressed the frustration of 'the more thoughtful members of the Club' at the annual meeting.⁹¹ Fink nominated Frank Shew as Captain, but Shew would not stand against John Lang, who had been Secretary previously, and a

Name plate of the first MUBC eight, *Alexandra*

1875–6 MUBC Rules and Bye-laws, as annotated for a subsequent reprinting

strong rower for the Club. (This was *not* the same John Lang as the famous Club officer and record keeper of the early twentieth century.) Lang and Fink proposed the admission of non-rowing members.⁹² Many such men would come to join the Club as its prestige grew within the University and in Melbourne.

In 1880, the Club was twenty-one years old; like Melbourne it was coming of age. The 1880s presented entirely different challenges. Melbourne had changed from a primitive frontier gold town to an established world city. Its International Exhibition of 1880 put it on the world map as an equal to other great cities of the new world. The Boat Club too was changing, with the establishment of the colleges and the increase in the number of students, and it began to celebrate itself in a new and confident way.

Three of the Mitchell brothers and JH Hood with Whitehead (cox) c.1870. JH Hood was a Captain of MUBC and at various times a member of other clubs, including Richmond Rowing Club. This four won the Gardiner Cup Senior Gigs in 1869 and 1870, and the Grand Challenge Senior Fours in 1870 and 1871. The four Mitchell brothers (Hood replaced one of the brothers who had dropped out) were renowned Richmond oarsmen and the Mitchell family were the maltsters whose property was at the rear of the Sir Henry Barkley Hotel (later known as the Riverside Inn) alongside Punt Road Bridge



'The Yarra Below the Falls' c.1858 Richard Daintree and Antoine Fauchery photographers
State Library of Victoria picture collection