

# Chief Secretary's Department

1855 – 1901

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## Details

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The Chief Secretary's Department played a significant role in the administration of Victorian government agencies from the time of its establishment in 1855. Prior to this, the Colonial Secretary had responsibility for many of these functions. For a long period of Victoria's history, the Chief Secretary's Department was the body with ultimate responsibility for wards of the state and juvenile offenders (for example, Victoria's Department of Neglected Children was a sub-department of the Chief Secretary's Department). The Chief Secretary's administrative involvement in child welfare means that the correspondence records of the Chief Secretary are a potentially rich source of information about children and families' interactions with the 'care' system. The position of Chief Secretary was finally abolished in Victoria in 1980.

The Chief Secretary's administrative involvement in child welfare means that the records of the Chief Secretary are a potentially rich source of information about children and families' interactions with the 'care' system. For example, the Registers of Licences contain records of children licensed to the care of private persons between 1874 and 1878.

The Chief Secretary was responsible for the registration of private homes for the purpose of maintaining, nursing, and later adopting out infants under Infant Life Protection legislative provisions from 1907, the provision of financial assistance towards child maintenance from 1919, the administration of the Children's Welfare Act 1924, the regulation of adoption from 1928, employment conditions for children from 1928, and guardianship of child migrants from 1952.

It was not until the passage of the Social Welfare Act in 1970, that the Social Welfare Department finally assumed full responsibility for child and family welfare in Victoria.

The Chief Secretary's correspondence records (comprising indexes, registers and correspondence files) are in the custody of Public Record Office Victoria (PROV). They contain files relating to particular institutions, statutes, inquiries and also can refer to individual children (for example, if someone wrote to the Chief Secretary regarding the case of a particular child who was a state ward).

The Inward Registered Correspondence (previously called the Chief Secretary's Correspondence) contains records relating to Charitable Institutions, including churches, schools, hospitals, benevolent institutions (including orphanages) and grants-in-aid (institutions receiving grants in aid corresponded with the Chief Secretary who supervised the distribution of grants, and required regular returns of expenses). The Chief Secretary also administered a special fund for the Maintenance of Deserted Children (the practical responsibility for this was delegated to the Police Department). The correspondence includes letters received relating to charitable institutions, including orphanages, benevolent societies, and reformatories, as well as correspondence relating to "Destitute Cases", including "Deserted Children". In some cases, this correspondence relates to particular wards of state. This series is open to the public.

The Chief Secretary's Inward Registered Correspondence comprises 3 archival series: their reference numbers are [VPRS 1189](#), [VPRS 3991](#) and [VPRS 3992](#). Finding records within the correspondence files can be complicated and involves searching through the index and the register to find the reference number for an individual item of correspondence. Reference staff at PROV are available to help researchers with this.

Another set of correspondence records is within [VPRS 1226](#), Supplementary Inward Registered Correspondence (1841 to 1979). Subjects include Industrial and Reformatory Schools, Minutes of enquiries into Selina Sutherland in 1908-1910, inquiries into, reports on, and certificates of detention & release for various Asylums and Mental Hospitals, inquiry into Coranderrk Mission 1880-1883, the Neglected Children's Act 1888, and the Royal Commission into Charitable Institutions 1871.

## More info

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### Related Entries

#### Related Events

- [Royal Commission into Charitable Institutions, Victoria \(1870\)](#)

#### Related Organisations

- [Immigrants' Aid Society \(1853 - c. 1902\)](#)
- [Coranderrk Children's Asylum and Dormitory \(1863 - 1924\)](#)
- [Bendigo Benevolent Asylum Industrial School \(1868 - 1885\)](#)
- [Kew Children's Cottages \(1887 - 2008\)](#)
- [Sutherland Homes for Children \(1908 - 1991\)](#)

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