

Charles Edward Augustus de Boos 1819–1900: His Life, Work, and Writing

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Introduction

Mid-nineteenth century colonial Australia was a much more literate society than many would imagine today. This is evident from the contemporary newspapers, both in their number and their quality, not just city papers such as *The Argus* in Melbourne and the *Sydney Morning Herald*, but also many country ones, some of which ‘attained a “literary-ness” and quality unimaginable today’ (Stewart). The papers were not only the major sources of news and, through their advertisements, important means of communication, they were also a major source of recreational reading of all kinds—fiction, satire, humour, and poetry. And, along with some professional people, it was the journalists who provided much of the latter, for ‘literary Australia was largely journalists’ Australia’ (Stewart). Journalism provided the writers with an income and, in the absence of any significant local book publishing, the newspapers were the outlets for their work. The weekly journals that were gradually added to the ‘dailies,’ contained much larger literary sections, providing a place for the longer serialised stories, as did the magazines that appeared, such as *The Australian Journal*.

There was no shortage of writers in mid-nineteenth century colonial Australia. A few became, and remain, well known, such as Marcus Clark and Rolf Boldrewood, along with Charles Harpur and Henry Kendall for their poetry. Some are less well-known, such as John Lang, Henry Kingsley, Mary Fortune, and Ada Cambridge. Others are largely unknown, in no small measure due to the fact that much writing was published anonymously or, at best, under a pseudonym. It was by no means the norm for the writer’s name to be given. For some of the known as well as the unknown writers, it is unlikely that all of their work has yet been identified.

One such writer is Charles de Boos. Apart from his novel *Fifty Years Ago* (1867/1999) and some of his satirical writings for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, most of his large and varied corpus of work is little known. Even less well known is his life story, which is the case with many of the early writers. De Boos was one of those who contributed to the early foundations of Australian literature, pre-dating other more well-known writers. Unfortunately, much of what has been written about him is limited in scope, and contains inaccuracies and misunderstandings that continue to surround him. One of the first to write about him, or more particularly about his novel *Fifty Years Ago*, observed that ‘de Boos is not a well known author, and we have few facts about his personal life’ (Hamer, ‘Redemptive Theme’). Later, through his journal *Margin* and the Mulini Press, Victor Crittenden did much to publicise de Boos and his writings.¹ However, the resources for the necessary research were limited and dependent on too few sources. This was before the availability of the National Library of Australia’s Trove website and the digitisation of many early newspapers, which have contributed significantly to the material presented here.

This essay has two parts. De Boos’s life story is the concern of the first part, as it contributed significantly to his writing and is therefore essential to an understanding of it. His reporting

for *The Argus* in Victoria and the *Herald* in New South Wales meant that no writer had more knowledge of the goldfields, and this provided him with the settings for much of his fiction. His travels in Europe, Victoria and New South Wales brought him into contact with all kinds of people. As a teenager, he experienced war in Spain. His Huguenot ancestry—religious persecution, migration—surely influenced his attitudes to the ‘little people,’ the ‘diggers,’ women and children, the Chinese, and the Aborigines, as did his commitment to the Church of England and the Freemasons. All of this and more he brought to the settings and concerns of his many and varied writings. These are discussed in the second part of the essay.

Life and Work

De Boos was born in London in 1819, of Huguenot ancestors from the Normandy region of northern France, who have been traced back to around 1600. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, they fled to England, seeking refuge from religious persecution (Gwynn). Like so many others, at the time and later, they settled in the Spitalfields district of East London, and were involved in various aspects of the silk trade, especially dyeing and weaving. They were members of the Huguenot churches, especially the French Church of Threadneedle Street. The immediate London family of de Boos illustrates the gradual assimilation of the Huguenots into English life. He and his six siblings were baptised in the Church of England. His father appears to have been an accountant, and by the mid-1820s, the family was living in the Westminster district of London. From accounts published during his lifetime (Heaton 54), de Boos was educated in Addiscombe (in south London), most likely at the East India Company Military Seminary. As well as military subjects, he had a sound classical education. Then, whilst still in his teens, he participated in the Carlist wars as a member of the British Auxiliary Legion that fought in support of the Queen of Spain.

He arrived in Sydney on the barque *Australasian Packet* on 22 October 1839. Just what he did initially is not clear. Except for a statement in his obituary, no evidence has been found that he took up farming in the Hunter Valley. There is evidence to support his working for the *Sydney Monitor* and possibly the *Sydney Gazette*, which ceased publication in 1841 and 1842 respectively. He is mentioned as one of a number of ‘significant contributors’ to the *Monitor* (Wilde, Hooton, and Andrews 734), while some years later, he wrote of his first trip to Goulburn ‘at the end of 1839,’ which could well have been as a reporter (*Sydney Morning Herald* [SMH], 20 January 1871, 5), a trip that marked the start of his extensive travelling in Australia. For the four years from August, 1842, nothing has yet been found to indicate where he was or what he was doing, other than that he visited New Zealand. Then, in August 1846, he re-appeared, and for the next twelve months, he was Secretary of the Maitland Jockey Club and actively involved in the life of the local community. Returning to Sydney, he most likely worked as a reporter for one of the contemporary newspapers, both in Sydney and beyond. In May 1848, he married Sarah Stone, aged sixteen, the daughter of a publican, and less than a year later, the first of their thirteen children was born (six survived for no more than three months). In August 1849, he published *The Metropolitan*, a weekly journal of politics, literature, science and the arts. It was initially well received, but no evidence has been found that it lasted more than four issues.²

In April, 1850, he and his family sailed to Melbourne, where he was immediately employed by *The Argus* and reporting on Victoria’s political affairs. In 1851, he began his long association with gold-mining, visiting and reporting on the gold discoveries at Ballarat, Castlemaine (then known as Mount Alexander and Forest Creek), and Bendigo, and later on gold-mining in the Ovens Valley. He was most likely *The Argus* reporter at the first mass

protest rally, when up to 14,000 gold miners gathered at Forest Creek on 15 December 1851, primarily in opposition to the cost of a miner's licence (*Argus*, 18 December 1851, 2). As well as working for *The Argus*, he was employed by the Victorian Legislative Council as its Government Reporter, Shorthand Writer, and Committee Clerk. How he was able to do both jobs at the same time has still to be determined, especially given that *The Argus* was 'the bane of the government' (Serle 18). At some stage in 1855, he left both jobs, and in July, published a new weekly newspaper, *The Telegraph and Sporting Times*. Like his earlier endeavour, it was well received, but lasted only two issues. Of particular interest is the fact that the first issue contained the initial chapters of his first novel, *The Stockman's Daughter*.

De Boos and his family returned to Sydney sometime after April 1856. He may have worked initially for *The People's Advocate*, but he soon joined the *Sydney Morning Herald*, where he remained for the next sixteen years. As Australia's first reporter with a knowledge of shorthand, his main task was contributing to reports of sittings of the New South Wales Parliament, which were the 'Hansard' of the day. His other work involved travelling to many parts of the Colony, particularly to report on the goldfields. His first series was entitled 'The Goldfields of New South Wales' (1857), which involved some remarkable travels largely on horseback (Figure 1). This was followed by the 'Fitzroy Diggings' (1858), for which he made two round trips to Rockhampton and the Fitzroy River in the space of two and a half months (Crabb). From 1865, his travels were recorded in various articles, but especially in a number of series of 'Random Notes by a Wandering Reporter,' published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Sydney Mail* between 1865 and 1875. But, as discussed below, these were just some of his writings.

Through the late 1860s and early 1870s, he was licensee of more than one hotel in Sydney and served as an alderman on the Marrickville Borough Council. After retiring from the *Herald* in May 1872, he became involved in aspects of the gold mining industry, including having at least one mining lease in the Turon Valley near Hill End, and being director of a number of gold mining companies.

At the end of 1874, aged 55, he started another career, being appointed as a Mining Warden by the New South Wales Government. In no small measure, this was the result of the knowledge he had acquired of the goldfields and gold mining and the evidence he gave to the 1870 *Gold Fields Royal Commission of Inquiry* (151–54). As well as Mining Warden, at one or more appointments, he was also Police Magistrate, Coroner, Justice of the Peace, Clerk of Petty Sessions, Assistant Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages, Agent for the 'Curator of Intestate Estates,' and Marriage Celebrant. He had appointments at Braidwood (1875–1880), Copeland (near Gloucester) (1880), Forbes (temporarily, 1880), Temora (1880–1882), Copeland again (1882–1887), and Milparinka (near Tibooburra) (1887–1889). This work involved a great deal of travelling. Nothing better illustrates this than a round trip of over 1600 km he made from Milparinka to Cobar and south to Hillston.

In all of his appointments over a period of nearly fifteen years, de Boos was well regarded and highly respected, not only for his professional work but also his community activities; at Temora, for example, he was involved with the establishment of the hospital, jockey club, and Church of England. Of particular note was the remarkable recognition of his work in the Braidwood district, by way of a 'gold past-masters jewel' from the Braidwood Masonic Lodge, and even more so the unique gift of a gold medal presented to him by the local Chinese community, as 'a token of their esteem for the very fair and impartial manner in which he always settled their mining disputes' (*SMH*, 22 March 1881, 5). When his departure from

Copeland was announced in 1887, the local correspondent for the *Maitland Mercury* (2 April 1887, 5) wrote that ‘we are being deprived of a fair and impartial administrator of the law, as well as a gentleman both charitable and ready to assist in any movement having for its object the welfare of the public.’

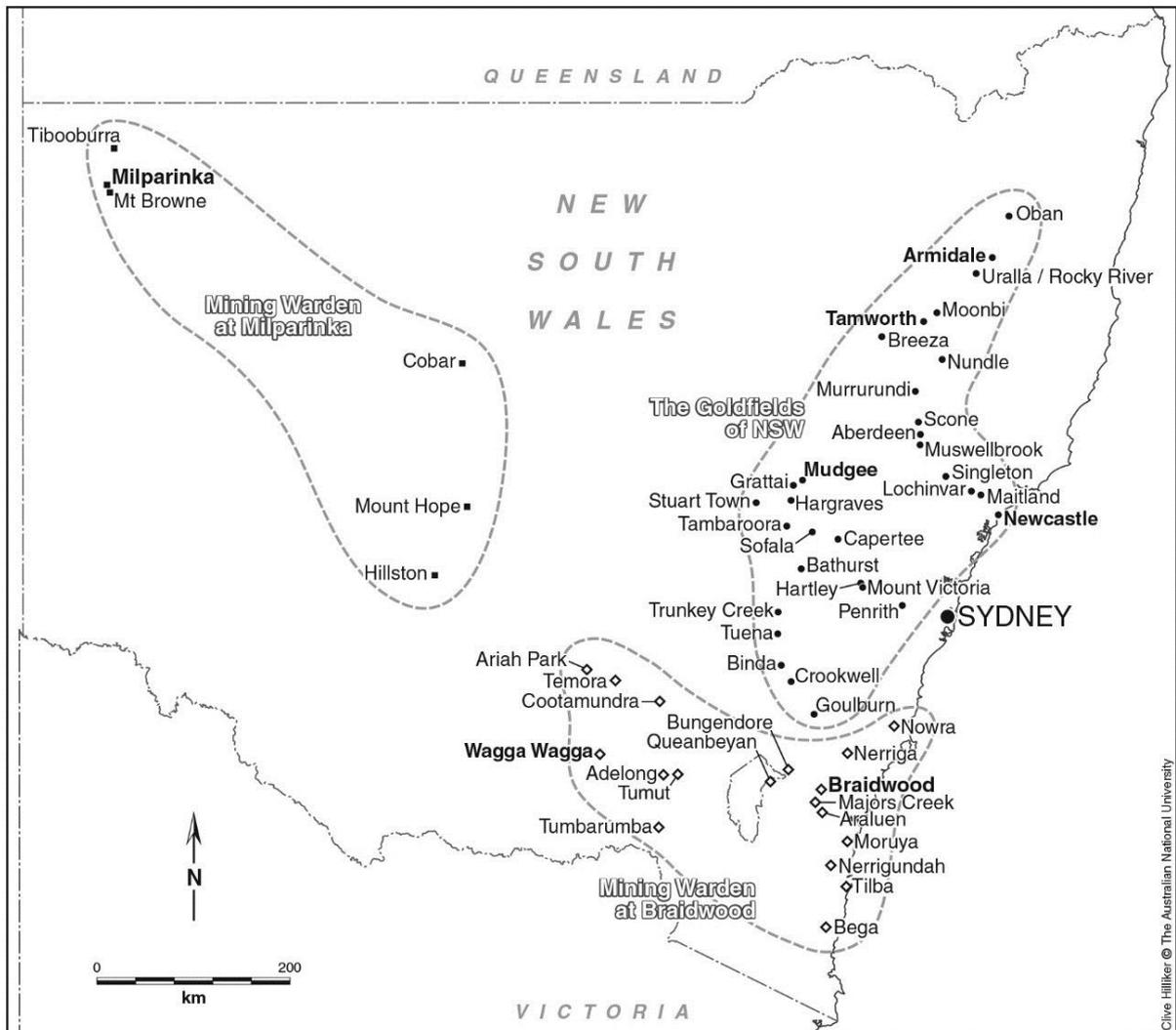


Figure 1. Some of the places visited by de Boos when writing ‘The Gold-Fields of New South Wales’; as Mining Warden based at Braidwood; and as Mining Warden based at Milparinka. This provides an indication of the travelling he did as a reporter and as a mining warden.

In spite of this record, his reputation has been tarnished by one brief episode. The *Australian Dictionary of Biography* states that ‘at Temora de Boos was accused of partiality, insobriety and improper language’ (Holt). As far as it goes, this is correct, but it is a very inadequate comment on what transpired, and from this have come some very inaccurate statements, not least in *The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature*, which states that ‘his appointment as mining warden and police magistrate [were] (posts in which he was considerably criticised)’ (Wilde, Hooton, Andrews 225). De Boos worked successfully in Temora for a total of nearly three years, initially from his base some 300 km away in Braidwood, and including the initial finds in late 1879 and the major rush in May, 1880 (Fritsch). However, criticisms of de Boos made over some months in the *Temora Star* culminated in an editorial in March, 1882. Whilst acknowledging his ‘uprightness and singleness of purpose,’ de Boos was described as wrong-headed, perverse, and systematically erroneous in his actions as a public officer,’ and he was

accused of partiality towards people in court who were represented by his solicitor son, William (*Temora Star*, 1 March 1882, 2). Not surprisingly, some of his decisions upset people, and as a consequence de Boos became caught up in the verbal warfare between the *Star* and the *Temora Herald*, which gave de Boos its full support. Some four months after they were made, the *Temora Star* published a withdrawal of the charges and an apology (12 July 1882, 3).

If the problems were real, there were at least some extenuating circumstances. For some of the time, de Boos was the only judicial officer of any kind in Temora and the surrounding district. His work load was extremely large; he had major problems with his assistant, Henry Margules;³ and there was his family situation. His wife Sarah had died in December, 1872, and he had three sons, all under 30 years of age, and two young daughters (aged 18 and 16 in 1882), all apparently with him in Temora.⁴ Further, there were health problems, which necessitated periods of leave.⁵

However, the real problem came when the accusations were picked up by William Forster, the Legislative Assembly member for the nearby electorate of Gundagai. Forster had a habit of asking questions about issues from all parts of the colony, but in this case his intent was more personal. In response to his first questions, the Minister of Justice stated that ‘Repeated complaints have been made respecting decisions by Mr. de Boos. There were some complaints of his partiality, others of insobriety, and others of improper language.’⁶ Even though many of the complaints could not be substantiated, the main complainant did not appear to exist, and the *Temora Star* accusations had been withdrawn, de Boos was reprimanded and a further inquiry initiated. Conducted by barrister H.E. Cohen, it is difficult to judge just how serious this inquiry was, as it was held behind closed doors and Cohen was in Temora for less than two days. But even before Cohen had presented any report of his inquiry, Forster was asking further questions of the Minister of Justice.⁷ Before they could be answered, Forster died suddenly, seemingly relieving de Boos of any further difficulties, though he must have wondered what would happen following his departure from Temora. Yet he did not lose his Government positions, as in early December 1882 (before that month’s election), he was returned to Copeland as Police Magistrate, Clerk of Petty Sessions, and Mining Warden. The following month, Cohen was appointed Minister of Justice in the new New South Wales Government (*SMH*, 6 January 1883, 10). De Boos retained his positions. Surely, if Cohen, as the Minister of Justice, had found anything in Temora to justify action against de Boos, he would have taken it, rather than leaving him in his important judicial positions.

From Milparinka, he returned to Sydney and lived in his own residence in Lewisham until early 1892, when his youngest daughter married. His later years were spent with her and her family in Ryde. In the first few years of his retirement, he did some writing and continued his active involvement in the Freemasons. He died at the family home on October 30, 1900.

Writings

De Boos’s early work as a general reporter for the *Monitor*, *Gazette*, *Argus*, and *Herald* (as well as other papers he may have worked for), at least some of which seems to have taken him beyond Sydney, has yet to be identified. Nothing survives of his own two papers, and we only know something of their content from reviews in other papers. If nothing else, we know of his work from complaints about his reports when working for *The Argus* and the *Herald*—complaints he readily rebuffed, given his facility in the use of shorthand.

Starting with the series on ‘The Goldfields of New South Wales,’ his work beyond Sydney provided him with a welcome opportunity to get away from parliamentary reporting. From specifically gold mining, his reporting became much more broadly based, especially his ‘Random Notes,’ an important function being to inform Sydney readers of the *Herald* and *Mail* about country New South Wales. The articles contain a wealth of material, not just on mining, but on the natural and built environments, social conditions (especially for women and children), the problems of alcohol abuse on the goldfields, the poor and discriminatory treatment of Chinese gold miners, and prevailing attitudes to and treatment of Aborigines. His strong social conscience was clearly evident. He wrote of locations and situations as he saw them, complimentary and otherwise, the roads he travelled and the modes of travel, the people he met, the places in which he stayed. There was no rushing through the countryside; he made full use of his observational and descriptive abilities. A few illustrations must suffice. January 1871 in Goulburn ‘was exceedingly hot and oppressive—and it can be hot in Goulburn and no mistake—as hot in summer as it is cold and bleak in winter.’ Whilst the location had much to commend it, with the Wollondilly River and ‘a beautiful range of limestone hills’ to the north-east, the town itself raised some questions. It did not ‘offer very much in the way of amusement to the visitor,’ and though it was ‘very well laid out, with fine wide streets, . . . it has been built upon the old primeval Botany Bay principle, and has its gaol and Court-house directly in the centre of the city’ (*SMH*, 20 January 1871, 5). On a second visit to Berrima, he found it ‘just as dead, dull and miserable as ever’ (*SMH*, 6 July 1865, 8). He was rarely impressed with country roads; parts of the twenty four miles of tracks from Ophir to Tambaroora were ‘about the worst I have ever travelled’ (*SMH*, 26 July 1865, 2). At Tambaroora, he wrote of ‘some 40 or 50 dwellings, all substantially built, the majority being neatly whitewashed in front, and having well-kept gardens at the back, in which not only vegetables, but flowers and trees are being cultivated.’ He wrote of the industriousness and peaceful behaviour of the Chinese miners, and found the Tambaroora people extremely praiseworthy of in their relations with ‘this curious people.’ In recounting the care given to a sick Chinese miner, he wrote: ‘This is the way the men of Tambaroora act towards a man like themselves, though he chances to be born in China.’ This was in marked contrast to the way the Chinese were treated at Lambing Flat (now Young), about which his comments were scathing (*SMH*, 30 July 1865, 4). And in a moment’s reminiscence, even Goulburn’s climate was not all bad:

All kinds of English fruits, shrubs, and flowers can be grown here; and I can scarcely conceive a greater pleasure to the old Englishman, who has been many years confined to the purlieu of Sydney, to come upon a country like this, and see the cherries, currants, and gooseberries of his native land, growing in as great profusion as ever he saw them in the gardens of the old country. In the spring, he will see the lilac in full bloom: and if that don’t take his thoughts back home, then he has no heart. (*SMH*, 20 January 1871, 5)

His reporting of debates in the New South Wales Parliament provided him with the material for two long-running satirical columns. The first comprised the numerous writings of ‘Mr. John Smith, of Congewoi Farm’ (1862–1865), which described parliament in ‘the slang speech of the time.’ In 1874, many of these were collected together as *The Congewoi Correspondence*, ‘edited’ by Charles de Boos. These columns were followed by ‘The Collective Wisdom of New South Wales’ (*SMH* and *Sydney Mail*, 1867–1871). A very popular alternative account of parliamentary proceedings, the columns were a commentary, frequently unflattering, on the government, politicians, and public life of the day. Some of his comments about Mr Forster provide an illustration:

Mr. Forster has established for himself a reputation for wordy pugnacity, and is now beginning to gather the fruits that are sure to be borne by so dangerous a character.

Forster has snarled and snapped, but then he does this so regularly, that it may almost be regarded as his chronic state.

Mr. Forster . . . lost his temper . . . that innate spirit of opposition that forms part of his idiosyncrasy.

Mr. Forster will say all the most excruciatingly bitter things which an imagination rich in sarcasm can furnish.

The Timon of the House . . . A frame of mind more Timonic and unamiable than ever.⁸

Initially anonymous, the writings got de Boos and the *Herald* into trouble more than once, not least because virtually all parliamentary members received a mention, and usually by name. In one Assembly debate, the writer was described, among other things, as a ‘downright liar,’ a ‘hireling,’ and a ‘ruffian’ (*SMH*, 28 August 1867, 2; 2 September 1867, 5). By 1882, the identity of the anonymous author was known. It is no wonder that Forster took the opportunity of the Temora incident to ‘get his own back’ at de Boos. It is somewhat ironic for someone whose life and work contributed so much to his writing, that it should later contribute in the way it did to this unfortunate incident in his public life.

Some of his other serialised writings, mainly in *The Sydney Mail* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*, present a variety of topics and literary forms, some hard to categorise. What is perhaps his first serialised story, ‘The Yo-Yo: a legend of the Lachlan district,’ has only recently been found. Though published in 1861–62, the first four chapters were written in 1847, which makes them some of his earliest writings. ‘My Holiday’ is an account of a walk from Manly to Palm Beach in Sydney (1861, republished Jennings). Again using knowledge gained from his parliamentary reporting, ‘The Midge Correspondence’ is a satirical look at government through the eyes of a clerk in the ‘Circumlocution Office’ (1863–64). ‘The Poor Man,’ as told by ‘Mr. Redde Pepper,’ is both a satirical and more serious commentary on the land laws of the day, especially the consequences of the Robertson Land Acts of 1861, a topic about which he also wrote at length in some of his ‘Random Notes’ (1864; republished Buck and Wright).⁹ Though in many respects fiction, ‘The Corncocks: a history of a Colonial Family, gathered from their own Correspondence’ (1865) gave expression among other things to issues dealing with women’s property and other rights. De Boos’s knowledge of the goldfields provided the material for ‘Mr. Pick, the Gold Miner,’ a series of stories of gold mining and gold miners as told by an old digger (1867). ‘The Romance of the Blue Books: pursued by fate’ (1868) was a serialised crime story based on a Select Committee report, the ‘Blue Book,’ into the crimes of Joseph Wilkes, and which had much to do with reform of the laws of evidence and the then inadmissible testimony of Aborigines (Wright and Buck, *The Romance*; Wright).

Up to and including *Fifty Years Ago*, de Boos’s fictional writings were set in pre-Gold Rush New South Wales, drawing on his personal knowledge and experiences of ‘country’ and country people. *The Stockman’s Daughter* (*The People’s Advocate* 1856, republished 2009) is

a story of a property owner, bushrangers, an Aborigine, and the stockman's daughter set in the Bungendore-Lake George area (near Canberra), which de Boos must have visited before moving to Melbourne. This may well be described as the first truly Australian novel about the Australian bush, published well before other similar stories appeared.

Fifty Years Ago: an Australian tale is a story of early settlers and Aborigines, of murder, revenge, retribution and finally redemption, set in parts of the lower Hunter Valley (1866–67). Unusually for the time, it was not a newspaper serial, but was initially issued in a series of fifteen pamphlets (or signatures), with a cover illustration by F.C. Terry, and then published as one volume (1867). The pamphlets sold for one shilling each; the complete volume cost ten shillings and, later in the year, five shillings. The story re-appeared in 1869–70 in *The Australian Journal*, with the addition of numerous line drawings by A.J. Fisher. Thirty years later, over the period just before and after the author's death, the story appeared again in *The Australian Journal* (without illustrations), this time with the title, 'Retribution, or Eighty Years Ago.'¹⁰ In 1999, the 1869–70 version, including the illustrations, was republished, with an extended introduction by Clancey. The book's dedication provides an interesting comment on the nature of publishing at the time, and the importance of newspapers in the emergence of Australian literature:

To John Fairfax, Esq., whose helping hand has been the mainstay of the early footsteps of the infant literature of Australia, this work is inscribed with every feeling of respect, by his faithful servant and friend, Charles de Boos.

The book was widely advertised and publicised, including well beyond New South Wales. In comments on the early parts and reviews of the full story it was well received (e.g. *Bell's Life in Sydney*, 29 September 1866, 4), though not his at times favourable depiction of Aborigines (*SMH*, 20 September 1867, 6).

The story owed much to the content of 'The Romance of the Blue Books.' There are influences from the American Fenimore Cooper's writings (Healy), though de Boos did not need Cooper's 'Indians' to write about Australian Aborigines, certainly not to the extent of the invalid comments of Pascal. De Boos's knowledge of Aborigines is clearly evident in his earlier writings, such as 'The Yo-Yo' and *The Stockman's Daughter* (works unknown to earlier commentators), as well as the reports of his travels. Nor did he need the 1857 Hornet Bank Massacre to form the basis of his story (Clarke). Just how 'dependent' his writing was may merit further study. His literary facility may have been limited, his style 'unadorned and often plebian,' but he had no limitations in terms of observation and description, with 'a thorough knowledge of the Australian bush, and close and intimate observation of the aborigines in their tribal life' (Hamer, *Fifty Years*). For Healy, no others wrote of this period 'with the perspective, scope, or moral concern of de Boos. In spite of all his faults he brought to bear on Australian materials a strong ethical sense and a serious imagination.' In summary, '*Fifty Years Ago* is one of the best books written in the infancy of Australian literature' (Hamer, *Fifty Years*); 'no novel written in the period . . . is more Australian' (Hamer, *The Surrender*). And it was not published in London.

The fictional writing that followed is set firmly in the goldfields of New South Wales and Victoria. Based on his own knowledge of early Melbourne and the Victorian and New South Wales goldfields, *Mark Brown's Wife* portrays gold-rush Melbourne and the brutality of life on the Victorian goldfields, concluding in Forbes and the Lachlan diggings in New South Wales. It was serialised in *The Sydney Mail* in 1871, *The Echo* in 1887, and *The Australian*

Journal in 1892, with a new title, 'In the Early Fifties: a story of Australian life'; it was republished in 1992.

When he left the employ of John Fairfax & Co. in 1872, his writing as a journalist stopped. As a public official, he had other writing to do, including annual and numerous other reports for the New South Wales Department of Mines. These were largely to do with the mining and processing of gold and other minerals, but not limited to these subjects. For example, more than once he expressed his concern for the miners and other residents of Araluen after flooding. As an employee of the colonial government, he was not allowed to take on any other paid work, though Marcus Clarke and Rolf Boldrewood certainly did, but they had friends 'to encourage [their] superiors to blink at any 'misconduct' such as writing' (Crittenden, *The writings*; Eggert and Webby, xxiii-xxx). Did de Boos simply abide by the rules? Certainly at Braidwood and Temora, his public service positions and community work would have left little time for writing; though at Copeland, he had time for a fine garden. There are a few short pieces from around the time of his retirement. But did he stop writing fiction? At present, there is no clear answer. Some stories were re-issued, and at least two new ones appeared, close to his retirement. *Me and My Horse*, a 'comic novelette very much in the later *Bulletin* style,' is the story of a miner who rescued a horse that had fallen down a mine shaft, a sketch of life on the Peel River goldfields in northern NSW (*The Echo* 1889, republished 2004). 'The Secret of the Old Shaft' starts with a body at the bottom of an old mine shaft in the Turon Valley and ends with one of the finders married to his long-lost sweetheart and living on a large estate in England (*The Echo* 1889). It appeared again in *The Australian Journal* (1893), this time titled 'The Mystery of Big Oakey.' If these two stories were published earlier, they have yet to be found.

Conclusion

In many ways, de Boos was ahead of his times. As indicated at the outset, he was particularly concerned for the disadvantaged. His attitude to the racially victimised Chinese was seen in his description of the sick Chinese miner in Tambaroora, and the gift he received from the Chinese in the Braidwood area. He was concerned for women and children living in the frequent squalor of the goldfields, especially where there was abuse of alcohol. He supported the diggers. In responding to the awards he received in Braidwood, he stated:

As some of you know, when I was in this district I considered it my duty always to give the digger my advice as to the best way for him to proceed in any difficulty, and not to send him to a lawyer to spend his money without perhaps getting any satisfaction after all. I consider a warden, as the name implies, should be the guide and protector of the digger. Any digger coming to me with a complaint was just in the same position to me, as a warden, as any man who comes to me with any complaint. As a magistrate I want to hear what he has to say before granting him a warrant. I am well aware that by following such a course I have greatly displeased the legal fraternity; but I cannot help that: I conscientiously regard it as in strict accordance with my duty, and I shall ever continue in it while I hold my present position. (*SMH*, 30 June 1881, 5)

He was part of the 'critical' press, championing law reform and attacking the Robertson Land Acts because of their disadvantageous impacts on the 'poor men' and individual settler families. He was concerned for everyone when there were outbreaks of lawlessness, especially when there was an inadequate number of police. He had respect for the Aborigines; as has

been written of *Fifty Years Ago*, ‘The novel seems to suggest that the White man is superior to the Black only in the lucky accident that he has had the benefit of civilisation to develop a higher consciousness. De Boos’s sympathetic observations, coupled with his imaginative and sensitive analysis, produced an interpretation of Aboriginality highly unusual for the time’ (Wilde and Headon). His social commentary, both serious and satirical, as well as his descriptive writing, was totally in keeping with the man he was. In many respects, he gave voice to a different way in colonial NSW.

It is certain that there is more to be learned about most aspects of the life and work of de Boos. This is true of his ancestors from France and London, his early years and ‘education’ at Addiscombe, and his involvement in the Carlist wars in Spain when still a teenager. It is also true with respect to his early years in Australia—what he did on arrival in New South Wales, the ‘Hunter Valley question,’ the ‘missing’ four years about which virtually nothing is known, and his time in Melbourne and on the Victorian goldfields. There is also more to be learned of his time as a mining warden and public official in New South Wales.

In terms of his writings, new investigative tools and methodologies are making possible research that could not have been done even a decade ago. Collaboration with colleagues at the Centre for Literary and Linguistic Computing, University of Newcastle, has enabled three series of articles in the *Sydney Morning Herald* previously attributed to him to be determined as being the work of another writer (Crabb, Antonia and Craig). The Centre’s methodologies will hopefully assist not just in determining the work of other authors, but in identifying more of the work of de Boos. That more exists there is little doubt; for one thing, some of his writings listed by Heaton have yet to be located. Even without finding any more work, as this essay has sought to show, there is much to support the view that de Boos was not only one of colonial Australia’s foremost goldfields writers and major social commentators, he also made an as yet unacknowledged contribution to the early foundations of the country’s literature.

Charles de Boos was a remarkable man who led a remarkable life. His obituary, published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (31 October 1900, 7) stated: ‘His life story can be told in a few words.’ Nothing could be further from the truth.

Acknowledgements

This is an introduction to research in progress for a biography of Charles de Boos, my wife’s great-great-grandfather. I wish to acknowledge the assistance of Victor Crittenden, who first suggested I write the biography; the staff of the National Library of Australia, especially those in the Newspapers and Microforms Room, for generous and continuing assistance; Dr Julieanne Lamond, School of Literature, Languages, and Linguistics, Australian National University; Professor Hugh Craig and Dr Alexis Antonia, Centre for Literary and Linguistic Computing, University of Newcastle; and Clive Hilliker, Fenner School of Environment and Society, Australian National University, for the map. The helpful comments of the editor and two anonymous reviewers are also acknowledged.

NOTES

¹ See Crittenden (1996) and Crittenden’s introductions to the Mulini Press editions of books by de Boos (see Bibliography); they are all very similar pieces in terms of the biographical material on de Boos. Similar material is in Laurie Clancy’s ‘Introduction’ to the Mulini Press edition of *Fifty Years Ago*.

² For example, *Maitland Mercury*, 22 August 1849, 2. There were advertisements for the paper in the *SMH* (8 September 1849, 1), but no comments about it.

³ Complaints about Margules and his actions and behavior were reported earlier in the year (*Cootamundra Herald*, 7 May 1881, 5). See also *Mr. Henry Margules, late Mining Registrar at Temora (Papers, Minutes, &c.)*, 5 December 1881. *New South Wales Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly*, Volume 3, 1881, 667–721; and *Patrick Hannan's Mining Claim at Temora. Report of Select Committee of Legislative Assembly. New South Wales Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly*, Volume 4, 1883–84, 473–91.

⁴ In early 1882, there were advertisements in the local press for 'De Boos Brothers,' auctioneers' (*Temora Herald*, 26 and 30 January 1882). The business almost certainly involved the two eldest sons of Charles de Boos, Charles and Francis.

⁵ 'Mr. Warden de Boos is very ill, and with difficulty sat in the Warden's Court to-day [6th].' *Maitland Mercury*, 11 April 1882, 4; *Temora Star*, 10 May 1882, 2.

⁶ *New South Wales Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly*, No. 20, 26 September 1882, 84.

⁷ *New South Wales Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly*, No. 27, 6 October 1882, 111–12. It was pointed out that most of the complaints had 'been previously dealt with either by the Department of Justice or that of Mines.' A few days later, Forster asked another question, on an unrelated matter, but it was still along the lines of de Boos not doing his job properly, a suggestion that the Minister of Justice did not support (*New South Wales Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly*, No. 29, 11 October 1882, 122).

⁸ *SMH*, 8 August 1867, 5; 19 August 1867, 5; 11 November 1867, 5; 18 November 1867, 5; 2 December 1867, 5.

⁹ These articles were republished in 2005 with a commentary by Anthony Buck and Nancy Wright. The name of de Boos does not appear on the book's cover or title page. See also Wright and Buck 1998, 2001.

¹⁰ In 1906, an abridged and emasculated version by was published by A.C. Rowlandson with the title, *Settler and Savage: One Hundred Years Ago in Australia* (N.S.W. Bookstall Company, Sydney). It sold for 3/6d, and 2/6d for the paperback version. Rowlandson had purchased the copyright from the heirs of de Boos. It included six full-page illustrations by A.J. Fisher. Along with the line drawings in the 1869–70 version, this is another example of changing the nature of the story to suit the times. However, 're-making' novels in this way took them out of the historical context in which they had been written. Personal communication, Professor Paul Eggert, 23 May 2014.

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