



Chinese-made stamps on furniture made in Victoria

(Created by Dr Pauline Rule and Dr Sophie Couchman, last updated June 2011)

Victorian factory legislation from the late 1890s required all Chinese or part Chinese-made furniture to have a stamp which clearly stated that the furniture had been made by Chinese labour. Conversely furniture made by European Australians had to be stamped 'European Labour Only'. Some other Australian states also adopted these practices.

Generally stamps on furniture give both the name of the furniture factory (sometimes also a person's name) and the address. Using one or both of these pieces of information it is possible to find out a little more about the furniture maker who made your item of furniture.

Some Chinese furniture makers can be found in the following reference book:
Fahey, Kevin; Simpson, Christina & Simpson, Andrew, *Nineteenth Century Australian Furniture*, Daniel Ell Press: Sydney, 1985.

Chinese furniture makers can also be tracked in Victorian street and trade directories, especially the Sands and McDougall directories which were published annually. These are available on microfiche in the genealogy sections of the State Library of Victoria. A large number of these directories have been digitised by Archives Digital Books Australia. They may be available in a digitised form in municipal or genealogical society libraries. You can look for furniture makers in the trade pages of the directory, the street section and the alphabetical listing of names in the directories.

The annual reports of the Chief Inspector of Factories, Work-rooms and Shops, contained in the *Victorian Parliamentary Papers*, for the years 1897 to 1900 list the names and addresses of Chinese furniture makers among others who were prosecuted for breaches of the Factories and Shops Acts. The reports for these years and subsequent years contain interesting commentary on Chinese furniture making in Melbourne. You can find copies of the Victorian Parliamentary Papers in the State Library of Victoria in hard copy (1900 onwards) at LT 328.94504A and microfilm (prior to 1900) at LTOM 1.

Many Chinese-Australian carpenters made their own tools following traditional Chinese methods. Examples of their tools and the work they created can be seen on display at the Museum of Chinese Australian History.

A detailed description of Chinese furniture making in Victoria is available on the Chinese-Australian Historical Images in Australia website:
<http://www.chia.chinesemuseum.com.au/biogs/CH00016b.htm>.