

Family History

Persons called before Queensland Government Committees

What was the role of those called before parliamentary committees?

Those called before government committees were often invited because of their knowledge or expertise in the topic being discussed.

Minutes of the evidence to most of the early Queensland royal commissions, select committees and other government inquiries can be found in the Queensland Legislative Assembly *Votes and Proceedings* (QLA V&P) (later known as the *Queensland Parliamentary Papers*). These inquiries covered a range of topics including education, immigration, mining, railway construction and the police force.

The **index to persons called before these government committees (1860 to 1920)** is available on the State Library of Queensland website:

1860 – 1901 <http://fhr.slq.qld.gov.au/committees/>
1902 – 1920 <http://fhr.slq.qld.gov.au/committees2/>

“*Index to persons called before Queensland Government committees (1860 to 1920)*” is also available through Queensland Government open data portal.

<https://data.qld.gov.au/dataset/slq-persons-called-before-committees>

Why would these records be of interest to family historians?

A wide variety of people from different backgrounds and occupations were called to give evidence before these committees. They included farmers, graziers, publicans, seamen, miners, labourers, civil servants and railway employees.

For family and local historians an individual’s transcript can often provide excellent background information on the person that may not be available in any other document. There is also the advantage of reading the person’s view in their own words

Examples of evidence:

Example 1

Oliver Crofts called before the royal commission on the working conditions in Queensland shops, factories and workshops (QLA V&P 1891, volume 2, p.1026-1029) supplied information on his occupation, place of birth and where he worked in England. More detail about his current working conditions is spelled out further in the document.

| | |
|--|--|
| What is your trade? | “Draper’s Assistant, Edward and Lamb’s” |
| How long have you been there? | “Twelve months” |
| Were you born in the colony? | “No; in England” |
| Were you in the trade before you came here? | “Yes. I have been in it all my life. I was apprenticed to my father.” |
| How long have you been in Australia? | “Four years” |
| Where did you work at home? | “With my father in Derbyshire” |
| Have the long hours affected your health? | “They have. I am frequently taken sick during the long hours on Saturday. I do not call the hours during the week too long.” |

Example 2

John Memonitch, called before the select committee appointed to inquire into the claim of John Memonitch for a reward as the discoverer of the Clermont Gold Field, gives us an idea of the uncertainty many had about their age. (QLA V&P 1897, volume 4, p.611-613). We can also tell he is interesting from the way he speaks.

| | |
|--|---|
| How old are you? | I could not say exactly to the minute. Over sixty, I believe." |
| Are you the person claiming to have discovered Clermont Gold Field? | "Yes, I am." |
| When did you first go on the field? | "I first discovered it about 1861, but I was there before." |
| Did you report payable gold to anybody? | "I reported to Mr. John Winter. I met Mr. Winter at Yaamba, and I gave him information that I had found good gold. He said, "Keep quiet for goodness sake." |
| And how many years have you been in the colony? | "Thirty-six years." |

How are the indexes arranged?

The indexes are arranged alphabetically by surname. Each entry provides the name and occupation of the witness the name of the inquiry and the year, volume and page of the Votes and Proceedings (Parliamentary Papers). An example is provided below:

| Surname | Given Name/s | Occupation/Other | Case | Reference | Pages |
|---------|--------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------|-------|
| Broad | Edwin | Blacksmith and Wheelwright in Esk | Proposed railway extensions | 1900/v.3 | 453 |

The reference (year, volume and pages numbers) refers to the Queensland Legislative Assembly *Votes and Proceedings* (MFL 328.943) which are available on microfilm in the Family History reading room, Level 3.

Where is there a list of the committees of inquiries that were held?

Checklist of Royal Commissions, Select Committees of Parliament and Boards of Inquiry [Part 5 – Queensland, 1859 – 1960] (REF 016.35494093 1978 or FAMHIS 016.35394 1960-1978) by D.H. Borchardt contains a list of some of the government committees held during Queensland's history. It includes a brief summary of the committee's evidence and what conclusions, if any, were reached. This publication provides the year the committee's evidence was published in the Queensland Legislative Assembly *Votes and Proceedings*, the volume, and page numbers.


Other State and Federal government committees

The evidence to select committees, royal commissions and boards of inquiry held by the Federal Government and by other State Governments also appeared in their government publications. D.H. Borchardt's series ***Checklist of Royal Commissions, Select Committees of Parliament and Board of Inquiry*** (REF 016.35494093 1978) includes committees of the following governments:

- Pt. 1 Commonwealth of Australia, 1900-1950
- Pt. 2. Tasmania, 1856-1959
- Pt. 3. Victoria, 1856-1960
- Pt. 4. New South Wales, 1855-1960

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