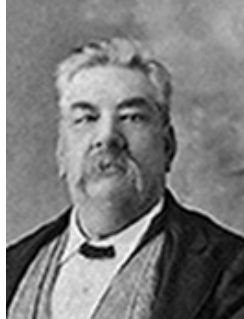


Missing Person

John Skinner Box 1829-1912
Eliza Chidlaw James 1836-1926



The Box family goes to London

John Skinner Box was the third son of **Sarah Skinner** of Crediton, and **William Box** of Stoke Damerel (the old name for Devonport, situated close to Plymouth Dockyard) in Devon. He was born on January 9th 1829 and baptised in Stoke Damerel in June 1830. He was not the first child of that name, for Sarah and William had another son John Skinner Box that died at age 2 years and 4 months in 1829. His parents had married on January 18th 1826 at Stoke Damerel and moved to Poplar, Middlesex, the east end docklands area of London where their second son William was born. Poverty and crime characterized this part of London, but there was also work for skilled labour in the new shipyards.



Houses in Duke Street, Devonport, the street where members of the Box family lived in the early 19th century. Photo: Euan McGillivray 2014

John was the second of seven surviving children, his younger siblings being James John, born in 1834 at Devonport, and the others born in Poplar: Edward (b1838), Nelson (b1840), Sarah Emma (b1841) and Amelia Ann (b1844). His older brother, William, had an intellectual disability and is described as 'afflicted' on one census and 'idiot' on another. The census of 1841 records the family living at 24 Williams Street Poplar, father's occupation being a journeyman joiner. This street was very close to the West India Docks where his father, as a ship joiner, was probably employed. Ten years later they were all still living there, except for John. Both John's parents died at the Lambeth Workhouse, and both suffered from dementia. His father

died in 1870 and his mother in 1883, both in the workhouse infirmary, the hospital for the poor.



The West India Docks, London 1837 engraved by F.W. Topham after a picture by R. Garland. Source: Wikimedia Commons

Death at sea

In 1850, John now a ship joiner like his father, was living in nearby Bromley and on November 11th in St. Leonard's, the parish church at Bromley, he married 20-year-old Sarah Ann Scott. In c1851 they had a daughter Sarah Ann Julia Box. Then about a year later John migrated to Australia leaving his wife and daughter behind in London. He may have travelled with his brother James, who was also to come to live and work in Melbourne.

About five years later John's wife decided to join him in Australia and set out with their 6-year-old daughter on the ship *Aloe* which departed London on July 27th 1858. This year was known for its 'Great Stink of 1858', a summer heatwave, combined with the Thames River as the main sewer for all of London, reaching its peak in pollution and therefore in stink. From the outset of her journey Sarah was suffering from consumption (tuberculosis) and tragically she died during the journey on September 5th and was buried at sea. The *Aloe* arrived at Melbourne on November 6th 1858. Little Sarah Ann was reunited with her father in Melbourne. She later worked as a saleswoman and married Joseph Gibson in Fitzroy in 1883.

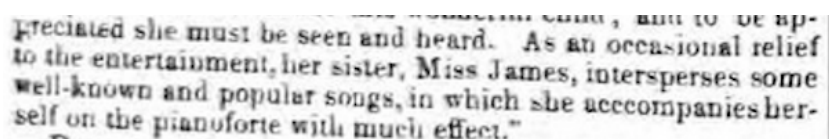


Cartoon from *Punch* depicting the Great Stink of 1858. Source: history.com

Musicians on the road

Eliza Chidlaw James was born in the parish of St. Georges, Hanover Square London on June 11th 1836 to **Eliza Chidlaw Goff** and **William James**. William, born in Donhead St. Mary, Wiltshire, was a musician but also a butler to the Earl of Rosebery, Lord Primrose, and later a shopkeeper and stationer. The family lived in the Belgravia district of London where work was to be found with wealthy families. In 1844 when Eliza was 8 years old her mother died at the age of 40 from dropsy of the chest and heart disease. A few months later her grandmother, **Dorothy Goff** (nee Chidlaw), died and her grandfather **James Goff**, a licensed victualler, died in 1850. Her father William was living in 1871 but exactly when he died is not known.

Eliza spent much of her childhood travelling around England as a supporting performer to her younger sister Sarah Maria, a popular child musical performer of her day. Their father William experienced various highs and lows of life, at one time being sent to the debtors' court. His daughters' musical performances were able to provide some extra means of income when the need arose. Referred to as Miss James, Eliza is sometimes mentioned in reviews of Sarah Maria's concerts. For example, in the *Gloucester Journal* of November 9th 1850, Eliza was described as 'another young genius'. The *Essex Standard* review of July 30th 1852 describes Eliza's performance:



preciated she must be seen and heard. As an occasional relief to the entertainment, her sister, Miss James, intersperses some well-known and popular songs, in which she accompanies herself on the pianoforte with much effect."

This is where Eliza's professional musical career apparently ends.

Eliza's journey on the *Aloe*

Eliza and her sister were left an inheritance by their grandfather James Goff. Their entitlement was due when they each reached 21 years of age. Perhaps this enabled the two young women to pay for a passage to Australia. In 1858, when Eliza was 22 and Sarah Maria 19, they boarded the *Aloe* (the same ship in London boarded by John Box's wife and daughter) and began the 4-month journey to Melbourne. According to descendant Alice (Lilsie) Lillian Smith, her grandmother Eliza told her that she looked after John's child on the ship after the mother had died. This is probably how John and Eliza met.

John Box's first jobs in Melbourne

Early pieces of possible evidence of John Box in Melbourne were advertisements in *The Argus* in 1853. In March a bricklayer was sought to build and plaster a chimney. Applicants were to see John Box and Baker, carpenters in Queen Street¹. In August John Box advertised his trade including carpenter, builder, undertaker, verandah, pallisades, blinds and sash maker. His address was opposite the *Robert Burns Hotel*, Lonsdale Street west². In November John Box was seeking bricklayers and supplies of loam and could be found at the same address³. In his first few years in Melbourne, John owned several small allotments of land in Rupert Street Collingwood, that he advertised for sale over 1854 and 1855. In November 1855 he had a misfortune when his horse was stolen from his stables in Rupert Street. He put an ad in *The Argus*

describing the horse and offering a £10 reward for conviction of the thief, or £2 for recovery of the horse⁴. Earlier that year John was a witness to the marriage of his brother James, also a builder, to Irish woman Ann Kett on October 1st at St. Stephen's Anglican Church in nearby Richmond.

John and Eliza marry

Eleven months after Eliza arrived in Melbourne, she married John Box. The wedding took place at St. Stephen's Anglican Church Richmond, on September 20th 1859. According to the marriage certificate, John a widower aged 28, was a contractor residing in Richmond and Eliza aged 23 was the proprietor of a school, residing at St. Mary's, Melbourne. The church of St. Mary's in North Melbourne ran a small school in the 1850s that could have been the place where Eliza lived and worked. The marriage witnesses were Eliza's sister Sarah Maria, and Alexander Rennie. On May 13th 1865, John and Eliza were the witnesses to Sarah Maria's marriage to William Welchman at Trinity Church East Melbourne, the first wedding in that church.



St. Stephen's Anglican Church, Richmond where John Box and Eliza James married in 1859 and where two of their children, Rosina and Ernest, were baptised. Source: onmydoorstep.com

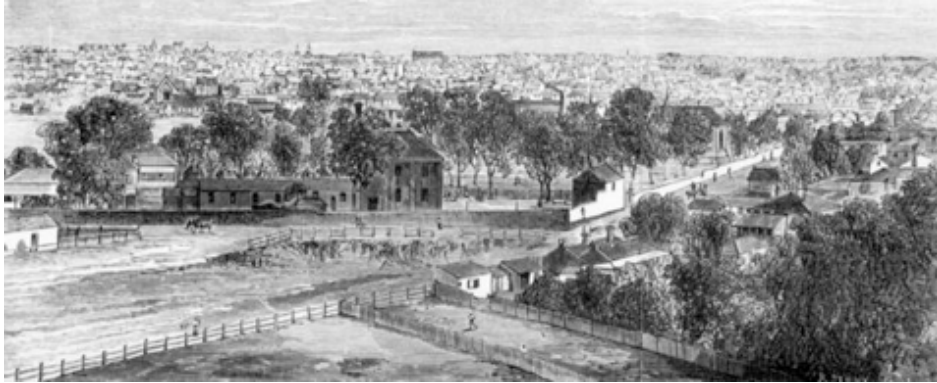
Right: St Stephen's in 1861.
Source: State Library of Victoria



Small time land speculator

In 1861 whilst living in Collingwood (called East Collingwood then) John and Eliza had their first child Alice Marie Eliza. The next year Sidney Horace John was born, and a third child Amy Florence Jane was born in 1864. John must have been making a reasonable living as a builder/contractor but also in buying, selling and leasing land and houses. The Collingwood rates books of 1864 show they owned two properties in Cromwell Street, one with a brick house and the other a wooden house. As well they still owned four properties in nearby Rupert Street. In 1865 those in Rupert Street were sold and replaced by four more Cromwell Street properties, leasing one of them to his brother James.

In 1859 John had discovered that renting out property had its problems, when he successfully took his tenant, J B Phipson, to court for damage to his property. Mr Phipson had to pay 21s. with 5s. 6d. costs. However, in 1863, John would find himself in trouble for 'permitting a nuisance to exist on his premises'⁵ in Brown Street Collingwood. A 'nuisance' might be rubbish, unhygienic or dangerous substances or anything that causes public annoyance. John was ordered to remove the 'nuisance' in 7 days and was fined 5s. with 25s costs. This would not be the last time John would find himself in a courtroom.



View of Collingwood by R. Jenny, mid 1800s. The area where the Box family lived in the early 1860s. Source: *PictureVictoria*

Expanding the business

In the early 1860s, John was trying to expand his business opportunities. In 1862 he placed advertisements in the Ballarat newspapers for horses, tip drays and fencers, and in Melbourne advertised for labourers to make bluestone culverts. (There are also advertisements from 1861 through to 1863 for *John Box & Co.* taking government contracts to build in Gippsland, wooden bridges, road improvements, culverts and logging, and advertising for labourers. Could this be our John Box? Quite possibly, as will be seen later, he had Gippsland connections.) Perhaps these enterprises paid off, for by 1864 at a Crown Land Sale, John was able to buy one allotment in Albert Street East Melbourne and Eliza bought three allotments of her own in North Melbourne. The following year John bought another Albert Street allotment and over that year the Box family moved from their Cromwell Street house to the residence in Albert Street, East Melbourne.

In August 1865 Eliza gave birth to their fourth child Edwin William Alexander at Albert Street. John's daughter from his first marriage, Sarah Ann Julia Box, now 15 years old, was living at this address too. In July and August 1863 an advertisement had appeared in *The Argus* for 'An experienced young lady desires ENGAGEMENT in a confectioner's shop. Speaks French. Mrs. John Box, Cromwell-street, Collingwood'⁶. Was this Sarah Ann Julia Box seeking work, or most likely Eliza's sister Sarah Maria? (And why would speaking French be an asset in a confectioner's shop? Perhaps it's to give the impression that you're well educated.)

'Nursegirl' needed

In 1866, John was still in business advertising for slaters, bricklayers and general labourers and the rate books of that year show he still owned and leased at least four brick houses in Cromwell Street Collingwood. On December 20th, their fifth child Rosina Bertha May was born at Albert Street East Melbourne, the last of their children

to be born there. Eliza placed an ad in *The Argus* published that same day: 'Wanted, a tidy NURSEGIRL, about 17. Apply Mrs. John Box, Albert-street, below Powlett-street.'. With five children under the age of six, it would seem she needed the help, and her step-daughter Sarah was probably working.

Then everything was about to change. On January 9th 1867, *The Privateer Freehold Gold-Mining Company* of Ballarat in which John had shares, gave notice that unless all monies owing by shareholders were paid by January 14th, these shares would be forfeited. John who had five shares was named among others. It seems John could not honour his debts. In *The Age* newspaper on January 31st John is in a list of 'New Insolvents':

John Skinner Box, of Melbourne, contractor.
Causes of insolvency: Losses on contracts and depreciation in the value of mining property. Liabilities, £701 12s 11d; assets, £194; deficiency, £507 12s 11d. Mr Courtney, official assignee.
Thomas Gresham Willis, of Mount Pleasant

Eliza's piano sold

John appeared before the Insolvents' Court on January 29th and the next day in *The Age* appeared a notice for a public meeting of his creditors to be held at 11am on the 20th of February at the Insolvents' Court House, Collins-street west. To raise the money to cover his debts the court determined that Naylor and Co. would auction off all his belongings (of course that included Eliza's) on March 7th at 11am at their auction rooms, 10 Collins-street east. A particular item featured in the advertisement was a 'rosewood cottage pianoforte by Chapel and sons', obviously Eliza's. A detailed list of items was published on the auction day:

THIS DAY.
At Eleven O'Clock.
To Parties Furnishing, Brokers, and Others.
SUPERIOR HOUSEHOLD FURNITURE.
Also,
ROSEWOOD COTTAGE PIANOFORTE,
By Chappelle and Sons.
In the Insolvent Estate of John S. Box.

NAYLOR and Co. will **SELL** by **AUCTION**, at their rooms, 10 Collins-street east, this day, Thursday, at eleven o'clock,
The whole of the furniture attached in the above estate,

Comprising—

Cedar loo table, mahogany chairs, sofas, and couches
Tapestry carpet, fenders and irons
Gilt pier glass, ornaments, bronze clock
Gilt cornices, damask curtains
Rocking chairs, arm chairs, mahogany cabinet
Mahogany bedstead, feather bed, bedding
Cedar washstands, toilet tables and ware
Marble tray toilet glass, kerosene lamps
Iron cots and bedding.

Also,
A rosewood cottage pianoforte
And
Kitchen utensils, &c.
Without Reserve.

The Box family lost everything from the piano down to kitchen utensils and of course any houses and land in their possession. Personal explanations for insolvency were given by John in a 'Special Examination' of the Insolvency Court published in *The Age* on April 3rd:

SPECIAL EXAMINATION.—*In re John Skinner Box, of Albert-street, East Melbourne, contractor.* The insolvent was examined by Mr F. L. Smyth, who appeared for creditors. Insolvent: Had been married about seven years. Bought a piece of land in Albert-street from the Crown, 95 feet frontage by a debt of 70 or 80 feet. No building on it. Gave £120 for the land, part of which amount was borrowed. One-fourth of the land had been sold and built upon; that portion realised £40. The remainder had been mortgaged to Mr John Wood, of Fitzroy, to secure £70. This money had been spent, and insolvent attributed his misfortune to the dispute between the two houses of Parliament. Insolvent was next interrogated respecting a quarter of an acre of land, also in Albert-street, to which his wife was entitled in her own right, and on which a house had been built by insolvent. The cottage property had also been mortgaged to Mr Wood, for £200, for which the insolvent had agreed to pay 12½ per cent. The meeting closed.
The court adjourned till next day.

Not sure how a 'dispute between the two houses of parliament' can be to blame for John Box's 'misfortune', perhaps some unresolved legislation pertaining to land purchases or building regulations. But it certainly appears that John and Eliza were living beyond their means.

Desertion

John was granted a Certificate of Discharge on May 17th 1867. But life was about to become much worse for Eliza. She had to somehow bring up Alice 6 years, Sydney 4 years, Amy 3 years, Edwin 18 months and baby Rosina less than 3 months old, now without a husband. In *The Argus* of September 20th 1867, this notice appeared:

Missing Friends. Messages, &c.
FIVE SHILLINGS REWARD for address of Mr. JOHN BOX, contractor, late Punt-road, Richmond. Gledhill, 95 Swanston-street.

From September 1867 through to the end of January 1868, the auctioneer William Gledhill (misprinted Glendell) also placed advertisements in the *Gippsland Guardian*:

NOTICE.
A Reward will be paid to any person furnishing the address of John Box, a contractor, lately arrived at Port Albert from Melbourne, and now residing somewhere in the district. W. H. GLENDELL, 95, Swanston street, Melbourne.

John had deserted his family and his financial responsibilities. It was believed he had gone to Gippsland (where *John Box & Co* had contracts in the early 1860s). Eliza, now heavily pregnant, and with her five young children (and possibly her step-daughter) moved to 16 Little Lennox Street (now Carroll Street) in Richmond and leased a three roomed wooden house. Here on February 23rd 1868, her sixth baby was born: **Ernest George Henry**. Ernest and Rosina were baptised at St. Stephen's Anglican Church where John and Eliza had married eight years before. The other children had been baptised at St. Mark's Anglican Church, Fitzroy.

Children in 'care'

By November 1868 Eliza had moved to 155 Gertrude Street Fitzroy and here suffered the loss of her 3-year-old son Edwin. His death certificate states he died of 'marasmus' (wasting away) from which he had suffered for two months. Then in February 1869, Amy now aged 5, Rosina aged 2 and Sidney aged 7, were taken into state care due to being 'neglected'. Their records⁷ state:

'Father deserted 7 months ago. Mother has four other children to support and is being maintained by the Society for the Educated Poor.'⁸

Amy and Sidney are described as being in good health, but dirty and with marks on their skin similar to ringworm. Rosina's health was described as 'very delicate'. Children taken into care at that time would be living in situations not unlike the dreaded workhouses of England. 'Neglected' children, that is if they were found 'begging, without a home or means of support, residing with thieves, prostitutes or drunkards or declared to be uncontrollable by their parents'⁹, depending on their age, would be sent to the Industrial Schools for vocational training, education and religious instruction. Sidney was sent to the industrial school at Sunbury that was described in the inspector's report of 1869 as:

'seriously overcrowded, about 700 children being lodged there, with room for 500 only.'¹⁰



Sunbury Industrial School which operated from 1864 to 1879, where Sidney was sent in 1869. Source: vhd.heritage.vic.gov.au

He was discharged only a few months later on July 31st. Amy and Rosina however, were much worse off. They were initially sent to the Princes Bridge school which the inspector described as:

'with 300 inmates, is wholly unfit for occupation, the buildings being so dilapidated as to render them insufficient to shelter the children from the inclemency of the weather; they are also infested with rats, and the decaying timber is full of vermin.'¹¹



Industrial School, Geelong, 1867, by Charles Travers Mackin. Source: Geelong Gallery. Amy and Rosina Box were sent here in 1869. The Geelong Industrial School was established in around 1865. In 1869, the School moved from Ryrie Street to Myers Street. It housed children including those who, for health reasons, were moved from Melbourne's industrial schools. Source: findandconnect.gov.au

The girls were there for 10 months until December when they were transferred to schools at Geelong – Myer Street for Amy and Ryrie Street for Rosina. Their conduct was reported as 'good'. Amy was discharged in December 1870 and Rosina discharged in October 1871 in a better state of health than when she was first admitted nearly two years earlier.

Extortion attempt

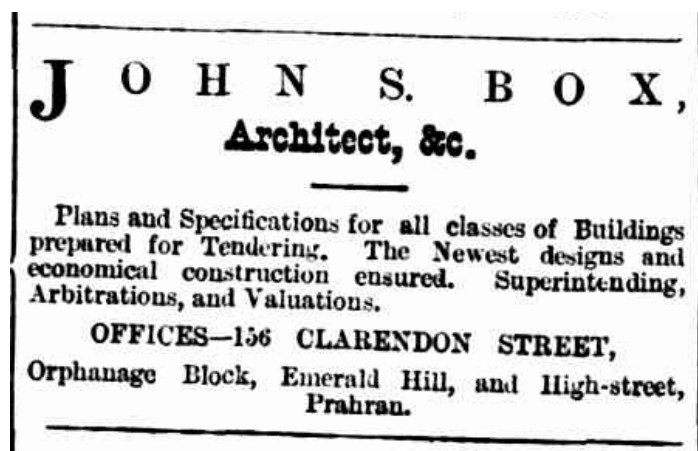
John eventually was back in business but now describing himself as an architect (his granddaughter Alice 'Lilsie' Smith said she didn't believe he ever was a qualified architect).

On December 9th 1871, *The Australasian* newspaper reported on a District Court case: 'An attempt on the part of an architect to squeeze money out of a contracting firm by threats'. John Box had summoned Messrs. *Trinnick and Timmins*, contractors, for £1 10s for work, labour and materials for additions to a building contract. John had been paid £5 for the additional plans and specifications and this amount was considered in the trade to be large for such a small contract. When the work was completed, the contractors asked John for their certificate of satisfactory completion, but after making them wait a few days, he refused to sign it unless they paid him an extra 30s. John's response was 'Well, I'm d——d (sic) if I ever give you the certificate unless you give me the 30s or an IOU for the amount'. As they needed to be paid by the proprietors, they offered to pay John £1 which he refused. Under pressure they signed a document that John had written up agreeing they owed him the 30s then John handed over the certificate saying 'I can enforce this in any court of law'. However, when John requested payment they refused saying they would expose his extortion. The court sided with the defendants, the judge stating he was glad they refused to pay the 30s, he understood the pressure they were under to receive their certificate and the negative impact the extra cost would have on the proprietors. The news report closed with: 'The case was dismissed, with 30s costs. The complainant asked for a nonsuit, which was refused.'

John's return

I'm not exactly sure when Eliza and John resumed life together, but it was at least by 1873 when their last child Edith Martha Charlotte was born on November 13th at Macarthur Place in Carlton. In 1876 John advertised for tenders for a range of services including gas-fittings, paper hanging and cementing, mostly at hotels such as the *Park-View Hotel* Punt Road Prahran, *Exchange Hotel* on Flemington Road, and the *Kent Hotel*, Rathdowne Street Carlton¹².

From about 1877 the family moved to the suburb of Prahran, and John's address was 86 High Street Prahran and 57 Chapel Street Prahran. According to advertisements¹³ he was tendering for work on mostly dwellings and shops around Prahran, Windsor and St. Kilda. The following year he placed large ads in *The Record and Emerald Hill and Sandridge Advertiser* (Emerald Hill being the old name for South Melbourne):



But John continued to have run-ins with those around him.

Drainage problems in Prahran

By 1879 the Box family were living in Alfred Street, College Lawn, Prahran. John wrote a letter heading a petition from 31 residents to the Prahran City Council dated September 1st 1879 regarding drainage problems in Alfred Street¹⁴. The letter outlined suggestions as to how the problem should be remedied and an estimation of costs. Three years later he wrote to Prahran CC on another drainage issue concerning a neighbour's property in the same street. This neighbour sought to prove that poor drainage on John Box's property was the cause of water accumulating under his house. However, the Health Officer's report noted that this complainant's house had been built on low lying land which was the cause of the drainage problem and would be impossible to completely remedy. John Box signs his letters now as 'Architect and Surveyor'.

More court appearances

In 1884, John is again in court, this time over £13 19s owing to him from John Moran. He won and was awarded 26s costs. John had another win in court two years later over a disagreement with his landlord Edward Attfield about the terms of the lease of his High Street premises. John won this dispute on appeal in the County Court.

From 1883 to 1889 John's business address changed to 56 High Street St. Kilda. The *Sands and McDougall* Directories from 1888 to 1889 show John and Eliza living at 16 Alfred Cottages, Alfred Street Prahran, and from 1891 to 1894 as residing at 70 Alfred Street Prahran. By 1903 the electoral rolls show John and Eliza had moved to 18 Great Davis Street South Yarra, and by 1906 they were living at 22 Ralston Street South Yarra.



College Lawn Prahran taken from the Town Hall looking west in 1867, where the Box family lived in 1879. Source: *PictureVictoria*

Weddings and grandchildren

Over the 1880s and into the early 1900s many of John and Eliza's adult children were living close by in the suburbs of Prahran and Windsor. There were many weddings to celebrate: In 1883, Sarah Box, John's daughter by his first marriage, married Joseph Gibson of Northcote at her home in Smith Street Fitzroy. Sarah worked as a saleswoman and Joseph was a warehouseman. Alice married Charles Nutting, a salesman in 1885 at St. Matthew's Anglican Church in Prahran; Sidney, a carpenter married Clara Wrigley, a stationer's assistant from Windsor in 1886 at St. Matthew's; Ernest, a painter married **Frances Annie Blunden**, a dressmaker, at her home in South Yarra in 1889; Edith married Alfred Martin in 1896.



Left: Alice Marie Eliza Nutting (nee Box), Eliza's eldest daughter. Source: Sue Creighton

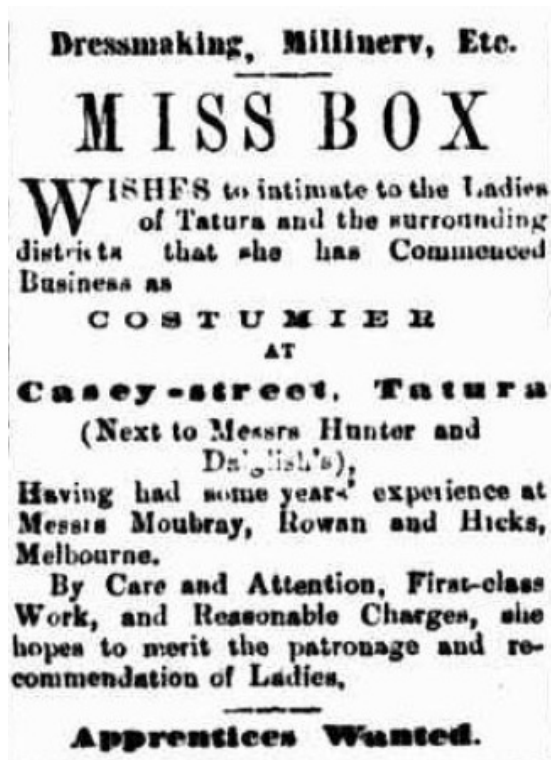
Right: Edith Martha Charlotte Martin (nee Box) Eliza's youngest daughter. Source: Robyn Ann Martin

Consequently, there were many grandchildren arriving: Sarah and Joseph, after losing their first baby Leslie Harold in 1884, had son Stanley Vivian in 1886 and daughter Gladys Irene in 1887. Another baby son Vincent Dudley died in 1888. Sidney and Clara had a daughter Clara Emily Eliza in 1887, Ivy Ruby in 1890 and Percy Sidney in 1893; The Nuttings produced 8 children between 1885 and 1901 (the eldest two dying

in 1890); and Ernest and Frances gave birth to Marie Frances in 1891, Edith Emmeline in 1893, Leonard Ernest in 1897 and Alice Lillian in 1904. On the birth registrations of Ernest's daughters Marie and Edith, the 'nurse by whom certified' is Mrs E Box. Perhaps Eliza acted as a midwife for these births.

Adventurous and enterprising daughters: Amy and Rosina

The Victorian railway lines had been extending from Melbourne to various parts of the state over the 1860s and '70s which improved communications for gold mining, agriculture and other businesses. But this also meant it was now easier for independent women to move from Melbourne to new centres of opportunity. The rail link to Tatura near Shepparton, (183 kms from Melbourne) was completed in 1880 and by 1891 Amy Box had moved there. She set up her own business as a 'costumier' in Casey Street. According to her advertisements¹⁵ she had been employed at *Moubray, Rowan and Hicks* in Melbourne, a reputable firm of drapers and outfitters. She had also worked in Sale in Gippsland (over 200 kms from Melbourne) for *N. McEntyre and Co*. In 1889 she was featured in their advertisement as 'taking a leading part' as a dressmaker at *Moubray, Rowan and Hicks*.



Left: Advertisement from the *Kyabram Union* April 17th 1891 for Amy Box's business. Below: Hunter & Dalglish merchants (now gone) was next door to Amy's costumier business. Source: Tatura Museum



Whilst in Tatura Amy met farmer Alfred William Fletcher House and they married in 1893 at St. Matthew's in Prahran. By the early 1900s the couple had moved permanently to Melbourne where Amy gave birth to two daughters - Ermyn Vida Sophia and Hazel Phyllis Mildred. It seems Amy was a believer in alternative medicines as she was a patient at the Homeopathic Hospital in South Melbourne. She died there in 1915. Cause of death was intestinal cancer for which she was given an 'operation for intestinal obstruction'¹⁶. She was 51 years old and is buried in the Brighton General Cemetery. Her death notice¹⁷ reads, 'a patient sufferer at rest'.

Women's suffrage petitioner

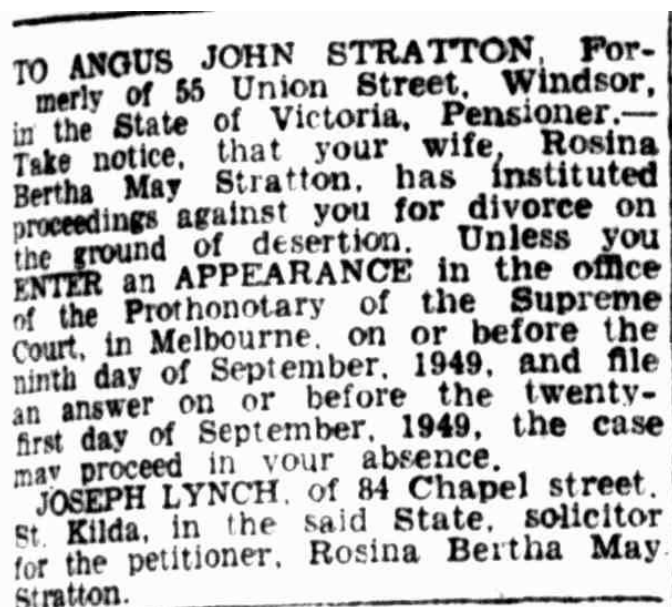
Like her sister, Rosina was also a dressmaker. The rail connection to Mansfield (about 200 kms from Melbourne in the foothills of the Victorian Alps) was completed in 1891 and Rosina was there at this time. She conducted her dressmaking business in High Street in the old *Courier* newspaper office (demolished in 1958 and now is a laneway off High Street). Whilst living here she was a signatory to the Women's Suffrage Petition¹⁸ calling for women's rights to vote:

Rosina Box, one of 30,000 signatories to the 260-metre long 'Women's Petition' of 1891 seeking women's right to vote. Source: Parliament of Victoria



Married three times

Rosina eventually returned to Melbourne and was to marry three times: firstly to a storeman and divorcee John Rainy Jouneau Creighton in 1898. They had two children, Frederick Baden and Bertha Alice. John died in 1908 at the Yarra Bend Lunatic Asylum. Then in 1916 Rosina married widower Charles Hall, a contractor. He died in 1937. In 1941 at the age of 75 (although she put 66 on the marriage certificate) Rosina married Angus John Stratton, also twice a widower. But this marriage was doomed, and on August 12th 1949, this appeared in *The Argus*:



TO ANGUS JOHN STRATTON, Formerly of 55 Union Street, Windsor, in the State of Victoria, Pensioner.— Take notice, that your wife, Rosina Bertha May Stratton, has instituted proceedings against you for divorce on the ground of desertion. Unless you ENTER an APPEARANCE in the office of the Prothonotary of the Supreme Court, in Melbourne, on or before the ninth day of September, 1949, and file an answer on or before the twenty-first day of September, 1949, the case may proceed in your absence. JOSEPH LYNCH, of 84 Chapel street, St. Kilda, in the said State, solicitor for the petitioner, Rosina Bertha May Stratton.

I don't know if Angus appeared or not.

After an eventful life, Rosina died at the age of 95 and was cremated at the Springvale Crematorium.

The 'deserving poor'

The *Old Colonists' Association* was set up as a charitable institution to provide for the first immigrants who did not have the advantage of support in their old age from extended family groups as they would have back in the old country. Their aim was to provide for 'the deserving poor' (as opposed to the undeserving poor?). In 1869 land was acquired in North Fitzroy to build an aged care facility in the form of a village. The buildings were financed by private benefactors and each had a cottage dedicated in their name. One of the donors was Canon Perks, the Anglican minister who had married John and Eliza in 1859. The village now consists of 142 cottages designed in a range of architectural styles and surrounded by English style gardens. The estate is classified by the National Trust, as it has important heritage value.



A street at the *Old Colonists' Homes*, Rushall Park, North Fitzroy c1910
Here John Box died in 1912. Source: Old Colonists' Association Victoria

Golden Wedding

In October 1906 John and Eliza Box left South Yarra to live at the *Old Colonists' Homes*, Rushall Crescent, North Fitzroy. In September 1909 the couple celebrated their 50th Wedding Anniversary there. Author Frances O'Neill writes in her study of the *Old Colonists' Homes*¹⁹:

'The golden wedding of one of the married couples resident in the Homes provided an excuse for a celebration in September 1909, when Mrs Wijnbladh provided an entertainment and afternoon tea for the descendants and relatives of Mr and Mrs John Box as well as the residents of the Homes. The hall was decorated with "golden drapery, flowers and wheat ears" and "an excellent program of song, music etc., including a piano and violin duet by lady visitors was very highly appreciated."²⁰ (I wonder if Eliza played or sang at her anniversary, a dubious celebration considering their marriage history.)

In March that year son Sidney, aged 47, died from stomach cancer at the Austin Hospital, Heidelberg. He was buried with his brother Edwin at the Melbourne Cemetery.

Granddaughter Alice 'Lilsie' Smith remembered being taken to the *Old Colonist's Homes* to see her grandparents when she was a little girl. She was introduced to John as 'Ern's youngest' but she does not recall her grandfather being at all interested. This may have been due to the fact that John suffered senile decay in the last three years of his life and was probably incapable of showing any interest in her. She was only 8 years old when he died and remembers him only as a stern man.

On November 14th 1912 John Skinner Box died at the *Old Colonists' Homes*. He was 83 and the cause of death was given as senile decay. He is buried at the Melbourne Cemetery with his sons Sidney and Edwin.



Eliza and John Box.
Taken at Yeoman's
Studios 287 Chapel
Street Prahran between
1895 and 1900. Source:
Louise Smith

Eliza leaves North Fitzroy

After her husband's death, Eliza left the *Old Colonists' Homes* to live at 21 William Street Balaclava. On May 21st 1913 her son Ernest, died from cancer in the Alfred Hospital. Further tragedy befell her when in 1915 her daughters Amy and Edith both died from cancer within 6 months of each other. The electoral rolls show that by 1924 Eliza had moved to 34 Northcote Avenue Caulfield to live with her eldest daughter Alice Nutting and family.

A tough life

Eliza was a very religious person and would give her granddaughter Lilsie religious texts as birthday presents. Lilsie was not very enthusiastic about this, but every year it was the same gift that came out of Grandma Box's big black bag. After all of her trials, she seems to have staunchly held on to her faith.

She had a lot to contend with in her life. At 8 years old her mother died and her father experienced fluctuating fortunes. As a young teenager she had accompanied her talented and popular little sister around the concert halls of Britain, singing and playing piano. At 22 she took the brave step of leaving home with her sister to venture to Australia. Once married, she had 7 children within 12 years, one toddler dying from 'wasting away'. She not only lost all her possessions due to her husband's insolvency, but after he deserted, and left her in desperate circumstances, she had three children taken away and put into 'care'. She probably accepted her husband back because she would have had few other options for survival, but John doesn't sound easy to live with!

Eliza Chidlaw Box died on June 11th 1926 at Waverley Road East Malvern, possibly a private hospital as her usual address was still Northcote Avenue. The cause of death was given as progressive senility. She was aged 90 and outlived all but two of her seven children. She was buried at Brighton Cemetery in the grave of her daughter Amy House.



Left: Eliza Chidlaw Box with her daughter Alice Nutting at the Nuttings home *Chidlaw*. 1916
Source: Sue Creighton. Below: The grave of Eliza Chidlaw Box, her daughter Amy House and son-in-law Alfred House. Brighton Cemetery. Photo: Ann Hurley 2008



Ann Hurley

2020

See my story **Crafts and Trades** for more about their son Ernest George Henry Box
See my story '**The Musical Wonder**' for more about Eliza's sister Sarah Maria James.

hurleyskidmorehistory.com.au

Notes:

¹ *The Argus* March 3 1853

² *The Argus* August 13 1853

³ *The Argus* November 22 1853

⁴ *The Argus* November 9 1855

⁵ *The Argus* November 28 1863

⁶ *The Argus* August 4 1863

⁷ Victoria, Australia, Index to the Children's Registers of State Wards, 1850 -1893 (Ancestry.com)

⁸ The Society for the Educated Poor was a charitable institution set up to provide loans to applicants deemed to be in dire need, and also act as a kind of employment agency recommending applicants who were seeking work, to employers.

⁹ Public Record Office of Victoria: Agency VA 1467 Children's Welfare Department (previously Department for Neglected Children), Chief Secretary's Department 1887 - 1961

¹⁰ *The Argus* June 4 1870

¹¹ *The Argus* June 4 1870

¹² Advertisements in *The Argus* between September and December 1876

¹³ Advertisement in *The Argus* between April and October 1877 and one in *The Age* November 16 1877

¹⁴ Prahran Historical and Arts Society Archives Vic.

¹⁵ *Kyabram Union* April 10 and 17 1891; and January 29 1892

¹⁶ Victorian death certificate for Amy House, September 24 1915

¹⁷ *The Argus* September 25 1915

¹⁸ <https://prov.vic.gov.au/about-us/our-blog/1891-womens-suffrage-petition>

¹⁹ O'Neill - *A Place of Their Own, The Old Colonists' Homes in Victoria* (2005) p75

²⁰ *The Observer* (Fitzroy) September 28 1909

Other resources:

Australian Electoral Rolls 1903-1954 (Ancestry.com)

Brighton Cemetery Vic.

Birth Death and Marriage certificates - General Register Office England

Creighton, Sue - Box descendant

England and Wales Census Records (Ancestry.com)

High Street Traders of Mansfield 1854-2000 Mansfield Historical Society (2004)

O'Neill, Frances *A Place of their Own, The Old Colonists' Homes in Victoria* (2005)

O'Neill, Frances *Picturesque Charity: The Old Colonists' Homes, North Fitzroy* (1991)

Powell, Janice - NSW., Box descendant

PROV Immigration lists and shipping

Richmond and Burnley Historical Society Vic.

Richmond and South Yarra rate books Vic.

Smith, Alice Lilian (1904-2001) family member

St. Stephen's Anglican Church Richmond Vic.

Trove (National Library of Australia)

Victorian Birth, Death and Marriage certificates