Nicholas Chevalier, 1828-1902
Australia’s first Impressionist

Paintings, Sketches, Etchings, Wood-cut engravings & Lithographs

The Roy Morgan collection covers Nicholas Chevalier’s artistic life beginning in Europe in 1848 including his time in Australia and New Zealand between 1854 and 1869 and finishing in 1871 when he arrived back in London.

Nicholas Chevalier’s skills were far reaching – an artist, engraver and musician. The Exhibition clearly showcases Nicholas Chevalier’s artistic and creative abilities.

Exploring the many facets of the life of Australia’s first Impressionist - Nicholas Chevalier - from his early life in Bavaria and Austria portrayed in his 1848 sketchbook of people and landscapes followed by his six years in Melbourne producing weekly creative political and social satire sketches seen in Melbourne Punch (from August 1855); and painting important Melbourne scenes, Victorian country landscapes and portraits for The News Letter of Australasia, The Illustrated Journal of Australasia, and other Melbourne periodicals.

Well before the term ‘Impressionists’ was used Nicholas Chevalier was sketching and painting his artistic impressions of landscapes and people. His impressionist style portrayed landscapes of great beauty – far more beautiful than they were in reality, while Nicholas Chevalier’s artistic impression of people was to show the extremes of character and emotion.

Like Alfred Hitchcock 100 years later, he would appear in some of his sketches and paintings, see his 1848 sketchbook (recto 21) & New Zealand Tour 1865-1866 paintings; and his artistic impressions of people portrayed their characters to a greater extent than their looks – indeed this is most clearly seen in the character portraits and creative political & social satire sketches – using Shakespeare and Dickens characters, 25 years before Dickens characters influenced van Gough’s artistic career.

James Smith, The Illustrated Journal of Australasia, Jan 1857 anointed Nicholas Chevalier as Australia’s first impressionist – years before French Impressionists (mid-1870’s) and Australian Impressionists (1890’s) emerged when he wrote:

“M. Chevalier, is evidently a devout believer in ‘treatment.’ His admirable pictures are highly wrought, and the subjects are lifted beyond the level of the commonplace. Exactness of form is observed to far higher degree than will be found in nature. Even while we admire them we feel that there is a somewhat of sophistication; a something added and a something discarded by the artist, a certain deviation from nature for the sake of art.”

James Smith, The Illustrated Journal of Australasia, Jan 1858 covered the first exhibition of pictures collected by the Fine Arts Association, held in the William St Exhibition Building and wrote:

“The collection comprised many works that would have taken a good position in the galleries of older countries. The works of Messrs. Guerard, Chevalier, and Strutt, deserve especial mention. M. Guerard has succeeded to admiration in portraying the peculiar features of Australian Scenery. His style is very peculiar; it is minute to a degree in detail, ...Mr. Chevalier, hitherto chiefly known as an artist in water colors, and as a clever caricaturist, exhibits, for the first time, paintings in oil, which manifest considerable skill and taste, as well in drawings in coloring.... And he is a painter. Despite the fact that his principal picture is unfinished (indeed a small portion, only, of it has received the final touches), the “Pilgrims halting at Tivoli” is one of the gems of the gallery. A few of the many figures are perhaps rather stiff, but there is a living spirit in most of them, and a delicious harmony of tone pervades the whole picture, while the drawing and coloring evince the hand of a master. The only other pictures he exhibits are an exquisite portrait of Raffaelle, after the well know engraving, and a little sketch in oil of “St. Kilda Beach on a Sunday morning”.”
1. Nicholas Chevalier’s Bavarian sketchbook, 1848

Nicholas Chevalier’s first sketchbook includes many pencil and watercolour drawings made by him during the summer months of 1848 when visiting Bavaria and Austria and at the same time studying architecture at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich.

It is a significant relic from the early career of one of Victoria’s colonial artist (arrived in Melbourne, Christmas Eve 1854), illustrating the extent of his artistic development at around twenty years of age, while still a student. Nicholas Chevalier’s sketchbook, 190 x 220 mm, is on original plain papered boards (heavily worn) with cloth spine (now rebound in half kangaroo leather, using the original boards), pastedown with label of stationer Andreas Kaut, München.

The sketchbook leaves include watercolour and graphite sketches and studies by Nicholas Chevalier on the rectos and versos, a number of them signed (or initialled) and dated. The subject matter is evenly divided between landscape studies made during a Wanderung through southern Bavaria and into the Austrian Tyrol, and detailed studies of ecclesiastical and secular architecture elements (stonework and wood carvings); there are also a small number of studies with human figures including himself asleep (21 recto).


Graphite. Study of a wooden fence. Unsigned and undated. [4 verso]


Graphite. Six studies of figural stone columns on a church in Untermenzing, Munich. Artist’s caption: *Unter-Mendsing*. Unsigned, dated 23 July 1848. [7 recto]
Graphite. Five studies of stone capitals on a secular building in Altenstadt, Bavaria. Artist’s caption: Altenstadt. Unsigned and undated. [8 recto]


Graphite and watercolour studies of decorative wood carving in a church interior, plus a study of a pair of shoes. Untitled, unsigned and undated. (13 recto)

Graphite and watercolour studies of church wood carvings; large graphite sketch of the Walchensee (75 km south of Munich), titled and dated 12.6.48. [14 verso]

Large watercolour study of a fountain in the form of a swan. Artist’s caption is difficult to decipher. [15 verso]

Large graphite sketch of the Walchensee. Titled and dated 18.6.48. [16 recto]

Graphite sketch of a girl leaning on a balustrade. Titled in French ‘Rose agée de 4 ans à Milch....’, undated. Initialled by the artist lower right. (19 recto)

Graphite and watercolour sketch of a country residence, titles French ‘maison à Berque (local Starnberg)’. Signed ‘N. Chevalier’ lower right. (20 recto)
Graphite sketch of man asleep in garden. Titled ‘I’m plafonda P... Pistorino’. Dated 18.8.48 Signed ‘N. Chevalier’ lower right. (21 recto-half leaf only)

Graphite and watercolour studies of figural wood carvings. Untitled, unsigned and undated. [26 verso]

Finely detailed graphite study of a figural scene on a church architrave. Titled in French ‘Basrelief au portal d’église à Starnberg’, dated 18.6.48 at 11 o’clock. (34 recto)

Watercolour study of a wood carving (from a church pew?) Titled ‘Partenkirchen’. Undated. [23 verso]

Large watercolour study of a stand of trees, done in the late afternoon light. Dated 18.6.48 (4 o’clock). Artist’s caption is difficult to decipher. [32 recto]

Large graphite sketch of two men performing a Bavarian folk dance in a tavern at Partenkirchen. Titled, dated 18.6.48 and initialed by the artist lower right. (24 recto)

Finely detailed graphite and watercolour study of a Corinthian stone capital. Artist’s caption is difficult to decipher. (33 recto)

Large graphite sketch of a group of men and women seated at a Stammtisch in Passing (Bavaria). Titled and dated 18.7.48 at midnight, initialed by the artist lower right. (36 recto)

Small graphite studies of architectural elements. Artist’s captions (indistinct), unsigned and undated. (37 verso)
2. *Melbourne 1840*, Oil on canvas by C. H.
(Nicholas Chevalier/George Haydon), c.1856

Painted from *Melbourne in 1840* lithograph printed by George Arden (joint publisher, Port Phillip Gazette) from a drawing by R. G. (George) Haydon *Melbourne in 1840*. Author/Artist George H. Haydon (1822-1891) arrived in Melbourne in July 1840 and departed for London in January 1845, see two lithographs below. Artist *Georgiana McCrae* arrived in Port Phillip March 1, 1941 and became a friend of *George Arden*.

In July 1841 the *Port Phillip Gazette* promotion advertisement advised “*A number of Lithographic engravings of View of Melbourne are in the course of preparation...*”.

Georgiana McCrae’s September 8, 1843 note, *Georgiana’s Journal*, page 38, supports this: “...*took the boys to see Mr George Arden’s dromedaries...*”. *George Arden* left Melbourne late 1843, returning in 1846. (Details; *A Sketch of Port Phillip* by George Arden, Garravembi Press, 1991, introduction Thomas A. Darragh, page 8.) A copy of the lithograph *Melbourne in 1840* was published in 1934, *Georgiana’s Journal, Melbourne a hundred years ago*, edited by Hugh McCrae, Angus & Robertson Ltd., page 243 - see below.
Nicholas Chevalier arrived in Melbourne on Dec. 25, 1854 and initially visited his brother Louis Chevalier at his father’s sawmill near Beechworth, before leaving for the goldfields. On March 5, 1857 Nicholas Chevalier married Caroline Chevalier (née Wilkie; 1836 –1917). They both began a close friendship with Georgiana McCrae leaving Melbourne Nov. 1868 as part of Prince Alfred’s extensive Royal Tour. They arrived back in London in mid-1871, and continued extensive correspondence with Georgiana McCrae and others in Australia and New Zealand.

In c.1856 Nicholas Chevalier used the lithograph of George H. Haydon’s drawing Melbourne in 1840 to paint Melbourne 1840; which was used for the c.1875 Melbourne in 1840 lithograph engraving attributed to Nicholas Chevalier.
3 The Illustrated Journal of Australasia (1857-1858) – wood-cut engravings - sketched by Nicholas Chevalier, engraved by Nicholas Chevalier, Samuel Calvert and Frederick Grosse

Nicholas Chevalier was good friends with Eugene von Guérard; below is a wood-cut engraving by Nicholas Chevalier of Eugene von Guérard’s sketch “Mt William from Mt Dryden”, The Illustrated Journal of Australasia printed and published by William Williams, January 1858.

Eugene von Guérard "Mt William from Mt Dryden" sketch, 7 Juny, 1856. The Artist as Traveller, Page 180.


Nicholas Chevalier began working for Melbourne Punch from its second issue published on August 9, 1855; his last 5 sketches were published in February 1861.

Nicholas Chevalier arrived in Melbourne on Dec. 25, 1854 and immediately went to his father’s sawmill in Beechworth. At the same time his brother Louis was working at the Beechworth sawmill (and also ‘trying’ grape growing on the nearby Joseph Docker property near Wangaratta). After about two months Nicholas Chevalier had left the area and was in the Sandhurst (Bendigo) goldfields.

In mid-1855 Nicholas Chevalier returned to Melbourne from the goldfields intending to return to London however he was offered a job at Melbourne Punch and decided to stay. (In 1851, Nicholas Chevalier moved to London and studied lithography under Ludwig Gruner, he made many contacts including those at London Punch.)

In Melbourne Nicholas Chevalier initially lived in the house of his brother Louis at the city end of Victoria Parade, East Melbourne. In 1859 they had moved to live at 9 Royal Terrace, Nicholson St, Collingwood, while by 1864 Nicholas Chevalier’s address was listed as 53 Spring St.

“Nicholas Chevalier ... the son of a Swiss steward on a Russian prince’s estate. Well-educated, accomplished in several arts, cosmopolitan, a linguist and social lion, he was the product of the art schools of Munich and London. From 1855 to 1861 he was cartoonist for Melbourne Punch, when (‘believing the ship was sinking’ said James Smith rather acidly in his reminiscences) he left to join the Illustrated Australian News as landscape artist.” (Marguerite Mahood, Melbourne Punch and its Early Artists, La Trobe Journal, No 4, October 1969.)

“Chevalier’s talent for seizing the essential characteristics of a face can be seen by comparing his cartoons with the surviving photographs of his subjects. In a few lines he could develop and repeat a likeness — which makes his pictorial history easy to follow.” (Marguerite Mahood, Melbourne Punch and its Early Artists, La Trobe Journal, No. 4, Oct 1969.)

Punch’s Contribution to the Nightingale Testimonial, Nicholas Chevalier, Melbourne Punch, No. 2, July 24, 1856.

(Now on display at Her Place Women’s Museum Australia, 208 Clarendon St. East Melbourne. For further details visit: www.herplacemuseum.com.)
Below are 11 wood-cut engravings (published in *Melbourne Punch Vol. 1 & Vol. 2*) from sketches by Nicholas Chevalier – some of the wood-cut engravings were by him, others by (or with) Frederick Grosse. Many drawings of Nicholas Chevalier’s early sketches in *Melbourne Punch, The Illustrated Journal of Australasia, The News Letter of Australasia*, and others were also engraved by Samuel Calvert - they worked together as a team.

MR. PUNCH PAYS A VISIT TO THE DIGGINGS

THE “GOVERNMENT STROKE.”

RESPECTABLE MATES:

FRESCOES FOR THE NEW HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT, NO. IV.
THE FIRST PROOF OF THE FIRST JOURNAL.

THE FAIR PRINCESS---PUBLIC OPINION---
INTERCEDING WITH KING KERR FOR THE BURGESSES OF EMERALD HILL.

Earthquakes at Geelong
An allegory of the growing importance of the labour force, at a time when the Victorian population had tripled and industrial activity was diversifying, is seen in The Coming Man (see p. 71) of 13 May 1858, which shows a simple, rugged but heroic figure rolling up his sleeves as he gazes towards the rising sun that lights the empty landscape. The working man’s vote, after manhood suffrage in 1857, and his energy were expected to be happily cooperative in the development of the colony; he had not yet become the ogre ‘King Working Man’ of the late ‘eighties.” (Marguerite Mahood, Melbourne Punch and its Early Artists, La Trobe Journal, No 4, October 1969.)
6. Nicholas Chevalier - Views of Melbourne

*Melbourne from St Kilda Road* c.1865 & *Melbourne from the Yarra* c.1868

*Melbourne from St Kilda Road*, watercolour by Nicholas Chevalier, c.1865. Painting used for lithograph engraving by J C Armytage c.1873, published in *Australia* by Edward Carton Booth, 1873-1876.

*Melbourne from the St Kilda Road, c 1873*

J C Armytage lithograph engraving from the above Nicholas Chevalier, original watercolour, c.1865.
Melbourne from the Yarra, watercolour by Nicholas Chevalier
Painting used for lithograph engraving by E. Brandard c.1873,
published in Australia by Edward Carton Booth, 1873-1876.

Melbourne from the Yarra, across East Melbourne, c.1873
E. Brandard lithograph engraving from the above Nicholas Chevalier,
original watercolour, c.1868.
On January 13, 1864, Nicholas Chevalier was in Gipps Land with Von Neumayer. Von Neumayer wrote: ‘... suddenly came in sight of old man in a very wretched condition, leading a half starved horse and winding his way through the bush. From him learned Wentworth Diggings quite abandoned, with only two men remaining in some gully...everywhere traces of gold diggings. Place completely worked out and very wretched looking.’ (Australian Odyssey, Page 110, Simon Gregg, 2011)

Nicholas Chevalier’s view of the abandoned but picturesque diggings was reproduced in no fewer than three lithographs, printed for The Melbourne Album (1864) [No. 194], The Artistic Melbourne Advertiser (1865) [No. 213], and Australian Views and Victorian Scenery (1867) [No. 218], and also reappeared as a more finished studio work in 1868 [No. 152], Australian Odyssey, Simon Gregg, 2011, extract from Pages 135-136 follows:

“While he (Nicholas Chevalier) was not the first to practice chromolithography in Australia, he was almost certainly the first to employ the process for ‘high art’ ends, with a number of prints conveying very successfully the pictorial depth and perspective of the original paintings.... The publication of N. Chevalier’s Album of Chromolithographs was a great success, and led to Eugene Von Guerard publishing his own album of Australian Landscapes the following year....While Chevalier cannot be credited for the introduction of chromolithography to Australia, as the first artist to issue a complete album entirely of his own views, he undoubtedly played a large part in its popularity. Aside from his own album of 1865, Chevalier contributed to a number of other albums, including Charles Troedel’s The Melbourne Album (1864), The Artistic Melbourne Advertiser (1865), Australian Views and Victorian Scenery (1867), and Edwin Carton Booth’s two volume opus Australia Illustrated (1873) (See Point 10, below), in which sixteen of Chevalier’s works were reproduced as steel engravings.”
8. Nicholas Chevalier’s first New Zealand Tour, 1865-1866

On Nov 22, 1865, Nicholas Chevalier with his assistant artist Ebenezer Wake Cook began an extensive tour of New Zealand’s South Island, beginning in Dunedin & covering Queenstown, Manapouri, Te Anau & Bluff.

Nicholas Chevalier, On the track to Lake Ada, Fjordland Sound, with view of Mt Eda, New Zealand, Dec. 1865 - oil, 54.5 x 34.5cm. The oil painting has not been on public display.

Nicholas Chevalier, On the ‘lower’ track to Lake Ada, Fjordland Sound, New Zealand, sketched Dec. 1865 - watercolour painted on pencil (1868), gouache, gum on paper, 24.4 x 35.1cm.

The Art Gallery of New South Wales holds On the ‘lower’ track to Lake Ada, Fjordland Sound. Unfortunately it is wrongly named Ovens River, Victoria, with watercolour date 1868.

PROVENANCE: Gift of Edward Levy Montefiore, Paris, to Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1901 as Landscape (New Zealand). (Above right shows the engraving of Nicholas Chevalier’s Ovens River published 1873 in Edwin Carton Booth’s Australia Illustrated.)
Nicholas Chevalier 1868-1870 tour with Prince Alfred (The Duke of Edinbergh) in the ‘HMS Galatea’

Prince Alfred’s Nov. 1868-1870 tour covered New Zealand, the Pacific Islands, Hawaii, Japan, China, Manila, Singapore, India and Penang (in present day Malaysia) where at each place Nicholas Chevalier painted the local sites.

In April 1870 Nicholas Chevalier departed the tour in Ceylon and to arrive in the UK via ‘Suez’ by mid-1871.

The Galatea Waltz and lithograph The overland route via Suez, c.1871 from sketch by Nicholas Chevalier made after his extensive tour in the ‘HMS Galatea’ with Prince Alfred (The Duke of Edinbergh).

Both Nicholas Chevalier sketches made in 1871 on his overland route to England via Suez as he and his wife returned to London.

The first sketch is not far from Point de Galle, called Wak-waller, where travellers made the visit in carriages, and the natives congregated to exchange flowers of the season for back-sheesh.

The second sketch shows Bitter Lake and the Freshwater Canal. The Illustrated Australian News, Melbourne, c.1876.
10. Nicholas Chevalier in London, 1871-1902

From mid-1871, Nicholas Chevalier started on a series of Australian watercolours that would become the basis of sixteen steel engravings included in Edwin Carton Booth’s *Australia Illustrated*, published in 1873 - below are some examples from the Roy Morgan collection.

Lake Colac, Victoria

Morse Creek, Victoria

Mount Zero and Lake Taylor, Victoria

Sandridge, Victoria

The Basin Bank, Victoria

Victoria Valley & Mount Caroline
Return of Burke & Wills to Coopers Creek

Mallee Scrub, River Murray

The old and new home stations - Bontharambo

See The Docker family’s grand brick mansion, Bontharambo, built in the Italianate style, page 34, Gary Morgan’s Women, the Media, and People from Other Countries who have made Victoria 1851 to today.
11. Other Nicholas Chevalier paintings and sketches - published from 1871 in the UK, Australia, and New Zealand

From 1871 lithographs of numerous Nicholas Chevalier paintings and sketches were published in the UK, Australia, and New Zealand. In addition Nicholas Chevalier received numerous commissions which resulted in him again painting some of his earlier Australian scenes; see *Australian Odyssey*, Simon Gregg, 2011.

*Christmas Day in Australia* by Nicholas Chevalier (similar to other of his etchings of the Yarra River), *The Illustrated London News*, Dec. 23, 1871.

*The Eagles Nest, Mount Richmond, New Zealand* from the picture by Mr N. Chevalier, The Australian Sketcher, January 20, 1877.
References:


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