Captain Sweet's Colonial Imagination:
The Ideals of Modernity in South Australian Views Photography 1866 - 1886

Karen Magee

Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Art History
School of History and Politics
University of Adelaide
October 2014
DECLARATION

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

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SIGNED:______________________________________   DATE: ______________
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Correction to image acknowledgements for images reproduced in the PhD thesis Captain Sweet’s colonial imagination: the ideals of modernity in south Australian views photography 1866 - 1886.

I would like to acknowledge that all images in the collection of the State Library of South Australia are reproduced with their kind permission.

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ABSTRACT

Captain Samuel Sweet worked as an outdoor photographer in South Australia (including the
Northern Territory) between 1866 and 1886. In Australian public libraries, museums and archives
his photographs are consulted as objective visual documents. Their more recent appearance in
public art galleries ascribes to them the status of art, obscuring the fact that Sweet was a commercial
photographer whose subjects and style were directed by the colonial market.

This thesis documents the extent and nature of Sweet’s oeuvre, and examines his photographs
within the original context of their creation, including Sweet’s photography business, photographic
practices, the photography market, the man himself and the colonial context in which (and for which)
his photographs were created. It analyses his photographs as both images and as material objects,
utilising scientific testing.

It argues that, as a commercial photographer, an Englishman and a colonist participating in the
creation of a new world, Sweet did not photograph colonial South Australia, but rather the ideal that
was being sought in its creation. It identifies Sweet’s as the largest visual record of the South
Australian colonial process and boom-time, and pinpoints the pitfalls awaiting researchers and
viewers who mistake his photographs as simple objective documents or aesthetic objects. It argues
that if we are to make better use of Sweet’s photographs today – as art objects or research sources
– we must first understand them within the full context of their creation.

It concludes that Sweet’s photographs mapped an ideal of modernity, rather than reality, onto
photographic paper, and that when his work is approached from this perspective, we not only
achieve a deeper insight into his work, but also into the world he was picturing.
I would like to thank my Principal Supervisor, Associate Professor Robert Foster and Co-Supervisor, Mark Kimber for their guidance, and Associate Professor Cathy Speck for providing me with a solid art historical basis from which to commence this project.

Gael Newton, Senior Curator at the National Gallery of Australia gave valuable mentorship and encouragement. I am also indebted to Gael and to Andrea Wise and James Ward at the NGA Conservation Department for enabling this to be the first doctoral project of its kind to utilise scientific testing of photographs, and for educating me on the material analysis and conservation of albumen silver photographs.

At the Art Gallery of South Australia, Julie Robinson and Jane Messenger introduced me to Captain Sweet and taught me the value of diligent research and careful cataloguing. I have them to thank for setting me on this path. This project would also have been impossible without the assistance of the State Library of South Australia, especially Beth Robertson, Margaret Southcott and Sue Ward for allowing me extended access to Sweet's work; Linda Czechyra and the digitisation team for providing images and permissions; and Jenny Scott, Anthony Laube and the staff of the SLSA Somerville Reading Room for their assistance, encouragement and support. I am also grateful to the staff of the NLA Pictures and Manuscripts Reading Room for allowing me access to Sweet's albums and photographs on my visits to Canberra.

Associate Adjunct Professor Jack Cross (University of South Australia) generously shared his research and early manuscripts for Great Central State: The foundation of the Northern Territory and was enormously helpful with my research on Sweet's time in the Northern Territory. I would also like to thank Derek Walker of Raukkan Community Council, Dr Mary-Anne Gale and the Ngarrindjeri elders who helped to identify the locations and people in Sweet's Point McLeay Aboriginal Mission Station photographs. Tim Smith helped to clarify who photographed what in the Northern Territory, between 1869 and 1875, and kindly provided an early draft chapter from his thesis. Jane Lydon has been kind enough to share a draft manuscript of her forthcoming article on 1850s portraits of Aboriginal residents at Poonindie Mission Station.
I am also grateful to Ellie Young, Mike Ware and Gold Street Studios for teaching me how to make contact prints in sunlight, and to Stephen Becket and Alex Bishop-Thorpe for their expertise on nineteenth century photographic processes, as well as feedback on an early draft of ‘Sweet’s Photography Business’. My deepest thanks also to Sweet’s great great grandchildren Christopher and Susan Robertson and to Christopher’s wife Jennifer for their hospitality, encouragement and for sharing their family’s history and photographs with me.

Early photography experts Ron Blum and Marcel Saffier have kindly given me their time and expertise, and allowed me to see works in their collections. Marcel’s assistance with Brisbane-based research is deeply appreciated as is his encouragement and valuable advice. I am grateful to Ross Fargher, of the Prairie Hotel at Parachilna, who helped to identify some of the locations of Sweet’s Great Northern Railway photographs and to the late Keith Nicholls who drove me to sites of the photographs which I could never have discovered alone. Keith gave me a much deeper insight into colonial life in the Far North. His friendship, although sadly brief, was one of many personal riches that resulted from this project.

Most especially, I am indebted to Lauren Tomczak for entering data into the Captain Sweet Database, audio typing transcripts of primary documents, and for her unfailing support and encouragement. My deepest thanks goes to my partner Simone Tippett who helped with formatting images and text, and who sustained me and the thesis with patience, encouragement and an income.
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ABBREVIATIONS

Collections
AGNSW  Art Gallery of New South Wales
AGSA  Art Gallery of South Australia
NGA  National Gallery of Australia
NGV  National Gallery of Victoria
NLA  National Library of Australia
NPG  National Portrait Gallery
NTLIS  Northern Territory Library and Information Service
Pitt Rivers  Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford
SAM  South Australian Museum
SAMM  South Australian Maritime Museum
SLNSW  State Library of New South Wales
SLSA  State Library of South Australia
SLT  State Library of Tasmania
SLV  State Library of Victoria

Newspapers & Periodicals
Adelaide Observer
Brisbane Courier
Clare (SA)  Northern Argus
Gawler (SA)  Bunyip
Frearson's Monthly Illustrated Adelaide News (Illustrated Adelaide News before 1880)
Frearson's Weekly Illustrated (est. 1878. Subsumed by Frearson's Monthly Illustrated Adelaide News from 1884)
Kadina Herald
Hobart Mercury
Melbourne Argus
Northern Territory Times and Gazette
Port Augusta Dispatch
South Australian Advertiser
South Australian Register
South Australian Gazette and Colonial Register
South Australian Government Gazette
South Australian Weekly Chronicle
Southern Argus
Sydney Morning Herald (SMH)
Wallaroo Times
## Archives

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<td>ACCA</td>
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<td>C5</td>
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<tr>
<td>S34</td>
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<td>C15</td>
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<td>Letterbooks</td>
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<tr>
<td>S55</td>
<td>Citizens’ Rolls</td>
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<td>NAA</td>
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<td>SA Government Public Service Review</td>
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## Publications

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<tr>
<td>Boothby's</td>
<td>Josiah Boothby, <em>The Adelaide almanac and directory for South Australia</em>, also known as Boothby's directory 1872-1878, Boothby's South Australian directory 1879-1883, printed and published by J. Williams, Stationer, 1872-1883, later titled Sands &amp; McDougall's South Australian directory.</td>
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