

Working Children:  
A social history of children's work  
in New South Wales, 1860-1916.

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## SUMMARY

In the 1860s work performed by children was reflected the wider labour market. Children undertook paid employment in formal situations and work of a more casual nature on city streets. They also performed unpaid work at households and farmsites. Children working at the homesite contributed to home based production and service, and also, through domestic duties, to the daily reproduction of labour. Children's participation in the workforce was significant in the three main sectors of the economy. Small-scale farming, most commonly on selections, made significant use of children's labour. Selection, and its appropriation of children's labour power, continued throughout the entire period. The colony's infant industrialisation utilised cheap, child labour in its development from craft-based to more intensive, larger-scale industry. Children's labour power was usually of financial import to their households and usually allocated with regard to age and gender. In times of intensive demand or financial difficulty, the need for children's labour could lessen gender strictures. Demand for children's labour power was, at times, in conflict with the expanding liberal state, which was extending its training and supervision of future citizens through primary education. Mass education was generally accepted, although many families used schools on a casual basis so that children could alternate work and schoolwork. The 1880 Public Instruction Act pragmatically reflected common practice by making some schooling compulsory.

By 1916 patterns of children's work participation which held for much of the twentieth century were set. Children were virtually excluded, through attitudinal and legislative change, from the paid main-stream workforce. Their effective, and permanent, removal from the urban, industrial workforce had been closely controlled. Their use as casual labour, was circumscribed by adherence to daily, all-day compulsory schooling. Children's work on city streets was limited and

regulated. Their work at the home site and in the rural sector continued, now fitted around demanding schooling requirements.

Pressure on the state, from organised labour and other concerned interests, to remove children from employment in factories and streets had intensified from the 1890s. These demands were echoed by educational authorities, who, since the beginning of the period, had called for strict adherence to their full-time ideal model of school. The state, reflecting and consolidating attitudinal change, responded in an incremental fashion with increasing regulation and control. State action included the 1916 Education Act which could enforce adherence to the ideal school model. The withdrawal of children from mainstream labour was accompanied by an increasingly widespread, accepted and entrenched ideology of protected, nurturant and dependant childhood.

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I declare that this work has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

Marle Murray

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## ABBREVIATIONS

ANZHESJ	Australian and New Zealand History of Education Society Journal
APBR	Aborigines Protection Board Report
AONSW	Archives Office of New South Wales
CIRA	Census and Industrial Returns Act
HER	History of Education Review
JAS	Journal of Australian Studies
JRAHS	Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society
ML MSS	Mitchell Library Manuscripts
MLOH	Mitchell Library Oral History
NSWBOHC	New South Wales Bicentennial Oral History Collection
NSWGG	New South Wales Government Gazette
NSWLAVP	New South Wales Legislative Assembly Votes and Proceedings
NSWLCJ	New South Wales Legislative Council Journal
NSWPD	New South Wales Parliamentary Debates
NSWPP	New South Wales Parliamentary Papers
RCF&JLFS	Report of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Hours and General Conditions of Employment of Female and Juvenile Labour in Factories and Shops
RSCICPB	Report from the Select Committee on the Infants' and Children's Protection Bills
RFS	Report on the Working of the Factories and Shops Act
SCCWCM	Select Committee on the Working Classes of the Metropolis Report and Evidence
SCEC	Select Committee on the Employment of Children
SCRB	State Children's Relief Board
SCSMAC	Select Committee on the State of Manufactures and Agriculture in the Colony
SPCC	Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children

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### Note on Style

The guidelines for postgraduate students issued by Macquarie University have been followed in the compilation of this thesis. Where necessary the Australian Government Publishing Service's Style Manual for Authors, Editors and Printers, (Fourth edition, Canberra, 1988) has also been followed.