***Assessment Books*  Source Sheet No. 28**

**What Are They?**

Assessment Books are rate records of City properties. Produced annually by the Corporation, they contain information about properties in the City liable to pay council rates (some properties are exempted, for example churches and government buildings). The information, which includes the values of properties, is used to calculate the rates which are levied on property holders each year.

Successive Municipal Corporations Acts since 1840 have authorised the Council to levy rates in order to raise revenue for annual expenditure by directing assessments to be made on the estimated annual value of buildings within the City. To achieve this the Council was empowered to appoint valuators ‘to value, rate and assess all such buildings, lands, tenements, and hereditaments’ and to record their returns in a ‘book of assessment’ to be signed by the Mayor and made available for inspection by the citizens (clauses LXI to LXVI of Act No. 11 of 1849 *To Constitute a Municipal Corporation for the City of Adelaide*). The City Treasurer’s Department became responsible for compiling the Assessment Book each year.

**History of the Series**

The Archives holds three series of Assessment Books:

2nd Series 1846 - 1849 (Record Series No. S5) 2 volumes.

3rd Series 1849 - 1853 (Record Series No. S6) 3 volumes.

4th Series 1854 onwards (Record Series No. S34) 1 volume per year until 1976-77, 2 volumes per year thereafter.

Printed versions of Assessment Books continued to be made available until 2005-06 after which they were generated in electronic form only (note the 2002-03 record is not available as no printed copy appears to have been made of the electronic record before it was deleted).

A 1st Series of Assessment Books appears to have existed from 1841 to 1843. The 1840 Municipal Act empowered the Council to ‘make and levy a just and equitable rate or assessment’ on all proprietors and occupiers of property within the municipal boundaries. The first assessment was completed and adopted by the Council in June 1841, and the Council Minute Book mentions that ‘a form of Rate Book was produced by the Town Surveyor’. The whereabouts of this record, however, has not yet been discovered, assuming it survived following the Council’s collapse in 1843.

The 2nd Series of Assessment Books originated during the period when the City was placed under the control of the Police Commissioner from 1845 to 1849. The earliest book (1846-47) deals only with that area bounded by North, West and East Terraces, Flinders and Franklin Streets (Town Acres 1 to 252). The 3rd Series was prepared by the City Commissioners who administered the City from 1849 to 1852, and whose authority extended across the whole of the City (Town Acres 1 to 1042). South and North Adelaide were assessed separately, the latter first being included in the assessment adopted on 17 February 1851. The 4th Series was created after the City Council was re-established in June 1852, and covers the entire Council area, with the first assessment being adopted on 20 October 1852.

From the 1852-1853 assessment each Assessment Book was divided into Wards, with the assessment of properties proceeding by ascending Town Acre number within each Ward. This was in effect a ‘walking order’, which was the pattern in which the valuer walked around the Ward assessing the individual properties. From 1852 to 1874 there were four municipal electoral Wards, namely Gawler, Hindmarsh and Grey Wards in South Adelaide, and Robe Ward in North Adelaide. In 1874 an amendment to the Municipal Act resulted in the creation of two additional Wards - the eastern half of Grey Ward became Young Ward, and the eastern half of North Adelaide became MacDonnell Ward. This arrangement remained unchanged until December 1992, when the number of Wards was reduced to five with the amalgamation of Gawler and Hindmarsh Wards for the 1993 election. The *City of Adelaide Act 1998* reduced the Council from 16 to 9 members including the Lord Mayor, removing the position of Alderman and removing the Wards ensuring that members elected were to be representatives of the whole. In 2007, the Ward system was re-introduced as North, South and Central Wards.

**Using Assessment Books**

Books were divided into a number of vertical columns in which the valuer entered information. Besides an annual assessment number (which generally changes from year to year), and the Town Acre number location, each entry provided details of the names of the owner(s), occupier and agent (executor) of a property, the name of the street in which it was situated, and a description of the type of building or the size of the landholding, together with its annual assessed value and the rates payable. The date on which the rates were paid was also recorded. Originally in handwritten form, these records were later typewritten from around the beginning of the 20th Century.

The Assessment Books can be used to determine the location and longevity of occupancy, or ownership of a property, its exact location within the City and its annual value. They can also indicate when significant alterations and additions were made to a building, or when a new building was erected on a particular site, because the annual property value, and hence rates, rise accordingly. This is not always the case, however, because sometimes property values and rates levied tended to fall, reflecting fluctuations in the state of the local economy which had a direct impact on the property market (for example, values fell markedly during the economic depressions of the 1890s and 1930s, whereas they rose significantly during the boom periods of the 1870s and 1950s).

Only the name of the principal householder or occupant of a premises is shown (along with that of the owner and agent) but not of other occupants such as spouses, offspring or lodgers. Occupations are not shown; however, it is sometimes possible to deduce these from the description of the premises (e.g. hotel, stable, woodyard, and warehouse).

As a rule, assessments were presented in the same Ward sequence within each volume - Hindmarsh, Gawler, Grey, Young, Robe and MacDonnell - and information about properties can be found by locating the appropriate Town Acre number within each Ward. In early Books (1846 to1852) which were not divided into Wards, assessments simply followed consecutive Town Acre number order. Pre-1860 Books contained the most detailed descriptions of properties, often indicating the number of rooms in a building, sometimes even types of construction materials used, whereas information provided in subsequent Books is generally confined to one word descriptions of the property.

It is important to remember when researching the Assessment Books that the assessment was undertaken by the Corporation valuers during the year prior to the one that is shown on the volume. Thus the 1865 Assessment Book, for example, was compiled during 1864, and was adopted by the Council on 19 December 1864. Fortunately, the date on which the annual assessment was adopted by the Council is always included at the end of each volume, while for those Books which have been microfilmed, it has been typed on the outside of the box which contains the film.

**Access**

The Assessment Books are one of the most highly used records in the Archives, being particularly useful for family history and heritage research. While some early books are quite fragile, almost all volumes are large and heavy, making handling difficult. To ensure their preservation therefore, all the Assessment Books from the nineteenth century, and a significant number of those from the twentieth century, have been microfilmed for use in the Search Room. Many of the books have now been digitized and can be viewed on the Archives’ Search Room computer. They are also progressively being added to the Archives’ website, starting with the earliest 19th Century volumes, and maybe viewed at [*http://photosau.com.au/adelaiderates/scripts/home.asp*](http://photosau.com.au/adelaiderates/scripts/home.asp)

Those volumes which have not yet been filmed or digitized, can be made available on request, generally within 24 hours, although because of their prodigious size and weight, only two volumes will be made available for research at one time. The 2005-06 electronic only versions of the Assessment Books may be accessed on the Archives’ Search Room computer.

**Further Information**

**City Archives:** Topham Mall, off Currie and Waymouth Streets, Adelaide 5000

**Counter / telephone enquiries:** 9**.**00 am to 5.00 pm Monday to Friday

**Search Room open for public research:**10.00 am to 4.00 pm Tuesday to Thursday

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