Background

Heritage Victoria commissioned the development of *Victoria’s Framework of Historical Themes* in February 2007. The brief was to develop a framework that identifies and describes the themes that are significant and distinctive to the natural and cultural heritage of the State. The selected themes were to correlate with the *Australian Historic Themes* framework, and build upon comparable models developed by other State and Territory government agencies.

The Framework is currently in a draft format, and subject to consideration by the Heritage Council of Victoria.

The Framework is to have practical applicability in several key areas defined by the project brief, including:

- significance assessments of heritage places and objects/collections
- management of community heritage collections, including conservation prioritisation
- interpretation and tourism planning
- development of heritage area studies and
- other uses identified in the course of the project by the Contractor or steering committee.

Specifically, the thematic framework needs to fulfil the relevant key direction set out in the Victorian Government’s strategy, *Victoria’s Heritage: Strengthening our communities* (July 2006):

**Direction 1** Recognise the richness of Victoria’s cultural and natural heritage

And the related strategy to achieve this direction:

1.1 Recognise and celebrate the diversity of Victoria’s heritage and acknowledge the places and objects/collections which are special to Victorians.

Using the Framework

*Victoria’s Framework of Historical Themes* is designed for use by heritage professionals, local government, teachers, custodians of museum collections, interpreters and others interested in Victoria’s natural and cultural heritage.

The framework recognises that thematic approaches are already in use by heritage professionals, for example, in thematic environmental histories of local government areas. It provides a very broad and flexible framework at the State level, so that these local studies can continue to evolve while being linked to State, and, where relevant, national contexts.

The thematic framework provides a practical and comprehensive research tool which can be used at the State or local level to assist in the identification, assessment, interpretation and management of heritage places and objects/collections. In particular, it can help to encourage a comprehensive approach to listings and provide a comparative context for the better understanding of the historical significance of places and objects/collections.
What is a thematic framework?

A thematic framework can be used as a ‘how to’ tool for those interested in identifying, assessing and interpreting historic values in places.

- There are a number of benefits of using themes, including:
  - helping to think more widely about historical processes in assessing places
  - assisting in structuring research
  - assisting in the preparation of interpretive texts
  - justifying an assessment of historical significance so as to avoid criticism of ‘targeting’ certain places for heritage controls
  - when used with criteria for assessing heritage significance, helping to clarify the significance of a place through providing its historical context and linkages (for example see Australian Historic Themes pp.6-7)
  - showing how specific types of place are commonly associated with a theme to provide an ‘aide memoir’, making sure these kinds of places are not missed in heritage area surveys and heritage assessments of places and objects/collections.

Themes can also be used to ensure comprehensiveness in the representation of places in heritage registers; they can be used in a similar way with museum collections.

Equally, they can be used as a sieve to select stories and associated places and objects/collections that are significant and distinctive to a State or region.

Purpose of the framework

The purpose of the framework is to provide a consistent set of themes which highlight what is distinctive about Victoria.

The consistent organising principle for the thematic framework is activity. By emphasizing the human activities that produced the places and objects/collections we value, and the human response to Victoria’s environment, places and objects/collections are related to the processes and stories associated with them.

The themes are not intended to follow a chronological order. Rather, they are generic, and designed to be applied and interlinked, regardless of place or period. This is consistent with a number of frameworks that are generic or universal, in that they describe the same aspects of human activity whatever the nation, State or region being examined.

How the framework is structured

Victoria’s Framework of Historical Themes consists of nine main themes, with sub themes and prompts to help evoke distinctive aspects and strong stories in Victoria’s history.

The themes are designed to easily link with the Australian Historic Themes, with some differences to better accommodate Victoria’s particular historical patterns.
What is distinctive about Victoria?

In developing the framework, the focus has been on identifying themes that help us to understand what is distinctive and different about Victoria's history and heritage. The nine themes that comprise the framework are designed to highlight places and objects/collections that express important aspects of our historical development, culture and identity. They cover broad historical processes and activities that link and overlap, creating a richly diverse and multi-layered cultural inheritance of landscapes, places, objects/collections and their stories. Some of these historical processes relate Victoria to a much bigger picture.

International context

As a former British colony, Victoria was part of the worldwide process of European colonial expansion in the nineteenth century. This set the tone of early colonial life and explains many features of the early economy, geared to the export of raw materials to Europe and other parts of the European empires. The transfer and adaptation of European beliefs, ideals and institutions also created a distinctive culture in Victoria.

Gold and its legacy in all areas of life is an example of a story that has a worldwide, or international, context and potential world heritage significance.

Of potential universal significance is the legacy of Aboriginal cultural landscapes and sites in Victoria, as evidence of the oldest living culture in the world. Other aspects of Victoria’s heritage may also be of wider significance when comparative studies are undertaken in the future.

National context

At a national level, Victoria’s growth and development are symbolic of the rapid expansion of the Australian colonies in the second half of the nineteenth century, built on raw materials especially pastoral products, minerals such as gold, and a growing range of local industries.

The State’s heritage provides an insight into its key phases of development from the long Aboriginal occupation of the land to European exploration and settlement, becoming Port Phillip District, part of the colony of NSW, to separation and naming for Queen Victoria. As the colonial capital, Melbourne became a grand Victorian-era city, a thriving industrial and commercial metropolis, and the cultural and political focus of Victoria. It has evolved into a sprawling metropolis of garden suburbs and industrial areas.

The State of Victoria has a rich and diverse natural and cultural heritage that illustrates the historical occupation, use, adaptation and development of the land since the arrival of Aboriginal people. This in turn promotes a greater understanding of the history of Australia as a whole.
Themes and sub-themes

1. Shaping Victoria’s environment
   The theme includes the evolution of the environment from a scientific point of view and Aboriginal people’s traditions about how the land and its features were created. This theme also traces how our understanding and appreciation of the environment has changed over time:
   1.1 Tracing climate and topographical change
   1.2 Tracing the emergence of Victoria’s plants and animals
   1.3 Understanding scientifically diverse environments
   1.4 Creation stories and defining country
   1.5 Exploring, surveying and mapping
   1.6 Living with natural processes
   1.7 Appreciating and protecting Victoria’s natural wonders

2. Peopling Victoria’s places and landscapes
   This theme examines the people who occupied Victoria over tens of thousands of years and the waves of immigration since European settlement:
   2.1 Living as Victoria’s original inhabitants
   2.2 Adapting to diverse environments
   2.3 Arriving in a new land
   2.4 Migrating and making a home
   2.5 Maintaining distinctive cultures
   2.6 Promoting settlement
   2.7 Fighting for identity

3. Connecting Victorians by transport and communications
   This theme traces how early pathways often followed Aboriginal lines of travel and were later formalised as road and rail networks:
   3.1 Establishing pathways
   3.2 Travelling by water
   3.3 Linking Victorians by rail
   3.4 Linking Victorians by road in the twentieth century
   3.5 Travelling by tram
   3.6 Linking Victorians by air
   3.7 Establishing and maintaining communications

4. Transforming the land
   This theme explores how occupation and use of the land, and exploitation of its natural resources, have transformed Victoria and shaped its diverse cultural landscapes:
   4.1 Living off the land
   4.2 Living from the sea
   4.3 Grazing and raising livestock
   4.4 Farming
   4.5 Gold mining
   4.6 Exploiting other mineral, forest and water resources
   4.7 Transforming the land and waterways

5. Building Victoria’s industries and workforce
   This theme explores how secondary and tertiary industries were developed in Victoria and examines the experiences of those who have worked in them:
   5.1 Processing raw materials
   5.2 Developing a manufacturing capacity
   5.3 Marketing and retailing
   5.4 Exhibiting Victoria’s innovation and products
   5.5 Banking and finance
   5.6 Entertaining and socialising
   5.7 Working
6. Building towns, cities and the garden state
This theme focuses on the development of Victoria’s cities, towns and suburbs, including the application of innovative planning ideas which contributed to Victoria’s identity as the ‘garden state’:

6.1 Establishing Melbourne Town, Port Phillip District
6.2 Creating Melbourne
6.3 Shaping the suburbs
6.4 Making regional centres
6.5 Living in country towns
6.6 Marking significant phases in development of Victoria’s settlements, towns and cities
6.7 Making homes for Victorians
6.8 Living on the fringes

7. Governing Victorians
This theme focuses on the role of the State and its institutions in shaping the life of its citizens in all facets of life:

7.1 Developing institutions of self-government and democracy
7.2 Struggling for political rights
7.3 Maintaining law and order
7.4 Defending Victoria and Australia
7.5 Protecting Victoria’s heritage

8. Building community life
This theme covers the ways Victorians have built community life and institutions in a variety of forms and expressions:

8.1 Maintaining spiritual life
8.2 Educating people
8.3 Providing health and welfare services
8.4 Forming community organisations
8.5 Preserving traditions and commemorating
8.6 Marking the phases of life

9. Shaping cultural and creative life
This theme displays Victoria’s cultural life in its many facets:

9.1 Participating in sport and recreation
9.2 Nurturing a vibrant arts scene
9.3 Achieving distinction in the arts
9.4 Creating popular culture
9.5 Advancing knowledge in science and technology
Linking State, National and Local themes

Victoria’s Framework of Historical Themes reflects the theme groups set out in the Australian Historic Themes Framework, but are grouped slightly differently.

The Australian theme ‘Developing Local, Regional and National Economies’ is split three ways, between the themes 3. Connecting Victorians by transport and communications, 4. Transforming the land and 5 Building Victoria’s industries and workforce. Although these themes are strongly linked and interdependent, they do stand out separately as significant aspects of Victoria’s history.

The Australian theme ‘Working’ will be divided between the three themes, enabling links to be made more readily between particular industries and Victoria’s social development.

The theme ‘Educating’ forms part of theme 8. Building community life, because of the links that exist between communities and their schools. The Australian theme group ‘Marking the Phases of Life’ has been included in theme 8. Building community life.

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