Russell Grimwade (1879–1955) maintained a strong affiliation with the University of Melbourne throughout his adult life. This association encompassed the role of student – Grimwade graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in 1901– to council member, deputy chancellor and benefactor. When Grimwade prepared his will in 1949, he left a large component of his substantial estate to the University of Melbourne including his collections of Australiana, art, books and archival records.

Together with his brothers, Russell Grimwade controlled the family business of wholesale druggists established by his father, Frederick Sheppard Grimwade, in partnership with Alfred Felton in 1867. During Russell Grimwade’s lifetime the family business prospered, allowing him the time and resources to pursue his many personal interests, including that of collecting. Grimwade was both an industrialist and a naturalist. In the first half of the twentieth century this combination would have seemed incongruous. However, Russell Grimwade was endowed with an inquiring mind, and formal studies further cultivated a logical and methodical disposition.

Of Russell Grimwade’s various interests, his greatest passions were for Australiana and the native plant kingdom, especially the eucalypt. His motivation to collect Australiana was driven by the realisation that his was ‘an era that may be passing for all time’. While his compatriots still looked to Europe for inspiration, Grimwade’s enthusiasm focused on the evolution of Australia as a new nation, and the use of its native forest resources.

Underpinning Russell Grimwade’s scientific and historical predilections, and consequently his collecting activities, were an attention to detail and an accuracy of record.

For Russell Grimwade, trees and plants – particularly the Australian eucalypt – held a lifelong appeal. He marvelled at the use of its timber, advocated for a foundation for the advancement of forestry and supported its regeneration. Russell Grimwade was an early conservationist. His roles in the botanical domain were multi-faceted and encompassed collector of books, art patron, chemist, furniture-maker and author.

Although he had not studied botany in a formal sense, Grimwade achieved an exceptional level of knowledge in this field. He read widely and collected more than 250 books on the subject. Russell Grimwade’s own book, An Anthography of the Eucalypts, published in 1920, was an early reference survey of Australian eucalypt species and remained the only resource of its type for many decades.

Russell Grimwade’s fondness for working with timber resulted in many pieces of domestic furniture. One of the earliest alterations to the Grimwade family home, Miegunyah, bought in 1910, was the installation of a workshop. Here he built a specimen chest to house the collection of gum pods, seeds and leaves accumulated during his research for An Anthography of the Eucalypts.

In business, Russell Grimwade maintained a continuing interest in pharmaceutical substances, particularly those of botanical origin. As chairman of the Grimwade company, Bosisto’s, from 1920 to 1951, he was able to combine his fascination for the eucalypt with the research and production of eucalyptus oil.

Russell Grimwade’s interest in early European exploration of the Australian continent extended to his collection, in illustrated book form, of the documentation of native flora. In the late 1940s, Grimwade met the artist Margaret Stones, and became her first private patron when he commissioned her to draw wildflowers of the Mornington Peninsula, a region near his country property, Westerfield.
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