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Women on the Move: Gender, Money-making and Mobility in Mid-Nineteenth Century Australasia

Wednesday 29 May 2013 4:15-5:30pm

School of History Seminar Series

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McDonald Room, Menzies Library, ANU



In 1864 Josephine Venables was advertising her Auckland-based Servants' Registry Office in both Auckland and Napier in New Zealand. Born in England, she had already crossed the world from Europe to Australia three times with her parents. Settling in Melbourne after marriage, she had run a dressmaking business and registry office and had travelled to China and written about it, before migrating again to Auckland as a new widow. Between

1864 and her death in 1928 at the age of 97, Venables moved around New Zealand at least four more times, each time establishing businesses to earn her own living.

Josephine Venables' geographical mobility, and particularly the way she used money-making to facilitate that movement, might seem unusual in an age when such transnational, economic mobility has been typically regarded as a male prerogative. Onward mobility and particularly transnational mobility has been the focus of much recent scholarship, looking particularly at the movement of ideas and 'imperial careers' in the web of empire. However, while elite lady travellers have been discussed by scholars, along with the floods of domestic servants, who emigrated apparently to marry and settle in the colonies, other female mobility has been less well documented. This includes the way in which business, geographical mobility and an awareness of empire intersected in the lives of women who did not necessarily stay in one place after their initial emigration.

Arising out of a broader project that repositions women within the colonial, urban, commercial world, this paper considers the connections between business, mobility and gender in Australasian cities in the middle of the nineteenth century. Inspired by Desley Deacon's work on the 'mind maps' of theatrical performers, who travelled the well-worn circuits of empire, it extends this concept to include other colonial women, challenging the notion that 'husbands do and go; wives stay and cope'

Catherine Bishop graduated from ANU in December 2012 with a PhD in History. Her thesis, 'Commerce Was a Woman: Women in Business in Colonial Sydney and Wellington' won the 2012 ANU Gender Institute PhD Thesis Prize for Excellence in Gender Research. Currently teaching in the School of History at ANU, Catherine has just been appointed as Research Officer for the History Research Initiative at the University of Western Sydney. She is on the editorial collective of *Lilith* and recently co-convened the successful inaugural *Lilith* conference. She has published in Australian colonial, gender and labour history as well as about Australian missionaries.