The Australian
Women's Register

**Entry type:** Person
**Entry ID:** AWE5980

# How, Louisa Elizabeth

(1821 - 1970)

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| **Born** | 18210101, England United Kingdom |
| **Died** | 19700101, Heaton New South Wales Australia |
| **Occupation** | Photographer |

## Summary

Elizabeth Louisa How is the earliest known Australian female amateur photographer. The subjects of How’s portrait photography include members of her merchant family, friends, staff, and visitors to the How’s family residence at ‘Woodlands,’ North Sydney. How’s landscape photography recorded views of Sydney Cove, Government House, Campbell’s Wharf, and views around her house and garden. How’s salted paper prints were developed using half-plate glass negatives.

## Details

Elizabeth Louisa How is the earliest known Australian female amateur photographer.

Elizabeth Louisa How was born 1821 in England, and she married James How, a labourer from Melvern, Cambridgeshire. They had two sons, William, born in 1844 and Edward, born in 1848.

The family migrated to Australia under the assisted passage scheme arriving in Port Phillip, Melbourne, Victoria, aboard the 'Royal George,' on 28 November 1849. On arriving in Melbourne, James How gained employment with the merchant and wharf owner Joseph Raleigh. Records show that by 1857 he was listed as one of the principal directors of a merchant and shipping business How, Walker & Co., which had originally been started by a relative, Robert How. During this period the family moved to a property called 'Woodlands,' where they resided until 1866. It was next door to the present-day Admiralty House at Kirribilli Point, North Sydney, NSW.

The records do not show what or who inspired Elizabeth Louisa How's interest in photography. It has been established that she acquired a copy of the English publication *Art Journal* for 1850. The particular issue she obtained included a number of articles dealing with the development of photography; one of her early photographs was based on an engraving of a portrait which she saw in this volume, that of the Dowager Countess of Darnley after the painting by Sir Thomas Lawrence. Some scholars have suggested that she may also have gained some training from professional studios in England as well as obtaining her photographic materials from the same source. However, others consider it more likely that obtained her photographic supplies in Sydney from the dealer William Hetzer, who was known for his salted paper prints using half-plate glass negatives, since this was the same process that How worked with.

The Australian National Gallery in Canberra holds an album of 48 salted paper prints attributed to How. The album includes photographs dating from October 1858 to January 1859. The subjects are largely portraits of How's family, friends, staff and visitors to their house in Woodlands. The friends who appear in these photographs are the merchants George S. Caird, Robert P. Paterson and Hendricks Anderson, the explorer William Landsborough with his Aboriginal companion, 'Tiger,' and the settler Charles Morison from Glenmorison, New England. She also photographed Sydney Cove, Government House, Campbell's Wharf, and views around her house and garden.

Her photograph of *John Croker*, taken in Sydney on the 25 December 1859, was shot on the veranda of her house, a position that provided her with adequate lighting. She set up the photograph to appear as if it was taken indoors by moving a side table and armchair outside and by draping a piece of fabric in the background to appear as if it were a curtain (Davies 31).

The fortunes of the How Merchant Company declined in the 1860s, and in 1866 How shifted from Woodlands to Calingra at Woollahra, Sydney. Her husband James died in about 1869 and a year later Louise moved to Heaton, also in Woollahra. Little is known of her and her children's movements after this date, other than they relocated several more times. It is also unclear how long she continued to pursue her interest in photography. She died aged seventy-two, in 1893.

## Technical

How produced salted paper prints using half-plate glass negatives.

## Collections:

Art Gallery of New South Wales

National Gallery of Australia

National Museum, Canberra

## Events

**1995 - 1995**
Louisa How's work featured in *Art Gallery of New South Wales* exhibition

**2000 - 2000**
Louisa How's work featured in *Mirror with a Memory: Photographic Portraiture in Australia* exhibition

**1995 - 1995**
Louisa How's work featured in *Women Hold Up Half the Sky*

## Published resources

**Resource**
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

**Exhibition Catalogue**
Mirror with a memory: photographic portraiture in Australia, Batchen, Geoffrey and Ennis, Helen, 2000

Masterpieces of Australian Photography, Lebovic, Josef and Cooke, Susette, 1989

**Book Section**
Louisa Elizabeth How, Crombie, Isobel, 1992

Louisa How, Crombie, Isobel, 1995

**Book**
The Mechanical Eye in Australia: Photography 1841-1900., Davies, Alan and Stanbury, Peter, 1986

Shades of Light: Photography and Australia 1839-1988, Newton, Gael, 1988

**Journal Article**
Louisa Elizabeth How, Crombie, Isobel, 1984

**Resource Section**
Louisa Elizabeth How, Crombie, Isobel,
http://www.daao.org.au/bio/louisa-elizabeth-how/biography

## Archival resources

**State Archives & Records NSW**
Persons on Bounty Ships Arriving at Port Phillip: Assisted Passage 1849-51.

**Author Details**
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