

EARLY PAINTERS OF THE PENINSULA

It is not widely known that there is a substantial number of watercolours of Manly and the Peninsula in the collection of the National Library in Canberra. The two painters, Edward Combes (1830 – 1895) and George Penkivil Slade (1832 – 1896) were active in the 1860s and 1870s in visiting the Peninsula and capturing the beauty of the landscape in small paintings of 30cm by 15 cm.

Both were keen exponents of the plein air school which was coming into vogue because of the availability of paints in tubes, as previously each painter had made their own paints by grinding and mixing dry pigment powders with linseed oil. The plein air painters liked using the natural light and working in the elements as opposed to a studio. While both were amateur painters, plein air was carried to another level by the Heidelberg School in the 1880s and beyond by Roberts, Streeon, Condor and others.

While Combes and Slade were very good amateur painters, their other interests were many in that Combes was a politician, engineer, surveyor, art administrator and gold miner, and Slade was a solicitor. Both were good friends of the famous colonial painter, Conrad Martens (1801 – 1878), and supported Martens in his later years when he had fallen on less prosperous times.

Combes and Slade are represented in the collections of the NSW Art Gallery, State Library and National Library and two of Slade's works can be seen on the Manly Lagoon website showing views of the expanse of the inland water and at the beach. Their paintings encompassed views from the Spit to Pittwater and are a wonderful record of the native landscape of the area.