



**Oral History Association of Australia New South Wales
President's Report to the Annual General Meeting 22 September 2012**

Volunteers - The glue that keeps the Australian community (and Oral History NSW) together

Volunteering is a universal activity that people of all ages undertake because they want to. They support the values of a particular organisation, and they enjoy it. The Oral History Association has been built on the generosity of spirit of many volunteers; proactive community members from a wide range of backgrounds who are interested in history. Among our membership are enthusiastic amateurs, students and professionals interested in local and family history, teaching history, museums, heritage preservation, organisational and cultural archives, documentary making, libraries, sound preservation and many more who together contribute to an interdisciplinary and multi-layered understanding of history.

The past year has seen continued strengthening of our Association. To ensure that the growth can continue and be sustained without committee burnout, considerable time has been spent in undertaking a strategic planning exercise. I am sure most of you have been involved in this sort of activity and know how important it is to take time to gather and analyse the strengths and weaknesses of a voluntary not-for-profit organisation such as ours. We went on to consider the opportunities and resources available for meeting Oral History New South Wales prime objectives:

- to promote the practice and methods of oral history;
- to educate in the use of oral history methods;
- to encourage discussion on all aspects of oral history;
- to foster the preservation of oral history records in Australia.

Our conclusion was that the Oral History Association remains relevant and meets a need. Oral History has become more widely used in the practice of history in many settings and digital technology has facilitated this. To ensure the Association's ongoing viability the first priorities to be addressed were the need to see more members actively involved in managing and implementing the various aspects of the association's program and to have a clearer separation between governance (Management Committee) and the operations (programs and events).

So a SOS Call to Action went out to all members in April. The response was overwhelming; Management Committee vacancies were filled immediately and other members have come forward to take up various program management and administrative responsibilities. It has been especially heartening to hear comments by members who have recognised that all voluntary organisations face an ongoing need for renewal and cheered us on promising help at a future time. We need to ensure that in accepting to serve on a committee or task group, members do not see it as a lifetime commitment impossible to escape, but rather as an opportunity to share their experience, new ideas, skills and, most of all, their enthusiasm.

Membership figures declined to 202 in 2011 and to date in 2012 this downward trend continues with only 170 current financial members. The Association's website is well used and provides an easily accessible referral point for the wider community seeking information about oral history.

A new service has been added to the website so that sound recordings of seminars are available for downloading. Thanks to Trish Levido's monitoring of technology developments, there are regular updates and tips on the website. Tiiu Tarmo has now taken over the constant job of managing the website.

Training in oral history theory and practice has been a major priority

Three OHAA NSW workshop introductory programs *Capturing Memories: Oral History in the Digital Age* have been conducted in collaboration with the Royal Australian Historical Society. All have been sell outs and the feedback very positive. Central to the work of oral history is the importance of a person telling their story in their own voice. This means that it is not a choice to use digital technology; it is an obligation that we record at the best possible standard so that the richness and integrity of the storytelling is captured. In order to produce archival quality recording, oral historians need ongoing practical training as the technology changes. We need also to develop our skills in listening at depth in our interviewing practice and strengthen skills in historical research and analysis. Trish Levido, Carol McKirdy and Maria Hill will continue to develop this program in the coming year. Trish's willingness to handle the hiring of recording equipment to members is very much appreciated.

Presentations and workshops have been conducted for community groups by Rosie Block, Trish Levido, Roslyn Burge and Dianne Taylor. Our ongoing partnerships have been a key to reaching a broader audience. Over 400 people have attended events co-sponsored with the Royal Australian Historical Society and the State library of NSW in the past year with people travelling from all over NSW and even interstate.

Later this year the *Capturing Memories: Oral History in the Digital Age* workshop is offered as a pre-conference event for those travelling to Sydney for the annual Royal Australian Historical Society state conference. Plans are in hand to make this practical workshop available in a limited number of country centres in 2013. We begin a new involvement with the State Library next year when oral history is offered through their Lifelong Learning Program. A warm thank you to Maria Walsh, CEO at the Royal Australian Historical Society and Sally Hone, Curator of Oral History at the State Library of New South Wales for the arranging the availability of such fine venues for OHAA events.

The Association is committed to promoting an interest in history

OHAA NSW's regular seminars aim to provide stimulating presentations and discussions around the use of oral history as part of historical method. These occasions are also opportunity for members to meet and share experience and skills and this year's interesting program included:

Connecting the 'History' in Oral History

Three guest historians discussed how their oral history practice connects with broader historical narratives followed by a panel discussion examining oral history's place in historical work moderated by Dr Sue Rosen. Panel Members: Dr. Judith Godden, Professional Historian and author Dr. Paula Hamilton, Historian and Author, Co-Director, Centre for Public History, UTS Emma Dortins, Historian with a strong interest in heritage

Memory and Remembering : Using Oral History to Preserve your Family History

Dr. Janis Wilton an award winning public and oral historian based at the University of New England, discussed how oral history interviewers can tap into memories to create interviews that are rich in descriptions and insights. Di Ritch, Michael Clarke and Laurel Wraight spoke about their varied experiences with family history projects and offered many helpful tips.

Dr. John Carty, Anthropologist and Co-curator of the Australian Museum

Yiwarra Kuju: Canning Stock Route Exhibition

A memorable viewing of this stunning exhibition based on 250 oral histories. Dr. John Carty's extensive research around the Canning Stock Route in recent years has given him a deeper appreciation for the importance of Aboriginal oral histories and their place within broader Australian narratives.

We now look forward to the November **Oral History and Photography Master Class** with the internationally recognised oral historian, Dr. Alistair Thomson. Alistair invites us to explore the theory and practice of combining oral history with photographs.

As a member of the History Council of NSW, the Oral History Association has again contributed a 'Sound Bites' event around the History Week theme – this year *Threads – they wore what?!* Do take the opportunity to listen to these interesting snippets of interviews on the History Week website. www.historycouncilnsw.org.au/history-week/sound-bites-2 Carol McKirdy has again very efficiently co-ordinated this project.

Involvement in national Oral History Association Activities

Forty people from New South Wales attended the very well organised Oral History Biennial Conference in Melbourne last October when Frank Heimans was presented with the prestigious national Hazel de Berg Award for Oral History Excellence recognising those who have made an outstanding contribution to the cause of oral history in Australia over a considerable period of time. Frank's career as an oral historian and cinematographer stretches over 35 years and his enthusiasm for sharing his experience has seen him give many presentations to Oral History Association members, community groups, and local libraries. Presentations were made by NSW members Carol McKirdy, Tim Carroll, Margaret Leask, Alec O'Halloran, Ben Morris, Joanna Sassoon, Barry York, and Leonard Janiszewski.

This was the 17th Oral History Association of Australia National Conference and brought together researchers and historians using oral history in their work within communities of memory across the many fields and disciplines that contribute to community, public and academic institutions. The next conference will be held in Adelaide in September 2013... make a note to be there. The other primary role of the national Oral History Association is the publication of a refereed annual journal which reflects the diversity and vitality of oral history practice in Australia and overseas. Journal No.33 featured articles by three members of OHAA NSW.

Oral History Association Life Membership was conferred on Diane Rich and Joyce Cribb at the Annual Conference. Both Di and Joyce have been inspirational and untiring members for many years. Joyce has just retired as Editor of *Voiceprint* after 15 years and cheerfully hands over to Margaret Leask and Sally Zwartz. Thank you also Joyce for the role you have played as our Public Officer.

Thank you to all who have contributed to the Association's program

This year's program has only been possible by the concerted work of an enthusiastic committee: Roslyn Burge, Michael Clarke, Joyce Cribb (who is also Public Officer), Louise Darmody, Frank Heimans, Trish Levido, Carol McKirdy, Sue Rosen (Treasurer until March) and Frances Rush. The Association has benefited from the skills of our new Secretary Andrew Host in implementing an administrative data base to ensure all members are contacted regularly and receive both *Oral History Network News* and *Voiceprint*. Tim Carroll is the new Treasurer working closely with bookkeepers, First Class Accounts. Thanks to you all.

Oral History is alive and well in New South Wales and our task remains one of encouraging and supporting expertise in its use. The Oral History Association NSW is committed to continuing its role as a community of practice providing a forum for networking and for the fruitful exchange of experience and ideas. Please continue your membership support and encourage others to do likewise.

Sandra Blamey

President, Oral History Association of Australia NSW Inc