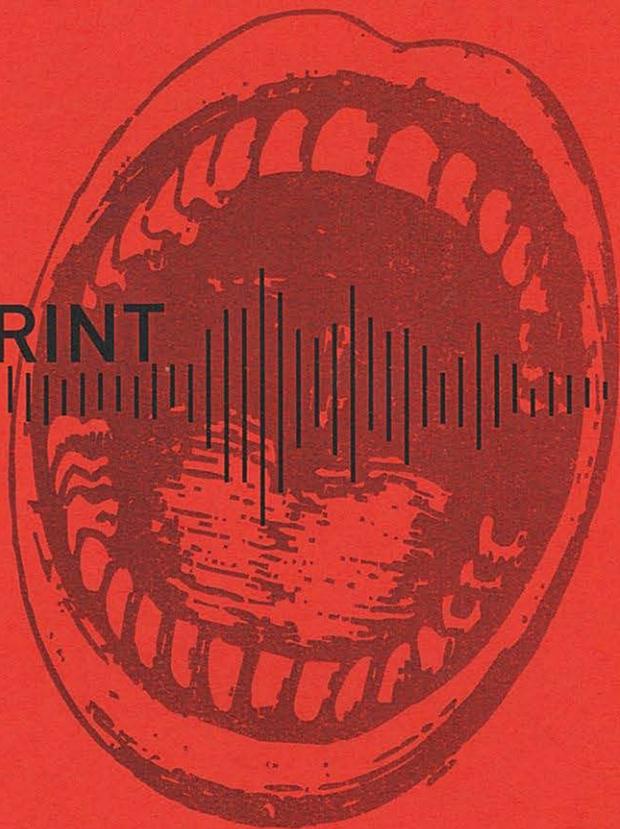


Newsletter of the New South Wales Branch
of the Oral History Association of Australia

VOICEPRINT



33

October 2005

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Editorial



How quickly the year is running away! Soon the big year with the international conference will be here. I am hoping to meet many of you there and then I can try and persuade you to write something for Voiceprint!

In this edition we have included reports on the various functions and meetings held in the first half of 2005. The seminars have been challenging – one becomes aware of how it is the stories of the people all around us that make history interesting for future generations. It is also interesting to note how oral history has been used to add life to some prize winning publications. It is very heartening to see this recognition, and observe how oral histories are being interwoven with other historical research. Five books have been mentioned in this Voiceprint, all recommended reading.

Voiceprint has in recent times had few pictures, but it would be nice to change that. I have determined in the next few months to try and get the camera under control, or maybe it is the operator! I am sure our members have some photos which would be of interest to members. Do send me some per e-mail <ivancribbo1@optusnet.com.au>. We are on broadband and have a mailbox that will accept them. Some members have had trouble with the address, using an 'o' instead of – zero one after the 'bb' of the name (if you are not familiar with the way we are numbered by modern technology easy to do!). Of course if you have real photos in print we can use them too! Words on paper are also very welcome but it does speed up the editing if contributions come in computer format.

However the contributions come, we look forward to receiving them.

Joyce Cribb

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Membership



New Members

Welcome to our New Members who have come to us at a good time of year as our financial year is near the beginning. Good timing!

Barbara Blackman	writer
Jan Davis	regional – education worker
Barbara Moritz	tour-guide
Margaret Blundell	student
Rachel Davies	student
Colleen O’Sullivan	retired interested in oral history
Shayne Davy	community worker
Lynette Gurr	built heritage specialist
Lydia Fegan	psychologist
Anna Jarrett	trainer
Pam Lofthouse	heritage consultant
Rosanne McEwan	teacher
Rob Lee	knowledge manager
Susan Grimes	associate lecturer
Bridget McKern	writer
Professor Nicholas Fisher	research consultant
Kathleen Hellmann	ranger, National Parks and Wildlife Services
Adele Nye	student
Lake Macquarie City Library	
Port of Yamba Historical Society	

A warm welcome to you all! We have such exciting events in store and you are all in good time to share in them.

Rosie Block

Nuts & Bolts

Member announced winner of the Inaugural Magarey Medal for 2005: Isabel Flick and Heather Goodall

(Members may remember and enjoyed hearing our member Heather Goodall speak last July about the late Isabel Flick and the book that was published of Isabel's lifestory. We do congratulate Heather on this special recognition and winning of this award. I have included the citation that went with this award for your interest as well as the history of the prize. I was most surprised when I asked my "search engine" to find Magarey Medal and up came football and footballers and more football! Ed)

The Award:

Sydney academic and writer Dr Heather Goodall has been announced as a Magarey Medallist for 2005 – without going anywhere near a football!

Dr Goodall, an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences UTS, is the inaugural recipient of the new Magarey Medal, established by University of Adelaide academic Dr Susan Magarey. She received the award for her co-authoring of the autobiography of Aboriginal woman, the late Isabel Flick.

Isabel Flick: The Many Lives of an Extraordinary Aboriginal Woman was co-authored by Isabel herself and Dr Goodall, and features the weaving together of autobiography, oral history and biography. It tells the story of Isabel Flick's lifelong

challenge to the racism of the wider society and to injustice among her own people, and of the wide networks she helped to build within the Aboriginal community and extending beyond it.

For the new Magarey Medal, women biographers will be recognised for their scholarly achievement – as distinct from the original Magarey Medal, the oldest individual award in Australian football, won annually by the fairest and best footballer in the South Australian National Football League.

Dr Magarey, an Adjunct Professor at the University of Adelaide is the first cousin four times removed of William Ashley Magarey, who founded the football medal as President of the South Australian Football League in 1898. She says she established the prize to help redress the balance between the documented achievements of men and women in South Australia.

"I have spent the greater part of my life in South Australia where, every year, my family name appears on the front page of the newspaper and on television and radio coupled with a great deal of excitement, hype, sweat and testosterone," Dr Magarey says. "I have not been absolutely thrilled with the exclusivity of this association, and now seek to balance it. The Magarey Medal for football is a prize for a sporting man; the Magarey Medal for biography is a prize for a scholarly woman."

The new Magarey Medal will be awarded to a female writer who has published



the work judged to be the best work of biography written on an Australian subject. It is worth \$10,000 in its first year, and will be indexed thereafter to inflation. It will be administered and judged by a panel composed from the Australian Historical Association and the Association for the Study of Australian Literature.

Citation:

Isabel Flick: The Many Lives of an Extraordinary Aboriginal Woman, by Isabel Flick and Heather Goodall, and published by Allen & Unwin, is, as Linda Burney says in her Foreword, the story of an Australian hero. It is also an outstanding example of a collaboration between its subject, Isabel Flick, and her chosen interviewer, adviser and editor, Heather Goodall, in which it remains Isabel's autobiography despite her death halfway through the process. Before she died, Isabel Flick asked Goodall and her family to complete her story. The result is a multi-layered account of her "many lives" which accurately reflects the circles of family, friends, communities and political organisations that Flick sustained and within which she worked. *Isabel Flick: The Many Lives of an Extraordinary Aboriginal Woman* does what a good biography or autobiography does: it tells the story of a life, and through that life it tells the story of a family, a community, a series of networks, and a nation.

Isabel Flick was, indeed, an extraordinary woman. She was born in Goondiwindi in 1928, and was brought up on the banks of

the Barwon River outside Collarenebri, in the Aboriginal settlement called the Old Camp. The story she tells is of her struggle to be educated – of not being allowed to attend the white school in Collarenebri, of having to leave her family and community to get three years schooling at Toomelah Mission – and then, when she has children of her own, of working as a cleaner, first in Collarenebri and then in Sydney, to make sure they get a good education. And through all this, she traces her gradual politicisation, as she discovers her lack of rights and works out her strategies to deal with this lack – speaking up, negotiation, and putting past injuries behind her. One extraordinary part of this story is how she became an advocate for the rights of Aboriginal children when she worked as a cleaner at the Collarenebri school, speaking out whenever she saw them treated badly, and becoming a valued adviser to the Parents and Citizens Association of the school.

Gradually the shy young woman who trembled with fear when she first spoke to a policeman became the centre of groups who demanded better health services and housing, who refused to sit in the roped-off section at the local pictures, who organised fundraising, who began to become involved in welfare organisations such as the Far West Scheme, and learned to speak up for what her people wanted to politicians, police, welfare and lawyers. As she told Heather Goodall, "I started to get gamer and gamer." When Goodall met her in Sydney in 1974 she found an "astute and

Nuts and Bolts (cont...)

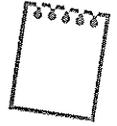
shrewd" community activist who was also an "hilarious" storyteller.

When Isabel Flick returned to Collarenebri in 1978 she remained at the centre of local and national networks concerned with housing, education, deaths in custody, land rights and women's welfare. She was awarded the Order of Australia in 1986.

When Isabel Flick asked Heather Goodall to help record and edit her life story, they had been friends for many years. They had met in 1974 when Heather was a graduate student recording Aboriginal oral histories. Since then she had become a prize-winning scholar of Aboriginal history and was an Associate Professor of History at the University of Technology, Sydney. Beginning in 1997, they recorded Isabel's memories, visited important sites, and had many group discussions with family and friends. Their recording sessions had only reached 1972 when Isabel died of lung cancer in February 2002. The book therefore is mainly in Isabel's voice in the first five chapters and has more of Heather Goodall's voice in the final seven chapters. But as Goodall says in her introduction, "it has been important for me that it remains Isabel's book, with an autobiography at its core which explores the questions she wanted to ask about her life." She has succeeded admirably in this, drawing on Isabel's carefully saved papers, on conversations with Heather over the years and the vivid and eloquent memories of those who knew her well, to make a seamless book that remains, very much, Isabel's.

The book is beautifully produced by Allen & Unwin, with good quality paper and an attractive font. The narrative flows smoothly through Isabel's words, Goodall's contextual links (marked by italics) and the interspersed narratives of others (marked by a line at the side). Sustaining the differences of tone and point of view in this syncretic melding of voices is one of the book's most remarkable achievements, as events are recounted by more than one participant and the angle of view shifts. The multi-planed portrait of Flick that emerges is a testimony to the worth of such embedded, multi-voiced biography, drawing on the collective model of ethnography and yet sustaining Flick's own account of herself and her life as its centre. There are charming and helpful maps, a family tree and numerous photographs drawing on family albums and other archival sources

Heather Goodall is currently an Associate Professor in Social Inquiry and a member of the Centre for Trans/forming Cultures at the University of Technology, Sydney. She has worked in collaboration with Aboriginal people on many projects since the early 1970s. Her book, *Invasion to Embassy: Land in Aboriginal Politics in New South Wales*, was awarded the NSW Premier's Prize for Australian History in 1997. As Ann Curthoys says in her tribute at the front of *Isabel Flick: The Many Lives of an Extraordinary Aboriginal Woman*, this is a wonderful book

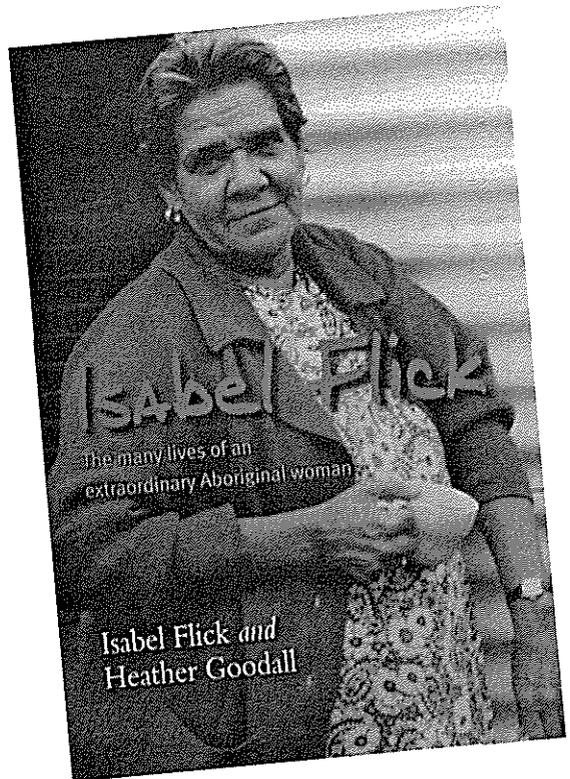


that made her laugh, cry, and think afresh. This is what the best life stories can do, and that is why this book has been awarded the inaugural Magarey Medal for Biography.

Professor Desley Deacon (Chair)
History Program, Research School
of Social Sciences
Australian National University.

Associate Professor Barbara Milech
Communication and Cultural Studies
Curtin University.

Dr. Nicole Moore
Department of English
Macquarie University.



Nuts and Bolts (cont...)

With Angel Wombats For Company

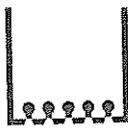
(Lesley Jenkins from Queensland has recently returned from her Churchill Fellowship in Oral History. The following article is the first installment of a series she will write chronicling her journey. Thank you Lesley for your report. Ed)

Before I left on my Churchill Fellowship everyone told me to pack light. I did so, and even though there was only room for a couple of pairs of pants, a few skirts and one book, there was room for twelve small terracotta wombats with gilded wings. A potter made them for me and they arrived wrapped lovingly in tissue and bubble plastic. They nestled together in a plastic container as I took them to the US and Canada, on to the United Kingdom, Wales and the Channel Islands and over the Alps to Italy, before parting with the last angel wombat in Ireland. As I traveled I gave them to people who had gone out of their way to help me understand their oral history work and how this could be applied in Australia.

Dr Willie Smyth, Folk Arts Program Manager at the Washington State Arts Commission in Olympia received the first wombat. I had a placement with him for four days as I explored his approach to the collection and documentation of oral history. He has a collection of 400 recordings, mostly cassettes, with 300 interviewees and most of the interviews run for 90 minutes. Some of the interviews are fully transcribed. They do not follow the life story approach, rather

they are undertaken to explore the specific skills of community members undertaken over time, such as Indian basket weavers, or to explore other aspects of occupational artistry. Willie's training is as a folklorist. This is a degree course run at a number of Universities in the United States. I was to meet many folklorists on my travels in the States as they are often involved in oral history, either as curators, collectors of sound and stories, or in management positions in archives and art institutions.

"...folklore is the study of traditions. Things learned by observation, imitation, not from a book. Folklore passed over space and through time: blues singing, basket making, fairy tales, flat foot dancing, herbal remedies, knock-knock jokes." Dr Betty Belanus wrote this explanation in her novel, *Seasonal*, Round Barn Press, Maryland, 2002. Betty is also a trained folklorist and a curator at the Smithsonian Centre for Folklife and Cultural Heritage in Washington DC. I stayed with her a bit later in my trip. I mention this now because the approach to the collection of oral history is fundamentally different when you are documenting the how, what, where & when of a craft or activity, as opposed to the 'life story' which centers on how the person got to be who they are in order to embrace the craft or activity. The life story or life history model is the one I encountered at the large institutions I visited: Columbia University Oral History Collection and the National Life Story Collection based at the British Library Sound Archive.



My time with Willie Smyth focused on the development of the Tour Guide for the Interstate 5 North Heritage Tour: Seattle to Blaine (USA – Canada Border). This included an audio track with traditional music and narratives from local residents. I was interested to find out how this was developed and funded. How many people were involved in the production of the very professional looking, spiral bound booklet? How were the narratives collected and edited along with other sound on the CD or cassette? My first surprise was to learn that these booklets take a team of about six people 1-2 years to finish.

I had originally thought that the development of the Tour Guide could be translated to my current work– a history of the Barcoo Shire. The Council had expressed interest in a range of outcomes as well as the traditional book.

Two interns have been working on a number of the Tour Guides and a freelance editor and contracted folklorist were also employed. The maps, sound editing and finished artwork is all outsourced to professional companies. Jens Lund, the folklorist, collects the oral histories and the music in the field, but a professional sound editor does the final mix. The route is traveled many times during the development of the Tour Guide as the speed of the vehicle has to coincide with the spoken word and the identified landmarks. A professional actor ties the narrative together with a voice over. One of the interesting and perplexing

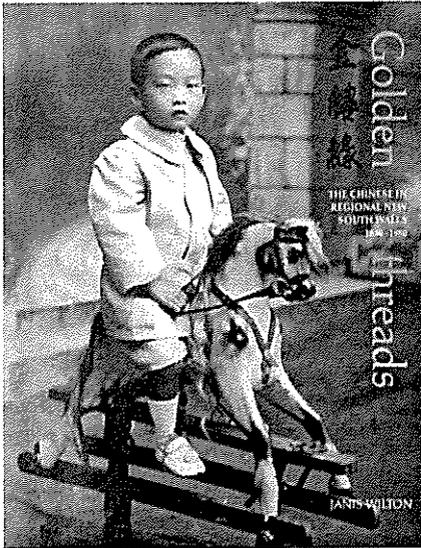
aspects of the Tour Guides is that much of what you hear about you can't see. The visible landscape is married with an invisible one of music, songs, stories and reminiscences. These features were essential to the first Tour Guide from Othello to Omark as this identified the region as a cultural heritage site worthy of the funding they received from the Department of Transportation. Subsequent guides have received money from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Washington State Arts Commission.

In 2000 Michael L. Murray wrote a paper, *Touring the Invisible landscape: Oral History and Heritage Highway Tourism*, Graduate Program in Folklore, University of Pennsylvania, Oral History Association Meeting, Durham, North Carolina, 12 October 2000: about the invisible landscape portrayed in the Tour Guides commenting; 'As the landscape is depopulated of loggers, fishermen, and farmers, these people of the earth and sea come to be the inhabitants of a "lost world" that is nostalgically remembered' As I toured one of the routes it was certainly preferable to hear reminiscences from an 'old timer' long since removed to a nursing home, than to hear the story of the huge carpark that passed my view as I was driven along at 100 kilometres an hour.

To Be Continued...

EnergyAustralia National Trust Heritage Awards 2005

Winner: Golden Threads – Janis Wilton and Joseph Eisenberg



The Energy Australia National Trust Heritage Awards are now an annual event which recognise achievements and contributions to the documentation, interpretation and protection of Australian heritage in NSW. There is a range of categories which, in itself, highlights the variety of ways in which heritage is researched and presented: built heritage, landscape conservation, conservation management plans, cultural heritage, education, adaptive reuse, interpretation and presentation.

Janis Wilton and Joe Eisenberg's work on Golden Threads won the Cultural Heritage – Individuals category in the 2005 awards presented in April 2005. The award was in particular for the book from the project (Golden Threads: The Chinese in regional NSW 1850-1950, Powerhouse Publishing, 2004). The commendation stated:

A well researched, well written record of the little recognised contribution of the Chinese community to the building of the modern Australian society, particularly in regional Australia.

The Golden Threads project and book have at their core oral history interviews with members of Chinese-Australian families and with local residents able to share memories of the Chinese presence. The project combined the insights from oral history interviews with objects and photographs in local museum and family collections, sites significant to the Chinese presence and the broader history of the Chinese contribution to regional New South Wales. In its design and complementary use of illustrations and text, the book aims to provide an appealing, accessible and attractive permanent record of some of the discoveries from the project and of the important role family members and local museums play in recording our history and heritage.



Branch Report OHAA NSW 2004/2005

It is usual to end with thanks to the committee, but I am going to begin with those thanks. Two members have retired owing to pressure of work – Stephanie Coleman and Margo Beasley. The other members are Michael Clarke, Joyce Cribb, Frank Heimans, Margaret Park (Canberra), Diana Ritch, Alan Veenstra with Berenice Evans our Treasurer. Our meetings have continued to be the most vibrant think-and-ideas tank and I am so grateful to you all.

Our seminars in partnership with the State Library of New South Wales have been diverse and well-attended. The first was conducted by members of the Aboriginal Support Circle of the Older Women's Network – a most inspiring occasion both in regard to the women interviewed and those interviewing, and also how they managed to raise the money and publish an outstanding book. What a success! Heather Goodall spoke about her Vietnamese interviews and also of her friend and collaborator Isabel Flick, and Roslyn Burge described her project with Tamil people.

The next one was conducted by Rod Freedman, award-winning documentary filmmaker, who shared with us his experiences of interviewing his Uncle Chatzkel in Lithuania with no common language between them – and how he made the eponymous film. He also

showed us excerpts from the latest series of Australian Biography filmed for SBS television and spoke about the issues involved in making such a series – fascinating!

Our third for the year was focused on war – mainly on those who stayed at home and how it was for the War Widows and their families for whom no one came home; and then for those families who found a stranger had returned from battle. As to the soldiers themselves we found two grandfathers fighting on opposite sides in WWI and we look forward to further researches into that family. A most moving morning. Our presenters were Patricia Campbell and Roslyn Burge for the War Widows, Kristy Muir on the families and Melanie Oppenheimer about her grandfathers.

PHIN (Public History Interest Network) is still operating and an enjoyable meeting was held at Ahimsa, the home of Marie Byles, a haven in suburban Sydney where the spirit of that remarkable pioneer traveller and bush walker still palpably resides.

This year's prizes include the Energy Australia National Trust Award to Janis Wilton for her book, *Golden Threads*, and to Heather Goodall the Magarey Prize for her book written together with her friend

Reports (cont...)



Isabel Flick. Congratulations! Siobhan McHugh's *Minefields and Miniskirts* had a very successful season at the Glen Street Theatre – congratulations also to her and the cast. Altogether they bring oral history into much prominence.

Sensis who publish the Yellow Pages have consented to have in the Sydney Directory a heading called 'Oral History Providers' which will send people to the historians' listing – so we have a profile at last! If there are any consultants who have not yet registered with them do think of doing so.

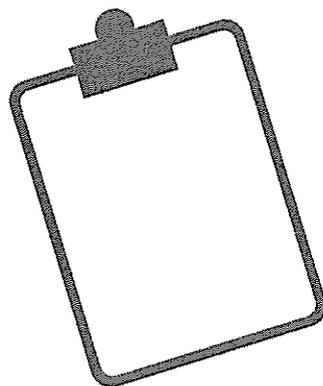
Because there was no biennial national oral history conference this year the OHAA joined forces with the CISH/AHA conference and many New South Wales members participated in the four interesting panels.

Plans for the IOHA conference next July 2006 are going forward and the conference committee of Janis Wilton, Paula Hamilton and Rosie Block meet regularly. We are receiving valuable help from Peter Rubinstein in regard to sponsorship and from Sandra Blamey who is investigating hotels for our delegates.

Membership has continued steady and I am grateful to all our members for their loyalty and interest.

We are looking forward to interesting times!

Rosemary Block President



OHAA Conference, July 2005 – by Jill Cassidy

The conference in Sydney in the first week of July proved to be very stimulating and enjoyable, made more so by its inclusion in the program for the Australian Historical Association and part of the Congress for the International Historical Sciences. The ability to attend sessions in these other areas added spice to what was already an exciting program. What made this conference particularly useful was the provision of extended discussion periods at the end of the presentations, to allow for lengthy debate between the presenters and audience.

The OHAA sessions began on Wednesday with 'Talking Communities' chaired by Janis Wilton. Jan McCahon spoke of gathering oral histories for the town of Victoria Park in Western Australia. She pointed out how important it was for informants to be given recognition for their contribution, in this case a Certificate of Appreciation from the Mayor.

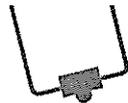
Heather Goodall explored the importance of place in recalling past events. She pointed out that we remember in settings, we dream in settings. People don't always have a clear reason for their thoughts of place, and may have to explore them during the interviewing process. She has found that returning to a significant place for the interview has elicited more response from her informants.

Sandra Hodgson spoke of her project recording the cultural codes of the Hmong people of Far North Queensland. The community, particularly the men, are anxious about the erosion of language and other aspects of their culture; they especially want to make sure the women retain their traditional values. Sandra found this occasionally difficult, in that her ambition was to empower the women if possible. However, she needed to do what the men wanted.

I talked of the issues arising from curating *Past lives, new beginnings: Migration and Tasmania* at the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, especially the importance of community consultation for producing an exhibition that migrants really relate to. On the other hand, there were times when I as curator had to make final decisions, and this had the potential to cause conflict. However, in the event this did not happen, largely due to the good relations developed over the course of the exhibition development.

Finally, Mary Ann Jebb gave a fascinating account of Jack Wherra's boab nut carvings. Such carvings are unique to the Kimberly and have been bought by the Sydney Museum and other institutions. Mary Ann took digital images of the carvings back to the Kimberly and recorded the local community's explanations for the stories on the boab nuts, many of which related to Jack's own history of serving 18 years in gaol for tribal killings.

Reports (cont...)



'Oral History and its Challenges' also raised interesting issues. Margaret Hamilton discussed the lack of method for national accreditation of oral historians. People who do it badly queer the pitch for others who might come afterwards, but the Western Australian branch has been unable to devise a good method of accreditation despite many attempts. In discussion later it was suggested that for those who wished accreditation a system of peer review might be established, whereby experienced members of the association could judge transcripts.

Margaret Park spoke of the need to bring oral history collections into mainstream collections such as libraries. She also referred to a program of interviewing soon-to-be-retired road engineers for Roads ACT, and how important this is seen to be as a standard method of preserving corporate knowledge. Frank Heimans spoke of his interest in 'adding vision to oral history' and the part that video history is playing in television – a growing contribution.

'Oral History and Technology: the Way Forward' was an excellent summary of current directions. The Quadriga system seem to be the best mass storage system, but at a basic cost of \$70,000 is only for the largest libraries. For people doing the interviewing, Beth Robertson gave a brief summary of her chapter in the soon to be published new edition of the *Oral*

History Handbook. She recommends the two best systems as recording onto laptop computers (but only for the technology confident) and the new solid state recorders.

'Handling Ethics and Ethic Committees' was as heated as usual, as oral historians bemoaned yet again the fact that their history research is treated as if it is a medical science, with names having to be withheld and the tape eventually destroyed. Hopefully, this message will get through to the various ethics committees so that this does not have to happen in the future. It was considered of great importance that there should be a historian or someone from the humanities on the ethics committees, not just doctors and ethicists.

All in all, the conference sessions provided an excellent coverage of many of the issues confronting oral historians today, and a chance to come to some sort of consensus on many of the points raised.

Some additional comments from Rosie Block

We are indebted to Jill for her thoughtful and interesting report on the CISH/AHA conference to which we of the OHAA hitched our wagon. The theme of the AHA gathering was 'Inclusive Histories' – seemed just made for us! Sadly our members were generally unable to attend due to the exigencies of the CISH registration, to wit, no day rate and a very high fee for general registration. All of us are grateful to the OHAA National for funding so many of our speakers.

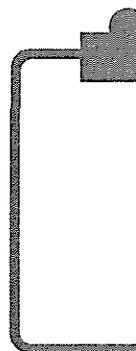
Despite our being relatively few on the ground, oral history had a great profile at the conference and was prominent in both book launchings that took place at lunchtime.

Dr Peter Read launched Maria Nugent's interesting *Botany Bay. Where histories Meet*. She avers in her introduction that on her first visit to Botany Bay she went to meet and talk to Iris Williams who took her to Frenchmans Beach where la Perouse had landed briefly in 1788 and where there had been an Aboriginal settlement for many years, now gone. In this intimate introduction to a Botany Bay which meant so much to Aboriginal history, Maria determined that the theme at the heart of the book would be the nature of the relationship between local Aboriginal pasts and histories and those that can be described as imperial, colonial or national. It is a most interesting study.

The next book launching was of *Ten Pound Poms. Australia's Invisible Migrants. A History of postwar British Emigration to Australia* by Jim Hammerton and our dear Alistair Thomson. Michelle Rayner of the ABC did the honours and praised oral history for its vividness, its uniqueness and its great contribution to history in general. A great moment for us all. Both authors gave both amusing and touching accounts of some of their interviewees.

I attended a session on Jewish Holocaust Survivor testimonies to meet up with Amelia Klein who is researching the responses of grandchildren to the accounts of their grandparents' survival of the Holocaust. Her doctoral thesis will have a large oral history component.

It seemed to all of us that oral history, now seen to join 'mainstream' history, actually had showed itself and attracted good attention. Janis Wilton attended the AGM of the Australian Historical Association and was made very welcome. It seems that a mutually satisfactory relationship may have been affirmed.



OHAA Seminar – *Families And War: Research and the Personal Interview*

State Library of NSW – Saturday, 7 May 2005

(Patricia Campbell, Chief Executive Officer, War Widows' Guild of Australia and Roslyn Burge, historian, both spoke of the Guild and the Oral History Project it has commissioned. Thank you to Roslyn Burge for the following summary. Ed)

The War Widows' Guild of Australia NSW Limited is entirely a women's organisation and everything...achieved by women '

The Guild nationally is about to celebrate its diamond anniversary and the NSW Branch, established in June 1946, has commissioned a history of its establishment, development and achievements: as part of that history an Oral History Project is underway.

Mrs Jessie Vasey established the Guild in Victoria in 1945. Already active during wartime on behalf of the wives of servicemen, she and her husband, General George Vasey, discussed what steps might be taken after the war to look after war widows and honour society's obligations to them. As the war drew to an end Mrs Vasey found herself a war widow and set about working for this group of women.

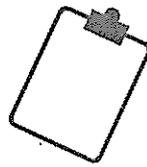
Pensions were inadequate, housing was difficult post war, many widows were in dire financial circumstances and official recognition of war widows at public ceremonies of commemoration was occasionally overlooked. The Guild's most urgent aims were advocacy and rehabilitation: ensuring increases in the war widows' pension, medical, hospital

and other benefits; and handicrafts were seen as a practical means of helping women overcome their grief and learn a craft and selling their handiwork to augment the pension. Mrs Vasey also understood the political pressure the weight of numbers of war widows could successfully bring to bear and believed "the meagreness of pensions...makes it necessary for widows to band themselves together to press their own case"²

The NSW Guild soon established a weaving school in the Army's Drill Hall in Millers Point and items were sold through the War Widows' Shop in Rowe Street in the city. The Rowe Street Shop operated for almost fifteen years, providing a substantial stream of income to supplement the Guild's work and adding to the Guild's high profile.

After advocacy, housing and information services for members, fundraising occupied enormous amounts of Guild time. Members' modest subscriptions were never enough to subsidise the Guild's work and throughout most of its existence expenses have been admirably shaved and income avidly sought at every possible turn.

The ambition, frugality and hard work of the Guild meant that by the end of the century the Guild's housing portfolio had provided a home for thousands of women and was valued in the millions.



The success of the Guild owes much to the enterprise of many women who have worked to make it a recognisable advocacy group and a financial and social success – an organisation developed by and for war widows.

Members are proud of the Guild and its achievements. Merle Dwyer, now in her 90s, joined the Guild in 1948. She had been married for 10 years, her husband was away at the war for three and a half of those years and when he returned she spent the next three waiting for him to die. She echoed the feelings of many members as she spoke of her pride: *War Widows' Guild had been such an object of admiration... In those days women didn't do a lot but it was entirely a women's organisation and everything had been achieved by women. I can remember going to the annual meetings and there would be a lot of important people from the different services.* The most senior ranks in the military, businessmen and politicians were invited to the Annual Meetings, which provided the Guild with an opportunity to demonstrate its successes or berate hapless government ministers who had not fulfilled the Guild's high expectations.

The interviews

The loss of their husband is the most obvious unifying thread for war widows and their responses to widowhood differed. Today half the membership is in their 80s and sometimes their widowhood is a more recent event.

Life members interviewed were young women, some with children, when their husbands died. Mrs Ruby Myers, foundation member of the Guild's oldest existing branch at Lismore, waved her husband off at the tiny station at Eltham, near Lismore and said, *he left Eltham Railway and that was the finality of the war for me.* With two young children to care for she returned to live with her parents. Olwyn Green made the greatest geographic shift in early widowhood of any interviewee. Aged 27, she and her daughter, mother and brother moved from Grafton to live in Sydney where she undertook tertiary studies. *When I left Grafton, where we were living when he was killed, I had no prospects whatsoever. Honouring her husband was uppermost...I've used him as a sort of model and inspiration and I think that accounts for the fact that I have never married again...and I also wanted to give my daughter the best possible life I could.*

For some, the death of their husband at war meant their children had a better chance: Kathleen Melville, whose husband never returned from the war, worked at the National Bank in Melbourne and remembered: *Another lass in the bank that I worked with, her attitude was when she got the news – she says, 'Well thank God my children will now eat.'*

Guild Presidents are nominated from among the membership and former President, Beryl Page, a resident of Guild housing and Board Director, bore a weight

of responsibility in her role yet felt that 'looking out for each other' sustained many members. With immense funds behind it, the Guild could no longer continue to function as an incorporated body and became a company limited by guarantee in the 1990s. Directorship of the Board brought with it onerous legal obligations and for Beryl those obligations were more than legal: *being on the Board was a responsibility... you were there to represent those members and you were there to see that those members were going to be looked after and that's how it is. And that's how I'm sure each member of the Board feels now, they're there to make sure that the War Widows; the members, don't miss out on anything....*

The reminiscences of war widows interviewed capture many themes associated with the experience of loss or bereavement and the imperatives of a new existence. But they also record pride in the Guild, its independence and recognition, and a shared sense of achievement in its successes.

References

¹ Merle Dwyer, interviewed 23 January 2003

² War Widows' Craft Guild, inaugural minutes 4 June 1946

Roslyn Burge

BRINGING THE WAR HOME – veterans and their families.

(Kristy Muir and Melanie Oppenheimer addressed this second topic on the morning. Ed)

Kristy Muir's research has centred around the effect war has on veterans and their families and how many of them are living with mental illness. She spoke of how a culture of silence engulfed the returning veterans and there was no discussion of their experiences. Mental illness has for the families that she interviewed been a taboo topic. The veterans suffered in silence and along with them their families. Kristy detailed the experiences of four families, sad and troubled histories of life fraught with problems as the result of the trauma and stress the veterans continued to suffer.

Melanie Oppenheimer told us a fascinating story about her two grandfathers who both fought in France during WWI. One grandfather, attached to the 6th Bavarian Reserves, fought with the German army. Her other grandfather from NSW and of Scottish farming heritage fought with troops from Australia. Melanie explained the detail and challenge of the research she undertook to trace the war records of the two men. The fact that she was unable to read German and had to have documents translated added to the difficulty. The two men were at different times in the same area of France! It was as indicated a fascinating story which illustrated how often truth can be stranger than fiction.

The talks provide a very stimulating morning enjoyed by an interested audience.

Joyce Cribb



OHAA Seminar – *Appreciating the Past for the Future: Oral History and the Roads and Traffic Authority*

**State Library of NSW Saturday
23rd July 2000**

I think I had not before this seminar thought about how much of interest there is in the Roads and Traffic Authority history. The Authority is collecting this in a number of ways including their oral history program. The morning was far too short to cover all aspects of the history of this organisation and its work. The buildings, the roads, the bridges, the machines, the people – workers and the public, the planning, the preservation of heritage; in two hours we seemed to have only touched the surface of the wealth contained within the scope of the RTA's history.

Staff from the RTA – Maria Whipp, Senior Environmental Officer, Planning and Heritage, Stuart Hill, Environmental Officer, Planning and Assessment and Vince Taranto, Investigations Officer (including oral history) all contributed to a very successful seminar.

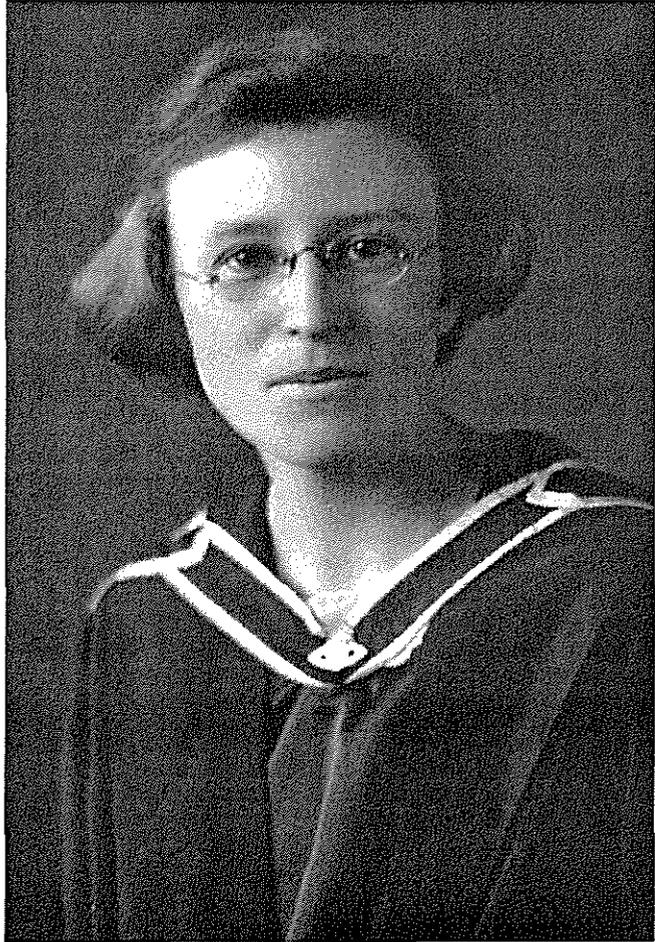
After the seminar I listened again to some tapes I have from their collection on the harbour bridge, road development and the river ferries. I found the oral history of *NSW Vehicular Ferries* a very interesting story. Like others in the collection the tape is a compilation from many interviews with a narrator linking the story together. The tape shed light on the building and maintenance of the ferries across many

of the rivers in the state. Considerable interest was added by the stories of those who worked on the ferries or used them for transport. It was interesting how the ferry timetable was an all important part of the schedule that gave direction to the day's program for many people. I expect that in the world today our activities and program are still controlled by external services and events. However, these are not nearly as romantic as the ritual of catching the same ferry across the river each day, and sitting relaxed, chatting with the other passengers. Ah, the romance of journeys past! There are still a few ferries operating in NSW – a chance to experience a more leisured style of travel – recommended for a weekend drive!

Joyce Cribb

Public History Interest Network Visit to “Ahimsa”, Day Road, Cheltenham, A National Trust Property

Saturday, 14 May 2005



Marie Byles on graduation in Law and
Arts from Sydney University in 1924
(photo courtesy National Trust archives)

Ahimsa is the former home of Marie Byles and on a sunny afternoon PHIN members gathered to inspect the property and learn about Marie Byles. The house is still somewhat hidden away on the edge of the Lane Cove river valley bushland, but once found, there is a magnificent view across the valley towards Pennant Hills, Wahroonga and Turramurra. Sitting on the large verandah, which Marie used as a sleep-out, I reflected on the round about route it had been to get there from the North Shore, when, in reality, it was only a couple of kilometres across the valley (if one could fly!). Marie Byles had a very simple small home – a very marked contrast to some of the newer larger homes we passed in the street on the way to Marie's property.

Julie Petersen, Public Programs Manager, Museums and Properties Department, National Trust of Australia (NSW) told us of Marie's life and the history of the property. Dr Allison Cadzow also talked about Marie's interest in the bush and bushwalking.

Marie was born at the turn of the century and graduated from the University of Sydney Law School in 1924. She went into practice as the first female solicitor in NSW with offices in Eastwood and in Sydney CBD. She was also one of the first to bring Buddhism to Australia. She built a meditation hut in her garden so like minded individuals could find accommodation and have discussions and meditate. The hut was designed with a wall that opened out to overlook part of

the garden and bushland. A very pleasant aspect which the PHIN group enjoyed as we learnt and wondered about this remarkable woman.

She won achievement and recognition as mountaineer, explorer and author, exploring the mountains of New Zealand and China as well as the bush around Sydney and nearby coastlands and mountains. With her friend Paddy Pallin, she campaigned for and established the Boudi National Park Trust. As a result of a vicious assault on her, reputedly by the husband of a lady she defended in the Family Law Court, she spent the latter years of her life as a recluse meditating in the hut in her garden.

Since her death, the home and garden have been given to the people of Sydney as a quiet retreat. It is administered by the National Trust. Her library was bequeathed to the Fisher Library at the University of Sydney.

Thank you to PHIN for arranging a most enjoyable afternoon.



From our International President

Rina Benmayor is professor of Oral History, Latina/o Studies and literature at California State University Monterey Bay. She chairs the Department of New Humanities for Social Justice and directs the Oral History and Community Memory Institute and Archive on the campus. She currently serves as President of the International Oral History Association

(Our International President visited Sydney in March where she spoke at a special Seminar conducted by UTS Faculty Humanities and Australian Centre for Public History. The topic was "Multicultural Identities and Digital Storytelling". Unfortunately I was ill and unable to attend the seminar, but I am pleased to include Rina's report of her visit to Sydney and plans for the 2006 conference from the IOHA newsletter. Ed)

I had the great fortune in March to make a site visit to Sydney (no, IOHA didn't fund it!), one of the most beautiful cities in the world, on a par with Rio de Janeiro and San Francisco! Over coffee at the State Library of New South Wales, an impressive colonial/modern venue in downtown Sydney, I met with Paula Hamilton, Janis Wilton and Rosie Block, our Australian conference coordinators, to review conference plans and get my work assignments!

The major pieces of the conference (the call for papers, venues, translation services, technology services, registration and accommodations) were already in place! We approved the beautiful conference logo, and I then visited the conference venue itself – a spacious, comfortable, and technologically equipped building of the School of Design at the University of Technology, Sydney. Yes, this time the conference will be in ONE building! It won't be palatial Rome, but no chance of

getting lost! A wide range of hotel/hostel/dorm accommodations will be available near the University and throughout the city. Sydney is very easy to navigate, with excellent bus and metro services.

The 2006 conference will also mark the 10th Anniversary of IOHA as a formal association. We are working to bring together some of the pioneers of IOHA to reflect on future directions of oral history as a global field. At Sydney, we will also introduce two new components, which we hope will become regular practice in the future. Some of our world-renown experts will be offering Master classes in oral history methodology: covering interviewing, archival practices, and interpretation. These workshops will take place at the State Library, one day before the Conference opening, with limited enrolment at a

modest fee. During the conference, spaces in the program will be marked for Special Interest Groups to convene and share work in poster sessions or informally, across geographic and linguistic divides. These are in response to suggestions from archivists and others at the Rome meeting.

Speaking of Rome, I am happy to report that proceeds from the Rome meeting have, in part, enabled the formation of an Italian Oral History Association! Bravo, Sandro! With this, IOHA is fulfilling one of its principal goals – to network oral historians and stimulate the formation of national/regional associations in parts of the world where such organizations did not previously exist. We did it in South Africa, and we did it in Rome! Our hope is that the conference location in Sydney will enable oral historians from India, China, Vietnam, Indonesia, Thailand, as well as Japan (where there is a young oral history association) to network and organize.

Behind the scenes, Council has been busy fundraising for scholarships for Sydney, particularly for scholars from poorer, developing countries and from places under-represented in IOHA. The Scholarship Application and Criteria are posted on the Homepage. The deadline is August 31. Also on the homepage is a Contribution Appeal to membership – both institutional and individual. Your contributions will go to directly defraying the costs of travel and accommodations for scholars and practitioners who could not otherwise

participate. While those with Euros and U.S. dollars have an advantage in Australia, a large number of our members come from countries with unstable currencies. The ability to present their work in Sydney may well depend on your generosity as colleagues.

The Council and the Conference organizers have not been idle! We look forward to your proposals, to a magnificent Sydney conference, and to moving IOHA into its second decade with a flourish!

Rina Benmayor IOHA President



IOHA President Rina Benmayor (second from the left) and Conference organizers Paula Hamilton, Janis Wilton, and Rosie Block, meeting in Sydney, March 2005

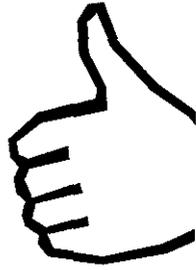
Sent to the Mountain: A History of Mount Penang Juvenile Justice Centre 1911 – 1999 by Valerie Ruby, reviewed by Joyce Cribb

This history written by Valerie Ruby and published in 2003 by the Closure Committee of Mount Penang Juvenile Justice Centre provides a very detailed history of this institution over its 88 year history.

Valerie Ruby is one of our members and has produced a history that has much that will appeal to oral historians. The book is peppered throughout with quotes from the boys as well as others connected to the institution and these give life and interest to the historical facts. There are a large number of photographs illustrating the story so there is a face to many of the characters described and many which illustrate the buildings, the interiors, the grounds and the activities undertaken at the institution. It is very pleasing to note that there are many from the earlier years so all 88 years are well illustrated. The photographs and quotes add greatly to the character of the book. It is a quite delightful and at times challenging book to dip into, for those interested in social history and social justice. Much to wonder and reflect on about the way it was “back then” and think about “how is it now?”

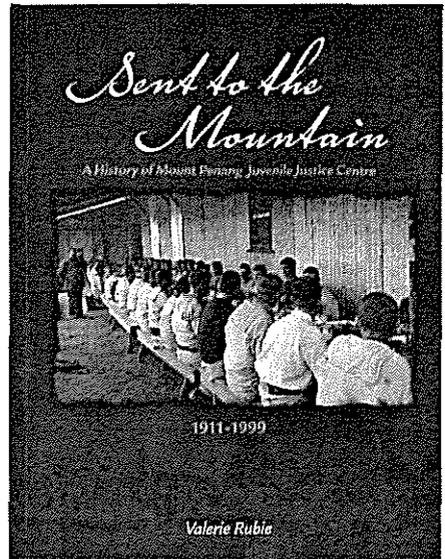
It is also a valuable book for those interested in the definitive history of the institution. An extensive bibliography and index are included and the text has been informed by a wide variety of sources, including government departmental official records. The history is presented chronologically in seven chapters related to different periods of development from the beginning in 1911 to the closure in 1999. The history tells of the development of the institution at Mount Penang and in parallel explains the changes and development of government initiatives especially from the Juvenile Justice and Education Systems which directed the management of the institution.

The centre was built on 700 acres of land on a high plateau known as Mount Penang in the Kariong district of today. The land has a magnificent view – it was often remarked upon by interviewees it was designed as an industrial farm and in fact the farming continued until closure. Great regret was felt by those involved with the farm when the prize pigs and dairy herd were sold off prior to closing. The new institution originally known as Gosford Farm Home for Boys was built to replace two institutions the Nautical School Ship (NSS) Sobraon and Brush Farm Home for Boys, Eastwood.



The institution continued with many of the nautical traditions. Boys had sailor suit uniforms (poor lads had to keep white trousers clean and pressed them under their mattresses). Assembly took place on the quarter deck (the boys also scrubbed it!) The Sobraon was established as the second school ship in Sydney to provide care and training for destitute and neglected boys and Brush Farm had been established as a reformatory. It was decided in 1911 (ideas were changing) to close both institutions and build a new establishment on acreage in the country for boys who were dependent, neglected or delinquent. The original boys (teenage lads) who were "sent to the mountain" set up a tent village and constructed the buildings. Over the years the building and development of the farm continued and throughout the history of the institution the boys worked and developed the farm. The story of how the boys worked and lived is told in detail in the book by the many oral history excerpts. Throughout the book the reader is drawn to feel with the boys as their stories unfold! A book to enjoy and a history preserved.

(Please write to Valerie Ruby at 17 Ashwood Close, Glenning Valley, 2261, if you would like to purchase a copy of this book)





XIVth International Oral History Conference

Sydney, Australia, 12-16 July 2006

“Dancing with memory: oral history and its audiences”

- Oral History Association of Australia website: <www.ohaa.net.au>
- International Oral History Association website: <www.ioha.fgv.br/>
- International Conference website: <www.une.edu.au/iohazoo6>

Papers are expected from around the world to contributions to the XIVth International Oral History Conference hosted by the International Oral History Association in collaboration with the Oral History Association of Australia, State Library of New South Wales, University of Technology Sydney, and University of New England.

(This will be the event of 2006! I do hope you all can come – look forward to meeting you all. Details will continue to be posted on the web site. See the notes from IOHA newsletter from the International President. Ed)

- Conference web <www.une.edu.au/iohazoo6>

Committee Meeting Dates

18 October 2005, 22 November 2005

Members are encouraged and welcome to attend the management Committee meetings held at the State Library at 5.30pm. Please meet in the Mitchell Wing vestibule at 5.25. (Staff will direct you if you miss the group).

Seminar Date for 2005

5 November

www.une.edu.au/iohazoo6

Noticeboard

Website Oral History Association of Australia <www.ohaa.net.au>.

Do bookmark and visit this site from time to time to keep up to date with what is happening around Australia and especially for details and links to the International Conference. Note conference <www.une.edu.au/ioha2006>

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