



voice print

The Newsletter

of the NSW Branch

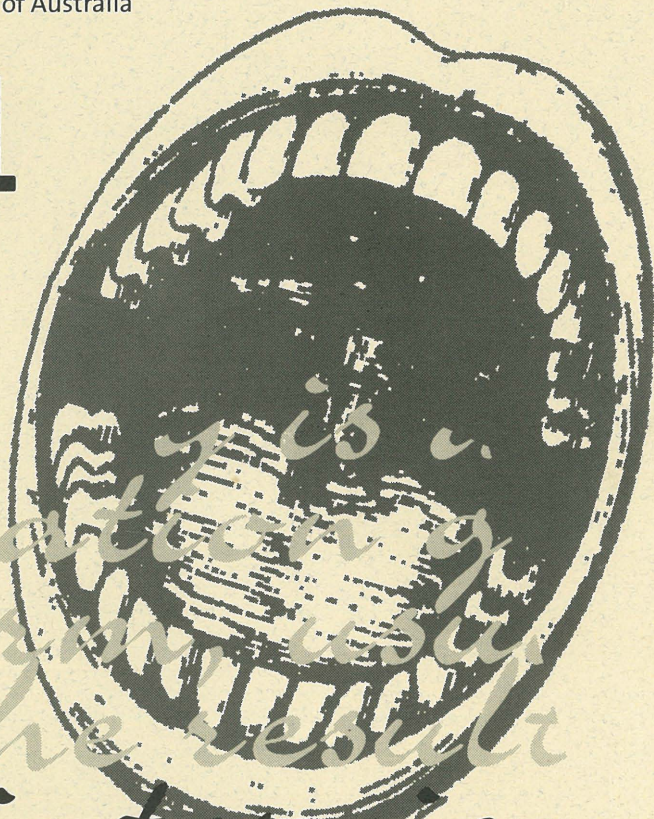
of the Oral History Association

of Australia

Inaugural issue

August 1994

1



*... is a
... attention
... form, usually
... as the result
... nred interview
... a means of finding
... t the past by asking
... tions of people who*



Voiceprint is the newsletter of the NSW Branch of the Oral History Association of Australia and it will be published quarterly.

Issue No. 1 – August 1994

Please send articles and correspondence to: The Editor, **Voiceprint**

Oral History Association of Australia
(NSW Branch) c/- State Library of New South Wales, Macquarie Street, Sydney, NSW, 2000

ISSN: 1322-4360

Editorial: Stephen Rapley

Layout and Design: Burk Associates





Oral History in the Sun: *Inaugural Conference of the Oral History Association of Australia (Queensland Branch), 6-8 May 1994.*

The advertising for this conference was enticing – even the very title enticed with its promise of oral history in the sun, a conference at a tropical resort. Magnetic Island was beautiful, relaxing and the sun was warm. In keeping with this ambience, the organisers were equally warm and friendly.

The program was a mixture of papers and workshops, mainly directed to the novice oral historian. Participants were led through an overview of oral history and memory, to insights into basic theory and practice, and then to more specialised aspects such as interviewing one's own family, the aged and the those with disabilities. Given the preponderance of participants employed by public institutions, it was sensible that another theme was working with and through public institutions, and consultation with the community.

Another sensible decision was to 'piggy-back' the conference with that of the conference of the Australian Society of Archivists. Given the expense of travel, it is much more convenient for, at least some, participants to attend one conference and immediately go to the next.

While the conference was a success, many participants also voted with their feet and formed alternative groups discussing oral history outside the parameters of the official conference. I think that there were three problems which adversely affected participation.

Firstly, the conference was held in an enticing location which was new to many participants. Only the duller newcomer to those surroundings would resist the urge to explore. A wiser move for the organisers would have been to program for such explorations, even if it meant having an extra, optional day. This day could be one of orientation – to the surroundings, to other participants and the glory of Queensland sunshine.

Secondly, conference organisers needed to have faith in participants and to take risks. Risks include having sessions which are relatively unstructured. There was a hopeful sign that this was the intention. The conference allowed for a one-hour session on the first morning entitled 'Reports from projects: delegates are invited to speak briefly about their current oral history projects'. This was a

An inaugural conference is always difficult for organisers and is ideally a learning process. It is hoped that the Queensland branch will be emboldened by its overall success and that future confer-

ences will see greater involvement by participants and, as appropriate, an adaptation or rejection of traditional conference structures.

Judith Godden

South East Asian Oral History

As Judith mentioned, archivists also got together in Townsville. From both sides of the equator they came to discuss the challenges of preserving tapes and documents in a steamy tropical climate.

Many South East Asian countries have extensive oral history recording programs. Mrs Zakiah Nor, Director General of the National Archives of Malaysia told Ros Bowden about some of the innovative ways oral history is recorded and used in her country.

We started in 1984 on a new approach using Oral History by getting a live audience to take part. We called it a history narration session. At each gathering we've had 150 to 200 people. At first there is a talk introducing the guest and giving some background and then the guest presents a detailed account of his or her own story. After that members of the audience ask questions. Normally such programs would take 3-4 hours and are recorded on video and audio and meant for researchers.

Then we went further by taking subject areas, say the Japanese Occupation or Independence, where there are people still alive. We get three or four people as a panel of speakers. Each one contributes to a subject and then the audience asks questions. At the same time we can confirm data because there is more than one person talking. So one person tells and the other three confirm or add more information. These history narration sessions have been very popular. We have covered lots of topics on administrative history, women in Malaysia – that's very popular we didn't even have enough room, people had to stand to hear about the contribution of women to nation building.

Are the people who come to these sessions invited guests or interested public?

Some are invited. We would like people to come from the universities or from institutions of higher learning and people interested in certain subject areas. We make announcements on radio and TV and some of the general public come on their own. This is a wonderful thing

dialect groups and most of these interviews were conducted in Chinese dialects and we do have some conducted in Mandarin. Some of these Chinese dialect interviews have been transcribed into Mandarin.

If an interview is conducted in say Malay – do you ever translate it into another language?

Those that we feel are worth it, are transcribed into Malay and then translated into English for the convenience of foreign researchers as well as local researchers who cannot understand Malay.

How frank are the interviews?

They are quite frank because they can impose restrictions if they want to.

What projects are planned for the future?

Next year is 1995 and we will be commemorating the end of the Pacific war and we will be starting a mini project on the Post War British Military Administration in Singapore.

From interviews recorded in Townsville and first broadcast on 'That's History!' on Radio National.

Telling it Like it is: A Guide to Making Local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander History, 2 books and a video, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra 1992

Diane Smith and Boronia Halstead,

Lookin' For Your Mob: A Guide to Tracing Aboriginal Family Trees Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra 1992, 132 pp, b&w pics, diagrams, ISBN 0 85575 209 2

Penny Taylor, *Telling It Like It Is:* Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra 1992, 123 pp, b&w pics, ISBN 0 85575 243 2

Marcia Langton (author), Lew Griffiths (Producer/Director), Ron Hurley (Presenter) ***Back Trackers***, video (24 minutes)

These three productions were funded by the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, and

the National Reconciliation and Schooling Strategy. They are presented and sold as a single package.

Lookin For Your Mob advises Aboriginal and Islander people how to go about tracing their family history and genealogy. There are chapters on how to find and use photographs, museums, libraries, indigenous organisations, electoral and war records. Historical societies throughout Australia are listed but Aboriginal Land Councils, among the most useful organisations through which to make contact, are not. A friendly introduction by Iris Clayton, a Wiradjuri woman, reas-



Last call for papers for the Oral History Association of Australia Journal for 1994

Friday 29 July is the deadline for articles, book reviews and reports of projects in progress to be submitted for this year's OHAA Journal.

Send your contributions to the Editor, OHAA Journal, c/- Oral History Program, State Library of NSW, Macquarie Street, Sydney, NSW, 2000.

OHAA visit to the Jewish Museum

OHAA members are invited to join members of the Australian Society of Archivists in a visit to the Jewish Museum.

Meet at 5:30 at the Museum, 148 Darlinghurst Rd (cnr Burton) Darlinghurst, on **Wednesday 17 August 1994**.

Admission \$5.00

Refreshments will be served at 5:30 and the talk by Alan Jacobs, the Curator, will commence at 6:00pm followed by a tour of the Museum. We imagine that the visit will be concluded about 8:00pm.

National Oral History Association of New Zealand Conference 1994

The New Zealand conference will be held in conjunction with that of the New Zealand Historical Association, **19-22 August** in Auckland. Conference organis-

ers have been seeking papers about a range of topics including land rights, medicine and health, gender, work, migration and the presentation of history. Contact Megan Hutching, President, NOHANZ, PO Box 3819, Wellington, New Zealand. (reprinted from Word of Mouth No 27 June 1994)

International Conference on Oral History 1994

The International Conference will meet in the United States at Columbia University, New York City, **18-23 October**. The program includes workshops (in French, English and Spanish), research papers, discussion about methodology, and reports on the status and traditions of oral history in various nations. Contact: Ronald J. Grele, Oral History Research Office, PO Box 20, Butler Library, Columbia University, New York, New York, 10027 USA. (reprinted from Word of Mouth No 27 June 1994)

OHAA National Conference 1995

The next national conference of the Oral History Association of Australia will be held in Launceston **8-10 September 1995**.

giving people who have recovered from stroke another language to explore their experience.'

'One of the things you realise in community publishing that it isn't just about making books, it's about distributing and playing a role for a wide readership and, partly we do that by making books that are cheap and accessible but partly by distributing them through alternative networks. We set up a market stall about a decade ago, and it's still running. There's still someone from QueenSpark selling books in the street market every Saturday.'

'And interestingly we have actually gone into not the alternative bookshops but the mainstream things like W. H. Smith, the big newsagents, and in fact working class people buy most of their

books in newsagent type shops, and getting them into those shops has been important. We did a book which was an oral history of areas of Brighton which were knocked down in the so-called 'slum clearances'. It was a sort of photo memory book and it sold about 6000 copies in quite a small town. Smith's had refused to stock our books for the previous ten years, but people were flooding into Smith's saying 'Where can we get this book?' and eventually the manager rang us up rather shamefaced and said 'Can we have your book?' and ever since then they've had it. They even did a window display recently! So you can change the commercial world of publishing and distribution when you show that there is a readership for stories that aren't in the mainstream.'

Stephen Rapley

Full Steam Ahead!

Oh no, not rain and cloudy skies when the weather for the previous week was so perfect! Still stalwarts, Rosie Block and Margot McKenzie turned up for the Lady Hopetoun Cruise on Saturday 19 March and weren't they glad!

Clouds cleared, rain stopped, sun shone and together with such pleasant company, commentary by Margaret Reid and John Rich, a very happy time was had by all. We started from Rozelle Bay and

followed the northern shoreline to Concord, then returned along the southern shore when Margaret commented on the oral history of the various buildings and bays, past and present.

John Rich, the Main Engineer, told us about his experiences when he studied his apprenticeship in steam at Bristol – all students had to make a miniature ship with all the appropriate accessories. When he joined the Sydney Maritime Museum (a voluntary organisation) he

talk about a program we did for the National Library documenting the AIDS epidemic through a series of almost 80 interviews. I also spoke about my private work in local history, Aboriginal history, corporate history, school and family history, and my involvement in teaching oral history in schools. I put in a plug for the Oral History Association and the sem-

inars we run and the encouragement given to the growth of oral history throughout Australia.

After the talk I stayed and spoke with the members for about an hour, answering many questions which showed how oral history has captured the interest of so many people.

Di Ritch

OHAA at the University of Sydney

After meeting Professor Roy MacLeod at the Powerhouse Christmas Party 1993, Judy Wing was invited to take part in a seminar with his post-graduate research students on 5 May. Discussion was to focus on history in the community and Judy was asked to speak about the Association and the practice of oral history in general.

She outline the objectives and structure of OHAA then provided some information about the reasons for its formation in 1978 and the lively debate that occurred soon after. This controversy arose when an article by Professor Patrick O'Farrell, which questioned the use and value of oral history, appeared in Quad-

rant in November 1979 following the publication of Paul Thompson's *The Voice of the Past* and Wendy Lowenstein's *Weevils in the Flour*. Since that time, however, oral history has been accepted as an important resource for historians, families and others.

A brief guide to setting up a project and the practicalities of interviewing formed the final section of the talk. Questions were asked and some experiences, both humorous and dramatic, were related.

Judy Wing

wonderful idea – an ice-breaker which promised to stimulate and interest. It was in keeping with the principles of adult learning which stress that we all have something to contribute. The reality, however, was disappointing. There were too many participants to all report but there was no attempt to break into smaller groups, which would have allowed for all to speak with a short 'report back' plenary session at the end. Instead, the convenor opened by reading a lengthy paper of marginal interest by an absentee. Participants were then asked to come forward and to report their own projects. Only the most confident and experienced speakers made the walk to the microphone. As one of these speakers also presented a paper on his work that afternoon, the extra information the session provided about participants' interests was limited. Yet this session could have been fascinating, for example, learning about the large grant that Queensland's Tenants' Association had received for public housing tenants to undertake their own oral history.

In addition, even the most inexperienced oral historian had important insights to offer to an open session. One that struck me was the comment by one novice that she was surprised there were no talks by interviewees. The perspective, she pointed out, was all from the viewpoint of the interviewers – a perspective I'd taken for granted.

Thirdly, if a large group of people with special interests or perspectives are invited then conference organisers need to recognise that, in consequence, the basic structures of the conference may need to be altered. In this case, about one third of those enrolled were Aboriginal people, yet the structures remained that of the conventional, academic conference/workshop. It was not enough to have an Aboriginal convenor for an opening session, and papers by indigenous speakers for the final morning session. The conference role given to one elder in poor health who had endured a long, uncomfortable coach trip was also questionable and caused predictable distress.

Participants in such a conventional conference structure are positioned as 'learners' and the speakers as 'experts'. As a result the white and Aboriginal participants learnt little from each other. This was made clear by remarks by one participant in the final session bemoaning what she saw as her lack of opportunity to talk to Aborigines. Yet the Aboriginal participants I spoke to were generous in offering advice and insights into the tricky problems confronting whites, who include Aborigines among their oral history informants. In addition, a number organised a follow-up conference: ***One Family, Many Histories*** is a national conference for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories to be held 13-15 September in Brisbane.

because we get not only questions that we have but the public come up with questions we would never think of!

We have been doing this for almost ten years now and it's wonderful. People come back and use the material. Mostly now it is on video and people like to see the personality. It has become a very useful reference source for us.

You also have a program on TV & Radio to interest people in history.

Yes, we have what we call *Today In History*. We give a date, then a one or two-minute program in all languages of the country. The DJ for the program gives a date of an event then he gets the public to phone in and provide information. They must of course have been involved in the event itself. It is recorded and also becomes part of the archive.

Does the Malaysian Government place a high priority on history?

With any subject area, if we don't promote it people will forget. We feel it's our role to go on promoting history and the archives. More and more people are now using the archives for research and we keep telling them you cannot just accept books as a source of reference. You see, people in Malaysia hardly write, whereas in the West they do write. So in our case it all remains in the mind of the people and when they die it goes off with them. Files in the archives sometimes don't tell exactly what happened in between and there are many things that are not

recorded and not known. If we have no opportunity to talk to the people, we would never know.

ASEAN has realised the importance of oral history and has started a regional program where every country is given money to record at least 12 statesmen who were involved in the early stages of ASEAN. In two years we hope to get at least 12 people in each country and we should have quite a bit about the early stages of ASEAN. It is very important and we are using oral history 100 per cent.

Singapore has been running oral history projects since 1979. The material is transcribed and stored in their archives and books have been published using the material.

Irene Quah, Research Officer at the Oral History Centre was also at the Townsville conference.

The government feels that there is a gap now only to have projects that document the élite like politicians, trade unionists and senior civil servants. We need to document the history from the bottom up. There are very few people who keep diaries of their experiences so there is a need to interview these people before they die.

In Singapore you have many different languages. Are the interviews recorded in a number of languages?

We have one project on the Chinese

dialect groups and most of these interviews were conducted in Chinese dialects and we do have some conducted in Mandarin. Some of these Chinese dialect interviews have been transcribed into Mandarin.

If an interview is conducted in say Malay – do you ever translate it into another language?

Those that we feel are worth it, are transcribed into Malay and then translated into English for the convenience of foreign researchers as well as local researchers who cannot understand Malay.

How frank are the interviews?

They are quite frank because they can impose restrictions if they want to.

What projects are planned for the future?

Next year is 1995 and we will be commemorating the end of the Pacific war and we will be starting a mini project on the Post War British Military Administration in Singapore.

From interviews recorded in Townsville and first broadcast on 'That's History!' on Radio National.

Telling it Like it is: A Guide to Making Local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander History, 2 books and a video, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra 1992

Diane Smith and Boronia Halstead,

Lookin' For Your Mob: A Guide to Tracing Aboriginal Family Trees Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra 1992, 132 pp, b&w pics, diagrams, ISBN 0 85575 209 2

Penny Taylor, *Telling It Like It Is:* Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra 1992, 123 pp, b&w pics, ISBN 0 85575 243 2

Marcia Langton (author), Lew Griffiths (Producer/Director), Ron Hurley (Presenter) ***Back Trackers***, video (24 minutes)

These three productions were funded by the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, and

the National Reconciliation and Schooling Strategy. They are presented and sold as a single package.

Lookin For Your Mob advises Aboriginal and Islander people how to go about tracing their family history and genealogy. There are chapters on how to find and use photographs, museums, libraries, indigenous organisations, electoral and war records. Historical societies throughout Australia are listed but Aboriginal Land Councils, among the most useful organisations through which to make contact, are not. A friendly introduction by Iris Clayton, a Wiradjuri woman, reas-



Last call for papers for the Oral History Association of Australia Journal for 1994

Friday 29 July is the deadline for articles, book reviews and reports of projects in progress to be submitted for this year's OHAA Journal.

Send your contributions to the Editor, OHAA Journal, c/- Oral History Program, State Library of NSW, Macquarie Street, Sydney, NSW, 2000.

OHAA visit to the Jewish Museum

OHAA members are invited to join members of the Australian Society of Archivists in a visit to the Jewish Museum.

Meet at 5:30 at the Museum, 148 Darlinghurst Rd (cnr Burton) Darlinghurst, on **Wednesday 17 August 1994**.

Admission \$5.00

Refreshments will be served at 5:30 and the talk by Alan Jacobs, the Curator, will commence at 6:00pm followed by a tour of the Museum. We imagine that the visit will be concluded about 8:00pm.

National Oral History Association of New Zealand Conference 1994

The New Zealand conference will be held in conjunction with that of the New Zealand Historical Association, **19-22 August** in Auckland. Conference organis-

ers have been seeking papers about a range of topics including land rights, medicine and health, gender, work, migration and the presentation of history. Contact Megan Hutching, President, NOHANZ, PO Box 3819, Wellington, New Zealand. (reprinted from Word of Mouth No 27 June 1994)

International Conference on Oral History 1994

The International Conference will meet in the United States at Columbia University, New York City, **18-23 October**. The program includes workshops (in French, English and Spanish), research papers, discussion about methodology, and reports on the status and traditions of oral history in various nations. Contact: Ronald J. Grele, Oral History Research Office, PO Box 20, Butler Library, Columbia University, New York, New York, 10027 USA. (reprinted from Word of Mouth No 27 June 1994)

OHAA National Conference 1995

The next national conference of the Oral History Association of Australia will be held in Launceston **8-10 September 1995**.

giving people who have recovered from stroke another language to explore their experience.'

'One of the things you realise in community publishing that it isn't just about making books, it's about distributing and playing a role for a wide readership and, partly we do that by making books that are cheap and accessible but partly by distributing them through alternative networks. We set up a market stall about a decade ago, and it's still running. There's still someone from QueenSpark selling books in the street market every Saturday.'

'And interestingly we have actually gone into not the alternative bookshops but the mainstream things like W. H. Smith, the big newsagents, and in fact working class people buy most of their

books in newsagent type shops, and getting them into those shops has been important. We did a book which was an oral history of areas of Brighton which were knocked down in the so-called 'slum clearances'. It was a sort of photo memory book and it sold about 6000 copies in quite a small town. Smith's had refused to stock our books for the previous ten years, but people were flooding into Smith's saying 'Where can we get this book?' and eventually the manager rang us up rather shamefaced and said 'Can we have your book?' and ever since then they've had it. They even did a window display recently! So you can change the commercial world of publishing and distribution when you show that there is a readership for stories that aren't in the mainstream.'

Stephen Rapley

Full Steam Ahead!

Oh no, not rain and cloudy skies when the weather for the previous week was so perfect! Still stalwarts, Rosie Block and Margot McKenzie turned up for the Lady Hopetoun Cruise on Saturday 19 March and weren't they glad!

Clouds cleared, rain stopped, sun shone and together with such pleasant company, commentary by Margaret Reid and John Rich, a very happy time was had by all. We started from Rozelle Bay and

followed the northern shoreline to Concord, then returned along the southern shore when Margaret commented on the oral history of the various buildings and bays, past and present.

John Rich, the Main Engineer, told us about his experiences when he studied his apprenticeship in steam at Bristol – all students had to make a miniature ship with all the appropriate accessories. When he joined the Sydney Maritime Museum (a voluntary organisation) he