



# voiceprint

Newsletter

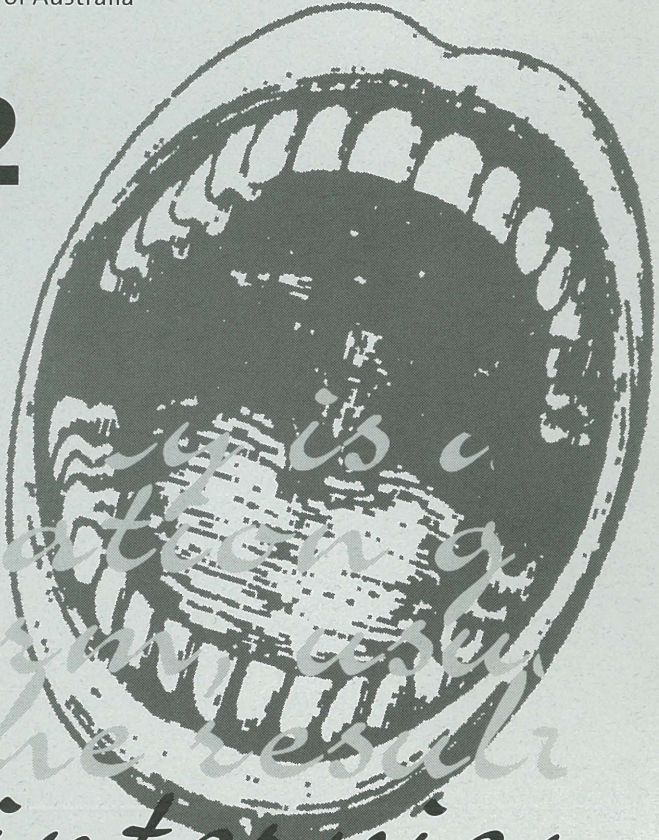
of the New South Wales Branch

of the Oral History Association

of Australia

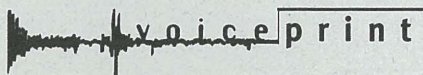
## 2

November 1994



*... is a  
rather a  
form, used  
e, as the result  
nated interview  
a means of finding  
it the past by asking  
tions of people wh*





**Voiceprint** is the newsletter of the NSW Branch of the Oral History Association of Australia and is published quarterly

**Issue No. 2 – November 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

Tel (02) 230 1697 • Fax (02) 223 4086

ISSN: 1322-4360

**Editorial:** Stephen Rapley

**Layout and Design:** Vanessa Block



# Editorial

Welcome to the second issue of the OHAA (NSW Branch) newsletter **Voiceprint** and our review of oral history events.

The indefatigable Janis Wilton has filed a report fresh with excitement from the International Oral History Conference held in New York in October. Janis has also penned her impressions of a history and writing excursion closer to home.

Judy Wing reports on a meeting she attended on behalf of the Association which was hosted by the NSW Ministry for the Arts. It signals a new initiative aimed at strengthening the Arts Ministry's support for the state's history community. And Judy is to be congratulated for ensuring OHAA's continuing involvement in this exciting development.

You'll also notice that we've inserted a tiny questionnaire in this edition of **Voiceprint**. The OHAA (NSW) committee would like to hear from you, the members, about the kinds of activities and events you'd like organised in the new year. Topics currently being discussed by your committee include sessions exploring 'New Media and Oral History' looking at the implications for oral historians of the explosion of interest in interactive multimedia (which Janis mentions in her report from New York), and 'Editing and Publishing' exploring the range of options now available to present the results of all those hard earned oral history interviews. Please tell us what you'd like to find out more about in this wide field of oral history.

Finally a note for that noble band of librarians and serials cataloguers who were probably thrown into confusion by our newsletter's change of name and number. The last edition of our Bulletin was number 42, and then **Voiceprint** reset the counter to 1.

I hope you enjoy **Voiceprint**, number 2, and of course all feedback is welcome at the usual address as shown on the inside front cover.

Stephen Rapley

# Contents



## News:

History and the Ministry for the Arts	3
International Oral History Conference, New York, October 1994	4
Regional developments after the New York conference	7
Seminar report: Memory and History	7
Oral History of the Australian Response to AIDS	8
Talking History in Central Queensland	9
Exciting new look 'Locality'	11
25th Anniversary Issue of 'Oral History'	12



## People:

Stephen Rapley	12
----------------	----



## Diary:

1995 National Conference	13
OHAA Journal	13
Sydney Writers Festival	14



## History and the Ministry

On Saturday 5 November the Committee for the Arts and Literature Program, of the NSW Ministry for the Arts, hosted a History Review Consultation to consider the history section of the Ministry's Program. The meeting was held on the rooftop of the Australian Museum and various organisations involved with the production of history were invited to send representatives to participate in the discussion. The task of the day was to identify the history community in New South Wales and to consider ways to establish a network for communication and for the dissemination of information among historians working in the field.

I attended the seminar on behalf of Rosie Block (who was otherwise engaged with the OHAA workshop) and the New South Wales Branch. It was a most interesting and successful day, largely due to the excellent organisation of the program and the skills of Neil James, Program Manager Literature and History, and Anne Rowland-Campbell, Literature and History Committee, who chaired the plenary sessions.

By the end of the sessions, which were interspersed with morning and afternoon tea and a delicious lunch, the day's discussions culminated in the passage of

the following motions: the preamble sought to foster participation in, and understanding of, Australian history through coordinating and promoting Australian history, activities and projects; it was agreed that the NSW Ministry of Arts introduce an awards program for a wide range of Australian history projects; that the history community seek the help of the Ministry to establish a State History Centre; that the State History Centre be an independent governing body which is representative of the 'broad history community' and is serviced by a permanent staff; that the Centre be based in the Sydney CBD; and that a working party (which would report to the Ministry) be established from this meeting to facilitate these proposals and receive submissions on the above. Those attending were invited to put their names on the board to become members of the Working Party and the Oral History Association is thus represented.

The Committee for the Literature and History Program and the Ministry for the Arts are to be congratulated for initiating consultation with the professional history community.

**Judy Wing**

*Ed. Gives 'that's history' a new and brilliant meaning!*



# International Oral History Conference,

*New York, October, 1994*

---

**A**n inspiring beginning. Bernice Reagon, singer with the group 'Sweet Honey in the Rock' and activist, recounted her route to oral history, burst into song to illustrate the power of words, music and their combined messages, and advocated splendidly the need for multi-voice narratives. Then a plenary with some of the better known names in oral history theory and practice reflecting on the conference theme of identity. Rina Benmayor explored and illustrated the reality and challenges of non-fragmented multiple identities in which no one factor defines an individual. Andor Skotnes reported on a project at his university aimed at crossing lines of difference and using oral testimonies to bring about dialogue between groups and individuals in conflict. Michael Frisch expressed concern that as oral historians have turned to consider theoretical issues, they have risked focussing solely on theory rather than using theory to understand life and the experiences recorded through oral histories. He urged a reassertion of the place of history and people in oral history. Alessandro Portelli returned to the idea of multiple identities. He argued for recognition of both the richness and suffering in the experiences which underpin our ideas

of who we are:

When we've been torn to pieces, it is important to create a whole. Similarly, for those who've been forced into cohesion, it is important to break into multiplicities. ... Multiculturalism is bound to make us rich and make us suffer.

Daniel Bertaux provided a too idealistic picture of how well the French idea of equality has worked in assisting ethnic communities to work together.

Provocative, parochial at times, stimulating. A good start to an international oral history conference sited in a church in uptown Manhattan. The participants did come from various parts of the world and not just from Europe and the Americas as had happened at previous conferences. In New York there were also representatives from (parts of) Asia and Africa, a strong contingent from Latin America, and a fistful from Australasia.

The opening plenary over, the sessions of the conference began. Four, sometimes five parallel sessions. Four papers to each hour slot. Choosing sessions and getting to them was a challenge – they were on different floors. Thematic groupings of papers – for some the theme worked, for

others there were bemused smiles. Timing, as always, became a problem – too much to be said in too short a time. Often the chance to discuss was thwarted. Meeting between sessions became difficult. But veteran conference stalwarts and patient others sidestepped the difficulties and we were able to seek and find. And there was a great deal to seek and find. Here I offer a limited further taste.

One day offered sessions on Nation Reports. Half an hour each, no coffee breaks, 13 nation reports delivered – Australia, Argentina, Bangladesh, Brazil, Canada, Indonesia, Philippines, Spain, South Africa, Tanzania, United Kingdom, United States, Zimbabwe. A sense of the diversity of the status and stages of oral history in different countries emerged, and also of the ways in which national histories have left their mark on the shape, content and focus of oral history enterprises.

Just a couple of examples. In the African countries, oral history lies at the core of university tertiary courses. It is a compulsory component and not questioned. A stark contrast to the resistance of (some) universities in Australia, Europe and America where traditions of documentary history have been hard to unbend. In some countries like Bangladesh and Indonesia, the emphasis is on collecting oral histories and the most serious concern is the lack or

resources to support and maintain, let alone develop, any extensive oral history collections.

It also became clearly evident that, in all countries and to varying degrees, national political climates had intruded on oral history developments, and that oral history activities were at different stages. In Argentina, for example, during the military rule of the 70s and early 80s oral history activity stopped as did intellectual debate. Since the end of the regime, there has been a gradual revival resulting, in 1993, in a first meeting on oral history. By contrast, in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada (and Australia) the oral history movement has, for some time, been formalised into oral history organisations with journals, newsletters, branches and conferences. In Spain, a long history of oral history activity dating from the 1960s ('even though we didn't know that was what we were doing until Ronald Fraser told us') culminated six years ago in the establishment of the international journal, *Historia y Fuente Oral*.

Through this day of nation reports, the value of reporting and comparing became readily apparent. Oral history emphases and activities in different national contexts can inform each other and offer inspiration, ideas and exchange of information. It was a feature of the conference which could well be more centrally placed and better organised. It

was a feature which highlights the desirability to ensure that we are better informed about oral history activities in all their diversity throughout the world.

Other tastes from the conference – not all of which I savoured – included:

- › Readings by feminist, peace activist and writer Grace Paley
- › reports on a variety of projects: recording the legal profession, oral history in museums, multimedia stories of life, archival collections, oral history and development
- › a plenary session reflecting on the future of the international oral history movement
- › a day long oral history workshop
- › papers on themes like - gay and lesbian culture, women, local history, collective identity, life stories, ethnic communities, memory, Jewish history, the body, World War II, the military, and movements of resistance

Emerging through the rushing and jamming of the conference were also contacts, ideas and possibilities. Some

are buried in my notes and await my attention. Others are being activated more quickly as I pass on possibilities to others. Eg. the Canadian Oral History Association last year published a directory of oral history projects - a useful example for our proposed national directory. At a meeting of conference delegates from Asia, it was decided that a regional newsletter should get underway with a view to establishing a network for the exchange of information and, ultimately perhaps, for the organisation of seminars and conferences. Australia, through the OHAA, could be part of this network. Museum curators, especially in Latin America, working with oral history and in multimedia are eager to exchange information and establish contact with their counterparts elsewhere in the world. And the list goes on. And I haven't even mentioned the ideas and innovative uses of oral sources in New York museums – my post-conference exercise!

Exhausting, exhilarating, at times frustrating, but still worth the effort and expense.

**Janis Wilton**



## Regional Developments after the New York Conference

---

**A**fter compiling this report Janis received a note from fellow delegate, Daniel Chew from the Oral History Centre in Singapore. One of the proposals of the Asia group who met at the New York conference, was that Singapore act as a clearing house for information on oral history in the region.

A second proposal was that a regional oral history conference be organised as a first step towards a future international conference to be held in Asia. In his letter Daniel Chew points out that there is already an institutional framework within ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) for organising oral history

conferences. The first was held in Malaysia in 1991 and the second in Singapore in 1992. Indonesia is to be the next host. Discussions are under way about the possibility of observers from outside ASEAN attending this next ASEAN oral history colloquium in Indonesia.

As a financial aside, these meetings enjoy funding support from the ASEAN Secretariat, although there's uncertainty whether this funding assistance would be extended to participants from outside the ASEAN region.

We'll keep you posted on future developments.

**Stephen Rapley**

### *Seminar Report* **Memory and History: An Oral History Practical Seminar**

---

**O**ver 70 people listened in fascination to Heather Garnsey's outstanding talk on family history, 'Family Memoirs and the Voice: Oral History and Family History' held on 5 November at the State Library of New South Wales. Heather Garnsey is the Executive Officer of the Society of Australian Genealogists.

Heather's anecdotes about her own family emphasised how important it is to capture these stories on tape. This talk was followed by Rosie Block's practical guide to recording oral history.

# Oral History of the Australian Response to AIDS

---

The National Library of Australia has recently completed a joint oral history project with the Australia Federation of AIDS Organisations (AFAO). The project titled 'The Australian Response to AIDS' was funded by an \$80,000 grant from the Commonwealth AIDS Research Grants Committee over two years.

The purpose of the grant was to record the recollections, ideas, arguments and feelings of a range of Australians who had been directly affected by the AIDS crisis since 1983.

Australia's response to the AIDS epidemic has been one of the best in the world and the range of interviews done by the National Library covers all areas of this response.

The three largest categories of interviewees were people living with HIV/AIDS, officials with AIDS organisations, and leading figures in medical research. Others interviewed included politicians, health educators, advertisers, insurance executives and journalists.

My involvement was interviewing six people. This was a very interesting, educational and emotional experience and in my small area I became more aware of the impact this epidemic is having throughout the world.

My first interview was with a man living with AIDS. He was diagnosed ten years ago. It was a very emotional recording in which he discussed the effects - both positive and negative - of the AIDS virus on his life.

My second interview was with Professor Ron Penny who was the first to diagnose AIDS in Australia. He spoke of the medical, political and educational responses. Until a cure can be found the best prevention is education and Professor Penny, while leading in the medical research area, has also been at the forefront of AIDS education.

The AIDS epidemic has also called for changes in the insurance field. Mr Kevin Pyke was instrumental in drafting these changes. He spoke about how insurers have had to understand and come to terms with an epidemic that had the potential to completely disrupt the industry.

In all the interviews discrimination was mentioned. With this in mind I decided to interview the President of the Anti-Discrimination Board, Mr. Steve Mark. The Board had published 'Discrimination - the other epidemic' (1992), a report of the Inquiry into HIV and AIDS related discrimination. Mr. Mark's valuable insights into this area made this a very interesting interview. He stressed the substantial personal and social impact of the virus on

both the individual living with it and the community at large.

Another interview I did was with the man in charge of the AIDS quilt. Anyone who has seen this quilt cannot help but be moved by it. I heard some of the stories about the individual panels and the emotional effect the quilt has wherever it is displayed. This recorded interview documents its history and impact. It is a very positive expression of love.

Another wonderful expression of love was the last recording I made for the 'The Australian Response to AIDS' project.

I interviewed a young woman who had loved and cared for a young haemophiliac man who had contracted AIDS from a blood transfusion. Her story of their love and courage, and his eventual death was very beautiful and emotional and I felt very privileged to hear it.

All 83 of the 'The Australian Response to AIDS' interviews have been preserved on archival quality tape and have been fully transcribed. Most are restricted, some for 30 years, but the future will have a valuable record of a unique time in history. **Diana Ritch, Oral Historian**

## Talking History in Central Queensland

---

**T**hanks to the Queensland Writers Centre, I recently spent eight days talking history and writing on the Central Queensland coast. It was a privilege, an insight, and hopefully some inspiration to others. My touring companion was South Australian writer Lolo Houbein. Lolo mainly writes fiction although autobiography, biography and topical issue articles also rest comfortably in her repertoire. I wore my oral historian's garb (along with the little gold mouse created by my mother!) For most of the tour we gave joint sessions – exchanging, interchanging, laughing, cajoling. Our audiences and participants were a varying mixture of poets, short

story writers, novelists, local and family historians, and academics. Our emphases changed from group to group.

We explored the meeting ground between oral history and fiction: the use of other people's memories and personal experiences to evoke understanding, emotions and a sense of identity, and the need to ensure that appropriate research and creative writing skills underpin all writing, whether fiction, or non-fiction. We workshoped people's abilities to tape memories, whether their own or someone else's, and to convert those memories into sentences, paragraphs and stories evocative of past places, events and people.



For oral history, it was like starting at the end: trialling and developing the shape and form of an end product with often only brief introductions to all the research, interview and transcribing skills which so often are the stuff of oral history workshops.

The benefits were apparent. Local and family historians, still caught in the tasks of uncovering stories and documenting details, had glimpses of an end product shaped by creative writing skills. Fiction aficionados tasted the possibilities of listening to others' memories, hearing and capturing their voices, and providing fuller images by exploring and presenting the views of a variety of observers and participants.

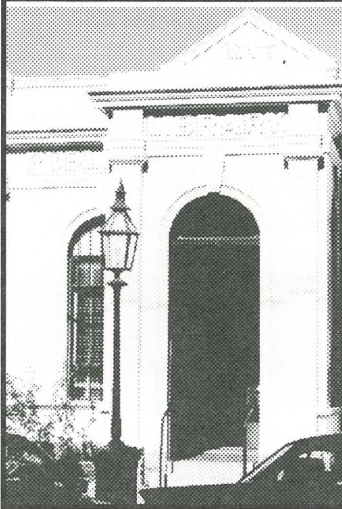
In the midst of these encounters we also discovered an inspiring array of individual and group projects incorporating oral history. They included formally established projects like those on the Mount Morgan mine and on Remote Area Nursing based at the University of central Queensland in Rockhampton, the A to Z Disability Book Project under way in Gladstone, and the fieldwork being pursued through the Dreamtime Cultural Centre at Rockhampton. Other work is being done at an individual level. There is a variety of local and family history research building on or developing oral history material: some intended as the basis for fiction or poetry, some for family or local archives, some for

histories. Jill Miller in Gladstone is continuing to record the experiences of women who work in what were traditionally male occupations. There are also a number of projects in the making. These include an English as a Second Language class contemplating interviews with each other as the basis for both learning English and producing a publication; a writer using memories as a focus for children's books which explore cultural diversity; and members of a local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community working to record and present their perspectives as an integral part of the curriculum for local schools.

Some projects and activities are rushing ahead. Others seek encouragement, assistance and support. Oral history and community arts networking into the regions could be a help, with focussed workshops a possibility, and the sharing of ideas and problems through the OHAA Newsletter.

**Janis Wilton**

## COMMUNITY HERITAGE GRANTS



The National Preservation Office is offering grants of up to \$5,000 to assist community organisations such as libraries and historical societies, multicultural and indigenous peoples' groups to preserve their documentary heritage collections.

Applications close Friday, 14 April 1995. Guidelines and application forms are available from:

Katy Bellingham  
National Preservation Office,  
National Library of Australia  
Canberra ACT 2600.  
Ph: 06-2621357 Fax: 06-2734493  
e-mail: [kbelling@nla.gov.au](mailto:kbelling@nla.gov.au)



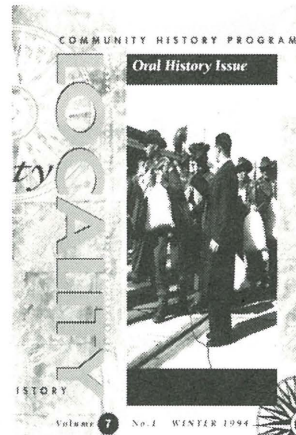
NATIONAL  
LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA

## Exciting new look 'Locality'

Oral history is the theme of the bright new edition of *Locality*, the publication from the Community History Program based in the School of History at the University of New South Wales. The CHP is soon to become the Centre for Community History, with an expanded schedule of activities including the Community History Annual Lecture.

*Locality* is published quarterly and if you're interested in becoming a subscriber, you should write to the Community History Program, School of History, University of NSW, Sydney 2052. The CHP can also be contacted on phone

(02) 3852379 & fax (02) 313 7525, or  
Internet: [L.McCarthy@unsw.edu.au](mailto:L.McCarthy@unsw.edu.au)



---

## Stop Press

When a program turns into a centre it is GOOD NEWS. Thus Chancellor Professor John Niland who introduced the Minister for the Arts, Peter Collins, QC, MP, who opened the Centre on 4 December 1994. Community History is certainly here to stay – and growing. Having been supported in its ‘program’ state by the School of History and the Bicentennial Authority, it has made its energy and its message felt throughout New South Wales. Congratulations on hanging in there and growing up to be a Centre.

---

## 25th Anniversary Issue of ‘Oral History’

---

The latest number of the Journal of the British Oral History Society, celebrating 25 years of ‘Oral History’, includes a lively report on the state of oral history in Australia, written by Rosie Block and Janis Wilton. There’s also a brief illustrated report extracted from the SA Branch’s ‘Word of Mouth’ newsletter on Peter and Jay Read’s exciting multimedia CD-ROM ‘Long Time, Olden Time: Aboriginal Accounts of Northern Territory History’.

As well, Paula Hamilton joins Alistair Thomson and Michael Frisch in a special article that brings together some international perspectives on the debates about memory and history. From early celebrations of ‘history from below’ through arguments about the reliability of memory, and the relationships between oral history and popular and collective histories, the co-authors provide a comprehensive survey of the debates in three different countries, the UK, the USA and Australia.

People |



---

## Stephen Rapley

---

Stephen Rapley is retiring from the editorship of the newsletter and we thank him very much for his contribution as founding editor of **Voiceprint**. We need a new editor URGENTLY. All offers to Rosie Block (02) 230 1697.





## OHAA Journal No. 16

The next edition of the Journal of the OHAA will be published in December 1994. The title of the journal is 'Publicity and Privacy: Balancing the Interests in Oral History' and it contains papers from the 1993 OHAA National Conference 'Private Eye to Public Ear' as well as book reviews and Branch reports.

The Journal will be posted out to all members in December, and it will also be available for sale to non-members for \$15 from:

OHAA (SA Branch)  
122 Kintore Ave  
Adelaide, SA 5000



*Butter/White Wings bake-off. John Pearce interviewing Bob and Dolly Dyer. 23/4/64. photo Jack Hickson. Australian Photographic Agency Collection, State Library of New South Wales*

## 1995 OHAA National Conference

**8-10 September 1995**, Launceston, Tasmania.

Don't forget to put down the dates for the next National Conference in your diary. The theme chosen by the conference conveners from the Tasmanian Branch is 'Words at Work'.

The deadline for expressions of interest in presenting a paper at the Launceston meeting has passed (1 November 1994). However, Jill Cassidy is seeking suggestions from our readers about oral historians, both from Australia, and from overseas who may be visiting this country in September next year, who might be invited to address the conference.

All correspondence should be sent directly to:

Jill Cassidy  
Queen Victoria Museum and Art  
Gallery  
Wellington Street  
Launceston Tas 7250  
phone (003) 37 1391 fax (003) 37 1117

---

**Sydney Writer's Festival, January 1995**

At the State Library of New South Wales,  
20–26 January 1995.

Exciting sessions by visitors Bernice Rubens (UK), Amitav Ghosh (India), Alan Duff (New Zealand), Jane Urquhart (Canada) and Rohinton Mistry (Canada) as well as many stimulating addresses and panels by Australian writers.

Of particular interest may be ***Memories into Multi-Media – Oral History Profile.***

This session includes Diana Giese, Peter Read and Frank Heimans. Rosie Block will be in the chair; 26 January, 1:30–3pm. Up to the minute for oral historians.

---

**OHAA Seminar, 11 March 1995**

OHAA (NSW)/State Library Seminar, 11 March 1995, will offer a full morning session on oral history and new media with Heather Goodall (UTS) and Stephen Rapley (ABC). The flyer will be mailed later – meantime please note the date.

We wish all our members and their families a very happy and enjoyable Christmas and holiday season.

