



voiceprint

Newsletter

of the New South Wales Branch

of the Oral History Association

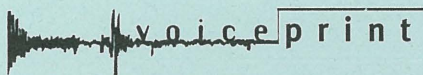
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November 1995



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Editorial

The final issue for the year has been compiled by an Editorial Committee which has doubled since the last issue. Angela Wawn and Shelley Barwick have joined the team and are warmly welcomed. Despite the best intentions, we are all busy people and sharing the load between four will lighten it for each individual.

*In our last issue we invited participation in the newsletter by members and the lack of any replies has been somewhat disappointing. However, we intend designing a questionnaire which we will send to all members, inviting ideas and suggestions as to what you would like to see in **Voiceprint** .*

If any members would like to suggest ideas for inclusion in the questionnaire, we would be glad to receive them.

There are several lengthy reports in this issue, courtesy of Shelley Barwick and Angela Wawn. They have been published in their entirety and they will be of interest to those who were unable to attend either the National Conference or the Workshops at the State Library. It is apparent that events such as these are richly rewarding for those able to attend both for information gained and for the experience of sharing with others who are interested in oral history.

We would like to wish all OHA members a happy Christmas and a safe holiday season.

Jenny Allison

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New Members

New Members from July 1995:

Terry Bug	Breakwater Museum, Russellvale
Shelley Barwick	Sydney
Sam Iskander	Sydney
John Brain	Canberra
Annie Bolitho	The Channon
Cecelia Clarke,	Canberra
Lillaine Gedye	Sydney
Errol Floyd	Sydney
Robin Archer	Masada College, Sydney
Virginia McLeod	Sydney
Barry Nobes	Sydney
Barbara Pillans	Sydney
Fay Richardson	Sydney
Margot Seligmann	Sydney
Neil Sauber	Morpeth
Michelle Young	New Delhi, India
Angela Wawn and Don Beresford	Sydney
Suzanne Whyte	Gwandalan

The following are the members of the new Executive:

Rosemary Block	President
Judy Wing	Secretary
Margot McKenzie	Treasurer
Steven Rapley	ABC Radio National
John Rich	Consultant Engineer with an interest in jazz
Graeme Curry	Lecturer in the Faculty of Nursing at UTS
Diana Ritch	Consultant Oral Historian
Verena Mauldon	Museums Australia

Dr. Ian Stewart
Ernest Buckley
Margaret Droulers
Lianne Hall

Gynaecologist from Wagga Wagga
Diversional Therapist
Retired member of the State Library
Oral History Officer at the Stanton Library
North Sydney

Judith Godden has resigned due to her promotion to Head of the Department of Behavioural and Social Sciences in Nursing at the University of Sydney.

We congratulate her and thank her for her past service.

A member of the Editorial Committee will attend each Executive meeting.

REPORTS

“Words at Work”

The Oral History Association of Australia National Conference

“History is not the old walking plough, it is the person behind it.”

The Oral History National Conference was held at Launceston from 8 to 10 September 1995. The conference was well attended. In this brief report, I have not attempted to cover every speaker or every aspect of the conference, but merely offer the reader a small selection of the creative and diverse applications oral history offers.

John Roles, a last minute guest speaker at the conference, who works for the Brighton Museum and Art Gallery in the UK says “public institutions have a direct responsibility to make use of oral history. It is not a luxury, but should be

a core of public studies. Oral history benefits local people who live in the country or the cities – it’s for the people”.

A very contemporary approach to oral history was taken by him in his latest project “My Brighton”, a case study combining multi-media – CD Rom, and community history for the medium sized museum. The computer was set up so you could take a trip through Brighton, using the guide of your choice. There were five guides to choose from, all of whom had chosen different areas of Brighton according to their own interests. The guides offered to show the participator very different aspects of the city. For example, if you chose to see it through the eyes of a local artist, you

would touch the screen on his/her name and his/her photograph would appear and he/she would make a verbal introduction. The participator could then look at a map of Brighton and choose where to go, and get a synopsis on the place of interest. Also available were photos, history notes, and a facts file. Going through the process, the participator felt very involved and was able to exercise freedom of choice in terms of how much or how little information was chosen.

One of the questions John was asked was why didn't he use video instead of multi-media. He said that he found a "moving talking head" unnecessary and that a photograph and the voice was enough. Another factor was the major financial costs in video and the amount of memory used on the computer. The multi-media introduction is meant to be a "taster" only. John Roles and his staff started the project through a newspaper article and waited for a response. John was asked a question about how he dealt with accuracy, because everyone has a different truth, often a criticism of oral history. He replied that after a great deal of thought and discussion about this he left the mistakes in: sometimes people made obvious mistakes, but he just left them in and corrected them in the facts file. There is also a book available on "My Brighton" with extract tapes and all the material (fifteen hours and 30,000 words) was archived and digitised.

Tracey Ryan from Redland Shire Council presented a paper called "Promises, processes and product: Passing the time in the Redlands." Tracey has a flair for marketing, and has taken the slant of using oral history as a major promotional resource in promoting tourism. For her project she used extracts from testimony, lots of pictures, a post card book, displays, and took the information into the community, providing a consultancy service. There was wide community institutional support.

Tracey believes multi-media is a very successful way to promote oral history, and sees a lot of potential in the Internet as well. For her project, Tracey used only professional interviewers and said that if oral history is to be taken seriously in terms of obtaining grants, funding and financial support from institutions, then professional interviewers must be used to get the best possible results from the interview itself. Successful projects attract money, and the more projects that gain recognition, the more oral history will grow as a legitimate profession.

Roberta Bonnin is a community writer who did a project on "Women of Quandamooka: Exploring representation through recording processes, text and photography". Roberta demonstrated a very creative approach to oral history in her project, going beyond tapes and transcripts to a living museum encom-

passing art, philosophy and photography, which she termed “personal cultural mapping”. When asked how she chose her subjects she replied “purely because I liked them”. She found oral history a wonderfully creative way to present the information about these women and talked about one woman, for instance, who was very difficult to get anything out of, and whose story eventually became a chest of drawers which could be opened and explored.

Dino Hodge’s oral history project on homosexual men in the Northern Territory eventually grew to become a theatre piece which ultimately played in New York as a 70 minute show. The play used the words of the people entirely, presenting a story in a non-academic form. He selected participants for what they brought to the project. The works recorded from the interview were faithfully followed, using an actor to present them.

During Rosemary Block’s paper, “Keeping Faith With the Voice” and Francis Good’s paper – “Transcripts, Uses and Abuses” an interesting debate arose regarding the importance of the transcript. Rosemary’s belief is that the recording is the original document and anything after that is an excerpt, and it is of the utmost importance to keep the faith for the voice in combination with logging. Francis, while agreeing wholeheartedly that the transcript is the

secondary source, insists that there still must be a transcript, albeit properly treated. Points put forward in favour of transcripts are that we are still a print oriented society and many people simply do not listen to the tapes.

It was agreed by all that tape and transcript are two different products and equally important. Transcripts are valuable when they are put on computer enabling the researcher to search for important parts of the transcript that he or she may be researching, as opposed to wading through tapes.

Anne and Donald Richie brought greetings from the United States Oral History Association. Accomplished and entertaining speakers, they generated a lot of enthusiasm for oral history, which, as Donald Richie said, is “a flexible tool limited only by your imagination”. An invitation was issued by the Richies to any interested oral historians to visit the USA for the 30th oral history conference to be held in 1996. In the US there is an oral history channel on cable TV, and a history channel. Reminiscence oral history is becoming accepted in tertiary education as part of historical research and there is no doubt that up and coming generations who have cut their teeth on technology will invent even more creative ways of using oral history.

A video oral history project on “The Knowledge” (which is obtaining a cab licence in London) was a very interesting

life story collection and another medium to work with. The video was entertaining, interesting and watchable.

An exciting oral history project was put together by Kate Walsh from the Migration Museum, turning oral history into visual art. This project was based on the Onkaparinga Woollen Mill and migrant workers from war-torn Europe who were employed at the Mill and elsewhere locally during the 1950s to 1970s. After the interviews and transcripts were collected, a group of artists immersed themselves in an intense workshop listening to the interviews and reading the transcripts, becoming completely familiar with the stories that the migrants had to tell. The result was a display, "Boatload of Dreams". Eight major themes emerged for the artists which were represented by eight doors and other installations. The project represented themes of home, country, war, life, children, towards a new life, and integration. There was a publication that went with the project. The tapes are archived and there is a transcript available as well. The old Onkaparinga Mill was turned into a social history museum to house the project.

Another interesting treatment of oral history was from Tasmanian Robyn Friend, freelance writer and community artist: "Voices from the Invisible: Oral History as poetry." She endeavoured to catch the rhythms of speech in her

transcripts and described it as "spoken broken prose". As a professional transcriptionist myself, her paper and her treatment of speech in writing has given me a lot to think about, and has changed the way I think about transcripts forever.

Anyone wishing to buy the 1995 Journal which has published most of the papers from the conference may do so through the Association. The next conference will be in Alice Springs in 1997.

Shelley Barwick

Workshop

Held on 12 August 1995 at the State Library of New South Wales

This was a day which provided a number of insights into how different people approach their oral history projects.

A Self-Publishing Success

Pat Study Clift started by speaking about the current research which she and her husband, Jim, are conducting on the life of a female bushranger whose hideout was in the ranges around Glen Innes.

Several years ago, Pat and Jim self-published their first book, *Only Our Gloves On*, and ended up selling 3,000 copies. They attributed its success to several factors, including its colourful characters, being chosen as book of the month by Myers Tweed Heads, its use on ABC radio, and the 11 promotional articles run by the *Narrabri Courier*, which had printed the book.

Help for the Self-Publisher: An Option

Patrick Blake, of Dymocks Books/Bookpress, described the process of self-publishing, for which an author usually has to arrange everything including typesetting, design, make-up, pagination and quotations from printers. He warned the economics are not bright for books which have a short run of, say, 500 copies

consisting of text only with a simple cover.

Dymocks/Bookpress, in association with E & I Publishing, Dymocks and Dashing Printing will carry out the full self-publishing process, including reading the manuscript, editing, designing, and arranging illustrations. Everything is vertically integrated while the writer, who is also the publisher, remains in full control. Although self-publishing can be expensive, this is an alternative which frees the author from much of the detailed production work.

They charge an initial fee of \$1,000.00, with further charges including \$50.00 for stocking the resulting book in any of Dymocks 77 stores for 60 days. Further details of costs involved are available from Patrick Blake at Dymocks/Bookpress.

Tips for Preparing a Local History

Louella McCarthy from the Centre for Community History at the University of New South Wales, spoke on *Researching and Writing a Local History*. Her advice is to start the project with a problem, looking at questions of tradition and the changes that have taken place over time, then formulating the causes and effects of the changes. It is also advisable to read

widely to find out what other people have said about the topic to assist the areas on which to focus and also to ask the right questions.

Pam Liell spoke on *Memories: the Burwood Oral History Project* from tape to type, describing the process from the interview, checking the tape, deciding on what information to obtain, obtaining photograph permission forms, labelling the tape correctly, typing out the interview log using colour-coded paper, then transcribing the tape.

Practical Advice for Organising

Sally Clarke's talk was on "*Oh dear! This does bring back memories*": *Seniors' Stories into Print*, detailing the importance of:

- Photographs, which should be copied, captioned immediately and returned swiftly to their owners;
- Keeping lists of photographs, captions, and where they are to appear in the text;
- Collecting as many maps as possible;
- Using plastic pockets for material;
- An index;
- Using a designer for the book;
- Allowing a leeway of at least two weeks between the estimated date of publication and the date of the official launch to overcome any unforeseen problems;
- Checking the proof before the final printing;

- Getting review copies to the local papers prior to the launch
- Producing a flyer for distribution to local papers, bookshops and other relevant areas for publicity.

Gina Lennox talked about producing *People of the Cross*, for which her large dog was her companion whilst she was conducting interviews.

She found that, after she had edited her tapes, she often had more questions she wanted to ask, and advised that consultation with her interviewees was important to avoid any misunderstandings about the finished stories. She used six different photographers, all with different styles, only arranging for photographs to be taken after she had carried out the interviews.

Interviewing Family Members

Susan Varga spoke about producing a book from interviews with a close family member, which is covered elsewhere in this issue of *Voiceprint*.

Angela Wawn

Public History Conference

Professional Historians Association NSW Inc.

Although this conference was held in June of this year, as it was advertised in an earlier edition of *Voiceprint* we thought members would be interested in reading the report which was written by Paul Ashton, President of PHA.

“To mark the PHA's tenth anniversary, the Association held a ‘Public History’ conference at Millers Point on 24 June. More than 60 people attended the day-long event, some of whom were interstate visitors (1 from Victoria, a couple from Canberra and 1 from Western Australia). It was also good to see a turn up of individuals from various institutions including the State Library, the Department of Urban Affairs and Planning and a number of universities.

Speakers included Graeme Davison (who gave a stimulating keynote address), Peter Read, Judith Godden, Paula Hamilton, Catherine Snowden, Grace Karskens, Tony Prescott and Jan Penny. The three sessions were chaired by Rosemary Broomham, Joan Kent and Paul Ashton.

One striking feature of the papers was the diverse experience of ‘public historians’. Other themes which emerged were the interaction of history with other disciplines and the overlaps and intersections between ‘public’,

academic and amateur history. Warning signs were also observed. Graeme Davison noted the new, global managerial style which was antithetical to history. The most striking feature of the discussions which followed was their animation and length. Despite the best efforts of the Chairs, the conference ran over time by one hour. But this did not matter given the relaxed nature of the conference and intended earlier-than-usual closing time.

And speaking of closing time, it must be reported that the post conference drinks (inside and on top of the Palisade Hotel) and the dinner (which was held later at the Hero of Waterloo Hotel) were also highly successful. Thirty-two people attended the dinner. Entertainment was also provided by the Association's Hon. Auctioneer, Chris Keating, who conducted a mini auction of books during the evening.

Finally, at the close of the conference the Association's revised code of ethics was launched by Shirley Fitzgerald. Developed by the Ethics Committee and edited by Christa Ludlow, the publication contains seven chapters. Christa Ludlow was also given an Honorary Life Membership to the Association given her tireless efforts and her recent move into another professional area. **Paul Ashton** *President*



INSIGHTS

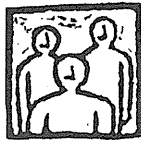
Further to the “Between the Bridges” article in the last newsletter, here’s an interesting excerpt on soundscapes from the newsletter of the South Australian branch of the OHA, “Word of Mouth” June 1995; courtesy Beth Robertson:

“April’s talk by Bruce Emsley about recording sound effects was fascinating. Bruce, who worked with the ABC for 30 years and now runs Sound Environment Productions, has collected and catalogued thousands of sounds – from a blow-fly bumbling against a window and bird song in the bush to wharf activities and steam trains. He played evocative examples and discussed matters of recording technique which have much relevance to oral history. For instance, Bruce recommends that interviewers deliberately record at least 30 seconds of silence during a recording session – when the microphones are left running but the interviewer and interviewee say nothing, allowing the situation’s unique ambient sounds to be recorded. This will then be available for editing, so that pauses between excerpts, for

instance, sound natural rather than sterile.

Many of us who heard Bruce will never hear sounds in quite the same way again. My favourite example was his recording of a fox hunt. His aim was a recording that could provide effects for productions set in any era. Bruce had explained what he was doing to the leader of the hunt and set up his equipment next to a hedge. We heard the dogs approach and scramble over the jump, the horses’ hooves and their laboured breathing, the riders urging their mounts – and then we heard the hunt leader grunt ‘G’Day Bruce’, and another rider, who didn’t know what Bruce was up to shout, ‘Get out of the way you fool!’ Finally, that bane of sound recordists’ efforts, the aeroplane, began its inexorable journey overhead. Another session ruined!”

Miriam Moloney



IN THE FIELD

New South Wales Fire Brigade

One of the attractions of going to the Oral History Association's workshops and meetings is coming into contact with and discussing their projects with the wide cross-section of people interested in oral history.

One of these people is John Richards, Historian for the New South Wales Fire Brigade. He has two current projects, one of which involves oral history, the other a pictorial history of the Fire Brigade.

The recording of oral histories for the Fire Brigade started following the appointment of Commissioner Ian MacDougall, A.M. As a former naval officer, he was familiar with the Navy's practice of using oral history techniques to record the career and experiences of each retiring officer.

The Fire Brigade has now introduced a similar practice, interviewing those retired officers who consent to participate in the scheme. Two or three interviews are carried out with each officer at the officer's home, with the interviews being taped, documented and eventually published in booklet form.

The master tapes are placed in the Fire Brigade's archives, while copies of the books and tapes are sent to the State Library of New South Wales, and are also kept in the Fire Brigade library.

This project was started in late 1994/early 1995, and John Richards is dedicated to obtaining as many interviews as possible because he considers it is vital to speak with the many fine officers whose experiences are currently undocumented.

Angela Wawn

Marrickville Remembers

Through meeting up with a former colleague at one of the Oral History Association's workshops, we discovered that the Marrickville Heritage Society is undertaking an oral history project in conjunction with Australia Remembers.

They have obtained a grant of \$5,000.00 to assist them in capturing the wartime memories of people who were living, working or going to school in the Marrickville local government area during the Second World War. This area includes Stanmore, Petersham, Enmore, Sydenham, Tempe and parts of Camperdown and Newtown. Among the memories sought are:

- what it was actually like for civilians living in Sydney during the war;
- how people coped with, for example, food rationing;
- how people managed despite other shortages caused by the war situation
- and how they managed generally

After receiving their grant in March 1995, the Marrickville Heritage Society then set about organising how they would manage the project. When this was in place, they advertised for participants,

using publications such as the War Widows' Guild newsletter and genealogical society newsletters.

The organisers of the project were aware from the outset that they faced quite a challenge in tracing participants because a number of people left the area at the end of the war to move to the Canterbury/ Bankstown and Sutherland areas.

They now have 100 participants in the project, with 15 interviewers carrying out the interviews. When the interviews are completed, it is planned that the tapes and accompanying logs will be placed in the local study section of the Marrickville Library. The major purpose of the interviews is to produce a book featuring extracts from the interviewee's memories, probably organised under topic headings.

Angela Phippen, who is organising the project, has agreed to provide a detailed article on the project for the next issue of *Voiceprint*.

Angela Wawn



ARTICLES

“Heddy and Me”

A Daughter's recording of her Mother's Lifetime Experiences

Susan Varga knew all her life that, at some stage, she had to record her mother's life story. It took her many years before she was able to confront the issues, conduct a series of interviews with her mother, then write her story.

At the Oral History Association's workshop on 12 August 1995, Susan Varga spoke about her experience in producing the result: *Heddy and Me*, published by Penguin.

She described the difficult process of creating an oral history of a family member who is still alive, including how to control the style, pace and tone of both the interviews and the finished product.

After a false start, where she discovered she was not the one who was setting the parameters, she arranged with her mother, Heddy, that they would have a commitment to meet once a week. She immediately discovered that this provided a regularity and formality which had not been there previously. They settled into a routine with sessions of one and a quarter hours each week. She discovered that she then became the interviewer rather than the daughter,

and was able to be non-judgmental, interested and warm.

After each session, she would log the tapes, as well as recording her own reactions to both the person and the story. These reaction pieces were vignettes without any continuity but related to the interviewing process itself, becoming her diary of the process by reflecting the mood of the day, and became an important part of the book.

The experience of interviewing her mother, with whom she had had a troubled relationship for many years, was therapeutic for both Susan and Heddy: the mother telling her own story, the daughter writing a commentary on the narrative injecting conflict and contrast into the mother's recounting of her life history.

Heddy gave Susan licence to use what she liked and, at times, they talked with the tape recorder turned off, when Susan made a written record of the discussions.

She wanted to interweave the historical background with the personal story of Heddy's childhood, including her relationship with her own parents. In

order to obtain a historical perspective, Susan read as much as she could about Hungarian history, particularly during the war years and the Holocaust. Before she began the actual process of writing, she arranged to go on a trip to Hungary for three months, three weeks of which were spent with her mother visiting scenes from Heddy's childhood.

Research for the book took Susan Varga a little over a year, while writing it took a further two and half years and five drafts.

At the writing stage, Susan had to decide who was to control the book: she or her subject. She relied heavily on her material to counter her own memories of her childhood, but on occasions found it difficult to arrive at a balance between her voice and her mother's voice. Eventually, she allowed her voice to predominate where her own memories were involved.

Susan and her mother came to an understanding that there would be no holds barred, but unfortunately she was unable to reach a similar understanding with other members of her family. Although she did not provide them with the right to veto anything in the book, she allowed them to read it before publication. The result, as well as a published book, was a process that was cathartic for both mother and daughter, particularly as Heddy felt that finally someone was listening to her. Susan

found that some people were critical of her, particularly in relation to her honesty about her conflict with her mother, but she considered that the process ended up as a great gift to her mother because Heddy felt that it validated her life.

The book itself

Heddy and Me is an effortlessly flowing narrative telling one family's experiences before, during and after the cataclysmic upheaval of the Second World War.

The book opens with Susan Varga questioning why she had become interested in her father long after his death and the death of almost everyone who knew him, and when she had lived longer than he did.

The book then moves seamlessly between the past and the present, between the cultural richness and diversity of life enjoyed by reasonably well-off middle-class people in Hungary in the years before the war, and the culturally bleaker existence of a Jewish refugee family coming to terms with the enormous differences of life in middle-class Australia in the years after the war.

The story moves between Heddy's parents and grandparents after the First World War and during the 1930's, her own much-loved father's squandering of his financial resources by an addiction to gambling, her marriage to her first husband Feri (Susan's father) despite her downwardly mobile family circum-

stances, life as a well-off young middle-class married woman in the early years of the Second World War, her subsequent life in the country when Budapest became unsafe, and how life changed when Feri was drafted into a Hungarian labour camp in early 1944.

The narrative then moves through the traumatic war years, from the German invasion of Hungary to the “liberation” by looting, raping Russian soldiers, Heddy’s return to Budapest, her eventual discovery that Feri had died in the labour camp, her second marriage to Gyuszi, who had lost his wife and two sons in Auschwitz, and their eventual emigration from Hungary to Australia.

Life in Australia was very different, with language problems and the need to settle the two girls into schools, but the determination of both Heddy and Gyuszi saw them eventually settled into a comfortably well-off middle-class life on Sydney’s North Shore, which Susan hated.

The final part of the narrative deals with Susan’s adolescence and her deteriorating relationship with her

mother, interwoven with her trip to Hungary in 1990 to finalise research into Heddy’s early life.

This is a sometimes painful personal insight into the effect of war on one family and their attempts to re-establish their lives in a far-off, strange country told in an easy narrative style which takes the reader effortlessly from the First World War in Hungary until the present day in Australia.

Angela Wawn

Diary of Events



November 8 1995: Talk, *Richard III*, by distinguished actor John Bell, two of the king's letters will be read by members of Richard III Society. 5.30 for 6, SLNSW. Library Society \$12 members, \$15 non-members. Bookings 230 1500.

November 11 1995: Excursion. In the footsteps of Matthew Everingham to celebrate the bicentenary of his attempted crossing of the Blue Mountains. 9-6. RAHS, members \$41, \$46 non-members. Bookings 247 8001

November 12 1995: Dance Performance by Link Theatre. Site-line. First Government House Place, Bridge Street, 12.45, 1.45, 2.45. Free. (Courtesy of Joy Hughes, PHA)

March 9 1996: By popular request, OHA Seminar solely on The Interview. Metcalfe Auditorium State Library of NSW. Rosemary Block 230 1697.

NEW BOOK TITLES

Some new book titles available in the Library Bookshop, State Library of New South Wales, Macquarie Street, Sydney (02) 230 1611

Ros Bowden, *Women of the Land*. Stories of Australia's Rural Women. Sydney, ABC Books 1995 • \$16.95

Jean Scott, *Girls with Grit*. Memories of the Australian Women's Land Army. Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1995. • \$19.95

Joscelynne Scutt, (Ed.) *City Women, Country Women*. Crossing the Boundaries. Melbourne, Artemis 1995. \$19.95

Rosemary's comment: "The theme is entirely by chance! is it a trend?"