



# voiceprint

Newsletter

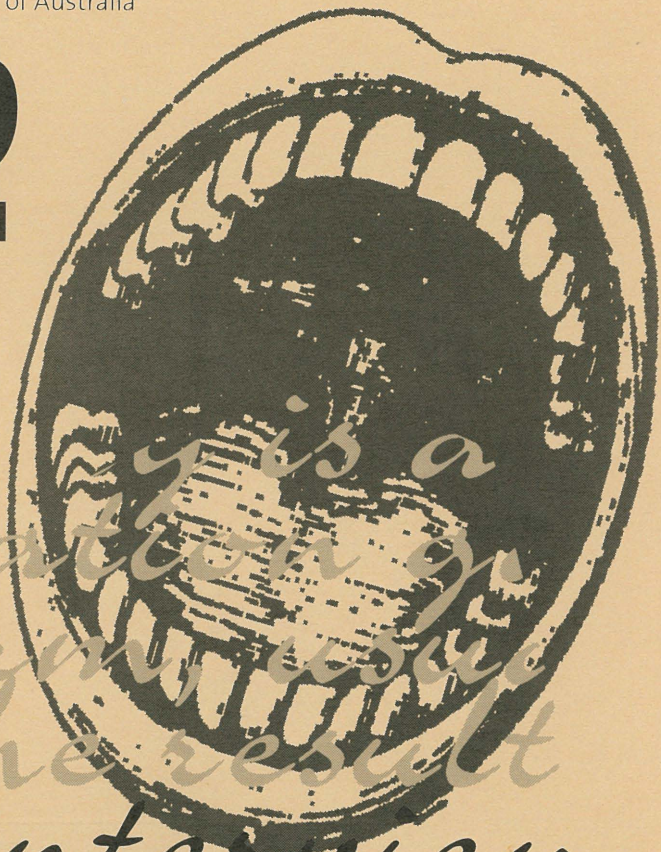
of the New South Wales Branch

of the Oral History Association

of Australia

# 9

August 1996



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# Editorial

*In this issue we present two different perspectives on the use of oral history.*

*I recall that leading up to and during the Bicentennial celebrations in 1988 there was an upsurge in interest in family history. Indeed, the ABC published, under the auspices of the Bicentennial Authority Program for Older Australians, a book by Elizabeth Butel called "A Life Album". Reminders of life events throughout the book were aimed at encouraging older people to write their life stories themselves or record them so that helpers would write the information into the book for them. There was a feeling then, as there was in 1919 as we see towards the end of this issue of **Voiceprint**, that it was important to record the memories of older people for posterity.*

*Peter Newton, editor of the Sydney Jazz Club's **Quarterly Rag** is similarly concerned with collecting the memories of older people specifically those who have been involved in the field of jazz. The article is interesting for the information it provides about what has already been achieved and for the suggestions that Peter has for the future.*

*David Battersby's article gives us a different reason for encouraging older people to search their memories. Reminiscence Work or Therapy, is being used by such professionals as Diversional Therapists as a tool to help older people in a number of ways, amongst which is the improvement of morale, decrease in depression, enhanced cognitive functioning, increasing life satisfaction and increasing self-esteem. Reminiscence is being used in many different areas where older people gather together, such as nursing homes and community groups and involves those participating telling their stories in varied forms. We are glad to have David Battersby's permission to publish this article – as Reminiscence is the topic of our next seminar on Saturday 21 September.*

*I hope that you, as **Voiceprint** readers, get as much out of reading about the diverse aspects of oral history as I do. It is easy to get immersed in one's own project and not be aware of what others similarly involved are doing.*

**Jenny Allison**

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## New Members

New Members to July 24 1996:

Anne Giles was listed in the last issue as a "farm historian". In fact we misread an abbreviation for "fam" historian. Our apologies, Anne, BUT we had a lot of enquiries to be sent onto our farm historian of whom we are now at least one fewer!

Members, what about a bit of farm history? Do let us know if you are conducting oral histories in that area. Jenny Hudson is investigating the Liverpool Plains – anyone else got their microphone on the rural scene?

<b>Robin Archer</b>	Museum Studies student
<b>Ann Arciulli</b>	Student
<b>Jillian Baxter</b>	Librarian
<b>Paul Brunton</b>	Curator of Manuscripts, Mitchell Library
<b>Noeleen Curran</b>	Archaeologist
<b>Gladys Lim</b>	Local historian, Burwood Oral History Project
<b>Greg Patmore</b>	University lecturer, interested in industrial history
<b>Adriana Piscicelli</b>	Student
<b>Lea-Anne Redfern</b>	Research Assistant
<b>Paul Scifleet</b>	Archivist, Mitchell Library
<b>Myfanwy Thompson</b>	Student

## WANTED: Oral History Coordinator

The Institution of Engineers, Sydney has a large on-going oral history program focused on recording the experiences of eminent engineers. The Program is managed through the Engineering Heritage Committee and interviewing is done by a team of volunteers, supplemented by professional interviewers.

The Oral History Co-ordinator is responsible for day to day administration. This includes arranging interviews, supervising and training interviewers, logging tapes and preparing and issuing correspondence.

The applicant would be a casual employee and will need to be knowledgeable in oral history techniques, be able to use and have access to a word processor, and be able to work from home.

Hours of work are as required, ranging from 8 to 16 hours per week.

For further information please contact: Michael Clarke, Chairman Engineering Heritage Committee, phone and fax (02) 745 3752

## Letters in Praise of Lucy Taksa

**From Michael N. Clarke, Chairman of the Engineering Heritage Committee**

Dear Dr Taksa

Some weeks ago I was at the Oral History Seminar at the State Library, at which you spoke about the Eveleigh Locomotive Workshops. It was I that asked the question about featherbedding in the workshops, based on the account of my ex Welsh coal miner father-in-law. Might I say what a fascinating morning it was and thank you for such an interesting and stimulating address.

You asked for information and artifacts, I think to do with your History of Labour? project. Perhaps you might be interested in the following.

As you will know, I live at Enfield and I am not far from the old Enfield tram depot, which became a bus depot. The site is now derelict and about to be redeveloped for home units.

Outside the gates in Tangarra Street is a war memorial, "*To Fallen Comrades – Lest We Forget*", but it is in a sorry state and looks as though they have been forgotten. I had taken a photograph of it about six months ago and a copy is enclosed.

Memorials like these, together with monuments, plaques, banners and trophies become casualties of change, obsolescence, bankruptcies, take-overs and so on. Perhaps there may be some place in your project for mention of these aspects.

You may also be interested in the fact that my committee runs an Oral History Program to record the work history, experiences and accomplishments of engineers. To date we have recorded over sixty interviews and this year hope to do about another fifty. The tapes are lodged in the State Library with Rosemary Block...

**From Ian Stewart, Wagga Wagga**

Dear Dr Taksa

The first and most pressing purpose of this letter is to express my thanks for your absorbing account of the life and times of the workers at the Eveleigh Railway Workshops which I had the opportunity to hear at the State Library last Saturday.

Your presentation perfused a number of my interests. Firstly you gave me a timely reminder about thorough preparation for oral history projects before embarking in interviewing. Secondly I enjoyed a warm sense of nostalgia evoked by the narrative and the photographs. As a schoolboy and later as an undergraduate at Sydney University, I travelled the tracks between Erskineville and Redfern (I lived at Caringbah) over the period between 1955 and 1966, an era central to the passing of steam. Thirdly, I, as do others in your audience, have more than a passing interest in railway history. I chuckled at the quote from Mary[?] Lucy, remembering the depiction of the family life of EE Lucy in "Man of Steam". While David Moore's book is not a major historical contribution (and neither is it so meant) I find the photographs stunning. He never fails, I believe, to combine successfully, art and social photo-journalism.

My main historical interests are far from the above. I am a gynaecologist and part-time historian, presently preparing a PhD dissertation on developments in undergraduate medical education in NSW between 1930 and 1975. In this I am making use of oral testimony and hope increasingly to do so.

What cropped up only today, when I was paying a visit to one of my interviewees was a comment by him which I thought may interest you, if you haven't come across the information already. While he was educated at Sydney High School, at least one of his brothers attended Sydney Grammar School and was a pupil at that school during the General Strike of 1917. According to my interviewee, his brother's class was seconded to work at the Eveleigh Railway Workshops for the duration of the strike. Their job was to clean the steam engines. These students (and they weren't the most senior boys) even lived out at the Workshop barracks for the period. I wondered whether there were other school students similarly employed. I hope this information is of some value to you. Once again thank you for a most interesting presentation last Saturday...

## Reminiscence Therapy: The Theory and Practice

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### **An address to the 18th Annual Convention of the Diversional Therapy Association of New South Wales, Sydney 18-19 May, 1996**

David Battersby, Faculty of Health Studies, Charles Sturt University

In the Foreword to a recent book, Robert Butler, who is Professor and Chairman of the Department of Geriatrics at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine, wrote the following:

*I believe that at least four categories of fitness become more and more essential to maintain as we grow old. The first, and the one we are most familiar with, is physical fitness – the bodily strength, resilience and an agility that are stimulated by appropriate exercise. Intellectual fitness, the second category, comes from keeping the mind engaged and active. The third, social fitness, requires forming and maintaining significant personal relationships that may be called upon in good times and in bad. No less important is the fourth category: purpose fitness. Purpose fitness means having feelings of self-esteem and control over one's own life. There are many ways to cultivate these feelings, but*

*[reminiscence therapy] may be the best of all!*

It was Robert Butler, who, over 30 years ago, suggested the potentially important role of reminiscence therapy for older adults. Butler indicated that in order to adapt and to cope with old age, people must constantly review and reflect on their life experiences. Reminiscence therapy, for Butler, represented one “possible response to the biological and psychological face of death”<sup>2</sup>.

The demographics relating to older people at the time Butler was writing in 1963 have changed dramatically. Let me digress briefly to demonstrate this with just three statistics. First, during 1994 and 1995, it is estimated that the net increase per month in the world's population of those people aged 60 years and over will be 950,000 and projections to the year 2010 suggest that it will be 1.4 million per month by then. Second, more than three quarters of all of the people who ever reached 75 years of age in the whole of the history of the world are alive at present! Third, while the world population will treble during the period 1950 to 2025, the over-60s population will show a five-fold increase and the over-80s



will increase seven times. Globally, we are now facing entirely new phenomena with the ageing of the population. Nothing in our past history has prepared us for the profound social, cultural and economic consequences of these demographic realities.

It is now common knowledge that today's older population has experienced greater changes in their life-time than their parents or grandparents could have imagined. They have seen changes in both the natural and built environment, changes in moral values, in artistic tastes, in politics and society and they have lived through two world wars. In adapting to all these changes they have demonstrated a certain flexibility and tolerance of the human spirit and indeed they have much to teach us and we have a great deal to learn from them. Every older person, from his or her experience of life, has a unique story to tell. The telling of these stories and in relating history have brought prominence to the methodology of reminiscence therapy.

### **What is Reminiscence Therapy and what are its benefits**

In general, reminiscence therapy is a process involving people recollecting, reflecting on and recreating events, feelings, incidents and happenings, either individually or collectively. The focus is on long-term or, more precisely, remote memory because it is within the

remote memory systems that the processes of reminiscence usually take place. There are, however, some competing definitions of reminiscence therapy. Some researchers talk about reminiscence in simple terms as the "recall of the past" rather than as a process involving reflecting on and evaluating past events. Others distinguish between autobiography, life review and reminiscence:

*... the term autobiography refers to a written personal account of an individual's life story. Life review denotes the purposeful recollection of the events and emotions of one's life story, not necessarily in written form. Reminiscence is the recalling of past events or feelings and does not denote any specific purpose or attempt to be inclusive or thorough with regard to the life course<sup>3</sup>*

What is evident from these various interpretations is the view that reminiscence therapy is "a selective process in which memories are evoked and reconstructed, probably with varying degrees of intensity and emotional involvement"<sup>4</sup>.

Although reminiscence can be a very private, individual or "intrapersonal" process, it is frequently undertaken with two or more people and often results in narrative. Parker refers to this narrative in the following terms:

*It is by talking about past events with other people that our lives come to have the appearance of a meaningful order. The symbolic reconstruction in an interpersonal context provides a means of obtaining input from others and achieving reciprocity or an exchange of ideas. It is through conversation that we come to understand our pasts, and ultimately ourselves...Simply put, people tend to create coherent explanations for how their lives unfolded"<sup>5</sup>.*

It is this "unfolding" of lives and the explanations that are given which are considered to be the significant benefits associated with reminiscence therapy. Indeed, so popular has it become that a number of books and reminiscence training programs have been marketed<sup>6</sup>. What, then, are the benefits of reminiscence therapy?

In summary, a review of the evidence shows that reminiscence therapy has been found to:

- > facilitate socialisation in institutional settings<sup>7</sup>
- > improve morale<sup>8</sup>
- > increase self-esteem<sup>9</sup>
- > increase life satisfaction<sup>10</sup>
- > facilitate acceptance of mortality<sup>11</sup>
- > assist in personal growth<sup>12</sup>
- > ease mourning and bereavement<sup>13</sup>
- > decrease depression<sup>14</sup>
- > enhance cognitive functioning<sup>15</sup>

> offset the decline of the working memory<sup>16</sup>

> facilitate cognitive performance<sup>17</sup>

Birren and Deutchman<sup>18</sup> in their examination of the benefits of reminiscence therapy cite more than 30 research studies which, they claim, report the following positive outcomes arising from the use of reminiscence therapy:

- > sense of increased personal power and importance
- > recognition of past adaptive strategies and application to current needs and problems
- > reconciliation with the past and resolution of past resentments and negative feelings
- > resurgence of interest in past activities or hobbies
- > development of friendships
- > greater sense of meaning in life and a feeling that one has contributed to the world.

In taking these findings into account, it is also important to acknowledge that some of the therapeutic benefits of reminiscence have been disputed. Parker maintains, for instance, that some of the studies upon which these claims rest are fraught with methodological problems (e.g. small sample sizes) and are theoretically inadequate<sup>19</sup>. Despite these apprehensions, there is general

agreement that reminiscence can and does have positive benefits if used appropriately and is a valuable therapeutic tool for professionals, such as Diversional Therapists.

### **The Practice of Reminiscence Therapy**

In Australia, there is an emerging interest in reminiscence work as an educational and social activity for older people. There has always been a use for reminiscing as a therapy, particularly for depressed psycho-geriatric patients<sup>20</sup>. However, the practice of reminiscence therapy has been continually refined and articulated by those who also see its therapeutic benefits.

What, then, is the practice of reminiscence therapy? Kirkland argues that reminiscence therapy is a term used to describe a wide range of activities on the memories and experiences of the older people who take part<sup>21</sup>. She continues:

These activities, which include story-telling, contributing to oral history and local history projects, painting, creative writing, drama, and participation in projects with school children, may be carried out by groups of people or by individuals and they range from formal, structured projects to informal and social occasions<sup>22</sup>.

In Australia, reminiscence therapy with older people takes a number of forms. It is used as an activity in nursing homes, in outreach programs for older people, sometimes in U3As and Schools for Seniors and in community and neighbourhood groups. It is based around the belief that every older person, from his or her experience of life, has a unique story to tell. The telling of these stories, whether in the form of art, poetry, writings or drama has given prominence to the practice of reminiscence work. Its methodology often involves:

- > A meeting place: this is usually a comfortable and convenient venue which is easily accessible for older people. It has to have good toilet facilities and some means for making tea and coffee. (A formal classroom with rows of chairs is not suitable and any background noise will make the situation difficult).
- > Equipment: Some groups find a cassette tape-recorder helpful as an initial means of recording reminiscences. As the work evolves, the use of art materials, drama props, writing materials, etc., can be used.
- > A reminiscence group: This is usually not too large: between six to ten people with a 'facilitator'.
- > 'Recall' material: This is often used (e.g. old newspaper clippings: photographs; etc.) as a prompt for reminiscences. The local library or newspaper usually has

archival material of relevance. There should also be a willingness to evoke memories by using the other senses which can be stimulated by the use of music, food, fragrances, etc.

- > A 'facilitator': This person is one who is experienced in reminiscence therapy, who has worked with older people and who is able to engender a relaxed atmosphere amongst the group. An effective facilitator is one who does not linger on subjects or topics which produce anger or tears but rather encourages the sharing of memories as a rewarding experience. The facilitator is a sensitive listener.
- > An outcome: Every reminiscence project gives something back to those who shared their memories. A booklet, for instance, might contain examples of creative writing, collected rhymes or recipes or some aspect of local history. Likewise, paintings, crafts, singing, drama and poetry are other popular mediums for the expression of reminiscence work.

There is need for some caution with using reminiscence therapy. First, a well functioning reminiscence group can be disrupted by those who may be suffering from a psychotic depression, or who are unable to communicate effectively because of a physical or cognitive disability or who may be suffering from delusional states. Second, reminiscence

therapy can prove to be dysfunctional, particularly if "rules and procedures" are not made clear from the outset<sup>23</sup>. Third, "monopolisers" can frustrate and ultimately disrupt a reminiscence group and must be handled effectively and sensitively. And fourth, "amateur therapists" may emerge within a reminiscence group and seek to be judgemental about others' stories or to play the role of a professional therapist. They, too, must be managed so as not to disrupt the group as a whole.

There is an increasing number of reminiscence projects underway throughout Australia. Indeed, of the various activities for older people, reminiscence work is an exciting exemplar of an activity that can be an enabling process which emancipates older people and assists them to gain power over their lives. This empowerment can occur in several ways. For instance, as Kirkland points out, by enabling older people to reflect upon their experiences and to consider the factors that have influenced them, they may be in a much better position to take action to maintain and to improve their lifestyle and to retain their independence and freedom to make choices about their life. Alternatively, as an outcome of reminiscence work, older people may become more active in current affairs in the light of critical reflection on the past; they might decide to assist in the

conservation of the local environment and traditions or to join in social action for change by drawing upon their past experience and expertise. Empowerment may also result from the opportunity of simply sharing life experiences through reminiscence work. Here, personal growth and self-awareness become enabling mechanisms through which older people are able to assert themselves. A typical illustration of this can be seen in the pioneering reminiscence work undertaken at the Wade-Lyn Nursing Home in Sydney almost 10 years ago. One of the facilitators, in a report on this reminiscence work, recounted that:

The people from Wade-Lyn Nursing Home have become very special to us, yet they represent the thousands of untold stories and unsung songs locked away ... To be part of this recall when people tell you that they are 'too old' to remember, or 'no one is interested in me', and to see the transformation when they hear their stories read back is a wonderful and humbling process<sup>24</sup>.

Like other reminiscence projects around Australia, the outcome of the Wade-Lyn Nursing Home reminiscence work was a book of recollections and poems. But, it was much more than that as Sorensen outlines:

The aim was to do more than fill in the time of nursing home residents; this was to be a learning experience. We didn't start out to write a book; that came after some months together as we saw the material collected ... What began to emerge as we put the pieces together was a picture of a group of people passing through life, growing older and experiencing the changes which have been part of the last hundred years and the changes which are simply part of growing older<sup>25</sup>.

Here Sorensen captures the essence of reminiscence work that is being undertaken with older people from across Australia: the learning materials that are developed, whether they be written, painted, sung or performed, come from older people themselves and are shaped by their thoughts, their beliefs and their experiences.

### **Conclusion**

Reminiscence therapy, used appropriately and in an informed way, can be an enabling, empowering and liberating experience for older people. There is little doubt that it can help with the rediscovery of oneself as questions are asked about "where we have been, where we are now, and, it is hoped, where we are going"<sup>26</sup>. For Diversional Therapists, reminiscence therapy can be

an invaluable tool used in empowering older people to discover for themselves the rewards of recapturing their past.

<sup>1</sup> From the Foreword to:

***Guiding Autobiography Groups for Older Adults*** by James Birren and Donna Deutschman (1991), The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, p. vii.

<sup>2</sup> Butler (1963), p. 66.

<sup>3</sup> Birren and Deutschman (1991), p. 113.

<sup>4</sup> Parker (1995), p. 517.

<sup>5</sup> Parker (1995), p. 516.

<sup>6</sup> For example, the American Association of Retired Persons has created a reminiscence training program which can be purchased by those who would like to be involved in, or set up, reminiscence groups.

<sup>7</sup> See, Berghorn and Schafer (1987); Fielden (1990)

<sup>8</sup> See, Baker (1985); Fallot (1980); Fielden (1990)

<sup>9</sup> See, Berglan (1982); Sherman (1987)

<sup>10</sup> See, Haight (1984, 1988)

<sup>11</sup> See, Pickrel (1989)

<sup>12</sup> See, Holzberg (1984)

<sup>13</sup> See, Viney et al (1989)

<sup>14</sup> See, Parsons (1986)

<sup>15</sup> See, Hughston and Merriam (1982)

<sup>16</sup> See, Robertson (1985)

<sup>17</sup> See, Salthouse (1991)

<sup>18</sup> Birren and Deutschman (1991), p. 4&6

<sup>19</sup> Parker (1995)

<sup>20</sup> See, Fleming and Bowles (1983)

<sup>21</sup> Kirkland (1987)

<sup>22</sup> Kirkland (1987) p. 35.

<sup>23</sup> For instance, the protocols that are sometimes used include: a willingness to share stories; a commitment to be an attentive listener; striving to be supportive of others; avoiding judgmental statements; avoiding comparisons and implying judgements about "right" and "wrong".

<sup>24</sup> Hayman (1987) p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> Sorenson (1987) p. 137.

<sup>26</sup> From the Foreword to: ***Guiding Autobiography Groups for Older Adults*** by James Birren and Donna Deutschman (1991), The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, p. vii.

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## Hear Me Talkin' To Ya – Aussie Style

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The collecting of oral and written reminiscences in jazz and its several inspirational or directly related musical styles (e.g. gospel, blues, ragtime, swing, bop and so on) has a long and respected history. The seminal work in this field appeared in the now classic anthology *Jazzmen* published in New York in 1939 under the editorship of Frederic Ramsey Jr. and Charles Edward Smith. This is considered by some to be the first major study using informants who had been part of the birth of jazz, although sporadic field and studio interviews were being conducted prior to the publication of this collection, those made for the US Library of Congress by Alan Lomax in 1937-38 being of particular significance. Subsequent research has led to modifications of some of the beliefs and myths that had emerged from the memories of these aging musicians; yet despite the inevitable errors of memory, *Jazzmen* has long been a model for later writers and field workers.

As more performers become available who are prepared to speak into the microphone and to have their thoughts transcribed into print, so the field is forever expanding. Since early times, because its performance is essentially an infinitely variable creative process, jazz has changed direction a number of

times, both musically and technically, producing many sub-genres, each having its own dedicated players and proselytisers, all capable of adding to an increasingly rich soil for aspiring oral historians to plough.

Commensurate with this musical evolution were the ongoing and rapidly increasing technological changes in sound recording and reproducing systems, as well as the unlimited potential of film, radio and television. Since the early '50s, jazz publications utilising the results of oral history and more formal interviews have proliferated as books, audio-visual recordings, in radio transcriptions and in jazz magazines (commercial glossies distributed widely or in fanzines and other ephemera with limited circulation). Detailed bibliographies, discographies and research directions reflecting this large body of oral tradition in jazz history are still wanting in Australia and, I believe, should be given priority by any group indulging in this type of information gathering, if only to ensure that duplication of effort does not take place.

Of particular importance in more recent times was the publication of *Hear Me Talkin' To Ya*, edited by Nat Shapiro and Nat Hentoff, in 1955. It drew substantially on interview material that



had already appeared in journals, magazines and autobiographies. Still a much sought after book, it has acted as an important catalyst for the more recent endeavours in jazz interviewing. The 'memory' business in jazz and blues is now quite extensive, the subsequent comparisons giving us increasingly well defined pictures of the continuing evolution of jazz and its performers and listeners within the wider socio-cultural context.

Over the past several decades, a number of jazz archives and institutes of jazz studies have been created in the United States and Britain in particular, each with extensive programs of interviewing and writing up the results as putative reference tools. Some of the archives have financial backing from parent universities, and generous grants from the public and private sectors. So far, there has been no concerted effort to establish and finance such establishments in Australia, in a way whereby the collected materials are quickly catalogued, properly maintained and easily accessed.

In late June 1996, following exploratory discussions between the National and NSW Jazz Coordinator, Eric Myers, jazz historian Bruce Johnson and officers of the National Film & Sound Archive (NFSA) a public meeting was convened. A broad range of topics was

discussed including the setting up of an Australian Jazz Archive, the types of material that should be held in it, the role of oral history, and the compilation of bibliographies and discographies. Needless to say, public and private funding (or the lack of it) was of prime concern, and radical ways in which this could be resolved in the ongoing economic gloom were discussed.

At least one small jazz oral history project by the husband and wife team Laurie and Alwyn Lewis is already being funded by the NFSA. In Victoria, Tom Wanliss and several other jazz-loving associates have commenced working among jazz musicians in that State. The important Australian Jazz Convention, now in its 51st year, has a substantial tape archive presently in the custody of Melbourne jazz record seller Roger Beilby. In Sydney, Kate Dunbar, President of the Sydney Jazz Club, has been collecting and transcribing the memoirs of many of her musical colleagues (she is a jazz singer of renown), some of which are being published with some editing in the Sydney Jazz Club's journal *Quarterly Rag* (now under my editorship). At its Annual Conferences, the Australasian Sound Recordings Association and its affiliate the Fellowship of Australian Discographers have also discussed the importance of encouraging the collection of oral history. One matter

raised at its 1995 meeting in Sydney was the need to stimulate such interest among younger people. Indeed, I hope that young fans are looking at some of the more recent jazz tendencies that have merged with other musical forms (e.g. crossover, fusion, jazz rock), but I know of none.

With many of our greatest jazz musicians and singers now in their twilight years, and young tyros getting ready to step into greatness, writing the history of jazz in Australia continues to be a most exciting field, but it does need some direction, particularly in best practices for the collection of oral history – perhaps this could be provided in topic-specific workshops or seminars, held by such organisations as the Oral History Societies. Subjects discussed could include the benefits of technology change, both audio and visual, interviewing techniques, the role and rights of the interviewee and, above all, the importance of the interview that failed because the interviewer showed not only a worrying ignorance of jazz itself but had never heard performances by the interviewee.

It is my belief that in setting up a National Jazz Archive, we in the jazz world will need to become aware of the skills that can be acquired from organisations that already have a long and excellent track-record in history

gathering. Advice from members of this society would be most welcome.

**Peter J. F. Newton**

*Peter Newton is a freelance author and editor who has been a member of the Oral History Society (NSW) for several years. He is editor of Sydney Jazz Club's Quarterly Rag, has served on a number of government-sponsored jazz committees and has published widely in Australia and elsewhere on jazz and other cultural matters. He is currently compiling a comprehensive bibliography on jazz in Australia.*

# An Early Oral History Project

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*Dr. Jan Roberts, an earlier contributor to Voiceprint has sent the following to the Editor. Found during research for her book, **Maybanke Anderson:sex, suffrage and social reform, it is from the RAHS Annual Report of 1919.***

## **“Recording Pioneer Reminiscences and the Government Subsidy”**

“Closely connected with the Country Lectures Scheme is the Proposal to record the reminiscences of the pioneers and old settlers of the various districts throughout the State. For many years the Society has been anxious to initiate a movement with this object in view, but the lack of funds has prevented action. But the ranks of the pioneers are rapidly being thinned and soon the golden opportunity will be lost. The view has been repeatedly expressed by our members that the Society stands in urgent need of substantial endowment or bequest so that it can carry out this important work ere the pioneers carry with them to the ‘Great Unknown’ all records of the early history of their respective districts. Either a generous private benefactor must come to our assistance or the Government must substantially subsidise the Society. For, as Mr. T.W. Heney, in his valuable article on The Pioneers\*, recently stated, ‘it is a

thing worth doing even if the collected material lay for a generation in MS., for the men whose memories and family papers are the only sources of that knowledge are going out one by one, and before many years are over, they too, like their stories of the past, will be one with Nineveh and Tyre’.

It is a pleasure to report that the Premier (Hon. W. A. Holman M.L.A.) has displayed a keen interest in this question, and together with his colleague, the Chief Secretary (Hon. Sir Geo. Fuller, M.L.A.) is fully alive to the necessity of immediate action. Your Secretary interviewed the Premier in May last, and on the latter’s suggestion formulated a scheme which was placed before Sir George Fuller on October 29 by a strong deputation. The Chief Secretary expressed his fullest sympathy with the proposal, and undertook to ‘strongly recommend’ that a subsidy of £1000 be granted for the purpose especially as ‘it was a work which must be done at once’.

It is to be regretted that the Cabinet felt unable to finance the proposal to the extent recommended by the Premier and Chief Secretary. A sum of £100 has been promised for the current year. Little can be done until the subsidy is substantially increased, and though the Government may be face to face with financial

difficulties, unfortunately the departing pioneers will not wait in the flesh for more beneficent seasons. As, however, prominent members of the Cabinet are keenly alive to the necessity for

immediate action, your Council is hopeful that they will come to our assistance at the earliest opportunity. The Council for 1920 is urged to renew the question.

\* See 'Daily Telegraph' Nov. 29, 1919".

## Reviews



Wilton, Janis (comp.) *Oral History in Australia: a list* Sydney, Oral History Association of Australia (NSW), 1996.

This publication marks one of the first attempts to compile a nation-wide guide to oral history products and publications. Janis Wilton notes in the introduction that the idea for the book came out of oral history workshops held at the State Library of New South Wales, where a need was identified for a comprehensive bibliography on oral history. Such a publication, it was felt, would serve as a useful tool for those involved in oral history at any level, and provide a valuable indication as to what has been done in the way of oral history projects in Australia.

The list is organised by subject, including headings such as "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People", "Local Communities and Local Histories" and

"Rural Life". This organisation by subject also includes some cross-referencing, designed to assist the reader in identifying areas which may fall under more than one heading. There is a section devoted to "Archives and Collections", which deals with oral history collections in archives and libraries, while "Method and Theory" lists useful references for finding out about the practice and application of oral history interviewing. The list is not limited to books and articles; it also includes other formats such as videos, sound recordings and exhibition catalogues. What is common to all these is the fact that oral history is used or featured in them in meaningful ways.

This publication certainly illustrates the range and diversity of oral history activity in Australia, as well as highlighting those areas which have to date received a greater or lesser degree of

attention. While Janis Wilton acknowledges that at least some of the weighting of entries in the categories is a result of her own interest, she also makes clear that this list is not finite; a form is included at the end of the book for readers to communicate omitted or

recent products. *Oral History in Australia: a list* is indeed a valuable resource for anyone interested in oral history in all its facets.

**Cassandra Findlay**

Archivist, Westpac Bank

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## Diary of Events



**August 31**

RAHS Guided Tour of the Showground, Cricket and Football Grounds. Bookings essential by August 28 (Tel. 9247 8001). Cost \$15 RAHS members, \$18 non-members.

**September 4**

RAHS Day Lecture: History of Luna Park. Speaker Sam Marshall. Venue: History House Auditorium at 1.00 p.m. Bookings on Tel. 9247 8001.

**September 13-Nov. 8**

Oral History Course. University of NSW and the State Library, designed for practising professionals. Contact Maureen Henninger Tel. 385 3589, fax 3853430.

**September 27-29**

Conference. Biennial Oral History Conference: People, Identity, Place: Oral History in the Community. Australian

Oral History Association (Queensland Branch) and the John Oxley Library. Details contact Niles Elvery Tel. (07) 3840 7895, fax (07) 3846 2421.

**September 27-29**

NSW Association of Family History Societies State Conference. Theme: "What about Federation?". Venue Macquarie University. Enquiries to R. Borkovic Te. 9456 3011 or K. Palmer 9456 2367.

**October 10-13**

International OHA (USA) Conference at Philadelphia. Theme: "Oral History: Memory and the Sense of Place".

**October 26, 27**

RAHS Local History Conference. Theme: "History: Rites, Rights and Writings". At Kinross Wolaroi School, Orange.

Courtesy of PHAA and RAHS.