

Local History Co-ordination Project

A Local History Co-ordination Project has been set up in the School of History to assist the writing of local history in New South Wales in the years leading to the Bicentennial. Established by Professor Patrick O'Garrell and Assoc. Professor John Ingleton, the Project has been in operation since May. It is funded jointly by the Australian Bicentennial Authority and the University of New South Wales. Anne O'Brien and Julia Horne have been employed as its full-time workers.

The broad aims are to co-ordinate the writing of local history throughout New South Wales, to provide help where required in historical method, and to work for long-term support of history-related activities. We will write no history ourselves but provide a central point of reference and information for those who are writing local history. As a university outreach program, its main impetus is to narrow the gap between university history de-

partments and local historians. Situated as it is in the School of History at the University of New South Wales, the Project is well placed to engage the services of academics who are experienced in the study of history and who feel a strong commitment to communicating that experience to the wider community. But the Project also calls upon professionals who are experienced in different approaches to history such as display method, oral history and publishing.

The Project's monthly news bulletin, *Locality*, acts as a means of reporting and exchanging information. It contains information about relevant events, activities and projects as well as substantial articles, and readers are encouraged to contribute to the bulletin. Given the extent and range of local history activities in New South Wales, the Project's role of co-ordination — via *Locality* — is vital.

A motivating force behind the Project is that its activities should be determined in consultation with those at whom they are aimed. The Project is running a series of conferences and workshops in city and country on writing local history. The programs for

these are not static; they will change to suit the different needs of city and country communities. Rather than impose a pre-conceived program on local historians, the plan is to visit local areas, talk to interested people, assess areas of need and offer services geared to the needs of that particular community. The first such field trip was to attend a small meeting at the Council Chambers in Queanbeyan, at the invitation of Queanbeyan's Town Clerk to meet local people interested in their area's history. As a result of that meeting, nourished particularly by the ideas of those present, a regional conference was organised and held on 20 September. A wide variety of people from the south-east region attended, representing groups such as local history societies, the National Trust, schools and professional architects working on conservation. A number of independent researchers attended.

The conference included a paper by Peter Orlovich about the *Action Committee on Local Government Records*. This committee was established in 1981 to encourage local government authorities to establish and maintain proper facilities for the storage and management and use of their own archives.

Peter Spearritt, director of *Historic Record Search*, explained that this nation-wide Bicentennial project was aiming to locate and register paper-based historic documents held in private hands. Both of these initiatives involve identifying historic records which, of course, are the mainstay of any history writing; to include discussion about them in conference/workshop programs, as well as in *Locality*, is an important aspect of the Project's co-ordinating role.

The first workshop was held in August in Sydney and will be repeated in October. The program was intended to provide a context for local history writing. Papers were presented on the essential elements to consider in studying local history, ways of using evidence and drawing conclusions, communicating history via museums and aspects of publishing. The number attending workshops is limited to 30 to allow as much participation and discussion as possible.

The Project also offers research advice to authors writing local history. We travelled to Forbes, Parkes, Bathurst, Orange and Ilford in early August to meet with local historians there who are engaged in preparing manuscripts for publication. We also talked with members of local council and local history librarians whose interest and support of their area's history is vital for raising the community's awareness of its origins, development and thus planning for its future. Again after these consultations, a conference is being planned for this region to be held at Parkes on Saturday 22 November. Sessions planned include discussions on oral history, displaying historical themes and relationships between family and local history.

The project aims to encourage as much discussion about local history as possible. To this end, we invite enquiries on (02) 697 2377 or write to us c/-LHCP, School of History, UNSW, PO Box 1, Kensington, NSW, 2033. To subscribe to *Locality*, please send to the above address your cheque or money order made out to the LHCP for \$10 (for 12 issues) with your name and address.

Anne O'Brien
Julia Horne

AACOBS approved*

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Stephen O'Connor's qualifications appeared as BA, DipLib, MSocSc (Hons). They should have been listed as BA, DipLib, ALAA. He is currently completing his Masters degree.