LAA: 50 in focus

To give LAA members a closer view of proceedings excerpts from papers by Jane La Scala, Robert Sharman and Anne Hazell are reproduced here.

Achievements

Jane La Scala

Jane La Scala prefaced these remarks by saying that although she had been a member of the Association for 30 plus years she felt she had 'flirted around the edges' of Association activities and that these comments should be taken as ones of an interested observer rather than those of one who could take any credit for any of the achievements. . .

I don't know how many of you saw *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome*. In that film there were some children living in caves outside Sydney, after a nuclear holocaust. One of the ceremonies that the children performed was 'the telling'. They told about civilisation as it used to be. I get a feeling as we are gathered here today that we are witnessing 'a telling' which reinforces those things that we learnt, and we are learning from the past and hope that we can pass on to future generations of librarians.

Key issues being addressed by the Association still have a strong public library bias — free libraries, freedom of information, censorship, library funding, NIP, National Language Policy — all bear on public library matters.

In addressing these matters the LAA has adopted strategies and the language of politics and of business. We have a Corporate Plan. We use professional lobbyists to assist with campaigns for Federal funds and to protect public library funding from the deprivations of State ministers. The sophistication and effectiveness of the SOLV and CAPL campaigns leave the 1976 Federal aid campaign for dead at least in its execution if not in the conception.

The Association's major achievments are, in my view, that it has been able to survive and change with the times. It has addressed major public library issues and has made great progress in these issues — standards, censorship, free libraries, children's librarianship, multicultural library service, service to people with disabilities, the role of libraries in combatting illiteracy, community information, bookmobile librarianship, joint-use facilities etc.

The Association has produced a journal of consistent quality since 1951 under a succession of tireless and often under-appreciated editors, and now a newsletter that lives up to its name by inciting debate and certainly by never being boring.

But I think the major achievements of the LAA have been the achievements of individuals. People whose influence can be tracked like veins of gold through the sludge of professional torpor. These people are the individuals who have seen visions and who have fought for them. They have got things done . . .

But what of the future, the Association is alive and well. The challenges will continue with the new Horton Report and the library summit ahead. I applaud the moves the Association is making and see them as essential in the current climate. However, in our rush to justify the economic relevance of libraries and to adopt the Harvard Business School as our alma mater, I would urge us not to forget that man does not live by information alone. The founders of our Association were concerned with the spread of knowledge, of learning, of thought and ideas, of experience transmitted from one human mind to another. And we as librarians must not be ashamed to remind our masters and our publics of the cultural and educational relevance of libraries to the wellbeing of Australia as a mature and civilised nation. Perhaps the 90s will bring a backlash from the sci-tech business trained people to explore their cultural heritage. And I hope that there will be librarians there to help them on that journey.

We weren't dragooned into membership of the Library Association we just simply never found out there was a choice. *Meg Cameron*

Learning from the past

Robert Sharman

Robert Sharman was President of the LAA in 1971-72. In this talk he looks back on these years analysing some successes and failures.

We also spent a great deal of time making representations to government, and I regret to say on reconsideration, that our emphasis, on many occasions, was on the negative. We were concerned about Public Lending Right, appointment of non-librarians to library positions . The files of correspondence I have on those matters are far fatter than those I have on dealing with areas in which we were more positive. I have files on Federal aid to school libraries and relationships with archivists, who were outside the Association and on these matters we were making positive approaches to government and to some of our professional colleagues . . .

The mistakes we made in the past are precisely those being made today. We as a profession are reactive rather than proactive. We fulfill the aphorism which has been developed from T.H. Huxley's famous statement 'Territory does not make a nation'.

Territory may or may not make a nation, but territoriality makes a profession. We missed our opportunity to gain Federal Government aid for public libraries because our representations to government had, in the most part, been devoted to preserving the territory we claim as ours, not to seeking to get better library service for the public. We welcomed Federal Government aid to school libraries and we did a lot towards that, I admit, but failed to adjust our standards for professional membership of the Association in order to welcome into the Association the school librarians or teacher-librarians who were to be employed in giving service to school children. We heard that the Australian Labor Party had adopted Federal Government aid for Public Libraries as a plank in its platform but did not discover till far too

Some of the speakers: *(top row) Jane La Scala; Carmen Hannaker; Ted Flowers, Margaret Trask; Peter Judge; (bottom row) Robert Sharman; Ian McCallum; Boyd Rayward; Wilma Radford; Gordon Bower.*

late what had to be done to translate planks into performances.

These are among the finer achievements of our times — our concern for archives and archivists, our efforts to gain Federal government aid for school libraries, our evidence before the STISEC Enquiry.

Our failures were in the areas where we were so concerned about the invasion of other groups into our territory, or about the loss of our status, that we exhausted the patience of government and brought about a worsening of relationships with the very groups whom we should have cherished. Can we learn anything from this today?

I never ever cracked the way to borrow from my high school library, there must have been a method. The books were always locked up in glass cases and if you arrived at 4.30 on Tuesdays they may have opened those cases, I don't know?! *Allan Horton*

LAA:50 News Release

Leading librarians meeting in Canberra today at the Library Association of Australia's 50th anniversary celebrations welcomed the Commonwealth Government's intention to review the public library system in Australia announced in documentation accompanying the Prime Minister's recent policy speech for the Australian Labor Party:

> *. . . we will review the public library system in Australia with a view to its full integration in a national information network available to all in the community.*

The conference emphasised the need for immediate implementation of this review.

The conference looked to a future in which there is efficient, equitable access by the public to the total library and information resources of the nation. It is essential that there is wide consultation with all levels of government, the library profession and the public in the review.

The conference applauded the Government's decision to take up again the recommendations of the landmark Horton Report of 1976. This report was commissioned by an earlier Labor government and a central recommendation of the report was strong Commonwealth involvement in the provision of public library service.

Objectives for the future

Anne Hazell

I believe the Association's major objective during the next ten years should be the completion of a statement about information access and use which is accepted as policy, initially by the Federal government, and later by state and local government. And secondly that it should be accompanied by the development of an implementation strategy. In other words I'm talking about NIP.

If this is achieved I would argue that the LAA will have made a major contribution to the quality of life of the 21st century. And furthermore I would argue that the major players in this game are the teacher-librarians whose field of operation is with the young people who will be the information users of the next century . . .

There is no doubt in my mind that a National Information Policy and Plan are of great importance to Australian schools. I believe that the Australian education system is already making considerable progress towards the goals outlined for it in the NIP policy documents — awareness of the value of information and how it can be used; greater familiarity with various information technologies; the enhanced ability to acquire, manipulate and use information.

The education sector has accepted the need to develop students' understanding of the power information brings. But it could easily happen that without co-operation between existing information agencies the cost of accessing information may be prohibitive for a large part of society. It is therefore essential that governments at all levels accept responsibility for developing a policy and an implementation plan. The LAA therefore both nationally and at state level must continue to lobby politicians with a view that information is a change agent for producing higher quality of life and a major factor in determining our economic and social wellbeing.

And thanks to . . .

The LAA:50 Committee would like to thank the National Library for its hospitality during the conference. The hardworking crew at the library helped enormously and the facilities made the library a perfect venue. Thanks also to the LAA staff who worked so hard behind the scenes to ensure everything ran smoothly. — *Jenny Gleeson, Conference Convener.*

An extra special *InCite* thank you goes to each of the following: Warren Horton, Judith Baskin, Averill Edwards, Malcolm Bodley, Mark Cranfield, the NLA photographers and sound people who ensured that photos and tapes were processed in time to meet a tight deadline schedule. — *Kathy Husselbee, Editor.*

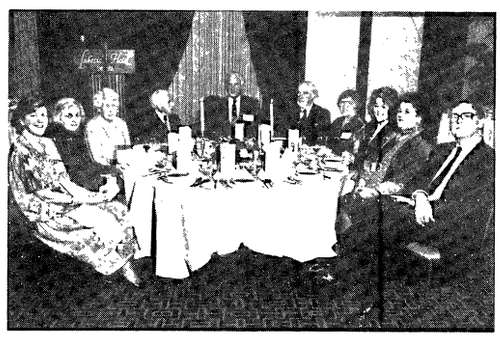
On the social side . . .

A modern couple at the informal dinner at Albert Hall.

Kerry Webb, Margaret Chisolm and Gordon Bower in the mood!

Jenny Adams, Mr and Mrs Cliff Burmester and Jean Arnot.

Ted Flowers, Jean Whyte, Florence Bryan, Jean Brewer and John Brewer.



The official table, Lakeside Dinner.