

THE SOURCE

Library history — a double serving

The rise, and speedy fall, of the Tasmanian Public Library in the mid-nineteenth century is at first sight an unlikely source of instruction and entertainment for a late twentieth century reader. In *The origins of the State Library of Tasmania*, John Levett traces contemporary developments in England and outlines the Tasmanian environment in which the Public Library failed to thrive. He writes feelingly of the political and social scene in Hobart, of the Tasmanian parliamentarians of the time (including, in the words of the Melbourne *Argus*, 'as often as not a brazen charlatan, or a bold mendicant')

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and of the decidedly mixed motives of some of the Library's promoters at the time of its rise.

Levett also chronicles its fall, and describes how the collection, including four volumes donated by Queen Victoria as a memorial to Albert the Good, fetched up in a brewer's malt-loft fewer than 20 years after the Library's foundation. This account, written in the deceptively limpid Levett prose, and presented in a nicely designed and illustrated booklet, forms the entertainment.

The instruction lies in the parallels which Levett allows the reader to draw between the conditions that inhibited the growth of the Tasmanian Public Library and those that challenge us today. People with 'vision, energy and drive,' Levett concludes, were needed in 1868, and 'we have great need of them in 1988.'

The origins of the State Library of Tasmania by John Levett was published in 1988 by the Australian Library Promotion Council Tasmanian State Committee. Copies are available from John M. Beattie, MHA, Parliament House, Hobart, Tas. 7000, for \$7.00 including postage. (ISBN 0 909739 27 7)

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In recent years, Australian library historians, Levett among them, have been increasingly active, with a healthy number of higher degree candidates presenting in that discipline, a fair number of related publications and a series of forums on Australian library history. The third of these was held at the University of New South Wales in July 1987, and a collection of papers presented at it has now been published by the School of Librarianship.

Boyd Rayward, in his introduction, places library history in the broader context of the history of the dissemination of ideas. It is interesting that three of the papers in this collection were given by non-librarians: John Fletcher, a lecturer in German with intense and productive bibliographical interests; Wallace Kirsop, a professor of French who is making an extensive contribution to bibliography and the history of books in Australia; and Martyn Lyons, a lecturer in history whose studies and writings include the history of reading in nineteenth century France. The presence of speakers such as these is a healthy infusion.

The range of subjects treated by librarian and archivist participants is also varied. The 1950s debate on the control (some said subordination) of archives by libraries is described by Michael Piggott, while Greig Tillotson presents

a panoramic snapshot of parliamentary libraries in Australia. Peter Orlovich describes the extent of the archival loss incurred when the Garden Palace burned down in 1882, a loss of which today's historians and genealogists are acutely aware.

The variety continues: Brian Huber delves into censorship in colonial

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Australia, Carol Mills analyses some of the output of the New South Wales Bookstall Company, and Michael Talbot traces the origins of the Institutes Association of South Australia. A very thorough assessment of the Free Library Movement is made in Rodney Snibson's paper, which casts further light on the part played in the development of library services in Australia by lay people and librarians who possessed astonishing quantities of Levett's 'vision, energy and drive': people like Metcalfe, Remington, Brain, Drummond, Ifould, Bales and Stanton.

John Metcalfe also looms inevitably large in Jim Cleary's paper on Australian publishing and book importation during World War II, dovetailing neatly with Cleary's earlier study of army library services during this period. In fact the whole book complements and supplements the existing literature of Australian library history remarkably well, pointing the way to further study and, one hopes, to further forums.

Australian library history in context: papers for the third Forum on Australian Library History, University of New South Wales, 17 and 18 July 1987, edited by W. Boyd Rayward, was published by the School of Librarianship, University of New South Wales, in 1988. It costs \$15.00. (ISBN 0 85823 747 4)

Strined relations

As a new chum I was entranced by the richness of the Australian language. I

still marvel at the assimilations from English dialect, the borrowings from foreign languages and the mass of words of Aboriginal origin to describe flora, fauna, landforms, implements and so on. And I have always admired the ways in which 'o' or 'y' or 'ie' could be added selectively to word-stems to create unique Australianisms such as arvo, milko, postie and bullocky. It is marvellous to consult works like E.E. Morris's *Austral English*, which must have been an object of some curiosity when first published in 1898, and more recent efforts by enthusiastic amateurs like Sidney J. Baker, and professionals of the ilk of Gerry Wilkes. Now there is another gem to consult, perchance to browse, with the publication of *The Australian national dictionary: Australian words and their origins*.

This landmark work is the culmination of 10 years lexicographical labour by editor W.S. Ramson, his staff, consultants and stalwart readers. In 5 years these readers collected about half a million citations for Australianisms, working through a bibliography of some 9500 items which had been compiled for the Dictionary project by Pauline Fanning.

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An 'Australianism' here is defined as 'one of those words and meanings which have originated in Australia, which have a greater currency here than elsewhere or which have special significance in Australia because of their connection with an aspect of the history of the country'. Each term is defined, its origins, if known, are outlined, and there are illustrations of the ways in which the word has been used in the sources consulted by the contributors. These citations are dated and arranged in chronological order, as in the *Oxford English dictionary*, and cover a wide range of subjects and genres, as well as historical periods.

The wide net cast by the editor has captured 10 000 Australianisms, illus-

trated by 60 000 quotations, which should provide help for the most far-ranging reader of Australian material, from Cook's voyages to the latest Carey.

In this dictionary there has been a policy of not attaching labels, such as 'derog.', 'coarse' or 'vulg.' to words, which might tend to be over-interpretative or over-restrictive, particularly in Australian English where there is, as the editor points out, 'easy movement between formal and informal usage'. In most cases the quotations and citations will help out, if you want to know whether you can politely call someone a 'peb', 'septic' or 'choco'.

It's hard to put the *AND* down, like all seductive reference books. You look up 'pea-dodger' (bowler hat) and are distracted by the verb 'peacock' ('To obtain the choicest parts of a tract of land, esp. those controlling access to water, in order to render the surrounding land of little or no value to others'). You glance at 'hoy' (a bingo-like game in which playing cards are used) and cannot help reading the entry for Hoyt's, and the man outside.

In as dynamic a field as language, there can be no such thing as the last word. As our language changes and grows over the years, it is nice to know that there will be continuing research into Australian English, and, one would hope, further editions of this excellent dictionary emanating from the Australian National Dictionary Centre, jointly established by the Australian National University and Oxford University Press.

This dictionary is a thorough, informative and entertaining work which must find a place in every Australian reference library. *The Australian national dictionary* was published in Melbourne in 1988 by Oxford University Press and costs \$75.00. (ISBN 0 19 554736 5)

David J. Jones



The Source Book: reviews of reference material for Australian libraries and information services. \$27 non members; \$18 members; \$1.50 postage

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