

ACT reference and heritage library services

Tony De Domenico, ACT Minister for Urban Services

The ACT government provides a network of eight regional and branch libraries located throughout Canberra to meet the demand for public access to library services. These libraries all provide reference services through access to the collection which is spread throughout the library system.

The ACT Library Service's reference collection contains some 33 000 items, with a further 3000 catalogued items housed in the heritage library. This collection is supported by the Library Service's lending collection which contains over 600 000 items. The reference collection includes material in all disciplines to varying levels of detail depending upon the collecting level adopted. The Library Service's collections are included on the Australian Bibliographic Network, and it is hoped to make the catalogue available on the Internet in the near future.

In providing library services to the ACT community the Government is particularly aware of the range of national resources which we are fortunate enough to have located within the ACT. These libraries include the National Library of Australia, the ACT's two university libraries and the libraries associated with other national institutions. In addition, there are many large specialised departmental libraries located in Canberra. While public access to these services varies, we cannot ignore the opportunities such close physical proximity can provide for our citizens. The ACT Library Service therefore seeks to complement rather than duplicate these services and will continue to co-operate

with these agencies to ensure that the best possible library service is provided for all ACT residents.

The ACT government primarily sees its role, in relation to the provision of library services, as serving the local community. With a population of 305 000, it is considered appropriate that the ACT should aim to provide a level of services equal to that provided by similar-sized local-government authorities.

To help meet this aim, the ACT government recently engaged a consultant, Brian Haratsis of Urban Spatial and Economic Consultants, to undertake a review of the library service. The consultant's report was released for public comment on 31 May 1996. The government has yet to consider the review in detail and has not adopted any of its recommendations at this stage.

Many ACT librarians will be aware that an earlier review of the ACT Library Service recommended that a reference/heritage library be established. The current review considered this issue and recommended that reference and information services should be undertaken through our existing network of libraries rather than through a single reference library. This recommendation recognises the ACT's ability to utilise electronic services to provide the community with access to a quality reference and information service from all of its libraries.

The government had already recognised the benefits to be gained by improving the Library Service's electronic services and has, in this financial year committed \$340 000 to update and extend the library serv-

ice's use of information technology. As part of this project, all libraries in the ACT will be connected to the Internet. Increasing use is also being made of CD-ROM databases to provide reference assistance. In addition to the use of electronic information services, it is recommended that key reference service functions be provided at the major regional libraries rather than throughout all eight branch libraries. The review also specifically recommends developing the Civic library's business reference services through the introduction of business information and appropriate databases.

The government recognises the importance of collecting Canberra's documentary heritage, not only to make it available to the ACT's current residents but also for the benefit of future generations. The collection of heritage material in the ACT requires close co-operation with the National Library of Australia to ensure that we do not overlap with the National Library's program. In practice, this means that we collect material relating to the people who live and work in Canberra rather than material which relates to Canberra as the seat of the Commonwealth Government.

The Heritage Library is housed within the Griffith Library complex and is open eight hours per week, and at other times by appointment. The collection, which comprises material relating to the documentary heritage of Canberra, has been devel-

oped over a number of years, initially under the auspices of the National Library.

In addition to the three thousand catalogued items mentioned, the collection includes a range of uncatalogued material, such as photographs, manuscripts, tape-recordings and films, ephemera and posters. Over the past two years, the collection has been re-organised to improve access and storage. In addition to the comprehensive collection of monographs relating to Canberra, the library has a number of specific collections. Of particular note are the collections of ACT theatre programs from the 1920s through to the present, the newspapers and magazines unique to Canberra (see photograph above), and the photographic collection from the old Department of Capital Territory which covers the period from the late 1950s to the 1970s.

To ensure that the heritage collection is developed in a consistent manner, a draft collection-development policy is being prepared and will be distributed for public comment in the near future. Information on the ACT government's library services is available on the City Services' Internet home page at <http://actg.canberra.edu.au/actg/dus/csg/org5/act1/library.htm>

