

And when *will* the ACT get its own reference library?...

We contacted a number of prominent ACT librarians and asked for their views on the need or otherwise for an ACT reference library — we received only two responses:

So why don't we have a library?

There is no doubt that the ACT needs a reference library of its own. Go into the main reading room of the National Library of Australia on any day of any week — especially during teaching time at Canberra's schools and universities — and you'll see most of the carrels and chairs occupied by local students. No-one suggests that they should be turned away. However, the primary role of the National Library is not, and should not be to meet the educational needs of the studying Canberran. It is also inappropriate to ask the National Library to take a special interest in seeking out and preserving the local history of the Canberra region, in serving the information needs of the various ACT business enterprises, or in supporting ACT government departments and agencies with materials beyond the scope of their own special libraries — all tasks undertaken by state libraries.

At the time this was being written there has been considerable publicity about the effect of cuts in the National Library's acquisitions program on its ability to support scholarship nationwide. It's not often the National Library makes it onto ABC Radio National, ABC TV, *The Australian* and *Campus Review* all in one week. Its collection development policy is another issue, of course, but it is apparent that the National Library has to ensure that within its limited funding it does a limited number of things well, rather than spread itself too thinly attempting to be all things to all people. If it's truly to be a 'National' library, serving local needs cannot be a priority.

The question is not why the ACT should have its own reference library, but why not?

*Peter Clayton
University of Canberra*

Too reliant on the NLA

It is sad that the ACT, given its high socio-economic mix and support of culture in the libraries, has not seen fit to provide a specific

ACT state/reference library. For far too long the ACT Government has relied on Canberrans using the facilities of the National Library and other libraries to accommodate the needs of students and ACT history researchers. The ACT is a 'poor relation' to all the other states and territories in this regard, that is, in having a proper state reference library. If the ACT Government is too 'poor' to create one maybe it should 'outsource' the facility to the National Library or Australian National University?

Previous administrations of the Committee of the ACT Public Libraries were duped into thinking that adequate provision would be made following the distribution of the Casino funds but this has proved false. There is a need for a common focus in an ACT Reference Public Library. In the Internet era there also needs to be adequate provision for the students and adult population, including pensioners, for free public access to the overwhelming array of information resources, particularly in the reference area. I fully support the ALIA initiative in bringing this to public attention.

*Colin Steele, University librarian
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