

'A true public servant'

Port Phillip mourns Vida Horn, founding St Kilda librarian (9 May 1925 — 14 November 2003)

The City of Port Phillip is mourning the death of Vida Horn (nee Smith) who planned and established the St Kilda Library which opened in 1973, after a huge community campaign. Vida Horn died in the Epworth Hospital from cancer on 14 November at the age of 78. She was still working as a freelance editor at the time of her death.

Deidre Pellizzer, a former City of Port Phillip library services co-ordinator, described Mrs Horn, as she was always known to staff, as 'a true public servant'. She was passionate about libraries and always focussed on the needs of library users. She understood the need for civic space as well as books, and the library — which she helped to plan from 1970 to 1973 — had a real sense of grandeur. It was a very modern building for its time.'

As well as appointing staff and overseeing the purchase of books and other materials, Mrs Horn had to keep a watching brief on the building program. By the time the library was officially opened on 14 May 1973, everything from the rosters to the filing system was in order ready for the rush of local residents who had waited so long for their own library. She even wrote the library by-laws. 'It was the sort of job people describe as challenging. Fortunately, I had marvellous staff,' she told people at the 30th anniversary celebrations of St Kilda library in May 2003.

When Mrs Horn was appointed in 1970, the town clerk

apparently told her he would be watching her every move and made some aspersions about her politics. She told him in no uncertain terms that if he repeated the allegations, she would regard it as slander and would refer the matter to her solicitors.

'Mrs Horn was forthright but fair,' Ms Pellizzer says, 'and always stuck up for staff rights and shared the workload by being very hands on. She did most of the book buying herself and spent time on the front desk to keep in touch with the users. Mrs Horn was well respected among members of the library profession.'

Mrs Horn sometimes had to do battle with Enrico Taglietti, the library's architect. Taglietti was a leading proponent of the 'Brutalist school' of architecture. Mrs Horn recalled, 'When we objected to his lighting plan and insisted that there be good lights over the reading tables, Taglietti snorted and said, "You librarians, you're all the same — obsessed with the printed word!"'

The new library was immensely popular but keenly administered. Librarians did not wear uniforms but were expected to turn up in the St Kilda colours of red, black and white. If users had overdue books, they could expect a visit from council by-laws officers. Staff maintained a file of blacklisted users with very overdue books.

Mrs Horn said earlier this year that the library was the biggest toy the local kids ever had. 'Local kids broke everything that could be broken. We used to call them the St Kilda Product Testing Association. They even stole the red public phone from the foyer! But when they needed help with school work or, in fact, any help at all, they came to the library.'

Mrs Horn's passion for cataloguing apparently extended to home where she reputedly catalogued her freezer in triplicate — but apparently her husband did not always follow it!

When Mrs Horn retired in 1987, she was the only woman to head a department of the St Kilda Council. She was a founding member of both the St Kilda Festival Committee and the Garden Festival Committee. She was an executive officer of the committee on history projects and liaised with Anne Longmuir, the author of volume 3 of St Kilda's history, *St Kilda: the show goes on*. Mrs Horn was also behind the memorial plaques placed around St Kilda.

Mrs Horn's retirement present was a (fake) gold-plated library card. She was later appointed a life member of the library service. She remained an active member in the St Kilda Historical Society to her death.

Carmel Shute, City of Port Phillip



Vida Horn speaking at the 30th anniversary of St Kilda Library May 14, 2003. Richard Holt, a St Kilda librarian (right), was one of the staff dressed in 70s' gear.

Phillipena (Ena) Noël, AOM 1910–2003

To many people, Ena was Australian IBBY. In 1966, the enthusiastic and popular teacher-librarian became president of the Australian section of IBBY, a post she held until her retirement from the position in 1992. She did, however, remain as the Australian associate editor of *Bookbird*, a role she maintained until her death.

It was not Ena's longevity in her IBBY capacity that marked her contribution to the organisation, however, it was her love of children and their literature, and her realisation that it was through IBBY that she could make a real and positive difference to that world. She led the Australian section of IBBY with her trademark dedication, organising events and editing the newsletter. As both the president of Australian IBBY and a well-known expert in the field of children's literature, Ena was often invited to speak at conferences and seminars: perhaps her finest achievement in this sphere was organising probably the first truly international children's literature conference of its type ever held in Australia, and then speaking commandingly at the opening.

Ena was equally highly-regarded on the international scene. She served on the IBBY executive committee from 1982 to 1986, attending the meetings at her own expense. Importantly, she was instrumental in the winning of the 1986 Hans Christian Andersen Medals by two Australians, author Patricia Wrightson and illustrator Robert Ingpen, the first time that both medals had been awarded to citizens of the same country in the same year. At the same time, Ena organised and led large Australian contingents to the biennial IBBY congresses which are held in cities around the world. She loved and promoted Australian children's literature but, equally, wanted Australians in the field to gain an appreciation of the children's literature of other countries, so promoting international understanding.

In 1994, Ena initiated the Ena Noel Award for the encouragement of young Australian authors and illustrators for children. Held under the auspices of IBBY and awarded at the ALIA biennial conferences, winners have included Sonya Hartnett, Steven Woolman and, most recently, Beth Norling. Ironically, she died just as entries for the 2004 Ena Noël Award were being received by Australian IBBY.

It is fitting that this remarkable woman, who did so much for children and their books over four decades of endeavour, should be remembered by the award that bears her name. Thus, Ena Noël's name and her contribution to children's literature live on.

Dr John Foster, president, Australian Section of IBBY