

Making connections

Alison Gregg, *Local-Link* convenor

The ALIA Local Studies group packed a lot of activities into 2003. Highlights included a summer visit to the Perth Observatory and a November bus tour to Kojonup and Albany to enjoy and learn from local history collections and the new initiatives there. The committee has been busy planning programs and giving encouragement and advice to meet our members' needs.

Our big blockbuster efforts for 2003 were two highly successful one-day workshops on topics of immediate relevance to local studies. The first — on digitising the collection — attracted a wide and varied audience and demonstrated a range of approaches to what is now a crucial tool of our profession. Nine weeks later we were back again for more, this time on indexing the collection. Which thesaurus to use? Which subject headings? Is there any model that really meets our needs? The short answer is 'no' so the 2004 program features a detailed survey on what local studies collections are using and why, and what can be done to ensure we get a system relevant to us.

The 2004 program began in February with a visit to UWA Archives and a twilight tour of the beautiful UWA campus. Activities for the remainder of the year include talks, tours and workshops: on municipal heritage inventories and local studies (April), a follow-up to the thesaurus workshop in June, panel discussion on the use of volunteers in local studies (August), country visit to local studies in the wheatbelt in Spring, and performing arts / ephemera collections in November. Details are yet to be finalised, but that's the outline for your monthly planner.

So you see in Local Studies we are always busy *Lookin' Forward, Lookin' Back*. That phrase has been imprinted on my mind since late one Saturday night in September 2003 when I tuned to ABC Radio and found it swamped with tributes to the late and great Slim Dusty. 'Great' is an appellation that he would never have applied to himself. Caller after caller stressed Slim's modesty and sincerity, and his keen appreciation of just those virtues in everybody else. Slim was above all dinkum. There was no 'side'

to him. He did not give himself airs and he was always ready to lend a hand. Years ago when I lived in an outback town, his frequent visits were a delight. The team came in, set up their own performance space, brought and managed all their own gear, fixed their own accommodation, never sought favours from the often hard-pressed locals. Slim was engaging, friendly, and absolutely professional in all that he did. And I think what he did best was to make connections with the lives of his listeners. He wrote and sang of the things they knew best, ordinary things at the heart of what it means to be Australian. There was no fake sentimentality, no pretence; just recognition of real concerns of real people; quiet enjoyment of the things they enjoyed.

Lookin' Forward, Lookin' Back was the title song on his 100th country music album released in 2000, the year he was named a National Treasure. It epitomises what he gave to the community: reflection on the past and the present, and a way of thinking about and helping to shape the future. A lot like local studies really. ■

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