

Donovan News

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Celebrating Fourteen Years of Donovan & Associates

Spring 1994

... keeping in touch with clients and other friends ...

Historians write to be read

One axiom of business is that, even if a company did not have a competitor, it would have to invent one to ensure that it retained the edge that is honed by competition.

We at **Donovan & Associates** like to 'invent' or visualise the readers of our books and reports to ensure that what we write fulfils the purpose of the commissioned history and is appropriate to the intended reader.

Ian Warden, a journalist for the *Canberra Times*, made a similar point in a profile of staff writers which appeared on 27 May 1994:

Ian Warden joined *The Canberra Times* in 1975, giving up the pursuit of a Ph.D in Australian history at the Australian National University when he realised that his PhD thesis would only reach an audience of three, its scholarly examiners. Craving a larger readership he asked *The Canberra Times* for a job . . .

All writers — historians included — like to be read. For commissioned historians, however, it is particularly important that others read what they write, otherwise much of the time, effort and expense invested in the project will be wasted. So, it is important that a history is written with the potential reader in mind.

Donovan & Associates regularly promotes the idea that history can be used in many useful and legitimate ways. While most commissioned histories are probably written because of an impending celebration, history can also be used for such purposes as marketing, management training and policy development. However, in each instance, what is essentially the same history must be told differently because of the needs of the different readers, from employees or potential clients through to decision-makers and managers.

It is not difficult to ensure that a history project is appropriate for its purpose and its readers, but it does require an awareness on the part of the historian and the client.

IM WRITING THIS HISTORY FOR THE READER: MY MUM...



PROJECT UPDATE

Donovan & Associates has continued to be busy during the period since the previous *News*.

Changing the Guard, the history of the Australian Protective Service — with a foreword by the Prime Minister — was completed on time and was launched in Canberra on 20 October, the tenth anniversary of the APS.

Adventures with Clito, the collection of historians' anecdotes compiled by Peter Donovan was published on 1 August.

The manuscript for the history of Faulding, Australia's international pharmaceutical company, has been completed, edited and illustrations chosen. It is on track for publication early in 1995 to mark the 150th anniversary of the company.

Both the history of the South Australian Pastoral Board and the Heritage Survey of the Flinders Ranges are continuing and are due to be completed in 1995.

The oral history of the Australian Medical Association continues. Peter Donovan took the opportunity to interview key Western Australian members while attending the Australian Historical Association in Perth in September.

New Projects

Donovan & Associates has continued to win new projects since the previous *News* which illustrates continuing satisfaction with the range of services we have to offer.

Given the nature of our business it is not often that we win repeat business, but we have gained two repeat clients during the past few months.

A particularly significant new project is to provide the Australian Council of National Trusts with an overview of mining history in Australia. Additional details are given in the accompanying article.

D & A also won the contract to document buildings in the DSTO Laboratories Area at Salisbury. This follows upon the project of last year when we were asked to provide a heritage assessment of the buildings on the site. Peter Donovan has managed the project with the assistance of Barry Rowney and June Waters. The project is to be completed in November.

The firm was also called upon by the City of Port Adelaide to suggest innovative ways in which the history of Port Adelaide could be written. This report was submitted to the Corporation in September.

Donovan & Associates with Bernard O'Neil also won the contract to write a history of Sacred Heart College which is to celebrate its centenary in 1997. Work on this project will begin in earnest in 1995.

Recently **Donovan & Associates** learned that the firm had been chosen to write a history of Quality Bakers in Australia, a subsidiary of the giant food company, Goodman Fielder Limited.

AUSTRALIA'S MINING HERITAGE

There have perhaps been few industries so important to the economic development of Australia as that of mining. Leaving aside the Aboriginal mining for ochre and the trade networks that this established, coal mining began near Sydney soon after New South Wales was established. Coal mining has underpinned industrial development in Australia ever since, and has become a major export earner. Gold mining was a major factor in attracting free immigrants to the colonies in the mid-nineteenth century and, although its economic and social contribution has waxed and waned, it has continued to be important to the economy. Iron ore has become a major export in the period since World War II, so too has alumina and uranium.

Many of Australia's major cities and towns owe their establishment or prosperity to mining including Burra, Ballarat, Bathurst, Broken Hill, Mt Isa, Tennant Creek, Kalgoorlie, Coober Pedy and Roxby Downs. Many other towns have flourished, and then died as minerals have become scarce.

Indeed, there are few aspects of Australia's economic and social history that have not been influenced by mining.

The Australian Council of National Trusts recently commissioned **Donovan & Associates** to grapple with all of these concepts in order to provide a document which will help develop policies for the conservation of Australia's mining heritage.

We have not been asked to write a comprehensive history of mining in Australia; that would take far longer than the time allowed and would require several experts. Moreover, few historians have had the presumption to write a comprehensive history of mining in Australia: Geoffrey Blainey concentrated only on precious and base metals when he wrote his history of Australian mining titled *The Rush that Never Ended*.

Instead, we have been asked to provide an overview of what has already been written to help ensure that no significant issues will be overlooked in future policy development associated with the conservation of Australia's mining heritage.

The project demands an Australia-wide approach and to undertake it successfully we have obtained assistance from experts in mining history in each State and the Northern Territory. Members of the team include Dr Peter Bell who will provide an overview of mining in Tasmania; Dr Charles Fahey (Victoria); Professor Alan Hargraves (New South Wales); Dr Ruth Kerr (Queensland); Professor David Carment and Susan Harlow (Northern Territory); Ken Spillman (Western Australia); and Bernard O'Neil (South Australia). It is an impressive team. Each member has written at length about mining in each particular region.

The project is a challenging one, but is very satisfying because of its identification with such fundamental features of Australia's history. We aim to ensure that it will also prove to be very useful in the conservation of Australia's mining heritage and will provide a firm theoretical foundation for continued work in this area.



New Publications

Donovan & Associates is constantly writing history. Much of this appears in the form of reports or lectures which have only limited circulation. New books appear less frequently, but they are all the more special for that. Two books have been published since the previous *News*.



Adventures with Clio: Historians recounting their memorable experiences, compiled by Peter Donovan was published on 1 August. It looks at the lighter side of researching and writing history and tells of the often humorous, frustrating or embarrassing incidents that occur during the course of research trips, visits to archives, meeting informants, presenting papers or overseeing the publication of books.

Although lighthearted, the collection was designed to help humanise history and the work of historians.

The book has a softback, measures 110 x 180 mm, has xii + 116 pages and is illustrated by Stephen Stanley.

Changing the Guard: A history of the Australian Protective Service, written by Peter Donovan, was launched in Canberra on 20 October.

Although the Service is only 10 years old, it traces its ancestry back to 1935, with the establishment of the Defence Establishments' Guard to provide security at government defence properties. This Guard was established under the provisions of the *Peace Officers Act 1925*, which was in the same tradition as the Act establishing the first Commonwealth Police formed by Prime Minister Billie Hughes when he was pelted with an egg while at Warwick in Queensland in 1917.

The book recounts the history of this security function and the changes to it caused by significant world developments.

The book has a hardback, measures 185 x 265 mm, has xiv + 250 pages and is illustrated in both black and white and colour.



Odds and Ends

D & A frequently calls upon a network of colleagues with special skills to help ensure the success of projects.

Barry Rowney, South Australia's premier heritage architect who works closely with **D & A** on heritage projects, was recently given the commission to design an interpretation centre at St Joseph's Provincialate at Kensington in order to help tell the story of Mary MacKillop. This was an initiative identified in an earlier **D & A** project, when Barry provided preliminary sketches and ideas.

Bernard O'Neill, a fellow historian who has collaborated with **D & A** on several projects, is completing the second volume of his history of the Mines and Energy Department, *Above and Below*, which is due for publication in December.

Stephen Stanley, the regular cartoonist in the *News* and other **D & A** publications has recently published a new children's book, *Puzzle Body*, following his successful *Puzzle Planets*.

Peter Donovan attended the Australian Historical Association conference in Perth in September and presented a paper in the Public History stream.

Donovan and Associates is now on E-mail in order to provide clients with a better service. The address is:

donovan@peg.apc.org

Copy-editing of the *News* is by Bernard O'Neil. The cartoons are by Stephen Stanley.

WHEN COMMISSIONING A HISTORIAN - hire a professional historian

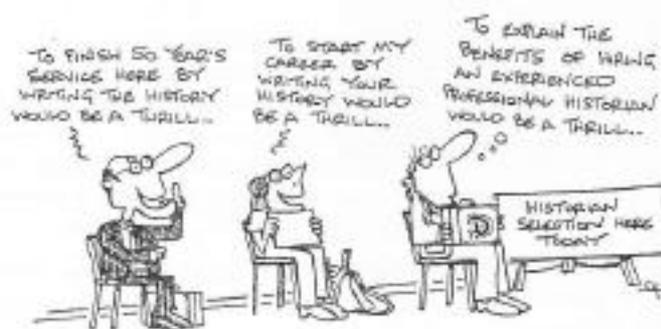
Those clients who seek a cheap history usually get what they pay for.

'We'll get a student to write the history' Some clients try to interest a student to write the history as part of a higher degree. They fail to understand that the degree process is the formal means by which the student learns the profession and that the student must write history in a very structured fashion, complete with detailed footnotes and with examiners in mind, not the general readers who might be expected to read a commissioned history.

Using a student to write the history of an organisation is like having an architectural student design and supervise the building of a house or factory as part of the thesis — if this was legally possible. Certainly the architectural student might be brilliant, and the project or case an easy one. However, trained and professional architects have more to offer a client than knowledge only. They know about the building industry in which they work and have gained practical experience that enables them to foresee and avoid problems and to work efficiently with an economy of effort. Moreover they carry insurance to cover unforeseen difficulties.

'Charlie has forgotten more of the history of the place than anyone else has learned' Another cheap approach is to have a long-serving member of staff write the history in the belief that because he or she has a long association with the organisation he or she must know its history. But this, too, is a false economy. Long-time employees will certainly have a detailed knowledge of aspects of the organisation, but their perspective will generally be very narrow. Moreover, anyone who works in an organisation will have ready-formed ideas — even prejudices — about incidents, people and decisions. And, long-time employment in an organisation is no guarantee that the person will be able to write about it in a satisfactory manner: even a company secretary will have had little experience writing extended and lively prose.

Historians are trained to take a wide view of issues and any lack of familiarity with an organisation is more than balanced by the objective viewpoint of the historian and his or her familiarity with writing. A trained, experienced professional historian may be more expensive than a student or a superannuated employee but will give far better value for money.

**DONOVAN and ASSOCIATES**

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