

# Donovan News

Number 2

An Occasional Publication

Spring, 1988

## Does History Matter?

There are few Australians who have not had the opportunity to dwell upon their past during the past few years, after the 150th anniversary of Victoria in 1984, two years later, South Australia's 150 Jubilee, and now in 1988 the commemoration of 200 years of European settlement in eastern Australia.

But how important is our history? Bicentennial activities have often been marked by controversy, and many of the froth-and-bubble celebrations have shown scant regard for the history upon which they have supposedly been based.

1988 may not have been the 'Celebration of a Nation' that our political leaders might have hoped. For all that, though, the Bicentennial has forced every Australian, Black or White, Asian or European, to think about the history of Australia and his or her place in it. Because of this it has been a good thing: we need encouragement to think about our history from time to time.

But a sense of history should be an abiding thing, it should not be dependent upon an anniversary or a celebration. It is important because it provides us with a context and an identity. It enables us to see where we have come from, what has shaped us and our attitudes, what sets us apart from others and how we relate to them, and it gives us a base upon which to plan for the future. It enables us to put our lives in perspective.

A sense of history is as important for organisations as it is for individuals, because if organisations have no appreciation of where they have come from they can have little appreciation of where they ought to be going.

This News seeks to emphasise the importance of a sense of history, and the manner in which Donovan and Associates endeavour to promote it.

## THANKS

Judging by the positive feed-back that we have had, the first issue of the News seems to have hit the mark and to have been well received. Emboldened by this we have been encouraged to provide a report on developments during the past six months.

## PEOPLE

Peter Donovan has had a number of speaking engagements during the past few months. Besides speaking at the Tourism conference in Canberra in June, he also spoke to the annual general meeting of the Mt Lofty Historical Society about Australian National and reasons for the closure of the railway line to Victor Harbor. During the last few weeks he has also spoken to meetings of the Blackwood Rotary Club, and the Adelaide Social History Group about Public History, and what historians have to offer business.

Perhaps more significantly, for the past several months Peter Donovan has been working as a Visiting Fellow at the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre at the Australian National University in Canberra. He has been funded by the Department of Defence to complete a study on the role of the Northern Territory in Australia's defence planning,

thereby providing a historical context for the work of others in the SDSC. His three books on the history of the Territory gave him an admirable foundation on which to build. A spin-off of this Fellowship was the opportunity to gather background material for the history of the Australian Submarine Corporation.

**Bernard O'Neill**, co-author of the history of Australian National has returned from his trip to Germany in search of more material for his biography of South Australia's pioneer geologist Johannes Menge. His research also took him to London.

Visitors during the past few months were **John Silburn** and his family from Canada. John is the president of **Restoration Engineering** in Ontario, Canada. The Silburns and the Donovans first met in Rome in 1980, while John and Peter attended the International Centre for Conservation. John is presently working on a new museum in Toronto and was pleased to visit some of the new generation of museums recently opened in Australia.

## PROJECTS

During the past few months **Donovan and Associates** has been working with others under the direction of the **National Environmental Consultancy**, a subsidiary of **Pak Poy and Kneebone**. The project has been concerned with drawing up a conservation and management plan for the West Terrace Cemetery. **Donovan and Associates** was charged with providing the history of the site and helping to establish its cultural significance. Client for the project is the State

## HISTORY and TOURISM

In June, 1988, Peter Donovan presented a paper to the **Frontiers of Australian Tourism**, held at the Australian National University in Canberra. The main ideas he sought to put across were the need for more qualitative research in the tourism industry, and the fact that historians could contribute a great deal to this.

The premise of his paper was that tourism is a two-edged sword. It brings undoubted economic benefits to the nation or region and broadens peoples' understanding, and is to be encouraged because of this. However, unless extreme care is exercised tourism can destroy the very things that sustain it, directly through physical damage and hastened deterioration, and indirectly by devaluation.

Much of the destruction and devaluing of Australia's cultural heritage is the result of ignorance, with perhaps, sometimes a touch of greed. Those in positions of authority and influence in the tourist industry must work to raise the awareness of developers and operators of the value of the heritage in their charge, and impress upon them the benefits - financial included - in seeking appropriate advice to ensure its better interpretation and conservation. After all, natural attractions and those that are of cultural significance are fragile things which, when lost, cannot be recreated.

Besides the possibility of damage or destruction of our cultural material, **Donovan and Associates** have long been concerned that so much of our current tourist promotion actually falsifies or devalues our history. This is a problem in several of South Australia's chief tourist destinations in the Adelaide Hills and the Barossa Valley which were settled by Germans from Silesia. Much of the tourist promotion and the development in these areas suggests that the Germans were from Bavaria, with all the overtones of oompa-pa bands, beer halls and men in leather shorts.

Peter Donovan went on to highlight ways in which historians could make a valuable contribution to the tourism industry.

He pointed out that they are able to offer advice on specific cultural heritage sites that will enhance their interpretation and provide a better appreciation of them for tourists. • They can help establish the precise significance of any site, and advise on appropriate documentation and interpretation. • Many of them are able to advise on measures that will ensure the appropriate development, management and conservation of the site. • They are trained to recognise and establish regional differences that might help inform tourism planning that will ensure a more enriching experience for tourists. • And they can establish linkages with other sites in the area that will complement and highlight the main feature.

## HISTORY as it HAPPENS

An exciting new direction for **Donovan and Associates** was marked by our appointment as historians for the **Australian Submarine Corporation**. The Corporation was formed only in August 1985, and many have expressed surprise that Historians should become involved so early. However, this is something that Donovan And Associates have been urging for some time, and it is the reason why we were so eager to be involved with the **South Australian Challenge to Defend the America's Cup**.

Just as the South Australian Challenge was one of the most significant sporting developments in South Australia, so the work of the Submarine Corporation promises to be of great significance for Australia and South Australia. It is the largest defence project in the history of Australian defence procurement, and has immense implications for Australian industry in general and that concerned with high technology in particular.

As with the South Australian Challenge, so with the Submarine Corporation our role is to record the significant developments of the Company as they happen: we are to try to anticipate many of the questions that future historians will ask and ensure that the information is preserved in a readily retrievable way. However, our brief is to record the history of the Company rather than that of the project. Because it is such an important defence project, subject to rigid security, this history will have to be left to others.

We anticipate an important part of our ongoing work being the management of an oral history programme. Particularly through this means we hope to provide important background on all key people and developments in the Company.

Department of Housing and Construction which is responsible for the administration of the cemetery.

The West Terrace Cemetery is by far the most significant cemetery in South Australia. Its history is almost as long as that of the State, and it is associated with many South Australians who made major contributions to the life of the State. At the same time it contains an extensive collection of monumental sculpture much of which would be considered as works of art in any sculpture gallery, all is rich in symbolism which reflects a great deal about the way successive generations of South Australians have viewed life and death. Because of this, the cemetery was entered on the Interim List of State Heritage Items independently of the conclusions determined during the course of the project.

Although our heritage survey of the town of Peterborough was completed some months ago we learned recently that it is to be printed and ready for wider distribution within a matter of weeks.

## WHY NOT an ORAL HISTORY PROGRAMME?

Historians can do more than simply write books.

When many chairmen and general managers think of historians and perhaps consider recording the history of their organisation they frequently think only of large books and are often daunted by all the attendant costs. However, books are not the only means of recording the history of an organisation.

Rather than immediately deciding upon the publication of a book, perhaps CEOs might consider the implementation of an oral history programme that aimed to include key people chosen because of their length of service with the organisation or because of their particular roles within it. Such a collection of interviews, suitably transcribed, indexed and preserved, would serve to record a great deal of the history of the organisation. Should a decision be made later to publish a history of the organisation, the record of interviews would provide an admirable base from which to start.

Indeed, an oral history programme might be an admirable - relatively inexpensive - means of judging, or perhaps stimulating, interest in a history project, and serve to establish the feasibility or advisability of proceeding to publication.

## PUBLICATION UPDATE

*Waltzing Matildas* was launched at Old Parliament House on 23 April. Doing the honours was Major-General Ronald Hopkins, who served in Palestine with the 6th Light Horse Regiment in the First World War, and who was largely responsible for the formation of the Australian Armoured Corps in 1941. Members of the Regimental Group Association travelled from most parts of Australia for the occasion. At the dinner at the Newmarket Hotel following the march on Anzac Day, Peter Donovan was made an honorary life member of the Association for his efforts in compiling the history.

*The History of Alice Springs* is on target for a launch in November. It is being published by the Alice Springs Town Council and

produced by John Ferguson Publishers of Sydney.

*Defending the Northern Gateway*, written by Peter Donovan while a Visiting Fellow at the **Strategic and Defence Studies Centre**, will be published later this year or early next year as one of the series of Canberra Papers that is produced by the Centre. A condensed version of the monograph will be produced as one of the series of Working Papers published by the Centre.

*The Long Haul*, the history of **Australian National** has lagged a bit, but it has been edited and is ready for typesetting. Design work for the book is being undertaken by **Ian Kidd Design**. One problem has been in finding someone to write the Foreword: because of government reshuffles during the past twelve months there have been upwards of four ministers who might be considered for the job.

## STOP PRESS

**Donovan and Associates** has recently been commissioned to write a history of F.H. Faulding and Co. This promises to be an exciting project. Faulding was established in 1845, less than a decade after the foundation of South Australia. It reflects a great deal about the history of the State, and of course is identified with that of the pharmaceutical industry and that of health care generally. It is now the only Australian national wholesaler of pharmaceutical products and a Company with interests world-wide: in the 1988 *Australian Business* review of the nation's top 500 companies it was considered the third largest of the chemical companies. Later issues of the *News* will carry details of progress on the history which is scheduled for publication in May, 1990.



**DONOVAN and ASSOCIATES**  
History and Historic Preservation Consultants

P.O. Box 436, Blackwood, South Australia, 5051. Ph. (08) 270 1770

- Corporate and Biographical History
- Local and Regional History
- Heritage Survey and Assessment
- Advice on Archives & Records Management
- Advice on Cultural Tourism
- Litigation Support
- Public Relations, Display & Education
- Social Science Research
- Manuscript and Report Preparation

**ARA**

Adelaide Research Assistance

PO Box 436 Blackwood South Australia 5051 • Ph (08) 270 1770

# Donovan News

## Supplement - 2

### TENDING THE CORPORATE MEMORY

Information is the key to success in any endeavour. However, no matter how much information has been gathered, if it is in such a form that it cannot be used, it is as good as useless. So it is that the proper management of non-current records in any company or organisation makes good sense.

Australian companies have been slow to appreciate the benefits that they can derive from curation and management of the records and artifacts collected over many years. The several banks have established archives, so too has the CSIRO, BHP and the AMP Society, but very few others.

Companies overseas have not been so slow to establish their archives. Thomas Cook has an archive in London, Wells Fargo, in America, has a separate history department of upwards of a dozen professionals. Other well-known American companies to have established corporate archives include Kraft, Nabisco and the Walt Disney organisation.

#### Good Business Sense

The establishment of a company archive makes sound business sense.

In the first instance self-protection requires that archives be established.

Organisations are required by law to maintain particular records for given periods. Official documents must be preserved for the life of the organisation, financial records should also be retained for several years, and a construction company such as Boulderstone Hornibrook believes it is important to retain contractual documents and others concerned with their many construction projects in case of actions taken against the company. Other information is important simply because it is part of the history of the organisation.

Of course, if an organisation intends to have a written history produced at some later time, some form of archives is important.

Because particular records must be kept, and because an officer must be placed in charge of these records, there is no reason why it should not be done professionally, under the direction of a trained archivist. If records cannot be produced when they are required, they are effectively lost, and time spent looking for them is wasted.

Again, because certain records must be kept, it makes good sense to centralise all those that are no longer current. This ensures that they can be organised properly, quickly retrieved and easily curated. Too many organisations have their records with those officers immediately responsible for them. However, in the wake of periodic reorganisations and staff changes important records are easily lost.

#### Evident Benefits

There are evident financial incentives for any organisation to establish an efficient archives, not the least of these flows from the more efficient use of space. Not all documentation generated during the course of a construction project, be it a building, new gas mains or a railway line, or the development of a new product, needs to be kept.

Nor need this material be kept in the form in which it was generated. Information for record purposes can quite easily be stored on microfilm or microfiche, with great savings in space.

But this being so, someone needs to be responsible for culling the material and deciding what is to be kept or microfilmed. This must be done in accordance with established guidelines, and ought to be done in accordance with archival practice. There are numbers of trained archivists who are available for this purpose.

In 1984, History Associates Inc, an American firm of history consultants, was commissioned to establish an archive for Texas

Instruments. Three years later, the company's records had been centralised, and their volume reduced by two-thirds. This promoted huge savings in space and the time needed to retrieve information.

## Uses of Business Archives

Business Archives are important for researchers interested in business history. But they can also be of immeasurable value to the generating organisation.

Properly managed archives will ensure that there is ready access to vital information. And once accessible, important Company records can be put to good effect. Kraft Inc of the United States, established its own history department in November 1983. The three professionals employed there are more than fully occupied serving the company's several divisions, Corporate Communications first of all, but also Marketing, Publicity, Law, Creative Services, Research and Development and Operations. As one of them explained, 'We provide information documentation, verify information, approve copy for publication and help with speeches, audio-visual presentations and press releases. Though the collection is not open to outside researchers, we will answer telephone and written requests for information'. [*Public History News*, Vol 8, No. 4, Summer, 1987]

The establishment of a history department or an archive in a company will not contribute directly to profits, but through the many uses to which the records can be put, a company history department should pay for itself by helping other divisions to generate the profits. On the other hand, the lack of proper records management can cost a company dearly should actions be brought against a company, and relevant documentation be not ready at hand.

Besides helping an organisation to protect its interests and to function more efficiently, the development of an archive and the proper curation of records and artifacts can also improve its public image and generate goodwill.

History is frequently the only way that people outside an organisation can relate to it. The use of a company's archive material can help establish linkages with customers and prospective clients. Several companies have been encouraged to establish an archives when they decided to publish a history of the organisation. Later they have found that the material in the archives can be used in other ways to promote the organisation, particularly

through both permanent and temporary displays in museums and exhibitions.

Moreover, the records and artifacts peculiar to one organisation frequently reflect the history of an industry and are of interest to many people beyond the originating organisation. This is particularly true of records associated with the South Australian Gas Company, or the pharmaceutical firm, F.H. Faulding.

Numbers of companies have sponsored travelling exhibitions. But historical exhibitions need not be grand affairs. A simple exhibition travelling to various branch offices of an organisation can both display and promote pride in the organisation.

Much of the material suitable for exhibition purposes is tailor-made for advertising. Nostalgia is a powerful emotion. Companies can play upon this and establish their bona fides by using old, once familiar material. Kraft has done this with its recent re-running of early television advertisements for 'Vegemite': the implication is, if a product is still popular it must be good.

The records generated by any organisation represent its collective memory and should be used to promote new initiatives by the organisation. Ideally, every organisation should have its central record repository or system of records management under the control of a professional. Given the importance of the corporate memory all organisations should have a professional records manager. If this person is not equipped to establish an archival programme, the expertise is readily available to do so. Once the system has been established it is a simple matter to keep it functioning.

Perhaps a firm might be happy to microfilm its records and take advantage of the savings in space, but not too interested in the fate of the records afterwards. In this instance there are numbers of public archives that would be happy to take care of the records. In this instance, managers should appreciate that these institutions will only accept such records on loan. They remain the property of the originating organisation, which may determine the conditions under which researchers have access to them. This guarantees confidentiality.

**Donovan and Associates** are happy to advise any managers who believe that better care and use might be made of the records of their organisation.

# Donovan News

## EXTRA

### DONOVAN & ASSOCIATES

History and Historic Preservation Consultants

P.O. Box 436, Blackwood, South Australia, 5051, (08) 270 1770

10 October, 1988

Received too late for inclusion in the *News* was the information that Peter Donovan's history of Alice Springs was one of the five works to receive a commendation and prize of \$1,000 from the panel judging the ABC Bicentennial Manning Clark Local History Awards.

The Manning Clark Local History Award was one of a number of literary awards sponsored by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation in association with the Australian Bicentennial Authority, and as such was a feature of the Authority's publications programme. The ABC hopes to produce a number of programmes from the winning entries.

At the time of judging, the history of Alice Springs was still in manuscript form. As indicated in the *News* the history is due for publication in November, to coincide with the centenary of the surveying of the town by David Lindsay.

It is a large book in many respects, not only in its 400 or more pages. It tells the story of one of Australia's most renowned - and romantic - towns, tracing its history in the context of that of Central Australia from the beginning to the present day. It seeks to consider all of the dominant issues that have helped to make it unique, not the least important being the interaction of white and black Australians. However, its main theme highlights the efforts of many people to overcome the isolation of the Centre.

The Alice has always been something of a paradox. Although one of the most isolated of Australian towns in the virtual centre of the continent, it has always been in close contact with the nerve-centres of the world, first by means of the Overland Telegraph, presently because of the presence nearby of Pine Gap.

The book has a wealth of illustrations to complement the points made in the text.