

Donovan News

Number 31

Autumn 2003

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

Marinated in History

When interviewed recently about American foreign policy since World War II, author Gore Vidal justified his right to speak on the subject by saying, 'I have been marinated in the history of my country'. Some time ago historian Geoffrey Blainey was questioned on his qualifications to speak on a social issue; he replied by saying, 'I am a historian'.

Historians are schooled in the study of the past in all its complexity, so they can understand it and interpret it to others. They are taught to appreciate the significance of context or perspective, or 'span' as it was called by the eminent Australian historian, Sir Keith Hancock. He went on to explain:

Span reveals itself in historical or sociological work as an awareness of background; it places the object of immediate and intense study in its proper relationship with the other objects, near or distant, to which it is necessarily related. Attachment is to the particular thing, span is a consciousness of the relation of things.

This concern with context and relationships, especially in time, is what sets historians apart from other writers.

Thus historians, rather than simply 'writers' or authors, should be the ones to write history. After all, 'The past is a foreign country', as author L.P. Hartley pointed out, 'they do things differently there'. So it is that those who would visit the past need a guide trained in observing and explaining it. Other writers might be appropriate for the publication of a newspaper or a company's annual report, but historians are the ones needed to unravel and explain history.



D&A's Scope of Work

Several projects have been completed by **Donovan & Associates** during the past six months.

The Conservation Management Plan for the Edinburgh Defence Precinct was officially launched on 10 March 2003.

Additional research continues into aspects of the Edinburgh Defence Precinct's history in association with redevelopment work there.

June Donovan has continued her work as the cultural heritage officer with the Defence Science and Technology Organisation (DSTO) at Edinburgh.

D&A has delivered the design guidelines for new monuments to be erected in the historic West Terrace Cemetery.

D&A has also completed a project for the New South Wales' National Parks and Wildlife Service. This involved researching and writing the history of several pastoral stations close to the Darling River in western New South Wales. A report appears on page 3.

Heritage History

The year 2003 marks the 25th anniversary of the Heritage Branch, the South Australian government's heritage agency. This was one of the first state heritage agencies in Australia, and it set the standard for others to follow, particularly in the prominent role given to historians.

Yet an embryonic heritage unit existed within the South Australian Museum several years earlier. Beginning in 1974, Graeme Pretty, the Curator of Anthropology, had gathered a small but diverse group of professionals to undertake a heritage survey of the Murray Flats of South Australia. Peter Donovan was the first to be recruited, followed soon afterwards by architect Barry Rowney. This group continued until 1977 when funds under the National Estate Grants Program were exhausted.

Peter Donovan went on to undertake the heritage survey of the City of Unley before joining the Heritage Unit as a consultant to assist with its formation and early development. Barry Rowney had already been recruited as the inaugural heritage architect.

Peter Donovan left the Unit in 1979 to study at the International Centre for Conservation in Rome in 1980. D&A was formed later that year and has been undertaking heritage work since then. Many recent D&A projects have seen Barry Rowney, since retired from the Unit, and Peter Donovan working together again.



The Heritage Unit in front of the Gateway Hotel, Adelaide, 17 July 1979. Standing at rear, left to right: Gavin Malone and Barry Rowney. Standing in front, left to right: John Dallwitz, Peter Donovan, Don Grant, Susan Marsden, Mark Butcher, Murray Evans, Robyn Arbuckle and Stan Czalkowski.

Outback Heritage & History

Donovan & Associates has been undertaking heritage and history projects in remote parts of Australia since the firm's inception.

D&A began on the strength of a grant to write a history of the Northern Territory from 1911 to 1978. There followed a history of Alice Springs and another of Connellan Airways.

D&A undertook a heritage survey of the mound springs area of northern South Australia and another of railway heritage throughout the state, and then another of the Flinders Ranges.

Peter Donovan wrote a history of the South Australian Pastoral Board which is responsible for Crown lands held under pastoral lease. He lived with the Strzelecki Track construction gang for a week while writing a history of the Track.

D&A has also undertaken work in western New South Wales. This includes a heritage survey of the Willandra Lakes World Heritage Area and a history of the Millewa Red Gum Forest near Deniliquin.



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

On the 'parched Paroo'

Peter Donovan was engaged in fieldwork in western New South Wales immediately before Christmas 2002. This was an essential part of a project commissioned by the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) to research the history of several pastoral stations. These stations had been acquired by the NPWS with funds from the National Heritage Trust in order to preserve rare species, landforms and cultural features. Key features include a small series of mound springs on the edge of Lake Peery, Aboriginal painting and engraving sites, and a former Aboriginal quarry and tool-producing site.

The stations are on either side of the Darling River near Wilcannia and extend northwards to the Paroo River Overflow. The stations were proclaimed as the Paroo-Darling National Park in late October 2002.

Several of the stations once formed part of the giant Momba Pastoral Holding of 852,885 ha, which incorporated 40 separate runs. Ownership was vested in the Momba Pastoral Company in 1888 with Peter Waite as managing director and key shareholders Robert Barr Smith and Thomas Elder, all of whom were principals of Elder Smith & Co. The South Australian connection continued in the early 20th century when Sidney Reid, son-in-law of Sidney Kidman acquired a Momba much reduced in size. Where previously a giant sheeprun, it was now managed as part of the Kidman cattle empire. It reverted to sheep country once again in the period after World War II when, in accordance with government policy, the holding continued to be subdivided into smaller leaseholds, four of which now form part of the Paroo-Darling National Park.

The country in early summer 2002-03 was indeed, 'parched' because of the continuing drought: the Darling near Wilcannia consisted of a series of waterholes. It was hard to imagine riverboats with barges once navigating the river, let alone some of the creeks that usually flow into it.



Top left: Interior of a rock shelter featuring Aboriginal paintings.

Top right: The remains of a stone trough associated with a mound spring on the bed of Lake Peery.

Bottom left: The interior of the woolshed on Arrow Bar Station.

Bottom right: The Darling River between Mount Murchison and Wilga stations, November 2002.

The Paroo

The region associated with the Paroo River in northwestern New South Wales captured the imagination of Australia's early poets and came to represent the Out Back.

Henry Lawson in his verse 'Out Back' wrote of the ill-fortune of a swagman down on his luck:

He begged his way on the parched Paroo and
the Warrego tracks once more,
And lived like a dog, as the swagmen do,
till the Western stations shore;
But men were many, and sheds were full,
for work in the town was slack—
The traveller never got hands in wool,
though he tramped for a year Out Back.¹

An anonymous poet gave mock advice on how English new chums could find their feet in colonial New South Wales:

If you want a situation, I'll just tell you the plan
To get onto a station, I am just your very man.
Pack up the old portmanteau, and label it Paroo,
With a name aristocratic—Jimmy Sago, Jackeroo.²

The Paroo shearing sheds featured in the shearers' strikes of the 1890s that helped give birth to the Australian Shearers' Union: the shearers damaged plant on Momba on one occasion. An anonymous poet lauded the shearers' deeds and concluded:

Now I wish you young coves fortune
as years go rolling on,
You may think about the old chap
when some splaw bawls out his song.
For I've shore upon Manara,
and in Queensland fir out back,
But I never shore at Paddington,
I could not shear for Mac.
So cheer up my Lachlan ringers,
as you travel the Maroo,
Stand out like Dunlop shearers,
and the men on the Paroo.³

1. *In the Days when the World was Wide and other verses by Henry Lawson*, Pacific Books, Sydney, 1966, pp. 31-33.

2. Russel Ward (ed.), *The Penguin Book of Australian Ballads*, Penguin Books, Ringwood, 1974 reprint, p. 86.

3. Quoted in Russel Ward, *The Australian Legend*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1983 reprint, p. 217.



DONOVAN & ASSOCIATES

History & Historic Preservation Consultants

Donovan & Associates is a consulting firm which specialises in matters relating to aspects of historical research, writing and historic conservation. The firm undertakes a wide variety of tasks based upon these specialties. Major projects completed by the firm include large commissioned histories and heritage studies, recording of oral history and providing advice on records management.

Donovan & Associates was established in 1980 and has since undertaken work for clients throughout southeastern Australia on projects that have involved research and work in all parts of the country.

Donovan & Associates' services include:

- * Corporate and institutional histories
- * Regional and local histories
- * Heritage surveys and assessments
- * Land tenure research
- * Oral history programs
- * Advice on cultural tourism
- * Advice on historical displays

PO Box 436, Blackwood, South Australia, 5051
Phone/Facsimile: (08) 8270 1770
e-mail: p_donovan@optusnet.com.au