

Donovan News

Number 7

Celebrating Eleven Years of Donovan & Associates

Autumn 1991

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

HISTORIANS ARE THE EXPLAINERS

Historians do more than simply chronicle **what** happened in the past - there is little skill required in that. They also try to do more than describe **how** events and developments took place. They see their primary function as trying to explain **why** events and developments took place and in the manner that they did.

Historians are trained in studying and explaining issues, in understanding, not just knowing the past. This is why historians are able to make a valuable contribution to any individual or group concerned with planning for the future, whether it be devising policies or strategies for future development. The historians' skills also mean that they are able to bring particular insights to the resolution of current issues.

It is an old dictum that change, no matter how sudden and total, always has deep roots in the past. Those responsible for managing this change stand a better chance of doing it successfully if they understand its causes. Historians can help.

Currently, one of the few times that managers call upon the services of historians is when they wish to mark some event or milestone. But this fails to make the most of historians' special skills. A corporate history can be put to many uses and need not be linked to an anniversary. A history can be used to explain corporate culture to staff and employees, it can be used to explain the need for change in a new environment, or it can be used to explain the organisation to clients and customers.

As well, historians play a host of other useful roles. For example, a historian providing a perspective on industrial relations within an organisation can provide valuable background to discussions aimed at devising new industrial relations. The historian can provide valuable insights on other matters that might be the cause of a dispute or litigation.

A historian versed in organisational development is able to provide valuable new perspectives in management training courses.

Some time ago a company promoting its services as information communicators pointed out that 'In the age of the specialist, excellent generalists aren't easy to find.' Historians are these 'excellent generalists': they are trained in considering the wide picture to explain specific issues. Historians are 'The Explainers'.



PEOPLE

Since the publication of the previous **News** two new people have joined **Donovan & Associates** for specific projects.

Patricia Sumerling joined us after several years working at the Adelaide City Council where she was responsible for documenting items on the City of Adelaide Heritage Register and in preparing for publication the illustrated City heritage list. There would be few people in Adelaide who know more than Patricia about sources of information about the City. Patricia earlier worked for a time at the South Australian Archives.

Daniel Fazio has begun working with us after having recently completed an Honours degree in History at Flinders University.

Other 'Associates' presently working with us on continuing and new projects include **Allison Painter**, **Bernie O'Neill** and **Barry Rowney**.

Peter Donovan has received an honour in being invited to speak at the forthcoming conference in Christchurch organised by the New Zealand Historical Association. He will be opening the conference in May with a talk about 'History in the Community', and will also contribute to a workshop on 'Contracts and Commissioned History'. Following the conference he is to travel to Wellington to meet historians in the Department of Internal Affairs.

NEW PROJECTS

Donovan & Associates has begun several new projects since the publication of the previous *News*. Most of these have been small projects, but we welcome them for the opportunity they provide to work with new clients.

Some of the new projects have involved the use of oral history. The clients have decided not to commission written histories immediately, but still ensure that valuable information about the origins of their organisations is not lost with the retirement of key people.

One of these projects is concerned with recording the foundation and development of **Lindsay Point Almonds Pty Ltd**. Another focusses on the early history of **Giles & Giles**, a firm of chartered accountants. Additional details of these projects are in this *News*.

We have also begun another phase of the **Australian Submarine Corporation** history. The submarine building project has moved into a second stage and is largely the responsibility of a new generation of managers. Our task is ensure that this new stage is adequately documented.

Another client has been the **Royal Australian Chemical Institute (SA Branch)**, where we were required to order and provide a finding aid for the records of the Institute before they were deposited in an appropriate repository. Patricia Sumerling undertook the bulk of this work.

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TENTH ANNIVERSARY



Left: l-r
Leith McGillivray,
Patricia Sumerling,
John Painter,
Lothar Brasse,
Alison Painter.

Right: l-r
Barry Rowney,
June Donovan,
Alison Rowney,
Bernie O'Neil,
Heidi Brasse.



Donovan & Associates celebrated its tenth anniversary on 16 December 1990. The occasion was marked by a dinner for those who had contributed to its success during the first decade. Unfortunately, a few 'Associates' were unable to attend: Kay Rollison, Noreen Kirkman who is now working at Mt Isa, Roma Hodgkinson, presently in Uganda, and Pamela Runge now living in Canberra.

Lindsay Point Almonds Pty Ltd

One of **Donovan & Associates'** major oral history projects is concerned with recording the foundation and early development of Lindsay Point Almonds. The company was formed in 1972 to establish an irrigated almond orchard on Lindsay Creek, a small anabranch of the River Murray in Victoria, close to South Australia.

In large part the Lindsay Point story reflects the later history of Australia's almond industry, not simply that of a single, but very significant, company.

The venture was the brainchild of almond growers from the Willunga district in South Australia, most notably Eric Lacey, a long-time member and chairman of the Almond Co-operative. With the financial support of other investors, the company has become one of Australia's most significant almond producers, employing the most modern techniques and technologies that have virtually revolutionised the industry.

Features of the story include the changes to rural investment allowances, River Murray water rights and the supply of power by ETSA in South Australia but with payments to the Victorian SEC.

The venture is less than twenty years old but already Eric Lacey has died and several of the pioneers are no longer actively involved. The company believed that if the history was to be recorded, a start had to be made sooner rather than later, while much of the early history is still readily available.

A NEW PERSPECTIVE

As mentioned in previous issues of the *News*, we believe it important to keep up with developments in our field of expertise in Australia and overseas. In accordance with this philosophy, Peter and June Donovan travelled to Europe and America in October 1990.

The visit was programmed so that Peter and June could attend the General Assembly of ICOMOS in Lausanne in Switzerland, ICOMOS being the international body concerned with promoting the proper conservation of built heritage. Heritage conservation has been a major part of the work of **Donovan & Associates** since the firm's inception and the international contacts made during previous visits overseas have proved invaluable in providing fresh insights into local issues.

Peter and June travelled to Lausanne via America and Britain and took advantage of the trip to renew professional contacts and to extend their network further. Peter Donovan is a member of the ICOMOS specialist committee on Cultural Tourism, so he and June were particularly keen to see the manner in which significant heritage sites overseas are being managed. The time in America was particularly concerned with meeting people working in the field of Public History.



Part of the 'ANZAC' delegation to the ICOMOS General Assembly in Lausanne in October 1990. From the left, David Beavis (NSW), David Reynolds (NZ), Peter Donovan (SA) and Miles Lewis (Vic).

Giles and Giles

Another of our current oral history projects is the recording of the early history of the firm of chartered accountants, **Giles and Giles**. The company is quickly losing touch with its origins; Ken Giles retired in 1965 and died in 1968; Mawson Giles retired in 1978. Other early partners have also long retired from the practice with the last of the early generation having retired from the company late in 1990. Thus, the present directors believed it important to record some of the early history while this remains possible.

The story is a fascinating one. Although much of the history is common to the industry and other accounting practices, Giles and Giles' story is significant largely because of its service to country clients and to the hotel industry in South Australia. These aspects have helped determine its particular culture and underpin its success.

Our oral history programme will help preserve this unique record.

New Projects continued

We were recently engaged to compile a history of **Payneham Primary School**. The school was founded in 1878 but is due to close at the end of 1991. The changing settlement patterns in metropolitan Adelaide have meant that enrolments have been declining for several years. Alison Painter will be undertaking much of the project, with Daniel Fazio working as a research assistant. Daniel is an alumnus of the school and brings first-hand knowledge to the task.

A major new project sees the **National Trust of South Australia** as a client. We have been asked to identify, document and assess the surviving railway heritage in South Australia and to suggest strategies that will promote the conservation of the most significant aspects of this heritage. Funding for the project has come from the National Estate Grants Programme. The team, under the management of Peter Donovan, includes Patricia Sumerling, Bernie O'Neil and Barrie Rowney.

BHP, the Big Australian, has also joined our growing list of clients. A past employee, who spent most of his working life at Iron Knob, has written about his experiences in the quarries from the late 1930s. The company wants to have these reminiscences published and has asked us to help prepare the manuscript for publication.

During the past months we have also been involved in advising clients on the heritage significance of a number of properties in the City of Adelaide. Peter Donovan has also given talks to the Marion and South Australian Historical Societies, students in the Library course at the former Institute of Technology and at a Seminar on Local Heritage.

PUBLICATIONS

Several new publications with which we have been involved were published during the past few months.

Our history of the Real Estate Institute of South Australia, **Real History**, was launched by David Smith, the managing director of the *Advertiser*, on 14 November 1990, at a special ceremony at REI House.

REAL HISTORY



Prior to this, the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre at the Australian National University published **The Northern Territory in the Defence of Australia: Geography, History, Economy, Infra-**

structure and Defence Presence. This publication was edited by Desmond Ball and J.O. Langtry and carries a chapter by Peter Donovan concerning 'History of the Northern Territory'.



The Adelaide City Council finally published **Heritage of the City of Adelaide: An Illustrated Guide** in October 1991. The origins of this book extend back to 1981 when Peter Donovan with Susan Marsden and Paul Stark embarked on their task of identifying and documenting the significant heritage items in the City of Adelaide.

Donovan & Associates recently completed work on their heritage survey of the City of Salisbury and expect that the report will be published in the near future.

APH MILESTONE

Early 1991 marks the tenth anniversary of South Australia's **Association of Professional Historians**, the first of Australia's professional bodies for Applied Historians.

The Association was formed to provide a measure of support for historians working outside the academy, to encourage the recognition of their skills and expertise and to help raise the standard of history practised in the community.

Donovan & Associates has been active in the Association since its inception and totally supports its aims and objectives. All the historians who have helped to ensure the success of our firm have also been active in the Association. Patricia Sumerling once served as secretary, Alison Painter is presently membership secretary, while Bernie O'Neil is serving on the Executive.

We congratulate the Association on its first decade and wish it continued success.



DONOVAN and ASSOCIATES

History and Historic Preservation Consultants

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We offer a wide range of services, including:

- Corporate and Institutional History and Biography
- Regional and Local History
- Oral History Programmes
- Heritage Survey and Assessment
- Advice on Cultural Tourism
- Advice on Archives and Records Management
- Litigation Support
- Editing of Reports and Manuscripts
- Manuscript and Report Preparation
- Public Relations, Display and Education



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THE HISTORY BUSINESS: *
AN AUSTRALIAN PERSPECTIVE

Peter Donovan

Donovan and Associates, History and Historic Preservation Consultants celebrates its tenth anniversary in December 1990, making it the oldest history consulting firm in Australia and one very closely identified with the growth of Public History in that country.

History Outside the Academy

The notion of historians working as consultants is not new to Australia. For instance, Geoffrey Blainey, one of the country's most renowned historians, began his career writing commissioned histories 20 years earlier, that is, prior to securing an academic post and ultimately becoming Professor of Economic History at the University of Melbourne. In general, early commissioned histories were written by either academics on leave from their institutions or aspiring academics waiting for a teaching post.

It is a relatively new idea that historians might continue to practice history but never strive for an academic post. To a large extent, this trend proved a function of the sudden drying up of history posts during the early 1970s following on from a period of rapid expansion. Many history graduates, finding academia closed to them, sought new career directions, while others found a market for their historical skills in cultural institutions and private enterprise.

During the 1980s those historians outside the academy began to establish appropriate organisational structures. The Association of Professional Historians was founded in South Australia early in 1981, a development in which I performed an active founding and developmental role. The History Institute soon followed in Victoria, a Professional Historians Association was formed in New South Wales (NSW) in 1984, and more recently similar organisations have been established in Western Australia (1988) and Queensland (1990).

A History Company

Donovan and Associates, having been founded in 1980, is part of this evolving Public History movement and reflects many of its features, most notably the growing role of historians working as consultants for clients. Whereas most public historians in Australia continue to work as individuals in a limited area of historical endeavour, *Donovan and Associates* has sought to build a business organisation and to explore the wealth of opportunities available to historians, while correcting popular misconceptions about the role and practical utility of history. The company's principal staff have developed new skills, particularly in the sphere of people management and business practice, to complement those learned at university. The firm's rate of growth, though not spectacular, has proved steady and has been based in part upon the development of a network of part-time staff and consultants to offer specific skills or cover busy periods. This skills infrastructure has provided *Donovan and Associates* with

the flexibility to tackle a wide variety of projects as well as with a foundation upon which to construct a career structure for historians.

The firm's full name suggests the two distinct, but allied history services provided for clients:

- historic preservation.
- history.

Historic preservation

Prior to the formation of *Donovan and Associates* I was already exploiting the opportunities for historians in the field of heritage conservation in the wake of the establishment of the Australian Heritage Commission (1975). The latter fostered greater professionalism in heritage conservation work in Australia. New opportunities were provided for historians, alongside architects, crafts-people and others. Against this background I studied architectural conservation at the International Centre for Conservation in Rome in order to acquire appropriate expertise. Significantly, much of the firm's early work derived from consulting assignments in the field of heritage conservation.

We continue to provide a range of heritage services. On a macro scale broad-ranging surveys have been produced concerned with the location, identification, and documentation of items and sites suitable for heritage listing. One commission required the firm to identify and record sites associated with early European settlement in the Willandra World Heritage Region in NSW. A similar project was undertaken in the far north of South Australia at a time when the region was being opened up by mining and tourist interests. Other assignments involved surveys of potential heritage sites in urban areas (eg. Adelaide), country towns and other local government areas.

On a micro-scale *Donovan and Associates* has participated in conservation teams responsible for individual heritage buildings, where its primary role has been to provide documentary guidance on the sites and buildings. Significant examples in South Australia have included work on Fort Glanville - this was built in 1882 as part of the colony's defences - as well as on Adelaide's first cemetery and South Australia's initial Parliament House and early Destitute Asylum.

Most projects are won on open tender, but the firm has attempted to generate suitable projects. For instance, a proposal for an inventory of stained and painted glass windows in South Australia was sold to the funding authority on the basis of establishing suitable criteria for assessing the heritage significance of windows and apportioning scarce funds for restoration purposes. This particular project resulted in two books.

History Projects

Our firm has also secured commissions for regional, local and corporate histories. The history of a small country local government body about to celebrate its centenary represented our first task. The bulk of our work now derives from such commissions, especially as our firm has become more securely established and more widely known.

Earlier work was concerned primarily with local and regional history, which fitted in well with the principals' history training at university. My postgraduate thesis documenting the history of Northern Territory between 1863-1911 was published in 1980, and this was followed by a grant to take the story up to 1978. In 1988 this work led also to a visiting fellowship at the Australian National University in Canberra, where I collaborated in research work focused on defence and Australia's north. Two publications followed.

Other history projects included Alice Springs and a metropolitan city contiguous to Adelaide. Although our firm remains alert for opportunities to tender for such local and regional histories, recent marketing efforts have concentrated upon government, commerce and industry. Clients have included the South Australian Gas Company, Baulderstone Hornibrook (building and construction company), Australian National (the federal railway corporation), F.H. Faulding (pharmaceutical company), the Real Estate Institute of South Australia, and the South Australian Department of Road Transport.

Our first business history project arose out of a company's 125th. anniversary. Naturally, corporate histories prove an appropriate way of celebrating significant anniversaries, but *Donovan and Associates* have constantly argued that management should not wait for these rare occasions. Corporate histories possess another value, such as to guide current management during a period of change. In this connection, the firm was commissioned to record the history of the Australian Submarine Corporation which was formed in 1985 to build Australia's new generation of submarines.

History in the Community

The history services offered by our firm are extensive, and include:

- corporate, institutional and biographical history;
- regional and local history;
- oral history programmes;
- heritage survey and assessment;
- advice on cultural tourism;
- advice on archives and records management;
- litigation support;
- preparation and editing of reports and manuscripts;
- public relations, display and education.

Donovan and Associates remains convinced of the need to promote the importance of a sense of history in the community and to take advantage of the immense opportunities provided for historians through an enhanced awareness of the utility of history among community leaders. Of course, this is easier said than done. Our firm developed slowly but surely during the 1980s. The decade proved an important learning experience, and, as we enter the 1990s, it is worth emphasising our belief that it is important to talk to clients in the wider community outside of academia in language that they understand and to relate to them in the business-like fashion to which they are accustomed.

Peter Donovan is a principal of *Donovan and Associates* based in Blackwood, South Australia. He served as the first president of the Association of Professional Historians in South Australia and is currently a member of its executive committee.

He was educated at the University of New England, Flinders University and the International Centre for Conservation in Rome.

* The reprint of an article requested by the editor of *Push Newsletter*, the newsletter of the Campaign for Public Sector History, published by the Faculty of Human Sciences, Kingston Polytechnic, Kingston-Upon-Thames, U.K.