

Long Desperate Hours at the Typewriter: Establishing the Oral History Association of Australia

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This paper was requested by the-then editor to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the Oral History Association of Australia and originally published in this journal in 2008. It documents the founding of a national association by Jean Teasdale in Perth in 1978, prior to the existence of local oral history groups anywhere in Australia. It also establishes the influence of the first two oral history conferences in Australia, convened by Joan Campbell at La Trobe University in Melbourne in 1974 and 1975. The paper goes on to describe the consolidation of the OHAA in its early years, as well as assessing how much of the founder's original vision had been realised thirty years later.

The Oral History Association of Australia (OHAA) came into being at a meeting held at the University of Western Australia (UWA) on 26 July 1978 through the extraordinary energy and drive of one woman. While the same 'convergence of sociology and history'¹ that stimulated the emergence of oral history as a research technique in Britain in the 1960s was exciting a new generation of historians across Australia in the 1970s, it was social worker Jean Teasdale who spent 'the long desperate hours' at the typewriter² to bring about a national association.³

In 1975 Jean Teasdale had interrupted her career as a social worker to become one of the first two full-time interviewers appointed to the J S Battye Library of West Australian History's Oral History Program at the State Reference Library of Western Australia. She brought impressive skills and experience to the role. She had studied psychology at UWA prior to completing a Diploma in Social Science at the University of Adelaide, awarded in 1952.⁴ She had then worked in a range of agencies in Adelaide and Perth, as well as teaching at Western Australia's inaugural School of Social Work at UWA from 1965–1968.

Jean had also pursued an interest in History studying for a Master of Arts (Preliminary) at UWA (1969–1971), while continuing to raise four children. Prior to joining the Library in 1975 Jean was working as a family counsellor in her husband's general medical practice and contributing as a volunteer to support



Jean Teasdale (pictured) founded the OHAA in 1978. Photo courtesy John Ferrell.

refugees from Darwin in the wake of Cyclone Tracy (24 December 1974).⁵

The potential of oral history to contribute to the historic record had been recognised by the Battye Library's first librarian, Mollie Lukis, during a nine-month trip to Europe and North America funded by the Carnegie Foundation in 1957–1958.⁶ In 1961 she and her staff began recording interviews for the Library's collection as time permitted.⁷ This was the first oral history program in a major Australian library. While the National Library began supporting fieldwork by oral history practitioners in 1960, beginning with Hazel de Berg's recordings of writers and artists, it did not begin 'a full-scale oral history project' until 1970 when retired journalist Mel Pratt was contracted to conduct interviews with people selected by the library.⁸

The resources to establish a dedicated program at the Battye Library eventuated from the State election campaign in 1974 when Liberal Party leader Sir

Charles Court proposed ‘the gathering of live history while the memories of those who are making it are still strong.’⁹ When Sir Charles became Premier the State Librarian’s submission to establish an oral history program within the Batty Library was successful.

During 1975 and 1976 Jean researched and recorded over 60 interviews for the Library. Interviewees ranged from farmers (her own family background) and miners to government ministers and Western Australian-born entertainer Rolf Harris.¹⁰ Her role also involved training others in interviewing and recording techniques, proofreading transcripts and promoting the collection.

However, she felt isolated. She had been a member of the Australian Association of Social Workers since 1952,¹¹ benefiting from its program of publications and conferences and contributing herself to the development of the profession. There was no such support for oral history in Australia. So Jean joined three overseas associations: the United States’ Oral History Association (established 1966), Britain’s Oral History Society (established 1973) and the Canadian Oral History Association (established 1975), and she began corresponding with other practitioners identified through their journals.¹²

In 1977, with the idea of a national association of oral history already in her mind,¹³ she travelled to Britain where she attended an Oral History Society conference in London¹⁴ and met the editor of its bi-annual journal, Paul Thompson.¹⁵ On her return to Perth Jean was now determined to establish a similar organisation in Australia.

The idea of a national oral history association was not entirely without precedent. It had been raised at a one-day conference at La Trobe University, Melbourne in 1975. It was the third of three conferences between November 1973 and February 1975 that had begun to build a sense of community between oral history practitioners in the eastern states, and to suggest to Australian libraries and archives ‘the growing respectability in this country of oral history programmes’.¹⁶

The first Australian Folklorists’ Conference¹⁷ at the University of Sydney on 17–18 November 1973 was convened by the New South Wales Folk Federation (established 1970) but ‘brought into the open a number of questions which must be asked of any oral history programme whether it be concerned with the specialised fields of folk lore, tradition and popular song or interviews on tape with politicians and public servants or artists and writers.’¹⁸ Three months later two of the delegates, folklorists Wendy Lowenstein and Shirley Andrews, addressed a much larger gathering in Melbourne; the first national conference about oral history held in Australia.¹⁹



Joan Campbell convened two influential oral history conferences in 1974 and 1975. Photo ca. 1980, courtesy of Joan Campbell.

The one-day conference on 1 March 1974 was convened by Joan Campbell, a senior tutor and PhD candidate at La Trobe University. Joan’s primary interest was European history but she chose local topics for her postgraduate degrees so that she would not need to leave her young family to do research. In 1972 she began recording oral histories, and also made contact with the US Oral History Association, while she explored the idea of a PhD on the history of the Mornington Peninsula. Although she decided instead to research the colonial history of the Port Phillip district²⁰ she continued to record interviews with people on subjects of interest to her²¹ and to correspond with American practitioners. When she joined the History Department of La Trobe University in 1974 she offered to present an oral history course for third year students. She also taught oral history in a voluntary capacity through the Council of Adult Education.²²

The decision to convene a conference was made because of ‘the need for dialogue’ in ‘this relatively new development within the discipline of history.’²³ The conference program presented 16 speakers in five panels covering current developments in oral history, ethnohistory and interviewing. The speakers were primarily Victorian academics but the response was overwhelming; about seventy people attended,²⁴ the catering for tea breaks fell well short of demand and Tom Stannage, who attended from UWA, enthused that, ‘All that is vital in history in Australia seems to be occurring at specialist conferences like this one.’²⁵

As Joan reported in the proceedings, convening the conference ‘provided a vital means of communication between many researchers... From Townsville to Perth, and places in between, numerous letters have come in wanting to know more about the Conference and its aims.’²⁶ For ‘the Second Oral History Conference’ on 6 February 1975 she assembled eight speakers, including academics from Canberra, Queensland and South Australia, for a program focussed on immigrant

communities and folk traditions. She concluded that ‘the need for a listing of oral history contacts within Australia’ was clear.²⁷

Joan signalled her intention to convene a third conference in 1976 in the 1975 conference proceedings,²⁸ and referred to the lack of a formal association in a report she wrote for the US Oral History Association’s journal.²⁹ However the momentum was halted when she left La Trobe for the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology to coordinate the establishment of the Victorian Technical and Further Education Off-Campus Network to support distance education. Like oral history, distance education appealed to Joan’s interest in innovative approaches to research and teaching. She subscribed to the OHAA in its first year and was involved in discussions about the establishment of a Victorian Branch³⁰ but her involvement in oral history ended in the early 1980s.³¹

The timely publication of the proceedings of both La Trobe conferences fixed their influence on the growing interest in oral history in the late 1970s. The second proceedings also provided Jean Teasdale with an invaluable list of almost 150 oral history contacts and collections, which she used to begin canvassing support for a national association by a letter she circulated throughout Australia in March 1978.³²

It would seem that the time has come for Australia to think about a national association in conjunction with yearly conferences. ... Perhaps steps have been taken towards this in the East but certainly not here in the West. If you reply to this note I wonder if you would also say whether you would be interested or not in such an association being formed. ... I was not involved in the 75 conference so do not know what the feelings about a national association were at that time.³³

The following month Jean produced the Oral History Newsletter, Vol. 1, No. 1 on the Gestetner in her husband’s general practice.³⁴ The lead item was ‘Comments on the formation of an Australian Oral History Association’ in which she referred again to the second La Trobe conference:

A number of people in Australia now feel it is time for those working on some form of oral history, whether in their own work or in organized programmes to get together in some form of an association so that ideas, methodologies, ethics, etc. can be discussed, as well as offering a means of disseminating the growing volume of knowledge in this field through either a newsletter or a journal.

Following the Oral History Conference at La Trobe University in 1975 some had hoped that this would occur, but interest waned and no one was sufficiently motivated to collect

people together for this purpose. It is now felt that there is sufficient interest for a body to be formed at least in Western Australia, and it is for this reason that a meeting will be arranged some time in July.³⁵

The short time in which Jean intended to marshal support for the meeting is all the more remarkable given that she was also preparing to travel to Penang in early May to attend a ‘Colloquium on Oral History’ organized by the National Archives of Malaysia and the Universiti Sains Malaysia, in cooperation with UNESCO.³⁶ Nevertheless, the second edition of the Oral History Newsletter distributed in July included not only the formal notice of ‘an Oral History Inaugural Meeting’ on 26 July but also a draft constitution and standing orders based on those of the British Oral History Society.

By the day of the meeting Jean had recruited 23 people to serve in positions of the proposed executive or on the committee.³⁷ As high school history teacher John Ferrell, the inaugural Treasurer, recalled twenty years later, ‘Nothing was left to chance. There may have been nominations from the floor on which Jean didn’t rely³⁸ [but] she had nominees in advance for each position to ensure a committee could be established.’³⁹

There has been a persistent misconception that the organisation formed on 26 July 1978 was a Western Australian Oral History Association that predated the national body.⁴⁰ There was certainly some initial opposition to setting up a national association prior to establishing a local oral history organisation in the West.⁴¹ This is probably reflected in Jean’s words, also quoted above: ‘It is now felt that there is sufficient interest for a body to be formed at least in Western Australia’.⁴² In 1980 Wendy Lowenstein in Melbourne also questioned whether the OHAA had been formed prematurely, much to Jean’s chagrin.⁴³ However she had never had any intention of settling for less than a national association.

I had to seek a number of people for Executive positions before the meeting was held and people from other states had to be found since a National body was the objective. ... The committee was a very large one and possibly could have had fewer WA members.⁴⁴

Of the 32-person 1978-1979 committee, 11 were interstate representatives, including two of the three Vice Presidents: Professor Weston Bate of Deakin University in Melbourne and Graeme Powell, the Principal Librarian of the National Library of Australia in Canberra. The third was Professor Geoffrey Bolton of Murdoch University. Jean was elected Organising Secretary, and announced in the next issue of the newsletter, ‘The Oral History Association of Australia is now a reality.’⁴⁵

Jean had an ambitious program mapped out to

establish the role and influence of the OHAA and she gave herself a deadline in which to achieve it, deciding 'to devote two years to setting up the Association and although I hate typing, addressing envelopes, filing etc., I had to knuckle down to the job.'⁴⁶ She had intended from the outset to convene an oral history conference in Perth in 1979 to coincide with Western Australia's sesquicentennial.⁴⁷ Now, with the help of an OHAA subcommittee and support from the History Department of UWA and several sponsors, two were organised; a 'local conference' on the theme of 'Oral History and the Community' attended by about 70 people on 31 March⁴⁸ and a National Conference and Annual General Meeting (AGM) held on 18-19 August that drew 125 delegates.

In forming the program of the first National Conference Jean continued to be international in outlook. It was scheduled to coincide with the International Conference on Indian Ocean Studies to encourage participants from that region⁴⁹ (resulting in delegates from Indonesia, Kenya and Mauritius), and Professor John Saville, Chairman of the British Oral History Society, was invited as a keynote speaker. Papua New Guinea, Malaysia and Thailand were also represented.⁵⁰ The spirit of the conference established another precedent, as John Ferrell recalled:

[The] first Executive and their families made great efforts to ensure the success and good spirit of the first National Conference. All delegates were met on arrival at bus, train or airport terminals. Transport for delegates was arranged from university college accommodation. Some visitors were billeted. In this, again, Jean led the way, offering hospitality to three people.⁵¹

Membership grew steadily in response to Jean's tireless publicity; with 107 reported six months after the OHAA's founding⁵² growing to 285 by March 1980.⁵³ At the same time Jean was urging the formation of branches throughout Australia. She travelled to South Australia to be present at the meeting on 5 February 1979 that established the OHAA's first branch.⁵⁴ The NSW Branch was formed on 5 July 1979.⁵⁵ Jean was also on the Editorial Committee for the publication of the first Oral History Association of Australia Journal in 1979, containing the papers of the National Conference.

Responsibilities also began to devolve to others. Wendy Lowenstein in Melbourne was elected Newsletter and Journal editor at the first AGM, the NSW Branch organised the second National Conference in Sydney in May 1981 and Jean was pressing both the SA and NSW branches to take on responsibility for the National Executive after the Biennial General Meeting (BGM)⁵⁶ to be held at the Sydney conference. In the issue of the Newsletter that announced that the NSW Branch

would take on the role, it was also reported that Jean had resigned as Honorary Secretary of the OHAA and taken a six-month leave of absence as Liaison Officer.⁵⁷ She was just a little behind schedule; she had taken 27 months rather than two years to set the OHAA on its feet.

In every other way, Jean's timing had been perfect. She had established the national oral history association on the eve of the publication of Australia's 'first crop of "oral history books"'⁵⁸ that delivered the idea of oral history outside universities and well beyond the audiences of folk societies. Alan Roberts' list of these publications includes:

Scholarly works like [Ray] Broomhill's *Unemployed Workers* on the Depression in Adelaide and Clive Moore's *The Forgotten People* on Pacific Islanders in Australia; more popular works like Kevin Gilbert's *Living Black*, which won the 1978 National Book Council Award for Australian Literature; Wendy Lowenstein and Morag Loh's *The Immigrants*; and Lowenstein's massive *Weevils in the Flour* which won the Royal Blind Society's 'Talking Book of the Year Award'... Finally, from England came Paul Thompson's *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*... a handbook of the oral history method, an essay on the theory of oral history, and a masterly survey of the changing role of oral history in the development of western historiography.⁵⁹

The establishment period had not been easy for Jean. Apart from the administrative work, negotiation and travel, as soon as branches formed the OHAA began to take on a life of its own in ways that did not always meet with her approval. The most vexing issues were, not surprisingly, finances and membership affiliation.

In the May 1980 issue of the Newsletter both Wendy Lowenstein's editorial 'It's a big country!' and an article by Alan Roberts, President of the NSW Branch, entitled 'W(h)ither the branches?' suggested that provisions in the constitution and the view of some of the National Executive that branches should be self-supporting would inhibit the ability of existing branches to accept responsibility for the National Executive and discourage the formation of more branches. Jean's response 'as founder' was vehement:

At no time did I envisage that branches... would claim back a large proportion (currently one-third) of each subscription. This situation was changed once branches were formed and began looking for easy money... Is it really necessary for the national body to hand back such a large slice of the cake to branches without effort on their behalf. Should we not reconsider this

whole question of finance realistically before the national body, not the branches, 'wither'... [We should be] pulling together to make our already well known Association into a well organised whole rather than permitting branches to encircle and crush it.⁶⁰

At the BGM in May 1981 compromises were made on both sides, and the retiring President Professor Geoffrey Bolton commented wryly, 'It must be stressed that our negotiations on this subject have been more open and amicable than is customary in Federal-State conferences over funding.'⁶¹ The subscription rebate to branches was reduced to 25 percent, but membership affiliation was clarified; from now on a member living in the geographical location of a branch would be assumed to be a member of the branch.

Jean had regained her equanimity in her report as retiring Secretary/Liaison Officer,⁶² and was elected Honorary Life Member.

In moving the motion, Alan Roberts said that OHAA would not exist but for Jean's tremendous efforts. He felt some trepidation in taking over from her as Secretary/Liaison Officer, as Jean's was a hard act to follow. It would be interesting to see what new directions she found now for her energy and organising talent... The motion was carried unanimously and by acclamation.⁶³

She was not the OHAA's first Life Member. That honour had been bestowed on John Thomson, 'the WA Forestry Officer who carried his tape recorder through the hot dusty North West in the mid-1960s before most people had even heard of the term "oral history,"' at the inaugural AGM in August 1979.⁶⁴

Jean remained actively involved in the National Executive, as Vice President, and WA Branch until 1983, and in the practice of oral history. She was, for example, one of the WA Coordinators of the nationwide 'Australia 1938' interviewing program that provided source material for the Australians 1938 volume of the Bicentennial series *Australians: A Historical Library* published in 1987. Despite formally retiring from social working in 1993, she continued to work occasionally as a locum in the emergency department of the Sir Charles Gardiner Hospital. In 1997 her long-awaited book *Facing the Bow: European Women in Colonial Malaya 1919-1945* was published, based on interviews she had recorded in Australia, Malaya and Europe in the 1970s.⁶⁵ Jean died in November 2002.

Thirty years later, how much of Jean's original vision of the OHAA has been realised? Successive National Committees⁶⁶ have been as unsuccessful as Jean in finding reliable sources of external funding to support

the development of the OHAA. The same has been the experience of most other historical organisations formed in the late twentieth century. Instead, branch membership has been the basis of the OHAA's finances.

Branches were established in all states and each has endured. The WA Branch was the third formed after SA and NSW on 9 March 1980.⁶⁷ A meeting originally called for the purpose on 23 July 1979⁶⁸ failed to attract enough people due to a severe electrical storm. Branches in Queensland (for many years known as the Southeast Queensland Branch) and Victoria were formed in 1982.⁶⁹ The Tasmanian Branch was the last to form. There had been an attempt to start a branch in Hobart in the early 1980s but it was not until the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery in Launceston began using oral history in its exhibitions in 1988 that the idea found fertile ground. The inaugural meeting was held on 20 July 1991 to coincide with the launch of the Museum's book *Launceston Talks: Oral Histories of the Launceston Community*.⁷⁰

The territories have proven more elusive. A Northern Territory Branch is mentioned in issues of the Oral History Newsletter in 1980, but it was probably not formalised for want of the requisite ten members. Distance and the transience of the Territory's population continue to thwart the establishment of a local branch. Instead, Territorians are attached to the SA Branch.

The failure of an ACT Branch to persist is more problematical. One was formed at a meeting held at the National Library in Canberra on 1 March 1980. Twenty-six people attended and the first committee included representatives from the Australian National University, National Library and Australian War Memorial.⁷¹ However, the branch was disbanded in 1983⁷² and local members have since been attached to the NSW Branch. Canberra has the greatest concentration of Australians with secure employment in the field of oral history. Several national institutions have supported OHAA aims and activities over the years and the National Library hosted the 2001 conference, but a robust ACT Branch taking its share of responsibility for the National Committee, annual journal and biennial conference would be a tremendous support to other branches.

Most branches have long-standing and mutually beneficial relationships with their state libraries and, like Jean, oral history staff in state libraries have continued to play major roles in the development of the OHAA. Nevertheless, the OHAA has also lobbied vigorously for particular libraries not to cut back their responsibility for collecting oral history in response to increasing budgetary pressures.

It took about 10 years for the OHAA to become financially resilient. The national newsletter was

abandoned in 1985 as too expensive and increasingly redundant as branches established their own publications. The National Committee struggled to continue producing the annual *Journal* until 1986 when the first of three years' sponsorship from the National Museum of Australia not only ensured its continued existence⁷³ but also allowed branches to retain half of each subscription.

This was particularly timely for the SA Branch, which was struggling to develop its own publication. The first edition of the *Oral History Handbook* had been published in May 1983 as a little A5-size booklet of 32 pages compiled by the SA Branch committee. At \$1.00 to members and \$1.50 to others it was intended to provide a simple, affordable alternative to commercial publications such as *The Voice of the Past*. One thousand copies were sold in 18 months.⁷⁴ A revised and expanded second edition was produced in 1985 and a discount price for orders of 10 or more copies enabled other branches to buy in bulk and sell at workshops at a small profit. Now in its fifth edition,⁷⁵ about 16,000 copies of the *Handbook* have been sold since 1983.

The biennial conferences have never been a financial burden to the OHAA. Most have resulted in a modest profit that is shared between the host branch and the National Committee, and the more significant benefit of an increase in membership in the host state. The conferences represent the 'truly cooperative affair'⁷⁶ that Jean hoped the OHAA would become, with branch committees, as well as the National Committee, extending loans to the organising branch if required, sharing budgetary and logistical information from past experience, and sending delegates to participate in the associated BGMs.

The 1983 BGM gave branches the power to receive subscriptions directly from their members, as well as the responsibility for forwarding a portion of each amount to the National Committee. This is now known as the capitation fee, and it is used primarily to fund national OHAA publications including the *Journal*, membership brochures, *Guidelines of Ethical Practice* (adopted 1993) and *Guide to Commissioning Oral History Projects* (first published 1998); to subsidise branch activities, such as new editions of the *Oral History Handbook* and the Queensland Branch's *Talking Together: A Guide To Community Oral History Projects*;⁷⁷ and to support the planning stages of the biennial conference.

Even Jean's extravagant vision of 'an oral history association which encompasses both Pacific and SE Asian areas to form a Pacific Australasian Society'⁷⁸ has been realised in a way. The International Oral History Association (IOHA), formed in 1996, has six continents or areas represented on its Council,

including Oceania of which Australia is a part. A member of the OHAA National Committee has the role of international representative and provides contact between OHAA and IOHA. Two Australians, OHAA's Janis Wilton and expatriate (until 2007) Alistair Thomson, have served as President of IOHA. The 14th International Oral History Conference was hosted by the OHAA in Sydney in 2006 and brought participants from 29 different countries, and there have been about 15 Australian papers offered for the 15th International Oral History Conference to be held in Guadalajara, Mexico in September 2008.⁷⁹

Reflecting on the two years she devoted to establishing the OHAA, Jean admitted, 'I must say I resented very much the long desperate hours I spent at the typewriter. I could have produced two books in the time I spent as a non typist pushing those keys.'⁸⁰ Would a national Australian oral history association exist today if not for Jean Teasdale? Almost certainly, but it is likely to have emerged some time later from established state associations following the pattern, for example, of the Australian Council of Professional Historians Associations (established 1996). Instead, the evolution of oral history in Australia has been discussed in a series of 15 national conferences and distilled in 30 consecutive journals. Thanks to Jean's indefatigable endeavour and unwavering vision, the OHAA has been functioning as a 'well organised whole'⁸¹ for 30 years.

Endnotes

- 1 Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, 2nd ed., Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1992, p. 65.
- 2 Jean Teasdale, letter to Alan Roberts, 5 November 1981, reproduced in *OHAA Circular* 3, 10 February 1982, held in the records of the OHAA (SA Branch), State Library of South Australia (SLSA), SRG 257/4. The records of the National Committee of the OHAA, 1978-1987, are held in the National Library of Australia at MS 7982.
- 3 For an overview of oral history in Australia see Alan Roberts, 'The Development of Australian Oral History, 1798-1984' in *Oral History Association Journal* [hereafter *OHAA Journal*], no. 7, 1985, pp. 3-22. The material was also published in a shortened form in Louise Douglas, Alan Roberts & Ruth Thompson, *Oral History: A Handbook*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1988.
- 4 *Calendar* of the University of Adelaide, 1953, p. 135.
- 5 Information about Jean Teasdale is drawn from three sources: the biography on the cover of her book *Facing the Bow: European Women in Colonial Malaya 1919-1945*, Centre for Migration & Development Studies, Nedlands, WA, 1997; John Ferrell, 'Tribute to Jean Teasdale, Founder of OHAA', in *OHAA Journal* no. 22, 2000, pp. 133-5; and (unattributed) 'In Memoriam - Jean Teasdale, December 1928-November 2002' in *The West Australian Social Worker*, Australian Association of Social Workers (WA Branch), May 2003, pp. 6-7.
- 6 Margaret Medcalf, 'The Oral History Programme of the Battye Library of West Australian History' in *OHAA Journal*

- no. 2, 1979-1980, p. 53. This article and others that use it as a reference incorrectly place Miss Lukis' Carnegie trip in 1956. Contemporary sources show that it began in 1957. See *Archives and Manuscripts: The Journal of the Archives Section of The Library Association of Australia*, vol. 1, no. 3, December 1956, p. 24 and vol. 1, no. 4, August 1957, p.36.
- 7 Medcalf, 'The Oral History Programme', p. 53.
 - 8 Graeme Powell, 'The Oral History Collections of the National Library of Australia' in *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 5, no. 6, February 1974, p. 139.
 - 9 Medcalf, 'The Oral History Programme', p. 54. Court proposed the establishment of a Heritage Commission with functions including 'the gathering of live history'.
 - 10 See the State Library of Western Australia's catalogue at <http://www.slwa.wa.gov.au/>.
 - 11 'In memoriam', p. 6.
 - 12 Ferrell, 'Tribute to Jean Teasdale', p. 133.
 - 13 Ferrell, 'Tribute to Jean Teasdale', p. 133.
 - 14 Jean Teasdale, circular letter, 13 March 1978, SLSA, SRG 257/4.
 - 15 *Oral History Newsletter*, vol. 2, no. 1, November 1979.
 - 16 John Thompson, 'Oral History in Australia: Some Problems Discussed at the Australian Folklorists' Conference, Sydney, November 17-18, 1973' in *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 5, no. 6, February 1974, p. 143.
 - 17 The Australian Folklorists' Conference in 1973 pre-dated the biennial National Folklife Conference, 1984-1994, convened by the Australian Folk Trust.
 - 18 Thompson, 'Oral History in Australia', p. 143.
 - 19 The proceedings were published as Joan Campbell (ed.) *Oral History 74: Papers Presented at the First Oral History Conference, 1 March 1974*, La Trobe University, Bundoora, Vic., 1974.
 - 20 Joan Campbell, 'Pastoral Settlement in the Port Phillip district 1834-1847', PhD thesis submitted to the History Department, La Trobe University, 1981.
 - 21 Joan Campbell's tape recordings are dispersed in a number of collections, including La Trobe University, State Library of Victoria and National Library of Australia.
 - 22 Information from Joan Campbell. I am very grateful for the help provided by Joan on being contacted some 30 years after her association with oral history had ended.
 - 23 Campbell, *Oral History 74*, p. iii.
 - 24 Unattributed report 'Oral History Conference – La Trobe University' in *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol 5, no. 7, May 1974, p. 190.
 - 25 Review of *Oral History 74* in *Historical Studies*, vol. 16, no. 65, October 1975, p. 626.
 - 26 Campbell, *Oral History 74*, p. iii.
 - 27 Joan Campbell (ed.), *Oral History 75: Papers Presented at the Second Oral History Conference, 6 February 1975*, La Trobe University, Bundoora, Vic., 1975, p. iii.
 - 28 Campbell, *Oral History 75*.
 - 29 Joan Campbell, 'Developments in Oral History in Australia' in the journal of the US Oral History Association *The Oral History Review*, vol. 4, 1976, p. 49. The editorial introduction to Joan's report incorrectly states that a she convened a third oral history conference in 1976.
 - 30 Jean Teasdale, letter to Alan Roberts, 28 September 1981, reproduced in *OHAA Circular 3*, 10 February 1982, SLSA, SRG 257/4.
 - 31 Joan Campbell remained at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology until her retirement in 1987.
 - 32 Surveying oral history abroad in David K Dunaway and Willa K Baum (eds) *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, American Association for State and Local History, Nashville, Tennessee, 1984, Louis M Starr mistakenly credits Joan Campbell's second conference with '[giving] birth to an association in 1975', p. 19. Nevertheless, the list of contacts published in the proceedings was instrumental to Jean Teasdale achieving her goal three years later.
 - 33 Teasdale, letter to Alan Roberts in *OHAA Circular*.
 - 34 Ferrell, 'Tribute to Jean Teasdale', p. 134.
 - 35 Jean Teasdale, (ed), *Oral History Newsletter*, vol.1, no. 1, April 1978, p.1.
 - 36 Teasdale, *Oral History Newsletter*, vol. 1, no.1, 1978, p.3. Jean Teasdale reported on the Colloquium in *Oral History Newsletter*, vol. 1, no 2, July 1978, pp. 1-2.
 - 37 Minutes of the Inaugural Meeting of the Oral History Association of Australia held in Lecture Room 5, Arts Building, University of Western Australia at 8pm on 26 July 1978, pp. 6-7, SLSA, SRG 257/3.
 - 38 Five nominations from the floor are recorded in the minutes. Another three people were listed in the committee as published in *Oral History Newsletter*, vol. 1, no. 3, Spring 1978, pp. 1-2.
 - 39 Ferrell, 'Tribute to Jean Teasdale', p. 134.
 - 40 See 'In Memoriam', and Margaret Hamilton, 'Jean Teasdale, 1928-2002' in *OHAA Journal* no. 25, 2003, p. 112.
 - 41 Western Australian opposition to a national rather than a local association is evident in the Minutes of the Inaugural Meeting in 1978.
 - 42 *Oral History Newsletter*, vol.1, no. 1, April 1978, p. 1.
 - 43 *Oral History Newsletter*, vol. 2, no. 3, May 1980, p. 1, and Jean Teasdale's response in *Oral History Newsletter*, vol. 3, no. 1, October 1980, pp. 1-3.
 - 44 Jean Teasdale, 'The Oral History Association of Australia – Our Beginnings', *Oral History Newsletter* vol. 2, no. 1, November 1979, p. 3.
 - 45 *Oral History Newsletter*, vol. 1, no. 3, Spring 1978, p. 3.
 - 46 *Oral History Newsletter*, vol. 2, no. 1, November 1979, p. 3.
 - 47 Teasdale, letter to Alan Roberts.
 - 48 *Oral History Newsletter*, vol. 1, no. 5, Autumn 1979, p. 2.
 - 49 *Oral History Newsletter*, vol. 1, no. 3, Spring 1978, p. 11.
 - 50 *OHAA Journal* no. 1, 1978-1979, p. 8.
 - 51 Ferrell, 'Tribute to Jean Teasdale', p. 134.
 - 52 *Oral History Newsletter*, vol. 1, no. 4, Summer 1979, p. 7.
 - 53 *Oral History Newsletter*, vol. 2, no. 2, March 1980, p. 1.
 - 54 SLSA, SRG 257/2.
 - 55 *Oral History Newsletter*, vol 1, no. 6, Winter 1979, p. 1.
 - 56 The draft constitution circulated by Jean Teasdale in July 1978 required an AGM. The constitution adopted at the first AGM in August 1979 made provision for BGMs instead.
 - 57 *Oral History Newsletter*, vol. 3, no. 1, October 1980, p. 1. The position of Organising Secretary in the 1978 draft constitution had been split to become Secretary and Liaison Officer in 1979. Jean Teasdale had held them concurrently.
 - 58 Roberts, 'The Development of Australian Oral History', p. 17.

- 59 Roberts, 'The Development of Australian Oral History', pp. 17–18.
- 60 *Oral History Newsletter*, vol. 3, no. 1, October 1980, pp. 2–3.
- 61 *Oral History Newsletter*, vol. 3, no. 4, August 1981, p. 4.
- 62 In February 1981 Jean Teasdale resumed the role of Secretary from which she had resigned in May 1980. She had ended her leave of absence from the role of Liaison Officer in December 1980. *Oral History Newsletter*, vol. 3, no. 4, August 1981, p. 5.
- 63 *Oral History Newsletter*, vol. 3, no. 4, August 1981, p. 4.
- 64 *Oral History Newsletter*, vol. 2, no. 1, November 1979, p. 1.
- 65 The location of this series of Jean Teasdale's interviews had not been ascertained at time of publication.
- 66 At the 1983 BGM the National Executive and Council was replaced with a National Committee.
- 67 *Oral History Newsletter*, vol. 2, no. 2, March 1980, p. 4.
- 68 *Oral History Newsletter*, vol. 1, no. 6, Winter 1979, p.1.
- 69 The Queensland Branch was formed sometime between December 1981 and April 1982 (*Oral History Newsletter*, vol. 4, no. 2, November 1981, p. 10; *Oral History Newsletter* vol. 5, no. 1, March 1983, p. 9. The latter has an account of the branch's first workshop on 24-25 April 1982). The Victorian Branch was formed on 1 December 1982 (*Oral History Newsletter* vol. 5, no. 1, March 1983, p. 8).
- 70 Tasmanian Branch report in *OHAA Journal* no.13, 1991, p. 130; information from Jill Cassidy, founding Branch President and co-editor with Elspeth Wishart of *Launceston Talks*; and letter from Lyall Hunt to Beth Robertson, 6 October 1983 identifying Doug Munro, Port Arthur Conservation Project, National Parks and Wildlife Service as the secretary of the Tasmanian Branch, SLSA, SRG 257, Correspondence In, 1983.
- 71 *Oral History Newsletter*, vol. 2, no. 3, May 1980, p. 4.
- 72 Janette Condon, letter to Beth Robertson, 21 April 1983, SLSA, SRG 257, Correspondence In, 1983.
- 73 Janis Wilton, 'General Editor's Note' in *OHAA Journal* no. 8, 1986, p. 1.
- 74 Beth M Robertson, 'A History of the Oral History Handbook' in *Word of Mouth, Newsletter of the South Australian Branch of the Oral History Association of Australia*, Autumn 2006, pp. 7–8.
- 75 Beth M Robertson, *Oral History Handbook*, 5th ed., Unley, SA, Oral History Association of Australia (South Australian Branch) Inc., 2006.
- 76 *Oral History Newsletter*, vol. 1, no. 3, Spring 1978, p. 3.
- 77 Lesley Jenkins, *Talking Together: A Guide to Community Oral History Projects*, Oral History Association of Australia – Qld Inc., Kelvin Grove, Qld, 1999.
- 78 *Oral History Newsletter*, vol. 3, no. 1, October 1980, p. 3. Jean Teasdale also put a motion on notice for discussion on the agenda of the 1983 BGM calling for an investigation of the possibility of forming an Australasian Regional Association, SLSA, SRG 257, Minutes, 13 April 1983.
- 79 Information from Janis Wilton.
- 80 Teasdale to Roberts, 5 November 1981, *op. cit.*
- 81 *Oral History Newsletter*, vol. 3, no. 1, October 1980, p. 3.

Oral History Australia – Since 2008

Alistair Thomson

Since Beth Robertson published her invaluable thirtieth anniversary account of the establishment of the Oral History Association of Australia in 1978, the Association has been renamed Oral History Australia and reached its fortieth anniversary. I attended OHAA events in the early 1980s but then decamped to England for 24 years where I relished my involvement with the British Oral History Society (that had provided the constitutional model for Australia's Association) until returning to Melbourne in 2007. I've been active with the Victorian 'branch' and, from 2017, President of our national Association. In this addendum to Beth's article I reflect on developments in Australian oral history over the past decade.

The name change was part of a constitutional change in 2013 that recognised that the state branches were the drivers of oral history activity in this country, and that because of Australia's vast size it is easier for oral historians to be active and sociable at the state level. Under revised national and state constitutions, individuals now join one or other independent state associations. These state associations are the members of Oral History Australia (OHA), with each state association nominating one representative to serve on the OHA committee and continuing to pay a capitation fee to the national organisation. ACT oral historians continue as members of Oral History NSW, while Northern Territory oral historians are members of Oral History Australia SA/NT. Each of the state and territory associations provides introductory and advanced oral history training. A notable recent development is an emphasis on regional training beyond the capital cities, whether in Broome in the Kimberley, Townsville in north Queensland, outback NSW or Gippsland in southeastern Victoria. The state associations run conferences, publish their own newsletters and promote oral history activities

through vibrant websites. What hasn't changed is that all of these activities are run by volunteers, and that state associations are often indebted to a small number of dedicated enthusiasts.

Oral History Australia continues to organise the biennial national conference in partnership with a state association host (with each state taking a turn every 12 years). Although Beth reports that past national conferences often made a profit, this has become more difficult in recent years with venues such as state libraries now often forced by cuts to public funding to charge for use of their facilities. At the conference, and thanks to the generosity of her family, we continue to present the Hazel de Berg award to an outstanding Australian oral historian. In 2019 we are introducing national awards for an oral book and an oral history media production.

OHA also publishes the national journal, which celebrates its own fortieth anniversary in 2019. The journal has been online since 2017, and readers can now listen to hyperlink extracts from interviews that are cited in articles. Like the British journal *Oral History*, the *Oral History Australia Journal* aims to connect with the interests of a diverse range of oral historians, including university academics, professional historians, librarians and archivists, media professionals and community historians. This is not easy, with university journal-ranking exercises putting pressure on journals to be 'more academic', academic historians in turn pressured to publish in more prestigious outlets, and community historians wanting accessible writings that speak to their concerns. New editors Carla Pascoe Leahy and Skye Krichauff are canvassing plans to meet this challenge, including thematic journal issues such as this 'Oral History and Emotions' issue in 2019.

Oral History Australia, along with the state associations, is also an advocate for oral history.

In the past decade we've protested about cuts to oral history services in state and territory libraries, and we've argued that oral history journals should receive the respect they deserve in national journal ranking exercises. We've developed a guide for students and academics seeking approval for oral history projects from university ethics committees. These committees often don't understand the long-standing ethical principles and procedures of oral history. Though I've not added them up, Australian graduates have completed many wonderful oral history PhDs in recent years – despite the hassles of ethical approval – and there has been a string of Australian Research Council Linkage and Discovery projects that have featured oral history and contributed new interviews to state and national archives.

Our international collaborations and contributions remain strong. Australian oral historians feature prominently in international oral history publications, with Australian authors publishing eleven articles in the North American *Oral History Review* and nine articles in the British *Oral History* in the decade to 2019. Australians are a vibrant presence at the biennial International Oral History Association conferences (OHA also contributes to an IOHA conference bursary scheme that funds oral historians from less well-endowed continents), and in 2018 Sue Anderson was elected the third Australian President of IOHA. Oral historians from Australia and New Zealand combined in an oral history strand at the Australian Historical Association conference in 2017, and oral historians on both sides of the Tasman have recently created an Indigenous Oral History Network that supports Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Maori oral history, and connects to indigenous oral history in North America and other parts of the world.

Australian oral historians, like our colleagues around the world, have been living the digital revolution. We've grown accustomed to recording with digital devices and archiving digital sound files. We've developed new digital and online approaches to interview documentation, such as the world-leading National Library of Australia timed summary system (that enables online users to search interview timed summaries or transcripts for extracts on particular topics, and then listen to those extracts) or the crowd-sourcing online transcription developed at the State Library of New South Wales. In 2019 Doug Boyd, the leading North American digital oral historian, used a

Fulbright award with colleagues at our National Library to test voice recognition software for oral history transcription. Oral history awards offered by our state associations increasingly recognise the extraordinary innovation and imagination of oral history productions in diverse media, including radio and podcasts, website and museum exhibitions, dramatic performance and film, place-based oral history tours and good old-fashioned books (that might also be ebooks with oral history audio). Together we've been pondering the ethical challenges posed by oral history productions and online interviews that may now be available for use by anyone, anywhere, forever, and we've been rethinking how we manage and ensure informed consent in our digital age.

Perhaps the greatest challenge for our next decade will be to future-proof oral history collections. Our state and national cultural institutions have been digitising their analogue recordings, but in academics' studies and out in the community, old cassettes and reel to reel recordings are slowly dying. Digital recordings (and digitised copies of analogue interviews) are also at risk unless they are preserved by institutions that have the expertise, resources and stability to future-proof those recordings when digital media and platforms evolve. The great irony of the digital revolution is that the most robust element of an oral history interview is often the paper-based transcript that can survive for millennia. Australian oral history's great achievements of the past forty-plus years – recording life stories from individuals and groups who might not otherwise be in the historical record, and capturing Australian voices – are endangered. Our urgent task is to mobilise state and national archives and libraries to work with academic, community and professional historians, and together devise preservation strategies that will ensure invaluable oral history collections do, indeed, last forever.