

HISTORY COUNCIL OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA
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PRESIDENT'S NEWSLETTER
JULY 2010

Greetings to all.

We have been a bit constrained in our communication over the past few weeks as our ISP unexpectedly cancelled our web-page service giving us little time to find an alternative before the cut-off date. An alternative is being arranged as a matter of urgency and we will be up again soon. After holding this newsletter until the problem was sorted out, I have decided to publish by e-mail in the first instance.

With our Annual Lecture scheduled in a week or so and our AGM due in September it is a good time to review what has been an active period for the Council.

National Archives – Working on Stage 2

As a reminder, Stage 1 finished in April with the reversal of the decision to close the Adelaide office of the National Archives and remove its holdings interstate. Stage 2 of the campaign is to ensure that the detail of the decision matches the expectations of our community that there will be an accessible and user-friendly facility in Adelaide and also that some of the extensive SA records removed from the Adelaide office some years ago are returned. I have had continuing discussions with SA State Records about plans for co-location culminating in an inspection with the Departmental Heads of the former Commonwealth archive facility at Collinswood, and talks with the owner on the possibility of it being re-opened as a joint facility. It is still in good condition and readily adaptable. Everything is in place in this magnificent purpose-built archive, except the compactus shelves which were dismantled and taken interstate by the NAA. It is hoped a decision in principle will be made and announced by both bodies soon.

Meanwhile I have been invited to join the Adelaide Consultative Forum of the NAA and have attended two meetings already. An active and productive examination of what documents should be housed on Adelaide (both those here now and those which have been removed) is taking place and we are optimistic that there will be a good outcome.

175th Commemoration

Meetings of the Working Party chaired by Margaret Anderson, have been put on hold until after the State budget is delivered in September. We continue to be concerned at the lack of interest so far shown by the State Government in the 175th. I have discussed with Margaret the compilation of a list of activities, conferences and events that have been planned in the community for 2011, with a view to the History Council seeking a meeting with the Government prior to the Budget to demonstrate that there is widespread interest and commitment to the proper recognition of the significance of the year.

An example of independent initiative is that of one of our members, the Professional Historians Association (SA). The PHA is creating on its new website a section with the working title **SA 175** as the Association's contribution to the State's

175th anniversary. Its editors state that they 'want to provide to the community, through this world-wide electronic format, scholarship not otherwise readily available which will enhance understanding of the history of South Australia... The starting point is members' existing historical work on South Australian topics, and in particular "grey literature", ie, written work produced for a limited audience (such as commissioned reports).' Progress on this website will be shown at the PHA (SA) AGM on 11 August.

2010 Annual Lecture

By the time you read this the Manning Clark Professor of History at the Australian National University Professor Angela Woollacott will have delivered this year's lecture on the topic *Settler Society in the Australian Colonies 1830s to 1860s: Notes from South Australia*. The bookings have been high, with a waitlist established and we are expecting a good turnout for this important event in our calendar.

History Week Forum

The forum on the topic *State Collections: Why keep all this old stuff?* was held in conjunction with the State Library during History Week and was most successful with a full house present to hear the debate and join the discussion. The discussion was led off by panellist Brad Torrens, Director of the Progressive Development Council of SA (who had an uncanny resemblance to our Vice-President Professor Wilf Prest of Adelaide University) who made the case against the keeping of old stuff as an unnecessary and costly indulgence. This sparked some lively and persuasive contributions from the other panellists, Beth Robertson (Manager Preservation SLSA), Alexis Tindall (formerly of the Collections Council), and A/Professor Peter Monteath (historian Flinders University). After audience questions and comments, Alan Smith the State Librarian gave a concise and entertaining summary of the debate and discussion.

The success of the event has resulted in the State Library suggesting that the forum could become an annual event, and the Council is now committed to working with the Library to stage something special in 2011.

National History Curriculum

Council member Daryl Best of the History Teachers Association is the SA representative on the group which is writing the national history curriculum. He gave a presentation at the June Council meeting on the progress and shape of the project and went through the various elements of the subjects year by year which prompted a good discussion. We need to be vigilant to ensure that the subject content is balanced and does not just deal with the eastern states, but gives SA history a proper place in the curriculum. The period for comment has now ended and the national body is finalising its recommendations. It is an exciting initiative for the study and understanding of history and a great opportunity to increase the range of resources and create jobs for more specialist teachers of history.

The improving health of history in schools was demonstrated by Daryl in a presentation of the best of the Premiers ANZAC awards entries. Five students are selected in state-wide competition for a trip to the battlefields and some very high quality work was on display.

Australian Historical Association Conference, Perth

I was part of the planning for an initiative organised by Zoe Pollock of the History Council of NSW, for a session on the role and function of History Councils or

similar bodies in Australia as part of the AHA Biennial Conference programme in Perth this year. We were asked for papers on the Council's role with a case study of action on an issue. I prepared a paper entitled *Battling the Bureaucrats: Access to the National Archives* detailing our role in the proposed office closure. The other papers were Zoe Pollock on *Championing History and Heritage: An NSW Case Study* and Sue Graham-Taylor *History and Heritage vs. Mining: An asymmetrical Battle*. The session was held on the Thursday but I was not able to attend at the last minute. We were very fortunate that Executive member Karen Agutter was due to be in Perth on the day and was able to deliver the paper and take part in the discussion from an informed perspective. I greatly appreciated Karen making time to do this and the feedback was that the session was most useful and successful. My paper will be available on our website.

Promotional Postcards & State History Conference

Vice-President Wilf Prest has worked with Rob Foster to choose images for a series of postcards publicising the Council. We have been very fortunate and grateful to have the honorary services of Richard Venus of Engineers Australia (SA Division) for design and layout. Richard was the writer and editor of the fine publication *Engineering a City* which provides information and guided walks to help us discover how Adelaide was designed and built (it was highlighted in my December newsletter). The postcards feature some archival images of SA and invite comments on how best to mark the 175th Year of European settlement of the Province. They will be distributed at the Annual Lecture and in all delegates packs for the State History Conference in August. We are sponsoring the Conference again this year and will be hosting a morning tea.

Finally don't forget our AGM which is scheduled to be held in the Ira Raymond Room at the Barr Smith Library on Thursday 2 September. Hope to see you there.

All good wishes

John Bannon
President