

EDITORIAL

AUSTRALIAN ARCHIVES ON THE MOVE

At the time the last issue of *Archives and Manuscripts* went to press, the year 1973 looked as if it would be remembered, in the annals of the professional archivist, as the year in which the Parliament of the sovereign State of Victoria passed its Public Records Act – and for no other reason. A good year – and in view of the way in which the Victorian Act breaks new ground – perhaps even a great year, but not exactly an *annus mirabilis*. It is strange how suddenly the complexion of things changed, and by the end of August it was pretty obvious that 1973 would become one of the really significant years in the history of archives-keeping in Australia.

The first development of the second half of 1973 was the formation of the Australian Historical Association. The various States, and even territories, shires, towns and other lesser geographical subdivisions of this nation have had their historical associations, but there is a great importance to be attached to the formation of an Australian Historical Association. The Association was formed at the Perth meeting of the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science. A short paragraph appears about it in this issue. Perhaps more important however than the brief information in that paragraph is the letter written by AHA's President, Professor A. G. L. Shaw, to the Editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*. In that letter, Professor Shaw says:

One of the first tasks of the Association will be to try to improve the arrangements existing for the study of government archives, which historians have found to be particularly defective in the Commonwealth sphere. It plans to make immediate representations to Canberra, in support of a motion carried by the History Section of ANZAAS, which was very critical of the most striking deficiencies of the Australian Archives establishment.

The archives profession ought to be encouraged by the fact that when the leading academic historians finally got round to forming a professional and learned association (something of which they had been talking for many years) the provision of service through archives institutions was one of their first concerns. It may even be conjectured that perhaps the need to do something about archival provision in Australia is what finally galvanized the historians into action. (Or is that an over-simplified view of historical causation?)

Archives and Manuscripts wishes AHA well.

The second development of the latter months of 1973 concerned the possibility of the formation of a Society of Australian Archivists. The idea was discussed at an informal gathering which followed the Biennial General Meeting of the Archives Section of the Association, held in Perth on August 21, 1973. The prime mover in this was Mr Michael Saclier, the Archives Officer of the Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University. Mr Saclier, as editor of "Miscellany" (in this issue) has his own forum, and those interested will find further information if they turn to the relevant page.

The third event of importance in the spring of 1973 was the visit of Dr W. Kaye Lamb, formerly the Dominion Archivist of the Public Archives of Canada. Dr Lamb was present at a Seminar in Canberra on a National Archives System – a seminar held on September 1, at the Australian Academy of Science and under the auspices of the Australian Special Minister of State. The long and the short of it is, that apparently the Australian archival house is to be put in order. The AHA has made grumbling noises about provision for scholars to study archives relating to the national government, and it appears that the new national government is aware that something needs to be done. At least, this is the present Editor's view of the significance of the visit of our esteemed Canadian colleague. The Department of the Special Minister of State (which controls the Commonwealth Archives Office) has issued a press release about Dr Kaye Lamb's visit, and *Archives and Manuscripts* is pleased to be able to print it.

We are also pleased to be able to print the background document issued to participants in the September 1 Seminar. This is published under the title "A National Archives System" in this issue. However, it is stressed that this document is merely a preliminary formulation of ideas about a national archives system for Australia. It does not represent the culmination of the Australian government's thinking on the subject. It was issued as a background document for the people attending the Seminar in Canberra on September 1, and it is meant to be studied in that light. It does, however, provide some valuable information on the history of the Commonwealth Archives Office.

If, as a result of the formation of a society for the professional and academic historians of Australia, a society for the archivists of Australia, and a new program for the national archives of Australia, this country really becomes able to make a great contribution to archival and historical science — a contribution of such magnitude that overseas people can speak of Australian archivy and historical study with respect and even envy — then 1973 will have been a year of real achievement. Let us hope that in 1993 those of who are left will judge it so.