

## BOOK REVIEWS

# Publications in Records Management

RECORDS MANAGEMENT OFFICE OF N.S.W., *Publications in Records Management*, Sydney, 1978. Available gratis from the Records Management Office of N.S.W., State Archives Building, Level 3, 66 Harrington St., Sydney, 2000.

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Bibliographic details:

1. *File Format* (March 1978)
2. *File Creation* (March 1978)
3. *Principles of Keyword Classification* (March 1978)
5. *Manual of Keyword Classification* (October 1978)
6. *General Records Disposal Schedules* (December 1978)

Having persuaded 'management', whether in government departments or in private industry, that a records management program should be introduced, perhaps the most difficult task of all is to interest and persuade the registry clerks, secretaries and others whose everyday life it will affect. Without their support, any records management system, however excellent in conception, is doomed to almost certain failure. In her article reviewing ' . . . Three Years' Experience at the Records Management Office of New South Wales' (*Archives & Manuscripts* Vol 7 No 5 November 1979), Dianne Patenall remarks "our experience has shown that departmental support of change and willingness to implement changed procedures is in direct proportion to its own contribution to the formulation of those changes . . ." While encouraging the detailed involvement of departmental officers in compiling and implementing records disposal schedules, the RMO sees its role in training, offering expert advice, verifying work done in departments and coordinating information on matters of general concern. The *Publications on Records Management* are a central part of this work.

The five manuals so far published fall into three groups. Nos 1 and 2 — *File Format* and *File Creation* offer explanations and recommendations on such basic, but essential, matters as file cover design and layout, file fasteners, file copies, document order and prepunched paper (No 1) and the record activities of determining file categories, allocating file numbers, registration of documents, attaching documents to files, folio numbering, creating back volumes and file reconstitution (No 2). No 3. *File Movement and resubmit systems* (not yet published) will presumably complete this section.

Nos 4 & 5 — *Principles of Keyword Classification* and the *Manual of Keyword Classification* are, as their titles suggest, concerned with the classification of files so as to overcome the inefficient retrieval of information, and particularly to introduce the concept of keyword classification, the method which the RMO considers the most suitable for the naming of files. It is a system worthy of very serious consideration not only for its benefits to the immediate retrieval of information but also for its long term contribution to a records disposal policy — it is obviously easier to create and maintain a disposal schedule for records which have been properly classified. No 4 is a general introduction and much of the text is reproduced in considerably more detail in No 5. The *Manual* covers two main areas — (1) classification systems generally and a detailed introduction to keyword classification, and its use for general administrative records (or 'housekeeping' records) common to all government departments and (2) detailed instructions for developing a keyword classification system suited to the functional records of a particular department — with the emphasis constantly on the involvement of departmental staff at every level.

General Administrative Records are further considered in No 6. *General Records Disposal Schedules* — its object being to ensure the efficient and legal disposal of departmental housekeeping records and to control the accumulation of these records in departments. The *Schedule* has been approved by the NSW Public Service Board. No 7 *Records Scheduling and Disposal* (not yet published) will contain detailed instructions on how to compile and implement a record scheduling and disposal program for departmental functional records.

Interesting in themselves, these publications provide a most interesting insight into the work of the Records Management Office — and provide an excellent example for those about to embark (or already launched) upon implementing a records management system.

## Family History

E. LEA-SCARLETT, *Roots and Branches: Ancestry for Australians*, Fontana, 1979. 231 pp. Available for \$A5.00 from The Society of Australian Genealogists, Richmond Villa, 120 Kent St., Sydney, 2000.

### Reviewed by Joy Hughes

Researcher, Sydney

Publication of a paperback edition of *Roots and Branches* reflects the ever-increasing interest in family history. While it is admirable that those in pursuit of their ancestors are no longer willing to accept obscure family traditions, their search for the how, when, where and why is placing enormous strain on staff facilities at libraries and archives. Hopefully, many family historians, particularly beginners, will heed the advice and practical instructions provided by Errol Lea-Scarlett and by so doing will present themselves at the appropriate institution with an increased awareness of the nature and extent of the information likely to be found there.

Covering every aspect of family history in an entertaining and informative manner, the author stresses the need to separate fact from fiction; to verify and record information methodically; and to note sources carefully. Furthermore, he advises that there is no magic repository where family histories are available on application; that the Irish ploughboy was not driven from his ancestral castle by English oppression and that it is unlikely the family fortune is being held in Chancery.

The term genealogy, "musty" and "mispronounced by many of its devotees", is dismissed in favour of family history which "says everything that genealogy cannot say about the interpretation of history through the action of families in society". Acknowledging the usefulness of pedigrees, the author nevertheless encourages us not to make these the end point of our enquiries but the beginning; to be used as guides to add flesh to the bones.

Every chapter is amply provided with examples of the records under discussion. However, with the numerous comprehensive examples and the ease with which the author offers his instructions, the enthusiastic beginner needs to be reminded often that not all families leave a wealth of documentary evidence of their existence. Countless frustrating hours of searching may lie ahead. For many the search will ultimately be rewarding, but reference in the seventh chapter to "long, hard slogging" would have been more effective in the first.

The more experienced who wish to extend their search beyond the usual sources are directed to an impressive array of published, private and official records. Due praise is heaped on the guides published by the Archives Authority of New South Wales. Queensland, we are told, is following suit but “it is regrettable that the Australian Archives and the other state bodies have been slow to follow the example”.

Official records are discussed at length — information on civil registration, land, military and service records, and naturalization, would be of use to other than family historians. Inevitably, a search of shipping records is necessary — those for free settlers, like the convicts, deserved a separate chapter with additional information provided on the holdings and indexes of the national and all state archives. Convict musters and a comparative evaluation of the censuses to and including 1891 are also included in the chapter on official records. Here, the author enters into the long-standing controversy regarding preservation of census records. The inestimable value of censuses for historical, statistical and medical research is acknowledged by most western countries, where they are retained with varying restrictions on access. In Australia, every census taken since 1901 has been destroyed. “As recently as 1972”, writes Mr. Lea-Scarlett, “the destruction of surviving returns actually formed part of an election promise, and who can blame the vote-catcher or worried elector? Posterity it seems will sigh forever over the obliteration of individuality because the statistician came to ask too many personal questions and the computer threatened to remember all the answers”.

A separate chapter is devoted to convicts. The author provides background information on transportation, explodes some of the popular myths, defines terms and follows a convict through his official records to illustrate the information likely to be found. The enthusiastic beginner with convict forebearers may turn first to this chapter. For this reason, details of musters and censuses mentioned earlier in the book bear repeating, particularly as instructions on how to discover if your ancestor was a convict are lost in a small paragraph more than half-way through the chapter.

Some problems are incurred with convicts who arrived after 1837 or whose indents were not annotated. Here, the value of the Mitchell Library manuscripts catalogue should not be overlooked. Although original manuscripts are not available to those involved in family history research, many entries for convicts in the catalogue refer to the granting of a ticket of leave or a pardon. They include the name of the ship and the year, as mentioned in Governor’s despatches, thereby limiting a search to one year of these particular records. A short excursion from the Archives Office of N.S.W. to the Mitchell Library to check this catalogue is preferable to the alternative of reeling through years of Tickets of Leave or Pardons on microfilm.

Surprisingly, the Mitchell Library is rarely mentioned and although it is now physically separated from the Archives Office of N.S.W., the

author has missed a golden opportunity to clear up the confusion which persists regarding the functions and holdings of these two bodies. No doubt it is frustrating to many to find relevant entries in the Mitchell manuscripts catalogue only to be denied access to the material, but, on signing an undertaking, the Library's collection of printed books and maps is accessible and this policy should be made known in view of the impressive number of titles on source material, local and family history, evaluated throughout the book. Many of these titles will also be of interest to those involved in book selection. The appropriate authorities might also consider the need to microfilm Police and Government Gazettes, Blue Books and Probate Registers. In the meantime, as family historians delve into the past, one can only hope that their respect for these bulky volumes increases.

Mr. Lea-Scarlett successfully combines his knowledge and wit to produce an entertaining and practical treatise on ancestry for Australians which also includes much to interest students of Australian history.

## Access: To Radio 3ZZ

Joan Dugdale, *Radio Power: A History of 3ZZ Access Radio*. Hyland House, Melbourne, 1979. pp. 252 + xii. \$A 15.95.

### Reviewed by Henry Mayer

Professor of Political Theory  
University of Sydney

This remarkable book, which reads like a thriller, is a 'must' for all interested in the political use of information and archives, the dilemmas of social change and the nature of bureaucracy.

There is no need to be concerned with radio and society, let alone the issues arising in and from a multilingual access station, to benefit greatly from the work. The story of a short lived, tiny, minimal resource Melbourne station, set up with typical Whitlam verve and muddle, closed down via Government directives to the A.B.C. which it chose to obey, seems either only of local interest or just another weapon in the Fraser bashing armoury. The author runs both themes, but not in a dominant way.

The story is one of charm, confusion, spontaneity, struggles between proponents of many organizational forms, interpretations of 'access' and of 'community', a story of evil spies and agents of dark powers and of bold and good and tired people. Far from being tedious or unfruitful, Joan Dugdale, a key staff member of 3ZZ, uses her creative talents to make even faction fights within the left worth reading about. She does this by linking the particular with the general yet not being too abstract. One learns a good deal about society in this case study. It calls to mind a book of long ago, by Professor Ken Inglis, who is also writing the history of the A.B.C. I refer to his *The Stuart Case*.

The book is able to give life to endless arguments about the realization and operational significance of slogans such as 'access'. It can be read by Conservatives, who will see their fears confirmed: access did not work, hence it cannot work. Progressives will see the noble barque access wrecked by stupidity of the left, and the machinations of the Liberals.

*Radio Power* has a pretty typical interpretation of *why* things happen — a teleological one, in which 3ZZ is seen as giving voice to the non-mainstream groups (it did), as being a threat to the powers that be (it was not) and as being incompatible with the 'system': hence it had to go. On the contrary, had it lasted, as it could have, it would have been absorbed into the system just like 2JJ or 4ZZZ. Moreover, the book badly underrates the role of timing and of contingency.

For archivists, there are 22 documents, which otherwise would never have seen the light, in the appendices. Defamation actions are under way. Who is to collect material which is not 'official' but is usually scurrilous and possibly defamatory, while it is not yet safe 'history'? In the A.B.C. in Sydney alone two sheets of right/left staff association factions exist — *Broadcaster* and *Steampower* — and one can be sure they are not part of 'the A.B.C.': is it the archivist's or librarian's job to dig up and preserve 'records' of this kind? Dugdale's documents are mostly more solid than these sheets but they raise this sort of issue.

Whatever the answer, let me repeat that the book is what is called 'a very good read'. Pick it up and you won't put it down and might be led to reflect in new ways on 'unofficial' archives. Are there many readable works in your profession which give joy and instruction?

## Oral History

Morag Loh, ed., *Growing Up In Richmond*. Richmond, Victoria, Richmond Community Education Centre and Fieldworkers in Oral History, 1979. 45 pp. \$A3.50. Available from Richmond Community Education Centre, 121-3 Church St., Richmond, Victoria, 3121.

### Reviewed By Mark Cranfield

Australian Archives

In a recent article, 'Oral History: Facts and Fiction', Patrick O'Farrell suggested to the readers of *Quadrant* that it seemed time, in the interests of precise historical scholarship, to '... ask some questions ...': about the popular use of oral testimony and about the worth of certain claims to significance made for oral history.<sup>1</sup>

After noting a concurrence of local events (A.B.C. radio programmes, the formation of an oral history association, a planned national conference in Perth, etc.), O'Farrell selected for detailed criticism two published works: Paul Thompson's, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford: University Press, 1978) and Wendy Lowenstein's, *Weevils in the Flour: An Oral Record of the 1930's Depression in Australia* (Melbourne: Hyland House, 1978).

Of the arguments advanced in *The Voice of the Past*, one proved particularly distressing to Professor O'Farrell:

What is really dismaying, mind-boggling is Thompson's distillation of 'the intrinsic nature of the oral approach. It is about individual lives — and any life is of interest.' *Any life? Not to me. Is Mr. Thompson God? — with universal individual interest?*

This 'virtuous notion' with its ideological base in the cult of the common man was denounced as an aberration:

If to be ordinary is enough and sufficient, indeed heroic, no man or woman need seek to improve themselves, but surely this whole matter of the consecration of the ordinary swiftly degenerates into contradiction and a form of insupportable intellectual idiocy.

Not necessarily. There are other ways of seeing the matter. Professor O'Farrell's opinion needs, in short, to be recognized as an elitist view which, as Susan S. Tamke has put it, 'encourages the examination of individual subjective responses only if the subject is capable of producing aesthetic beauty, moral truth, or significant action'.<sup>2</sup>

Ms. Lowenstein's work also comes in for strong criticism. Professor O'Farrell lambasts it as 'mild skim-milk gathering', 'cheerful mythologizing' and '“history” the easy way'. He concludes his article by turning the author's own description of her work against her: '...as Mrs. Lowenstein tells us, this book is not a precise history. That is what

it is *not*, but what *is* it? And where will it lead us? Not into our history, but into myth'.

O'Farrell's questions and conclusions may be discussed somewhat further with the release of *Growing Up in Richmond*, the first major publication by Fieldworkers in Oral History, a co-operative group working in and around the Richmond Community Education Centre, Melbourne.<sup>3</sup>

Edited by Morag Loh, based on interviews by Loh, Wendy Lowenstein and others, the book presents accounts of childhood by eleven persons who lived in the Richmond locality in the decades between 1890 and 1960. It seeks to show what it was like to grow up in

a close community, a place with a certain identity, an industrial working class suburb with strong local loyalties . . . not only for the eleven people in the book but for the many others who shared some or all of their experiences.

Those interviewed include five women and eleven men. They range from Ethel Morrison, who was born in Richmond in 1891 and had hardly ever been out of the suburb, to Michelle and Sylvia Spaslov, youthful arrivals from Yugoslavia in 1956. Transcripts of the interviews vary in length from c. 880 words. Illustrations comprise six black and white formal group photographs and a number of story-book style pen and ink drawings (showing children at work, being punished, being delinquent and an evicted family group). A 'Notes' page indicates that the book is designed to be used in conjunction with other materials held in the "resource bank" of the Richmond Community Education Centre. A 'Things to Think About and Do' section reveals that the book is directed in the first instance to young persons currently growing up in Richmond. The publication is the first in a planned series about the ordinary working people of Richmond and their families. The series is available to libraries and institutions by subscription.

Is it history? And if so, where does it lead us?

One argument for acknowledging such projects as history is evident in Paul Thompson's description of a similar undertaking, the People's Autobiography of Hackney, which aims:

to build up through a series of individual accounts a composite history of life and work in Hackney, and . . . to give people confidence in their own memories and interpretations of the past, their ability to contribute to the writing of history.

In Thompson's view, it is unnecessary for historical information to be taken away from the community for interpretation by professional historians; a community ". . . can, and should, be given the confidence to write its own history".<sup>4</sup>

Where such studies might lead us, or at least lead some academic historians, may be suggested by further reference to the article by Susan Tamke cited above. In her article, Tamke argues that "the question of how ordinary individuals experience their culture is a topic which has been largely ignored" in historical studies and proceeds to advance the view that the scholarly use of oral history for the study of popular culture

potentially provides methods and techniques for the study of areas which have previously been largely neglected by both history and popular culture: the experience of culture by individual 'mass man'.



Tamke draws attention to the fact that oral history “points up the diversity of human experience” and that individuals experience their lives selectively, “that is, they consciously and unconsciously select experiences on the basis of individually felt needs as well as shared cultural ideas”. She goes on to say:

What has not been stressed enough by highly literate academic investigators — perhaps has not even been recognized . . . is that even in highly literate societies such as our own, the most effective communication in the transmission of values, attitudes and beliefs from one generation to the next is still orally transmitted in small-group interpersonal communication . . . in my interviews about [the religious experience of Victorian individuals] the evidence is overwhelming that what the interviewees remember are the community relationships, the interpersonal communications. The number who remember the names and personalities of their Sunday School teacher is amazing. While they forget the sermons, the books and the hymns — the artifacts which are typically studied — they recall personalities and relationships vividly. If affective attitudes are expressed and transmitted most effectively in oral form, they may be recoverable only by oral research.

Tamke concludes that a thoroughly developed oral research methodology would need to draw on concepts and techniques from various fields of study: cognitive psychology, the sociology of knowledge, structural and linguistic anthropology, symbolic communication and folklore.

Until that happens, groups such as Fieldworkers in Oral History might consider the following dictionary definition of fieldwork as appropriate to their endeavours: “any breastwork, dug-out or other fortification made by troops in the field”.

## FOOTNOTES

1. *Quadrant*, No. 148, Vol. 23, No. 11 (November 1979), 4-8.
2. Susan Tamke, “Oral History and Popular Culture: A Method for the Study of the Experience of Culture”, *Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Summer 1977), 267-279.
3. See W. Lowenstein and M. Loh, “The Richmond Local Resources Project” in this issue of *Archives and Manuscripts*.
4. Thompson, *Voice of the Past*, pp. 14-15.