

# The Establishment of an Archives: University of Queensland

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In April 1981, the University of Queensland took the initial steps toward the establishment of a University Archives. One year later, a permanent archivist has been appointed and a small archival facility is in operation.

To be embarking upon the establishment of a new functional area within the University is a difficult task in the current economic climate. The University in its seventy-second year, is making a somewhat belated entry into the archival sphere thus providing a situation inbuilt with difficulties. Notwithstanding, an appointment as the foundation University Archivist potentially should permit the full use and development of the wide range of professional skills of the archivist, providing for a higher quality of work satisfaction than is often the case in the more specialised and somewhat limiting positions within the larger, functionally fragmented archival institutions.

It was suggested that an account of the establishment, historical background, collections and facilities of the "newest" of the Australian university archives, would be appropriate at this point of time. This article is the result.

## The University of Queensland

The University of Queensland takes as its foundation date the 16th April 1910.<sup>1</sup> Teaching began in March 1911 with three faculties — Arts, Science and Engineering. From an initial enrolment of 83 students in 1911<sup>2</sup>, the University has grown to become one of the largest in Australia, with an enrolment in 1981 of 18,219 students.<sup>3</sup>

The former Government House<sup>4</sup>, at the eastern end of George Street in the central area of Brisbane, was dedicated to the University on the

10th December 1909 by His Excellency Sir William MacGregor, G.C.M.G., C.B., M.D., Governor of Queensland<sup>5</sup>, and provided the main accommodation for the new University. Various Science and Engineering subjects shared accommodation and equipment with the Central Technical College situated nearby.<sup>6</sup>

Many years of consideration of and debate over suggested permanent sites for the University ended in 1930 with the gift by Dr J. O'Neil Mayne and his sister, Miss Mayne<sup>7</sup>, of an area of some 114 hectares in a bend of the Brisbane river, known as the St. Lucia pocket. Occupation of the first building erected on the site was delayed by the outbreak of World War II. The University began the move to the St. Lucia campus in 1948 — a move which took until the early 1970s to complete.

To-day the University is well settled at St. Lucia, although its Medical School, adjacent to the Royal Brisbane Hospital, and its Dental School, are located in the centre of Brisbane. There are also many University operations throughout the state, ranging from a pastoral veterinary centre at Goondiwindi to the Heron Island Research Station.

### **The Record-Keeping of the University**

Historically, record creation and record keeping have been fragmented with individual sections, departments, groups and people working out their own requirements. The various moves of location undergone by most sections of the University, together with the cramped accommodation of the first forty years, have taken their toll of University records. Some items are remarkably well preserved, others are conspicuous by their absence.

In more recent years, the Central Administration has made occasional forays into the collection of possible archival material, but, on the whole, it has followed the practice of selective destruction of records based on self-determined principles of administrative value.<sup>8</sup> The Fryer Library<sup>9</sup> has taken on a *de facto* role in the university archives area, and has been responsible for the preservation of some vital records which otherwise may have been lost to posterity.

The daunting, but nevertheless rewarding task of being shown into a storeroom jammed with an endless number of dusty, unidentified series dating back to the creation of the agency, which I have faced many times along with my Australian Archives colleagues, has been an absent companion to date at the University of Queensland.

From my surveys this far, it seems that the primary record series, e.g., Senate and Professorial Board, and their related Committees minutes, Examination Results Registers, Admission to Degree Registers, have

survived in reasonable condition. The major file series of the Administration and of the various Departments have generally been culled, at least, on the basis of the aforementioned "administrative" value. Disposal schedules have been in operation to deal with the quantity of staff and student files. My main disappointment has been that a more comprehensive coverage of records of the early years of the University has not been kept, e.g. only the current and a small quantity of short-term intermediate student files are extant.

The colour and strength that is normally provided to a "collection" by the papers of key personnel, e.g. Vice-Chancellors and their Deputies, foundation and/or leading professors and academics, are with one or two exceptions absent. The Fryer Library luckily has made some inroads in this area. Hopefully, more such papers will come to light with the growth of the University Archives and its resources. It is hoped to begin an active campaign for such material once plans for the repository are advanced.

#### **The growth of the idea of the need for a University Archivist, 1978-1980.**

The idea of the need for a University Archivist evolved out of discussion connected with a proposal to produce a book on the History of the University for its 75th Anniversary in 1985.<sup>10</sup>

In May 1978, a Special Committee of the Senate was set up to consider and make recommendations in connection with the proposed history.<sup>11</sup> The matter of,

"the problems which could arise from the influx of a vast quantity of material and the need to employ the services of a trained Archivist,"<sup>12</sup>

was brought to the notice of this Committee by the University Librarian, Mr F. D. O. Fielding, in November of that year, following discussion with Mrs Nancy Bonnin, a member of the Committee.<sup>13</sup>

As a result, discussions were held in January 1979 with the Queensland State Archivist, Mr Paul Wilson, who provided the University with a brief report on the essential elements of a basic archival facility.

The newly-appointed Vice-Chancellor, Professor Brian G. Wilson, stated that "an institution the size and age of the University of Queensland should have appointed a full-time Archivist many years ago."<sup>14</sup>

Co-incidentally, I wrote to the University in September 1979 concerning their developments in the Archives area and the possibility of future employment. By invitation, I met with the Registrar when I was in Brisbane in January 1980, and subsequently, with the permission of the Australian Development Assistance Bureau, I was able to furnish the University with a copy of my report on proposals for the development of a National Archives in Western Samoa.<sup>15</sup>

Emeritus Professor R. G. Neale<sup>16</sup>, Director-General of the Australian Archives, was invited to examine the archival situation at the University, particularly in relation to its connection with the production of the book on the History of the University. Meanwhile Professor M. I. Thomis, Professor of History at the University of Queensland, accepted the invitation of the Senate to write the History.<sup>17</sup>

Professor Neale concluded that the appointment of a professional archivist was not necessary for the successful writing of the official *History of the University*. However, he did advise the University:

“annually to seek the services of an archival consultant to advise on the specialised needs of the various collections,”

and

“that the University should plan for the establishment within the next five years of a properly centralised archival authority, with custodial and related powers delegated within the University administration structure.”<sup>18</sup>

Following my move to Brisbane in mid-August 1980, and a meeting with the Registrar and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic), I was offered a ten week part-time appointment to undertake work associated with the development of an archives policy for the University. This appointment was extended for three months while the recommendations of the resultant report were considered by the Vice-Chancellor and his Executive.<sup>19</sup>

Fundamental to the report was the recommendation that the University should take immediate steps to appoint a permanent full-time Archivist. I added to this central recommendation the comment:

“Any recommendation I can make in the areas of equipment, facilities and procedures, can only be effectively carried out under the guidance and direction of an Archivist. Very little of a positive nature can be achieved in the field while there is no archival unit within the University structure.”<sup>20</sup>

This recommendation was accepted, and a twelve month secondment arranged with the Australian Public Service Board and the Australian Archives, to commence on 1st April 1981.

### **Towards the establishment of a University Archives, (April) 1981-(March) 1982.**

A Commonwealth Government General Development Grant provided the funding necessary for the basic salary for the University Archivist and for the purchase of a small quantity of shelving, boxes (standard cardboard and non-acidic board) and general equipment for the “archives room”, the temporary home of the University Archives.

My task was to undertake the basic establishment work necessary for a University Archives, particularly:

- (i) the equipping of an "archives room";
- (ii) the examination and listing of Central Administration records (in preparation for the publication of a guide to these records);
- (iii) the reviewing of existing disposal schedules and practices;
- (iv) the development of a unique system of arrangement and control for the University Archives.<sup>21</sup>

A room (9.5x5m) had already been set aside for an Archives on the 4th level of the J.D. Story Administration Building. The floors proving unsuitable for compactus shelving, thereby diminished the storage capacity, and a small area of 2m fixed shelving was installed, providing approximately 150 metres of shelf space. A section of this room (3.5x5m) provides office and working/sorting space for the Archivist, while two search desk carrels have been provided, one in permanent use by the Research Assistant involved in the *History of the University* project. The other desk is regularly in use by a small but growing number of researchers. Typical Queensland environmental control (ceiling fans and large windows) is all that exists in this part of the building.

Thus a primitive, yet workable, archival facility is in operation. On 1st April, 1982 I was appointed permanently as University Archivist.

### A collection policy

University archives in Australia are currently performing one or both of the following two functions:

- (i) the collection, preservation, arrangement, documentation and servicing of the records of the University itself;
- (ii) the collection, preservation, arrangement, documentation and servicing of non-University records considered to be of value to the particular university community (generally research scholars).

Clearly, each University has made a choice in this area, with the majority of university archives at this stage performing both the abovementioned functions, although there are some interesting exceptions.

While the University of Queensland has yet to establish its collection policy, the matter has been discussed at various stages. My own view on the matter is that the University Archives should concern itself only with the records of and those concerning the University itself. I have recommended "that the *primary function* of the University Archives would be as a central agency for the collection and preservation of the official

records of the University and the regulation and servicing of access to those records.”<sup>21</sup> Central to this recommendation is my concept of “official” records in the University context, which I see as covering those records produced by a range of agencies/groups/people employed by/associated/affiliated with the University and the University community. To me, this seemingly broad view of official records is vital to preserve a balanced and total picture of the University.

### **The University Archives, (April) 1982**

With the current facility and finances, physical control over a University Archives “collection” is impossible. Nevertheless, some key records of the Central Administration are gradually being located in the area, together with a limited number of departmental records and personal papers.

The records of the Senate and its Committees and of the Professorial/Academic Board and its Committees are currently located in locked cupboards in the Senate and Board Room respectively, located on the 7th level of the J.D. Story Building, which enjoys some measure of environmental control. The Central Records Section has basement “intermediate” storage in the same building. In addition, a number of scattered storerooms throughout the campus contain a variety of old financial, salary and related records.

This material is gradually being surveyed and listed with the following aims in mind:

- (i) to provide data for a proposed “Guide to the records of the University of Queensland,”<sup>22</sup> (a summary of the information currently being recorded in the finding aids);
- (ii) to provide the basis for a rationalisation of record storage areas, and determination of the total quantity of material in need of archival and intermediate repository storage;
- (iii) to facilitate the appraisal of records prior to their transfer to the future University Archives repository;
- (iv) to enable the University Archives to move from a starting point of *passive* preservation towards an *active* preservation phase.

Thus the concentration has been on establishing “intellectual” control over the central, extant records of the University, with the move towards physical control being necessarily deferred until the future University Archives repository can be provided. Plans are in train to provide for such a repository within the next few years.

Inevitably, this lapse of time between intellectual and physical control will result in a number of problems, many of which can be identified by the experienced archivist in advance. The system of documentation evolved

for the production of finding aids<sup>23</sup> has had to be flexible enough to cope with these anticipated problems, and in the end, only time will prove whether this has been adequate. An extensive archival education programme at all levels of the University community may help to eliminate a number of the difficulties. However, any such programme will be limited by time and resources and "the need to sell the need for the programme."

I have used the word "primitive" to describe the current archival facility. This is perhaps a reflection of my previous archival employment in the Australian Archives. As an officer of the A.C.T. Branch of that institution for nine years, I knew well the meaning of *temporary* accommodation, *unsuitable* environmental conditions, *developing* policies, etc. Despite the difficulties associated with the intense functional fragmentation and specialisation of archivists within the Australian Archives, it seems to benefit greatly from the development and mutual support of, and the inter-action between, these specialists.

With twelve months behind me in a new one-person Archives, I have been struck by the constant extremes of professional fulfilment and difficulty which seem to be the lot of such archivists. It seems to me that *we* exist, more so than others, on a great deal of luck, a lot of pious hope and a steady diet of long range plans and prospects.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. The date of gazettal of the appointment of the members of the first Senate of the University. UQA S4 Bound copy "Queensland Government Gazette April 16th 1910. Appointment of Senate, University of Queensland", 1910.
2. *Queensland Parliamentary Papers 1912. The University of Queensland Second Annual Report for the year 1911.* p.6. The enrolment increased to 87 during the year.
3. In 1981 only the University of NSW had a greater number of students enrolled — 18,265 (i.e. c.50 more). *Selected University Statistics 1981 Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission, December 1981.*
4. Old Government House was designed by the Government Architect and built by Mr J. Jeays, Contractor during 1860-1862. *The University of Queensland 1910-1935*, p.35.
5. MacGregor was subsequently elected Chancellor of the University at the first meeting of the Senate on 22nd April 1910, remaining in that office until 1915.
6. This site (much enlarged) is now occupied by the Queensland Institute of Technology.
7. Dr James O'Neil Mayne had been Medical Superintendent at the Brisbane General Hospital. He was a noted public benefactor and had his home with his sister, Miss Mary Emelia Mayne, at "Moorlands", Coronation Drive, Toowong. The St. Lucia site was purchased at the cost of \$63,000, following arrangements made with Mr W. A. Jolly, M.H.R., while he was Mayor of Brisbane in 1926.
8. This point could be expanded into a paper in its own right. For some recent debate on the merits of appraisal using either "historical" and/or "administrative" criteria, etc. See *Papers from the 1981 Conference of the Australian Society of Archivists*, pp. 224-246.
9. The Fryer Library is a Memorial Manuscript Library of Australian literature currently

located within the University's Central Library, whose collection can be classified as "Australiana".

10. This is the first record of active discussion on the need for an Archivist, although it appears that the matter had been briefly discussed some years before.
11. UQA S1 Volumes of Minutes of Meetings of the Senate, (22 Apr) 1910 — Meeting of 11th May 1978.
12. UQA S1 Meeting of 17th August 1978.
13. Mrs Bonnin, a former Fryer Librarian and a senior member of the University Library staff for many years, was the Honorary Research Consultant for the Committee.
14. UQA S1 Meeting of 26th February 1979.  
Professor B. G. Wilson was formerly Vice-President Academic of the Simon Fraser University, British Columbia. This University, although it was only some fifteen years old already had appointed a full-time Archivist.
15. In November 1978, I was seconded to the Australian Development Assistance Bureau, Department of Foreign Affairs, Canberra, as a short-term aid consultant. I visited Western Samoa, following an aid request from that government, to examine the existing archival situation and advise and report on the establishment of a National Archives.
16. Professor Neale, an Emeritus Professor of the University of Queensland, was a former Lecturer in, and subsequently Professor of, History at this University.
17. UQA S1 Meeting of 1st May 1980.
18. UQA S131 Subjects files, second series, 1965 — PUBLICATIONS, HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSITY, 1978-55110/41200/ — /02. Letter Professor R.G. Neale to Professor G. Davies, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic), 28th April, 1980.
19. The Senior Executive Officers of the University in addition to the Vice-Chancellor are Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic), Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Fabric and Finance), President of the Academic (formerly Professorial) Board, Registrar.
20. Ackland, Glenda I. *UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND ARCHIVES, A report to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) on the archival situation with in the University*, January 1981.
21. Ackland, G.I. Report, January 1981.
22. At this point of time I have envisaged three parts of this guide —  
PART I Guide to Committee Records  
PART II Guide to Records of the Central Administration  
PART III Chronology of key positions with brief biographies.  
The first of these should be available towards the end of this year.
23. It is planned to write an article on this control system for the next issue of *Archives and Manuscripts*.