

## From White to Red

### Baiba Berzins

In 1977, I stood for election as A.S.A. editor against Andrew Lemon. Luckily, the goddesses were on my side and I was defeated. Andrew skilfully guided the destiny of *Archives and Manuscripts* for a further two years while I was able to participate much more actively in the organisation of the 1979 Sydney Conference than if I had been successful. I can't remember why I stood; I think I was incensed about something that Andrew had written. Whatever it was, it is long since resolved and forgotten.



Baiba Berzins

I decided not to stand in 1979. I was exhausted from organising the Conference and from a heavy work and teaching load. I was also over-committed: I was Sydney Branch Convenor, I was involved in establishing the Oral History Association and in numerous other activities, and I had just taken up the job of Lecturer in Archives Administration at the University of New South Wales. There were, however, no nominations for editor and it was left to the Biennial General Meeting to fill the position. Robert French worked hard to persuade me to stand; I finally agreed and was elected as editor at the May 1979 B.G.M.

My editorship of *Archives and Manuscripts* ran from the last of the white issues (November 1979) to the first of the red (September 1981). I came to the editorship with considerable experience in writing and editing since I had published widely in numerous Latvian and Australian journals, newspapers, conference proceedings, etc. My knowledge about the mechanics of producing and distributing publications came from my involvement, since 1973, in the collective which produced *Refractory Girl*, the first periodical of the 'second wave' of Australian feminism. Compared to the collective and somewhat home-grown atmosphere of *RG*, the prospect of single-handedly producing *Archives and Manuscripts* and maintaining its high technical standard and professional content was, understandably, daunting. Especially before the first of 'my' issues appeared, I did often wonder why on earth I had ever agreed to the undertaking.

Andrew had not only set high standards but had also given *Archives and Manuscripts* a very decisive, independent archival voice as befitted the journal of a society finding its own professional identity and social role. It

was clear that he was going to be a hard act to follow.

In approaching the editorship, my principal inspiration was *The American Archivist*. I did not aim to produce an antipodean version or imitation of it: I had had contact with the archival profession in the U.K. and the U.S.A. and I knew that we had no reason to culturally cringe. I did, however, want to evoke the sense of excitement of a profession that was full of lively people, that was relevant and in touch with the times, that that journal then conveyed, and still does, to me. In 1979, moreover, *The American Archivist* had gone over to bright covers, illustrations and other technical innovations to convey a sense of activity and liveliness.

My first editorial decisions (in consultation with the Executive and Council) were administrative. To make things easier for myself, I decided to use a Sydney printer, Southwood Press; I am exceedingly grateful to Roger Barnes of the Press for the advice and assistance given to me over the ensuing two years. It was also decided that the journal's numbering would be changed so that volumes, consisting of two issues each, would coincide with calendar years; that each volume would have a distinctive colour; that the journal would be perfect bound, not stapled; that photographs and graphics would be included where appropriate and available and that advertisements would be accepted. A cover design was commissioned from the Sydney artist, Paddy Robinson. The result proved contentious but I always liked it since it depicted, for me, the order and control that we, as archivists, were endeavouring to bring to the mass of documentation which confronted us. Paddy's good eye for design, moreover, resulted in striking and eye-catching titling and sub-titling, well-balanced by her graphic.

In terms of content, Andrew was able to hand little over to me. The principal inheritance was a commitment to complete the publication of the series of articles by Peter Scott, Gail Finlay and Clive Smith on Archives and Administrative Change: this highly important and significant series of articles was published in the June and December 1980 and September 1981 issues. Unsolicited contributions were slow to emerge. The principal contributor, to whom I was very grateful, was Timothy Walsh: he wrote articles on conservation issues (in June 1980 jointly with Debbie Keane) for all 'my' four issues of *Archives and Manuscripts*. John Thompson and Renato Perdon contributed articles to the December 1980 issue; Anne-Marie Schwirtlich, Nancy Lutton, Chris Coggin, Merv Reed and B.E. King considerably lightened the load of finding material for the September 1981 issue.

All other *Archives and Manuscripts* articles and reviews in the issues I edited were commissioned: from current and former students of the Diploma of Archives Administration course (Ken Smith, Mark Cranfield, Peter Miller, Tony Mitchell, Colleen McEwan, Maggie Engel); from archival friends and acquaintances (Gerald Fischer, Dianne Patenall, Margaret Medcalf, Peter Orlovich, Michael Saclier, David Lance,

Beverley Lindley, Clive Smith, Pennie Pemberton, Fiona Campbell, Michael Piggott); and from sympathetic non-archival friends (John McMillan, John McQuilton, Chris Murray, Wendy Lowenstein and Morag Loh, Franca Arena, Robert Morrison, Joy Hughes, Henry Mayer, Mike Middleton, Heather Radi).

Because of the difficulty of getting material for publication, the four issues did not have strong themes. I aimed to provide information about past and current developments in archives administration in Australia and overseas and about issues which I considered to be of relevance to the archival profession in this country. The November 1979 issue focussed on talks delivered to, but not published in the proceedings of, the 1979 Conference. For the June 1980 issue, articles were commissioned on developments in new archival areas: sound archives, local resource collections, ethnic archives, school archives. The December 1980 issue had no identifiable theme; the September 1981 issue ranged from old to new — from archives in the Roman Republic to archives and computers.

A similar policy was followed in relation to book reviews. In addition to strictly archival works (e.g. Alan Ives' *Archives in Australia* and Michael Cook's *Archives and the Computer*), publications that I thought would be of interest to the archival community (e.g. *Radio Power* and *Growing Up In Richmond*) were requested and arranged for review.

An innovation was the section entitled Publication Notes. In this, I aimed to provide information about publications which I felt did not require review but which, nevertheless, appeared to be of interest to archivists. For this, my inspiration was my former supervisor Professor Henry Mayer. His vast and eclectic reading and his commentaries about publications in journals such as *Politics* and *Media Information Australia* have long been a source of great stimulation and valuable information both to his students and his readers.

News Notes had long been a traditional and extremely useful feature of *Archives and Manuscripts*. I decided to reduce the content received from the institutions which reported regularly by transferring information about personnel changes to the *A.S.A. Bulletin* while retaining news about administrative matters and acquisitions for *Archives and Manuscripts*. I also sought to include institutions and activities not previously included (e.g. the A.S.A. itself, the Diploma of Archives Administration course, New Zealand archives); the variable success of this endeavour depended on the response of those I approached about contributions.

In the June 1980 issue, I published the first of what I hoped would be a series of Conservation Notes by Robert Morrison. Regrettably, he was not able to continue the series. Despite the now greater availability of conservation news in Australia (e.g. via the *I.C.C.M. Bulletin*), I still feel there is a need for information about conservation which is specifically addressed to the problems facing Australian archivists.

During my term as editor I was pleased to be able to arrange for the publication of Janet Hine's extremely valuable *Index* to Volume 6 of *Archives and Manuscripts*. We were unable to find anyone to follow in her footsteps and to undertake the equally necessary task of indexing Volume 7. To facilitate access to information in *Archives and Manuscripts*, a deliberate policy of providing copies to abstracting and indexing services was followed: it is extremely gratifying to know that *Archives and Manuscripts* is included in local and international data bases such as APAIS/AUSINET and LISA/DIALOG. Every effort was also made to exchange copies with other archival publications overseas in order to gain maximum coverage for the Society's journal: unfortunately, little direct result was observable from these efforts.

The question of re-publishing out-of-print issues of *Archives and Manuscripts* arose during my editorship. I was opposed to this, regarding it as being not cost-effective. I am glad that we waited until 1984 when, thanks to the efforts of Barbara Reed, a microfiche edition of Volumes 1 to 10 was produced.

My most sincere thanks go to all the contributors, to the Executive (Margaret Jennings, Olga White, Frank Upward and Gunna Kinne) and to the Council who assisted me so much during my term of office. Being A.S.A. editor required a great personal commitment of time and energy, as do all the voluntary positions in our Society. I did think about organising people and committees to assist on a regular basis, as Nancy Lutton has done but for various reasons these plans did not eventuate. In many ways, 'editing' *Archives and Manuscripts* was the most 'glamorous' part of the job. Much more onerous was the production of the *A.S.A. Bulletin* and the distribution of both publications. I am in great debt to Anne-Marie Schwirtlich, Robert French and Colin Gray, who helped with such mundane but essential tasks as enveloping, sorting and getting the publications to the post office. I am especially grateful to Colin for his support, tolerance and understanding when the calls of A.S.A. editorship placed great demands on our personal relationship.

Ever again? No. Regrets? None.

After I became Mitchell Librarian in June 1980, it became clear that the A.S.A. editorship was a responsibility which the demands of my new job would not enable me to carry out beyond the due date. I always remain grateful, however, for the contact with the archival community and for the morale and confidence boost which being editor gave me. My initial trepidations vanished in the activity of actually producing *Archives and Manuscripts* and the *Bulletin*. I like to think it appropriate that I chose red, the colour of energy, for 'my' last issue of *Archives and Manuscripts*. I certainly felt exhausted by mid-1981 but the energy and insight that the experience of being editor gave me remain with me to this day. I hope that, in return, I was able to give the Society a voice which was informative, energetic and positive.