

'This Noble Task': The Achievement of Phyllis Mander-Jones

The following series of personal tributes to the late Phyllis Mander-Jones¹ and her work has been assembled at the request of the editor of *Archives and Manuscripts*. The editor's original proposal was for a single memoir, but at the suggestion of Miss Suzanne Mourot (former Mitchell Librarian) it was decided that a more interesting approach would be to seek short pieces from those scholars, archivists and librarians who knew Miss Mander-Jones or her work. As co-ordinator of the project I am grateful to all the contributors,² both for their articles and for their tolerance of my slightly harrying approach. I am particularly grateful to Miss Mourot and Mr Kenneth E. Smith (University of Sydney Archivist) for supplying information which would otherwise have been unavailable to me.

The authors of the articles would not, I think, wish to claim that their pieces are the product of deep or original research; rather, each piece is a considered and affectionate exercise in reminiscence or appreciation involving biographical and other information. It is perhaps an omission that the series does not include a bibliography of Phyllis Mander-Jones for she wrote and published extensively. However, this lack is at least partly — and most appropriately — repaired by the entries under her name in the Mitchell Library's published *Dictionary catalog of printed books* (1968), and in the indexes to Australian archival and library journals. Since each author has been free to choose her or his approach, the overall picture of Phyllis Mander-Jones that emerges is not a completely rounded one, and readers may also note some little repetition and perhaps slightly differing recollection of events. Nevertheless, the articles as a whole embody much valuable and detailed information on the life of a notable Australian woman who chose to make her professional career in the world of libraries and archives. This information could one day form at least the starting point for a full-scale biography which Phyllis Mander-Jones' life well deserves. The sequence of the articles is roughly chronological, either with regard to subject matter dealt with or the writer's acquaintance with Miss Mander-Jones and her work.

In Marguerite Yourcenar's *The memoirs of Hadrian*,³ a fictional work which interested Miss Mander-Jones, the Roman Emperor is made to say that 'even Plutarch will never recapture Alexander'. So it must be here, also. But from these pieces the assessment of Phyllis Mander-Jones as a wise and firm leader, affectionate friend, courteous officer, devoted scholar, adventurous traveller and thoroughly professional guardian of books and archives, comes clearly and unstintingly through.

For my own part I can add but little to the information contained in these articles. I met Phyllis Mander-Jones very briefly once or twice on visits to the Mitchell Library in the 1950's, and as a member of the Archives Section of the Library Association of Australia I was aware of her role as the Section's Representative Councillor at this time. I was also aware of her role as an L.A.A. examiner in the Australiana, book production, and archives papers in the Registration syllabus of the 1950's. Though I cannot be sure that she was ever my examiner when I took these papers, she had undoubtedly played an important part in their development, and as I often made test exercises of her past examination questions, perhaps I can claim at least that I studied in the shadow of her high professional standards. I recall a longer meeting in the 1960's when she called to see me at the old Archives Department of The Public Library of South Australia. She was by then engaged in her work of locating Australian and Pacific materials in British repositories and I could not have failed to observe both her enthusiasm and her devotion to the project, nor to be aware that she had mentally to hand a vast background knowledge of the whole field — titles of obscure or recent bibliographies and reference books peppered her conversation. My long-standing awe of her magisterial command of her field was greatly re-inforced by this hour or more of discussion.

Over the years that followed Phyllis Mander-Jones came to represent for me a particular kind of archival ideal. Her professional standing, scholarly knowledge and undoubted presence, seemed to exemplify those characteristics which I believe ought to mark the leaders of archives work in Australia if their work were ever to achieve worthwhile recognition with governments, academia and the public generally. They seemed, indeed, essential qualities if the task of preserving and utilising historical records of all kinds were to be adequately accomplished.

In her book, Marguerite Yourcenar has the Emperor Hadrian say that the work of preserving and copying ancient books — and to this perhaps we may add historical records also — is a

noble task...no less urgent than aid to veterans or subsidies to prolific families of the poor...for it would take only a few wars, and the misery that follows them, or a single period of brutality or savagery under a few bad rulers to destroy for ever the ideas passed down with the help of these frail objects in fibre and ink. Each man fortunate enough to benefit to some degree from this legacy of culture seemed to me responsible for protecting it and holding it in trust for the human race.⁴



Phyllis Mander-Jones, c 1930.

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As all of these tributes show, Phyllis Mander-Jones played an outstanding part in this noble task.

G.L. Fischer

FOOTNOTES

1. Phyllis Mander-Jones, MBE, BA, FLAA, Honorary Member of the Australian Society of Archivists. A citation in reference to Miss Mander-Jones' Honorary Membership appeared in the *Bulletin* of The Australian Society of Archivists for July 1976.
2. Several others whom I invited greatly regretted their inability to participate.
3. Marguerite Yourcenar, *Memoirs of Hadrian*, translated from the French by Grace Frick in collaboration with the author. Lond., Penguin Books, 1959.
4. Ibid p.176.

A World To Be Spanned And Enjoyed

By Lois Mander-Jones*

In 1895 one of the 'Belles of Newcastle' — as Margaret and Florence Arnott were known — married George Burnett Mander-Jones from Goomeri, Queensland. The young doctor with an M.D. from London who took Margaret Fleming Arnott for his wife, was the grandson of David Jones¹ whose son David Mander had chosen to take up land on the Burnett River rather than to go into the family store. Two vigorous and successful Sydney families were so united, Margaret's father being William Arnott of biscuit fame. David was named for his father and mother, Jane Mander, and christened his children with the name Mander which was then used as a double name to differentiate from the Hall Jones whose father George (a brother) was a partner in Queensland with David, and from other multifarious Jones cousins. In the 1930's Evan Mander-Jones took the hyphen by deed poll, mainly for consistent indexing, and in latter years Phyllis used this also.

* Mrs Evan Mander-Jones, sister-in-law of Phyllis Mander-Jones.