

In England Miss Mander-Jones had a wide circle of friends and acquaintances in her area of expertise; she was well-known and highly respected by those book-sellers who specialised in Australiana and by the librarians and other custodians of the major libraries and museums which had important collections relating to Australia and the Pacific.

The last time I saw Miss Mander-Jones was in mid-1981 when my wife and I visited her in Adelaide where she was living with her sister-in-law. She had only recently recovered from a serious illness. Although frail, her eyes were bright and her mind as keen as ever. She was looking forward to the publication of her *Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Library of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia (South Australian Branch)*. Among other things she talked of a visit that she had made before the Second World War to New Guinea. She had kept a journal which she had illustrated of this visit which I would have dearly liked to have seen.

An Interview With Phyllis Mander-Jones

Baiba Berzins*

In 1983 while in Adelaide for the A.S.A Conference I recorded an interview with Phyllis Mander-Jones. The tape, together with a transcript, are now appropriately held in the Mitchell Library, the institution over which Miss Mander-Jones presided with such distinction from 1946 to 1957. Her recollections included some interesting details of her early years in The Public Library of New South Wales when it was still housed in the old Australian Subscription Library building in Macquarie Street which she recalled as a 'wonderful old building' and the later demolition of which she regretted. But she recalled also that it was a building with awkward high galleries above the reading room where books were hoisted up by a hand lift and then shelved yet higher up with the likely danger of dropping them on readers — or even the Principal Librarian — far below! Her handwriting was subjected to examination since catalogue cards were then still handwritten. Her duties were many, including stints at the bag reception desk and attendant duty in the exhibition galleries. She recalled, also, that in the 1920's women held quite a few of the senior library appointments, both professional and administrative.

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Shortly after joining the Public Library she did some relieving work in the Mitchell Library — largely of an invigilating sort. She had always had an interest in Australian history and was familiar with A. W. Jose's *History of Australia* from her school days. She later discussed the possibility of a transfer to the Mitchell Library with Mr W.H. Ifould, the Principal Librarian, who was apparently inclined to see such a move as getting into 'a backwater' — a view with which Miss Mander-Jones decidedly did not agree. After her appointment as Mitchell Librarian came through she was 'furious' at the salary level offered and told management that she would refuse the position. But when informed that salaries were under review, milder counsels prevailed and her view changed.

As Mitchell Librarian, Phyllis Mander-Jones was also necessarily its field officer, and she recalled visits to the New South Wales Government records store in Macquarie Street to appraise archives for retention or destruction, always apprehensively aware of the great fire risk presented by the old building. Her industry and breadth of interest in acquiring material for the Mitchell Library was remarkable and the Library's interest in the Pacific led her to make an adventurous visit to South America in 1948, helped by a Carnegie Grant. Here I quote her own words from the tape —

I had been corresponding with a newspaper man in Chile — Valparaiso — a man called Evans, so I thought I'd like to possibly get down there. I knew there'd been a lot of trade contact with South America, and especially with Chile and also with Lima, Peru. I suggested to the Carnegie people that I go there as part of the itinerary and they didn't agree at first. They said it was very expensive. However, they got in touch with the Trustees in Sydney and I think the Trustees paid half the expenses for me to fly to Santiago in Chile. But there was nothing in Santiago. When I got down to Valparaiso I discovered that Mr Evans had been working practically on hearsay and that the actual records of which he had knowledge had been destroyed in some earthquake so there was really nothing to look at. I went to Lima and there was plenty to look at but I wasn't allowed to look at it because it was in the custody of a Roman Catholic order and they wouldn't admit women. I knew the British Consul — he was quite sure that he could get an entree into this monastery but it was impossible. I've forgotten which order it was, they sent monks on Spanish voyages. It wasn't the Jesuits. Anyway, obviously what we wanted to do was to send a Roman Catholic priest who'd be interested. In the end, Fr. Celsus Kelly got that grant and went to Spain and did quite good work, but nobody ever went to Lima again. I suppose those records are still there. I had been reading various American books about Spanish-American records and I remember being intrigued by something I read about Mexico. So I went to Mexico City and was very well received by the Mexican Archives. They had a store on top of a building in the main public offices in Mexico City. I remember being taken to this store, it was almost the attic of the building, and there were just acres and acres of bags of old documents. Absolutely impossible. I don't know what riches are there. I think that its a field that really is not quite a life's work, but at least ten years' work. Not the sort of thing you can tackle in a few weeks which was all I had.

For the interested inquirer the tape and transcript have, of course, many more interesting details relating to Phyllis Mander-Jones and her work with the Mitchell Library.

Spending that afternoon with Phyllis Mander-Jones was one of the most memorable events of my life. I remember her with great respect and with affection. Her achievements and her generous friendship are continuing inspirations. In my work, I am constantly reminded in a multitude of ways of the great debts that Australian scholarship and documentary custodianship owe this remarkable woman. Her intelligence, industry and foresight have established an indelible legacy.

The Indispensable 'Mander-Jones'

Eric Richards*

The real problem is weight, and the reviewers did not address it. A few years ago it would not have mattered so much: the long-distance scholar could settle in for a month in the ship's library, untroubled by the weight of learning. Now there is little choice, the pinched violence of the economy-class Boeing must be endured, and only twenty kilograms of gear. Thus the streamlined Australian historian heads off for Heathrow, pared to a minimum, reduced to one change of clothes, a passport, a Britrail pass, a copy of *Record Repositories in Great Britain*, and Phyllis Mander-Jones' *Manuscripts in the British Isles relating to Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific*.¹ A handsome volume and utterly indispensable, of course, but the very thought sends the scales quivering into 'excess baggage'. There will be copies in Edinburgh and at the British Library, improbably in Shrewsbury and Truro, and certainly not at Thurles or Haverfordwest. 'Mander-Jones' is too much like those perfectly comprehensive guidebooks to foreign places: so essential that they must be razored or photocopied into portable pieces to fit the traveller's bags.

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