

Editorial

'Archives and Manuscripts' turns forty

The fortieth year of *Archives and Manuscripts* brings with it a neat symmetry: between 1955 and 1975 it was produced by the Archives Section of the Library Association of Australia, and for the past twenty years by the Australian Society of Archivists. By coincidence, this year has also seen an introspective annual conference which began with retrospective pieces by former editors Andrew Lemon and Baiba Berzins. And this year a selection of key Australian writings, many from this journal, has just appeared as *Debates and Discourses*. November 1995 is indeed an appropriate moment for comment.

As earlier editors will confirm, it is a constant challenge to gather material of high quality, originality and relevance to our diverse readership, and in sufficient quantity to allow the luxury of selection. As much by good fortune as good planning, this issue seems appropriate to the occasion. Several articles carry a strong historical element, with the writing of Sandra Mowbray and Sigrid McCausland, Don Boadle, and Nancy Lutton and Hilary Rowell each describing and analysing archival endeavours from our past. That aside, the content overall represents nicely where the Australian profession's concerns are at the moment, be it electronic records, principles, debates linked to descriptive standards, records continuum perspectives, education, technology and accessibility, the state of the ASA, and contributions from (where else but) North America.

Looking over forty years' worth of the journal, any number of observations spring to mind. One concerns the title *Archives and Manuscripts*. The decision to replace its predecessor *Bulletin for Australian Archivists* reveals our library origins and endures, like the monthly *Women's Weekly*, for reasons which have more to do with recognition and tradition than logic. In 1955 'manuscripts' was shorthand for all those materials library manuscript sections collected. Manuscript librarians then tended to speak of papers, not archives, and not only those papers which accumulated naturally. Perhaps today 'archives' seems inappropriate too, with the growing acceptance of the records continuum model, yet our role always did cover records as well as archives.

Another noteworthy feature is the pattern of authorship: who has submitted material for publication over the years, who (for various reasons) has not, and who though having something to say preferred alternative outlets here and overseas. There was a time, in the pre-ASA years, when many in our

largest archives organisation boycotted the journal, and one hopes we are not now seeing another if more innocent under-representation, involving the profession's main centres of research, the university graduate programs. Of the Australians who do write, we should be proud that since 1955 a good number have been published in archival journals of the UK, US, Canada, Germany, India, New Zealand and the ICA.

Such openness to an international outlook has several additional aspects. Starting with Schellenberg's in the August 1957 issue, we have welcomed or sought overseas contributions, a trend which has increased in recent years, and while reports of study trips abroad are no longer offered, reviews of overseas conferences have begun to appear. There has also been a special interest in our region, for example in the former Australian colony of Papua New Guinea (the subject of our first theme issue twenty years ago) and more recently in Cambodia. Since May 1985 we have had International Notes which, though basically focusing on PARBICA and archival institutions in Pacific countries, now has started to include news from Southeast and East Asian archives.

Elsewhere in this issue it is stated that 'professional journals are reflections of the professional discourse'. Indeed they are, up to a point, for there are issues and subjects which have not been properly covered in our journal, as the non *A&M* sources for *Debates and Discourses* show. There are important discussions in seminars, at branch meetings and on listservs which one hears of rather than reads about. Uncharacteristically—for anyone who has been to all but our most recent annual general meetings—we seem happy in general to let go unchallenged (or are complacent about) sharp reviews and contentious articles. But if we have reservations, reflecting on our past should reassure us. The journal has seen many changes beneath its constant banner; for example News Notes and International Notes were introduced and remain, while Technical Notes, Miscellany and 'In the Agora' have gone. We have come a long way since that first roneoed 22 page issue of November 1955. We have survived the lean years described by the journal's longest serving (and suffering) editor Bob Sharman in his fifteen-year-term report of November 1975. There will be more change, and with readers' help and (hopefully) enlightened editing, the next forty years will be even better.