

Lesley Jenkins - 2007



Lesley Jenkins is a consultant historian specialising in oral history. She completed a Bachelor of Arts majoring in history and radio at the University of Technology in Sydney. She has been working in NSW and Queensland on history, oral history and community publications and projects for 15 years. In 1997 she completed a Graduate Diploma in Arts (Applied History) at the University of Queensland. Lesley has also worked as a journalist, as a correspondent for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and in the museum sector as a curator and consultant oral historian. She has written and presented many papers for state, national and international oral history conferences.

In 1992 Lesley began an oral history project with members of the Italian community in Lismore. Nowhere else in New South Wales at that time was there any documentation of the growth and interaction of a non-English speaking community, let alone one where the final published work was fully translated. The elegant and informative book, *The power of the land/il potere della terra: a social history of Italian settlement in Lismore*, kept the faith both with her interviewees and with those who supported the project. Her work set a benchmark for successful oral history conducted in close consultation with a community.

A program based on Lesley's project and broadcast by the ABC in 1994 emphasised that there had been no mention of the Italian community in the recently published official history of that region. Later a play on the same topic was presented at the Adelaide Festival. Lesley also set up a permanent display at the New Italy Museum at Woodburn, again including interviewees from her Lismore project.

Lesley has published three books, numerous booklets and contributed content to many social history and arts based web sites. She has been actively involved in the Oral History Association of Australia since 1992 when she joined the NSW branch. She then transferred to Queensland when she moved there in 1994. She has held the roles of secretary and president of the Queensland branch of the Association and was instrumental in having the branch incorporated. She has represented the association at intergovernmental meetings seeking greater acknowledgement of the role of the Branch and seeking greater support from the Queensland Government and the State Library.

Lesley's skill in oral history, particularly in the area of community history, is held in high regard. She shared her valuable experience in her excellent handbook, *Talking Together: A Guide to Community Oral History Projects*, Queensland 1999 which has sold well since its publication. She has conducted many oral history workshops which have raised funds for the Branch and educated many on oral history best practice.

In 2002 Lesley successfully applied for funding for the Queensland State Conference and played a major role in its organisation. This very successful conference ensured the financial viability of the Branch. In 2004 she was awarded a Churchill Fellowship to further her knowledge of oral history and its applications, travelling around the world to learn the latest in oral history practice.

At the 2003 OHAA National Conference Lesley held a training workshop for independent oral history contractors. As a result of this she set up an on-line independent Consultants' Discussion List which attracts lively debate. Lesley has always pushed for 'best practice' in equipment and training in undertaking oral history. When a member of the National Committee, Lesley made a valuable contribution including updating the Consultants Fees brochure and having it placed on the OHAA web site.

In conferring Life Membership on Lesley Jenkins, we acknowledge the long list of activities in which she has been involved or has initiated. This bears testimony to her being a conscientious, talented oral historian whose feeling for history and for the community results in fine collaboration with publishers, museums, exhibitions and heritage work.