

Queensland

Lesley Jenkins

June 2009

The South-East Queensland Branch of the Oral History Association of Australia formed on 9 December 1981 at a meeting attended by approximately 30 people at the University of Queensland Library. Library staff from the University of Queensland and the State Library of Queensland were particularly supportive of the establishment of a branch. At the meeting, reference was made to a large oral history project taking place in North Queensland by Carol Edmundson, and the establishment of branches in other states. Names familiar to Queensland history were represented at the first meeting including the meeting chairman Dr Rod Fisher, former lecturer in history at the University of Queensland, Helen Bennett active member of the Brisbane History Group, heritage specialist Marjorie Roe, University of Queensland Library and Margaret O'Hagan from the Fryer Library. Lesley Singh and OHAA life member Sue Pechey were also present. From the beginning the branch was active and ran many training workshops and seminars. The first project undertaken by the new branch was to work with Louise Douglas, setting up an oral history project to produce material about the depression years for part of what became a major Bicentennial work *Australians. A Historical Library*. Gilbert & Inglis (General Editors) 1987. Fairfax, Syme & Weldon. Sydney, Australia. 12 vols.

In 1990 Ros McCormack, a field officer with the John Oxley Library (JOL), joined the South East Queensland Branch of the OHAA. In 1991 the field officer at the library changed to Niles Elvery when Ros resigned, and the Branch changed its name and its focus from "Southeast Queensland" to "Queensland". In 1991 the branch convened the Oral History Association Biennial Conference and the Biennial General Meeting at the University of Queensland.

Niles Elvery assisted the Queensland branch by "providing facilities for mailing questionnaires and storing information collected for what will be a Directory of Oral History Projects and Products in Queensland". When Niles commenced his oral history work the Library had one CP430 Marantz cassette recorder and one set of Sennheiser professional microphones to accompany the recorder. Niles wrote a report requesting to go to the National Library of Australia and to South Australia to investigate their oral history programs. He spent two days at both places and following exposure to their collections and oral history programs, he recommended that the State Library of Queensland set up an oral history program.

The recommendations that were actioned as a result of the report included:

- To encourage the donation of Oral History recordings to the John Oxley Library;
- To set up the loan of equipment to interviewers providing they agreed to donate a copy of the recording to the library;
- To mirror the documentation for the oral history program on documents in use at the State Library of South Australia and the National Library of Australia.

Niles, who currently works at the State Archives in Brisbane, became an active president of the OHAA – Qld branch and this enabled him to provide the following services to the association:

- branch meetings held in the JOL reading room;
- seminars in the reading room held on weekends without cost to the Association;
- organised state wide conferences which was part of his field officer's role
- developed the collaborative role with the Association which built networks and the collection.

Niles also ran workshops for the association in his own time and conducted some workshops in regional areas on behalf of JOL. These workshops were at the request of community groups or libraries who met his expenses. Niles also became the state representative on national oral history projects such as the 'Once Upon a Wireless' project which recorded interviews with personalities from the radio industry. He was also involved in the 'Bringing them Home' report and the National Library of Australia donated copies to the SLQ because of this relationship. Oral history was a small part of Niles's job description and there was always a backlog of tapes to be catalogued. The recordings did not find their way to the on-line catalogue so access to them was limited to those who knew of their existence.



The oral history program collected material with a Queensland focus. A volunteer was responsible for registering incoming donations. Niles stayed in his position until 2003. After this time the oral history program was reactive, accepting donations of material, but with no links to the OHAA-Qld branch or to oral history project work taking place in the State or elsewhere.

The oral history program collected material with a Queensland focus. A volunteer was responsible for registering incoming donations. Niles stayed in his position until 2003. After this time the oral history program was reactive, accepting donations of material, but with

During this period the Queensland branch benefited from the involvement of professional oral history practitioners including Roberta Bonnin and Sue Pechey who sometimes taught and worked together. Lesley Jenkins became actively involved in 1994 and she took over the running of some of the oral history workshops from Sue Pechey. For a while the association was enriched by the presence of Ysola Best, a member of the Yugambeh people, who was involved in recording the stories of the Kombumerri (many of whom were her relatives) of the Gold Coast.

The OHAA-Qld Branch was diminished by the curtailment of support by the SLQ. The Branch found an alternative meeting space at a Bowling Club in New Farm and took on a more active training role. Independent practitioners who passed on a percentage of the course fees to the association undertook this role. In 1999 the association published *Talking Together – A Guide To Community Oral History Projects*, written by OHAA - Qld member and former president Lesley Jenkins. This book had been funded through a grant

from the Gaming Machine Community Benefit fund and proceeds from the sale of the book added to the coffers of the OHAA-Qld branch.

In 2007 Sue Pechey took over as President and the Committee organised a successful National Conference in Brisbane. Following the conference, Lena Volkova became President. Since then the Queensland branch has organised several workshops, supported members with grant applications, purchased recording equipment with a grant from the Gambling Fund, and is developing a web site.

In 2008, the status of oral history in Queensland was greatly improved when the State Library of Queensland appointed Gavin Bannerman as its first Oral History and Digital Storytelling Coordinator. OHAA (Qld Inc) has developed a good working relationship with Gavin resulting in committee meetings and workshops being held at the State Library. Gavin attends committee meetings and his input has been invaluable in helping OHAA (Qld Inc) promote oral history in Queensland. With this important development, our branch can look forward to a bright future.