

NEWSLETTER

JESSIE STREET NATIONAL WOMEN'S LIBRARY

Vol 15 No 2
May 2004

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LAUNCH OF *JESSIE STREET: A REVISED AUTOBIOGRAPHY*

Nearly 200 people gathered in the Lower Town Hall on Tuesday 9 March for the launch of *Jessie Street: A Revised Autobiography*. This unexpectedly large number would not have fitted into the advertised venue, and the Council staff made this larger area available at the last minute. It was also, thankfully, a much cooler venue, a godsend in the 40°C heat. Elizabeth Evatt launched the book. Then Lenore Coltheart, who edited the revised work spoke, followed by Maxine McKew as special guest speaker. Belinda Mackay thanked the speakers. Shirley Jones was MC, nobly trying to deal with a 'now-you-hear-it, now-you-don't' microphone!

Here are two accounts of the event, one from Belinda Mackay, and the other from volunteer, Janet Morrissey.

A Great Occasion

March 9th was a landmark day for many of us when the revised autobiography of my mother, Jessie Street, was launched. There was a very festive atmosphere amongst the large crowd of people who came to celebrate the occasion

and someone said to me how charming it was to be greeted in Druitt Street by two of the Library volunteers and directed to the Lower Town Hall. The volunteers did a splendid job of welcoming everyone and of labelling us all—no mean feat with so many people pouring through the doors all at once.

Elizabeth Evatt, who is a patron of the Library, launched the book. She gave a very interesting talk about the links between the Evatt family and Jessie. In their family scrap book she found cuttings



Elizabeth Evatt, AC, launches the book.

Seated l to r: Maxine McKew, Lenore Coltheart and the obscure Shirley Jones

about Jessie's work, especially in relation to her father, Clive Evatt. She is now researching her wider family papers and found a file marked 'Jessie Street' which contained letters from Jessie to Elizabeth's uncle, Bert Evatt. She drew attention to the photograph on display behind her, in which her uncle and Jessie are seen at the founding conference of the United Nations in San Francisco in 1945.

Then Lenore Coltheart spoke about the need to republish Jessie's autobiography, *Truth or Repose*. She reminded us that a

continued on page 2

ANNUAL FUNDRAISING LUNCHEON

MONDAY 20 SEPTEMBER 2004 at PARLIAMENT HOUSE

GUEST SPEAKER: HER EXCELLENCY, MARIE BASHIR, AC
Governor of NSW

PUT THIS DATE IN YOUR DIARY

Booking forms and further details in next newsletter

JSNWL FUNCTIONS

Lunch-Hour Talks

Venue The Lady Mayoress' Rooms, Town Hall, George Street, Sydney

Date and Time Third Thursday in the month from 12 noon to 1.30 pm

Entry \$20 (non-members)

\$15 (members). Light lunch included

For catering purposes, please let us know you are coming. Contact tel (02) 9876 3927 or (02) 9265 9486 or

email shirleyjones@ozemail.com.au

2004 PROGRAM

May —Thursday 20th

Nora Huppert—*Children Rescued from the Holocaust*

Nora, born in Berlin of Jewish parents, was one of the 18,000 children who, without their parents, were sent from Europe in 1938-39 to find refuge overseas. She will talk about her experiences as a child survivor. Nora has had her autobiography published and at present is recording the stories of other child survivors for publication.

June —Thursday 17th

Hazel Edwards—*Antarctic Writer on Ice*

In the year 2000, Hazel Edwards was writer-in-residence in a most unusual venue, Australia's Casey Station in Antarctica. She talks about her recent book on the subject and her never-to-be-forgotten experiences there. A well-known and prolific writer, Hazel has many different publications to her name, the most famous of which is *There's a Hippopotamus on Our Roof Eating Cake*.

July—Thursday 15th

Patricia Macdonald—*The VISE Squad*

After a lifetime of teaching in High Schools—State, private, country and city—Patricia, now semi-retired, has been tutoring in the outback of Australia with VISE - Volunteers for Isolated Students' Education. She outlines the history of VISE and recounts her very varied personal experiences over a period of nine years. Her talk illustrates the value of the organisation to families living in isolation.

JESSIE STREET NATIONAL WOMEN'S LIBRARY

The Library is open to the public
Monday to Friday, 10 am to 3 pm

Australia's national women's library is a specialist library with its sole focus on collecting and preserving the literary and cultural heritage of women.

Aims

- to heighten awareness of women's issues
- to preserve documents on women's lives and activities
- to support the field of women's history
- to highlight women's contribution to this country's development

Borrowing Policy

The public may borrow items on interlibrary loan. A loan collection is available to financial members of JSNWL.

Location: Level 1, Town Hall House
456 Kent Street, Sydney

Public Transport Services

Trains Town Hall Station

Buses QVB, George, York & Druiitt Sts

MERCHANDISE FOR SALE

Library Bags: sturdy and very popular these are screen-printed with the logo

Library Teatowels: printed with the logo

Lapel Pins: approx 12 x 20 mm, the pins elegantly enamelled in maroon and gold

Jessie Street Biography: a short biography by Heather Radi

Prices at the Library

Library bags \$5

Teatowels \$7

Lapel pins \$5/\$7.50 (non-members)

Jessie Street Biography \$5

Add \$1 for packaging and posting.



continued from page 1

colleague of Jessie remarked at the time of the launch of *Truth or Repose*, that she was 40 years ahead of her time. It's an amazing coincidence that Lenore found herself revisiting the book exactly 40 years on, with the ideas and issues still as relevant today as they were then. Jessie liked to work with people, and the crowds at the launch, with all the positive vibes is something she would have responded to.

After Lenore spoke, I wondered what was left for Maxine McKew to say, but as always she didn't disappoint. Describing herself as a 'political junkie' she came out with guns blazing asking 'Where are the women in politics today?' Maybe not as many as we would wish for, but still a long way ahead of Jessie's time. And equal pay still seems an impossibility. Maxine spoke with verve and wit. She pointed out that photographs showed Jessie in flat-heeled shoes that could certainly stay the distance and maybe today's women could read something into that. As Maxine picked her way back to her chair, my eagle-eyed grandson drew my attention to her very elegant, high-heeled slip-on sandals!

Congratulations to all concerned on a fantastic evening.

Belinda Mackay

What a Night it Was!

Tuesday, 9 March in the heritage setting of the Lower Town Hall, *Jessie Street: A Revised Autobiography* was launched. Everyone was there... But let me take you behind the scenes at Jessie Street National Women's Library on that Tuesday. A full-page blurb in *The Australian* really set off the phones... Have I replied? Will you still accept guests? Could my son/daughter/friend come?

So, we put the printing of the name tags on hold and discussed how to get the huge (and I mean huge) official photograph of the Australian delegation to the 1945 San Francisco Conference up to/down to (depended on which way one went) the venue along with umpteen boxes of THE book and assorted bits and pieces, not forgetting Shirley's subversive tea towels!

The temperature was rising and the uphill climb along Druiitt Street with the trolleys (one had a flat tyre) had no appeal at all. Enter the fantastic Town Hall concierge, Robyn... 'I can get you there via the goods lift.' And so she did: two heavily-laden trolleys, one HUGE picture, the name tags, the donation box (very important) and Shirley's tea towels

negotiated the labyrinths of the Town Hall with the help of a gorgeous bloke who took pity on these women of indeterminate years and eased the way by carrying some of the paraphernalia. And so we all arrived safely in the Lower Town Hall. Sandro was there to smooth out the problems and to make sure the room was swept and dusted. Blutack, drawing pins, sticky-tape, the odd bit of 'spit and polish' and all was ready!

We, the Library volunteers, brushed ourselves down, changed our shoes, chatted up the drink waiters, made ourselves known to the publishers, checked the toilets and prepared to greet the guests. And what wonderful guests they were—coming in from 40°C outside were family and friends of Jessie; those for whom she was an inspiration for what was possible for women to strive for; and interested women and men some of whom were not quite sure why Jessie was important, but knew she was. The official proceedings went according to plan and Maxine McKew's words were published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* two days later.

Books were sold, donations to the Library were made and new members garnered. THEN we had to get the huge official photograph, remaining boxes of THE book, assorted bits and pieces, leftover food and Shirley's tea towels back to the Library! This time it was downhill Druiitt Street (no goods lift) with the two trolleys and remember, one had a flat tyre... and downhill it was!

It was only 8.00 pm (for us it seemed like midnight) and the 'suits' were still crowding the bus stop—one volunteer (always shall she remain anonymous) was heralding our path, 'International Women's Day, make way...' and offering the few remaining edibles to all and sundry. Corner of Druiitt and Kent Street... what's new? The remaining launch material made its way back to the Library and we organised our ways back to our ordinary lives.

It was a great night in more ways than one and I know Jessie would have had a whale of a time and appreciated all the work 'before and after the scenes'.

Janet Morrissey, Education Consultant

AUTOBIOGRAPHY at DISCOUNT PRICE TO MEMBERS

\$25 (+\$9 packing and postage, independent of number of copies)

To order, contact the Library with credit card details.

LIBRARY MATTERS

THE SPACE SITUATION

There is little to report on the space front. Liaison with the Council over the space offered us in the Ultimo Community Centre has been on hold since the new Council was elected and Council staff's priority is making space available in Town Hall House for the extra staff who have moved across from the former South Sydney Council, now part of the City of Sydney.

LIBRARY NEWS

What Users are Looking for in the Library

Our Visitors' Book and record of phone enquiries tell us that the numbers of requests for material are increasing and there appears to be a greater variety of topics being researched. Many of our users were doing school projects; one was doing her PhD thesis and two visitors were trying to find out more about their Aboriginal forebears. Subjects recent users were interested in are:

Women in the media

Women's stories

Plays with only women in the cast

Women in the suburbs in the mid 60s—
suburban living and shopping

Gertrude Stein

Jessie Street's childhood at Yugilbar

Women philanthropists in the early 20th
century

Women in Russian history

Aboriginal women

A Farewell to Staff

We recently farewelled both Myra Keay and Margaret Rowland, who have both been with us since 1994, when we were housed in the NSW Writers' Centre in the suburb of Rozelle. Myra was Chief Librarian and Margaret was our cataloguer.

Myra Keay has now made her retirement from the Library final. As Chief Librarian she has been a pillar of strength and greatly valued for her computer expertise and her management of the library volunteers. After our move to Town Hall House, Myra as well as organising the work of the library and training the volunteers, was responsible for computerising the cataloguing system, for having the Library holdings put on Kinetica, the National Library database, and for having our

catalogue put on the City of Sydney's library catalogue system, Horizon.

Margaret Rowland joined us when our catalogue records were on cards. These were housed in a cabinet given us by the Teachers' College at Sydney University when they were downsizing their library. This was an interesting link with the past for Margaret, since she had attended SU Teachers' College and knew the library well.

Since many of our books belong to the period before cataloguing information was included in the preliminary pages, Margaret has necessarily had to do a lot of original cataloguing. This is a skill no longer taught. We are very lucky to have had Margaret's expertise for so long.

ARCHIVES NEWS

Recent Acquisitions

We have received several really interesting donations over the past few months.

Joyce Clarke Collection

An exciting collection was donated by **Joyce Clarke**, who recently moved into a retirement village. Joyce was formerly Secretary of the Teachers' Federation, and Head Mistress of Kogarah High School. A peace activist and a committed socialist, her life is recorded through a large and orderly collection of correspondence, minutes of meetings, reports, submissions and journals. Among Clarke's papers, copies of files created by ASIO, which document her political activities during the 1940s and 1950s, were discovered. This collection should be of particular interest to anyone interested in researching the cold war period of history in Australia.

Josephine Downing Collection

Marlene Arditto donated a fascinating small collection of papers and photographs which belonged to her grandmother, Josephine Downing. The collection had a miraculous escape from the tip when it was found by Marlene and her sister lurking on the top of a wardrobe where it had been placed 'out of harm's way' many years earlier. The Josephine Downing collection comprises: a certificate of title for a block of land purchased in Perth in 1905; receipts for the deposit, repayments and final payment of the loan taken to cover the cost of the property; a



photograph of William and Josephine on their wedding day; and their wedding certificate.

These papers are of particular interest as they show that, at the beginning of the 20th century, Josephine Downing a 29-year-old unmarried woman from Glengarriff, Ireland was able to purchase a block of land for herself in Perth at a time when most women were very financially dependent on men. Even long after this, banks refused mortgages to single women. She paid off her loan in June 1905. In November that year, in St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney, Josephine married William Kearney, a 34-year-old farmer from Ballarat, Victoria..

Sometimes papers that may seem perhaps mundane and unimportant can be crucial in documenting changing attitudes to women. It would be interesting to know the story behind the purchase of this block of land. A researcher or family historian may be able to find more information at some later date.

Beverley Sodbinow, Archivist

DONATIONS OF MATERIAL

We thank the following people and organisations who have generously donated material to the Library.

Marlene Arditto
Margaret Brink
Joyce Clarke
Merry Cooper
Irina Dunn
Amelia Fielden
Sybil Jack
Ursula Jack
Jean Kropper
Janet Morrissey
Ivan Patrick
Jan Roberts
June Young

Adelaide Women's Liberation Centre
Australian Institute for Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander Studies
Cambridge University Press
City of Sydney Library
Clouston & Hall
Random House

FEBRUARY LUNCH-HOUR TALK
SPEAKER: KRISTIN WILLIAMSON
Women on the Rocks: A Tale of Two Convicts

On 19 February Kristin Williamson gave an interesting talk on the writing of her latest book, an historical novel based on fact.

Women on the Rocks is a work of fiction based on several real characters and some actual events. I first became interested in writing an historical novel when I moved in 1997 to the Rocks, the earliest settlement in Sydney. I began to explore the narrow back streets climbing worn sandstone steps to seldom-used pathways. I discovered an archaeological site in Cumberland Street where small houses had stood side by side, with a well and a cesspit at the end of the street, then a tiny museum in Susanna Place, still with its original privy and open wash-house out the back. A map drawn in 1836 showed Kent Street, and nearby St Phillips church, where many of the convicts were married. As I explored I began to hear the voices of my characters.

I've always been interested in the lives of our female forbears and I wondered what it was like for the women who came from the ordered, class-regimented old world, where every woman knew her place, into the alien, harsh, disordered environment of the colonies. A few novels have been written about middle-class women in early Australia, but very few about convict women and I wondered why. The simple answer is that their voices were not heard because they were illiterate. They didn't keep letters or diaries that could be drawn upon by novelists. So while researching, all I ever found was an occasional quote from a court transcript, a newspaper report or an official quote relating to the Female Factory. Finding so few examples of the direct speech of convict women gave me the excuse to make their voices up.

What were these women like? Surely they weren't all just, 'damned whores,' as Lieutenant Ralph Clark of the First Fleet had described them. I decided to bend my research in the direction of finding two real women who had struggled and eventually triumphed. The Public Records Office provides little in the way of detail about convicts, but I did find one interesting example: 'Mary Jones, aged 14, charged with forging banknotes. Tried at the Old Bailey, sentenced to 14 years transportation. Arrived Sydney Cove aboard *Medway*, September 1820.' So young Mary Jones became my main character. Another one: 'Jane Henry alias Mariah Wilkinson, aged 17, uneducated, Presbyterian, born in Leeds, dressmaker. 5' 3". Convicted of receiving. Tried at Chester 27th of April 1824. Sentenced to transportation for 7 years.' In my story, Jane became Mary's best friend. I only found these two women after a long

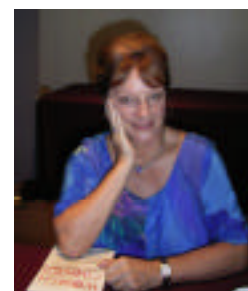
search for women who were very different personalities. I wanted to make them friends, as often happens in real life.

I was intrigued as to why Jane Henry had an alias and discovered that she had not only changed her name frequently, but had committed more crimes after she arrived in Australia. She was convicted, but escaped by seducing a young magistrate from a highly respected family, who was consequently disgraced and lost his job. Jane was then imprisoned in the Female Factory but she escaped by climbing the 14-foot sandstone wall and completely disappearing. Rumours about her whereabouts ran rife. She'd been seen disguised as a waterman and working on the boats on the Hunter River; she'd been seen rowing out to Bradley's Head and had drowned trying to board a sailing ship bound for Batavia; she'd been seen in New Zealand, where she was settled and making a fortune running a brothel full of black savages. Historical records show that Jane was never found, but in my novel I follow her to New Zealand where she makes a fortune in a dubious profession and later decides to become respectable, making a friend of the first Governor, James Busby and his wife, and of the missionaries struggling to convert the war-like Maori.

I also create a past for her in rural England where she meets her friend Mary Jones, when both girls are working as maid-servants in a country house. Mary is a naïve, trusting, god-fearing girl who admires Jane for her wickedness and has no suspicion that she'll soon betray her. Jane lets her take the punishment for the forged banknotes that she has stolen from an aristocratic lover, John Knatchbull (a real character) who was only playing with her affections and had suddenly jilted her. So Mary is transported to Sydney Cove, a terrified child of 14. She is assigned to the ex-convict Andrew Frazier, who has earned his ticket of leave and become one of the most respected and successful publicans on the Rocks, even visiting Government House as a guest of Lachlan Macquarie. All this is fact.

Mary, being literate, honest and reliable, pleases her master and at the age of 17 becomes his housekeeper in charge of ten servants. She also, a year or so later, becomes his common-law wife. Now Mary is a religious character and I assume she would have preferred to be married at St Phillip's Church but church weddings were not common amongst convicts and stoic Mary does not insist.

But Mary's contented life was not to last. According to history, in September 1824



Andrew Frazier, her beloved common-law husband met a pretty, flirtatious, newly-arrived convict named Ellen Hatton. She promptly set her cap at him and he was smitten. Mary Jones was unceremoniously packed off to the Female Factory to await another assignment. She was most unhappy and wrote a letter to Frazier, one of the few convict letters to survive, pleading with him not to forsake the old one for the new one, 'My time will be up in September and I will be coming out to my liberty. If I am guilty of any fault it is loving thee too well.' That was all I had to go by to recreate Mary's voice. Apparently she received no reply. Andrew Frazier and Ellen Hatton were married in church. All this is true, but not the next part. I won't reveal any more of this tale except to say that Jane's thieving catches up with her, she is transported to the colonies soon afterwards and the two unlikely friends are reunited in the Female Factory.

The lives of these two women entwine over the next two decades as we follow their love affairs, careers, their children and their political involvement in both Australia and New Zealand. The aristocratic John Knatchbull is transported for stealing a bank cheque and two sovereigns and becomes, to Mary's distress, romantically involved with her impressionable young daughter Harriet. Just days before they are due to be married, Knatchbull, alias John Fitch, commits a most gruesome murder and is hung at Woolloomooloo Jail. He committed this murder one block from where I now live.

I thoroughly enjoyed the challenge of writing a fiction based on fact. I did a great deal of research, in fact I was in danger of spending years on it. The hard part was putting aside the research and starting to write the story. It's easy to let facts get in the way of a good story. In the first drafts of this book I admit I nearly went crazy trying to keep the dates accurate. I twisted the story into unlikely contortions to try and make it fit, but by the later drafts I realised that I was damaging the narrative by insisting that it stick to real time and events. So I let go of a few facts and just let the story flow.

I admit to some bias in the writing of *Women on the Rocks*. I felt the need to counter
continued on page 9

MARCH LUNCH-HOUR TALK

SPEAKER: JUNE YOUNG

Tyson's Outback: A Pioneer Pastoralist

On Thursday 18 March June Young gave an enthralling talk about her grandfather, who amassed a huge number of pastoral properties in NSW, Victoria and Queensland. June has spent several years painting the buildings and surrounding landscapes and at the end of her talk showed us slides of these.

I want to talk today about James Tyson, a now almost forgotten figure. He was born in 1819 and died in 1898. He was the son of a convict woman, Isabella, and a free-settler father. They were married in England, where Isabella stole some gingham and a few coins to the value of about one pound and for that she was given seven years in Australia. The father, William, who was in the army, resigned his army commission and in 1809 sailed with his wife and a young son on the *Invincible*.

They arrived in Sydney and, as was common practice, the convicts were assigned as servants. Isabella was assigned to her husband, which was a very neat way of coping with the situation. After they had been here for a year or two William was given a grant of 50 acres of land at Narellan, where they began farming and raising their family and it was here that James was born. They left that property after William went bankrupt, but he was given a second grant of land at Wilton, not very far away from Narellan, at a property called Quince Grove, where James grew up.

When he was 19 his parents sent him to Sydney to his brother-in-law, to learn the boot-making business. James hated Sydney. He stuck it out for six months and then went back to the farm. He and his brother William then worked under contract on properties at Yass. At the end of eight years he and William decided it was time they went out on their own. They belonged to a family of 14, and needed to establish themselves. They got this property out of Wagga and started their cattle business. It was an absolute failure and they walked off bankrupt. So James and William and his young family took their stock and settled on a property called Jarramie, in the Riverina. They built two huts and for the next six years or so they just made a living. Nothing very much happened until the gold rush in 1852.

The gold rush was the turning point. There were 20,000 goldminers down at Bendigo and these people needed to eat, so the brothers took their stock to Bendigo and set up a butchering business. When they had used up all their own stock, James bought more stock which they slaughtered and the whole family of boys got involved. They made a huge amount of money. At the end of three years they sold this business for £80,000, and this gave all the boys a start. They bought properties in Oxley, in Deniliquin and also up on the Warrego in Queensland. This was the beginning for the entire family. James was the only one of the brothers who remained a bachelor. He was doing very well in Deniliquin and he decided he needed a fattening paddock because they were feeding the markets at Melbourne. So he bought a property called Hayfield, in Victoria, where they fattened the cattle for the market. Everybody did very well out of this enterprise, and James went on to accumulate a huge amount of property throughout a vast area of eastern Australia.

He became a great benefactor. He supported the governments, he supported churches, he supported people, he supported public causes. He was a very silent man. He hated ostentation and he would run a mile from any woman who had a marriageable daughter. He was a very forward thinker. He wanted to give the Queensland government money to build a railway to bring cattle to the markets in Sydney and Melbourne but this didn't happen.

James died intestate. His solicitor knew that wills had been drawn up but no one could find them, and at the time of his death his estate was worth £3 million. He outlived all his brothers and he looked after all their widows. There were about 72 nieces and nephews in the family and if any of them got into difficulties the mother would write to Uncle James and say, 'Please help,' and the child would be sent to see James. He'd set them working and he paid everybody a good wage.

When James died there were obituaries in all the papers in eastern Australia and in England. The fact that there was a will to be distributed was advertised and a lot of people of the name of Tyson came out of the woodwork in England,



especially in the Cumberland area round the Lakes district where there were literally hundreds of Tysons.

In painting the properties my idea was to try and get this man's name back into people's knowledge because, after he died and the properties were sold, his name has been quietly sinking into the background. My idea originally was to find the properties where my father had lived. My maiden name is Tyson, and I decided to go down to Jerramie and paint something there for the family because that's where my father was born. I thought the children would like to know where their grandfather came from. Then I read the entire story of James in a thesis from the Queensland University and because it was such a wonderful story that nobody knows very much about it I thought I'd try to visit each of the properties that James owned at the time of his death. There are properties from Tully in Northern Queensland right down to Hayfield in Victoria, right out to the Northern Territory border, through Spring Shore, down through Northern New South Wales, the Riverina.

It was a long way to travel but I decided that I would do that in four different journeys. I did the two that were closest to Sydney, Narellan and Wilton, first. When I was painting on those two properties people would see me and they would ask what I was doing, and then they would say, 'Oh yes my cousin is Aunt So-and-So and she knows so-and-so, and they would tell me all about that person. I also got a lot of information from the historic societies' records, and when I contacted the properties they all said, 'Yes, come and do your painting.' I took two years to actually do the paintings, and I have written the book and I had an exhibition in Sydney early last year. This was particularly successful for me because so many people came who would tell me something about the property in the painting they were looking at.

*Transcription by Anne Johnson
Abbreviated version by Shirley Jones*

APRIL LUNCH-HOUR TALK

SPEAKER: JAN ROBERTS

The Biography of a Macquarie Street Icon

Jan Roberts gave a fascinating talk on 15 April, which brought forth lively reminiscences from one member of the audience who had often stayed in the Astor as a girl with her grandmother. Questions after the talk and the slides of the Astor came thick and fast.

The Astor was Australia's first cooperative residential building and it exerts a powerful attraction, an attraction I felt when I decided to put some energy into researching it. My other projects have always been about people, but this book is about the building, the space it occupies at 123-125 Macquarie Street, and it's about the people who built it and who have lived in it. It was built in 1923, so last year was its 80th birthday.

How do you get information about a building like the Astor which is known for its secrecy? It's often talked about in gossip and scandal columns, but the people themselves are generally very private. Luckily I had an intimate connection with it. About 12 or 13 years ago, when prices of flats at the Astor had dropped because concrete cancer had been diagnosed, I was working on a mature-age doctorate and having to use Mitchell Library in Macquarie Street. My daughter was doing a post-graduate degree, so we girls decided we were going to find a small place in the city. We found this little back flat at the Astor when prices were at their lowest and when the building was almost at the stage where it could have been demolished.

Why make a fuss about a building that's only 80 years old? Because it's the only building of its type. I thought that no-one else was going to write the history of the Astor, so I pulled together a team of wonderful people—professional heritage architects, enthusiastic amateurs, and people who really loved the building and wanted to contribute. Some residents wanted to participate; others didn't. One thing I knew I might have to worry about was defamation. Fortunately I'd done an oral history work with some of the old timers from New Guinea and this gave me the sense to judge, when interviewing, whether something can go on the record or whether it's to be kept private. If I hadn't had this experience, I never would have been able to do the Astor project.

The first email I received was from a friend who said 'You're a very brave woman, Jan.' I thought 'Oh God. What have I done? I should really pull back now,' but that gave me strength somehow. However, we soon reached an impasse. There wasn't enough material coming in. Then I spoke to a journalist about the project and she was amazing. She put a tiny article in the magazine, *Domain*, and she looked at all my material and from it she chose something totally unexpected. Ruby Rich had lived at the Astor and she picked out a black-and-white photograph of her flat which Ruby had commissioned Harold Cazneau, the famous architectural photographer, to take.

That was the turning point. I heard from people all over the country, from South Africa, from everywhere, and they were so generous, sharing wonderful material and stories with me. They're all in the book, so you'll see a great cross-section of styles, from the very academic analysis of the architect to, say, Graham MacDougal talking about his Gran, whom he used to stay with when he was a boarder at school. Graham's Gran was one of the original shareholders. I knew that she had left her husband in the country. She obviously wanted a much more interesting life than the one Mr MacDougal was giving her. But what Graham didn't know was something I discovered when I was going through the Astor archives. I came across 'MacDougal's Real Estate and Letting'. I think Gran probably ran away from home without much money and so she formed this little company. She was bringing together people she knew in the country, with residents in the Astor who may have wanted to go on a trip and let their flat. Regulations allowed this. This little business would have enabled her to live quite comfortably and happily in the Astor.

The Astor is very much a women's building but I hadn't realised the strength of the women's connection to it until I started on the research. The Astor women were very strong women. Many of them left their husbands. Many of them, like Ruby Rich, didn't marry till later, Portia Geach didn't marry at all or Jean Garling. They didn't want to marry. They had the life they wanted without marriage and all that that entailed.



The cooperative element came from America. The founders of the Astor were John and Cecily O'Brien. They built Wyoming in Macquarie Street opposite the State Library, but obviously they wanted something more. The archives showed that he was Chairman for a long time, but we knew nothing more about them. Then some wonderful information came because of that little article in *Domain*. A family member of John O'Brien contacted us and we discovered the connection between the O'Briens and the Astor. The connection was actually Christian Science. Once you say Christian Science you are thinking about people whose life is not just one of pure materialism. The O'Briens were childless, they were wealthy, they were well-travelled. O'Brien was a country man, with money from the sale of a property called Wyoming. The family story was that he was tired of the local Irish priest always wanting his money, so he decided to go and live in Sydney where he and his wife could make a new life. After they had built Wyoming they became interested in the idea of another building in Macquarie Street that would reflect America. John O'Brien had joined the first Christian Science church in Boston in 1912. When we got these details, we realised the couple were in America before WWI looking at buildings—Boston, Chicago, New York—and seeing how people could live comfortably and happily and safely and with such stimulation in the middle of a big city, instead of having to live in the suburbs.

Cecily joined the church soon after in Sydney, so both these committed Christian Scientists were going to base this new residential block on the cooperative spirit they had noted in America. From America, they brought back the religion they were fascinated by, the style of architecture they wanted for this new building and the idea of cooperative housing. Under this system, everyone has one vote, everyone buys shares in it and everyone runs it. The

continued on page 9

To keep women's words, women's works, alive and powerful – Ursula Le Guin

CANBERRA NEWS

MARCH LUNCH-HOUR TALK

Speaker: Beverley Sodbinow
Women's Lost History

On the 4th of March we were lucky enough to have Beverley Sodbinow, the Library's archivist along to speak to our Canberra audience. This was particularly apt given the extensive archives held by the Library that have their roots in Canberra, including the Canberra Women's Archive, and the archives of Helen Leonard which were donated with approximately 13,000 photographs. March also signalled Women's History Month and what better way to celebrate than to talk about the trial

and triumphs of the preservation of women's history. Beverley's talk was enjoyable and well-attended; many people were surprised to find the Library has such a history of mobility, and were especially interested in its book wish list. Thank you to everyone that helped on the day. It is always a pleasure to spend time with Beverley and this was no exception.

Wendy Sanderson
Canberra Board Member

MAY LUNCH-HOUR TALK

Speaker: Dr Anna Gray
The Edwardians

Dr Gray is Assistant Director of Australian Art at the National Gallery of Australia. In her talk she will focus on women as artists and subjects during the Edwardian period, reflecting particularly on the content of the exhibition.

When: Thursday 6 May, 12.30 to 2 pm
Where: Canberra Museum and Gallery, London Circuit, Civic
Entrance: \$15 (non-members), \$10 (members), \$5 (students/unwaged)
Light refreshments included. Pay at the door.
To book, contact: Wendy on 6249 8782 or email wendysanderson@hotmail.com

A REMINDER

Celebratory Dinner
Friday, 14 May
Old Parliament House, Canberra
Speaker: Pru Goward



WHO ARE THE VOLUNTEERS?

As you know, the Library has many volunteers. Because they work on different days, many do not know each other, nor can the members know them all. So that we can all get to know each other, each issue of the newsletter is going to provide a 'thumbnail' of our volunteers, starting with some of the most recent ones.

Penny Moyes



Penny at her graduation. The ceremony was held in March on the lawns of 'Boooloombah', the lovely old property which is the centrepiece of the UNE campus. It was a perfect autumn day!

After completing my library studies to become an Associate of the (then) Library Association of Australia, I worked in various CSIRO divisional libraries, followed by 18 years in a private corporate library (which I set up and ran) on the Central Coast. After moving to the Southern Highlands in 1999, I worked for 18 months at Bowral Central Library.

I was married for 25 years to a Qantas pilot, which gave me the opportunity to travel and live for extended periods in London. I have two sons: Stuart, 29, an architect in Newcastle, and Michael, 23, an Internet engineer with Optus.

I began my BA degree at the University of New England in 1996, studying part-time by distance education. I completed the degree in 2003, graduating BA in Communication Studies and English Literature. This year I began a Book Editing and Publishing Diploma course at Macleay College, and I'm absolutely loving it.

I joined the volunteer force of JSNWL at the beginning of 2003, mainly because the scope of the library reflected the direction that my degree had followed in women's and gender studies. As well as putting my library experience to good use, JSNWL gives me an outlet for my feminist frustrations.



NEW MEMBERS

A warm welcome to our new members

Cassandra Anderson
Caroline Bowyer
Rebecca Braid
Cherrie Buckwalter
Shirley Daborn
Elizabeth Eldridge
Cecilia Fuentes
Sonja Georgeson
Maryann Goodes
Carol Green
Terese Hayward
Phoebe Hodgson
Jean Kropper
Sophie McGrath
Lyn Mealey
Karen Mitchell
Pam Neville
Judith Ramsay
Marian Sawer
Sonya Sodbinow
Shirley Tully
Herti Verge
Octavia Wilen
Ruth Wilson
Diane Young

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The AGM was held on Saturday 27 March in the Southern Function Room in Town Hall House. This room now holds the wonderful old council table and chairs, and was a lovely venue for the meeting.

The two motions making minor changes to the Constitution were passed. The term 'Donor member' is now replaced by 'Supporting member' and 'Student' has been added to the categories of membership.

The incoming Board for 2004 consists of

Executive	Members	
Chair Victoria Rubensohn	Wendi Balbi	Sybil Jack
Vice-Chair Olive Briscoe	Shirley Jones	Christine Lees
Secretary Wendy Fothergill	Wendy Sanderson	Penny Street
Treasurer Robyn Harriott	Jane Waddell	

We are very sorry to have lost Cathy Sanderson, who has worked long and effectively for the Library since she came on the Board as Secretary in October 1999. Cathy has been a driving force on the Board and her complete dedication has been an inspiration to us all. A vote of thanks was passed for her commitment over the years.

NOTES & QUOTES

This little treasure was sent in by member Jean Michaelides of Bowral. It is from *Housekeeping Monthly*, May 1955

The Good Wife's Guide

- Prepare yourself. Take 15 minutes to rest so you'll be refreshed when he arrives. Touch up your make-up, put a ribbon in your hair and be fresh-looking. He has just been with a lot of work-weary people.
- Listen to him. You may have a dozen important things to tell him, but the moment of his arrival is not the time. Let him talk first—remember, his topics of conversation are more important than yours.
- Make the evening his. Never complain if he comes home late or goes out to dinner, or other places of entertainment without you. Instead, try to understand his world of strains and pressure and his very real need to be at home and relax.
- Don't complain if he's late home for dinner or even if he stays out all night. Count this as minor compared to what he might have gone through that day.
- Don't ask him questions about his actions or question his judgment or integrity. Remember, he is the master of the house and as such will always exercise his will with fairness and truthfulness. You have no right to question him.
- A good wife always knows her place.

NEWS OF MEMBERS

Sandra Sherwood We were sorry to lose Sandra from the Board in January. She and young son Kyle returned to Canada to live, leaving her husband to see out his job here and pack up the house. All of them enjoyed their time in Australia and particularly appreciated Sydney's climate, culture and beautiful harbour. However, they had to make a decision whether they wanted to bring up Kyle as an Australian or as a Canadian with grandparents and cousins, and opted for the latter. Now Sandra's computer, her husband, her son and herself are all again under one roof.

Sandra writes 'When I left Australia I had developed both an admiration and understanding of Australian women's contributions, both past and present. I was repeatedly astonished by what had been achieved by the women honoured in the Library collection and by the women behind the Library itself. For this experience I am extremely grateful.'

Robyn Hanstock Robyn is researching for a PhD on the topic of the history of women as adult educators in Australia. This will include women who worked in colleges such as technical, business or TAFE, as well as other formal adult education institutions and organisations (other than university). It will also include those who taught in less formal ways, such as activists like Jessie or women in the community.

Juno Gemes Juno has on display a wonderful exhibition at Macquarie University. Called *Proof* it is a collection of photographs taken over a span of 30 years and documenting the emergence of the Aboriginal movement in Australia. Robert McFarlane wrote in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on Tuesday 20 April 'it is frequently elegaic in its assembly of images ... from iconoclast Burnham Burnham to poet Oodgeroo Noonuccal ...' The exhibition ran from 10 March till 10 May.

Congratulations to Ellen Lintjens

Ellen is one of the 20 people, considered to be future leaders, who has been selected to do a Master of Public Administration degree at the Australia and New Zealand School of Government (ANZSOG). She will complete her studies in 2005.

ANZSOG was established by a consortium of governments, universities and business schools, to meet the needs of government and the community sectors. Professor Allan Fels, AO, is Dean of the School.

Ellen is currently Executive Officer for the NSW-Asia Business Advisory Council and works with the NSW Department of State and Regional Development. She joined the Library in its very early days and was a member of the Committee from 1992 to 1996.



The people people work with best
Are sometimes very queer;
The people people own by birth
Quite shock your first idea.
The people people have for friends
Your common sense appall
But the people people marry
Are the queerest folk of all.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman

OUR FAVOURITE CATT STORY

Last year a bookseller rang me to say that a client was selling a book called *Why Wars Must Cease*. The book had been the personal copy of Jessie Street and was inscribed: "Mrs Street, bravest of brave women, here's to you. Carrie Chapman Catt, July 2 1945".

Would we be interested in buying it? The asking price was \$400. Belinda Mackay, Jessie's elder daughter, immediately said the Street family would buy it for the Library. I let the seller know. Unfortunately, the owner of the book then decided to offer it for auction on the internet. The family bid for the book, but it was acquired by a woman called Chase in San Francisco, who collects books to do with the women's movement.

I contacted Chase to see if she would consider selling the Street family the book. She was very interested in hearing about the Library, and when she learned about Jessie's long association with Carrie Chapman Catt, said she would bequeath the book to the Library. (For members who are interested in Jessie's association with Carrie, see pp 191-192, *Jessie Street: A Revised Autobiography*, edited by Lenore Coltheart.)

The Library has sent Chase a signed complimentary copy of the autobiography. She has become more than ever interested in JSNWL and Jessie Street as a person, and has recently announced her intention of personally presenting *Why Wars Must Cease* to the Library when next she comes to Australia, possibly later this year. We will be extremely happy to arrange a presentation function for her.

Shirley Jones
Public Relations Officer



THE LOAN COLLECTION

Karobran: The Story of an Aboriginal Girl by Monica Clare (Alternative Publishing Cooperative Limited, Sydney, 1978) 95 pp. Donated by Susan Geason.

The only novel ever written by an Aboriginal woman, this story is closely based on the author's experiences growing up as a part-Aboriginal in the NSW white community. It mirrors the experiences and sufferings of all other black women who had ever lived in a white society.

Faces in the Water by Janet Frame (The Women's Press, London, 1980) 254 pp. Donated by Cecile Pauly.

This novel, revolving around confinement in mental institutions, is about the fear the 'sane' have of the 'mad' and how the fear transforms into punishment of those who, to protect themselves, have retreated into a self-created world. Although this is a work of fiction, it is told in the first person and reads like a documentary. Janet Frame, one of New Zealand's foremost authors, was a patient in a psychiatric institution for eight years.

The Battlers by Kylie Tennant (Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1983) 401 pp. Donated by member Una Ellis

This is the story of a motley crowd of battlers that travelled the roads during the 1930's Depression looking for work—or avoiding it. A richly human novel about Snow, one of life's drifters whose home was the open road, and Dancy, a hard-bitten, but immensely likeable young woman. First published in 1941, this novel won for the author, the S.H. Prior Memorial Prize and the Gold Medal of the Australian Literature Society.

My Heart, My Country: The Story of Dorothea Mackellar by Adrienne Howley (University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 1989) Donated by member Shirley Jones

Every Australian knows Dorothea Mackellar's poem *My Country*, but not much has been written about the actual writer of the poem. Born in Sydney in 1885 into a wealthy family, Dorothea had more freedom than most women of that time. This biography captures her energy, her close family ties and recounts humorous anecdotes told to the biographer during the years she nursed the author.

Members may borrow any of these books. Contact the Library if you would like to have one or more sent you.

continued from page 4

Lieutenant Ralph Clark's statement that all convict women were just damned whores. In my book at least half of them are ambitious to become respectable and through the power of friendship and the indomitable strength of the human spirit, I think they did it.

Kristin then read two extracts from her book.

*Transcription by Anne Johnson
Abbreviated version by Shirley Jones*

Walking Tour—Friday 21 May

Kristin Williamson, as part of the Sydney Writers' Festival, is leading a Walking Tour around the Rocks to show where her convict characters, worked, lived and played. It leaves from Ariel Bookshop, 103 George Street. at 10 am. Bookings 9250 1999.

continued from page 6

O'Briens drew up the constitution. Whether you live in a flat in the front overlooking over the Botanic Gardens, with four bedrooms, room for your servants, two bathrooms, and a huge living space, or you live in a little bottom flat at the back of the building that has virtually no views and only one bathroom and a tiny kitchen, you all have one vote and everyone pays the same charges.

Then John became very ill and after he recovered he kept boasting about how his healing capacity had made him well. His wife became tired of hearing this and told him that when he was seriously ill she had called in a doctor. He never spoke to her again. He moved to another flat in the building and they brought in an unmarried niece to be their go-between. They only communicated through her and that's how they lived in the Astor for many years till both of them died.

Barry Humphries of course, was one of the most eccentric people who was there. A lot of the present people in the building remember the impact he made when he joined two flats together in the middle of the night, brought a builder in to put a spiral staircase in, didn't bother to ask permission or anything. I asked him if he'd contribute to the book, but he didn't want to.

At this point, Jan showed slides of the exterior and of the interiors of the larger and smaller flats and the views over the harbour and Sydney's skyline as seen from some of them.

*Transcription and abbreviated version
by Shirley Jones*

VOLUNTEER NEWS

The last three months have been a period of adjustment for the Library. Having lost two key players the remaining volunteers have come together to assess the situation, reallocate tasks and, by sharing the load, hopefully move forward.

This has been especially so in two cases. Firstly with the librarians after Myra Keay's departure and secondly the with the committee set up to organise the Parliamentary Luncheon after Cathy Sanderson's resignation. Both Myra and Cathy have given so much to JSNWL, not just time-wise but in sharing their outstanding skills and expertise. They will be missed.

Other activities have included: the book launch when 14 volunteers, besides enjoying themselves, contributed to a highly successful evening; and a display to celebrate the 15th birthday of JSNWL. Lynn Sitsky (research) and Annelies Jahn (graphic design) both helped to produce an eye-catching and informative display which the City of Sydney were delighted to have in the foyer of their library on Level 3 of Town Hall House during March.

Wendi Balbi, Volunteer Coordinator

OUR BOOKS REPAIRED

On 16-18 April, Camden held its Creative Craft Fair. Val Skinner, who does book repairs for Camden Municipal Library, demonstrated this craft, using books from Jessie Street National Women's Library as demonstration models. These 12 books were returned to us with a new lease of life. At her table, Val had put out 50 copies of JSNWL newsletters and 50 brochures. All but one of the newsletters were taken and about 30 of the brochures. The rest have been put in the Camden Municipal Library. We are most grateful to Val for doing this for us and for promoting the Library. Many women, she said, were keenly interested in JSNWL and its aims.

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN THE CRAFT OF BOOK REPAIR?

Val Skinner has offered to give a one-day training course in book repairs, at the Library, to anyone who would like to learn this craft and become a volunteer repairer for JSNWL.

Contact us on (02) 9265 9486.

A NEW INITIATIVE—SPECIAL DONOR CATEGORIES

BECOME A PRINCIPAL CONTRIBUTOR

Subscriptions and donations only partially cover the costs of running the Library and we are very grateful to the many members and friends who are able to make contributions to the Library over and above their annual membership subscription. This year we are instituting special categories for those who may wish to make more substantial contributions to indicate their support for JSNWL.

PRINCIPAL CONTRIBUTORS

DIAMOND	\$2000 and over
PLATINUM	\$1000-\$1999
GOLD	\$300-\$999
SILVER	\$50-\$299

Would you like to join the list of special donors for this year? A plaque in the Library will list the names and categories of all principal contributors, and the names of those who wish to be thus acknowledged will be published in each newsletter

The EDNA RYAN Awards

Edna Ryan was a shrewd political strategist whose warmth, wit, common sense and energy were inspirational. Thirty years ago she presented the now famous submission on the minimum wage to the National Wage Case. The EDNAs were established in 1998—an Awards night recognising feminist activities by women who are prepared to make their lives political.

Presentation of the 2004 EDNAs

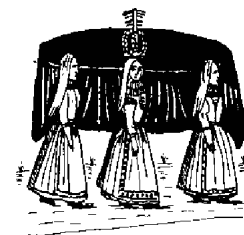
**Diethnes Restaurant
336 Pitt Street Sydney**

**Saturday 12 June from 5 - 7 pm
\$20, including Greek appetisers**

WEL's Annual Conference Dinner follows at 7.30 pm, cost \$40 for a Greek Banquet.

For Awards' nomination and booking forms contact:

WEL NSW, 66 Albion Street, Surry Hills, NSW 2010 phone/fax: 9212. 4374 email: welnsw@mail.comcen.com.au



More about Trotula

(see Feb 2004 newsletter, p. 10)

For the last 25 years, Monica H. Green has worked on the surviving medieval texts on women's health and has disentangled the complicated history of those generically labelled 'Trotula'. From Green's authoritative edition we learn that essentially three works have been amalgamated: *The Conditions of Women*, *Treatments of Women* and *Women's Cosmetics*. In their present version they derive from the medical school in the city of Salerno where there was probably a skilled female medical practitioner called Trota. Her expertise appears to have been in the areas of ophthalmology and gastrointestinal disorders, although it is not clear whether she is the author of any of the works included in the Trotula manuscripts. Many of the remedies in the Trotula, ultimately go back the Greeks, Hippocrates and Galen.

Monica H. Green (ed and trans), *The Trotula: A Medieval Compendium of Women's Medicine* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001)

*Sybil Jack, Board Member
Retired Assoc/Professor, History Dept
University of Sydney*

MONETARY DONATIONS

We are very grateful to the following people for their generous donations to the Library

Faith Bandler
Margaret Bettison
Marie Cavanagh
Christine Gibson
Theodora Hobbs
Sandy Killick
Josephine Krelle
Kathleen Lamoureux
Barbara Murphy
Jenni Neary
Rosa Needham
Helen O'Sullivan
Helen Thompson
Rosalind Wallis
Justice Margaret White

Fact File Writers Wanted

Do you enjoy researching and writing?
We are looking for volunteers to prepare short biographies of interesting and unusual women for our website.

Contact Jill Harris at the Library
(02) 9265 9486



BEQUESTS & ENDOWMENTS

Membership subscriptions and donations are not adequate to fully support our Library and its activities.

We need endowments and bequests to supplement our income.

JSNWL is a young and vigorous specialist Library with a collection unique in Australia. It is totally reliant on volunteers for its functioning and on membership subscriptions and donations for its running expenses. It receives no support from taxes or government contributions, except for an occasional grant or small amounts for special projects.

Would you like to make a contribution to the Library but are unable to do so at the moment? Then

Please remember us in your will.

MEMBERSHIP/VOLUNTEER FORM

Name(Ms/Mrs/Miss)

Address

..... Postcode

Tel (h) (w) Fax

Email (please print) Date/...../.....

- Member \$ 45 Concessional \$20 (unwaged/pensioner)
 Supporting member \$100 Life member \$500
 Organisation \$100 Student (conditions apply) \$5
 I wish to make a donation of \$ (Donations over \$2 are tax deductible)

I enclose a cheque/cash/money order for \$

OR Please charge \$ to my Bankcard Mastercard Visa

Card No. ----- Expiry date --/--

Signature

I was introduced to the Library by

AutoDebit An AutoDebit Authorisation saves you time and trouble and saves JSNWL time and money on processing your membership.

- I authorise JSNWL to charge this, and all future membership renewals as they fall due, to the credit card number given on this form.
 I authorise JSNWL to charge \$..... annually to the above credit card as a donation to the library

Signature

Volunteers Required

I would like to help with (tick where appropriate)

- Fact Files Oral history Tapestry project JSNWL functions Book reviews
 Newsletter mailout Transcribing tapes Processing archival material
 Reception work Staffing Library (Are you library skilled unskilled)

WOMEN'S RECORDS

Jessie Street National Women's Library wishes to contact women with archival material of interest to other women.

Name(Ms/Mrs/Miss)

Address

..... Postcode

Tel (h) (w) Fax

Email (please print)

Do you hold records of an organisation or association (if so please name)

- personal papers other (please specify)

Please return forms to

Jessie Street National Women's Library GPO Box 2656 Sydney NSW 2001

Jessie Street National Women's Library
GPO Box 2656 Sydney NSW 2001

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To keep women's words, women's works, alive and powerful — Ursula Le Guin