

NEWSLETTER

JESSIE STREET NATIONAL WOMEN'S LIBRARY

Vol 14 No 4
November 2003

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ANNUAL PARLIAMENTARY LUNCHEON

On Monday 22nd September 2003, Jane Waddell, Vice Chair, welcomed 235 guests to the 9th Annual Parliamentary Luncheon. It was an occasion for friends and members to meet again and enjoy each other's company and to welcome first-timers. It was heart-warming to see so many students representing their schools: Abbotsleigh, Ascham, Meriden, Pymble Ladies College, McKellar Girls High School and Wenona School.

Shirley Jones, introduced by Board member Virginia Gordon, delighted her audience with her well-researched talk entitled 'Women's Voice'. Faith Bandler who was our guest speaker, had chosen as her subject, 'Jessie Street for Peace', but said at the beginning of her talk that, when considering Jessie and her career she had felt it was

Photograph not available

Faith Bandler with three students from McKellar Girls High School and Lara Rutley, the Aboriginal Education Assistant

impossible to talk on just that one aspect of her life and work. Faith spoke of the many and varied campaigns Jessie instigated and undertook, but said that she felt the most important campaign she instigated was the one that led to the 1967 referendum. Jessie, who kept a watchful eye out for talent among women, was strongly of the opinion that Faith could help find a better deal for Aboriginals. She suggested that Faith and co-workers mount a petition to ask the Federal Government to change the constitution and remove discriminatory legislation. This, of course, required a

referendum. With Jessie's help, Faith and her co-workers formed a small group and circulated the petition for 10 years. Faith said she was pleased that Jessie had lived to see the referendum passed with an overwhelming 90.2% 'Yes' vote.

Faith's talk was a direct link with the past as, through her reminiscences, one was aware of the drive and motivation that Jessie Street brought to all her undertakings and how those around her

benefited from her thinking. Jessie Street was both an instigator and a catalyst to many of the social reforms of her day and she challenged the existing mores. In sharing these historical facts with the audience, Faith created a magical moment for us all and it was all the more poignant as this was Faith's last address before

retiring from the public arena.

JSNWL is indeed indebted to co-hosts the Hon. Dr Meredith Burgmann MLC and the Hon. Patricia Forsythe MLC for their continued support and we all truly appreciate the ambience that the Parliamentary venue lends to this important event in the JSNWL calendar.

Important also were the many volunteers who helped on this occasion. The function would not be the enjoyable and well-organised event it is without their

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JSNWL FUNCTIONS

Lunch-Hour Talks, 2003-2004

Venue The Lady Mayoress' Rooms, 2nd Floor, Town Hall

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

Entry \$15 (non-members) \$13 (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

November Talk — Thursday 20th

Ruth Wilson — *In Another Person's Skin*

Ruth has been training teachers, and students of all ages, to undertake oral history projects in the classroom. A group of students interviewed child survivors of the holocaust. Ruth shows a video demonstrating the impact of these interviews on the students involved.

2004 PROGRAM

February Talk — Thursday 19th

Kristin Williamson — *Women on the Rocks' - a tale of two convicts*

Kristin Williamson has written for film and TV and is a bestselling author. She talks about her latest book *Women on the Rocks*, set in Australia and New Zealand in the mid-1880s, which tells the tale of two women on the edge, making what they can of a strange new world.

March Talk — Thursday 18th

June Young — *Tyson's Outback: A Pioneer Pastoralist*

June Young is a painter and writer, who became fascinated by the story of James Tyson. Born to a convict mother and free settler father, he rose to be a millionaire pastoralist and philanthropist. June journeyed over 20,000 km to paint the homesteads he had owned and the surrounding landscapes.

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 Queen Victoria Building,
George St, York St and Druitt St



ESSAY PRIZE 2003

We are very disappointed to have to announce that this year we are not making an award in the Essay Prize competition. After much consideration, the judges decided that the entries received were not of a high enough standard to warrant the awarding of the prize.

We thank those who contributed and look forward to making an award for the 2004 competition.

significant contribution. Special thanks go to Cathy Sanderson, Judy Ashenden and Marjorie Tate for their contribution during the lead up to this event.

The winning tickets for the raffle and the Lucky Door prizes were drawn by students.

Report by Wendi Balbi

RAFFLE WINNERS

First Prize

Annette Griggs (Ticket 3267)
(Original framed painting by Max Mannix, donated by the artist)

Second Prize

Leanne Maslen (Ticket 4560)
(18 carat gold drop earrings, donated by House of Cerrone, Castlereagh Street, Sydney)

Third Prize

Elizabeth Mooney (Ticket 1860)
(\$200 worth of book tokens, redeemable at Angus & Robertson)

Lucky Door Prizes were won by
Janice Tamba and Carolyn Odgers

Proceeds of the Luncheon

Members will be pleased to know that the Luncheon was an outstanding success as a fundraiser. This year it netted the Library a total profit of over \$16,000, some \$6200 of which was proceeds from the raffle.

We look forward to another successful fundraising Luncheon in 2004.

Special Thanks

We wish to thank all those whose help makes this function such an outstanding success. First, special thanks to our army of volunteers who nobly help each year and ensure that the event runs smoothly.

Our grateful thanks also to **Jan Wood**, who comes each year to make a video of the event for our archives.

Anita Pollard was unable to be present this year to take photographs. Our thanks to **Nik Trevallyn-Jones**, who helped out by taking both film and digital photos.

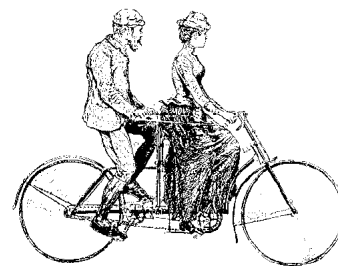


NEW MEMBERS

A warm welcome to all our new members

Jenny Bowling
Robyn Campbell
Joyce Clarke
Lia Chinnery
Gabrielle Curtin
Vivien Eime
Michele Ferguson
Wendy Fothergill
Vivien Freeman
Elisabeth Grace
Eliza Griffiths
Rosemary Harvey
Alison Hodgson
Leone Huntsman
Barbara Le Maistre
Vanessa McGlynn
Liz Maconachie
Leanne Maslen
Janet Morrissey
Susan Roberts
Ruth Robinson
Annie Tennant
Maggie Wildblood
Lola M. Woodward
Nonelle Woolley
Toora Women's Inc. (ACT)

A special welcome to the 14 members who attended the Parliamentary Luncheon in September and joined. Two of these new members are students, one from PLC and the other from Abbotsleigh. We also welcome those who have been inspired to become members through attending the lunch-hour talks in Sydney and Canberra.



LIBRARY MATTERS



THE SPACE SITUATION

We were hoping to be able to report further developments with our space situation, but there have as yet been no decisions made. Representatives from Jessie Street National Women's Library met with two representatives from Council to discuss what would be involved in any move on our part and what Council could do for us as far as a fitout was concerned. A proposal from the Council representatives is being prepared and will be forwarded to the General Manager.

VOLUNTEER NEWS

The face of any volunteer force is always in a state of flux. Over the last few months many of the regular JSNWL volunteers have been on leave for a variety of reasons: to care for a family member; to write a book; to travel overseas; or to unearth the delights of travel around Australia, with or without a caravan. Add to this the natural attrition caused by volunteers entering the workforce or just moving on and suddenly there was a need for replacements.

The Helpdesk column in the *Sydney Morning Herald* kindly ran an advertisement for us. As a result, I am delighted to welcome six new volunteers to the JSNWL team: **Dr Barbara Le Maistre** (Library Manager), **Vivien Eime** (secretariat), **Wendy Fothergill** (reception and assistant treasurer), **Alison Hodgson** (reception and computers), **Janet Morrissey** (education consultant), and **Ruth Robinson** (reception and librarian).

The next few months will be an interesting time with a new mix of skills and energy, that will hopefully provide the momentum and opportunity for further achievements for the JSNWL.

Wendi Balbi
Volunteer Co-ordinator



LIBRARY NEWS

Updating our Computers

We have recently purchased several new computers. We have replaced our archives computer, which was more than three years old, and installed Windows XP. With a CD writer and DVD player as well, it is up-to-the-moment and very versatile, and with its large memory, it will enable us to cope with any big new projects.

We have also replaced our two older computers by fitting out the former archives computer, which can now carry out their tasks. The upgraded archives computer has Microsoft Office on it and would be suitable for MYOB, as well as being our second Athena terminal. Its operating system is also Windows XP. Our three computers are now compatible and multipurpose.

What Users are Looking for in the Library

A recent glance at our Users' Survey showed us the variety of material users were counting on us to supply. Most of the researchers were doing either school or university projects, but the occasional reader came in seeking material on a subject they were reading for personal interest.

These are a few of the subjects requested over the last few weeks

- Women's magazines
- Spirituality
- Early 20th century contraception in Australia
- History of contraception in Australia
- Nursing and the law
- Paid maternity leave
- 19th century women writers
- Louisa Atkinson
- Gender and language
- The painter, Grace Cossington-Smith

Library Visit

Eleven members of the Broken Bay Secondary Teacher Librarians' Association visited the Library on 28 August. They were given short talks about the history of the Library, its archives collection, and the Library's use of the Athena system for cataloguing etc. The group was thrilled with JSNWL's hospitality and this sharing of knowledge and expertise. In writing to thank us they made a donation of \$250.00.

ARCHIVES NEWS

Community Heritage Grant

We are very pleased to announce that our application for a Community Heritage Grant from the National Library of Australia has been successful. The grant of \$3000 will be used for a preservation assessment. This will involve a professional survey of the current condition of our photographic and poster collection; it will give us an accurate description of the condition of the collection and a prioritised list of recommendations for improving the condition of the material.

Beverley Sodbinow, our archivist, will presented with the grant by the Minister for the Arts and Sport, the Hon. Rod Kemp MP, at a ceremony at the National Library in Canberra on 12 November.

We thank Beverley for the immense amount of time and the hard and very efficient work she put into the application and are proud of its success.

Pine Gap Reunion

On 11 November JSNWL will participate in the Pine Gap Reunion, organised by Maureen King and to be held at the theatre in Parliament House in Sydney. JSNWL holds a lot of Pine Gap material as part of the Canberra Women's Archives. At the Reunion, we will be displaying ten collages, called 'Women for Survival', compiled by the women who attended the Pine Gap Peace Camp in 1983. We hope that having the collages on display will enable women who had attended the Peace Camp to identify participants in the photographs. We will also be displaying banners, some books and badges and other relevant memorabilia.

Recent Acquisition

We recently acquired the papers of Women-Church, a group which has now disbanded. It published *Women-Church*, an Australian journal of feminist studies in religion, of which the Library holds a complete set. Beverley reports that the organisation's papers are in excellent order which will simplify the work needed on them

AUGUST LUNCH-HOUR TALK
SPEAKER: DR ANNE WHITEHEAD
“Bluestocking in Patagonia”

On 28 August, Anne Whitehead gave us a fascinating account of the poet Mary Gilmore’s years in South America. Here is an edited rendering of her talk.

In 1944, when William Dobell painted his famous portrait of her, Mary Gilmore was a famous writer and a campaigner for countless social causes, and a great champion for Aboriginal rights long before that cause was taken up by the wider left. She was 97 when she died in 1962 and was honoured with a state funeral.

Earlier in her life, the young Mary came under the influence of William Lane, an English social visionary. She adopted the racism of the Labor movement and the even more virulent racism of Lane. After the failure of the great shearer’s strike of 1891, Lane dreamed of establishing a socialist commune, a working man’s paradise in South America. One of the descendants of the Paraguay experiment, Marion Fisher, is here today. Marion is the granddaughter of a New Zealander, Jack Black, a bush worker and shearer who followed William Lane to Paraguay and became a good friend of Mary and her husband.

My book, *Bluestocking in Patagonia*, focuses on why Mary went to Paraguay and her experiences there, especially in Patagonia (which is a kind of geographical invention between Argentina and Chile. So you have Chilean Patagonia and Argentine Patagonia). This book deals particularly with Mary’s final two years in Argentina. In a sense, they are the lost years in Mary’s life. She published almost nothing from this time, but I was lucky enough to find a wonderful hoard of her writings in the Mitchell Library and in the National Library. So when I went to Patagonia, I was able to go to the places she writes about and to the little houses she lived in. And I argue in the book that these two years in Argentina changed her and the racist ideas she had adopted from Lane. The Mary who came back to Australia became one of the early European campaigners for Aboriginal rights and went on to be the great humanitarian that she was.

When she met Lane in 1892, Mary was a schoolteacher in Sydney, a tall, young

eccentric-looking woman with her auburn hair chopped extremely short. She was deeply impressed by Lane who was recruiting for his dream of a socialist commune in Paraguay, where there would be no bosses — except himself, as it turned out. Mary loved people with a good brain and William Lane was a remarkable writer and a charismatic figure. He was happily married; there is no suggestion there was any sexual involvement between them. She joined Lane’s New Australia Movement and after school would head into their city office and help edit their journal. It was here she met a tall, handsome, swashbuckling Queensland shearer called David Russell Stevenson. Like a lot of bushmen at that time, Stevenson was self-educated and used to carry Shakespeare in his saddlebag. Mary became absolutely infatuated with him. At the same time Henry Lawson was absolutely infatuated with her and begged her to marry him and come with him to Western Australia. But once she’d met Stevenson, poor Henry, who was two years younger than Mary and a puny specimen compared to Stevenson, was forgotten, except as a wonderful friend who she could talk to about writing.

When the colonists sailed off in 1893, Mary couldn’t go because single women weren’t wanted until the colony was established. The one single woman taken, a Queensland nurse called Clara Jones, was needed because the NSW government said they couldn’t go without a nursing sister on board. Clara and Stevenson fell in love on the voyage. Lane, who put a stop to their flirtation, told her Stevenson was engaged to Mary. Thinking Stevenson had lied to her Clara married the first man to come along.

Before Mary arrived, the first colony had broken up because of Lane’s dictatorial behaviour and Lane had formed a second colony over 100 km away. Because the schoolteacher had remained with the original mob, Lane wrote to Mary and begged her to come out. She had just turned thirty, the age at which she believed she would become an old maid, a future she devoutly feared. So she packed up, putting in eight yards of white muslin suitable for a wedding dress, and at the

Photograph not available

Anne Whitehead (left) with Marion Fisher, a descendant of one of the original Paraguay community

end of 1895 off she went. First of all a little sailing ship to New Zealand, then a tramp steamer and the perilous voyage around Cape Horn up the east coast of the continent to Montevideo. From there she had to negotiate her way without any Spanish onto a paddle steamer and travel 1600 km up the great rivers to the capital of Paraguay. From there she took a steam train and got off at a siding. She had expected Stevenson to meet her but it was Lane’s brother who met her for the thirty-mile ride to the rough little colony, just thatch huts and a jungle clearing. They had a welcome dance for Mary that night and Stevenson didn’t dance with her once. Humiliated and embarrassed Mary wrote to her old swain Henry Lawson saying, ‘Why don’t you come over after all?’ But Henry had just married and didn’t respond.

Mary went to the colony not just for love, but for its ideals on gender equality. What she didn’t realise was the colony had scrapped the clause about gender equality. As a single woman, she was in a pretty embarrassing situation. Before long she was reading to a man called William Gilmore who was in the colony hospital. He was nearly illiterate, but he was a good, kind, handsome man and before long an engagement was announced. I speculate that Mary may have prodded Gilmore towards a proposal because he was so shy, and although not in love with him at that time, I think she did fall in love within the marriage. I think their physical relationship turned out to be a wonderful excitement for Mary. There is a rash of quite sensual poems that she writes at that time.

Mary had a baby, Billy, the year after she married. In 1899, William Lane, with his family, walked out of the

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OCTOBER LUNCH-HOUR TALK

SPEAKER: SHIRLEY JONES

“In Our Collection: Readings and Writings”

On 23 October, Shirley Jones gave a talk on the collection of books held in the Jessie Street National Women’s Library. There were about 30 books from the collection on display, some of which Shirley read extracts from.

JSNWL is a library specialising in books about women, the criterion being ‘about’ women, not necessarily ‘by’ women. It contains two collections, the 9000 volume research collection that is intended to be permanent and the loan collection which members can borrow from. The books fall into two categories: fiction, in which the emphasis is on Australian women writers; and non-fiction, which covers all issues relevant to women, such as health, religion, law, education, work, etc. This collection is not confined to Australian writers.

In the fiction section we have many women writing from the early days of settlement. These include authors like Catherine Helen Spence, Tasma, Rosa Praed and Ethel Turner. Among these books are many first editions. The later period includes the writers such as Miles Franklin, Katharine Susannah Prichard, Dymphna Cusack, Florence James and many others. Jessie Street knew most of these writers and when she founded the journal called the *Australian Women’s Digest* she invited Miles Franklin, Marjorie Barnard and Eleanor Dark, among others to join the editorial board. You will find articles by Katharine Susannah Prichard and Miles Franklin in different issues of the journal. Among the modern writers we have authors such as Kate Grenville, Sue Woolfe, Barbara Hanrahan and Drusilla Modjeska. An unusual novel is one by Phyllis Somerville, called *Not Only in Stone*. This won a prize in Adelaide in and our copy was donated by Caroline Hewson, who is Phyllis’ granddaughter. She had to ask around the family to find a copy. There are not many around, so we are lucky to have this. Among the poets whose books we hold are Judith Wright and Kath Walker, both of whom were patrons of the Library in their time. Australian women playwrights are not numerous and we need to expand our collection. We have plays by Dorothy Hewett, Betty Roland, Dymphna Cusack and others. Unfortunately we do not have any of Oriel Gray’s plays, but we do have her autobiography *Exit*

Left. Oriel died a few months ago. All Australians have heard of Ray Lawler and *The Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, which won first prize in the Playwright’s Advisory Board 1955 competition and has since become famous both here and abroad. What is not widely known is that this play actually shared first prize with Oriel Gray’s play *The Torrents* which hardly anyone has heard of. [Shirley here read a section from Miles Franklin’s novel *Up the Country*].

I want to move now to the non-fiction holdings and here I have time to talk about only a few of the many categories the Library contains. The first one I have chosen is a subject which affects us all as women and that is childbirth. Very few women have written about the actual process of giving birth, partly because in earlier centuries few women were educated and fewer still wrote. The book *The Weaker Vessel* by Antonia Fraser is a compendium of women’s lives in 17th century England in all their different aspects. In this book Antonia does bring in the subject of childbirth, of contraception, and quotes from women writing about their numerous childbirths and the grief they felt when so many of their children died young in an age when you were not supposed to grieve for such deaths. [Shirley read some sections from this book]

Turning now to the subject of religion and the many learned women who ran convents in various countries in Europe. There are many abbesses whose names crop up in earlier centuries. Perhaps the best-known of these is Hildegard of Bingen, a 12th century mystic and visionary who was political adviser to Henri II, Frederick Barbarossa and the Pope. She was distinguished in medicine, natural history and theology and was also a gifted musician and painter. Of interest also is a movement called the Beguines, which goes almost completely unrecorded in history books. It lasted 200 years, through the 13th and 14th centuries. These communities of women were found mainly in Belgium and the northern areas of France and Germany and were accountable only to the Pope. They bought houses, but these were unlike convents in that women could move freely in and out of them. The Beguines nursed the sick, ran

schools for young women and taught them crafts such as spinning by which they could earn their living. The movement finally dissolved when male church leaders persuaded the Pope that the women should live permanently in Beguinages.

[Shirley showed a book of paintings by Hildegard of Bingen and one called *Building Feminist Theory*, which contains a short essay on the Beguines.]

We have quite a number of books by women pioneers from the time in which Australia was settled. There are collections of their writings in the form of letters to family in England and diaries they kept. One book *No Place for a Nervous Lady* by Lucy Frost is a collection of such writings. One section of the book contains an account by Sarah Davenport, a working-class woman, who emigrated with her husband and five children from Manchester. They set sail on 7 October, 1841. The ship struck a sandbank not long after leaving harbour but fortunately everyone was rescued before it broke up. The family went back to Manchester and had a second attempt at emigrating, leaving on 27 October. They landed safely in Sydney on 13 February 1842. [Shirley read Sarah’s account of life aboard ship and the troubles the family had settling in Sydney.]

I see that I have overstepped my time limit, so I shall have to leave things at this point.

A Thank-You

The Library would like to thank all those volunteers who help organise and run the monthly Lunch-hour Talks. Elizabeth Mooney contacts prospective speakers and arranges the program for the year. Other volunteers organise the photocopying and distribution of flyers, the catering (often making items themselves), and the donation of raffle prizes. At the actual function, the volunteers take on all the tasks that make these functions run smoothly. They show a great deal of commitment.

Our thanks then to our main helpers during the year: Alison Storey, Jenny Heidtman, Anne Wright, Kay Godfrey, and Marie Cavanagh. Thanks too, to Beverley Sodbinow for providing sandwiches and to Wendi Balbi for donating raffle prizes and to the many others who have helped out at the occasional talk when called upon.

SEPTEMBER LUNCH-TIME TALK

SPEAKER: ELENA ROSENMAN

“The Herstory of the Toora Single Women’s Shelter”

The September lunch-time talk was very well attended and we were pleased to have many of the workers from Toora Single Women’s Shelter with us on the day. Elena Rosenman was recently commissioned to write the herstory of the shelter for its 20th birthday celebration. In that 20 years Toora has offered services to more than 5000 women. Her talk focused on the politics, personalities and splits that shaped the shelter and the organisation as it stands today.

Elena focused broadly on the women’s movement in the early 70s, the first refuge in Sydney and how the idea was transferred to Canberra. Elena’s extensive interviewing and long days in Toora’s archives ‘shed’ (soon to be deposited with Jessie Street National Women’s Library) uncovered many changes in the service including the organisational restructure that saw the end of the Collective, its expansion into other services and their role in broader social change.

Most importantly Elena commented on the role of the refuge as an important centre for gathering information on, and providing a feminist analysis of, the needs and problems facing single women in crisis in Canberra. The idea of the personal as political allowed the refuge to gather important and other-

wise untapped information on the links between issues such as sexual assault, domestic violence, homelessness, unemployment and drug use.

Elena also spoke with a real sense of celebration and community that meant everyone that attended the talk left with tears in their eyes and plenty to think about.

*Report by Wendy Sanderson
Board Member, ACT*

To obtain a transcript of this talk or previous talks, please contact Jessie Street National Women’s Library. Transcripts cost \$20 (incl. postage).

We Record our Thanks

The lunch-time talks have been organised by Wendy Sanderson. The Library wishes to thank her and the following volunteers who have all made these functions such a success during the year.

Kristin Blume
Sophie Chessell
Susan Chessell
Margaret O’Brien
Narelle Mills

CELEBRATION EVENT

**Celebrating 100 Years since
Women across Australia went to
the Polling Booths for the First
Time**

**Tuesday 16 December, 2003,
at 1 pm
ACT Legislative Assembly
Reception Room**

The celebration of this event is a timely reminder of the importance of inclusiveness, of how much women have accomplished and how much work there is still to be done to achieve the important goals of equity and social justice.

Come along and have a good time, celebrate and contribute to women’s history. The event will include prominent speakers, performances and refreshments.

This is a Jessie Street National Women’s Library, Older Women’s Network (ACT) and National Foundation of Australian Women joint event.

As part of the celebration the organisers are planning to put together a booklet in which women express their views and record their memories related to this event.

For further information please contact Wendy on 6249 7537 or email her on wendyandel@netspeed.com.au

AUSTRALIAN WOMEN OF THE PRESS, 1803-2003

To commemorate two hundred years of the print media in Australia and to celebrate Women’s History Week 2003, JSNWL mounted a display at the entrance to the City of Sydney Library in Town Hall House from 13-20 September. This was a JSNWL community event, where fifteen volunteers contributed their skills by researching, editing, painting and formatting.

Based on material held in the library there were on display over 30 short biographies; 25 books and serials; photos; headlines of areas now covered by women journalists; a tree of names where each leaf represented a woman journalist; a time-line and an eye-catching poster to attract the passer-by. There were some formidable women amongst the nineteenth-century journalists and life was not easy for them in this field. Among the quotations was a delightful one from Mary Gilmore, ‘Men have sight, women have insight’.

This display now joins other displays in our collection that may be borrowed by schools and other interested organisations.

Photograph not available

*On display : some of the items from Jessie Street
National Women’s Library*

Report by Wendi Balbi

THE LOAN COLLECTION

Each newsletter from now on will contain a column about books in the Loan Collection, with brief information about the items mentioned. Remember this collection is there for you, as members, to use. You can call in at the Library and borrow from this collection, or you can ring us or write to ask for any particular book you would like to have sent you on loan.

Wacvie by Faith Bandler

Wacvie Mussingkon was Faith Bandler's father. He was kidnapped from his village in the New Hebrides and sold as a slave in Mackay, Queensland, where he worked on the sugar plantations until he escaped in 1897. Faith went to the New Hebrides in 1974 to learn about his life. This is a novel in which the characters are composites of real people, but the main events are true.

The Penguin Book of Australian Women Poets edited by Susan Hampton & Kate Llewellyn

This anthology represents 89 Australian women poets, ranging from the tribal Aboriginal singers, to immigrant women, to the well-known poets of today.

The Albatross Muff by Barbara Hanrahan

In this novel an intensely individual evocation of Victorian childhood merges with a Dickensian fairy story which becomes a feverish nightmare.

Janet Holmes à Court, by Patricia Edgar

This biography contains the details of Janet's life from her business life as chairman of Haytesbury to the relationship with her children. A strong determined woman.

North Coast Women: A history to 1939 by Baiba Berzins

This book deals with over a century of rapid change in all areas of the North Coast. It is a history woven from the experiences of women from all walks of life.

Women on Men by Margot Hilton

Men take up a lot of room in women's lives and women know a lot about the men they've loved, left and lamented. Interviews with 12 women, including Dorothy Hewett, Wendy Harmer, Debbie Spillane and Robyn Archer.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2004

The AGM will be held on Saturday 27 March, 2004, at 10 am in the Southern Function Room, Town Hall House, 456 Kent Street, Sydney.

We are calling now for any notices of motion that members may wish to have put at the AGM. These must be given in writing and reach the Secretary by Friday 12 February 2004.

Note: The rules for AGM procedures are strict. Amendments from the floor cannot be accepted.

Proposed Amendments to the Constitution

The following motions will be put to the meeting:

1. That Part 3, Section 5c of the Constitution be changed to include (viii) Student Membership

This will apply to secondary and tertiary students up to the age of 25. Student members will receive one issue of the newsletter per year.

2. That Part 3, Section 5c (iii) of the Constitution be changed to read 'Supporting Membership'.

The term 'Donor Membership' will no longer be used.

NEWS OF MEMBERS

To All Members — Please keep these items coming in. They are all welcome and I know a great many members look forward to the column.

On 3 September, **Christine Lees** and her husband were about 40 km out of Perth on a three-lane highway when they were mowed down by a road train! Christine writes:

When we turned a bend we saw two huge oversize vehicles crawling along towards us with frustrated cars behind. We pulled over to the side of the road and then drove onto the gravel verge. A road train ran into the car behind us, pushing it into the path of an oncoming car. Both slewed across the road. The road train then slammed into the back of our caravan. Our 4-wheel drive rolled over twice and we were left hanging upside down, saved by our seatbelts. Amazingly we were unhurt, but the caravan was completely demolished.

Christine is now back in Sydney, spending her time getting over the trauma of the accident and dealing with insurance claims.

Elizabeth Mooney is back from a holiday in Madagascar, one of a group of 12 well-travelled folk, aged from 31 to 82. They did both day and night tours, visiting six of the well-run national parks

in the south and were astounded by the incredible, but unfortunately endangered, fauna. The constant clearing of rainforests is mainly responsible. About 50 species of lemurs still survive. The guide knew all the species and could call them. 'To hear the exciting calls returned round the forest was amazing,' said Elizabeth. In Fort Dauphin they experienced two days of fireworks, music and general flag-waving as the country celebrated its independence from France.

Marie Muir usually acts as MC at the Annual Luncheon, but was unable to do so this year. She was called upon suddenly to fly to Perth to look after her granddaughter.



MONETARY DONATIONS

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

Baiba Berzins
Lady Black
Kristin Blume
Marie Breen
Prudence Cancian
Gabriel Curtin
Hon. Elizabeth Evatt
Bridget McKern
Lucie Manifold
Madeline Newton
Barbara O'Connor
Margot Simington
Helen Thompson
Lynda Wong
Broken Bay Secondary Teacher
Librarians' Association

TALK BY OUR AMBASSADOR

On the evening of 8 October at the Neighbourhood Centre in Kirribilli, I spoke to the women's group known as Constructive Women. It is good that women use the word 'constructive' in such a constructive way, since we are conditioned to think of it as referring to men and their work. The group includes women architects and builders and others involved in the construction industries.

The women were very interested in the work and scope of the Library and particularly in the life of Jessie Street. As with most groups, some had not heard of her and thought the name referred to a place rather than a person.

The lunch-hour talks and the occasional Saturday talks brought forth comments of interest, especially in the range of subjects and the speakers.

Marie Muir
JSWNL Ambassador

NOTES & QUOTES

Here lies Mary, the wife of John Ford
We hope her soul is gone to the Lord:
But if for Hell she has chang'd this
life
She had better be there than be John
Ford's wife.

Epitaph at Potterne, in Wiltshire, UK

BOARD MEMBERS

WENDY SANDERSON

Our New Member on the Board

During the year Virginia Gordon resigned from the Board through press of work. Virginia, who runs her own consultancy business, still retains an interest in the Library and was MC at the Parliamentary Luncheon this year.

In her place, we welcome **Wendy Sanderson** to the Board, as our member in Canberra.

Wendy is a young woman who has been involved with the Library for several years, initially in Sydney and now predominantly in Canberra. She is currently running the Canberra Lunch hour talks and has grand plans for Canberra members.

Wendy is studying for her honours in English at the Australian National University and is writing her thesis on the representation of Indigenous women in the First Fleet texts, Eleanor Dark's *A Timeless Land* and Tracey Moffatt's films. The absence of women's voices from history and the ongoing political relevance of this are the major focus of her studies and the foundation of her interest in the Library. She also works as the Publications Officer for Early Childhood Australia.

OLIVE BRISCOE

Olive joined the Board in March 2003.

Olive has a Master of Educational Administration, a Diploma of Teaching and is an Associate fellow of the Australian Institute of Management.

From 1980-1990 Olive was manager with Schinn Restorations, responsible for marketing and customer services and for training and development of senior managers in-house. She moved into the educational field in 1990 as Metropolitan Literacy Coordinator with the NSW Board of Adult and Community Education. In 1992 Olive was Language and Literacy Manager, statewide, for the Department of Industrial Relations, Employment Training & Further Education and between 1995 and 1999 held positions with the Australian Centre for Languages Pty Ltd (ACL) where she was responsible for setting up seven Adult Migrant English Program centres in NSW, and establishing the ACL/Vietnam National University Centre in Ho Chi Minh City.

Olive now runs her own business development consultancy. She has an abiding interest in women's education, and in mentoring women to help them advance in their areas of interest.

DID YOU KNOW THAT ...?

A classic example of the way patriarchal rules could sometimes work to the advantage of women, not against them, is provided by the fine tradition of Japanese women's writing. At the Emperor's court only men were permitted to use the scholarly language of Chinese: women were restricted to their own Japanese vernacular, on pain of mockery, disgrace or punishment. The 'beautiful irony' of this has not escaped later commentators: 'Dozens of women wrote brilliant literature that is still read today, while the men, whose "superior" Chinese produced a stilted and unnatural literature, are read only for historical information.' For it was in her own tongue that Lady Murasaki wrote the world's first novel and still one of its greatest, *The Tale of Genji*, at the beginning of the eleventh century, a golden age of female creativity in Japan.

Information found in *The Women's History of the World* by Rosalind Miles



'It's been on the best seller list for ages! I'm waiting 'til it comes out in paperback.'

MEMBERS' COMMENTS ON THE NEWSLETTER

I want to thank all of you who have written in or rung in or emailed to say how much you enjoy reading the newsletter. These have included members from Sydney and from rural areas, as well as a reader, Anne Haskell, from Summit, New Jersey in the USA. Everyone who comments, including Anne, appears to enjoy reading the edited versions of our lunch-hour talks. It is pleasing to know this, as volunteers put a lot of time into transcribing and editing the talks just so that those who can't come to the luncheons will at least be able to enjoy them secondhand. We do have marvellous speakers, and volunteer Elizabeth Mooney has lined up nine wonderful women to speak at the 2004 lunch-hour talks.

We'd like to hear comments from other readers. Let us know what you find interesting about the newsletter, and any other sorts of items you would like to see included. - Ed.

LUNCH-HOUR TALKS TRANSCRIPTIONS FOR SALE

Copies of the tapes of lunch-hour talks, both the Sydney and Canberra ones, are available. The costs are \$20 for the transcription and \$5 for a copy of the taped recording. Add \$1 for post and packaging.

Send a cheque or credit card information to the Library, along with your name and address. There will, understandably, be a slight wait for the more recent talks. Transcribing is time-consuming. We thank Anne Johnson, our volunteer transcriber, who comes into the Library once a week to work on the tapes.

JESSIE STREET — REVISED AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Members will be pleased to know that the new edition of Jessie Street's autobiography is nearing completion. *Truth or Repose*, published in 1966, has long been out of print. The book was originally written under difficulty, when Jessie was already experiencing the symptoms of the illness from which she died in 1970.

Jessie's family commissioned Dr Lenore Coltheart to produce this revised edition so that Jessie's account of her extraordinary life would be widely accessible. The new version does full justice to Jessie herself and the importance of her life's work.

It is planned to launch the book in Sydney on International Women's Day in March 2004. We know that this work is eagerly awaited.

There will be more news for you in the February newsletter next year.



*Good God it's true!
Men ARE from Mars!*

SUZANNE BELLAMY — 9th ANNUAL STUDIO VISIT

Join JSNWL member Suzanne Bellamy, at her Open Studio Workshops
For sale are Suzanne's 'elementals' — clay, print, fabrics and canvas

Friday 21 November to Sunday 23 November
10 am to 6 pm daily

Mongarlowe Studio Workshops
12 km east of Braidwood

Take the King's Highway, turn left at Northangera Road
and follow the signs for 1.5 km.

It's a great event.

Walk by the creek, picnic, and the teapot's always full.

Functions Other Women's Organisations

Women into Politics

Join WiP in celebrating the
80th Birthday of Joan Bielski, AM
at the Annual Dinner
Friday 28 November
Women's College, Carillon Avenue
6.30 for 7 pm
Wendy McCarthy, AO presides.

For further information ring 9906 5945

WAIG

Women's Action and Information Group, Lane Cove

Discussion Group, Meeting House
25 Stokes Street, Lane Cove
10 am to 12 noon, \$6
To book, ring 9427 1841

24 November — Cate Turner, a long-time member of the Older Women's Network (OWN) talks about the organisation, which promotes the rights, dignity and wellbeing of older women.

MERCHANDISE FOR SALE

Our Range of Christmas Presents

Want something different to give as Christmas presents this year? Choose from the JSNWL range of merchandise. We now have a new consignment of our very sturdy, very popular Library bags, thanks to Robin Porter, who both screen-prints and sews the bags for us. We also have Library teatowels and copies of the short biography of Jessie Street by Heather Radi.

Prices at the Library

Library bags \$5
Teatowels \$7
Jessie Street biography \$5

Please add \$1 extra for post and packaging. Send your order with payment to :

*Merchandise, Jessie Street National
Women's Library, GPO Box 2656,
Sydney, NSW 2001.*

SATURDAY AFTERNOON TALK

QUILTING: FROM BED COVER TO COLLECTORS ITEM

colony in protest at infringements against the various rules. Mary and her husband wanted to leave too and return to Australia, but they had absolutely no money. Will, however, was a shearer and Australians and New Zealanders, were regarded as very fast shearers in the predominantly British-owned sheep country of Patagonia. Will went for a season leaving Mary and their two-year old son in the colony. This was not a good time in her life. Her letters are those of a very grumpy and unpopular woman. Before long she walked out and stayed in the little town of Villa Rica. Will came back to get her, and they went by paddle steamer in August 1900 to Argentina. Will got his first job thanks to Marion Fisher's grandfather, Jack Black, on a sheep property. Mary stayed on for three months at a Salvation Army hostel in a slum suburb in Buenos Aires.

Finally Will travelled south ending up at the wretched little town of Rio Gallegos where he worked on a sheep property owned by an English family who took Mary on as governess for their daughter. She spent a happy eight months there and, being an egalitarian Australian, she befriended the workmen, including Jose, a peon of 12, who had come in search of work. He had no warm clothes and it was the beginning of the Patagonian winter when the temperature can go to thirty degrees below freezing, and the winds reach 80 km an hour. (Mary said the winds could make a woman in skirts airborne.) She took pity on Jose, persuaded Will to get him some warm clothes and she gave him ointment for his chapped hands. The boss, Herbert Felton, saw this and in the middle of a blizzard he kicked Jose off the property. Will, urged by Mary to go after him, found his little dead body in a snowdrift. Felton told them to bury the body behind the shearing shed. The death wasn't to be reported. But somehow news leaked out and the body had to be dug up and taken to the coroner.

Felton, who thought Mary was responsible for the situation, abruptly evicted her from the property. Gilmore wasn't chucked off; he was too good a shearer. In the middle of winter Mary and young Billy spent the next six months in the town, where Mary applied herself to the dictionary, learned some Spanish and survived by giving English lessons. It was incredibly hard and her letters to Will make painful reading.

I think those last two years were an incredible turning point in Mary's life,

On 1 November, enthusiastic quilters and interested non-quilters attended the afternoon function in the Marconi Room in Town Hall House. There were four speakers, Margaret Rolfe AO, Val Nadin, Margaret Wright and Sheila Bruhn.

The first speaker was Margaret Rolfe, who had come from Canberra specially for this event. Margaret was awarded an AO in 2001 for her services to the decorative arts, particularly as an authority on the history of quilts and quilt-making. Illustrating her talk with slides, she gave a fascinating account of the history of Australian quilts from the first known one, the Rajah quilt, made by convict women on their way to Australia, to later quilters more modern examples. She said that quilts revealed women's voices, and woven into them were their hopes, their experiences and their interests.

Val Nadin, our second speaker, is an experienced art quilter, exhibitor and judge at quilt shows. Her talk centred on quilts as art forms. She showed slides of the earlier types of Australian quilts, which were derived from American styles and made as covers, to the smaller very modern ones, designed to be hung as art forms. Quilters here have developed a distinctive style, using the bright colours suggestive of the Australian climate and landscape, a style recognised and acclaimed overseas.

and I admire her tremendously for her stoicism and bravery. She lived alone in town, only 80 km from the border, with a war with Chile threatening and troops drilling outside her house all the time. She slept with an axe, three carving knives and a whistle under her pillow. You will see from her letters that she sometimes becomes desperate and she says to Will, 'I am sorry I complain and I'm miserable to you ... I wish I didn't do it to you and worry you but I have to talk to someone.' But she came through it all, stronger for the experience, as the book details. She was a remarkable woman.

*Transcription by Anne Johnson
Edited version by Shirley Jones*

Photography not available

*Our speakers (l to r) : Margaret Rolfe, Val Nadin,
Margaret Wright and Sheila Bruhn*

Margaret Wright, who has co-ordinated many quilt exhibitions, spoke on Australian quilters' contribution to the Sydney 2000 Olympic and Paralympic Games. She was chair of the ten-member association which initiated and organised this project. Women from all parts of Australia were asked to contribute quilts for sale. Six hundred and thirty-eight were received, all with strong Australian/Olympic themes, and many of them sold via the internet almost as soon as photographs of them went up on association's website. Margaret showed us slides of representative examples.

The last speaker was Sheila Bruhn, who announced herself as 'not a quilter' but who was a 17-year-old civilian prisoner in Changi Prison during World War II. She spoke briefly of her life in the prison, how the women of all ages coped, and about the making of the first quilt by a group of Girl Guides in the prison. Each girl signed her name on her patch. The quilt was on display. Following this venture, the women made three other quilts — for the Australian, British and Japanese wounded soldiers. These are known as the Changi quilts. Sheila's slides showed interesting examples of the pieces that made them up, some humorous, some showing anxiety, some hope, each particular patch signed by the internee who made it.

There were 14 quilts on display, all demonstrating different aspects of the quilter's art. We are very grateful to our four speakers for making this such an interesting event. We also thank all the volunteers who worked so hard and to such effect.

DONATIONS OF MATERIAL

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

- Anna Bauze
- Juno Gemes
- Monika Law
- Robyn Mathison
- Penelope Moyes
- Margaret Rolfe
- Barbara Sherwood
- J. Wheatley

- Allen & Unwin
- Alliance Distribution Services
- Australian Institute of Management - Victoria
- Cambridge University Press
- Clouston & Hall
- HarperCollins
- National Library of Australia
- Pan Macmillan
- Random House
- Text Publishing
- Women-Church



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

EmailDate/...../.....

- Member \$45 Concessional \$20 (unwaged/pensioner)
- Donor member \$100 Life member \$500
- Organisation \$100 Student member \$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

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- I authorise JSNWL to charge this, and all future membership renewals as they fall due, to the credit card number given on this form.
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Volunteers Required

I would like to help with (tick where appropriate)

- Fact Files Oral history Newsletter mailout Processing archival material
- JSNWL functions Tapestry project Transcribing tapes Reception work
- Book reviews 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

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

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

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