

The National Library of Australia†

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1. History

In 1901, the six colonies occupying the continent of Australia federated together to become the Commonwealth of Australia. The new Parliament had many things to consider, not the least of which was the site for a new capital city. However, meeting in temporary quarters in Melbourne, they very early turned their attentions to library matters with the appointment of a Joint Library Committee to consider the provision of library services for the Parliament and in a wider context for the nation. In 1903, the Committee stated:

“The Committee has realized that the duties entrusted to it by the House of the Federal Parliament are of the utmost importance, as it has looked forward to the probability of the establishment of a Federal Public Library, of which the Parliamentary Library will only be one department”.¹

The Committee continued to deliberate and collect evidence from Australian and overseas librarians and in 1907, produced another statement, this time offering a firmer guide for future development:

“The Library Committee is keeping before it the ideal of building up, for the time when Parliament shall be established in the Federal Capital, a great public library on the lines of the world-famed Library of Congress at Washington; such a library, indeed, as shall be worthy of the Australian Nation; the home of the literature not of a State, or of a period, but of the world, and all time.”²

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As a National Librarian was later to comment "It must be admitted... that this noble vision faded somewhat during the 26 years of waiting in Melbourne for the National Capital to arise."

The Parliament had at its disposal the rich library resources of the State Library of Victoria and the Victorian Parliamentary Library and hence even the development of services to the new national body were limited. However, in these formative years, the first moves towards the creation of a great national collection occurred - in 1909, the gift of the Petherick Collection of Australiana, in 1911 the Copyright Act designating the Library the copyright depository library, and later in 1923 at an auction in London, the purchase of Captain Cook's journal and four additional Cook manuscripts.

With interstate rivalries tempered, politicians appeased as best they could, and a plan by a Chicago architect, Walter Burley Griffin, the first session of Parliament in the new capital of Canberra was opened in May 1927. The new Parliament House which also housed the Library, was intended to be a temporary building - 47 years later, Parliament is still in this building; but the Library has handsome new quarters.

Development of the Library in the prewar years of the 1930's was necessarily concentrated on services to the Parliament. However, reflecting the growth of Canberra, the Library assumed responsibility for services to the public of the city and to the new Canberra University College. The first wing of the new National Library building was completed in 1935. The Collections were expanding under a guiding policy of the Library acting "... as a depository collection of the more highly specialized books which other libraries cannot always purchase and to make these books available to scholars through inter-library loans." This point was strongly emphasized by a report of a survey on Australian libraries undertaken by Ralph Munn of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh and Ernest Pitt of the Victorian Public Library, a survey undertaken by the Carnegie Corporation in 1943.³ The other major event which is evidence of the Library's growing awareness of its responsibility as a center of scholarly research and bibliographical access,

was the commencement of the publication of the *Annual Catalogue of Australian Publications* in 1936, regularly published since, and now, through the fully computerized *ANB* service.

The national collection continued to grow with the acquisition of the Matthews collection on Australian ornithology and later in 1946, the collection of Sir John Ferguson - without doubt one of the most important collections of Australiana upon which Ferguson based his definitive *Bibliography of Australiana, 1784-1900*. By 1936, films and sound recordings had become part of the national resource and in 1945, the Library became the central distributing agency for educational and documentary films in Australia, maintaining as it still does, a large lending service Australia-wide.

The Second World War brought major developments in the Library's activities and functions. The reference service came into closer contact with Commonwealth departments and agencies and to facilitate this, a Liaison Office was established in Melbourne. The War also gave rise to the Library being designated as the Commonwealth Archival Authority in 1946 - a responsibility it no longer undertakes with the establishment of the separate Commonwealth Archives Office in 1960. It was during the war also, that an important international development took place. In 1944, the Library's Chief Reference Officer was sent to London to represent the interests of the National Library in Europe and establish a Library in Australia House for the staff, and the British public. This venture was so successful that a similar office was set up in the Australian Consulate in New York in 1945 - which I suppose is largely the reason I'm speaking with you this evening.

New outlooks and the promise of unprecedented national growth brought major changes after 1947. The Library Committee, and the newly appointed Librarian, H. L. White, persuaded the Government to double the resources of the Library to develop initiatives already taken, but above all, to launch an acquisition program which would allow the Library to support advanced research for the purposes of government and scholarship. Aggressive programming was immediately successful in attrac-

ting library materials of all kinds, including notable private collections relating to Europe and Asia. The US became an area of special concentration following a wartime decision of the government to develop Australian-American co-operation and understanding through books. The Liaison Officers in New York during this period - the 50's - were particularly instrumental in developing exchanges with libraries and institutions in the US and making wide contact with antiquarian and second hand dealers and private collections - the National Library as a result has a collection of American materials unrivalled in Australia and indeed, the Southern Hemisphere.

It was realized also that the Library's contribution could only be fully effective if it were in full co-operation with other Australian libraries - hence in 1949, the first major conference between the National and State Libraries was convened, a forerunner to the active co-operation and consultation that has developed since - the establishment of AACOBS in 1956 is the most potent example of this co-operation. AACOBS is an advisory body which has as its functions, the planning and recommending to appropriate authorities the further development of Australian bibliographical services, library resources and library services.

All this activity led naturally to a closer association with the world of scholarship, with Parliament, and with Government Departments both in Australia and abroad. It also inevitably deepened the crisis of accommodation and forced the collections, staff and services into an octopus like existence in a variety of unsatisfactory buildings scattered around Canberra. Finally in May 1956, the Government set up a Committee under the chairmanship of Sir George Paton. The Government was particularly concerned to ensure the future development and to determine the functions and control of an institution that was already discharging national and international responsibilities. The Paton Committee presented its report a year later⁴ and its recommendations ultimately became the basis for the National Library Act of 1960. This set up the National Library as an autonomous statutory body responsible to the Parliament through a Minister - the Parliamentary Library

continued to be controlled by Parliament and was thus separate in services and collections.

The functions of the National Library as set out in the Act largely continued existing activities while providing for their development in accordance with national needs and in co-operation with other authorities in Australia or elsewhere stated in general terms. They impose on the Library, a responsibility to develop a *national collection* of library material, including a comprehensive collection relating to Australia and the Australian people. The collections and services are to be used widely in the national interest. Beyond this, they are to be available for special purposes of the Parliament, Government Departments, and authorities of the Commonwealth Territories.

The separation of the collections had been completed well by the mid 1960's and the Library's development of its collections and services was advancing. All despite the continued crisis in accommodation. The Paton report had repeatedly stressed the need for a new building as vital, if effect were to be given to its proposals. So it was with a great sense of relief and accomplishment that the National Library building was opened in 1968. For the first time in its history, all the collections and services and staff of the National Library were brought together in location.

2. Activities and developments

Having given you something of the history of the National Library, I would now like to describe some of its activities and latest developments, and a few of the plans for the future.

- a) The National Library is the national focus for Australian bibliographical activity and creates and publishes a wide range of national bibliographies and indexes, including the *Australian National Bibliography*, *Australian Government Publications*, *Australian Films*, *Australian Maps and Current Australian Serials*. The Library also maintains the National Union Catalogue of Monographs and offers a location service based upon it. It also publishes the Union list, *Serials in Australian Libraries*:

Social Sciences and Humanities. More recently, the Library has developed its international activities and has been designated as the Australian ISDS centre, the ISBN agency, the centre responsible for ISORID, and the national focal point for UNISIST.

- b) The National Library's collections are expanding rapidly in size and breadth. A few figures taken at June of this year (1974) will indicate the nature of the Library's resources:

COMPOSITION OF THE LIBRARY'S COLLECTIONS

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| 1,439,976 | volumes |
| 72,662 | serial titles currently received (i. e. periodicals, newspapers and serials including additional copies) |
| 1,550 | running metres of manuscripts |
| 1,008 | oral history tapes |
| 17,887 | music scores |
| 84,000 | sound recordings and tapes |
| 25,150 | paintings, drawings and prints |
| 139,160 | photographs |
| 5,300,000 | metres of moving picture film |
| 60,000 | motion picture stills |
| 283,172 | maps |
| 500,000 | serial photographs |
| 91,411 | reels of microfilm |
| 509,208 | microfiche pieces (estimated) |
| 228,955 | microprint/microcards pieces (estimated), and |
| 3,100,000 | data records which are used for producing published bibliographies and current awareness and retrospective searches |

The material held by the Library in microform represents an estimated 574,000 titles of printed materials (monographs, pamphlets, periodicals, newspapers and serials). Approximately 7,000 reels of microfilm are of manuscripts.

In May of this year, it was announced that the National Library had formed a new music and sound recording collection.

The aim of the Section is to collect all Australian music materials both current and retrospective in all forms of music including classical, modern jazz, folk, pop, religious and indigenous. A particular effort will be made to collect overseas editions of Australian composers and records with Australian artists. The collection will build upon the existing holdings of books on music and music scores of European composers. Finally, emphasis will be given to music of the South East Asian Region.

The South East Asian region is Australia's nearest geographical neighbour, and as such has great political, strategic and economic importance to the country. The National Library is keenly aware of its role in collecting material from the countries of South East Asia - and for the whole of Asia for that matter. However, recently a major survey was undertaken by Mr. Stanley Sutton formerly of the India Office Library in London. His report was recently published. It underscores the importance of the regions and the responsibility of the National Library to collect materials which often appear in severely limited editions and printed on poor paper. The Library has had for about 5 years, an officer stationed in Djakarta for the purpose of acquiring a comprehensive range of Indonesian publications including commercial publications, society publications and the elusive government publications. With the lack of a traditional book trade and the difficult currency problems of Indonesia, a person on the spot is invaluable in establishing contacts and sources, and being able to export the material somewhat easier. The Library of Congress has of course operated such offices in the Asian region, including Djakarta, for many years. But for Australia, such an office devoted to acquisition of materials from a difficult area is a new and, we are pleased to say, a successful venture. Six other Australian libraries are also in the scheme as a co-operative plan to obtain a selected range of publications which are able to be acquired in multiple copies. It is possible that the success of the Djakarta office will lead to other National Library acquisition offices being established in other cities of the region such as Delhi, Kuala Lumpur etc.

Mr. Sutton recommended such a move for the future, however funds and priorities will dictate how soon such an expansion takes place.

c) Computer based Information Services

Late in 1969, the National Library of Australia became the MEDLARS centre for Australasia and the first automated information service was established in the region. At the present time, we are running in excess of 900 monthly SDI profiles and 2300 retrospective searches per annum. It was recognized that this was the first step in the development of computer based services of this nature and forward planning has continued since then. With the acquisition of the CAN/SDI programmes in 1973, the National Library has been able to implement the BA Previews System as a natural supplement to MEDLARS and a co-ordinated Biomedical Information Service is both in operation and under further development.

As a parallel to the Biomedical Service, the National Library has established an Educational Information Service which will initially use the ERIC data base supplemented by Australian produced materials.

The National Library has developed the Australian MARC format and produces the *Australian National Bibliography* by computer. It is now operating an Australian MARC record service which supplies other Australian libraries with MARC records from the Australian, LC and BNB MARC files.

d) To conclude this brief survey of the National Library, I wish to describe two very recent developments which I think show the trend for the future as well as consolidating the Library's existing services. The planning and development that has taken place with increased impetus over recent years is largely the outcome of the work of the Scientific and Technological Information Services Enquiry Committee (STISEC) set up by the Council of the National Library of

Australia in February 1971 and which presented its report to the Australian Government in May 1973. This report, known as the *STISEC Report* Volume I, ⁶ has already received some distribution within North America and was reviewed in the *Library Journal*.

The Committee was appointed to investigate the national need for scientific and technological information services. Its task was to suggest how, in the national interest, any inadequacies identified by its inquiries might best be overcome. The genesis of the report was as follows:

“The evidence gathered and considered by the Committee leaves it in no doubt that there is immediate need in Australia for a greatly improved and more closely co-ordinated system to collect scientific and technological information and to disseminate it with a minimum delay to those who need it. The Committee is convinced that a national authority must be established with the responsibility to complement and co-ordinate existing collections and services; it would have a particular responsibility to ensure the provision of those information services which ought to be, but at present are not, available in Australia. The national authority should give maximum consideration to the introduction of those services and information handling methods which utilize modern computer and telecommunication techniques. It should act as a focus for international as well as national, co-operation in the effective and efficient transfer of scientific and technological information.”

Further the Committee “highlighted the need for interdisciplinary collaboration”. And “concluded that a firm relationship should be established and maintained between information services in science and technology and those in the social sciences and humanities”. Consequently the planning and development now going on is looking at the total national scene and beyond STI services.

The development of direct services and supporting collections on science and technology by the National Library commenced during the financial year 1973-74. The continued development in this current financial year has already seen

the announcement of ANSTEL - Australian National Scientific and Technological Library. With the establishment of ANSTEL the Library is playing a major role in promoting industrial, scientific and technological development throughout Australia by encouraging:

- (i) maximum utilization of the National Library's extensive multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary collections in Science and Technology;
- (ii) maximum co-operation between the National Library and other bodies able and willing to contribute to national library and information services and the development of the National Library as a point of access to other specialized services, in order to avoid unnecessary overlap and duplication.

ANSTEL is the first of the national subject libraries and services to be created within the National Library. National subject libraries are being created by bringing related specialized collections into subject units with specialized staff capable of providing dynamic services by reaching out to all sections of the community in need of information.

Membership in ANSTEL is open, free to industrial and commercial undertakings, federal, state, academic and similar organizations. Members will receive copies of the first published list of over 20,000 scientific serials in the National Library, which will be issued to mark the foundation of ANSTEL. Periodicals to be received by airmail will be marked to assist those organizations in need of more prompt information from abroad. It is planned that ANSTEL will be operational from January 1, 1975.

At the same time, there has been an ongoing detailed examination of the necessary planning for the development of a national library and information network which will co-ordinate the development of STI services and collections by agencies throughout Australia (Federal, and State governments, private industry and commercial organizations) and generally lead to the formulation of national policies in this area. The most recent manifestation of this concern is the announcement of

ALBIS. I quote in part from the public advertisement:

“With Governmental approval, the National Library is to undertake extensive consultations and surveys over a period of two years to determine the feasibility of an Australian Library Based Information System (ALBIS).”

ALBIS is to be based on voluntary co-operation between Federal, state, municipal, industrial, social, academic, artistic, humanistic, scientific, technological and other organizations able and willing to contribute to a library based information system to meet the Australian community by developing traditional and computer based services in the most effective way.

Submissions are invited from organizations and individuals of all kinds indicating:

- 1) the range of traditional and computer based information services available in their fields;
- 2) the ways in which these services should be developed to meet current and future needs for the next fifteen years;
- 3) the extent to which the organization or individual can help
 - (a) by assisting in detailed surveys of national needs
or
 - (b) by developing traditional and computer-based information services to meet those needs
or
 - (c) by making these available to the public as a whole.

As its contribution to the surveys of use and needs, the National Library is re-organizing its existing collections and services into subject units so that they can more effectively supplement the work of other libraries and information agencies. ANSTEL, which was just described is the first example of this effort.

References

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6. Australia. Scientific and Technological Information Services Enquiry Committee. *The STISEC Report; Report to the Council of the National Library of Australia by the Scientific and Technological Information Services Enquiry Committee, Volume 1*. Canberra, National Library of Australia, 1973.