

**Identity and nation in the Australian public library:
the development of local and national collections 1850s – 1940s,
using the Tasmanian Public Library as case study**

Heather Gaunt, B. Mus., B.A. (Hons), Post Grad. Dip. (Art Curatorial Studies)

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

University of Tasmania

September 2010

COPYRIGHT STATEMENT

This thesis may be made available for loan and limited copying in accordance with the Copyright Act 1968.

Heather Gaunt

September 2010

DECLARATION

I confirm that this thesis is entirely my own work and contains no material which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by the University of any other institution, and to the best of my knowledge and belief no material previously published or written by another person except where due acknowledgement is made in the text of the thesis, nor does it contain any material that infringes copyright.

Heather Gaunt

September 2010

ABSTRACT

The major public reference libraries in the capital cities of Australia all maintain a 'heritage' role that is a central aspect of their function in their communities. All have acquired rich and extensive collections relating to the history and literature of their respective states and, in a number of cases, to the nation as a whole. However, this aspect of philosophy and practice has not always been part of the public library's institutional goals. When the major public reference libraries were established in the Australian colonies in the second half of the nineteenth century, the acquisition of a 'local archive' reflecting local colonial history and culture was desultory or non-existent in most cases.

This thesis is a cultural history of the growth of the 'will to archive' in the public library in Australia over the course of a century, focusing on the period from the 1850s to the 1940s. It addresses *how*, *when*, and *why* the Australian public library came to be a repository of the local and national past, as distinct from (but never replacing) its role as a purveyor of Enlightenment culture and learning. The evolution of this function is situated within a broader framework of emerging historical consciousness, the growth of civic nationalism related to the federation of the Australian colonies in 1901, changing attitudes to the production of history and the new value accorded to accurate historical records, and efforts to establish a 'national' creative literature. The thesis argues that the archiving mentality that emerged in the last decades of the nineteenth century, stimulated by the emerging interest in local history, became naturalised in the twentieth century through the forces of nationalism and patriotism. The evolution of this function was complex, influenced variously by factors such as the degree and type of cultural philanthropic activity, historical 'amnesia' toward the colonial convict past, and residual 'cultural cringe' toward Australian literary production.

While addressing local archiving practices across all the major 'state' public libraries, the thesis focuses on the Tasmanian Public Library. While providing an overview of the development of the local archive in Tasmania over a century, the thesis examines in detail the agency of key figures such as trustee James

Backhouse Walker and philanthropist William Walker, and the effect of the local penal past on the formation of the local archive, exemplified by the ‘life cycle’ of convict text *The Hermit in Van Diemen’s Land* by Henry Savery.

This study emerges from the conviction that a close examination of the formation and stratification of library collections that symbolise and promote national identity contributes valuable information about emerging and changing ‘worldviews’ of communities, particularly the ways in which communities identify as members of a region and nation. Utilising the lens of public library philosophy and collections, the thesis offers a new way of reflecting on the formation of local and national identities in Australia.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my Supervisors Associate Professor Stefan Petrow and Professor Michael Bennett, and my Research Supervisor Tony Marshall, for their support in the production of this doctoral dissertation. In particular, Stefan has been outstandingly available, helpful, critical and supportive throughout the process, and has made the business of working off-campus a smooth and successful one. Professor Emeritus W Boyd Rayward has been a generous (long-distance) mentor throughout the research and writing of the dissertation, and has encouraged my efforts to think in the broadest terms to an international audience, and to make a show for Australian library history. Professor and Chair of Australian Literature at the University of Western Australia, Philip Mead, has given valuable advice and encouragement, enriching my historical perspective from the discipline of Australian literature. Likewise Associate Professor Andrea Witcomb has supported my explorations in museology and memory, and provided invaluable criticism of work in progress.

I am grateful to the State Library of Tasmania for the award of a three week Research Fellowship in 2005 that directly stimulated this doctoral project. At the State Library of Tasmania, I am greatly indebted to Tony Marshall, Senior Librarian, Heritage Collections, and his staff, particularly Ian Morrison. Tony has gladly shared his enormous expertise, and provided limitless support and encouragement. I am also grateful to library staff at the Mitchell Library, Sydney, the State Library of Victoria, the Battye Library in Perth, the John Oxley Library in Brisbane, the 'Special and Rare Materials Collections' at the Morris Miller Library, University of Tasmania, and the British Library.

I am very grateful to descendants of William Walker, particularly Rod Walker, who generously provided access to private papers, and accommodation in their Tasmanian home. Great thanks also to Margi Mason-Cox, who offered friendship and accommodation throughout the research. I am indebted to Sandy Fitts, for her encouragement and generous reading of the final draft of the thesis.

Finally, thanks to my husband Peter Gaunt, and children Meaghan and William, who were always supportive and assured me (however hopefully) that this would be ‘the best PhD ever’.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----|
| List of illustrations | xii |
| Abbreviations | xiv |
| INTRODUCTION: | |
| Introduction | 2 |
| Scope of the study | 6 |
| Significance and contribution | 11 |
| Methodology | 12 |
| Sources | 23 |
| Structural summary | 27 |
| CHAPTER 1: | |
| Transfer of the ‘liberal archive’: the development of local collections in the Australian public library in the 19th century | |
| Introduction | 33 |
| The development of the liberal archive in Britain | 35 |
| The Australian public library as a derivative institution | 40 |
| Inconsistencies in archiving the locality in the Australian state libraries | 43 |
| Understanding the failure to archive | 47 |
| Dissemination of print culture in southern Tasmania in the 19th century | 51 |
| The Tasmanian Public Library | 52 |
| AJ Taylor as liberal librarian | 56 |
| The first collections | 62 |
| Local history and the colonial archive | 66 |
| The new historical section of the Royal Society of Tasmania | 77 |
| Conclusion | 79 |
| CHAPTER 2: | |
| Professionalism and patriotism: Federation nationalism and the public library | |
| Introduction | 81 |
| Federation and civic nationalism in Australia | 85 |
| Patriotism and professionalism in the public library | 89 |
| Invocations of nation | 94 |
| The promotion of a centralised ‘national library’ | 98 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Classification schemes in the national debate..... | 103 |
| Parallel patriotisms at the Tasmanian Public Library | 107 |
| Federalism in the Tasmanian Public Library | 113 |
| ‘Nationing rhetoric’ in Tasmania..... | 119 |
| Edmund Morris Miller as progressive nationalist..... | 122 |
| Conclusion | 132 |

CHAPTER 3:

‘No better missionary work’: library philanthropy & cultural change, part 1

| | |
|--|-----|
| Introduction..... | 134 |
| Philanthropy and library history | 135 |
| The international context for Australian library philanthropy | 139 |
| Attitudes to philanthropy by librarians and managers | 144 |
| Social philanthropy in Tasmania..... | 147 |
| Books, elevating culture and the development of library philanthropy | 150 |
| Elite philanthropy..... | 153 |
| Public stock donations | 156 |
| Carnegie philanthropy and institutional change | 161 |
| The lending library and the stimulation of local philanthropy..... | 170 |
| Further implications of the lending department..... | 174 |
| Conclusion | 178 |

CHAPTER 4:

Patriotism and civic faith: library philanthropy & cultural change, part 2

| | |
|---|-----|
| Introduction..... | 180 |
| Changing perceptions of philanthropy in Australasia..... | 181 |
| Book collectors and patriotic philanthropy..... | 183 |
| William Walker (1861-1933), collector and library philanthropist..... | 191 |
| Walker’s bibliophilic and philanthropic motivations..... | 196 |
| Walker as annalist | 200 |
| Walker as hoarder | 204 |
| Australiana collecting and philanthropy as valorised leisure..... | 208 |
| Walker’s donations to the Tasmanian Public Library..... | 212 |
| The new Australiana collection of the Tasmanian Public Library..... | 216 |
| Walker’s philanthropic legacy | 223 |
| Conclusion | 225 |

CHAPTER 5:

Penal history and the archive: The Tasmanian Public Library and *The Hermit in Van Diemen's Land*

| | |
|---|-----|
| Introduction..... | 227 |
| History, memory and the development of the local archive | 230 |
| History, memory and the 'history of the book' | 234 |
| Henry Savery's <i>The Hermit in Van Diemen's Land</i> : creation and reception..... | 236 |
| The Tasmanian Public Library and the 'convict stain' | 243 |
| The kindling of amateur historians' interest in <i>The Hermit</i> from the 1880s..... | 245 |
| The disposal of <i>The Hermit</i> by the Tasmanian Public Library | 252 |
| The will to forget? | 257 |
| Changing attitudes to convict history and the archive | 262 |
| Conclusion | 269 |

CHAPTER 6:

'How to encourage our literature': National fictions in the Australian public library

| | |
|---|-----|
| Introduction..... | 271 |
| The 'fiction debate' in the international public library | 274 |
| Literary nationalism, Australian fiction and Australian readers | 277 |
| The Australian public library and fiction 1890s-1920s | 283 |
| National creative literature in the Australian public library..... | 290 |
| Australian fiction at the Tasmanian Public Library | 294 |
| EM Miller and the promotion of Australian fiction in the public library | 296 |
| Changing cultural nationalism in the 1920s and 1930s | 298 |
| National fictions in Australian public libraries in the 1920s and 1930s | 301 |
| The Australian Library Association and Australian literature | 304 |
| External agencies promoting public library provision of national literature | 310 |
| Engagement with national fictions in public libraries from the 1930s | 318 |
| Conclusion | 324 |

CHAPTER 7:

Preservation and promotion: heritage in the 20th century in the Australian public library

| | |
|--|-----|
| Introduction..... | 327 |
| The growth of the public historical sphere in the early twentieth century..... | 329 |
| Enrichment of historical collections in the major public libraries | 331 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Showcasing public heritage | 336 |
| Competitive and collegial relationships between the major libraries in the formation of the local and national archive..... | 343 |
| Development of formal state archives in the major libraries | 347 |
| The growth of the public historical sphere in Tasmania, 1920s onwards..... | 351 |
| Heritage at the Tasmanian Public Library from the 1930s | 354 |
| The creation of State Library of Tasmania and Tasmanian Archives..... | 361 |
| Further enrichment of the Australiana collections..... | 363 |
| Libraries and ‘heritage’ in recent decades | 366 |
| Conclusion | 368 |
| CONCLUSION: | |
| Summary of findings..... | 372 |
| Avenues for future research | 374 |
| Conclusion | 377 |
| SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY: | |
| Primary sources..... | 379 |
| Secondary sources..... | 389 |

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

| | |
|---|-----|
| AJ Taylor, librarian at the Tasmanian Public Library 1873 - 1921. (Tasmanian Archives and Heritage Office, Hobart 30-7668)..... | 59 |
| Edmund Morris Miller, 1940. (Tasmanian Archives and Heritage Office, Hobart PH30/1/2210)..... | 123 |
| The exterior of the Carnegie building, Tasmanian Public Library, Hobart, c. 1907. (Tasmanian Archives and Heritage Office, Hobart, 30-494)..... | 167 |
| The opening ceremony of the new Carnegie Library, 1907. (Tasmanian Archives and Heritage Office, Hobart SLT23-24-2388-1)..... | 167 |
| The Reference Room of the new Carnegie Library, Tasmanian Public Library, c. 1907. (Tasmanian Archives and Heritage Office, Hobart SLT23-24-2388-2)..... | 168 |
| The Lending Library of the new Carnegie Library, Tasmanian Public Library, c. 1907. (Tasmanian Archives and Heritage Office, Hobart SLT NS1013-185) | 168 |
| The ground floor reading room, Carnegie Library, Tasmanian Public Library, c. 1907. (Tasmanian Archives and Heritage Office, Hobart SLT23-24-2388-3)..... | 169 |
| William Walker at 51 years of age. Photograph taken at Adelphi Studios on The Strand in London, 1912. (Walker family, Tasmania)..... | 194 |
| Title page with mutilated publisher's details, <i>The Hermit in Van Diemen's Land</i> (1829). (Henry Savery, <i>The Hermit in Van Diemen's Land: from the Colonial Times</i> , Hobart Town, Printed by Andrew Bent, 1829, State Library of Victoria, copy with bookplate of James Edge-Partington) | 238 |
| Annotations identifying characters in a copy of <i>The Hermit in Van Diemen's Land</i> (1829). (Henry Savery, <i>The Hermit in Van Diemen's Land: from the Colonial Times</i> , Hobart Town, Printed by Andrew Bent, 1829, State Library of Victoria, copy with bookplate of James Edge-Partington) | 241 |

John Marshall's 'Key' to *The Hermit in Van Diemen's Land*, originally inserted in the copy of the book owned by Justin McCarty Brown, and removed by JB Walker. (Special and Rare Materials Collection, Morris Miller Library, University of Tasmania, Hobart W9/C4/11)..... 242

ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|--|------|
| Tasmanian Archives and Research Office | TAHO |
| University of Tasmania Library | UTL |
| State Library of Victoria | SLV |
| State Library of Tasmania | SLT |