

State archives in New South Wales 1788-1960 : A tale of tension and neglect

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Abstract:

This paper will explore the history of archives in New South Wales from 1788 until the passing of the Archives Act in 1960. In the early years of the Colony's history, little attention was paid to the management and preservation of non-current public records and it was the opening of the Mitchell Library in 1910 that provided the first real stimulus to action in the area of public records. Political inertia during this period and conflicting ideas on how archives should be managed will be examined as well as the effect of the history profession, including the role of James Bonwick and Frank Murcott Bladen in the production of Historical Records on New South Wales. Tensions existed in the Library profession over the establishment of a public record office that was distinct and separate from the Public Library of NSW and there was an underlying unwillingness to support an archival body which was not part of the Library. The paper concludes with the establishment of the Archives Authority of New South Wales in 1960.

In a damning indictment of government apathy and neglect in most countries in the world, the former Principal Librarian and Principal Archivist, of the Public Library of NSW, Gordon Richardson, in his 1951 thesis on the archives of the Colonial Secretary comments:

For centuries national archives were left to rot in safe custody....1.

This is a balanced observation of the lack of action by successive governments in New South Wales from the foundation of the Colony in 1788, until at least the establishment of the Mitchell Library in 1910.

Regrettably this mindset permeated NSW Government thinking in relation to records and archives almost from the founding of the colony in 1788 until well into the 20th century and to a great extent government parsimony and lack of action in this area continues to this day. The records created in the early years of the Colony are certainly not extensive and relatively few have survived. A combination of the belief that these records were the personal property of the successive early governors, an inability to recognise the importance of official correspondence, lack of paper for creating records and a desire for practical achievements in the colony conspired to make the collection and preservation of records a very low priority. Nevertheless, the Colonial Secretary was given the appellation Registrar of the Records as early as 1821. According to Doust in his MLib thesis 'The Administration of Official Archives in New South Wales 1870-1960'

In general what remains of the pre-1826 records is more the result of chance than of proper record management practices. The exception is the

legal records which were for the most part kept, although too often in disarray. 2.

Convict records, the *raison d'être* for the Colony were kept almost meticulously and survive in reasonably good order to this day. In a Governor's minute no 81 of 10 October 1827, Governor Ralph Darling states the obvious:

It appears highly expedient, that the original indents, and muster rolls of prisoners, should be carefully kept and registered, in the Secretary's office. 3.

In the 1830s record keeping followed the British pattern with the formal registration of correspondence. This was a great leap forward from the rather slap dash methods adopted by previous administrations in New South Wales. In general records were retained mainly because of inertia. They were only considered if they became a nuisance and got in the way because of space problems or if a department was re-locating. (This sounds remarkably familiar). Another aspect which impinged on record keeping practices during this period and well into the 20th century was the perceived shame of convictism, especially by those who had convict relatives. How things have changed today, when it is almost a badge of honour to have a convict ancestor. For example in the early years of the 20th century there was much debate about the need to retain the records of the convict era because of their shameful nature. Many families in the top echelons of NSW society did not want to have the records kept because of the fear of exposure as having convict ancestors and there was quite a strong push to have these records destroyed. Fortunately sanity prevailed and the convict records are now considered to be the jewel in the crown of State Records and were the recipient of a UNESCO Australian Memory of the World citation in 2006.

Archivist of New South Wales James Bonwick

I would now like to turn to the work of James Bonwick, 1817-1906, one of two men who were pivotal in the development of the idea of a public record office or archives in New South Wales. However, ironically it was in England from the early 1880s than Bonwick made his mark on the archives of Australia in general and on those of New South Wales in particular.

The first recorded awareness of the value of public archives and of the necessity for their preservation as fundamental source materials for the history of Australia dates from the third quarter of the 19th century when the Centenary of the Colony was approaching. This interest led to the appointment of an archivist in New South Wales in 1887 and to the publication of the History of New South Wales from the Records and Historical Records of New South Wales. 4.

The New South Wales Government almost stumbled into history matters with the acquisition of 'Brabourne Papers' in 1884. These papers relating to New South Wales included letters of such early luminaries as Banks, Flinders and Bligh. These were finally purchased for £375. Bonwick was employed by the NSW government to list and briefly describe these papers. This was the first work of an archival nature that Bonwick did. (As an aside the papers are all now available on the State Library's web site <http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/banks/>). During this period Bonwick was angling for a position in NSW and he gave a lecture to the Royal Colonial Institute in London in 1895, where he regaled them with *curious stories of shameful negligence in the preservation of official documents here and in the colonies. 5.* Bonwick also commented on the negligent way the New South Wales

Government looked after its archives in his monograph 'The First Twenty Years of Australia':

All these precious manuscripts were extracted, in the writer's presence, from a heap of rubbish and old documents, laden with the undisturbed dust of many years. 6.

Bonwick's main interest lay in the preservation records for posterity and he followed this interest assiduously even though he was not successful in having a public records office created in any of the Australian Colonies. During the period 1872 and 1891 Bonwick had to call on the good offices of Sir Henry Parkes to support and assist him in his endeavours. Clearly Bonwick was angling for a Public Service position when he wrote to Parkes stating:

It was as the historian and not the copyist, that I sought to select from the old records of our Colony. I would copy the most important, make a digest of the others, and give a collective report of the whole as the archivist. 8.

On 8 May 1885 Bonwick wrote a private letter to Sir Henry Parkes saying,

By this mail is sent an application to the Colonial Secretary at Sydney, for permission to act as the archivist in your colony to a small extent. Knowing from Sir Saul, (Agent General in London), who has little interest in literary matters, that the Govt may need a friend to literature to support my claim, I ask your service. Objections to a general transcription of early records I can understand, as family names and stories may appear, so I seek only to make for your Public Library a list of all the documents in the Record Office here, from 1786 and a short digest of their contents. 7.

Sadly for Bonwick he was never appointed archivist of New South Wales, however he was the first to raise the profile of archives in the Australian colonies and he certainly contributed to the belief that the proper care of government archives were the cornerstone upon which a democracy is built.

However, not everyone was impressed with Bonwick's work. A reviewer of Vol 2 of the Historical Records of New South Wales asked rather tartly:

Why must we read a quantity of the dreariest public correspondence, all that is hardly the material for history The whole thing has been conceived on an excessive scale which neutralizes the talent of the historian and exposes the community to ridicule ... besides the disproportion of the work is melancholy. Four solid tomes bring us only a few years on our way to New South Wales. In four volumes Mommsen has written the history of the majesty of Rome. 9.

Nevertheless it wasn't all brickbats. In the preface of Historical Records of NSW Alexander Britten wrote

But for the active search made in London by Mr J Bonwick FRGS, the early records on New South Wales would have been little better than a blank, the transcripts that have been made repair, so far as can be repaired, the loss of early Colonial records. 10.

Meanwhile Bonwick in a letter to Henry Parkes on 2 November 1881 stated:

I hope soon to report to you upon the systems adopted in various countries, in relation to the preservation and utilization of materials constituting a records office. 11.

Not surprisingly James Bonwick was not the first person who suggested the establishment of a Record Office for government archives, this honour goes to George Burnett Barton the brother of Edmund Barton, the first Prime Minister of Australia. Barton noted that:

The records of the Colony for the past hundred years are stored in a large room at the Colonial Secretary's office; but no attempt has been made to ascertain their contents, or even to arrange them so that their contents could be ascertained, by anyone in search of information they are supposed to contain ... the result is that the records, in their present condition, are not available for historical or any other purposes. 12.

Archives were invariably stored in a haphazard and catch-as-catch-can arrangement with no special premises. In 1880 when the Garden Palace was constructed it was thought to be a good idea to store some State archival material there. Regrettably when the Palace burned to the ground these irreplaceable archives, including relics of the Eora people, were also destroyed. In a later period when archives were stored in old sheds at Shea's Creek in Sydney it was good luck rather than good management that led to the survival of these records as they were stored in appalling conditions. In subsequent correspondence to Sir Henry Parkes, Barton puts forward a proposal for his employment as Keeper of Public Records which fell on deaf ears.

In 1891 a History Board was appointed to revise the text of the official history of New South Wales, to supervise the Colonial archives collection and to publish the documents on which it was based. This grew into the well known series Historical Records of New South Wales, the first volume was edited by Alexander Britten. The editorship then passed to Frank Murcott Bladen (1858-1912). Who went on to become Principal Librarian at the Public Library of New South Wales in January 1907 where he was most vociferous in his criticism of the lack of a public records office in New South Wales, stating that:

It is a disgrace to Australia as an enlightened nation that there is no place where the original papers bearing on the discovery of the continent; the exploration and settlement of the states; the constitutional history and records of their courts of law and judicial and political institutions can be consulted by the student of history. 13.

As Principal Librarian Bladen occupied an influential post to push for the establishment of a records office, though despite his best efforts, nothing tangible occurred during this period. Bladen had undertaken an overseas visit to Europe in 1902 looking at archives which clearly would have influenced his thinking during this period. The concept of a records office was once more on the agenda with some very heavy duty supporters: in this case the Trustees of the Public Library of NSW who were pushing for a separate public records office for their own possibly more selfish reasons. This was the construction of a suitable building not only to house the library collections of the State but also the archival collections. The opening of the Mitchell Library in March 1910 is a significant milestone in the history of archives in Australia. For the first time in the history of the country there was a focal point for the collection and studying of Australian

history. The librarians of the Mitchell Library were not at all concerned about purist arguments about differences between books and archives and proceeded down a path of acquisition and arrangement of official documents that we are living with to this day.

The next significant event in the history of the archives is the submission of a proposal by Mungo MacCallum, President of the Trustees of the Library, advocating the creation of an archives. This was submitted to the Government on 20 September 1911. The report states:

The object is to establish an archives office in which all public records of a certain age shall ultimately be deposited

At present there are scattered in the premises of the government departments, of the courts, of various trusts, boards, and the like, large accumulations of documents, many of which are known to possess high historical value. In not a few cases these are exposed to great damage from fire, damp, neglect and inadequate housing; in others, they are likely to go astray or pass into private hands; in others they are intentionally destroyed without due examination; either because they are in the way or for some other reason. Even when they are satisfactorily stored they are often entirely inaccessible, or accessible only after great trouble, to the legitimate researcher; and in certain instances their contents are quite unknown. It is proposed that these documents should be

- 1. collected and housed under one roof*
- 2. placed in a building safe from accidents of fire and weather and under responsible and intelligent supervision*
- 3. arranged and catalogued and under due safeguards, brought within the reach of those who would use them aright 14.*

As previously mentioned the report did have the ulterior motive of securing more accommodation for the Library, however, it did provide a practical and pragmatic solution to a neglected area of government activity, the storage of State archives. Regrettably, like so many government reports, it was noted, referred to a sub-committee and not acted on.

Frank Bladen, who had certainly tried to put archives on the Government's agenda had been ill for some time and retired from the position of Principal Librarian in January 1912 and died in September of the same year. He was replaced by W.H. Ifould who remained in charge of the Library until 1942. Ifould quickly understood the potential for conflict over the final disposition of archives, between the Library, controlled by a Board of Trustees, and the Government, who regarded such control as shifting responsibility away from the Government. This was something that many in the NSW Public Service and the Government were most unwilling to do. In a report to the Trustees in July 1914 Ifould states

I feel confident that responsible government officials would always oppose the idea of control by Trustees and especially by Trustees whose trusteeship for the Library and buildings would suggest an alienation of documents which theoretically should never leave the possession of the government.
15.

This tension between the Government/Public Service and the Library and Trustees runs like a thread throughout the history of archives in NSW leading right up to the establishment of the Archives Authority of NSW in 1961.

Fundamentally the Government did not trust the Library to look after its documents however, the Government was consistently unwilling to take proper responsibility for its own archives. At the height of the First World War Sir William Dixon, who later became the second great benefactor of the Library wrote a compelling letter to the Colonial Secretary, advocating the establishment of a separate archives department. According to Doust

The Trustees undoubtedly saw the establishment of an archives office as a means towards completing their building, they never seem to have understood the special nature of archives; they saw them as a class of historical manuscripts which although to be kept separate from the other manuscripts in the Mitchell collection could well be in the same building.

he goes on to say:

It is vastly to the credit of both Trustees and their Principal Librarian that neither ever seemed to have envisaged anything but a clear and quite uncompromising separation of public archives from private documents, however they may be housed or administered. 16

During this period the establishment of a public records office in New South Wales was not a very high priority of the Government's agenda. The First World War was at its height and other more important matters were occupying not only the Government, but the whole Australian nation. Nevertheless, in April 1917, the Premier's Department suggested to the Education Minister that the sum of £1000 be noted for consideration in the next estimates for the express purpose of establishing an archives department. Regrettably the Minister refused on the grounds of financial stringency, the amount was removed from the estimates and the idea of an archives office languished for another 40 years or so. Ifould, seeing that this avenue was closed to him, tried to extend the program which Doust rightly calls the 'creation of an archives through administrative action'. 17. This system was established as early as 1910 when government departments were requested to refer documents intended for disposal to the Principal Librarian, who would evaluate them for their historical significance. This system operated in a partially effective fashion for many years and:

Large quantities of public records went out of official custody into the care of the Library, which certainly was not another department, nor empowered by legislation to receive the records. The creation of a de facto archives in this way may be thought by purists to be a negation in terms: the 'archive quality' of the records might be said to have been destroyed or impaired, although it would be straining a point to say that the records had become estrays. Against this must be weighed the fact that the records or substantial quantities of them, were preserved when otherwise they would certainly have been destroyed and it was by means of the Premier's instructions that their partial preservation was ensured. 18.

It is worth quoting at some length from the request for the deposit of documents from the Department of Public Instruction dated 18 August 1910:

I am directed by the Minister of Public Instruction to acquaint you that the Trustees of the Public Library of New South Wales have represented to the Government that documents valuable only from the historical point of view are at present buried away in various government departments where they

are inaccessible to the student, exposed to neglect, and in some cases likely to be destroyed.

In Great Britain itself, such papers, after the expiry of twenty years, are handed over to the authorities of the Records Office. It further appears to the Trustees that this function might in part be usefully undertaken by the Mitchell Library as the chief repository of material dealing with the history of Australia.

The Cabinet have now approved of a recommendation made by the Trustees that accredited representatives of the various Departments should be authorised to confer with the Principal Librarian and the Mitchell Librarian in regard to such papers, of the age of 25 years or more, as are not of current use in the particular departments, and to hand over to the Mitchell Library those of them that the Librarians consider to be of historical value. The Cabinet, however, makes the proviso that 1) all records dealing with the antecedents of early settlers should be excluded from consideration; and 2) the consent of the Minister of the Department concerned shall be obtained before any search is made or documents removed to the Library. 19.

These requests were issued irregularly until the late 1950s by the Premier's Department and by the Public Service Board. Over the years these requests and directives did have a positive effect on the growth of the State's archives so that by 1961 when the Archives Authority of New South Wales was established there were approximately 2500 metres of archives held in the Library which otherwise would not have been there. Key departments such as the Department of Lands, Chief Secretary's Department and the Supreme Court were represented. Shamefully there was also considerable destruction of records and some departments are very poorly represented in the archives. Destruction often occurred in crisis situations caused by moves, administrative change and lack of storage space for archival materials. Despite all these apparent set backs, it was noted in the first *Annual Report of the Archives Authority of New South* in 1961 that the Authority:

Was pleased to find that although there had been no previous statutory authority, a sound foundation had been established for the control and management of State archives 20.

In the same report, the Authority also states that

Without previous statutory authority the preservation of public archives had hitherto necessarily been somewhat haphazard, while many records of importance had been inadvertently destroyed or had been allowed to decay through inadequate care; some archives had been allowed to go into private hands and even to leave the State. 21.

While this was not an ideal method of building an archival record of State Government activity, it was the only system in place and it did ensure that at least some of the State's archival heritage was saved. Doust observes in his thesis:

The 'de facto' State archives which the Trustees of the Public Library so carefully nurtured for fifty years could not have functioned and did not function as effectively as it might have done, had there been any way of

ensuring that the instructions to departments concerning the disposal of their unwanted records would always be complied with. 22

He goes on to observe that librarians were not aware or as fully trained in archival matters as they should have been:

By their training and experience the librarians were accustomed to dealing with discrete items which could be handled by ordinary techniques of librarianship; and not unreasonably, they had no experience of the research value of complete archival series of records as distinct from the particular uses of individual items within a series. They tended therefore, to request only particular items of special interest, with consequent loss of completeness of the record, and this 'jewel box' approach was further reflected in the treatment accorded to records when they were handed over to the Library. 23.

The 1910 Premier's Directive started a tradition that has lasted until this day in a variety of manifestations, whereby agencies are reminded of their responsibilities in relation to archives at irregular intervals. Though it took the passing of the State Records Act 1998 to create a fully rounded regime that covered record keeping from creation to archiving or destruction.

During the 1930s significant transfers of records took place from the Chief Secretary's Department (former Colonial Secretary), Supreme Court and from the Department of Public Instruction (now Department of Education). From a purely archival perspective the transfer of Government archives to the Library was not a satisfactory arrangement, in that the 'ownership' of the archives passed from the State of New South Wales to that of the Trustees of the Public Library of NSW, a point a number of departments made from time to time over the years. Nevertheless, on a purely practical basis the deposit of Government archives in the Mitchell Library did ensure their long term preservation. Without the initiatives taken by Bladen, Ifould and subsequent State Librarians right up to the 1950s the State of New South Wales would be far poorer in its archival heritage, despite the fact that much was lost because of the rather subjective nature of deciding in each department what was, and was not, of historical significance. Another factor that helped in the retention of official archives was the inherent inertia of the public service and the unwillingness to discard files, especially when there was sufficient room for storage. The great weakness of this system of collecting archives was its random and ad hoc nature, the reliance on untrained staff in departments to make key decisions about the disposition of the archives and the lack of archives trained staff in the Mitchell Library to arrange and describe Government archives.

Since the 1930s there had been some agitation by bodies outside of government for the establishment of a proper public records office along the lines of the Public Records Office in Britain, most notably by the Royal Australian Historical Society. This was especially the case around the time of the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the Colony of New South Wales and the mounting of an exhibition by the RAHS to commemorate that event. This brought into sharp focus the lack of a proper Government archives in New South Wales. There was even some discussion of the Royal Australian Historical Society taking on this role itself, in a rather fanciful way through the establishment of a permanent historical museum. This was following a model that had been established in the United States where local historical societies became responsible for their State's archives and were funded accordingly. However, not everyone was of the same opinion in relation to the RAHS or to the Mitchell

Library and H.J. Rumsey President of the Society of Australian Genealogists wrote, in a letter dated 3 February 1938 to the editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*:

I was delighted to hear Mr Stevens (BSB Stevens Premier of NSW) express, at the Historical Exhibition, his opinion of the need for a public records office, where official records that may later be of value for historical or genealogical purposes may be stored and indexed. I was surprised however, to hear Mr Justice Evatt the next day declare that the Mitchell Library was quite sufficient for the purpose. While no one could have a higher opinion of the Mitchell in its own sphere than I have, I do not think that it would take the place of a Public Records Office. Having spent many weeks among the documents of the Public Records Office, Chancery Lane, London, and being familiar with the Mitchell and its treasures, I cannot imagine the Trustees of the Mitchell storing and indexing the many thousands of public documents that should be saved from destruction. 24.

Meanwhile at the Library the Trustees were still of the opinion that the Mitchell Library should be considered the de facto state archives department. As in the past the Library was more concerned with the completion of library buildings rather than the disposition of the State's archives. This was not at all unusual in Australia during this period, with many states adopting a similar system to NSW of de facto government archives housed within the State Libraries. However, at this point, world events overtook this eternally simmering archival debate with the outbreak of war in September 1939. Once more the archives were placed on the back burner, to be ignored until the war was over in 1945. Nevertheless, it is a regrettable fact that during the war a great amount of potentially valuable archival material was recycled by zealous government departments for the war effort.

Chronologically, though slightly out of place, the visit of Dr T. R. Schellenberg, Director of Archival Management at the National Archives in Washington D.C. is a significant milestone. Schellenberg proved to be a consummate sales person in relation to archives and his visit started a trend that led to the gradual separation of libraries and archives in Australia. Increasingly government archives were acknowledged as being separate, distinct and requiring special treatment. This was a great conceptual leap forward in the way government archives would be dealt with from this point on. According to Doust:

It was the sound practices evolved, on good theoretical grounds, by this Department of the Library, which laid the foundations of the work of the Archives Office of New South Wales. 25.

In 1955, writing in the journal *Public Administration*, Marjorie Jacobs from the University of Sydney, a noted academic historian, experienced archives user and commentator on records/archival matters, stated:

Experience in New South Wales suggests that the abandonment of the practice of asking departmental officers to assess the historical value of materials has much to commend it. In the past instructions to departments to transmit to the Mitchell Library material of 'historical importance' led to the destruction of valuable records, simply because their importance was not obvious to an officer who had no knowledge of the methods of historical research. If the practice of permitting departments to destroy records is developed in Australia, both local experience and the Committee's investigations in Britain suggest that an

historical assessment of the older records which have now accumulated should be made and that they should be disposed of only by experienced archivists. 26.

This problem was not a new one, but Marjorie Jacob's article brought into sharp focus the increasingly difficult problems faced by government departments as to what was considered an historical record, what to keep and what to discard. Doust also comments on the mind set of librarians in the organisation of archival materials noting that:

The mistake made by librarians was in thinking that their indexing methods could be applied to archival materials generally. 27.

Jacobs in her article in Public Administration goes on to say:

Australian archives have perhaps, reached the point where the desirability of relieving the libraries of the burden of their selection and custody must be reviewed and consideration given to determine procedures for their disposal and assign the responsibility for records management and archives administration to officers directly responsible to the Prime Minister and the Premiers. 28.

In essence the battle lines were drawn between the forces supporting the status quo, which on the positive side had saved many an archive from destruction, but on the negative side had led to a shambolic and haphazard growth of government archives in New South Wales. These archives were stored in a library which applied the techniques of librarians, preferring a subject and indexing approach to the arrangement of these archives rather than that of archivists who rightly favoured that the State's archives be maintained in their original order as created in each department.

After the Second World War there was a massive growth in the New South Wales Public Service as more and more services were demanded of government by the general public. This led to a commensurate increase in the size of the Public Service, placing greater pressure on accommodation and storage of records. The NSW Public Service Board which had been established in 1895 played a pivotal role in the overall control of the Public Service, including accommodation and in the 1950s and 1960s the question of unnecessary storage of Government records was once more on the agenda. The Board, ever keen for economy, turned its attention to the advocacy of centralised storage for Government records. Two rather inappropriate locations in George Street and at Goldsborough House at Circular Quay had been approved, but according to Phyllis Mander Jones, the then Mitchell Librarian, Goldsborough House was a fire trap and quite inadequate for the proper storage of Government archives. The Government and the Board were keen to remove unwanted records from city storage to cheaper storage in the suburbs, but continually chose substandard and inappropriate locations and facilities for the records storage. In 1951 a committee was established by the Public Service Board to look at the whole question of records storage and the committee recommended:

That departmental records be reviewed, inventoried and classified either for disposal or retention.

That the inventories of records prepared by departments be examined by a Records Committee for each department consisting of representatives of the Public Service Board, the Public Library and the department, and the records

committee make appropriate recommendations on the disposal of the records, including an assessment of storage space required.

That a State Records Repository be established.

That disposal action, including the management of the proposed repository be under the control of the Principal Librarian. 29.

Inevitably the question of the storage of records and archives is usually anchored firmly at the bottom in any list of government priorities. This has always been the case with the care of NSW government archives from the very earliest days of the colony. It was clear that the storage at Goldsborough House was most inadequate, but the proposal to move records to Shea's Creek, was greeted with some dismay by the Principal Librarian, John Metcalfe, who noted that the building was very rough, it was situated close to other buildings which had been used as wool stores and had over the years, become saturated with highly inflammable lanolin. Hardly the place for the storage of the State's archives!

In July 1953 a major report on the archives was presented to the Trustees of the Library by John Metcalfe, Principal Librarian. The report outlined developments with archives in the Library and called upon the Trustees to 'reconsider and re-affirm their policy as the controlling body of an Institution which has become in fact the repository for the archives of the State of New South Wales'. Metcalfe clearly wanted to entrench the Library's control over the archives and the report was accepted by the Trustees. 30.

A major event in the history of the archives in NSW comes in November 1953 with the establishment of an Archives Department at the Public Library of New South Wales. Most significantly it was independent of the Mitchell Library. Allan Horton, who later became University Librarian at the University of New South Wales, was appointed to the position and reported to the Principal Librarian. From an administrative viewpoint the new Archives Department operated within the Library but was responsible to the Public Service Board. The reason for the existence of this Department was primarily for the storage and care of archives, semi active and non current records.

The separation of control of archives from the Mitchell Library in itself is a significant milestone in the history of archives in general and in NSW in particular. The debate over the control of archives by librarians had been aired in the Sydney Morning Herald and the Journal of Public Administration. In the 1950s Jim Gibbney indicated that:

He resented the subordination of archivists to librarians and saw Miss Mander Jones, Mitchell Librarian, in the Public Library of New South Wales, as a prominent member of the enemy camp. 31.

Gibbney was not the only archivist who resented the control of the archives by librarians in Australia and Theodore Schellenberg's visit had brought this issue to a head, though during his visit he had to be quite tactful as his host was the Commonwealth National Library. In many ways Schellenberg's visit was a call to arms for Australian archivists as he recognised the divide and distinction between librarians and archivists and the work they do. Schellenberg also encouraged Australian archivists to start their own professional journal and to begin a cooperative descriptive project. Librarians and archivists had treated each other with civility, but throughout the history of the detachment of the archives from the control of the State and Commonwealth libraries, there had always been

strong tensions and undertones of dissatisfaction, especially from those in the archives camp. This was also apparent with accreditation by the Library Association of Australia which required library qualifications to belong but would not accord archivists with experience the privilege of membership. This naturally rankled with the archivists. This underlying tension persisted right up to and beyond the establishment of the Archives Authority of New South Wales and persisted in minor ways for many years.

In 1954 the Commonwealth National Library Archives Division held a seminar on archives in Australia. Questions dealt with included such weighty topics as, what authority should be invested in the archivist? And what are the essential features of archival legislation? The seminar did come up with recommendations for archives legislation and the draft bill for an Archives Act in NSW which was prepared by Allan Horton used the recommendations of the seminar, which was also attended by Schellenberg, as a basis for the draft. According to Doust:

Schellenberg's visit to Australia was important in crystallizing points of view and in informing Australian archivists of modern overseas practice, especially in North America. It spurred on those who had been working towards archival legislation in New South Wales. It accelerated proper provision for archives; but it did not do more than give impetus to momentum which had been gathering speed over the years and which by 1954 could not have been stopped. 32.

In 1955 the Minister for Education, R.J. Heffron commented

I would be very happy to see an Archives Act on the statute books of this State... I suggest that Mr Metcalfe lets me have, on the Trustees behalf, whatever he thinks might be useful for a Cabinet Minute and a draft bill. 33.

However, the draft bill took another six years before it became legislation and commenced on 1 June 1961. From 1955 until the act was assented to on 17th November 1960 there were many behind the scenes machinations taking place. One camp was keen that the archives be completely separated from the Public Library of NSW, the other, led by the Principal Librarian, John Metcalfe, would have preferred that the Library retain control. Marjorie Jacobs in her recent article in Record from the University of Sydney Archives has thrown new light on the behind the scenes jockeying for position between the Library and the Archives and credits Dr Harold Wyndham with the insight, foresight and intelligence to realise that the days of archives being the appendages of libraries was well and truly over. 34. Remarkably for archives this topic of discussion spilled over into the pages of the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Daily Telegraph*. On 13th November 1956 the *Daily Telegraph* reported that the government was to form an Archives Department and that the Department would preserve historical public documents and receive documents that Government departments no longer required. In 1957 the *Sydney Morning Herald* was much more critical of the Government, taking it to task over the Archives Bill:

It would be pleasant if one could welcome the Government's Archives Bill unreservedly. After nearly 60 years of neglect of state records it is encouraging to see the Government tackling this matter at last and appointing the first State Archivist in New South Wales history ... the invaluable historical records in this State have never been properly looked after. Fortunately, the wonderful, if somewhat chaotic Mitchell collection of public records and private papers went some way to make up this neglect... It is for that reason, no doubt, that the Government has now decided to

perpetuate this arrangement by handing over all its State records to the Public Library and making the Principal Librarian, State archivist. This may seem a natural development, but is it really wise? In all civilized states in Europe and America it is now recognised that it is better to keep archives separated from libraries. The care and collection of records needs special skills which the librarian cannot be expected to have. 35.

In addition the Royal Australian Historical Society weighed into the debate indicating that it too was fully supportive of the separation of any Government archives function from the control of librarians at the Mitchell Library. Clearly a new perception on the importance of the State's archival heritage was dawning and the days of selecting items of historical importance, the jewel box approach to archival management, were drawing to a close. Gordon Richardson, the then Principal Librarian threw his weight behind the legislation but still trying to ensure that the Public Library retained control of the archives. Richardson stated in a letter to the Minister of Education on 4 September 1959:

The reasons for this urgent need for archival legislation in New South Wales can be summarised as follows

- a. To legalise the present 'de facto' State archives so that its custody of public records is a recognized legal fact*
- b. To give the archival authority the legal power to prevent the unauthorised destruction of public records*
- c. To enable those departments and authorities who have the legal obligation of permanent custody to transfer records for safe preservation, to release valuable office space, and for use by properly authorised research workers and to clear up legal doubts in general*
- d. The whole concept of 'public records' should be based on the premise that such records are public property, the property of the sum of all the citizens who collectively constitute the State. Only by proper archival legislation can such records effectively be made public records in fact as well as in name. 36.*

Clearly in point a) Richardson was tilting the debate in favour of the Library to ensure it retained control. However, the government was more influenced by the arguments of Harold Wyndham the Head of the Department of Education and Marjorie Jacobs who both had worked behind the scenes for the establishment of a separate and independent Government archival agency that was not under the control of the Trustees of the Public Library of New South Wales. An Education Department minute of 16 February 1960 was possibly the last nail in the coffin for the continued control of Government archives by the Trustees. The minute strongly supports the establishment of a separate archives entity and states:

*... it is considered that it would be a regrettable error to vest in one part time body such as the Trustees of the Public Library the added responsibility of establishing and maintaining State archives ... a function which deserves nothing less than a single purposeful thought of a separate part time body
.... It is felt that the Trustees of the Public Library by their composition are ill equipped to attract without difficulty, the cooperation of other independent authorities which are very jealous of their traditions and standing. 37.*

Even so, the Archives Act proved to be a very weak piece of archival legislation and certainly did no favours for the newly established Archives Authority of New South Wales. New South Wales had to wait until the passing of the State Records Act in 1998 before a comprehensive piece of legislation relating to records and archives was in place.

On 21 September 1960 The Daily Telegraph reported the State Government would establish an Archives Authority, chaired by a judge, but as it happened the first Chairman of the Authority was Harold Wyndham, the Director General of the Department of Education. 38.

The Act was proclaimed in July 1961 and for the sake of continuity Gordon Richardson, Principal Librarian was appointed Principal Archivist. This had the effect of diffusing any concerns the Trustees of the Public Library may have had but clearly placed the new Authority well out of control of the Trustees themselves. It must be noted that it was 1976 with the appointment of Ian Maclean to the position of Principal Archivist, that the apron strings were finally severed.

Once again, I must give the final word to former State Librarian Russell Doust who comments on the proclamation of the Archives Act that

The hopes and expectations of fifty years had at last been realised: legislation was in being to provide for the proper custody and control of the State archives, suitable accommodation was assured, and most importantly, there was promise of proper financial provision. 39.

The debate continues on what the true meaning of proper financial provision. I expect many of my colleagues working in archives would agree with me. However, the archives-library relationship has matured since these early days of rancour and testiness and having grown out of the same institution there is a continuing and abiding level of good will and respect between the State Library of New South Wales and State Records New South Wales.

Finally I would like to acknowledge the work of former NSW State Librarians Russell Doust and Gordon Richardson whose theses I have drawn heavily in the writing of this paper.

Endnotes:

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26. Marjorie Jacobs 'A new approach to departmental records'. *Public Administration* June 1955 p 121
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