



ANNUAL REPORT  
2019

Celebrating 30 Years

*Jessie Street National Women's Library serves to:*

- *Highlight the contribution of Australian women to this country's development*
- *Highlight awareness of women's issues*
- *Ensure that documents relating to Australian women's lives and activities are collected and made accessible*
- *Support the fields of women's history and women's studies*

*To keep women's words, women's works, alive and powerful*

*Ursula K. Le Guin*

## **CHAIR'S OVERVIEW**

We celebrated 30 years since the founding of the Library at the Annual General Meeting in the presence of two of its esteemed founders: Shirley Jones and Lenore Coltheart. We marked their contribution to the Library with Honorary Life Memberships and also marked the support and work for the Library of the Hon Dr Meredith Burgmann, Myra Keay, Bridget McKern, Bev Sodbinow, Jane Pollard, Jan Burnswoods and Marie de Lepervanche. We were pleased to welcome to the celebratory AGM and lunch three of our patrons: the Hon Quentin Bryce, the Hon Elizabeth Evatt and Professor Emerita Elizabeth Webby.

At the Christmas Party, we acknowledged the prodigious efforts of Michele Ginswick with an Honorary Life Membership as well.

The year saw the end of our five year Business Plan and we held a planning workshop on 24<sup>th</sup> October to explore ideas, test assumptions, discuss achievements and challenges and develop strategies for a new five year plan. We organised the Plan around six priority categories: 1. Resources, Assets and Fundraising. 2. Technical and Administrative Services. 3. People. 4. Activities for Members, Stakeholders and Supporters. 5. Outreach. 6. Partners. The Plan has been finalised and is available to interested members and all volunteers.

We welcomed 130 visitors to the Library in 2019 and were supported in our work by over 40 volunteers including two men. We provided various services and organised events including our very popular Lunch Hour Talks held at Customs House Library. The Library maintained its strong membership base with over 450 members. Our Newsletter Committee met and our editors and writers compiled and published our quarterly newsletter.

The Library's Facebook page had over 1400 followers and Diane Hague, Sherri Hilario and Hanne Marks contributed to the composition of 120 posts during the year. We opened a Twitter account managed by Jessica Stewart. We continued to engage our social media for promotion of the Library and the events of other organisations related to the Library's core mission. With a view to building strong relationships with organisations, we printed business cards for all volunteers to use when representing the Library.

The Board met on nine occasions. Members gave generously of their time, in particular, Sherri Hilario as Secretary and Jean Burns as Treasurer. They made outstanding contributions to the efficient operation of the Library and with all other volunteers, helped to build its reputation in the broader women's community.

The **City of Sydney, Ultimo Community Centre** staff provided courteous assistance with our queries and requests and we extend our thanks to them and the contractors who manage maintenance and our lease. We filled in our quarterly surveys and supplied the Annual Review required as a condition of our lease within timeframes. We received an A rating from the City of Sydney for our performance during 2018.

In January, the Library was approached by the Acquisitions Editor, **GALE Primary Sources**, a **Cengage** company, with an offer to digitise some of the Library's archival

collections. **GALE** saw this as an opportunity for the company to expand the scope of its collections to cover more regions, including Australia. Professor Susan Margery, and several other academics, had referred the company to the Library, a recognition of the value of our holdings. We discussed the proposal and the draft Content License Agreement at Board meetings and among the volunteer Librarians. It prompted them and the Archivists to research a range of copyright issues as well as digitisation policies of libraries in Australia.

In the course of the exploration of all issues, we discovered that many library policies or processes were still under development and international and national copyright law in this area was either evolving or complex. One of our volunteers, Marc Smith, in discussion with Lynne Morton and Julianne Patterson, drafted a Digitisation Policy and Strategy for the Board's consideration. Our longer term approach to digitisation is one of the Library's key challenges for the future and an action item in our Business Plan 2020-2025.

The Chair and Board member Valda Rigg investigated **Her Place** – the First Australian Women's Museum based in Clarendon Terrace in Melbourne. This newly established institution is intended to link with libraries, museums and universities. It offers a space for regular exhibitions. As yet, it is very much in its infancy. The Board is hopeful that collaboration with **Her Place** will be possible in the future.

Board members visited the **Canberra Museum and Art Gallery (CMAG)** exhibition on protest movements: *Activism: forces for change in Canberra over the last century*. The exhibition featured one of our precious banners on women raped in war. It was borrowed by **CMAG** to define the women's movement section in that exhibition which also featured video footage of that 1981 ANZAC march.

The Library built upon its relationship with Bonnie Djuric of **Parragirls** with the attendance by two Board members of events at the **Parramatta Female Factory** culminating with the launch of a book – *Parragirls: Re-imagining Parramatta Girls Home*.

During the year, the Library hosted a meeting of the Australian Society of Archivists, supported student placements from Sydney TAFE and study tours from Charles Sturt University.

Our work is undertaken by a large group of generous volunteers. They discharge a range of responsibilities to enable the Library to continue its services and outreach to the community and add to our outstanding collection. The professionalism of the librarians and archivists meets international standards and our catalogue was increasingly accessed by people worldwide.

As Chair, I thank the selfless and generous volunteers for making my work and that of all Board members so pleasurable. We are a community of women, with some men, committed to advancing women's equality and preserving women's social, political and cultural history. We can be confident of enduring into the Future.

**Jozefa Sobski AM**  
Chair of the Board

## TREASURER

The Library had a successful year in 2019 and the continued support of the **Council for the City of Sydney** is critical to this success. Through their Accommodation Grants Program, the Council provides a significant rent subsidy for the premises occupied by the Library in the Ultimo Community Centre. In 2019 the rental subsidy was in excess of \$66,000. The ongoing financial support of the Council is acknowledged with gratitude.

Overall **Income** in 2019 was around \$6,000 in excess of budget. Donations to support the day to day operations of the Library was in excess of \$6,000, around \$1,200 less than the approved budget. Donations to the Library's **Capital Investment Fund** totalled \$33,966 or \$9,000 in excess of budget. This was in part due to the Library receiving a bequest of \$4,200. The balance of the fund at the end of 2019 was \$434,234.38, moving ever closer to the target of \$500,000.

The major fundraising event for the Library is the **Annual Luncheon** held at NSW Parliament House in September. The profit from this event in 2019 was \$15,597.88. The regular **Lunch Hour Talks** remain popular and in 2019 achieved a net profit of \$2,014.05. The Library acknowledges the support of members and volunteers who organise, work at and attend these events to ensure they continue to be successful fundraising ventures for the Library.

The Library welcomed 25 new members in 2019, and one Life Member resulting in **Membership revenue** of \$14,540 which was as per budget. It is now standard practice to issue a renewal reminder to members with the November Newsletter and those members who have not renewed by the end of March are sent a reminder in April each year.

Overall, **expenditure** in 2019 was around \$3,000 in excess of approved budget. This was largely due to increased costs for the Annual Luncheon, a result of the increase attendance, for which the Library received increased revenue. Unplanned increases in expenditure are attributed to:

- Repairs to printer hardware (\$800)
- Upgrading InDesign software for newsletter production (\$263)
- The Library's 30 Year Celebration (\$1,250)
- Increased cost of membership of the National Library of Australia (\$880)

At the end of 2019 the Library's Westpac **Term Deposit** was valued at \$112,882.00 with a maturity date of 5 March 2020. The Library finished 2019 with a **cash position** of \$163,139.77 plus \$434,234.38 in the **Capital Investment Fund**, a total of \$597,374.15.

On behalf of the Board I would like to thank Jann Skinner for her continued role as Honorary Auditor and for providing assistance and support to me throughout the year.

**Jean Burns**

Treasurer

## SECRETARY

Last year, the Board decided it was time for a 'Brand refresh' across all communications platforms as part of the Library's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations. The revamped website and social media sites were launched at the celebratory lunch following the AGM. The new Newsletter look was delayed due to an overlapping need to upgrade software systems.

In addition to a steady increase in membership, over the past year our records also show there has been a significant increase in the number of enquiries, by telephone and email, as well as in visitors to the Library.

Requests and enquiries range from the routine and familiar (changes of address, donations of books and badges) to the unexpected.

Some unusual research subjects requested over the past year include an Arts project specialising in embroidery; a study of women and historical ships; murders at Hanging Rock and advice on depositing Anglican Deaconess papers.

We were also contacted by Kaldor Public Art Projects about participating in a performative art installation by Agatha Gothe-Snape, commissioned as part of their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary exhibition at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. Two volunteers responded and participated in *Lion's Honey* as Saturday Reader and Sunday Reader respectively.

Records show visitors travelling from Bathurst, Melbourne and California. A returning PhD student from Cambridge spent 3-4 weeks looking at material relating to Australian Women's Liberation (1964-80). A researcher from Queensland spent two days looking into the history of women in Local Government in Queensland.

Some visitors just enjoyed reading restricted loan books. Though we get few Inter-Library Loan requests, those we do receive tend to be for rare or specialised items, such as a request by the Law Reform Commission.

It is wonderful to be able to achieve the Library's Aims and Objectives by meeting people's needs across such a wide range of subjects.

There were 9 Board Meetings in 2018. The attendance record was:

Chair	Jozefa Sobski AM	8
Vice Chair	Suzanne Marks	7
Secretary	Sherri Hilario	6
Treasurer	Jean Burns	8
Members	Michele Ginswick	7
	Diane Hague (corresponding member)	9
	Robyn Harriott	9

Barbara Henery	5
Beverley Kingston	7
Susan Price	6
Vallie Rigg	6
Marion Shaw	7
Beverley Sodbinow	6

All quarterly surveys and the Annual Self-Assessment required by the City of Sydney's Accommodation Grants Program were completed.

Returns required by the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profit Commission (ACNC) were submitted.

**Sherri Hilario**

Secretary

**Christine Lees, Hanne Marks**

Administration

## **LIBRARY**

In 2019, as part of an extended overseas trip, volunteer Sherri Hilario arranged to meet with three related institutions. She met with the Center for the Study of Political Graphics (CSPG) and its founder Carol Wells. CSPG is an educational and research archive, located in Los Angeles CA, with over 90,000 human rights and protests posters and pictures. There was agreement to pursue an exchange of posters in the future. The Feminist Library in London was filled with boxes due to a delayed move to new premises. However, talking to one of their volunteers, there was a real sense of its activist community based commitment. Glasgow Women's Library continues to inspire, spending many hours there over two days thanks to the generosity of Librarian Wendy Kirk. We were given a copy of *21 Revolutions: new writings and prints inspired by the collections at Glasgow Women's Library*. A highlight was being read to at the Story Café.

History Week, titled *Women, Memory and Landscape: sites of activism, resistance, persistence*, saw a strong collaboration between the archivists and librarians to create a week of displays and events. Drawn from all corners of our holdings was a special display commemorating the Women for Survival Peace Camp 1983. There was also an exhibition of over 25 posters and the launch of a new initiative, the Story Café. Two were held, one led by archivists and the other by librarians. It was a lovely opportunity to settle in to the pleasure of listening to stories and poems being read aloud.

Our Poster collection continues to be a vital resource. For IWD, the Library was asked for the loan of one of the posters made during its collaboration with artist Ciara Phillips as part of the 2018 Biennale of Sydney. *Future Feminist Archive – Live! In Wollongong*, at Wollongong Art Gallery, was an exhibition dedicated to the 1938 and 1979 marches. The Library received a donation of the book *The feminist revolution: the struggle for women's liberation*, published in 2018 by the Smithsonian Institution, for which we were able to provide two poster images, which are acknowledged. Also in 2019,

relationships were established with feminist poster makers past and present, Anne Sheridan, Toni Robertson and Wendy Murray.

Book club continues to thrive, generating lively and insightful discussions and reviews. Books read stretched across memoir, biography, fiction and non-fiction. A unique focus of the group is (re)discovering the classics from the Library's collection by authors such as Katherine Suzannah Pritchard, Henry Handel Richardson and Thea Astley. A recurring resonance of topics and issues across generations of writers came into stark relief. Also, the Library was thrilled to be given the six shortlisted titles by the Stella Prize.

Serials Librarians Lynne Morton and Julianne Patterson embarked on the task of reorganising our serials collection into the Dewey Decimal Classification system. This will take some time as we hold over 500 serials. They will also be extending into a review of subject headings in the catalogue records with the aim of facilitating relevant search results and the continued enrichment of our Catalogue.

There was a sustained increase in the number of researchers utilising our resources. We provided research assistance and support, for undergraduate and postgraduate researchers, academics and independent scholars both in-house and electronically. In addition, we continued to provide targeted and strategic industry placement opportunities for TAFE and Charles Sturt University Library Studies students.

**Sherri Hilario**

## **ARCHIVES**

The year 2019 was a busy and productive one for the archives team. The Library's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary gave us the opportunity to comb the records from 1989 to the present, and Jan Burnswoods provided illustrated historical accounts for the four issues of the Newsletter. Bev Sodbinow was one of the long-serving current volunteers interviewed for the Newsletter, reminiscing about her experiences since 1999.

Work continued on a number of projects. Gina Dolphin is cataloguing the large collection of Helen Leonard's papers, which cover many important areas of women's activism over three decades, from encouraging and assisting breast-feeding mothers to improving the presentation of women in the media. Christine Smith has done a great deal of work transferring data relating to the material from the Canberra Women's Archive into KOHA. Vallie Rigg has continued work on the appropriate storage of our banners, several of which have now been carefully photographed.

The banner *In memory of all women raped in all wars*, first carried by women in the 1981 Anzac Day March in Canberra, together with a film, was lent by the Library to the Canberra Museum and Gallery for an exhibition on activism during the year. The banner and film came originally from the Canberra Women's Archive.

The History Week display at the Library in September, incorporated a number of items from the archives relating to the Pine Gap women's peace camp in 1983. A welcome



by-product was the donation of photographs and a scrapbook by a woman who had been at the protest and came to see our display. The archives team also participated in the Story Café, reading from diaries, letters and personal papers.

Accessions during the year included minutes from a decade of the Zonta Club in Sydney, legal papers relating to the women arrested at Pine Gap in 1983 and a number of badges. There was also a group of letters, collected by a midwife, from north coast women who had recently given birth, giving her some details of the birth. The papers of Lesley Squires covered an important sex discrimination case against Qantas in the 1980s. An article in the Library's Newsletter for February 2020 explains the significance of this case, together with related cases brought by other female flight attendants.

Amongst the visitors during the year was a large group of archivists. The Australian Society of Archivists held its monthly meeting at the Library in March; Christine and Beverley addressed the group and several items from our collection were displayed and discussed.

## **Jan Burnswoods**

### **ANNUAL LUNCHEON**

The choice of Debora Cheetham AO as our speaker in 2019 was an inspiration! Her address is best described by Jessica Stewart in the *Newsletter*. Deborah, without notes, 'wove a story of this land we share and the journey we need to take, from knowing to understanding'. Imbedded in her message was her belief in the 80,000 year old culture of which she is part and how, through a deep appreciation of the place of the arts in both indigenous and non-indigenous cultures, all Australians can feel proud of a continuation and connection to country and so mature as a nation.

Margret Campbell performed a moving *Acknowledgement of Country*, leading the guests into the dining room. From this point Jozefa Sobski AM as MC adroitly managed the rest of the program. Barbara Henery reviewed Library activities for the year. Our speaker was introduced by Suzanne Marks and thanked most sincerely by Tyra Beazley, a Year 10 student at GRC Penshurst Girls Campus, Deborah's old school. A full house saw 325 guests in attendance including foundation Library patron Elizabeth Evatt, Professor Emerita Elizabeth Webby, our Parliamentary Hosts the Hon Bronnie Taylor and the Hon Penny Sharp, as well as other State Members of Parliament. We welcomed Jacq Fingleton and Sarah Street, members of Jessie Street's family, and Penny Street. Other groups included the NSW Teachers Federation (a member organisation), Women's Action and Information Group (WAIG) and the Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL). 68 students, 34 of whom were sponsored, from nine schools were present. The support of the Muir family through the sponsoring of a school table in memory of Marie Muir, a much loved, longstanding Board member, MC and convenor of this event for many years was acknowledged. A profit of \$15,598 was achieved.

Again, we would very much like to thank the staff of the Strangers' Dining Room, without whose efforts a successful lunch would not have been possible. Above all, it is important to acknowledge the long months of organisation and planning carried out by the tireless Annual Luncheon Committee, and to extend our warmest thanks for their cheerful teamwork and dedication.

**Michele Ginswick**

## **LUNCH HOUR TALKS**

The five Lunch Hour Talks held this year were well received and well attended. Again we were welcomed and accorded continued support from the Librarian at Customs House, Lydie Bacot, and her team. Our core volunteer team has worked together to look after all aspects of the organisation of the events both on the day and beyond in their inimitable way and ensured all attending feel most welcome. I thank them all most sincerely.

The speakers in 2019 were:

**Thursday 21 February: Nadia Wheatley, *Her Mother's Daughter***

Acclaimed adults' and children's novelist, Nadia Wheatley's story telling has always had roots in a sense of place. Beginning with descriptions of the rural area in which she grew up, she recounted the details of her mother's pre-married life and the short time she had with her daughter. There was an audible gasp of horror from the group when Nadia revealed how she found out that her mother had died. A collection of small objects which Nadia brought along added to the poignancy of her story and showed a family who cruelly kept even the smallest memento from her.

**Thursday 21 March: Anne Benjamin, *Saffron and Silk: An Australian in India***

Anne Benjamin told of the cultural impact she experienced when, as a Sydney academic she married her Indian born development worker husband and they went to live in Chennai. She described life with a new baby, a new language and far from home support, all intensified by the domestic politics of the fresh water supply amidst the national political climate which surrounded the assassination of Indira Gandhi. Anne's focus on the strength of the women and their successes was heartening in the face of so many reports of the horror which befall so many Indian women.

**Thursday 20 June: Cleo Lynch; *Careering into Corrections: from housewife to prison officer***

Suburban housewife and mother, Cleo Lynch, experienced a life-changing event leading to a career in the NSW prison system. She became the inaugural manager of the first pre-release community-based facility for women in this jurisdiction. In her memoir, she tracks her career in corrections from its catalysts, through its various stages and locations until her retirement 16 years later.

**Thursday 15 August: Dr Sue Taffe, *A White Hot Flame*: Mary Montgomerie Bennett**

Dr Sue Taffe is a Melbourne historian who has brought to life the work of an under-recognised path-breaker in the long, tortuous journey towards recognition of Indigenous Australians, Mary Montgomerie Bennett. Mary moved from London in 1927 to Western Australia to work with the Wongutha people, desert dwellers on the Eastern goldfields. She corresponded and worked closely with Jessie Street and Shirley Andrews, resulting in the establishment of a Royal Commission. Dr Taffe is the author of 'Black and White Together' and of the website 'Collaborating for Indigenous Rights'.

**Thursday 17 October: Michelle Arrow, *The Seventies: The personal, the political and the making of modern Australia***

Michelle Arrow is an Associate Professor in Modern History at Macquarie University. Her book explores her research into the history of popular culture, focusing on the 1970s, a tumultuous period of social, economic and political upheaval, reflected in 'It's Time', stagflation and the Dismissal. But the 1970s was also the era when the personal became the political, when the women's movement and gay and lesbian rights activists tore down the boundary between public and private life and reshaped Australia's culture.

**Michele Ginswick**

## **NEWSLETTER**

For the four 2019 editions, the Newsletter Committee met four times: in December 2018, then April, June and October 2019. Its key objectives are to:

- Keep our membership informed and engaged in our activities
- Review the content material for the following Newsletter edition
- Coordinate the role of the Newsletter with the Library's other communication modalities namely Facebook and the website and
- Seek ways to continuously improve the Newsletter production

Steered by our editors Kris Clarke and Jessica Stewart and our proof reader Jan Burnswood and supported by the Committee and Library volunteers, the Newsletter continued to thrive. Three eight pages issues were produced in February, May and July and the 12 page November edition which included the report on our September Annual Luncheon.

Content reflected the richness of the Library's activities and diversity and dedication of our volunteers' expertise and interests. Some highlights included:

Our 30 year anniversary history of the library as well as articles on the Library's resources continued throughout the four issues.

February. The founding of the Library by Shirley Jones and Lenore Coltheart in 1989 and the challenges of the early days.

May. The celebratory AGM to honour our founders, interviews with Shirley Jones and Librarian Jane Pollard, honorary life memberships awarded, lunch and cake. Feature promoting our Annual Luncheon speaker Deborah Cheetham.

July. The Town Hall days and interviews with long serving volunteers from 1999 Christine Lees and Bev Sodbinow. First Australian Women's Song Book and the National Folk Festival.

November. The Ultimo years to the present day.  
Report on Deborah Cheetham's speech at Annual Luncheon.  
The Library's contribution to History Week.  
Feminist libraries around the world.

Through the Newsletter, the Library maintains a high level of transparency and accountability to our members by informing them on the current state of our capital investment fund, general donations, membership, new members and acquisitions.

We look forward to 2020 being yet another year of reporting on and sharing with our members/readers how the Library is functioning as well as the inspiring actions and stories we can bring to light.

**Suzanne Marks**

**BOARD 2019**

Chair	Jozefa Sobski AM
Vice Chair	Suzanne Marks
Secretary	Sherri Hilario
Treasurer	Jean Burns
Members	Michele Ginswick Diane Hague (corresponding member) Robyn Harriott Barbara Henery Beverley Kingston Susan Price Vallie Rigg Marion Shaw Beverley Sodbinow
Public Officer:	Sherri Hilario
Hon. Auditor:	Jann Skinner

**VOLUNTEERS 2019**

Sue Baker, Kathryn Berenger; Jean Burns, Jan Burnswoods, Bronwyn Campbell, Wendy Chester, Celina Ching, Kris Clarke, Rima D'Arcy, Dale Dengate, Isobel Dewar, Gina Dolphin, Lyn Eggins, Galavizh Farhadzadeh, Pat Francis, Jennifer Furness, Michele Ginswick, Diane Hague, Robyn Harriott, Barbara Henery, Sherri Hilario, Howard Houlston, Isobel Humphries, Beverley Kingston, Jane Lander, Roslyn Leal, Christine Lees, Hanne Marks, Suzanne Marks, Anne McNabb, Lyn Mealey, Lynne Morton, Julianne Patterson, Lorna Paviour, Kerith Power, Susan Price, Vallie Rigg, Marion Shaw, Christine Smith, Marc Samuel Smith, Jozefa Sobski, Beverley Sodbinow, Jessica Stewart, Pat Sutton, Judy Watts, Aleit-Marei Woodward.

## Jessie Street National Women's Library

Ultimo Community Centre, 523-525 Harris Street, Ultimo

GPO Box 2656, Sydney NSW 2001

Telephone (02) 9571 5359

Email: [info@nationalwomenslibrary.org.au](mailto:info@nationalwomenslibrary.org.au)

Website: [www.nationalwomenslibrary.org.au](http://www.nationalwomenslibrary.org.au)

