



HISTORY WEST Y

THE ROYAL WESTERN AUSTRALIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC

President's Report July, 2023 – June 2024

As I have said before, I count it a great privilege to be President of the Royal Western Australian Historical Society and thoroughly enjoying being in the role. Working with such an amazing group of people, whose passion for the history of Western Australia is unquenchable, is a joy.

The following is a brief account of the Society's activities for the financial year 2023/2024:

Communication with our members is a vital component of the Society's work and I thank Lenore Layman, who edits our monthly newsletter so skilfully and ----- who transforms the material into the very pleasing format we look forward to receiving every month. This is no small undertaking as is demonstrated by the amount of information contained in every edition. To those who contribute to this monthly digest, please keep the articles and news items coming; this makes the editor's job so much easier.

One of the jewels in the Society's crown is our annual journal, 'Early Days'. The first edition was published in 1927, and it has been published annually ever since. It was pointed out to me at the launch of this year's edition that 'Early Days' is now the only annual publication devoted to Western Australian history, which makes it a very significant journal.

As with previous editions, this year's 'Early Days' is very a high-quality publication, both in terms of its content and its reproduction. High praise goes to the Readings and Publications Committee, who oversee its production, with special mention going to Heather Campbell and Jennie Carter, the joint editors, who's hard work has produced yet another stellar edition. The publication was special launched on Friday, 23rd August at Stirling House. I gather this was the first time 'Early Days' has been launched at its own event, rather than as part of a general meeting. The success of the evening was demonstrated by the fact we had a full house, including all eight authors who contributed to the publication (that was a first too!).

Our 'on-line' presence is also vital as a means of communicating with members and we thank our Webmaster, Jeanette Longwood, for her work in keeping the website up to date and to all the contributors who supply information to her. Another important communication tool for the Society is our Facebook page and thanks go to James Cassidy for keeping our page up to date and interesting.

The Society's Council and Executive Committee have continued to meet in alternate months to manage our affairs. The Treasurer has continued her work on streamlining and improving and update our accounting system, making it more efficient and compliant with modern accounting standards.

The Council has continued to search for a new headquarters building for the Society. In October las year, we thought we had found a suitable building in Subiaco and submitted an expression of interest on it. Unfortunately, after a lot of hard work on due diligence, etc.,

we were confronted by the fact that the building did not have vacant possession, so, regretfully withdrew our interest.

It was then back to square one and the search began again. In June, another potential building was found, which although not quite as big as we would have liked, would fulfil our need very well. We hope to have more news on this building in the very near future. Our thanks go to Sally Anne Hasluck, who has led the charge on this quest and done an inordinate amount of work in the background to help the Society a pleasant and accommodating new home.

A week after Good Friday came a very good Friday for the Society. At 4pm on 4 April the doors opened on our annual Jumbo Second-Hand Book sale. Months had been spent collecting, pricing and sorting literally thousands of donated books. A queue of browsers and buyers eagerly formed well before the doors were opened and, by 6pm, the two hours had produced over \$7,400 in sales. Saturday and Sunday were busy with a steady stream of interested visitors, who managed to buy another \$10,000 worth of books.

At the end, on Sunday afternoon, all books left over were channelled to various charities by a team of 30 volunteers who had come especially to help pack up. There were marquees to be put away, tables to be dismantled, signs to be taken down — a superb all-round effort completed the day. Our thanks go to the very hardworking team, under the leadership of Pamela and Nick, who once again enabled the Society to swell its coffers by a significant amount.

Of the other events the Society runs, the Williams/Lee Steere Annual Prize for the best book published on WA history has become a major prize for history writing in the State. Last year the Society was delighted to receive a record nineteen entries, all of which add something to our understanding of WA's past.

As usual the winners were announced at the Society's AGM in September, 2023. This time the winner was J M R Cameron, for his book 'Before Gold: the Northampton Mineral District 1846-1880'. In addition, the judges awarded two commendations: Glen McLaren for 'Siren Song', a history of thoroughbred racing in WA, and Kalamunda and Districts Historical Society's Foothills Focus: an oral history of the early settlers in the Kalamunda Foothills.

Our Annual Lecture, 'People's Stories Making Australian History', was held on Thursday 6 June at UWA Club Auditorium with an audience of approximately 130, as well as a group online at UWA Albany. Chaired by Professor Jane Lydon, a panel of three speakers, Steve Kinnane, Mike Lefroy and Susanna Iuliano explored the three epic stories which have shaped Australian history and Australia today. Noel Pearson's 2017 text 'The Three Pillars of Australian History' inspired the evening's discussion, which was lively interesting and thought provoking. Steve spoke about the ancient Indigenous heritage, Mike demonstrated our British inheritance by means of his own family's story, and Susanna explained the multicultural transformation through her Italian roots. Thanks go to Sally Anne Hasluck, her hard-working team and everyone who made the evening such a success.

The Society's weekday morning community talks go from strength to strength and always draw a good audience. An excellent spin-off from the talks is the number of new members recruited at these events. Thanks go to those who organise the talks and the morning tea providers, who add a lovely, homely hospitality to the talks.

The bulk of the work of the Society is carried by our nine committees and our enthusiastic volunteers. I am sure their work to ensure a lively and active Society is very much appreciated by our membership.

It never ceases to amaze me how much time our loyal, and very hardworking, group of volunteers gives to the Society. The recorded volunteer hours average over 1,000 per month, but this is just the tip of the iceberg, as many people also spend a good deal of time at home working on Society business, which is very rarely recorded. What is also wonderful is that our volunteer force is one of the most-cheery group of people I know, which make it a pleasure to be amongst them at Stirling House. A heartfelt 'thank you' to you all: the Society would not survive without your loyalty and support.

I would also like to pay tribute to our Community Officer, Lesley Burnett. She is the public face of the Society; a role she carries out with great aplomb. More than that, Lesley frequently goes above and beyond the call of duty to make sure our daily affairs run as smoothly as possible. Thank you, Lesley.

Thank you to everyone who helps us to achieve our mission of ensuring present and future generations have access to the history of Western Australia.

Richard Offen
President and Chair of Council
September, 2024