

Ross Gibbs, PSM is currently Director-General of the National Archives Australia (NAA), a position he has held since April 2003. Ross's career in archives began in the Australian Manuscripts Collection of the La Trobe Library in the State Library of Victoria in the early 1970's. From 1991 until early 2003 he was Keeper of Public Records and Director of the Public Record Office Victoria (PROV).

Previously Ross was a member of the Collections Council of Australia, the organization set up to provide a coordinated approach to the common issues facing archives, galleries, libraries and museums in his capacity. He has also been President of the Australian Council of Archives and Convenor of the Australian Society of Archivists in Victoria and was the only archives member to hold the position of Deputy Chair of Visions Australia, the Australian Government's funding body that facilitates access to the nation's cultural collections, including archives.

Ross has a strong and long held commitment to making better known and more accessible the extensive collections of Australia's archives.

DON GRANT LECTURE - 1997

PARTNERSHIPS and PLANS 1997-2007

Ross Gibbs

Editors Note:

Ross Gibbs was invited to give this first Don Grant Lecture which was presented on 9th November 1997 in the Village Theatre, State Library of Victoria. At that time Ross was Director of the Victorian Archives, Public Record Office of Victoria and Keeper of Public Records – today, at the time of this publication, he is Director General of Australian Archives.

Ross Gibbs usually spoke ‘off the cuff’, sometimes referring to basic notes, and this lecture was no exception. Consequently, his excellent oration will have to appear as a synopsis as it was not taped. Ross has however kindly sent us his basis notes – those in the ‘eulogy’ regarding Don Grant being slightly more copious as they required some special research!

The original talk was illustrated with numerous related illustrations in the form of overheads which are no longer available – with one exception – a diagram which we have included.

The Eulogy – The Don Grant Years.

Don Grant was with the Public Record Office of Victoria for 16 years and for the greater part of that time had been Officer-in-Charge of the City Reference Office until he retired in November 1996. During this time he had guided and encouraged tentative beginners to family history and provided them with inspiration and insight needed in this field of research.

As many of you are no doubt aware, Don’s interest in genealogy began as a schoolboy, aged 14, when studying European History he was confronted with the genealogical charts illustrating the Wars of the Austrian and Spanish Successions. This made him realise that all people must have family trees and started his own.

Don’s pursuit of family history ran parallel to his career as a librarian from 1952 to 1977 – the last 22 years spent at the General Motors-Holden’s Technical Library – the last 16 of those years as Chief Librarian.

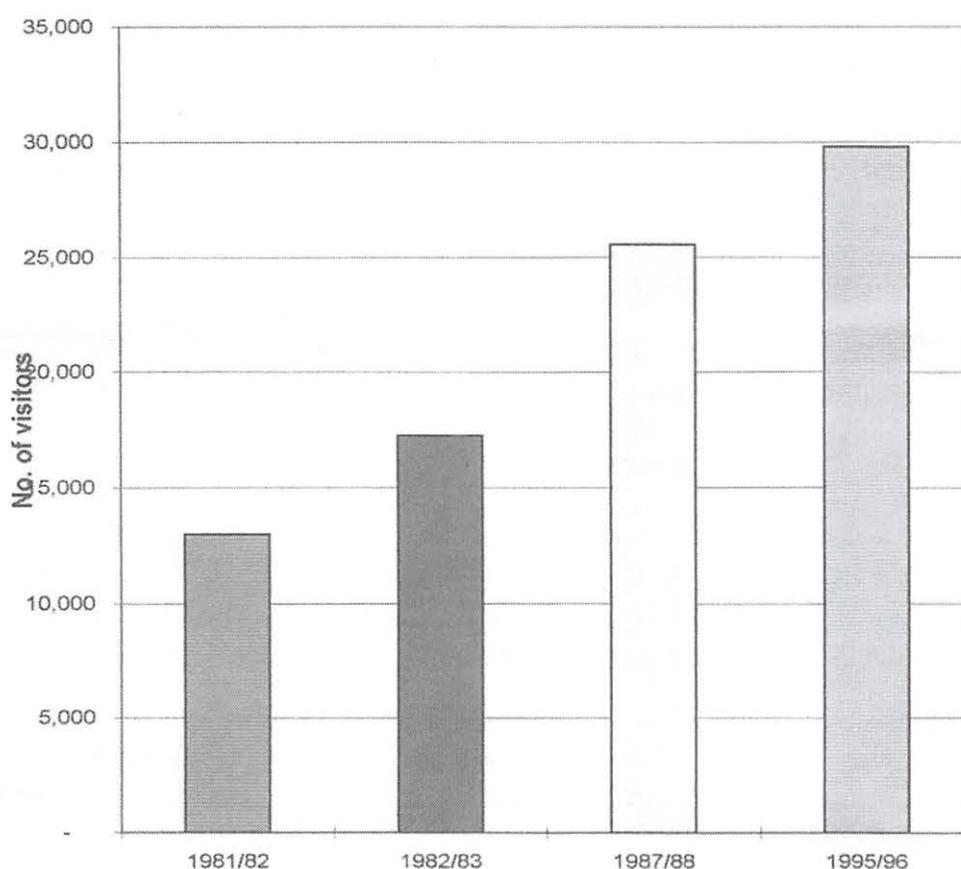
In 1980, after having worked for three years as a full time genealogist and record agent, Don joined the staff of the Public Record Office City Search Room to which he brought a wealth of experience and a stamp of authority to the Search Room.

Don joined the Genealogical Society of Victoria (GSV) in 1953 and was co-opted on to its Council. Twenty years later he was Joint Founder (with Peter Foard) of the Australian Institute of Genealogical Studies (AIGS) and was first President until 1981. During the 1970s he was the instigator of a number of initiatives which resulted in the formation of two other aspects of family history. The **Alexander Henderson Award** to foster excellence in the

production of published family histories; also, the **First Australasian Congress on Genealogy and Heraldry** which in turn resulted in the eventual formation of the **Australasian Association of Family History Organisations (AFFHO)** and the **Australian Association of Genealogists and Record Agents (AAGRA)**.

Don did much to bring professionalism to genealogy and in recognition of his contributions he has been elected a Fellow and Life Member of both the GSV and the AIGS.

DON GRANT YEARS 1980-1996 SEARCH ROOM VISITS



The Public Record Office-Victoria

Ross Gibbs then proceeded to outline major activities of PROV and some planning which was already in operation and more that was envisaged for the future.

First of all, Ross outlined the large indexing programmes which had been in operation for some time at PROV and which had set a precedent for other archival institutions in Australia. He highlighted for example the big programme of indexing passenger lists of immigrants to Victoria, both Assisted (1839-1871) and Unassisted (1852-1923).

The Assisted Ships indexing had been started by an offer from AIGS which was later followed by an offer from GSV to index passengers coming to Victoria from Foreign Ports, (1852-1923). Much had already been achieved by both teams and with additional helpers from outside the future looked very bright indeed for finishing the complete programme. Most of the indexing was carried out at the City Reference Office under the supervision firstly of Ivor Bishop and Don Grant and later after Ivor's retirement, by Eiril Wangerek and Don Grant. The number of indexers at this stage had been about 60 in number.

Ross Gibbs then went on to outline the involvement of PROV firstly, in in-house seminars, open days and members of staff giving specialised talks on many of the records held by the Public Record Office which were used by the public such as shipping passenger lists, probates, inquests, education, municipal records as some examples.

In addition to this aspect above, Ross emphasises that not only did PROV encourage schools, universities and other organisations to bring in groups to see and hear what PROV was now doing but also indicated the willingness of PROV to send staff out to other organisations to give talks. As examples he mentioned visits to places such as Melbourne suburbs, Mildura, Lakes Entrance, Swan Hill, Ballarat, Bendigo and Warrnambool. He also related how PROV was a regular contributor to outside publications such as *Ancestor* official publication of the GSV and *The Genealogist* official publication of the AIGS.

Ross also mentioned the importance of the Ballarat Office of PROV where the vast majority of records relating to Ballarat and district were now housed and that, although on a smaller scale, the Ballarat Office was undertaking similar programmes to those mentioned above.

Ross then went on to relate how important was the concept of partnership programmes with other organisations – for example, the sharing of the new premises at the Melbourne Archives Centre with Australian Archives Victorian Office and entering into relationships with external bodies such as galleries, the Koorie Heritage Trust, Australian Archives, historical societies, Arts Victoria for example. In government circles he outlined the PROV relationships and working procedures with the Premier's Office, the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee regarding future government support for the PROV in its proposed programmes for future developments such as electronic records for the future benefit of family historians and other researchers.

Ross Gibbs then mentioned there was an increasing need for PROV to endorse other places in Victoria as being suitable in all aspects of security and environment standards for the depositing and holding of local records, which for one reason or another could not be deposited centrally. He predicted that this aspect of the work of PROV would in all probability expand in the near and distant future.

Finally, Ross stated that another aspect of the work of PROV which should not be neglected in the future, was its own publications programme. Already published were – *Coming South* on immigration records held by PROV and *Genealogical Sources* with other publication plans in the pipeline. He also outlined plans for future relations with Australian Archives, the Koorie Heritage Trust, Aboriginal Affairs Victoria, the Public Records Advisory Council, Mirimback Nations and the Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust.