



Frances Awcock was the Chief Executive Officer and State Librarian of the State Library of Victoria in 1998, having previously been Technical Services Director at the State Library of Victoria from 1983 to 1988, and Director of the State Library of South Australia from 1988 to 1997. She was in charge of the State Library of Victoria's redevelopment program.

## **DON GRANT LECTURE - 1998**

### ***THE IMPACT ON FAMILY HISTORIANS OF THE REDEVELOPMENT OF THE STATE LIBRARY OF VICTORIA***

**Frances Awcock**

The redevelopment of the site formerly shared by the Museum of Victoria and the State Library of Victoria presents a unique challenge for me as the person charged with leadership and management of the State Library. Not only is a whole city block to be dedicated to library purposes but the redeveloped buildings will provide exciting links between the past, the present, and the future for all Victorians.

As well as celebrating our heritage through restoration of many of the nineteenth century interiors and the great Domed Reading Room, we will also be creating facilities and services that are highly visible expressions of the 'new age'. A hi-tech facility showcasing the latest computing, electronic and telecommunications technologies, combined with 'hands-on' opportunities to experiment and learn, will stimulate a new generations of Victorians to take advantage of easy access to the expanding world of knowledge and cultural resources. A multi-media centre will be an adjunct to this hi-tech facility and will include a wide community of commercially available media and products emanating from the State Library's own collections.

This major restoration program will see the glass roof lights and windows reinstated in the dome of the famous reading room. The annulus space around the perimeter will become a marvellous display facility for some of the Library's treasures and curiosities. It will also feature interactive kiosks and multimedia terminals and even people demonstrating the art of paper-making, fine-binding and printing. In other words it will become a gallery of voyage and exploration of the history of the book 'from tablet to terminal', as my former colleagues at the State Library of South Australia have so elegantly coined the phrase.

That is just a glimpse of what is being planned and there is much more, which I will reveal in the future as they are approved by the Library Board. It is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to re-create for the people of Victoria a Library that represents their highest aspirations for learning and self fulfilment – a State Library that Victorians will regard and use as their very own.

I am proud and excited to have been given the opportunity to preside over the redevelopment of the State Library at a time of such Government support. We have been given not only the resources for bricks and mortar; but also resources to improve our collections and our custody of them. In addition we have been given funds for establishing a widened program of events and publications and we are now honing our marketing skills and conducting significant market research designed to find out what our readers and customers need from us. We hope they, and you, will be quick to let us know when we get it right – and when we get it wrong.

The redevelopment project involves refurbishing the existing heritage buildings and constructing new buildings, enabling the Library to fulfil its key roles of preserving the past and providing resources for the future. This is already evident in the Trescowthick Information Centre, opened in 1997, which offers state-of-the-art technology in superbly refurbished surroundings.

One of the most striking features of the redevelopment plans is the roofing of the four courtyards surrounding the central domed building. The completion of the first of these has created an area that is spatially and visually impressive and incorporates the bluestone rear wall of the Queen's Hall, the original Library building opened in 1856.

Restoration of buildings and provision of significantly increased space will enable the Library to improve existing services and develop new ones. The project will provide progressively for greater increased public areas, environmentally controlled housing for the Library's priceless and irreplaceable collections, technological advances in the provision and extension of information services and improved working conditions for Library staff.

By the turn of the century the State Library of Victoria will be Australia's pre-eminent library, combining heritage and hi-tech elements to provide a new generation of library services within a magnificent complex of buildings.

The State Library's collections continue to hold pride of place in our planning and programming. They provide some of the clues to the Library's identity as well, of course, as a basis for its services. Although we recognise the shifts occurring around the world in response to digital resources and acknowledge that the Library is participating in this new order of things, we are striving to make our rich collections more easily accessible and to add to them wherever possible.

The State Library's role in extending access to its resources and services is clearly demonstrated by several articles published recently. The work of the Multimedia Access Team, for example, is making visual images of Library material more widely available through the Multimedia Catalogue and the Internet. Similarly, the *Libraries Online* project illustrates our partnership with public libraries in providing information resources electronically. On a different front, the Library's services to secondary students and their teachers are increasingly popular and highly regarded by all those who use them.

The Genealogy Centre is planned to expand into the rest of the Palmer Hall location where it is currently sited. Naming rights are under discussion for the centre and the genealogy collection.

*First Families 2001* is progressing well. At a function just last week, an application was made for funding from the Federation Centenary Fund, on behalf of the State Library, and support is being sought from the other State Libraries as a national project. Much interest has already been shown.

The proposed VAFHO Schools Project would be the first state-wide family history project to be initiated by any of the Australian States. The concept and full parameters of this project are still being developed in consultation with member societies; the initial response is very encouraging. It would be the aim of the project to have a state index of primary school students up to a specified date. The project would be achieved with the participation of member societies, State Library of Victoria, Public Record Office of Victoria and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter- Day Saints. It is expected that there would be a CD-Rom product at

the end, with the opportunity for other specifically tailored products, depending on the needs and views of the VAFHO membership.

I am looking forward to the next few years which will undoubtedly be the most exciting in the State Library's history. The needs of family and local historians will continue to play an important part in our accessioning of records for our collections.



**GENEALOGY CENTRE – STATE LIBRARY OF VICTORIA**