

REVIEWS — continued

Australian studies

AUSTRALIAN STUDIES. A SELECT GUIDE TO RESOURCES, HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES/comp Margaret Zerner. St Lucia: University of Queensland. 1981. 110pp. ISBN 0 86776 016 8.

This small handy-sized 110 page book is the first publication to be issued by the Australian Studies Centre (Humanities and Social Sciences) of the University of Queensland.

One of the main reasons for the founding of this centre in 1979 was because of the richness of Australian resource materials held at the University and other institutions in the Brisbane area.

In this publication Margaret Zerner has explored those holdings. She has not set out to give a detailed bibliography but rather to indicate the scope and acquisition policy of the various collections, stressing areas about which information is not readily available.

The headings under which the entries are grouped appear to have been dictated by strength of holdings and practical demand.

Some are by type of material and some by subject. They include newspapers, census and statistics, Gallup and other opinion polls, publications of political parties, education in Queensland, industrial relations, Queensland history, Fryer indexes, etc. Private and official archival sources are included as well as publications. The mixture is handled easily, dealing with manuscript material mainly in general terms.

The section headed Trade Union Records includes a more detailed note on 33 trade unions and their holdings, the result of a survey carried out by questionnaire. This is useful as it gives a lead to otherwise unlisted material.

This principle is well followed also in the section on newspapers, where only holdings are included if they are additional to the National Library's *Newspapers in Australian Libraries* (last edition was 1975).

Constraints of time and finance precluded cross referencing and there is no index, but these are hardly needed in a book of this size and arrangement.

At a time when some of us are still deliberating on how to compile a bibliography of resource materials for Australian history for the Bicentenary publications it is good to see that Queensland has taken the bull by the horns and done it.

I am sure it will be a most useful reference tool for every Australian history student in Queensland and should save librarians there a lot of time previously spent in guiding people to relevant sources.

Margaret Medcalf

LAA 22 Guests

Due to personal commitments, JUDY BLUME is not able to accept our invitation to be a guest at the Conference.

SHIRLEY HUGHES, children's book author and illustrator is arriving in Perth approximately 13 September, and departing Brisbane on a date to be announced.

Shirley's itinerary is being arranged by John Cody of Bodley Head and Richard Parslow of Collins. If you would like her to visit you, contact Richard Parslow, Education Manager, William Collins & Sons Pty Ltd, GPO Box 476, Sydney NSW 2001.

Thanks to all those who assisted me with arrangements for Judy Blume's proposed visit.

Harry B. Bahlin

LATEST ON VIDEOTEX

IT NOW APPEARS almost certain that the Minister for Communications will be forced to reverse his decision to exclude Telecom from the Australian Videotex arena. The reason is simple: most of the potential commercial beneficiaries of Australian Videotex systems want Telecom **in not out**.

Here is a quick recap on recent developments:

- Kerry Packer's company, Publishing and Broadcasting, has decided to forget trying to market an off-shore Videotex system in Australia. For a while it looked like P & B might use its Australian marketing agreement with British Post Office subsidiary, Prestel International to sell data base facilities to Australian information providers.

Not only was the cost of communications too high for P & B to make a go of it but the British GPO canned the whole Prestel International idea.

- The biggest worry, it appears, to potential commercial Videotex system providers is **not** which system to use. It is now the conventional wisdom that technical differences between some of the British, Canadian and French systems will iron themselves out over the next few years.

The big problem is that they need Telecom to provide a national grid, a national billing system and, most importantly, the cross subsidisation for rural and regional users. It would be fun indeed to watch National Country Party deputy leader, Mr Sinclair, attempt to facilitate a Videotex system which leaves his voting constituents out in the cold.

Telecom is really the only organisation which can provide national coverage. A quick look at the results, (ie very little), of a fragmented approach in the US might lead one to see the wisdom in the national common carrier being the prime mover in any given country.

Meanwhile ICL has announced that it will establish a commercial videotex bureau in Sydney and Melbourne for closed user groups. At the same time, the French are currently in town trying to flog their videotex system to whoever they figure might be in a position to buy 'em — which, in Australia at the moment, is a marketer's nightmare. (From *Horan, Wall & Walker Newsletter*, 18 December 1981).

The Association has written to the Minister for Communications expressing its concern at the decision to exclude Telecom for the time being from introducing a videotex service. The LAA and AACOBS issued a press release on 7 December which appears below. The *Australian Financial Review* on 9 December referred to and quoted from the press release:

'The Australian Advisory Council of Bibliographical Services (AACOBS) and the Library Association of Australia (LAA) have noted with concern the recent announcement by the Minister for Communications, Mr. Sinclair, that Telecom would not be permitted to proceed at present with its plans for the introduction of a national Videotex facility. We do not consider this constraint on Telecom to be in the public interest. We do not believe that Telecom should have any monopoly in this matter but it should not, we believe, be prohibited from being involved.

'We do not consider that questions of public sector versus private sector are relevant in this matter. We believe that the relevant

issue is the principle that a communication carrier should not control traffic content. We note therefore with concern that corporations in the private sector which have expressed interest in operating such services are a major retailing organisation and a major news and media corporation. It seems more than likely that such corporations would tend, despite the best will in the world, to limit the traffic content to organisations or interests in which they are associated, or sympathetic or, at the very least, not in direct competition.

'We do not dispute the interests of private enterprises in offering Videotex services of a general or specialised nature to either the community at large or to limited client groups. Users of such services should be quite free to determine whether or not the services and the conditions under which they are offered are appropriate to their needs.

'It is our opinion however that Videotex type services offer a means of information access and distribution of potentially major significance to Australian society at large in the 1980s and beyond. We believe that it is imperative that there be available a publicly owned facility through which information producers can distribute their products generally to the community and free of those constraints which will operate as a result of conflict of commercial interest in the case of privately owned Videotex systems. We believe that it is naive to assume that such conflicts of interest will not arise.

'It is therefore our view that it is in the public interest that a public authority be allowed to provide an appropriate carrier service as a means of access to, and distribution of information data bases. This service should be open to all interests in the community wherever they may be located through a single national and uniform system using equipment based on nationally accepted standards. In view of Telecom's record in developing a nationwide communication network it would seem appropriate that they should be the public authority charged with responsibility for providing a public and nationally available Videotex facility at this time.'

Chairman,
AACOBS Standing Committee
President,
Library Association of Australia

The *Australian Financial Review* on 16 December announced that the Department of Communications is reassessing the potential role for Telecom in providing a public videotex service and is examining schemes for joint Telecom/private sector capital involvement in setting up such a service. Mr Sinclair is anxious that videotex be available for a standard local call charge from anywhere around the country. This is one point which we specifically stressed in our correspondence with Mr Sinclair.

Claiming that the Government would about face early in the New Year, Senator Button said, 'The re-entry of Telecom is inevitable but the Minister wants to dispose of the matter during the height of the holiday season, when the electorate will be distracted.'

It is in our interests to carefully monitor progress and stress the LAA's concern that Telecom be involved through any media available.

Susan Acutt
Executive Director