

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Australian Historic Records Register*, Canberra, National Library of Australia, 1989, \$30.00.

This extremely useful register is the product of the Australian Bicentennial Historic Records search. After a number of pilot studies, almost 40 researchers went out into the field to elicit the response of all Australians, but also targeted particular individuals and organizations. The aim was to record details of the enormous range of documents held in private hands which were of historical significance. The scope was wide and democratic. The educational dimension of the project was also impressive. For the first time, many Australians realized that historic records were not just the paper trails of governments or the diaries and letters of Generals and Prime Ministers; the documentary records of people and groups from all walks of life also have historical significance. The register which was finally produced is an extraordinary distillation of our national heritage.

Because the number of records located, described and identified was so large, the Australian National Library opted to publish the register in microfiche form. Most Australian library users are now familiar with this medium of information storage and retrieval, so costs must have been significantly reduced. However, a printed guide booklet is included. The microfiche set contains a name, place and subject index. Thus a researcher who wishes to use the register looks up the index for say "French People" and finds the number 2961. He or she then has to look up the individual part of the fiche which is titled "From 02832 to 03320" and a description of the record listed within the range of these particular numbers can be found. In this case they are the records of Professor Michael Spencer, who became Professor of French at the University of Queensland in 1974. The fiche includes the dates, general scope and context of the records, together with the address of the owner or custodian to apply for access. We learn, for example, that Professor Spencer has "extensive correspondence in French (mainly letters received) with a variety of writers and public figures, including several hundred letters, cards, etc. from French author Michel Butor, whose work he has translated; and letters from other French writers, critics, men and women of letters and publishers".

The subject index also provides alternative descriptive terms. Therefore, someone interested in the French can also try "French People

in Australia"; ultimately the records listed under numbers 743, 879, 2711, 2812 and 3178, which are not listed under "French People", can be sought. There are some valuable Franco-Australian documents among them. The first (743) relates to the Taylor family for the years 1903-1987. Among them are the records of the Clappier and Varcin families, who emigrated to Queensland, presumably in the early part of this century. Their property *Valfleur* is now called *Fairlands*. The next (879) lists the documents of the Veron family. Henry Veron emigrated with his brothers Robert and Eugène from Brittany in 1872. Among the Hume family records (2711) is a reference to "correspondence with Huon de Kerrilleau connections in Australia and France 1975-1988 and original documents relating to the Huon de Kerrilleau family in France in the eighteenth century". Number 2812 details Sophie Caplan's rich collection of Jewish community records (1900-1988) among which are interviews with Franco-Australian survivors of the Holocaust, together with "rare printed works on Jewish genealogy, chronology, holocaust studies in French, German, Yiddish, Hebrew and English."

Records relating to individuals are also listed. A scholar interested in the personal records of the French sculptor Albert Dubucand, for the period of his sojourn in Melbourne between 1890-1892, should consult the entry under number 03178. They are held by Mr Robert O'Donohue in Nambour, Queensland!

I will not attempt to list records relating to other Francophone communities in Australia. Tantalising Franco-Australian cultural leads aside, this register will be of great use to anyone engaged in Australian historical research. The organisers and field officers of the record search, the Australian Bicentennial Authority and the Australian National Library deserve the commendation of all Australians for what they have achieved.

*Edward Duyker*

*Sylvania, N.S.W.*

Lynne Strahan, *Private and Public Memory: A History of the city of Malvern*, Melbourne, Hargreen/City of Malvern, 1989, 289 pp., illustrations, index.

For those of *Explorations* readers who do not already know, the City of Malvern is a municipality in Melbourne's south-east. Between Prahran on its west and Oakleigh on its east, it stretches from Gardiner's Creek in the north (a boundary it shares with Hawthorn and Camberwell) to the vast asphalt of Dandenong Road which separates it from Caulfield. *Private and Public Memory* is not the first history of Malvern. As a child I often pored over J.B. Cooper's sober (1935) account of Malvern's municipal evolution, cloth-bound in royal blue. I can still close my eyes and picture the plates of dusty roads, bearded men and paddock views from the Town Hall. Cooper's prose was often as dry and dusty as the roads in some of the photographs in his book. For all his conservatism, Cooper bequeathed me a sense of historical reality. Lynne Strahan's fine book has breathed poetry into that reality. Hers is a local history remarkable for its ecological and feminist sensitivity, for its compassion and for its rich basis in personal experience of the municipality from the 1940s onwards. Dr Strahan retells the whole story, but not in a conventional chronological manner. One of the great strengths of her book is that the author has adopted an innovative approach - exploring several historical themes in chapter form.

Reading this book, I was struck by numerous references to France, the French and French cultural influences which I feel are worth sharing. On page 44 there is a tantalizing reference to a Madam Touzeau and her "Malvern Orchestra". There are several mentions of soldiers in France during the First World War (see, for example, pages 52 and 162); Lady Stanley's "great French fête" of 1916 (page 55); the use of "French phrases" in a real estate advertising blurb of 1861 (page 57); the "Irish and French ethos" of the De La Salle brothers who established themselves in Malvern in 1912 (page 89); the "touch of continental sophistication" at Hadleigh Ladies College where the principals were assisted by Madame Lebeus and Mr Guenett (page 105); and Professor W.B. Crooke's "Anglo-French Academy" (page 106).

There are other fascinating connections. Dr Strahan writes of the "ever distinctive" Sacre Cœur convent which "eschewed competitive sporting fixtures and, in another expression of its indelible Frenchness, indulged in the games of *Cache* and *Catte*, which seem to have emanated from a fruitier tradition than Anglo-Saxon heartiness".

She also touchingly recounts how, in 1920, girls at Korowa received a letter from a resident of Villers-Brettoneux "the French village, pummelled into virtual non-existence during the war, where many local youths were buried". In sharp contrast to these Francophile currents, in chapter 6 (which deals with Malvernian obsessions with all things British) Dr Strahan tells us that the local press blasted critics of Empire day, in 1912, as wishing to deprive children of their natural heritage and "teach them the lessons of the French Revolution".

*Private and Public Memory* is not about Franco-Australian cultural links, but it does allude to many unexpected influences. Those who simply want to learn about Malvern will not be disappointed.

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Françoise Lionnet, *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1989, 258 pp.

Françoise Lionnet's book represents both a potently original approach to the understanding of autobiographical writing and an important study of female self-portraiture in its multilingual and multiracial context. Three of the women writers the author examines are Francophone: Marie Cardinal is a Franco-Algerian; Maryse Condé is an Antillaise; and Marie-Thérèse Humbert is a Mauritian. The other two, Zora Neale Hurston and Maya Angelou, are Afro-Americans. Lionnet sees all of these women united as *métisses* because of their mixed racial origins; and the theoretical dynamic of her book springs from an exploration of the cultural and linguistic politics of *métissage*. She writes: "All the texts... interrogate the sociocultural constructions of race and gender and challenge essentializing tendencies that perpetuate exploitation and subjugation..." Lionnet embraces *métissage* as a term because it is essentially free of pejorative connotations. As she puts it, *Métis* "derives etymologically from the Latin *mixus*, 'mixed' and its primary meaning refers to cloth made of two different fibres, usually cotton for the warp and flax for the woof: it is a neutral term, with no animal or sexual implication. It is not grounded in biological misnomers and has no moral judgements attached to it. It evacuates all connotations of 'pedigreed' ascendance, unlike words like *octoroon* or *half-breed*."

But Lionnet goes beyond the cultural, linguist and racial applications of the term. She also sees *métissage* as a form of praxis or reading practice which allows her to "bring out the interreferential nature of a particular set of texts" which she considers to be of "fundamental importance for the understanding of many post colonial cultures". This approach is necessary and valid because the writers under consideration "use linguistic and rhetorical structures that allow their plural selves to speak from within the straightjackets of borrowed discourses. The five women authors represent specific examples of creative *métissage* grounded in the historical and geopolitical realities that motivate and inspire them."

In applying this process to the textual criticism/analysis of autobiography and particularly to the "colonized subjects of patriarchy and racism" Lionnet makes an important contribution to feminist scholarship - in what is effectively the first comparative study of Afro-American and Francophone women writers. I found her discussion of the Mauritian author Marie-Thérèse Humbert's novel *A l'autre bout de*

*moi* particularly interesting, perhaps because Lionnet is herself Mauritian and is able to give considerable critical depth to her analysis because of her own cultural and linguistic *métissage*. It should be stressed, however, that *Autobiographical Voices* is not simply about women authors. Two of Lionnet's chapters deal with St Augustine (whose mother tongue was a north African patois) and Nietzsche. At first these two men might appear an incongruous choice to discuss with twentieth-century female writers. But Lionnet challenges her readers to reassess them, free of preconceptions, for a "feminist reappropriation of the covertly maternal elements of both the *Confessions* and *Ecce Homo*".

This book is a remarkable work which challenges the reader to walk through the overlapping ground of several disciplines and to advance and change the boundaries of these disciplines as he or she progresses. Lionnet even challenges her readers to alter the sequence of her chapters and to be "guided by the threads that seem most compelling". There is an impressive wisdom in her observation that "Reading is a two-way street and implicating myself in my reading, I am in turn transformed by that activity. I can never be a neutral observer of the structures of the texts I read, but my perspectives are also shaped, at least in part, by those present in the texts I discuss... our lives are overdetermined by language and ideology, history and geography, my purpose... is to try to investigate how that larger context may be present *in* the text, in the interweavings of its languages, but sometimes in such a subtle way as to have been neglected by critical discourses that did not take this context into consideration or that simply tried to eliminate it."

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**Bernard Gildas, *Guide des recherches sur l'histoire des familles*, Paris, Archives Nationales, 1988, 335 pp. (available from *La Documentation Française*, 29-31, quai Voltaire, 75340 Paris Cedex 07) FF120.**

This impressive guide to family history research in France first appeared in 1981. It is very pleasing to see it reprinted and available to the public once again. Some 10,000 Australians were born in Metropolitan France; but many more have Huguenot, Norman, Mauritian or 'Gold Rush' French ancestors.

Although the Archives Nationales have already published a guide to French Protestant genealogical sources, the guide under review provides a far broader picture. It is probably the most comprehensive work available and is well classified with addresses and bibliographies in each section. Among the appendices is a concordance of the Republican and Gregorian calendars.

The period covered is vast and complex. France, for example, did not centralize registration of births, deaths and marriages as Britain did in 1837. Many records were destroyed during the savage reduction of the Paris Commune in 1871. Still more went up in flames during the First and Second World Wars. Despite this, French archives are among the richest in the world. Anyone serious about French family history research cannot afford to ignore this guide.

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***Australian Dictionary of Biography*, volume 12: 1891-1939: Smy-z, General Editor: John Ritchie, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1990. 611 pp., \$53.**

Volume 12 of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* is the last of the projected series excluding the index volume. In all, six volumes have been devoted to the period 1891-1939 - a reflection of the growing size of the Australian population during this period and also of traumatic events in the international arena such as the First World War. The co-operative effort of hundreds of writers, this volume is an impressive work of scholarship and an invaluable reference work. As would be expected, it contains substantial entries on well-known national figures such as Arthur Streeton, John Wren, Charles Ulm, David Syme, Louis Stone, and Arthur Upfield.

Over the years I have reviewed a number of volumes in the *ADB* and railed against gender bias and anglocentrism. Most of the historians who have contributed to the present volume are well aware of the need to give women better representation in our history. Although women are still under-represented, it is pleasing to find more entries on them. There are also a number of entries on Aboriginal Australians. And given the greater awareness of our multicultural heritage, I was glad to encounter at least some entries on immigrants from France.

The first I came across in my reading of Volume 12 was G.E. Sherington's interesting biographical note on the educationist Augustine Soubeiran (1858-1933), a French immigrant of the mid-1870s who was one of the founders of Sydney's "Kambala" Girls School and the initiator of the French-Australian League of Help at the outbreak of the First World War. It's a long haul then to Maurice Blackman's important contribution on the writer Paul Wenz (1869-1939). Born in Reims in 1869 and educated in Paris, Wenz was a fellow pupil and life-long friend of André Gide. He emigrated to Australia in the 1890s and became a grazier on the Lachlan river. During the First World War he served as a liaison officer for British and Australian troops in French military hospitals. Wenz's war experiences inspired his novel *Le pays de leurs pères* (Paris, 1919) while Australia inspired his novels *Le jardin des coraux* (Paris, 1929) and *L'écharde* (Paris, 1931). He died of pneumonia in 1939 and is buried in the New South Wales town of Forbes.

In between Soubeiran and Wenz, I found a number of individuals with Francophone connections. For example, the pavement scribe Arthur Stace (1885-1967) is described as the son of a "labourer from

**Mauritius".** The mother of writer P.R. "Inky" Stephensen (1901-1965), Marie Louise Aimée, we learn from Craig Munro was a Russian-born Swiss woman. And the foundation director of the New South Wales Conservatorium of Music, the conductor Henri Verbrugghen (1873-1934), was a native of French-speaking Brussels.

Many more French-born and Francophone Australians deserved inclusion in this and earlier volumes. Over the years I have passed on a number of entries to the *ADB* dealing with Mauritians who have made important contributions to Australian society, but all have been ignored. Ironically they have been published by the *Dictionnaire de Biographie Mauricienne*. Perhaps in the years to come we will see new and revised volumes which will mention Marc-Joseph Marion Dufresne and his officers Julien Crozet and Ambroise Le Jar du Clesmeur, who led the first European expedition to Van Diemen's Land after Tasman; the artists and naturalists Nicolas Petit and Charles Lesueur who accompanied Nicolas Baudin to Australian waters; the sugar growing pioneers Eléonard Adam, Charles Burguez, Charles Lacaze and Joseph Duval; the agronomist Albert Giraud; the physician and cultural activist Louis Gellé and the journalists Léon Magrin and Albert Sourdin - to name just a few. One can hope!

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Joseph Lo Bianco & Alain Montell, *French in Australia: New Prospects*, Canberra, Centre d'Etudes et d'Echanges Francophones en Australie/Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers' Associations, 1990, 111 pp. (Available free by sending a stamped \$1.30 A4 envelope to CEEFA 6 Perth Avenue, Yarralumla, 2600).

*French in Australia* is a very welcome publication. At a time when it has been argued by some that the importance of French should diminish, Joseph Lo Bianco and Alain Montell have presented a wealth of statistical data to show the present strength of French language study in Australia and the value of expanding it. The authors' arguments are cogent. They have neither ignored the reality of English as the "Latin of the Modern Age" nor denied the economic value of Japanese to Australians. But they have presented a case for French as a very "learnable" language which, together with Italian and Spanish, has the least linguistic distance from English and already has a strong available infrastructure in this country. They suggest that the affinity with other Romance languages means that French should not be overlooked as a passport to its major siblings. They reaffirm the familiar arguments for French as an international/diplomatic language with official, co-official or semi-official status in very many countries.

In my opinion, the authors make a good case for the need to reassess traditional notions of the economic value of French in Australia. Central to their argument is the importance of French in Europe which after 1992 will have a single economy three times the size of Japan. But they add, "The trade, tourism and scientific value of French... extends well beyond Europe". Finally they argue that French will remain attractive to Australian students because of the cultural prestige associated with it. Lo Bianco and Montell proceed cautiously on this point. They write: "In setting forth such a dimension of French it is important to assert that no elitist and hierarchical notions of 'cultural superiority' are intended. It is rather, a point about a variable that has been examined extensively in the research literature of applied linguistics. Unless learners admire the culture and lifestyle of the speakers of the language they are studying, then it will be difficult to expect them to be motivated enough to stick with the study of the language sufficiently to gain proficiency."

*French in Australia* does not plead a special sentimental case. Rather, it presents a convincing description of French as a vital part of Australian education with an important role in the future intellectual,

economic and strategic considerations of our nation. It deserves to be widely read.

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